

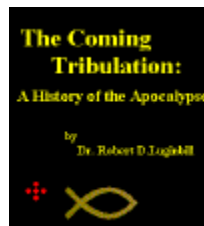
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The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 6

Last Things: Revelation 20-22:5

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Introduction: With the dramatic return of our Lord and His signal victory over the beast and his armies at Armageddon, human history now enters its final and most glorious phase. For a thousand years our Lord Jesus Christ will rule the world from His royal capital of Jerusalem, and the earth will see a time unlike anything that has come before. For the Millennium will be a unique period of blessing, one not only of material prosperity, but of complete justice and spiritual blessings beyond imagination. Indeed, this is the very time toward which much of Old Testament prophecy looked. These references are far too numerous to catalog in their entirety, but a few examples will suffice to show how the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, His victory over the devil, His deliverance of Israel, His entrance into Jerusalem with His concomitant coronation and session, and His rule of blessing are ubiquitous themes in the Old Testament, with this anticipated time of future bliss constituting the positive pole of the Day of the Lord paradigm upon which so much of prophecy depends.¹

1. The Victory of Messiah:

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) "Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!" (4) The One enthroned in heaven will laugh. The Lord will mock them. (5) At that time He will speak to them in His anger, and in His wrath He will throw them into confusion. (6) "But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain." (7) I shall relate the Lord's decree. He said to Me, "You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. (8) Ask of Me and I shall give [You] the nations as your inheritance, and as Your possession the ends of the earth. (9) You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, and You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel. (10) So now, O kings, learn prudence! Take warning, you judges of the earth! (11) Serve the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling! (12) Kiss the Son (i.e., pay homage to Him), lest He become angry [with you] and you perish for your [insolent] behavior. For His anger may blaze up in an instant [if you do not]. Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him." Psalm 2:1-12²

(1) God is our refuge and strength. [He is] our help in [times of] tribulation, [and] very quick to be found. (2) Therefore we shall not fear when the earth totters, when the mountains quake in the heart of the seas, (3) [when] its waters roar and foam, when the mountains shake on account of its swells. Selah (i.e., "rest"). (4) There is a river whose streams delight the city of God (Ezek.47:1-12; cf. Is.33:20-21; 41:18), the holy residence of the Most High (i.e., Messiah's capital). (5) God is in her midst. She will not be shaken. God will help her, before morning [comes]. (6) The nations were in an uproar. The kingdoms [of the world] tottered. He gave forth His voice. The earth melted. (7) The Lord of Hosts (i.e., Jesus Christ) is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge! Selah (i.e.,

"rest"). (8) Come, see the wonders of the Lord, [even] He who has wrought devastations on the earth, (9) [even] He who makes wars cease to the very end of the earth. He will break [every] bow and shatter [every] spear and burn [all] chariots with fire. (10) "Cease [your agitation] and know that I am God. I shall be exalted over [all] the nations. I shall be exalted over the [entire] earth." (11) The Lord of Hosts (i.e., Jesus Christ) is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge! Selah (i.e., "rest").

Psalm 46:1-11

(1) God is known in Judah; His name is great in Israel. (2) His tabernacle is in Salem; His dwelling place also is in Zion. (3) There He broke the flaming arrows, the shield and the sword and the weapons of war. Selah. (4) You are resplendent, more majestic than the mountains of prey. (5) The stouthearted were plundered, they sank into sleep; and none of the warriors could use his hands. (6) At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse were cast into a dead sleep. (7) You, even You, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry? (8) You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still (9) when God arose to judgment, to save all the humble of the earth. Selah. (10) For the wrath of man shall praise You; With a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself (i.e., those "left over" Messiah will take to Himself). (11) Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared. (12) He will cut off the spirit of princes; He is feared by the kings of the earth.

Psalm 76:1-12 NASB

(1) In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. (2) Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." (3) With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. (4) In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. (5) Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. (6) Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

Isaiah 12:1-6 NIV

2. The Deliverance of Messiah:

(8) Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. (9) He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. (10) Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. (11) You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). (12) You made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e., deliverance).

Psalm 66:8-12

(1) Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. (2) The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. (3) He has remembered his love and his

faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (4) Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; (5) make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, (6) with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the King. (7) Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (8) Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; (9) let them sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit., "*has come*") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Psalm 98 NIV

(9) O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! (10) Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. (11) He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Isaiah 40:9-11 KJV

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:1-3

(1) "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty.

Malachi 4:1-3

3. The Triumphal Entry of Messiah into Jerusalem:

(7) Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (8) Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (10) Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty – he is the King of glory. Selah

Psalm 24:7-10 NIV

Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness".

Zechariah 8:3

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout [for joy], daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is; humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal (cf. Rev.19:11).

Zechariah 9:9

(4) The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. (5) Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. (6) While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. (7) He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.

Ezekiel 41:4-7a NIV

4. The Coronation of Messiah:

"But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."

Psalms 2:6

(5) God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. (6) Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. (7) For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (8) God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.

Psalms 47:5-8 NIV

(24) Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. (25) In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines. (26) Praise God in the great congregation; praise the Lord in the assembly of Israel. (27) There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them, there the great throng of Judah's princes, and there the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali.

Psalms 68:24-27 NIV

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.

Psalms 97:1 NIV

The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim. Let the earth shake.

Psalms 99:1 (cf. Ps.80:1; Is.37:16)

5. The Rule of Messiah:

(1) Shout with joy to God, all the earth! (2) Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! (3) Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. (4) All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name." Selah (5) Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf! (6) He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot – come, let us rejoice in him. (7) He rules forever by his

power, his eyes watch the nations – let not the rebellious rise up against him. Selah
Psalm 66:1-7 NIV

(10) Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (11) Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; (12) let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; (13) they will sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit, "*has* come"), he comes (lit, "*has* come") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.
Psalm 96:10-13 NIV

(6) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called "He whose counsel is wondrous", "Mighty God", "the Father of Eternity", "the Prince of Prosperity". (7) To His dominion and its prosperity there will be no limit or end. He will establish it and lay its foundation on David's throne and over his kingdom, in justice and righteousness, now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.
Isaiah 9:6-7

(17) Your eyes will gaze upon the King in His beauty, and you will see the land expanding out [before you]. (18) Your heart will meditate on [the former] dread: "Where is the [beast's official] who counted? Where is the [beast's official] who weighed? Where is he who administered the fortified posts (lit., "towers")?" (19) [But] you will no longer behold [that] merciless crowd, those people too deep of lip to be understood whose tongues babbled things which could not be understood. (20) Behold Zion, the city of our festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem [as] an untroubled habitation, a tent which will not be moved; her stakes will not be pulled up forever, nor will any of her ropes be pulled down. (21) For the Lord our Mighty One will be there. It will be a place of rivers, majestic and wide which no boat will cross with oars, which no mighty ship will sail. (22) For the Lord will be our Judge, the Lord will be our Lawgiver, the Lord will be our King – He is the One who will deliver us!
Isaiah 33:17-22

We will have occasion to examine many other aspects of our Lord's millennial rule likewise prophesied in scripture as they occur in chronological sequence below. But it is also important to note at the outset that the coming of paradise to earth (the sixth and penultimate paradise to be precise³), will not change sinful human nature. Mankind will be no more satisfied with its lot than before, no more inclined to justice and righteousness, and no more interested in seeking God, despite experiencing on that great day the wonders of the personal rule of Jesus Christ and the blessings which He and His Father will shower upon the earth of that time.

I. The Second Advent Judgments: Revelation 20:1-3

For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal

its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).
Isaiah 26:20-21 (cf. 2Pet.3:10b)

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.
Matthew 16:27

(6) . . . since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.
2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9

Earlier in the book (i.e., Rev.10:1-11), John was given to hear the voices of the seven thunders, but then ordered not to write down what he had heard. As explained in part 3A of this series, these seven voices of thunder are predictions of future judgment which respond to the lion-like roar of the angel of chapter eleven who, as we have seen, is portraying Christ's Second Advent return.⁴ Just as the first half of the Tribulation is begun with seven judgments of warning (the trumpet judgments), and the Second Advent is preceded by seven judgments of punishment (the bowl judgments), so the actual return of Christ is accompanied by these seven "thunder" judgments. These three sets of seven judgments are thus part and parcel of the coming of the Day of the Lord, and, specifically, of the Tribulation which forms the Judgment part of phase II of the Plan of God: Completion.⁵

- Phase II: Completion: Realizes eternal objectives with victory in time (the "more" phase).
- Judgment II: the Tribulation: God's judgment upon the devil's kingdom and upon his earthly subjects. Satan and his angels are expelled from heaven and later imprisoned.
- Restoration II: the Millennium: earth is restored to an environment of blessing.
- Replacement II: Christ the King replaces Satan, the de facto ruler of the earth. The Church is resurrected in replacement.

The seven thunders represent the judgments directly connected to Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, inappropriate to discuss just prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation where they are mentioned in chapter ten (since they would not actually happen until later on), but easily discernible from scripture and necessary to consider here in their place of chronological occurrence.⁶ As the One to whom all judgment has now been committed (Jn.5:22; 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom.2:16; 14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10; 2Tim.4:1; 4:8; Jas.5:9; 1Pet.4:5; Rev.2:5-6; 3:1-3; 3:19-20), it is

appropriate that Jesus Christ administers them directly and personally. These seven judgments are as follows:

1. Babylon destroyed (Rev.18).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed (Rev.19:1-21).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet consigned to the lake of fire (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3).
5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands (Ezek.39:6; cf. Rev.20:9).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel (Ezek.20:34-38; cf. Rev.21-22).
7. The Judgment of the Church (Rom.2:16; 2Cor.5:10; cf. Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

Thunder is a sign of lightning. Just as the echoing of earthly thunder often heralds the approach of an oncoming storm we cannot yet see, so John was not given to see before their chronological occurrence the actual judgments or "bursts of lightning" which the seven thunders presaged. As the storm draws nearer, however, the lightning becomes visible for each in turn. The fiery lightning represents the judgment of God. This is often the case with fire generally (cf. Deut.4:24: "our God is a consuming fire"), and is also often the case with lightning in particular which is variously described as the arrows, spears, and sword of the Lord (2Sam.22:13-15; Ps.18:12-14; 144:5-6; Ezek.21:8-14; 21:28-30; Hab.3:11; Zech.9:14; cf. Ps.29:7; 77:18), and "the fire of God" (2Kng.1:12; Job 1:16 Ps.97:3-4; Ezek.1:4; 1:13-14; Hab.3:4; cf. Rev.4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). All seven of these divine judgments associated with Christ's return likewise involve fire as the instrument of judgment in one fashion or another.

1. Babylon destroyed: "she will be consumed by fire" (Rev.18:8).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed: "the Lord is coming with fire" (Is.66:15).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet: "they were thrown alive into the lake of fire" (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3): compare "lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding" (Ps.148:8), with "Who makes his angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire" (Ps.104:4); in the Abyss, the fallen angels will have nothing to do but to anticipate their own imminent end in the lake of fire.
5. Magog and the Coastlands: "I will send fire" (Ezek.39:6).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel: "He will cleanse [them] . . . with a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire" (Is.4:4).

7. The Judgment of the Church: "if anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss, but he himself will be saved – but in this way as through fire" (1Cor.3:15).

The first of these Second Advent judgments, the destruction of Babylon, occurred just prior to but closely associated with Christ's return; the time frame of judgments two through four is essentially contemporaneous with the Second Advent; judgment five will apparently occur in very short succession thereafter; judgments six and seven will require progressively longer periods of time to complete, and will occur sequentially. Once all of these judgments have been accomplished, the King's millennial reign, His coronation, His victory at Armageddon, and His wedding to His Bride the Church will be officially celebrated, then followed by a thousand years of bliss and blessing unlike anything the earth has seen since the fall of Adam and Eve. As we have seen since the beginning of this series (see in particular part 1), the Tribulation followed by the Millennium is the final "day" of human history, the "eschaton" or end times, the "Day of the Lord" in which all divine judgment will be completed in the Person of Jesus Christ. This process began with the tribulational judgments, will be followed by these seven judgments, and will be concluded at the end of Christ's thousand-year righteous rule by the Last Judgment, after which the present universe will be re-created, cleansed by fire and transformed into the New Heavens and New Earth "where righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13). But before that blessed day of eternity, Christ must rule until all enemies are placed under His feet (1Cor.15:25; cf. Ps.110:1; Heb.2:5-9).

"For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead."
Acts 17:31

1. Babylon

This judgment has already taken place at this point, occurring at the threshold of the Second Advent but considered eschatologically a part of it (i.e., it is literally "wrapped" into the seventh bowl judgment whose main application is the Second Advent: Rev.16:19 in the context of Rev.16:17-21). We have covered this judgment where it is described in detail, namely, Revelation chapter 18 (section II of part 5 of this series: "Judgment on Babylon").²

2. The Armies of Armageddon

The Second Advent and our Lord's destruction of the armies of the beast at Armageddon was the subject of the previous installment of this series. Following Babylon's destruction and occurring at the point of Christ's glorious return, this judgment has likewise already taken place at this point in the chronology of Revelation.

3. The Beast and the False Prophet

Uniquely among all of woman born, antichrist and his false prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire to experience the second death immediately upon Christ's return:

And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur.

Revelation 19:20

This judgment as well has already taken place, occurring between the initial point of Christ's return (Rev.19:1-19), and the culmination of the slaughter of Armageddon (Rev.19:21). As was pointed out in the previous installment of this series, these two are deprived of their part in the final trial, "The Last Judgment", because by their extreme words and actions in serving Satan and in attempting to utterly destroy God's people throughout the Tribulation – a trial in and of itself – they stand self-condemned beyond all doubt or argument. As with the fallen angels, no further trial is necessary to illuminate their choice, since that choice has been confirmed to such an unprecedented extent. The Tribulation constitutes their "trial" just as human history in its entirety constitutes the trial of Satan and his angels (Is.30:32-33; Dan.7:11-14; 9:27; 11:45; Hab.3:13-14; 2Thes.2:8; cf. Jer.25:26; Dan.7:26; Hab.2:2-20).

4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons

(1) And I saw another angel coming down from heaven with the key to the Abyss and with a great chain in his hand. (2) And he took hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Slanderer (*diabolos*, i.e., "devil"), even Satan. And he bound him for a thousand years (3) and he cast him into the Abyss, locked it, and set a seal upon it, so that he might not [be able] to deceive the nations [any longer] – until the thousand years (i.e., the Millennium) were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time.

Revelation 20:1-3

Not only is Satan now prevented from appearing before God the Father to slander believers (Rev.12:10). Here we see the fulfillment of the much anticipated removal in toto of the devil from the affairs of this world.

(12) How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit.

Isaiah 14:12-15

In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your

memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings.
Ezekiel 28:15-17

The seventy-two returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star".
Luke 10:17-18

Now the judgment of this world is [imminent]. Now the ruler of this world is about to be cast out [of it].
John 12:31

a. The Other Angel: This angel is not named, but based upon angelic military conduct as described elsewhere in scripture it is probable that he is of archangel rank and it is likely that he is none other than Michael. As the commander of the most elite angelic warriors who have distinguished themselves in the conflict with Satan (comparable to David's "mighty men"), Michael is the most likely choice for this extraordinary mission, possibly in direct leadership of his crack unit of angels.⁸

b. The Key: This is the key to the Abyss proper, not the key to its entry shaft which we saw used in Revelation 9:1 to effect a partial release of some of the demons detained therein for the fifth trumpet judgment. This second key to the Abyss proper (as opposed to its entryway only) includes not only the power to open and close the subterranean dungeon, but also to lock and unlock all the restraints therein (and was previously apparently used by the angel in Rev.9:14 to release for the sixth trumpet judgment the large number of fallen angels enchained in the Abyss proper behind its main entrance door).⁹

c. Special Security Precautions for Satan: We should note here that the security measures used to sequester the devil for the duration of the Millennium are threefold and are therefore unique. First, he is locked in the Abyss (in common with all other fallen angels removed from circulation from the beginning of human history for various violations of divine ground rules; cf. Lk.8:31). Secondly the devil is placed in chains within the Abyss as a second level of security (as were those fallen angels who severely violated protocol by cohabiting with human women prior to the flood; Gen.6; 2Pet.2:14-10; Jude 1:5-7). Finally and uniquely, the Abyss is specially "sealed", indicating that throughout the Millennium there will be no access to the Abyss whatsoever (and hence no possible chance of the devil exiting until the appointed time through either accident or design). The exceptional level of precautions taken here shows very clearly the importance of a Millennium without the devil.

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man (i.e., analogous to Satan)? Then he can rob his house (i.e., analogous to the distribution of the plunder upon conquering his kingdom: Ps.68:18; Is.33.23b; 53:12; 60:11; Lk.11:22; Eph.4:7-8).
Matthew 12:29 NIV

In the absence of any Satanic influence whatsoever, and with the provision of perfect environment by the Messiah Himself (as perfect, that is, as the mortal and therefore still inherently sinful human beings who will populate the world of that time can tolerate), mankind will nevertheless by and large still make use of its God-given free will to reject rather than to accept in faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thus proving both the nature of free will and the reality of it. This is also true for angelic kind, for even though the fallen angels will be put out of operation for a thousand years and given to witness not only their own total defeat but also the coming of the astoundingly marvelous Kingdom and penultimate Eden on the threshold of eternity, no change of heart or regret will be visible in any of them, to the extent that the devil, when he is released at the Millennium's end, will once again do all that is in his power to continue to fight against God.

d. Status of the Other Fallen Angels during the Millennium: As the head of the opposition to God, Satan's imprisonment is naturally emphasized here in Revelation 20:1-3, especially as this event fulfills many long-anticipated prophecies (e.g., Gen.3:15; Lk.10:18; symbolically as a type of Pharaoh and Egypt cf. also Rahab: Job 26:12; Ps.89:10; Is.51:9; and Leviathan: Ps.74:14; Is.27:1). However, the fact that only Satan is specifically said to be imprisoned should not be taken to mean that the fallen angels are exempt; rather, this is an instance of scripture focusing upon the leader of the rebellion and leaving us to understand by implication that his followers share his fate. Just as the devil is mentioned alone as being summarily thrown into the lake of fire at the Millennium's conclusion (Rev.20:10) and yet we know that his demons will suffer an identical end (Matt.25:41), so we should assume here that his fallen angels are likewise expelled from Christ's Kingdom at His return to languish in the Abyss for a thousand years along with their leader, a blessing similarly anticipated in prophecy.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].

Colossians 2:15

Given the reasons for the devil's removal from circulation during the Millennium discussed above, allowing his untold number of minions to remain at liberty would seem to be inconsistent with everything we know about that blessed time to come. Indeed, there are strong biblical indications that **all** demons are in fact removed to the Abyss at this time, with the devil merely being the last to be deposited therein before it is sealed for the duration of the Millennium.

(21) And it will come about on that day (i.e., the 2nd Advent) that the Lord will visit punishment upon the host of the [heavenly] heights in the [heavenly] heights (i.e., the fallen angels), and upon the kings of the earth upon the earth (i.e., antichrist's elite following). (22) And they will be crowded together, bound in a pit, and imprisoned in a prison. And after many days they will be punished.

Isaiah 24:21-22

The "pit" here is the place to which the human "kings" are committed, and is a synonym for *Sheol* or Hades (Ps.30:3; Is.14:15; 14:19; cf. Ps.28:1; 143:7; Is.38:18; Ezek.26:20; etc.). Specifically it refers to Torments, that part of the underworld where all departed unbelievers reside, awaiting the Last Judgment (Luke 16:19-31). The prison is a reference to another part of *Sheol*-Hades, namely, the Abyss (which in our context is described in precisely these terms with its chains, and with its locked and sealed entry door).¹⁰ It is into the latter that the "host of the heavenly heights", that is, the fallen angels who cast their lot with Satan, will be placed to await their final disposition at the end of history.¹¹

(4) All the **stars of the heavens** will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the **starry host** will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (5) **My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;**
Isaiah 34:4-5a NIV

"Tell them this: 'These gods (i.e., demons worshiped as gods), who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.'"
Jeremiah 10:11 NIV

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. [God] does as he pleases with **the powers of heaven** and the peoples of the earth.
Daniel 4:35a NIV

This incarceration of the demons to await their final judgment at the end of human history stands in direct and blessed contrast to the theme of the release of the (human) prisoners at the Messiah's return.

(6) I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and shall take You by the hand, and guard You, and appoint You a covenant for the nations and a Light for the gentiles, (7) to open the eyes of the blind, to bring forth the prisoner from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from their place of captivity (i.e., physical and spiritual redemption).
Isaiah 42:6-7

(8) This is what the Lord says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, (9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"
Isaiah 49:8-9 NIV

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place of their faint spirits.
Isaiah 61:1-3a

As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
Zechariah 9:11 NIV

e. The Participation of the Resurrected Church in this Operation: Believers most assuredly share Christ's authority in administering His millennial government (1Cor.4:8; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4), and when we are also told that we shall "judge angels" at 1st Corinthians 6:3, it seems likely that fallen angels are meant (for what need would the elect angels have for any sort of judicial evaluation, however small?). Further, while Revelation 19:21 places sole responsibility for carrying out the slaughter of Armageddon in our Lord's hands, Zechariah 14:5 and Revelation 19:19 state that we shall indeed "enter battle" in company with our Lord:

And then the Lord my God will enter [the battle], and ***all His holy ones with Him***.
Zechariah 14:5

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse ***and with His army***.
Revelation 19:19

At this point in time, that is, the point of the Second Advent, all fallen angels are at liberty (having been released in the course of the trumpet judgments), and yet all have been confined to the earth and its environs (since Satan and the other demons were "thrown down" by Michael and his forces: Rev.12:7). Since, as we have had occasion to see in the past, the number of resurrected believers belonging to the Church, the first part of Christ's double portion, will be precisely equal to the number of fallen angels,¹² passages such as this may indicate that the reason we "enter battle" with the Lord will be for each of us individually to dispatch our demonic counterpart back into the Abyss (enjoying at that time the same superiority in our resurrection bodies over angels as that possessed by Christ: Heb.1:4-14).¹³ If such is the case, this would be a fitting way for our Lord to underscore the replacement of the devil and his angels by the Church, now just newly resurrected and glorified for the first time.¹⁴

The Lord came from Sinai¹⁵, and burst forth like the dawn against them (i.e., all of his foes, human and angelic) from [Mount] Seir. He shone forth from Mount Paran, and advanced with His ***holy multitudes***; from His right hand [He cast] fiery judgment against them.
Deuteronomy 33:2

God will not turn back His anger; Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab (i.e., the mythical serpent symbolic both of Egypt and the devil).
Job 9:13 NASB

(5) Let the ***holy ones*** (i.e., believers) rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. (6) May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, (7) to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, (8) to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, (9) to carry out the

sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the Lord.
Psalm 149:5-9 (cf. Song 2:15)

"Behold! The Lord has come with His ***holy multitudes***, to render judgment against all
..."
Jude 1:14b - 15a

(2) Or don't you know that the ***holy ones*** (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute? (3) Don't you know that ***we will judge angels?*** How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters?

1st Corinthians 6:2-3

For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:12

f. Satan's Later Release: While Revelation 20:7-10 clearly tells us that the devil will be released at the end of the Millennium for a short time, there is no indication that his followers will likewise be set free – nor is there any reason for this. The temporary release of Satan and the world's rapid rallying to his banner to oppose the rule of the perfect Ruler will demonstrate once and for all that mankind, even in the most perfect environment possible in this sinful world, will still resent God's authority. The Gog-Magog rebellion will thus prove conclusively that salvation, universally provided by the grace of God in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is ultimately a matter of choice. Those who perish do so of their own free will out of an essential unwillingness to submit to the Lord, even though the alternative is the forfeiture of eternal life.

5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands

Then (i.e., immediately after Armageddon) I will ***send fire upon Magog*** (i.e., eschatological Babylon) and upon those who dwell securely in the islands (i.e., the remainder of the gentile world; Gen.10:5; cf. Ps.97:1; Is.11:11; 13:22; 24:15; 40:15; 41:1; 41:5; 42:4; 42:10; 42:12; 49:1; 51:5; 59:18; 66:19; Jer.31:10; Ezek.27:35; Mic.5:15; Zeph.2:11; 3:8b), so that they may know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 39:6

The judgment on Babylon which occurred prior to Armageddon, while devastating her territory in a singularly horrific way, did not destroy her entire population. We have already suggested that she will have given sanctuary to a large Jewish population, presently to be repatriated to the land of Israel (cf. Mic.4:10; and see section I.6 immediately below). At the time of our Lord's Second Advent, there will be found within her borders and throughout the gentile world at large a sizeable number of people who have taken the mark of the beast. While refusal to receive the mark exempts those who so refused (Rev.13:8; 17:8b cf. Josh.6:25; Matt.25:37-40), all who have worshiped antichrist and allowed themselves to be so marked will be excluded from our Lord's

millennial kingdom, and miraculously so, by being supernaturally incinerated in the wake of His return, similar in fashion to the fate of the soldiers who sought to arrest Elijah (2Kng.1:9-15; cf. Lk.9:52-55), and similar in its selectivity to the destruction of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families (Num.16).¹⁶

"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me."

Luke 19:27 NIV

The criteria for this destruction are twofold: not only unbelief, but also "reveling in unrighteousness", namely, supporting the beast and his anti-God agenda and so by definition rejecting the Messiah in favor of the counterfeit, the very thing which accepting the mark implies (2Thes.2:12).

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] (9) whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. (11) And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them an empowerment of error so that they may believe the lie, (12) in order that they may be **condemned**, [even all those] who **have not believed the truth** but **have [instead] approved of unrighteousness**.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12

Other passages foreshadowing this elimination of such stumbling blocks from Messiah's incipient kingdom include the following:

1. The workers in the field who are not taken (Matt.24:36-44).
2. The wicked servant who is thrown out with hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt.24:45-51).
3. The sleepy virgins who are shut out of the kingdom (Matt.25:1-13).
4. The lazy servant who is thrown out into darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt.25:14-30).
5. The enemies of the King who did not want Him to rule over them who are killed in His presence at His return (Lk.19:27; quoted above).

The supernatural fire sent upon Magog-Babylon (singled out here because it was the home country of the beast) and also upon the rest of the nations outside of Israel is sometimes referred to as "the Baptism of Fire" after the phrase used by John the baptist

for the eschatological alternative to accepting Jesus Christ (and receiving instead the Baptism of the Spirit; Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16; cf. Mk.1:8):

(10) For the ax has already been put to the trunk of the trees. Accordingly, every tree which does not produce good fruit is about to be cut down **and thrown into fire**. (11) Now I am baptizing you with water for the purpose of [your] repentance. But the One coming after me is more powerful than me and I am not worthy to carry His sandals. It is He who is the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit **and with fire**. (12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, **but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**.

Matthew 3:10-12

Just as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, began the Church Age, so also the baptism of fire will be one of the first acts of the returning King to begin the Millennium. Jesus will make a "clean sweep" of His threshing floor, removing the "chaff" (unbelievers who have already formally declared their hostility to Him through accepting the mark) by subjecting them to a fiery end (described here as "unquenchable" since this execution by fire is followed, after a thousand years in torments, by final disposition in the Lake of Fire; see section VI.2 below). The gathering in of the wheat has a double reference, looking forward as it does to the end as a whole, comprising both the frequently prophesied regathering of Israel into the Messiah's millennial kingdom (see section I.6 immediately below), and the final eschatological gathering up of all believers into the eternal kingdom following history's end (cf. Matt.13:24-30; 13:47-50).

(6) . . . since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) **wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire** upon these [same persecutors] who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.
2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9 (cf. Is.59:18b)

(1) "Surely the day is coming; it will **burn like a furnace**. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will **set them on fire**," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; **they will be ashes** under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty.
Malachi 4:1-3 NIV

The second passage here also conflates the Baptism of Fire at the commencement of the Millennium with the disposition of all unbelievers at the Last Judgment and the entrance of all believers into the eternal kingdom at the Millennium's end.¹⁷ In respect to its Second Advent application, not all unbelievers on earth will be subjected to fiery judgment on our Lord's return (if they were, then no one would remain to repopulate

the human race¹⁸, since all believers alive at the Second Advent are resurrected "to meet the Lord in the air"; 1Thes.4:17).¹⁹ Those taken away by fire are indeed unbelievers, those who "do not know God" and who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus". However, it is only those guilty of "subjecting you to tribulation" who are to be summarily dispatched with a fiery end. This offense seems to be one of which all those who received the mark of the beast are universally guilty. For the persecution of believers during the Great Tribulation was a key characteristic of all those who cast their lot with antichrist, participating in his pseudo-Christian religion, and acting as his instruments in the Great Persecution (covered in part 4 of this series). Therefore no one who joins the beast and receives his mark will be found to have clean hands in this respect, and none will be allowed to remain and taint the Messiah's incipient Kingdom.

(15) For behold, the Lord will come **with fire**, and His chariots will be like a whirlwind, to bring down His wrath in anger and His rebuke **in flames of fire**. (16) For **with fire the Lord is going to execute judgment** – and with His sword – upon all flesh, and many will be those slain by the Lord. (17) Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats **will be swept away together** (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.
Isaiah 66:15-17 (cf. Ps.21:7-10)

The dual destruction mentioned above, by means of sword (i.e., at the battle of Armageddon: Rev.19:21), **and** by fire, clearly indicates two phases of destruction: 1) Armageddon, where all assembled to do battle with the Lord will be destroyed by "the sharp broadsword which proceeds from His mouth" (Rev.19:15); and 2) the Baptism of Fire directed towards all who have taken the mark. This can be seen from verse 17, where the description of abominable cult activity refers to those who worship the beast and take part in his religion's foul rites and activities (which are by association with antichrist "[characterized] by violence", a reference to the persecution of believers referred to in 2Thes.1:7 quoted above), including the Great Persecution.

Just as the resurrection which immediately precedes the Second Advent is selective and determined on an individual basis (cf. Matt.24:40-41), so the Baptism of Fire which occurs at the commencement of the millennial kingdom will be restricted to a select population; but instead of consisting of those who lived for Jesus Christ and were uniquely resurrected while yet alive, this group will consist of those who chose against Him in the most forceful and willful possible manner. Their removal from the earth to prevent them taking any part in the glories of the Millennium will be likewise unique in the course of human history.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tortured/tormented in fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torture/torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the

beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."
Revelation 14:9-11

As our introductory passage, Ezekiel 39:6, suggests, the Baptism of fire will be extensive and will no doubt consume the great majority of the world's remaining population (for most of those who are not followers of Jesus will have chosen instead to follow the beast: Rev.13:8; 17:8b). It will not, however, be total, and we can expect a very large proportion of those who survive this judgment to be children who had not yet reached the age of accountability and consent at the time of the Second Advent (cf. Is.2:2-3; 60:14; 66:17). The purpose of this judgment will be two-fold and merciful in every way to all inclined to respond to God's mercy. By cleansing the threshing floor and removing all such stumbling blocks out of Messiah's kingdom (cf. Is.57:14; Zeph.3:11; Matt.13:41), the fire sent "upon Magog and upon those who dwell securely in the islands" has another very specific purpose, and one that works hand in glove with the first: "so that they may know that I am the Lord" (Ezek.39:6).

(2) At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it. (3) And many peoples will come and they will say, "Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."
Isaiah 2:2-3

6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel

a. The Regathering of Israel: The return of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is at once one of the most blessed and most frequent of all of the promises of Old Testament prophecy. It would be nigh on impossible to produce a completely comprehensive list of the passages, ubiquitous in scripture, wherein the return is expressed literally or figuratively, prophetically and by promise, in the Old Testament or in the New. Directly after Armageddon, our glorious Lord will begin the process of bringing all survivors of Jewish blood back to the Land. Whether hailing from Babylon (Jer.50:4-8; Mic.4:10) or previously imprisoned (Is.51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; cf. Ps.68:6; 79:10-11; 102:20; 146:7), whether dwelling abroad as a result of the recent diaspora caused by antichrist's depredations (Deut.26:6-8; Hos.8:10; Joel 3:2-8; Zech.14:2; Lk.21:24;) or in long established Jewish communities throughout the world (Jer.3:18; 30:10; Ezek.37:21; Zeph.3:10), all who are of Jewish blood will be repatriated to the place of judgment on the threshold of the Land of Israel in the opening days of the Millennium. There, in the "desert of the nations", they will stand judgment for their right to enter the land.

The return will be prominently announced:

(11) In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.
(12) **He will raise a banner** for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will

assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.
Isaiah 11:11-12 NIV

(12) In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. (13) And in that day **a great trumpet will sound**. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.
Isaiah 27:12-13 NIV

(10) They will follow the Lord; **he will roar** like a lion. **When he roars**, his children will come trembling from the west. (11) They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. "I will settle them in their homes," declares the Lord.
Hosea 11:10-11 NIV

(8) **"I will signal for them and gather them in**. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before. (9) Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. (10) I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them. (11) They will pass through the sea of trouble (i.e., the Tribulation); the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away. (12) I will strengthen them in the Lord and in his name they will walk," declares the Lord.
Zechariah 10:8-12 NIV

The return will be orderly:

(11) Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. (12) But **you will not leave in haste or go in flight**; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.
Isaiah 52:11-12 NIV

The return will be rapid:

(7) "Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son. (8) Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? **Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment?** Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. (9) "Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the Lord. "Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?" says your God.
Isaiah 66:7-9 NIV

The means for the return will be abundantly provided (Is.43:19-21; 48:20-21; 60:4; 62:10):

(15) The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that

anyone can cross over in sandals. (16) There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.
Isaiah 11:15-16 NIV

(7) The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. (8) And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. (9) No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, (10) and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.
Isaiah 35:7-10 NIV

(9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. (10) They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. (11) I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. (12) See, they will come from afar – some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan."
Isaiah 49:9-12 NIV

Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.
Isaiah 60:9 NIV

"And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord – on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels," says the Lord. "They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels."
Isaiah 66:20 NIV

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will be the Agent of the return (Ezek.11:17; 20:41-42):

(5) "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. (6) I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – (7) everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."
Isaiah 43:5-7 NIV

The return will be complete (Dan.12:1b):

Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind.
Ezekiel 39:28 NIV

(12) "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. (13) One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head."

Micah 2:12-13

The return will be a vindication:

(19) "At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. (20) At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the Lord.

Zephaniah 3:19-20 NIV

b. The Purging of the Jewish People prior to Reentering the Land:

(4) He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people. (5) "Gather to me this consecrated people, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." Psalm 50:4-5 NIV (cf. Hos.6:11)

In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; For then ***I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride***, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain.

Zephaniah 3:11 NKJV

Although the regathering will indeed apply to all surviving Jews, only those who accept the Messiah will be allowed into the land of promise (those who believed *before* Christ's return have, of course, already been resurrected as part of Christ's Bride). This process of purging is the sixth of the seven "thunder" judgments, the purifying of the new remnant of Israel following their regathering to the threshold of the land of Israel so that only the righteous may enter to inaugurate the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Is.60:21).

(34) I will ***bring you from the nations*** and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered—with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. (35) I will bring you into ***the desert of the nations*** and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. (36) As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. (37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will purge you of ***those who revolt and rebel against me***. Although ***I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel***. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV

Comment: In this passage we see all of the essential features of the process of regathering: 1) All of Jewish stock who did not receive the mark are regathered (v.34); 2) The place of initial regathering is near the Land, but not actually in the Land (v.35); 3) The purpose for this phased arrival into Israel is to render judgment as to who is fit to enter (vv.36-37); 4) Those who "revolt and rebel" even after witnessing the Messiah's miraculous return and their own astounding regathering will be purged from the remnant and will not enter the Land (v.38).

1) The Place of Purging: As explained immediately above, this judgment will take place **near** the Land of Israel but not actually **in** the Land (Ezek.20:38). Ezekiel 20:35 describes the place of judgment as "the desert of the nations" (Hebrew: *midhbar ha'amiym*, מדבר העמים). This is most often taken to mean the places of Jewish diaspora around the world, but that is obviously incorrect since verse thirty-eight very clearly states that all individuals of Jewish stock will "brought out of the land where they are living" yet "will not enter the Land of Israel". The true identification of "the desert of the nations" is Sinai. Israel was delivered from the nations to be her own nation state under God by going through the desert of Sinai and undergoing a process of cleansing and judgment under the leadership of Moses (a type of Christ). Just as Sinai was the place of testing and purging in the first Exodus, so also at this future time the same "desert of [deliverance from] the nations" will be Sinai.²⁰ The strong parallel deliberately drawn in Ezekiel chapter twenty between the situation of this future generation and that of the Exodus generation supports this identification: a prolonged stay in Sinai was the unhappy alternative for that previous generation who had likewise experienced the miraculous deliverance of God in bringing them forth from the nations. Sinai is on the threshold of the Land of promise. In terms of biblical geography, it is not technically in Egypt, but neither is it "in the Land" (the "brook of Egypt" will be the southwestern boundary of millennial Israel Ezek.47:19; 48:28). We can therefore conclude that the "desert of the nations" is indeed Sinai, given this unique name now because all those of Jewish blood are brought back to this place from all of the nations of the world where they had previously been scattered, not just from Egypt. Sinai will be the place of blessed cleansing for all willing to accept the Messiah, an event soon followed by their repatriation to the Land of Israel.

Therefore I am now going to allure her; ***I will lead her into the desert*** and speak tenderly to her.

Hosea 2:14 NIV

This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find ***favor in the desert***; I will come to give rest to Israel."

Jeremiah 31:2 NIV

2) The Time of Purging: As noted above, scripture describes the return to the land as something that will rapidly follow Jesus' return, so we may expect that the entire process of collection, transfer to Sinai, judgment and repatriation to be a very swift affair. In fact, Daniel chapter twelve provides us with a detailed and definitive schedule:

(11) From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

Daniel 12:11-12 NIV

The phrase from verse eleven above, "from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up", refers, as we have seen in part 3B of this series, to the Tribulation's mid-point and antichrist's session in the temple of God, an event that will be accompanied by the abolition of the daily sacrifice and the erection of the cult-idol statue of antichrist which the false prophet will animate (i.e., the "abomination of desolation", or more correctly, "the abomination that causes desolation": Dan.9:27; Rev.13:11-15; cf. 2Thes.2:1-12). Moreover, the "1290 days" must then stretch to a time beyond the end of the Tribulation past the Second Advent. That is because the Great Tribulation itself, the period which begins with the events mentioned here in Daniel 12:11, lasts for three and one half years only, a time frame described in scripture (in terms of lunar years) as either 42 months, or 1260 days, or "a time, times and half a time" (Dan.7:25; 12:7; Rev.11:2; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5). And since this period of time will be further shortened to some degree at least "for the sake of the elect" (Mk.13:20), it is impossible for the 1290 days to be fit in its entirety into this window of the Tribulation's second half. Even calculating on a 365 day year, the maximum yield for the period would 1278 days assuming a leap year, and this figure does not include the unspecified span of curtailment "for the sake of the elect". It seems best, therefore, to understand the differential between the actual return of Christ and the 1290 days as the interval within which all Israel will be regathered into Sinai so that we should complete Daniel's words somewhat as follows: "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days [**until all Israel is regathered**]", that is, until the premier prophetic event to which Daniel was looking in anticipation comes to pass.

The place of regathering, for the purpose of judgment and purging, will be the "desert of the nations", and the process of regathering will occupy approximately 30 days (depending upon the variables noted above). There then remains the differential between the 1290 days and the 1335 days, a span of 45 days. This 45 day period will then be the time frame of the actual judgment.

In addition to meshing seamlessly with all of the other information we have about these events, the above interpretation also has two further advantages:

1) It allows for a close parallel to the events of the Exodus. As we have seen, the fact that Israel will be regathered initially into "the desert of the nations", that is, Sinai, and winnowed in a way similar to that experienced by the original Exodus generation, invites this comparison generally. As we have seen since the beginning of this series, days are often representative of years in prophetic contexts (e.g., Ps.90:4; Dan.9:25-27), so that the 45 days naturally suggests the 40 years of wandering and testing in Sinai in addition to the 5 years of entrance under Joshua (cf. Josh.14:10). In its application to this particular prophecy in Daniel, the 40 days will then be the time of our Lord's

judging all regathered to Sinai, and the 5 days the period of their restoration to and resettlement in the Land of Promise under Messiah's reign.

2) This also explains Daniel's words "Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days". According to this interpretation, those who "wait for the Lord" (a picture of faith: Ps.27:14; 37:9; Is.40:31; Mic.7:7; Hab.2:3; Zeph.3:8; Rom.8:25; cf. Matt.24:13; Lk.12:36; Rom.11:25-26), and "reach the end" are the Jewish returnees who pass muster in the desert and enter the Land. All who do survive this judgment will most certainly be "blessed", both in comparison to those who do not and in absolute terms as well, for theirs it will be to experience the ineffable blessings of Millennial Israel under Messiah's reign, a boon much anticipated in prophecy from Genesis to Revelation.

(15) When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "**Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.**" (16) Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. (17) At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' (18) "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' (19) "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' (20) "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' (21) "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' (22) "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' (23) "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. (24) I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'" Luke 14:15-24 NIV

(1) Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: (2) "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (3) He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. (4) "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' (5) "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. (6) The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. (7) The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, **both good and bad**, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, '**how did you get in here without wedding clothes?**' The man was speechless. (13) "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Matthew 22:1-14 NIV

As our Lord's parable makes unmistakably clear, while being present at the great banquet in Israel (the wedding banquet "of his **Son**": cf. Matt.22:2) which celebrates the wedding of the Lamb and His Bride will be blessed indeed (Lk.14:15 above), only those who attain to it, that is, only those who are not destroyed first by outright rejection of the invitation (i.e., those who accept the mark of the beast and so are destroyed in the prior "thunder judgment", also known as the "baptism of fire")²¹, and who are not subsequently found wanting during the judgment in the desert (represented by the man without proper attire in Matt.22:11-14 above), will be allowed to enter the Land and enjoy all of the marvelous blessings to come.

3) The Process of Purging:

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent). (26) And it is in this way (i.e., coming to believe upon witnessing the Messiah's return) that all [true] Israel will be saved just as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.

Romans 11:25-27

When all Israel is assembled on the border of the Land, as we have already seen in the prior installment of this series, many in her number will already have come to believe in Jesus Christ, having been convicted of the truth of His Messiahship upon witnessing His sign of the cross appearing in the heavens along with His miraculous return.

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.

Revelation 1:7

And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son.

Zechariah 12:10

There are indications, moreover, that the process of repentance will continue right up until the end of this present judgment:

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.

Hosea 3:4-5 NASB

As the context of Hosea chapter three quoted above makes clear, the Lord is eager for reconciliation with Israel despite her previous reluctance (just as Hosea is commanded to reconcile with his wife despite her indiscretions).

(10) "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. (11) "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you."

Zechariah 2:10-11 NIV

During the Millennium, the change of heart among the offspring of the remnant of Israel will bring a flood of Jews to faith in Christ (comparable to the flood of gentiles that characterizes the Church age). Seeing the Messiah face to face (Deut.4:30; Is.17:7-8; Jer.3:22b-25; 23:19-20; Joel 3:17; Zech.12:10-14; Rev.1:7; cf. Is.31:6; 50:20-21; Matt.24:30), Israel will turn to Him in numbers that will proportionally outstrip the greatest gains of the Church age, as God abundantly blesses His chosen people, fulfilling all the promises He has made (Ps.80:18; Is.65:8-10; Jer.31:31-34; Ezek.20:33-38; 37:11-14; Hos.1:10-11; Mal.4:5-6; Matt.23:39; Rom.11:26). However, it is a sad fact that in spite of the nearly two millennia that Israel has spent "in the wilderness" (Amos 9:9), in spite of all the pressures of the Tribulation (cf. Is.48:10; Lk.13:6-9), in spite of all of the glories of Second Advent where "all mankind together will see the glory of the Lord" (Is.40:5), and in spite of this process of face to face judgment with our Lord, the hardness of the hearts of many of the original survivors will prove persistent and not susceptible to being cracked (cf. Zech.2:10-11). Scripture is very clear on this point. Not all who are regathered will enter, only the remnant, and that remnant is consistently described as small (Is.6:13; 17:5-7; 65:8-12; Jer.50:20; Joel 2:32; Mic.4:6-7; Rom.9:27-29; cf. Zech.13:8).

Although your people may be like the sand of the sea, O Israel, [only] a remnant of them will return.

Isaiah 10:22

I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion.

Jeremiah 3:14 NIV

(8) "In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. (9) This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

Zechariah 13:8-9 NIV

As is clear from the last passage in particular, in addition to the high casualty rate suffered by the Jewish population of the Tribulation generally, the "one third" who survive will be "refined". That is to say, they will be purified by a purging that distills them into a remnant of believers. This remnant will in turn provide the root stock for the abundant Jewish population of the Millennium, the majority of whom will continue in the footsteps of their forefathers in faith in Jesus Christ, the true Messiah.

The process of purging is clear to see from Ezekiel chapter twenty, the pertinent section of which for this topic is as follows:

(37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV

The procedure for this judgment will thus be very similar to what will transpire at the end of the Millennium during the initial stage of the last judgment as described in Matthew 25:31-46, otherwise known as the judgment of the sheep and the goats (covered below in section VI.1). In both cases we have a mixed population that must be separated, and in both cases it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who will do the separating. However, while the sheep and goats judgment will involve the entire millennial population at the end of history, this judgment will only concern those Jews still alive after the baptism of fire who have been repatriated to the doorstep of the Land of Israel. And while the later judgment will end in a living resurrection, with the believers entering eternity and the unbelievers cast into the lake of fire (Matt.25:41-46), no such resurrection occurs at this time. Those who are shown to truly be believers in Jesus will enter the millennial kingdom of the Messiah in their physical bodies. Those who refuse to accept Jesus will be dispatched to torments (the temporary residence after death of all unbelievers since the beginning of history) to await the last judgment. The criterion or basis of judgment will be the individual's attitude towards the newly returned Messiah. As Ezekiel 20:38 states, Jesus will "purge you of those who revolt and rebel against Me". All those who resist accepting and obeying Jesus Christ through faith, that is, all who persist in unbelief in spite of all that has transpired, will not be allowed to enter the land.

There are thus five discrete categories among those of Jewish blood who survive the Tribulation:

- 1) Those who previously accepted the mark of the beast: these are executed as part of the baptism of fire.
- 2) Those who accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ upon witnessing His return: these are allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.
- 3) Those who refuse to accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ in spite of the previous miracles and the message given during this judgment: these are executed in the process of this judgment and dispatched into torments to await the last judgment.
- 4) Those who did not accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ as they saw Him return, but who do repent and accept Jesus as their Savior during the process of this judgment: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.

5) Those who have not yet attained to an age or capacity of accountability, and so are not yet responsible for making this critical decision: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.

The purpose of this judgment is therefore not only to assure that the Millennium begins with a pure cadre of Jewish believers in the Land of Promise cleansed of all prone to "revolt or rebel" against the truth or to grumble against the Lord Jesus, their ruling Sovereign (cf. the parallels of Lev.24:10-23 and Acts 5:1-11), but also to give even those who have so far demurred for whatever reason every opportunity to put aside their hard-heartedness and accept the free grace of God for salvation. The fact that some sizeable portion of those so gathered will nevertheless still refuse to accept the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ is at once a startling and horrifying fact, and a testimony to the power of self-willed arrogance to blind the human heart against the truth even when it is so overwhelmingly revealed. For to be brought face to face with the Messiah Himself, to the gospel message from His own lips, to see the consequences of unbelief with one's own eyes, and to persist in arrogant rejection of Him nonetheless, is irrefutable testimony to the fact that, short of taking away our free will entirely, nothing God could ever do would result in all human beings turning to Him in faith. And as we are here for the purpose of exercising our free will in faith to accept Jesus Christ (or reject Him), this He will most certainly not do.

And it will come to pass that **everyone who calls** upon the name of the Lord **will be saved**. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:32

(11) "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. (12) As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. (13) I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. (14) I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. (15) I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. (16) I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, **but the sleek and the strong I will destroy**. I will shepherd the flock with justice. (17) As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: **I will judge between one sheep and another**, and between rams and goats. (18) Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (19) Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? (20) Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, **I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep**. (21) Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, (22) I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. **I will judge between**

one sheep and another. (23) I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. (24) I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.
Ezekiel 34:11-24 NIV

As it was during the time of the Exodus when far from the entire complement who left Egypt entered the land of promise (indeed, only Caleb and Joshua of the older generation did enter the land), so it will be during this future judgment. Just as in the Exodus the children who had not yet reached an age of accountability did enter the land after the forty years of refining, so also in a similar way, we may expect a large proportion of those entering and passing this judgment to consist of those too young to be held accountable at present with the result that they are automatically allowed to enter. There will also be opportunity for repentance, the giving of the gospel message from the Lord Himself, the truth about salvation through the washing of the water of the Word of God wherein accepting His Person and His work, the blood of Christ, results in cleansing from all sin, deliverance and salvation for all who are willing to accept the truth (Jn.3:5; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5; Heb.10:22; 1Pet.3:21; cf. Heb.9:14; Jas.1:18; 1Pet.1:23).

The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire.
Isaiah 4:4 NIV

I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.
Jeremiah 33:8 NIV

In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for ***I will forgive the remnant I spare.***
Jeremiah 50:20 NIV

(18) Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. (19) You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
Micah 7:18-19 NIV

(9) "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. (10) From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. (11) On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. (12) ***But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord.*** (13) The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."
Zephaniah 3:9-13 NIV

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."

Zechariah 13:1 NIV

(2) But who can endure the day of [the Messiah's] coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. (3) He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, (4) and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Malachi 3:2-4 NIV

But while all who repent of their prior unbelief and accept Jesus as the Messiah and the true Son of God at this time will be cleansed and forgiven, the purging process will discover the dross, and those who would otherwise have been the "sons of the kingdom" will be thrust out into outer darkness.

I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.

Isaiah 1:25 NIV

(11) "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 8:11-12 NIV

At the completion of this process, God will conduct the remnant, those who have passed the test of faith, into the Land of Promise to experience the glorious blessings of the millennial rule of Jesus Christ.

(8) This is what the Lord says: "As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do in behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all. (9) I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live. (10) Sharon will [again] become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me."

Isaiah 65:8-10

7. The Judgment of the Church

Also known as "the judgment seat of Christ", this judgment is Christ's evaluation of His Bride, the resurrected Church (i.e., believers from Adam and Eve to the last person to accept Christ before His return). Our Lord will personally evaluate the lives of every human being who has ever lived following their resurrection, whether it is unto life or unto death. This is the first such resurrection judgment: since the Church is the first

echelon of the resurrection following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, final judgment begins with us.

For [the] time for the [last] judgment to begin with the household of God is [imminent] (cf. 1Pet.4:7). And if it begins first with us, what [in the world] will be the result for those who are disobeying the gospel of God (i.e., the "good news" of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ)?

1st Peter 4:17

a. The Time and Place of the Judgment:

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.

Matthew 16:27

Behold, I am coming quickly, and I bring with me my wages with which to repay each according to his work.

Revelation 22:12

The passages above and many others refer the time of our rewarding at our Lord's Second Advent (e.g., Is.40:10; 62:11; Matt.16:27; Lk.14:14; Rev.11:18; 22:12). The judgment of the Church will thus almost certainly take place immediately after the conclusion of the regathering and purging of Israel, following the resettlement of the remnant in the Land of Israel. Rather than a judgment of those still in mortal bodies, however, the final evaluation of the Church will concern believers from Adam and Eve to the Second Advent, all of whom were already resurrected to form part of Christ's Bride at His return. For believers and unbelievers both, resurrection confirms every person's final eternal state (saved or lost), and is a necessary event **before** receiving final judgment (for reward or for confirmation of condemnation respectively; cf. Dan.12:1-3; Rev.20:11-15).

"But as for you, [Daniel], be on your way until the end. For you will rest, and [then] at the end of days you will **arise** [in resurrection] **to receive your allotted inheritance.**"

Daniel 12:13

Therefore our eternal status will not be at issue in this judgment. Even in cases where production for Jesus during one's lifetime has been virtually nil, while all false efforts will be burned up, those believers with little to show for their lives will yet "be saved", though "so as through fire" (1Cor.3:15). Having survived life with our faith in Jesus Christ still intact, we shall remain part of His Body forever, even if our eternal rewards are at a minimal level.

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver,

and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

Romans 14:10-12 and 2nd Corinthians 5:10 both state that the judgment will take place "before Christ's tribunal". The word "tribunal" (also often translated "judgment seat"), is the Greek word *bema* (βῆμα), and refers to a public podium, dais, or rostrum, used for public speaking or administering justice. The latter accords better with the analogy Paul is drawing in these two passages, comparing the public evaluation of believers' earthly service with the Roman administration of justice (Acts 18:12-17; cf. Matt.27:19; Jn.19:13; Acts 12:21; 25:6-17). Unlike most contemporary settings of jurisprudence where trials are held indoors and generally not made widely available, as in the example of Roman justice (where the trial occurs in some central part of the city or municipality, often in the open air, and always accessible to all), our evaluation before Christ's *bema* or judgment seat will be public, and since all members of the Church will be evaluated, it certainly stands to reason that the entire Body of Christ will attend. This circumstance argues for an outdoor venue (rather than within the holy of holies of the temple whence Christ will reign for a thousand years), and we know from Isaiah that during the Millennium there will be just such a large, open-air area for assembly in Jerusalem near the temple, miraculously protected from the elements:

(5) And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. (6) It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

Difficulties of space (the approximate size of the Church is unknown, but if the number of those who truly put their faith in the Lord from Eden onwards reached into the billions, it would not be at all surprising), and of time (obviously, to give each person an individual evaluation would require a tremendous amount of "earth time"), are likely to be met supernaturally. After all, everyone being evaluated will be at that point "eternal", so that both Judge and judged will be capable of standing somewhat outside of normal temporal and spatial constraints as well as within (compare the ability of the resurrection body to defy the limitations of time and space as we presently understand them). Therefore although the question of how long a time this last of the seven judgments, the "judgment of the Church", will take is not set out in scripture, on the basis of its association with the other Second Advent judgments it must surely be relatively short-lived (again, in "earth time"). That would seem to suggest that this will be a case of our Lord doing almost instantaneously (in terms of our present

understanding of time) what would otherwise require a very long period to accomplish, if one were to be restricted to the current laws of time and space (which our Lord clearly is not, and, in resurrection, our present earthly restraints will be greatly changed as well).²² In other words, it will both be a short judgment (in calendar terms), and a long and detailed one (in terms of the precise and exacting evaluation of each of us by our Lord Jesus Christ). The fact that we like He at that point will no longer be subject to temporal constraints in the same way as we are now (for we shall have been resurrected at that point) no doubt explains much about the potential to compress this process temporally from the earthly point of view.²³

b. The Order of Judgment: While the sequence in which we shall be judged by our Lord is not expressly specified in scripture, there is much to suggest that the order will proceed according to merit. That is to say, the judgment will not be chronological (i.e., starting with Abel, Adam and Eve, etc.), nor reverse chronological (i.e., beginning with the last tribulational cohort to be saved before Christ's appearance), but instead it will progress from the greatest believers to the least, beginning with the likes of king David and the prophets and the apostles, and terminating with all those whose production during this life was at the bare minimum level.

1) Many who are last shall be first: Our Lord's prophecy to the effect that many of those who were exalted in this life will find their positions reversed with those who were not is clearly tied to the principle that self-exaltation in the service of self-interest (i.e., **not** rank or position per se, but self-sought promotion) tends to negate reward, while self-abasement in the service of the kingdom of God (i.e., **not** asceticism practiced perversely for its own sake, but genuine sacrifices made on behalf of serving Christ's Church) tends to produce this reversal of the present order.

"Whoever wishes to be **first** will [have to become] **last** of all and a servant of all."
Mark 9:35

"So whoever **lowers** himself like this child, this person will be **higher** [ranking] in the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 18:4

"For the one who is [making himself] **smaller** among you all, this person is the **great[er]** [one]."
Luke 9:48

It is in this sense that we should understand Jesus' words about the exchange of places between "the first and the last": the standards of this world are not the ones our Lord will use in determining our eternal rewards; rather, our Lord will execute a true judgment wherein "many" who seem great in this life will be found to have produced little, while "many" who seemed insignificant in this life will be found to have produced much, with each group being rewarded "according to what they have done" (Ps.62:12; Matt.16:27; Rom.2:6; 1Cor.3:8; Rev.2:23; 22:12).

And it is not that **everyone** who seems to be "great" to the world's eyes will not also be so in eternity (e.g., David, Moses, Daniel, the prophets, the apostles, and many others seemed great at the time and genuinely were; these individuals will without question figure high on the list on that day of days); nor is it the case that **everyone** who seems insignificant in the world's estimation will not also be so in eternity (for some who seem not to be producing for the Lord really are not producing for the Lord). Nevertheless, the emphasis our Lord put on this point suggests strongly that we should take to heart the principle that present appearances are likely to be deceiving in "many" cases. For "many" who may seem to us now as likely to be among the first in the kingdom will in fact be shown not to have produced much at all that is significant for the Lord, while "many" whose work and sacrifice is not highly visible at present will be revealed as having produced significant results for Jesus Christ "on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom.2:16). It is for this reason that we should be reluctant to "judge before the time":

(4) The Lord is the One who judges me. (5) Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.

1st Corinthians 4:4a-5

Seen from this perspective, our Lord's statements about the "many first being last" and "many last being first" likely also indicate that the order of the judgment of Christ's Church will proceed as suggested above, that is, from the most meritorious to the least so.

But **many who are first will be last, and the last first.**

Mark 10:31 NIV

Indeed **there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.**

Luke 13:30 NIV

The context of the first passage above, Mark 10:17-31, is the request made of Jesus by the rich young ruler to know what must be done to inherit eternal life, his disappointment when told to sell his possessions, and Peter's desire to receive confirmation of the reward he and others will receive for following Jesus sacrificially. Against this background, Jesus' words "many who are first will be last, and the last first" are meant to demonstrate that although to the world's eyes the apostles were at that time nothing compared to the rich and powerful Pharisees and Sadducees, at the judgment their places would be reversed (so that Peter and his fellows should keep their eyes focused on their eternal reward rather than on their present humble status). The context for the second passage above, Luke 13:22-30, is Jesus' description of the narrow door of salvation, and the exclusion of many of the prominent religious figures of the day from the great millennial celebration-banquet. Against this background, Jesus' words "there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" likewise indicate that few of those who are seen to be celebrities in this world will be so in God's

eyes in the next, and that on the other hand many who are of no account in the world's thinking will be honored on that future day.

Perhaps the clearest evidence from this set of "first-last-last-first" passages which indicates that a correspondence is to be found between this reversal of roles (i.e., between the only apparently spiritual and with those who are truly meritorious though anonymous workers for Christ) and the order of judgment-reward comes from the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

(30) ***But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.*** (1) "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. (2) He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. (3) "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. (4) He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' (5) So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. (6) About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' (7) " 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' (8) "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' (9) "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. (10) So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. (11) When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. (12) 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' (13) "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? (14) Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. (15) Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' (16) "***So the last will be first, and the first will be last.***"

Matthew 19:30 - 20:16 NIV

With the use of the word "so" (Greek *houtos*, οὕτως, "thus / in this way") in verse sixteen above, we see that it is the reversal of the expected **order** that constitutes the fulfillment of the "last/first – first/last" prophecy. Applying this to the Church at large, the denarius represents the award of salvation which all who trust in Christ will possess equally. The workers hired first represent those who seem in the world's eyes according to the world's standards as likely to receive a larger reward, while those hired last appear to be precisely the opposite, namely, those whose reward will be the least. But in fact, the situation is exactly the reverse of worldly impressions. For our purposes here, the critical point of interpretation is the greater honor given to those whose production is often invisible to us here and now being represented **by the order** of evaluation: rather than having to wait at the end of the line, this group is promoted by being given their wages first (while on the contrary those who **appear** to our sight to be worthy of more, are not, and are in fact placed behind the truly more worthy). Thus this parable indicates that those who are truly first in God's eyes will receive their judgment and

reward first, while those who may seem more prominent to us but are actually not so in truth will have to wait until later, a situation which also reflects their relatively lesser rewards.

2) The Parable of the Banquet Guests:

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 14:7-11 NIV

As in the case of the first and the last, many of those who assume that they are deserving of "first place" (and are assumed by others to be so as well), will find themselves demoted to the end of the line when the true Judge begins His process of evaluation. In contrast, those who were at first not deemed worthy by their fellow diners of such honor, nor even deeming themselves so, will be promoted to the first rank. Humbling oneself for Christ, that is, pursuing Jesus' agenda in this life rather than what the world esteems, though such a course of action usually results in little worldly glory, is the only way to achieve anything worthwhile for Him and thus to be exalted by Him on that great day so as to be moved up to the first rank, that is, to be evaluated earlier in the order reflecting greater rewards (in contrast to those who sought honor in this life and accomplished little for Jesus, and will thus be among those evaluated last, an indication of lesser reward).

3) The Parable of the Talents and the Minas: The parable of the talents (Matt.25:14-30), and the parable of the minas (Lk.19:11-27), though not identical in all details do teach the same principles. In both cases, the master or king represents our Lord, while we are represented by his servants. In each telling of this parable, the servants are given money belonging to their lord and commanded to make good use of it until he returns (with his return representing the Second Advent). The money given to (us) represents the means, opportunity, and authority (cf. Mk.13:34) to act for the Lord in His stead here on earth according to the gifts we have been given (*n.b.*, the English word "talent" actually comes from this parable). Talents and minas are both monetary units used throughout the ancient Mediterranean world from Babylon to Rome. Depending upon the specific standard employed, the approximate weight of a talent could range from some 60 to 100 pounds. At current rates for gold, therefore, a single talent might be worth as much as a million and half dollars in contemporary terms (although its buying power in the ancient economy where money was scarcer in relative terms would be significantly greater). A mina (or mna), was commonly one sixtieth of a talent and thus, while still very valuable, was worth considerably less (i.e., comparing the total value of the amounts given to the servants who received the talents to that given to the servants who

each received a single mina equates roughly to eight million dollars versus twenty to thirty thousand dollars). The disparate range between these two similar parables indicates a similarly large range in the gifts and opportunities we are given, but the standard of judgment is the same in every case: our Lord expects a return on His investment, and will reward us wonderfully and marvelously in proportion to our efforts (i.e., the one whose mina gained ten more is placed over ten cities; the one whose mina gained five more is placed over five cities), but will do so with a reward that abundantly exceeds our results to an unimaginable degree (i.e., by the standards of the ancient world even more so than today, rulership over a city would be vastly more valuable than a single mina). For our purposes here, we see in both versions that the servants who accomplished the most are judged and rewarded first, and that the judgment continues in a descending order until it reaches the servant who accomplished nothing.

4) Millennial Offices: Finally, since we know that believers will share Christ's millennial rule (Matt.25:19-23; Lk.22:28; 1Cor.6:3; Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6; and see below), it stands to reason that those who will hold the highest positions will be rewarded first (as it is customary in the organizing of any hierarchy to begin with the top positions). It is not only logical but consistent with scriptural notions of appropriate honor for the likes of David and the two who will sit at Christ's right and left hands (presumably Moses and Elijah) and the twelve apostles to have the honor of first place in evaluation so as to take their places first in the millennial command structure which our Lord will establish.

c. The Procedure and Criteria of the Judgment: With the incarnation, all judgment was placed into our Lord Jesus Christ's hands (Jn.5:22; cf. Acts 10:42). Jesus is our Judge here and now and will be the One who judges us on that day; and since that is so, any idea we may have of taking judgment into our hands in criticizing our brothers and sisters in Christ is horribly presumptuous (as the passage immediately below states). We are Jesus' Bride, His Church, and He is the One who will personally evaluate "how we did" in living this life for Him (or not).

(10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also belittle your brother? For we will all stand before God's tribunal (11) as it is written: "As I live", says the Lord, "every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will praise God" (Is.45:23). (12) So then ***each of us will give an account*** concerning himself to God.

Romans 14:10-12

For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive ***recompense for what he has accomplished through this body***, whether it be good or worthless.

2nd Corinthians 5:10

It is clear from these and other passages that this will be a thorough and comprehensive judgment: our actions will be individually evaluated, with the eternal rewards we receive depending upon "what we accomplished" with our time, resources and opportunities here in life. Our Lord's judgment of us will thus be quite detailed, covering all of our positive actions, and all of our negative ones as well (1Cor.3:12-15), including even our

every word (Matt.12:36-37; cf. Heb.13:17; Jude 1:15). In the context of the passage immediately above, 2nd Corinthians 5:10, we see Paul using this future judgment to motivate our behavior here and now: because this future judgment is the *crowning* event of our lives on earth (though it takes place after resurrection), we should "make it our [primary] ambition to please Him (i.e., our Lord Jesus Christ)" (v.9). For if we were to find ourselves standing before Him this instant, we would certainly realize more fully and deeply than we can presently imagine that all of the troubles and pleasures of this life had meaning only in so far as we overcame them in service to Him (or failed to do so). In fact, the word Paul uses to express what should be our goal or desire or mind-set is the Greek *philotimeomai* (φιλοτιμέομαι), meaning etymologically and essentially "to love honor/office/promotion". This verb is used throughout Greek literature to express the inner drive of highly motivated individuals to compete for the top honors in society, be it in politics, athletics or any other field. Individuals characterized in this way are "ambitious", that is, possessed of a burning desire for success in their respective fields of endeavor. As Paul says elsewhere (1Cor.9:25), non-Christians pour their all into their work, professions or pursuits "to win a *perishable* prize, but we do it to win an *imperishable* one". When we stand before Jesus, we can be sure that it will not only be our words and actions that are evaluated, but also the intentions and motivations of our hearts. If we have loved the world and the things of the world more than our rewards and the One they glorify forever, that will be made abundantly clear.

The Lord is the One who judges me. Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.
1st Corinthians 4:4-5

Not only should we not judge others, but we should even refrain from judging ourselves "before the time". The reason for this seems obvious: if we are too harsh on ourselves for lack of visible progress in our ministries, we may be unnecessarily discouraging ourselves on account of trivial things that are truly not our fault, with the unfortunate result of possibly backing off on our efforts (but there have always been ministries which, while it is the Lord's desire for them to be done, yet do not yield the same obvious results as what those of others may *seem* to be yielding); on the other hand if we are too pleased with ourselves and our work, whether we are justified in our assessment or are grievously miscalculating, in either case we are similarly more likely to back off on our efforts as if we have already "arrived" (although if our Lord has given us a particularly fertile field it is certain that He expects more from us in terms of visible production rather than less). It is our Lord Jesus who has assigned to us the particular field we are to till, be it exceptionally fertile or barren (1Cor.12:5), and it is God the Father who provides the results (1Cor.12:6; cf. Mk.4:26-28). Therefore, we will avoid both potential pitfalls by keeping our eyes on the finish line ahead and resisting the temptation to look backward.

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which

God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:13-14

We know the course; we know the rules; we know how to run. Now is **not** the time to survey the course, or look back at how far we have come. Now is the time to run. If we keep on running in the way our Lord would have us do, our reward will take care of itself.

In terms of procedure, as suggested above, our evaluation will take the form of a dialogue between us and the Lord. In the parables of the talents and the minas, the master in each case summons his servants to discover how they have done, and in each case his servants give him a report (cf. Matt.25:19; Lk.19:15); likewise in each case, whether the report is favorable or unfavorable, the master pronounces reward (or punishment) based upon the results. Two obvious differences between the general approach indicated by these parables and the specific procedure of the Judgment Seat of Christ are, first, that our Lord knows very well ahead of time exactly what we have done (so that there is in no sense any "finding out" on His part during these proceedings). Secondly, the last individual in each case, the one who fails utterly to carry out his master's orders and is thrown into hell as a result, represents faithless unbelievers who squander their lives entirely. This group will not be evaluated until the last judgment. Believers whose production is at a bare minimum level will be rewarded last and least (discussed above), and while believers whose efforts have been in truth worthless will suffer loss of anticipated reward (1Cor.3:10-15, discussed below), no one at this judgment will lose their eternal life or full share in Jesus Christ.²⁴

The dialogue format of this judgment can also be deduced from our Lord's synoptic description of the parallel evaluation of millennial believers (i.e., the "sheep" of Matthew 25), and the final "last" judgment of all unbelievers which follows it immediately (i.e., the "goats" of Matthew 25). In each case, our Lord begins with an overall evaluation of the person's life based upon their deeds which in turn reflect their status, saved or lost respectively; and in each case the person being evaluated responds with a question which is then answered by our Lord. As this treatment is meant to be seen as synoptic in nature (e.g., the list of deeds or failures is clearly not meant to be seen as identical in every case), all we can glean from this description about the procedure of our own judgment is that there will be a verbal give and take whereby we are given to see the quality of our life's work (or lack thereof). This same essential picture is found at 1st Peter 4:5 where we are told that unbelievers, who we know are judged "according to their deeds" (Rev.20:12-13), will "*render an account* to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead", and also at Hebrews 13:17 where pastor-teachers are said to work hard (lit., depriving themselves of sleep) "as those who will have to render an account" – those sitting under their ministries should obey them and yield to them "so that they may do this (i.e., render an account to the Lord) with joy and not with groaning – for that would be unprofitable for you". In short, what the Bible has to say about the actual procedure of our life-evaluation before Christ's tribunal is precisely the sort of thing we ought to expect when a Judge with full powers and complete evidence evaluates an individual's record for the purpose of instruction and reward, namely, a dialogue wherein the facts of the case are revealed through a process of questioning and

answering, with a final pronouncement from the Judge which, in this case, will determine our eternal rewards for all eternity. The conclusion Paul draws from this sobering thought, appended directly to his discussion of the judgment seat of Christ in 2nd Corinthians 5:10 (quoted above), is telling:

Since then we understand ***what it means to fear the Lord*** (i.e., in anticipation of this judgment), we are [trying to] persuade everyone (i.e., to run a good race). Our motives in this are clear to God, and I hope that they are also clear in your hearts (lit., "consciences") as well.

2nd Corinthians 5:11

We should all certainly take the above in deadly earnest, and set to ordering our lives according to this future judgment. After all, if we are striving for success in whatever it is we must do in this life (work and profession), whatever we have obligated ourselves to do in this life (marriage and family), and even in whatever it is we choose to do in this life (hobbies and avocations), how is it that we are not striving with *at least* equal vigor in what will count not only for the short span of these lives of ours on earth but also for all eternity? The prospect of being publically judged by our Lord Himself in the presence of all our brothers and sisters in the Church should certainly fill us with reverent fear – but not with irrational terror. God is not asking us to do anything we cannot do, no matter how hard living our lives for Jesus may sometimes appear. We run this race one step at a time, one day at a time, one thought, one word, one deed at a time – and they all count. No matter how late in the race it may be, we still have time – "as long as it is still called 'today'" (Heb.3:13) – to make all our remaining opportunities count for Jesus Christ. He will provide us with the means to will and to do (Phil.2:13), if only we are willing to do. We should also take comfort in the fact that God is totally fair, cannot be otherwise, and that therefore our Lord Jesus' judgment of us will be absolutely impartial, totally objective, and based upon absolutely perfect and complete information. Jesus will take every pertinent factor into consideration in a perfect way, and render a judgment which is absolutely just in every respect.

(5) But according to the hardness and unrepentant nature of your heart, you are storing up²⁵ for yourself wrath in the Day of wrath and revelation of God's just judgment, (6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works. (7) To those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life. (8) But to those who are disobedient to the truth out of selfish ambition, obeying unrighteousness instead, [there will be only] wrath and anger. (9) Tribulation and vexation will be the lot of every single individual who does what is wrong, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (10) Glory and honor and peace will be the blessing upon everyone who does what is right, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (11) For ***there is no favoritism with God.*** (12) As many as sin without the Law will perish without the Law, and as many as sin under the Law will be judged through the Law. (13) For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but it is those who follow (lit., "do") the Law who will be justified. (14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do by nature the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of the Law has been written in their hearts when their conscience testifies against them,

and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them. (16) This [examination will take place] on the day when God **will judge the secret things of men** through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:5-16

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions. (13) For there is **no created thing [which can remain] invisible** before Him. **Everything is naked and laid bare** to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12-13

So if you are calling upon a Father who renders judgment upon each man's work **in a [completely] impartial way** [and you most certainly are], then [you should make it your practice to] live the remaining time of your [temporary] sojourn here [on earth] **in [Godly] fear**.

1st Peter 1:17

In regard to the standard of judgment which will be employed, it is evident from the passages treated above and indeed from a multiplicity of passages that all will be judged "according to works" (e.g., Matt.16:27; 2Cor.5:10; 1Pet.1:17; Rev.2:23; 20:12-13; 22:12). However, it needs to be understood that "works" (from the Greek *ergon*, ἔργον, cf. English "erg", "ergonomics", "energy"), is a generic term employed in the Bible to encompass the totality of our actions in this life and, by extrapolation, our lack thereof (something which one would hope is obvious from the equally large number of passages where the judgment is described in slightly different terms but with the same overall meaning: e.g., Rom.2:7; 14:10-12; 1Cor.4:4-5; 2Cor.5:10; 2Pet.1:9-11). Suffice it to say that we will be judged not by what we were tempted to do and didn't, nor by what we intended to do and didn't, but by whatever we actually did do in thought, word and deed throughout the entire course of our earthly lives. This will clearly include our motivations and reasons for doing (or not doing) whatever we did (or did not) do, as well as all the attendant circumstances pertaining thereto. Simply put, the Lord will know (and in fact already knows) more about what we did and why we did it than we could ever possibly dream to know ourselves in this life, even if we made such an investigation our prime concern (and what a hopeless, pointless task that would be).

The assumption on the part of many Christians that "works" is a phrase restricted to deeds of charity (or concrete, physical "acts" at all) is thus entirely incorrect. James tells us that "faith without works is dead", but the examples he uses to describe what the "work of faith" looks like are not charitable actions at all, namely, Abraham's trusting of God in the command to sacrifice Isaac, and Rahab's concealing of the spies because she feared God more than threat to her life from her own townsmen (Jas.2:21-25). In a similar way, in chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews where the apostle Paul gives us a veritable catalog of the "great deeds" of believers of the past, there is not a single instance of what we today would consider "charity". What all of the "deeds" in this chapter have in common are a remarkable faith-response to God, trusting Him in the

most difficult of circumstances and doing what He has called us to do regardless of the consequences. It is out of such faith that the "deeds" with which God is truly pleased must come, in the hope that He will reward steadfastness and steadfast service to Him and His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

Ultimately, it is the sum of our faith-choices for God, generating our hope, and manifesting a genuine love for God and His children (which is never without its own tangible fruits), which forms the basis for our reward. These are our true deeds, regardless of the misconceptions of the world or the sad manner in which some organizations may wish to define and limit them.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:11-12 NIV

(5) And to this end, along with ***your faith*** zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, (6) and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, (7) and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. (8) For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) But whoever does not possess these [virtues] is nearsighted or even blind, having forgotten the cleansing of his previous sins. (10) Strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your calling and election secure. By devoting yourselves to these things [virtue, growth and Christian production] you shall never be tripped up along your way. (11) For it is by such means that ***your path into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.***

2nd Peter 1:5-11

d. The Rewards: On the issue of rewards, the first thing that we should understand is that "reward motivation" in the Christian life is not only legitimate, but ***absolutely essential*** for a proper and successful running of the Christian race. We run to win, not to lose.

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and ***[must believe] that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.***

Hebrews 11:6b

Reward motivation is a quintessential means of transforming our thinking, leading us to modify our outlook on the world, to change our behavior where appropriate, and to adjust our priorities to the eternal over the temporal.

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Great believers in every generation of the Church from Adam and Eve to the end of the Tribulation have always had (and always will have) the desire to please God **and to be rewarded by Him** (albeit eternally rather than temporally) as the foundation of their thinking, motivating their entire approach to the Christian life, spurring them on in the race.

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ **greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt.** (26) For he was **looking to his reward.**

Hebrews 11:24-26

To be rewarded at the highest level requires in turn the highest sort of diligent attention to the truth and to the application of it to one's life. Further, such a manner of life is only possible if one **really believes** that what is done for Jesus Christ in this life is of infinitely greater importance than anything else. Thus it is that there is nothing more important than focusing on the treasures which await those who have performed well in the Christian life (instead of focusing on the transitory treasures of this world which are in truth merely dust) – at least for all those who wish to be richly rewarded in a manner which will be pleasing to our Lord. And indeed there is no better proof of this truth and no better example of the proper way to think about this issue than the example of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and **run with endurance the race set before us**, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, **for the joy set before Him**, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

As the most successful warrior on this battlefield, our Lord has won "the Name above every Name" (Phil.2:9), and has been seated at the right hand of the glory of God to await the day of His installment as King of King and Lord of Lords (Ps.110:1). But as the verses above demonstrate, as part of His reward He has also won for Himself a Bride, His Church. We are "the joy" or special reward with which our Lord motivated Himself to run that most difficult of all races here in the devil's world.

(20) Which [divine power] He (i.e., the Father) exercised in Christ by having raised Him from the dead and having seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places] (21) far above every other rulership or authority or power or lordship and [far above] every other name which may be mentioned not only in this age but also in the age to come. (22) And He (i.e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways.
Ephesians 1:20-23

All things have fallen to Him who has won the victory of victories, and we believers have in turn come "into the joy of our Master" (Matt.25:21-23). Just as our Lord Jesus encouraged Himself with "the joy that was before Him", so we too should never let slip from our mind's eye the joy of being rewarded and commended by Him for a job well done on this earth, for that is precisely what He desires us to do.

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) **Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place** and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:5-11

As Jesus' sacrifice was the most sublime of all time, not only in humbling Himself and becoming a human being, not only in enduring the most difficult life in human history, not only in ministering the perfect ministry whose end was condemnation and crucifixion, but also and most importantly in paying the penalty for all sin by being put to death for them in the darkness on the cross (His spiritual death), so He has reaped the greatest imaginable reward, and our own rewards on that day before His judgment seat will be apportioned out to us from what He has won. Thus, He is our example of the perfect approach, and a large part of that approach, not only legitimate but necessary for success, is a sharp focus on the eternal rewards which will accrue to those who walk like Jesus walked. For everything we do in this life that is truly for Jesus Christ will not fail to have its reward, given to us by the Lord Himself and enduring for all eternity.

"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for **your work will be rewarded.**"
2nd Chronicles 15:7 NIV

This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for **your work will be rewarded,**" declares the Lord.
Jeremiah 31:16a NIV

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's

reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives **even a cup of cold water** to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly **not lose his reward.**"

Matthew 10:40-42 NIV (cf. Mk.9:41)

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, **you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**"

Luke 14:12-14 NIV

(5) You who are slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling with simplicity of heart just as you [should obey] the Lord, (6) not doing so with "eye-service" (i.e., only when they are watching you) as those who seek to please men, but as servants of Christ, accomplishing God's will from your heart, (7) serving with good will as if to the Lord and not to men, (8) for you know that **whatever good thing each one of you accomplishes, he will receive [a reward] for this from the Lord,** whether he is slave or free.

Ephesians 6:5-8

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that **you will receive an inheritance** from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-24 NIV

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. **"For their deeds follow with them."**

Revelation 14:13

Every true believer will have at least **something** to show for their time on this earth. For as James assures us, "faith without works is dead"; therefore every true believer with a genuinely living faith will not fail to have accomplished at least some small acts that stem from that faith while here on earth. As mentioned above, we should resist seeing such acts as being restricted to what is currently thought of as "charity". Acting out of faith can take many forms, for as Jesus Himself assures us the fundamental "work" of all Christians is "to believe in the One He has sent" (Jn.6:29). Regardless of the level of production in this life and corresponding level of reward in the next, all true believers in Jesus Christ who exit this world with their faith still intact will receive an eternal inheritance "which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed" (1Pet.1:4), a perfect resurrection body, a place in the New Jerusalem, and eternal access to the Son of God Himself, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There will be many other extraordinary benefits in which the entire Body of Christ will share, some to which scripture alludes (as in our access to the tree of life: Rev.2:7; 22:2), and others which we cannot even at present imagine:

But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him".

1st Corinthians 2:9

(6) "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:6-7 NIV

This common set of eternal blessings which will fall to the lot of every believer for all eternity is analogous to the inheritance that all Israelites received upon their entrance into the Land of Promise – or more precisely put, the temporal inheritance is actually an analogy which teaches the enduring eternal one (just as the earthly temple is merely a representation of the true heavenly realities, etc.). Indeed, we find the New Testament replete with this inheritance analogy, indicating just how important it is for us to concentrate our focus on the eternal possessions we shall enjoy rather than on the ephemeral here and now. As members of the Body of Christ, we are God's heirs and we are Christ's heirs, possessors of an inheritance of eternal life in God's eternal Kingdom whose richness exceeds anything we can presently even imagine. Regardless of how little or how much we have done for Him in this life, all believers will receive a full share in Jesus and the kingdom:

(16) For the Spirit Himself testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. (17) And if we are God's children, then ***we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs*** of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:16-17

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and ***heirs according to the promise***.

Galatians 3:29 NIV

So that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become ***heirs*** in regard to the eternal life for which we hope.

Titus 3:7

Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, ***the heirs of His promise*** [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath (Gen.22:16-17).

Hebrews 6:17

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to ***inherit*** the kingdom he promised those who love him?

James 2:5 NIV

(8b) in all wisdom and understanding [God] has made known to us the mystery He has willed (according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ]) for administering this [present] fulfillment of the epochs: namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth – (11) In whom ***we also have an inheritance***, having been ordained according to the design of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will, (12) that we who have previously placed our hope in Christ might serve the purpose of generating praise for His glory (in life). (13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is ***a pledge of our inheritance*** for redeeming its preservation (i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:8b-14

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, ***the riches of his glorious inheritance*** in the saints.

Ephesians 1:18 NIV

. . . . giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you ***to share in the inheritance*** of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 1:12 NIV

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that ***you will receive an inheritance*** from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-24 NIV

And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called ***might receive their eternal inheritance*** on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant. Hebrews 9:15

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and ***to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed***, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time.

1st Peter 1:3-5

One important aspect of our coming reward which needs to be considered here is that a good deal of the authority, the gifts and the other tangible rewards we shall receive from the Lord are said to come to us as a result of our sharing in the plunder or "spoils" that He won by His victory on the cross (cf. Ps.68:12; 110:1-7; Mic.4:13).

Arise, O God! Judge the earth! For You will assign [us] an inheritance among all the nations.

Psalm 82:8

Then (i.e., at the 2nd Advent) an abundance of spoils will be divided and even the lame will carry off plunder.

Isaiah 33:23b NIV

Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12

(21) "When a strong man (i.e., Satan by analogy; cf. vv.14-20), fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. (22) But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

Luke 11:21-22 NIV (cf. Matt.12:25-29)

(7) And to each of us this grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) For it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive (i.e., He brought pre-cross believers to heaven). **He gave gifts to men.**" (9) Now [as to] this [phrase] "He ascended", what can it mean except that He had also [previously] descended into the lower reaches of the earth (i.e., Hades, from whence He brought the pre-cross believers to heaven)? (10) The One who descended is also the One who ascended above all the heavens (i.e., into the third heaven, the place of the Father's residence), in order to fulfill all things (i.e., complete the victory won at the cross; cf. Ps.110:1).

Ephesians 4:7-10 (cf. Ps.68:18)

In this last passage, we note that the spiritual gifts that are the unique province of Church Age believers are essentially our "weapons" whereby we may earn the battlefield decorations and earn a share of these "spoils" which will be ours for all eternity. Since the devil and his angels are described as the ones defeated at the cross and made subject to plunder, there is a sense in which all that they now have (i.e., their positions, powers, and territories on earth and within the universe) will fall to our lot on that great future day of distribution.

Reaping *significant* rewards is not, however, automatic. Establishing the sort of track-record in the Christian life commensurate with substantial honors awarded before the judgment seat of Christ requires diligence, consistency, persistence, and perseverance.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants **whose master finds them watching when he comes.** I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to

serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.

Luke 12:35-38 NIV

(6) Let him who receives instruction in the Word share in all good things with him who gives instruction. (7) Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (8) For the one whose sowing is directed to his own [sinful] flesh from that [sinful] flesh will reap corruption, but the one whose sowing is directed toward the Spirit, from that [same] Spirit will reap eternal life. (9) And [so] let us not grow weary of doing the good [work of God], for at [the appointed] time we will reap [our reward], **provided that we do not give up**. (10) So then as long as we have this opportunity, let us keep accomplishing the good [work of God] towards all [people], and especially to the family of faith.

Galatians 6:6-10

Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he **competes according to the rules**. The **hard-working** farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

2nd Timothy 2:5-7 NASB

(7) So **be patient**, brothers, until the coming (*parousia*, 2nd Advent) of the Lord. Consider: the [good] farmer waits for the earth [to yield its] precious crop, waiting patiently for it until it receives the late and early rains [which make it grow]. (8) So then, [see to it that] you too exercise [such] patience, [and] steady your hearts, because the return of the Lord has drawn near. (9) Brothers, do not grumble against one another so that you may not be judged [for it]. Behold, the Judge [Jesus Christ] is standing in front of the door (i.e., His return and our final judgment are imminent)!

James 5:7-9

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep **persevering** so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – **after** you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "**Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him** (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:35-39

Moreover, this consistent and dedicated work for which we shall be richly rewarded is nothing more, of course, than precisely what we are supposed to be doing in any case.

(7) "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? (8) Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? (9) Would he thank the servant

because he did what he was told to do? (10) So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "

Luke 17:10 NIV

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them).

Ephesians 2:10

The Land of Promise requires a significant journey. To receive our promised inheritance therein (and especially to receive it bountifully) we have to follow the Lord wherever He leads us (cf. Rev.14:4). Despite shortages of water or food, God has and will always provide. Despite opposition from enemies numerous and strong, He always has and always will give us the victory. The fight we fight, the journey we travel, the struggle with which we have to contend may not be obvious to the world (the purpose behind it and its ultimate reward certainly are not). But the way in which we negotiate the distance between "point A" (wherever we now find ourselves), and "point B" (the moment when our Lord Jesus calls us back to Himself) makes all the difference. Only by continuing to walk, fight, and struggle in a faithful way will we reap the maximum rewards to which we have been called.

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the Exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come to serve as examples for us, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:1-13

As Paul's assessment of the poor performance of the Exodus generation above indicates, the dangers and pitfalls along the way to Zion are numerous, and the number of believers who overcome them to win significant rewards is small in consequence. Indeed, through its use of athletic and military metaphors wherein significant rewards accrue only to the few, scripture seems to confirm what observation suggests, namely, that those who will receive the highest levels of reward will be relatively few in number, and thus in turn that while all believers will enjoy salvation, eternal life, an equal share of Jesus Christ, a resurrection body, and a place forever in the New Jerusalem, many if not most will have little to show for their life here on earth in terms of additional rewards (cf. Rom.2:7; 1Cor.9:24-27; Gal.6:7-9; Phil.3:11-16; 1Pet.1:9). For in the case of many believers, it will be seen that their time here on earth was largely wasted (from the divine point of view). Instead of living for Jesus, they were distracted by fear and greed, and worked for themselves instead. In the parable of the Sower, these are those who fell among the weeds and the thorns:

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that he becomes unproductive."

Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow up [over them like thorns and weeds] and stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that they become unproductive."

Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who are stunted by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they do not bear a full crop to harvest."

Luke 8:14

Finally in this regard, there is a large difference between what God judges to be genuine, legitimate production and what mankind may perceive. As the parable of the Sower makes clear, genuine production is always a result of genuine spiritual growth which precedes it. It is only the "good ground" which receives the Word and accepts it without compromise, responding to it in an acceptable and godly way, which produces a significant crop (Matt.13:23; Mk.4:20; Lk.8:15). It is a very common thing in the Christian life – and has been very common throughout human history – for people to attempt to "work" their way into heaven or into God's good graces. Even a cup of cold water offered in the Lord's Name will not fail to receive its due reward (Matt.10:42; Mk.9:41), but the gift of millions of dollars done out of self-righteousness and self-aggrandizement is of absolutely no avail in entreating God's favor. When unbelievers employ such methods, they are only engaging in self-deception. When believers do the same, attempting to substitute self-works for spiritual growth and true, godly production, their false efforts will be erased at the Judgment Seat of Christ. They themselves will be saved (just as the seeds that fall among the thorns indicate genuine believers who are ineffective for Jesus Christ), but only "though as through fire".

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) ***If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss*** [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] ***as through fire*** [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].
1st Corinthians 3:10-15

Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may instead receive a full reward. No one who goes wandering off, that is, anyone who does not keep to the teachings about Jesus Christ, has [even] a share in God.
2nd John 8-9

I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have so that no one takes your crown [away].
Revelation 3:11

Level 1 Rewards: All those who truly love Jesus Christ should take to heart the wonderful news that all of their legitimate efforts for Him here on earth will be richly rewarded by Him at His judgment seat. Indeed, above this basic level of salvation without significant production (representing those who were distracted by the "thorns" of life), scripture details three higher levels of reward (represented in the crowns of righteousness, life, and glory respectively, and in the 30, 60, and 100-fold harvest of the parable of the Sower). Before moving on to these higher level rewards, a few additional, general points need to be made here.

1) All believers will receive an inheritance for placing their faith in Jesus Christ and maintaining that faith to the end of their lives. This inheritance will be wonderful beyond expression and beyond our present ability even to understand it. It is doubtlessly true that a moment of eternal bliss experienced by the very last person in line when our Lord hands out eternal rewards will exceed to infinity the longest and most blessed human life here in time on earth. All believers will have eternal life, a full share in Jesus Christ and eternal access to Him and our heavenly Father, a resurrection body which will never age or know pain or grief, access to and a place in the New Jerusalem, and many other exquisitely sublime blessings which at present we cannot even dimly comprehend. That said, it is still the case that even "more" is possible, that we are called to have "more", that this "more" is earned through spiritual growth, progress and ministry here in time, and that this "more" will glorify our Lord Jesus forever, even as our efforts to win it please Him now and will be officially acknowledged by Him during this judgment.

2) There is an important distinction to be drawn between the type of believer being considered here who has very little to show for a life of faith (the thorny-ground type), and on the other hand an unbeliever who never had faith at all (the packed-ground type) or one who lost faith (the rocky-ground type). Faith without any works whatsoever is dead (Jas.2:20), so that all true believers will have some record of legitimate production, however small (Ex.34:20b). This example is not of "dead faith" but rather is one of a faith on "life-support", namely, a marginal believer just barely hanging onto their faith in Jesus, distracted by the worries of the world and its pleasures, never having committed to spiritual growth, and therefore never truly tested nor having accomplished the ministry intended for him. This thorny-ground category of believer **does** exist. In fact all scriptural and experiential indications suggest that it is by far the category containing the largest number of Christians. It is nonetheless the case that, in addition to being the most scantily rewarded category, it is also by far the most **dangerous** category. For that reason, as we can clearly see from the parable of the Sower (the thorny ground) and from the passages quoted above (i.e., 1Cor.3:10-15; 2Jn.1:8-9; Rev.3:11; etc.), biblical descriptions where this category is evident make very little distinction between the almost completely unproductive Christian and the unbeliever. That is because far from taking comfort in the biblical truth that even without significant production in life, eternity will be immeasurably wonderful, such Christians should rather take fright – because their marginal conduct makes them incredibly vulnerable to falling away from Jesus Christ altogether (not to mention that they are disregarding entirely the desires of their Lord and failing to engage in any meaningful way with the mission to which they have been called and for which they were given specific gifts at salvation and left here in life to utilize).

(45) "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? (46) It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. (47) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (48) But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' (49) and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. (50) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. (51) He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 24:45-51 NIV

As with the parables of the talents (Matt.25:14-30) and the minas (Lk.9:11-27), we see the main distinction emphasized in scripture to be one of the productive believer versus the unbeliever. In the passage above, largely unproductive believers are not even mentioned, while in the parables of talents and minas, they are represented by the theoretical option with which the unbeliever is reproached: putting out the "talent" on interest to let someone else do the work (but gaining at least some return, albeit marginal). All evidence suggests very clearly that a marginal Christian life wherein little is accomplished for Jesus Christ falls just short of being a wasted life – though it is inestimably superior to dying in unbelief.

3) Finally (in terms of preliminary matters), there is also an important distinction to be drawn between what the world may see and perceive as "good works" and genuine production for Jesus Christ which receives a reward. We certainly know that this is the case from the very vivid description Paul gives us in 1st Corinthians chapter three where we are told that "wood, hay and stubble" will be burned up, and that the believer under evaluation will "suffer loss" of reward for things he/she no doubt assumed would be richly rewarded. Only doing what Jesus really wants us to do and doing it His way results in reward. Doing what we want to do or what the world praises us for doing or what we wrongly assume is pleasing to God will not be rewarded. From a positive point of view, the three higher levels of rewards treated immediately below lay out in general terms what God's will truly is in this regard: spiritual growth (level 2); spiritual progress (level 3); ministry corresponding to spiritual gifts (level 4). These three higher levels are, moreover, sequential, so that, minor overlaps aside, a truly meaningful fulfillment of the ministry God has planned for a person and gifted him or her for is impossible without prior spiritual maturity and prior testing successfully passed (which are in turn essential components of truly effective ministry). From a negative point of view, there are also important scriptural caveats which make clear the distinction between legitimate production which will be rewarded and illegitimate production which will be burned. Man looks at the surface of things, but God looks on the heart (1Sam.16:7). A cup of cold water given "because [the recipient] is My disciple" (Matt.10:42; Mk.9:41) receives a reward, but not, we conclude, a cup of cold water given at random and from improper motives. God can certainly tell the difference between proper and improper motivation, even if it is difficult for us to make such distinctions.

(25) I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. (26) Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. (27) And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."
Luke 4:25-27 TNIV

Correct motivations always flow from humility, from obedience to God and to His truth, and from a desire for His glory, not our own.

"The one who speaks for himself seeks his own glory. But the One who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this is the One who is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."
John 7:18

The Pharisees did all that they did not out of a desire to glorify God but instead to glorify themselves.

"All their works they do [only] to be observed by men [in so doing]".
Matthew 23:5a

Anything done with such motives brings no reward from God, ***even if it would have done so*** when accomplished with correct motivation.

"(1) Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Matthew 6:1-2 TNIV

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Matthew 6:5 TNIV

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Matthew 6:16 TNIV

While we tend to think of monetary gifts given to charity as the prime means and measure of "good works", in fact, not only are gifts given for the wrong reasons worthless to God (a prime means and measure of the works to be burnt up before Christ's judgment seat), but we are also very wrong to imagine that the amount counts with God. For He has need of nothing (cf., Ps.50:8-15; Acts 17:25), and evaluates our giving on the basis of our true motives and our true means.

(41) Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. (42) But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. (43) Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. (44) They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Mark 12:41-44 TNIV

As with virtually everything else in the Christian life, legitimate production is a function of spiritual growth, and depends upon a proper attitude of the heart exercised in faith, for it is for faith that we have been called, and it is faith in Jesus Christ that is the fundamental "work" upon which all others depend.

Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He has sent."

John 6:29

Higher Rewards: Certain basic rewards will be the province of all believers, no matter how minimal their efforts for Jesus Christ during this life. All will take part in the resurrection, with the perfect, eternal, unimaginably wonderful resurrection body furnishing the essential "platform" for the enjoyment of a blissful eternity wherein there will be no pain or trouble or anything negative at all, only an inexpressibly delightful existence in which we shall revel for all eternity (e.g., Rev.7:17; 21:4; 21:9-27; 22:1-5). Merely being resurrected into eternal life will entail blessings and benefits beyond our

present ken, the entire fulfillment of that for which we were made, and the hope for which we presently yearn.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him. (18) ***For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us*** [at the 2nd Advent].

(19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved.

Romans 8:17-24a

All these wonders await the believer in Jesus Christ, regardless of spiritual effort in this life, and all who come through this life with their faith intact will experience the divine seal of approval at this judgment as our Lord Jesus acknowledges our name "in the presence of My Father and in the presence of the holy angels" (Rev.3:5). That name, our name, will be from that day forth a "new name" (Rev.2:17; 3:12; Is.65:15; cf. Is.62:2b), and our re-naming at the time of this judgment will be a very significant event. For our new name will reflect the spiritual course of our lives here on earth. Just as all God-given names in the Bible are incredibly important and are always expressive of essential spiritual realities, so we may be sure that our eternal name will encapsulate the effort we put forward for Jesus Christ and His Church, whether prodigious or pathetic. This fact alone ought to fill us with a single-minded determination to do all we can in our Lord's service to ensure that this new name will be a cause of rejoicing rather than regret, a name which glorifies Him forevermore through the accomplishment of the works prepared ahead of time for us to do by grace in the power of His Holy Spirit (Eph.2:8-10). For not everyone who stands before His judgment seat will receive a "Well done!" from Jesus Christ on that great day along with the additional rewards which accompany our Lord's positive endorsement, but only those who attain through their legitimate efforts to the higher levels of reward which exceed the basic blessing that will be the province of all believers.

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

Matthew 25:21 NIV

"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'"

Luke 19:17 NIV

The most common biblical symbol of exceptional service for Jesus Christ meriting these higher level rewards is the (athletic) crown or *stephanos* (Greek στέφανος; in contrast to the regal crown, the *diadema*, διάδημα). The *stephanos* "crown" has a long and colorful history in the Greek and Roman world, but there is a common thread which connects its multifarious uses. Whether awarded for military, athletic, artistic or political exploits (and all such instances are widely attested), the *stephanos* crown is invariably given as a reward for meritorious service or exceptional conduct of some sort. As such, it is often closely connected in scripture with our hope for rewards which extend beyond the resurrection body:

So then my beloved brothers whom I deeply desire, my joy and my crown [of victory], stand fast in the Lord, beloved, in this way [in which I have written you]!
Philippians 4:1

(19) For who is our hope and our joy, or the crown [of victory about which we] boast? Is it not in fact even [all of] you? [For you are our crown of victory] before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. (20) For you are our glory and our joy.
1st Thessalonians 2:19-20

I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away].
Revelation 3:11

Indeed, the essential idea which lies behind the crown of competitive-like effort in striving for achievement is ubiquitous in scripture. However, we are competing against the "world, the flesh, and the devil", not against our fellow Christians. We believers strive to win, without that hoped for victory necessitating any measure of loss whatsoever by our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ (indeed, we win our honors by **helping** them do the same). We can all win top rewards (or fail to do so), for it would most certainly be within the power of God to provide the same level of ultimate blessing and reward to ever single believer (and indeed to every single human being, were it the case that all chose to believe). The fact that the majority of believers will not attain to the highest honors in eternity has nothing to do with God's provision but everything to do with the choices made by each and every individual each and every day. For this reason every one of us ought to take pains to see the life we have been given for what it really is: not only a time of responsibility to do as God requires, but also as a time of immense **opportunity** to win the rewards our Lord Jesus very much desires us to win (Mk.4:21-25).

Once we have been saved, once we have committed ourselves and our lives to Jesus Christ, the purpose for our continued existence here on earth really has nothing at all to do with the priorities upon which the secular world focuses (essential as some of them may be), but instead has everything to do with carrying out our Lord's command to follow Him. It is through our determined and consistent efforts to seek our Lord Jesus (spiritual growth and application), and serve our Lord Jesus (spiritual progress and ministry) that rewards are won. And while as described above we will all be heir to blessings the least of which put the best of what the current world can offer in the shade to an infinite degree, nevertheless it is also true that there are indeed higher levels of

reward which will fall to the lot of those who made following Jesus and serving Him their top priority – not merely biding their time here on earth with an occasional "nod to God", but by taking up on a daily basis the challenge of making the most of our opportunities in time to excel for our Lord – in hope of reward for so doing. Thus, whenever we see individuals rewarded and honored in this life for their exceptional earthly achievements, be they of a military, political, artistic, athletic or other professional nature, we should make it our practice to reflect that we are involved in a similar quest, with the signal exception that we are seeking rewards and honors which are eternal rather than evanescent and temporal (cf. Gal.2:2; 5:7; Phil.2:16).

Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, **but we do it to receive an imperishable one**. So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus.

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) **I continue to drive straight for the tape**, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

(3) Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4) No one on military campaign becomes involved in the affairs of normal life. [He avoids such things] that he may please the one who enlisted him. (5) Likewise if anyone engages in athletic competition, **he does not win a crown if he fails to compete according to the rules**.

2nd Timothy 2:3-5

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and **run with endurance the race set before us**, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despoise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

(12) Therefore (going back to the race analogy of v.1), pick up those hands hanging slack at your side, put some strength back into your weak knees, (13) and **make straight**

tracks for your feet, so that, [even though you fell down,] what you sprained might not be twisted completely out of joint, but might instead work its way back to health.
Hebrews 12:12-13

All of the passages above make absolutely clear that there is no time to lose in this race of ours, and no effort which should be spared in putting our all into this competition in which we are engaged. For not only is this our duty, but there are also great rewards in so doing.

The higher level rewards occur in three distinct categories, and these are represented by the three levels of production yielded by the "good ground" in the parable of the Sower described as "thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold" (Matt.13:8; Matt.13:23; Mk.4:8; 4:20; cf. Lk.8:8), by the "gold, silver, and precious stones" of 1st Corinthians 3:12 (albeit here in descending order), and by the victory crowns of "righteousness", "life", and "glory" which likewise correspond to this three tiered system. To use a modern analogy, everyone whose earthly production entitles them to enter one of these three higher-level classes of reward will be "officer grade", set apart from the enlisted rank and file; but the three levels will be discernible even within this class (as between company, field, and general grade officers in our contemporary military establishment). To carry this analogy a step farther, it is also true that even within the highest class, there are a very small number of top-ranking individuals (such as the joint chiefs), and that will undoubtedly be the case in eternity as well. We can certainly expect the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, the twelve apostles, and the famous prophets and believers of the Bible to constitute a unique and special subset of the highest class.

If the desire to glorify Jesus through the awards we win, the desire to be praised by Him at this final judgment (and the reluctance to have our efforts shown to have come to naught instead) were not enough to motivate us to make our spiritual growth, production and ministry the absolute top priority of our lives, then the details of the rewards given by scripture, limited though they may be, should be sufficient to spur us on to greater efforts. The rewards that lie ahead for those who are committed to striving for them in a godly and acceptable way are absolutely disproportionate to any suffering or sacrifice or effort in this life. The parables of the talents considered above makes this abundantly clear: the servants who produce a (relatively) small amount of return proportionate to what they have been given are rewarded with the rulership of cities, that is, rewards exponentially more valuable than anything they had possessed or achieved in the king's absence. And if that is true in an earthly analogy, just imagine applying this same principle to eternal rewards in a new universe wherein there is no scarcity but only superabundance beyond our dreams!

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us ***an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation.*** (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.
2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

We may expect all such achievement which rates the three higher levels of reward to be violently opposed by the evil one. Indeed, to a certain degree such opposition is an essential part of the effort-reward principle. The higher level rewards represent recognition for effective engagement in the struggle which is the true Christian way of life, and military decorations (another frequent use of the *stephanos*-crown in antiquity) are an equally valid parallel to be employed here. Whether we think of these three higher levels of reward as "bronze, silver, and gold medals" or as "silver stars, navy crosses, and congressional medals of honor", in both analogies a higher degree of difficulty and accomplishment is clearly associated with each, and in terms of eternal rewards, that opposition comes increasingly and more aggressively at every stage from the satanic forces arrayed against us. Just as our Lord was opposed, so those who bear His Name and determinedly advance in His service will likewise be opposed. Indeed, it is our Lord and the example of His life which sets the pattern and the principle: just as the most effective and self-sacrificing life and ministry produces the most for God even as it garners the most opposition from the devil, so also it is right that it reap the highest rewards as well:

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) **Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place** and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:5-11

(5) For it is not to angels that He subordinated the world to come (which is our present topic), (6) but someone testifies at some point saying, "*What is Man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor. (7) You made him sovereign over all the works of your hands, (8) you put everything under his feet*" (Ps.8:4-6). For in subordinating the world to Him, He left nothing that was not subordinate to Him. However, we do not now yet see the world in subordination to Him. (9) But we do now see Jesus **crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered**, even He who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all.
Hebrews 2:5-9

In general terms, believers achieve the second level of rewards by means of spiritual growth and the attainment of spiritual maturity, persevering in the learning, believing and applying of divine truth to their lives, thus demonstrating consistent *faith* which transcends visible realities. The third level is achieved by passing serious and significant testing beyond the normal, everyday sort, thus demonstrating surpassing *hope* in eternal realities over temporal opposition. Believers attain the highest or fourth level of rewards through effective and consistent ministry in spite of all opposition to the point

of fulfilling the ultimate purpose for their lives and spiritual gifts, thereby demonstrating a *love* for their Savior which exceeds all other personal concerns. Finally, although it is certainly true that in any life, there will be some overlap in these functions, nevertheless, these reward levels are very much progressive in nature: consummate ministry (level 4) is impossible without the prior preparation of serious testing and refining (level 3); and the ability to pass such tests is impossible without prior spiritual growth and the attainment of true spiritual maturity (level 2).

Level 2 Rewards: The Crown of Righteousness – The "Faith" Level of Spiritual Maturity

The crown of righteousness, represented by the 30-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "precious stones" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "faith level" of high reward. It is achieved by the attainment of spiritual maturity, the completion of spiritual growth that comes to the believer who consistently learns the Word of God, **believes** the truth he/she has learned, and consistently applies Gods' truth to his/her life. What this means can be seen at least in part from the negative examples provided by the parable of the Sower and the judgment as described by Paul in 1st Corinthians 3. In the case of the latter, many believers, and notably many of those who have not attained higher-level rewards, must stand by and watch while everything done in life is burned up before Christ's judgment seat – the individual believer is saved, "yet as though by fire", and with "loss [**of reward**]" (1Cor.3:15). The fire which "assays" the work of each of us will not damage the genuine "rewards" we have achieved (even in the case of those who, while not attaining to a crown, will yet have some legitimate production to show for their time in this world), but the "wood, hay and stubble", representing the false works, missteps, and wasted opportunities of this life, will be obliterated by divine fire which tests and evaluates its true quality. Those whose effort in this life is found to be at least on the level of "precious stones" will thus of necessity have taken some advantage of the opportunities given, will have pursued sanctification to a sufficient degree to be rewarded in a significant way, having walked in faith consistently enough to produce spiritual growth and achieve spiritual maturity.

Scripture very clearly does draw a very visible line in the sand between those who are spiritually mature and those who are not (1Cor.2:6 [cf. 1Cor.3:1]; Col.1:28; Phil.3:15; Col.4:12; Heb.5:14; 6:1; Jas.1:4).

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking **be mature.**

1st Corinthians 14:20 NASB

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, **you who are spiritual**, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 NASB

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom **among the mature**, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.
1st Corinthians 2:6 NIV

These specifics are fleshed out in more detail in the parable of the Sower where spiritual maturity is described by its results. The good ground, even that which yields only this first higher-reward level of "30-fold", will of necessity have avoided the pitfalls of the previously considered type of ground, the ground plagued by thorns (cf. Matt.13:1-9; Mk.4:1-9; Lk.8.4-8):

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth **stunt** the [productive power of the] Word so that he **becomes unproductive**."
Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow up [over them like thorns and weeds] and **stunt** the [productive power of the] Word so that they **become unproductive**."
Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who **are stunted** by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they **do not bear a full crop to harvest**."
Luke 8:14

Therefore in order to achieve spiritual maturity, worry, desire for wealth, and the placing of the pleasures of this life in front of God's will must all be overcome. This does not suggest that a flawless Christian walk must be perfected before achieving any true results for the Lord, but it does indicate that a believer who allows the worries of life, wealth or pleasure to dominate his or her outlook and modus vivendi will of necessity not be capable of producing a "level two" crop for Jesus Christ. For if we are too worried and concerned about the necessities of life, we have not yet built up our **faith** to the point necessary for trusting the Lord to take care of our problems as a mature believer should (cf. Matt.6:25-34; Lk.12:22-34). And if we are still looking first and foremost to the riches of this world for our satisfaction and security then we have yet to develop a mature Christian **hope** which sets its heart on the rewards of eternity instead (cf. Matt.6:19-23; Lk.12:33-34). And as long as we are primarily focused upon our own pleasures rather than seeking to please the Lord, it is very clear that we have not yet progressed in our Christian **love** to the point of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity, defined above as having grown to the point where in the basic Christian virtues we have effectively turned our backs on the world and towards the Lord instead is the entry point to the field of battle whereon the higher level rewards may be won.

Don't be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but

is from the world. The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

As seen in this and in many other verses, sanctification, the turning away from sin and carnality generally is an important part of the spiritual growth equation: a good defense is essential for any military operation or competitive contest. But as in both of these secular analogies, defense cannot win on its own. Even more important in attaining spiritual maturity is our spiritual offense, and that process is all about God's truth: taking pains to seek it out, listen to it respectfully, take it into our hearts by believing it, and then applying it to our lives – actually acting and behaving out of faith, hope and love in a truly godly and correct way, based upon what is actually God's will as known from His truth (rather than merely upon immature assumptions).

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order **to prepare** all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the **entire body of Christ might thus be built up**, (13) until **we all reach that unifying goal** of believing what is right (i.e., "faith", Greek: πίστις, *pistis*) and of giving our complete allegiance (Greek: ἐπίγνωσις, *epignosis*) to the Son of God, that each of us might be a **perfect person**, that is, that we might attain to that standard of **maturity** whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may **no longer be immature**, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, **grow up in all respects** with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, **works out its own growth** for the **building up of itself** in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

The "goal" mentioned in verse thirteen above is described as consisting of *pistis*, faith (i.e., "believing") and "complete allegiance" (i.e., *epignosis*). The linking of these two words here is key. The latter word is usually translated (insufficiently) as "knowledge"; but while there are a number of Greek words for mere knowledge, the prefix *epi-* on this critically important New Testament technical term shows direction: this is not just something understood – this is something understood and effectively **applied**. *Epignosis* is knowledge which is believed, and which has been completely internalized by faith (1Cor.13:12; 2Cor.1:13; Eph.4:13; Col.1:9-10; 2:2; 1Tim.2:4; 4:3; 2Tim.2:25; 3:7; Tit.1:1; 2Pet.2:20-21; cf. Rom.1:28; 1:32; 3:20; 10:2; Eph.1:17; Phil.1:9; Col.1:6; 3:10; Philem.1:6; 2Pet.1:2-3; 1:8). *Epignosis* transforms the person who has fully digested it, because this new "information" is not only part of the memory – it has also critically become part of the conscience, forming and reforming the inner-person to see and to act in a completely new and different way. *Epignosis* causes internal change which produces external results. Thus, it is only by believing truth that true spiritual growth takes place. True spiritual growth is an "inside-out" process. We can clean and scrub the outside of the cup ad nauseam (as the Pharisees did), but this will never produce growth. We can adopt the most rigorous code of personal behavior (as the Pharisees

did), but this will not bring us closer to God, nor will it prepare us to live for Christ and to serve Christ. Committing facts to memory may help a person pass a secular, written test. Committing divine truth to the heart through faith is the only thing that contributes to a believer's passing of life's spiritual tests which alone harden and develop faith, focus and sharpen hope, and motivate and direct love in response to our Lord Jesus Christ in the cause of His Church.

After all, it is possible to be "ever learning" but "never come to an understanding of the truth", because when the "knowledge" or "understanding" (as it is in this passage, 2nd Timothy 3:7) is only *gnosis*, mere academic appreciation of some abstract principle, there is no inner change, no spiritual growth. Only the incorporation of divine truth into the heart by faith, only God's knowledge **believed**, has the potential of transforming our inner-man and rendering us useful to Jesus Christ so as to produce for Him and His Church. Even attending a Bible study where the truth is taught genuinely, accurately and in great detail (a rarity to be sure in this Laodicean era of the Church) will not in and of itself produce spiritual growth: **truth has to be believed** to become usable; **truth has to be believed** to become *epignosis*.

The passage quoted above, Ephesians 4:11-16, also shows very clearly the method by which the Body of Christ is to be built up: the teaching of the Word of God among the entire community of believers by gifted and prepared men for the purpose of spiritual maturity, a blessed situation which in turn empowers the gifts of all, and in a blessed "feed-back loop" results in more growth and more effective service by all. This is the ideal process to which we have been called. Sadly, Christian fellowships today where the teaching of the truth exists beyond even a superficial level are few and far between. But even if such a fellowship is found, God's truth in Jesus Christ **must be believed** to be of any benefit. Only by this essential spiritual mechanism is *epignosis* assimilated, God's truth made usable for the Spirit in the believer's heart, and spiritual growth attained.²⁶

(7) I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith. (8) In the future there is reserved for me **the crown of righteousness** which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that [great] day [of judgment] – and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearance (i.e., who have exercised consistent love for Jesus Christ in anticipation of His return).

2nd Timothy 4:7-8

Righteousness comes by faith to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom.1:17; 3:22; 4:3-24; 9:30-31; 10:6; Gal.3:6; 5:5; Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7; Jas.2:23). However, it is not by entry-level faith that this crown is won, but by "keeping" the faith, defined above as "fighting the good fight" and "completing the course" which God has laid out for us that believers earn this award. We all have God's righteousness in Jesus Christ, but only those who have achieved spiritual maturity actually live in consonance with the righteousness all believers positionally possess. The crown of righteousness is given for the witness of maturity, for achieving a measure of spiritual growth whereby a person actually "lives like a Christian", staying true to the faith and its principles ("I have kept the faith"), looking forward to the rewards of eternity more than earthly ones ("the crown . . . which the Lord will award me on that day"), and loving the Lord more than this world

("[having] loved His appearance"). Faith, hope and love, the three basic virtues of the Christian walk, become fully functional at the point of spiritual maturity (1Cor.13:13).²⁷ In 2nd Timothy 4:7-8 quoted above, Paul in characteristic humility does not lay claim to the next two levels of reward, the crown of life (given for endurance of testing) and the crown of glory (given for completion of ministry) – although if there has ever been a "triple crown winner" in the Church, it is most assuredly the apostle Paul. Instead, as an encouragement and an exhortation to "follow me", he holds out the promise of this first crown, the crown of righteousness, to "all" who have come to the point of a solid, mature faith, a focused and vibrant hope, and a genuine and constant love for Jesus Christ. Most if not all believers have some degree of faith beyond the basic "mustard seed" which brought them into union with Christ. Most if not all believers have some hope of the resurrection and the glories of eternity to the point that these truths form a part of their Christian motivation and encouragement. And most if not all believers love Jesus Christ to the point of doing or having done something for Him, His truth, His Church, in response to His sacrifice on our behalf by which we have been saved. Spiritual maturity, however, is the point where all three of these representative virtues are fully formed, complete, and "ripe". Just as we can watch the development of any fruit or vegetable as it grows, from being just barely discernible, to nearly full-sized yet green, to ripe and ready for picking, so it is in the case of a believer's spiritual growth. There are various degrees of size, quality, color and overall "goodness" in any ripe fruit or vegetable – and indeed in the Christian life God has set no limit or end to the potential for goodness which may be attained – yet what all mature believers have in common is this "ripeness" or discernible, distinct maturity. Immature believers may occasionally (and inconsistently) manifest some or all of the characteristics identified with these basic Christian virtues, but just as there is a clear difference between a green tomato, whatever its size, and a ripe red one, so those who have not yet attained to spiritual maturity are obvious – certainly to God, usually to other believers, and also often to the world at large. In the same way, mature believers are also known "by their [ripe] fruit" to be honorable and faithful followers of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt.7:15-20; Jn.15:1-17). The mature witness of our lives in effectively and consistently living up to the standard of righteousness which we have in Jesus Christ through faith is the essential produce which yields this second level reward, the crown of righteousness.

Level 3 Rewards: The Crown of Life – The "Hope" Level of Spiritual Production

The crown of life, represented by the 60-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "silver" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "hope level" of higher reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the hope they have in eternal rewards above earthly considerations, mature believers who endure significant testing successfully by preferring eternal life to this life. Winners of the crown of life of necessity have first attained spiritual maturity. This mature faith and faithfulness is then tested in the crucible of life in order to refine it further and also to demonstrate its true quality to the world of men and angels both. Just as the righteous life consistent with that righteousness by faith we all receive through faith in Jesus Christ is a witness to the world, reflecting the grace and goodness of God, to an even greater degree the perseverance of mature believers under severe pressure and tribulation yields

unmistakable proof that such individuals really do esteem God more than anything in this life, and that Jesus' opinion – and the eternal life and rewards He promises – are more real to them and more important to them than anything this world of dust and decay could possibly offer.

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. (7) But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, **will result in praise, glory and honor** for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
1st Peter 1:6-7

Many of the believers being addressed in the passage above had matured spiritually, and were at the time undergoing intensive pressure and testing. Specifically, the recipients of this letter were experiencing social ostracism along with legal and economic sanctions as the new "religion" of Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman world in the mid to late first century, and to incur increasing opposition as it did so. All truly good intentions on the part of Christians will be opposed by the evil one, and the reality of satanic opposition at every step and at every stage of spiritual advance is a scriptural fact. However, it is also very much the case that mature believers come in for – and are allowed to come in for – attacks of greater intensity. As the book of Job makes abundantly clear, such exceptional testing and tribulation really is "a compliment", though it doubtless will seldom seem so at the time. Believers who have not yet attained the solidity and consistency of faith which is defined by spiritual maturity are incapable of bearing up under such concentrated satanic attack – and God never puts upon us more than we are capable of bearing.

You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.
1st Corinthians 10:13

It may indeed often *seem* to us that the load put upon us is impossible to carry, but that is part of such tests. To grow beyond the basic level of maturity, we have to learn to trust God that though things seem unbearable to us, He is faithful and will see us through, and a large part of gaining and retaining that perspective is necessarily based upon the anticipation of future rewards (Heb.11:6).

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and **chose instead to suffer maltreatment** with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he **considered the reproach** [suffered on behalf] of Christ **greater riches** than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) **For he was looking to his reward.**
Hebrews 11:24-26

For believers who have grown up spiritually, this next level of resistance to our progress is essential if that mature faith is to be refined and made even more resilient. In Peter's analogy (1Pet.1:6-7, previously quoted), we see precisely what God intends. Just as steel

is tempered in a crucible, so fiery testing is essential to strengthen faith. In order for our faith to be honed into a focused hope capable of truly and experientially seeing the reward ahead as more valuable than anything in this life and as worth whatever suffering and significant trouble must be endured on this earth, we must successfully pass through trials and tribulation beyond the common sort (cf. Mk.10:30; Acts 14:22; 2Thes.1:3-4; 1Pet.2:19-21; 4:12). Only in this way does one earn the crown of life.

Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, ***and I will give you the crown of life.***

Revelation 2:10

The mark of a believer who has successfully negotiated the hurdle of this penultimate level of reward is a positive attitude in the midst of suffering. That is to say, the believer who has mastered this third level of spiritual advance not only endures severe testing with faith intact, but can actually be loving, hopeful, and even joyous in the process – an utter impossibility for anyone who has yet to mature spiritually or who has yet to be refined to the point of actually esteeming eternity and its rewards beyond this life. Only such a heavenly perspective is capable of laughing through tears.

Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, ***take pains to be joyful.*** For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.

James 1:2-4

And not only this, but ***let us glory in our tribulations,*** knowing that tribulation produces patience, and patience produces proven character, and proven character produces hope – and this hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (cf. 2Tim.1:7).

Romans 5:3-5

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us.

Romans 8:18

Level 4 Rewards: The Crown of Glory – The "Love" Level of Completed Ministry

The crown of glory, represented by the 100-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "gold" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "love level" of highest reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the love they have for Jesus Christ by successfully, faithfully and consistently completing the ministries He has assigned them for the building up of His Church. Winners of the crown of life must first necessarily have attained spiritual maturity, and then had that mature faith refined into a constant, eternal hope through serious and significant testing. Having been thus spiritually "blooded", these battle-tested veterans are then prepared for and capable of being used

by the Lord for the edification of His Body through the effective employment of their various spiritual gifts in ministries which He Himself assigns (1Cor.12:5; cf. Acts 9:15; Rom.1:1). Having first properly oriented to our place in the world by faith through our attainment of spiritual maturity, and having thereafter had this faith refined into a surpassing "blessed" hope focused on Jesus Christ, a hope which "anchors us" to the heavenly perspective in the face of temporal pressures and tribulations (Tit.2:13; Heb.6:19), we are ready to direct this mature faith and tested hope to our fellow believers in love for Jesus Christ and out of love for Him and His Church. This effective deployment of mature love in hopeful anticipation of reward will always involve the successful completion of a distinct ministry corresponding to the individual believer's particular spiritual gift(s).

An important caveat here is that Jesus is interested in the **actual** building up of His Church, not in wasted or only apparent effort expended in activities of only superficial significance. Only those whose faith is mature and whose hope has been tested are qualified to contend for this highest level of reward, and only ministry which actually does contribute to the salvation of unbelievers and/or the building up and progress of the faith of believers is capable of fulfilling this requirement. Moreover, although the effort involved necessary to win this highest crown will unquestionably be considerable, requiring faithful labor of long-standing duration, we should nonetheless be very reluctant to see such ministries only in traditional terms. It is not only those occupations and activities which are traditionally seen as "full-time ministry" that can qualify a person for the crown of glory. There is no formal "track" for such things, and the individual possibilities for ministering to Christ's Church in a significant way are as numerous and varied as the number of spiritual gifts multiplied by the various circumstances of each of us and of our brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom.12:6-8; 1Cor.12:4-31; Eph.4:7-16).

As each one has received a [particular spiritual] gift, [so let us be] ministering it to each other as good stewards of the **multi-faceted** grace of God.
1st Peter 4:10

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the choice of gift(s) we receive at salvation is the province of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.12:4; 12:11), and that the choice of specific ministry is the province of our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor.12:5). Therefore an essential part of effective ministry is the proper identification of our individual gifts and proper sphere of effort in support of the edification of Christ's Body – and only mature, tested believers are truly capable of allowing themselves to be led into just the right place so as to be used by the Lord in just the right way. Before the judgment seat of Christ, "many who are first will be last", and it will certainly be the case that many who are assumed in this life to be worthy of this highest award simply because of their role in traditional full-time ministry will not receive it, while others who are not even involved in anything that the traditional church visible has proclaimed to be a legitimate ministry will be called up to the "higher place" to the great surprise of all (Lk.14:7-11).

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2)

pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, ***you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade.***
1st Peter 5:1-4 (cf. Heb.13:17)

The crown of glory is here promised by the apostle Peter to all pastors whose ministry is properly carried out (it is not denied to other believers, merely specifically promised to pastors by way of example). With a few choice contrasts, Peter characterizes the attitude of service we should all adopt. We should minister "not out of necessity, but willingly as God would have it; not looking for gain, but with eagerness, and not as overlords, but as examples to your flock" (v.2-3; cf. 1Cor.9:16). Caring for Christ's flock, the goal of all ministry and essential purpose of all spiritual gifts, was the issue emphasized by our Lord during one of His last recorded conversations with Peter (Jn.21:15-19), and He repeatedly and emphatically made the point that all true love for Himself must manifest itself in ministry. If we truly do love Jesus Christ, then we will minister to His Body, the Church, according to the ministry we have each been assigned. Such ministry is the proof of our love, and is rewarded with the crown of glory. As Jesus told us in the parable of the faithful servant, service of this type will be richly rewarded at His return (Matt.24:45-51; Lk.12:41-48).

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then ***those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever.***
Daniel 12:2-3

It is for this reason that love is the greatest of the virtues – not love as unbelievers or the world in general may define it, but love as God defines it, namely, loving Jesus with our whole heart, and reflecting that love in all we do in this life (Matt.7:12; 22:36-39).

But [until that future time of our Lord's return] there now remains faith, hope and love, these three [cardinal virtues] – and the greatest of these is love.
1st Corinthians 13:13

And to this end, along with your faith zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2nd Peter 1:5-8

The ultimate demonstration of such love is to be found in providing for our Lord's Body by fulfilling the ministries to which we have been called through the effective application of our respective spiritual gifts (cf. 2Pet.1:10 Greek).

(15) When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Feed my lambs.**" (16) Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Take care of my sheep.**" (17) The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep.**"
John 21:15-17 NIV

In the same way you also, since you are [so] desirous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound [in them] for the purpose of **the edification of the Church.**
1st Corinthians 14:12

Let all these things (i.e., the functioning of the various spiritual gifts) be done for the purpose of **edification.**
1st Corinthians 14:26b

As we observed at the beginning of this section, the life of love, service and sacrifice of our dear Lord Jesus, and the glory He has received as a result, demonstrate beyond all question that the greatest rewards follow the greatest legitimate production. He was rejected by this world and made to wear a crown of thorns. But now He has been crowned with many crowns, and bears the Name that is above every Name so that it is to Him that all shall bow (Phil.2:9-10). If we would share in His glory and in His rewards to the full, we need to make it our business to follow Him wherever He leads, even if it be that such boldness means that we must share in His sufferings (Acts 5:41; Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.2:21; cf. 2Cor.13:4; 13:9; Gal.6:17).

(28) "You are those who have **stood by me in my trials** (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
Luke 22:28-30 NIV

(12) Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] **participating in Christ's sufferings**, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.
1st Peter 4:12-13

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he **considered the reproach** [suffered on behalf] **of Christ** greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was **looking to his reward.**
Hebrews 11:24-26

(12) Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship). (13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), ***bearing His reproach.***

Hebrews 13:12-13

e. The Consequences of the Judgment: Whatever loss of potential reward we may experience at Christ's judgment seat (1Cor.3:12-15), whatever embarrassment we may suffer for failure to live up to our full potential (Heb.13:17), and no matter how we may blush if our Lord Himself finds fault with our efforts here on earth (Rom.14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10-11), we may be sure that eternity for all those resurrected and face to face with our dear Savior in the New Jerusalem will be ecstatically blissful beyond our current comprehension. However, the prospect of eternal rewards instead of loss, of fulfilled rather than failed potential, and of hearing "Well done, good and faithful servant!" from the One we love the most ought to be sufficient motivation for us to grow "above the weeds" and produce a crop in response to His commands – as well as to make every effort day by day to ensure that we do not lose what we have worked so hard for hitherto (Col.2:18; 2Jn.1:8; Rev.3:11). For the rewards we earn during this very short time here on earth will last forever, and will be a source of joy to us and glory to Jesus Christ for all eternity.

As part of the "spoils of victory" which are distributed after the final defeat of the devil by our Lord at the second advent (compare Ps.110:1-7 with Is.53:12; cf. Eph.4:7-8; Lk.11:21), and which we will then be able to use and enjoy in our newly resurrected bodies, these eternal rewards to be received at this final, post-second advent judgment will be operative immediately upon reception for utilization and enjoyment during the Millennium (Rom.8:17; 1Cor.6:3; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

Therefore I will allot the great [of heart] to Him [as His portion of the plunder], and He will apportion plunder to the[se same] mighty [of heart].

Isaiah 53:12a

While Moses and Elijah (the most likely candidates to be seated at Christ's right and left hand; cf. Matt.20:23; Mk.10:40), the twelve apostles (Matt.19:28; Lk.22:28-30), and David (Jer.30:9; Hos.3:5) will have special roles during the thousand years (and this will no doubt be true of other exceptional believers of the Bible as well), all of us who take part in the resurrection will share Christ's millennial rule, having some part in His worldwide administration (with the higher positions of governance unquestionably going to those who receive higher levels of reward).²⁸

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father.

Revelation 2:26-27

Given all that is at stake, it would certainly be to our eternal benefit to make maximum use of all that scripture has to say about eternal rewards, and motivate ourselves thereby to serve our Lord consistently and to the best of our ability here on earth, taking maximum advantage of the unique opportunity we have for glorifying Jesus Christ and earning laurels that will never fade in the process.

Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus.

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) ***I continue to drive straight for the tape***, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

II. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

(7) Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (8) Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O gates, And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (10) Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.

Psalms 24:7-10 NASB

(1) Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. (2) How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! (3) He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. (4) He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. Selah (5) God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. (6) Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. (7) For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (8) God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. (9) The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

Psalms 47 NIV

(19) [Messiah speaks:] "Open for Me the gates of righteousness (i.e., the eastern gate of Jerusalem and the gate of the temple facing east)! I shall enter by them and praise the Lord. (20) This is the Lord's gate. The righteous will enter by it (i.e., through Christ; cf. Jn.10:1-9). (21) I shall praise You although You humbled Me (i.e., 1st Advent sufferings), for You have brought me deliverance (i.e., the victories of resurrection and Armageddon)." (22) [The chorus of celebrants responds:] "The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone! (23) This has come from the Lord, and it is wondrous to our eyes! (24) This is the Day which the Lord has made (i.e., the 2nd Advent)! Let us rejoice and delight ourselves in it! (25) Yes, Lord, deliver us we pray (*hoshi'ah na'* = hosanna!) [from the Tribulation]. Yes, Lord, bless us with prosperity (i.e., the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom)! (26) Blessed be the One (i.e., the Messiah) who is coming in the Name of the Lord! We greet you all (i.e., the Messiah and His retinue) from the house of the Lord! (27) The Lord is God! And He has caused His Light to shine upon us! Bind up the Sacrifice with ropes to the horns of the altar (i.e., the inaugural memorial sacrifice of the Millennial Kingdom meant to remind of the cross)." Psalm 118:19-27

The triumphal entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem described in the prophetic, Messianic psalms above has already occurred at this point, as has our Lord's session in the temple in Jerusalem and His completion of the seven thunder judgments, including the judgment and evaluation of the Church, the Bride of Christ. With all these preliminary matters concluded, and before the beginning of His day to day millennial reign, the most amazing celebration in the history of the world will take place, the celebratory banquet of our Lord's victory, the wedding supper of the Lamb. This feast is so named because it also serves to commemorate Jesus' winning and receiving His most precious possession, the Church, won at the cross and now placed in His arms forever through resurrection.

(6) And I heard something like the sound of a great crowd, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of powerful peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah (i.e., "praise the Lord")! For God our Lord the Almighty has begun His kingly reign! (7) Let us rejoice and be jubilant, and let us give glory to Him, because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride (lit., "wife"; cf. Rev.21:9) has prepared herself. (8) And it has been given her to wear a pure, resplendent [gown] of the finest material (now this fine material represents the righteous acts of His holy ones [believers])." (9) And [the angel] said to me, "Write this down: Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb! These [words] of mine are the true words of God". Revelation 19:6-9

We have already studied the scriptural image of the Church as Christ's Bride (in part 5 of this series, section V, "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride"; cf. Eph.5:22-32). However it is important to note here that the celebration of this wedding is to be found even in Old Testament prophecy. The Song of Solomon (as has been traditionally understood in Calvinistic circles²⁹), is an allegory relating to Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride (Song 3:6-11; 8:11-12; cf. 1Chron.22:5-19; Solomon is the typological though not the prophetic Son of David), and this analogy of the Messiah and His Betrothed is also found most notably in the Messianic marriage psalm, Psalm 45:

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A maskil.

A wedding song.

1 My heart is stirred by a noble theme
as I recite my verses for the king;
my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.
2 You are the most excellent of men
and your lips have been anointed with grace,
since God has blessed you forever.
3 Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one;
clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.
4 In your majesty ride forth victoriously
in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;
let your right hand display awesome deeds.
5 Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies;
let the nations fall beneath your feet.
6 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.
7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy.
8 All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia;
from palaces adorned with ivory
the music of the strings makes you glad.
9 Daughters of kings are among your honored women;
at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.
10 Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear:
Forget your people and your father's house.
11 The king is enthralled by your beauty;
honor him, for he is your lord.
12 The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift,
men of wealth will seek your favor.
13 All glorious is the princess within her chamber;
her gown is interwoven with gold.
14 In embroidered garments she is led to the king;
her virgin companions follow her
and are brought to you.
15 They are led in with joy and gladness;
they enter the palace of the king.
16 Your sons will take the place of your fathers;
you will make them princes throughout the land.
17 I will perpetuate your memory through all generations;
therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.

Psalm 45:1-17 NIV

Notable in the verses above is the presence here too of the "friends of the Bride" (vv.14-15). These "friends" were also seen in Revelation 19:9 as those invited to the great wedding feast ("Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb!"). These individuals will include all who are at this point believers in Jesus Christ, and will no doubt be mainly that large company of Jews who turned to Jesus immediately upon witnessing His return, although gentiles who have done so will certainly not be excluded (cf. Zech.8:23).

People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:29 NIV (cf. Matt.8:11-12; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Lk.14:16-24)

As to the location of the banquet, it will indeed take place at Jerusalem.

(6) On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. (7) On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; (8) he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (9) In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Isaiah 25:6-9 NIV

The special preparations for assembly will include the supernatural "canopy" which will, among other things, shield the congregation from the elements.³⁰

And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

Exclusion from this feast will be a cause of grief and regret, especially for those who have been removed from the earth by the fifth and sixth thunder judgments (see section I above):

(11) I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 8:11-12 NIV (cf. Lk.13:28; Rev.3:19-20)

Happy indeed will those be who respond to the Messiah when He returns, for they will be invited to celebrate gloriously on that great day of days in company with all who kept the faith in the great times of trial to come and rose to meet the Lord at His return! For these wonderful and blessed events are not vain hopes, but future realities decreed by the unswerving will of God; they are "the true words of God" (Rev.19:9b).

The length of the feast per se is unknown, but will no doubt continue for many weeks (cf. 2Chron.30:23). In many respects, however, the Millennium itself will be a celebration of the victory and reign of Jesus Christ, 1,000 years of blessing unparalleled since the garden of Eden, and not to be matched until the commencement of the eternal state. For good reason, then, the Prophets and the Psalms in particular are replete with songs of victory, celebration and gratitude which anticipate this wondrous moment, and which will undoubtedly be sung on that grand occasion with their depth of meaning only then fully appreciated (e.g., Ps.47; 76; 95 - 100; Is.26).

Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). You made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e., deliverance).
Psalm 66:8-12

Let us then make it a personal priority not only to be a part of that wonderful celebration, but to occupy a prime place from which to enjoy it to the full as a result of our life's work for Jesus Christ.

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
Luke 14:7-11 NIV

III. The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ: Revelation 20:4-6

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years. (5) This is the first resurrection (i.e., that of **all** believers).³¹ (6) Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in this first resurrection! Over these the second death (i.e., condemnation on unbelievers) has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for the thousand years.
Revelation 20:4-6

With these verses Revelation introduces and "covers" in broad strokes the entire millennial reign of Jesus Christ (the verses which follow move to its termination and the

"Gog-Magog" revolt). The brevity of the account is not entirely unexpected. As we have seen from the very beginning of this series, Revelation assumes that we have "done our homework", and that we as readers, or, more particularly, as teachers, will bring to bear the other pertinent passages, doctrines, and information that may be found elsewhere in scripture. As it happens, of course, the blessed reign of the Messiah is a subject very well covered in the Old Testament in particular so that there is indeed much to say. Before we supplement this passage, however, we should not fail to notice the special emphasis these verses place on the role the newly resurrected Church will play in the administration of our Lord's earthly kingdom, in particular, those believers who were martyred during the Tribulation for the sake of Jesus Christ. As we have already observed in great detail, the entire Church has already been resurrected by this time and will be rewarded in this way, and Revelation 20:4-6 neither says nor means to imply otherwise (especially when the correct translation is figured in; see the preceding footnote). But it is certainly the case that the tribulational martyrs for Jesus come in here for special mention with the unquestionable purpose of providing special encouragement. For those whose lot it will be to negotiate the Tribulation, to be persecuted by the beast and his followers, and to suffer death on Christ's behalf, the prospect of a solid reward which includes reigning with Him is put here as a given. This special guarantee is thus a pledge from God meant to motivate and support this group of believers during the Tribulation's darkest days: no matter how hopeless things may seem, and no matter that the cost of true discipleship during that terrible time will be one's life, God has promised salvation, and beyond salvation, the reward of sharing in Christ's rule for all those who reject antichrist's sovereignty, preferring to be executed for the Name of Jesus rather than to bow down to the beast.

Introduction:

(19) So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, (20) and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, (21) who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") ***until the times of the restoration of all things*** of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old.

Acts 3:19-21

The Millennium will be a literal one thousand year period wherein Jesus Christ will personally rule the restored earth without any interference from the devil or his followers. The Messiah's thousand year reign over the entire earth from Mount Zion will be an inexplicably blessed time, the penultimate Eden whose glories will eclipse those of any other time in human history since the garden of Eden and until the ultimate Eden commences, the eternal state and New Jerusalem (see section VII below).³² For the storm of the Tribulation has passed (Jer.25:32), and Jesus Christ Himself will now preside over an unprecedented time of calm, peace and plenty, ruling His kingdom in perfect righteousness and justice under Edenic conditions. For just as God previously restored the earth and heavens from a condition of catastrophic darkness to habitable status in order to create mankind in answer to Satan's rebellion, so during the Millennium the earth will witness a return to much of its earlier glory.³³ The fact that in the Millennium we shall still be "in time" (and therefore still coexisting with sin, even

though Satan and his angels will be imprisoned until the Millennium's end) means that the environment on earth will not be "perfect", but it will provide the most exquisitely wonderful conditions seen since Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden.

Just as the seventh Genesis day was a demonstration that everything God had done in re-creating the earth "was good" (Gen.1:31), so the Millennium will demonstrate that only a world ruled by God (through His anointed Son), can be made "good". The earth of Genesis chapter one is gradually reclaimed from a condition of darkness and devastation (following God's judgment upon Satan's revolt) by systematically ridding it of all factors unfavorable to human life and habitation, both by separation from elements hostile to life, and by replacement and filling with the elements necessary for life.³⁴ In an analogous fashion, the millennial earth under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will restore "goodness" to the world again, not only by removing from it the most pernicious source of evil (the devil and his angels and the world system of evil they promote: Rev.20:1-3),³⁵ but also by the provision of all things necessary to bring about blessing and abundance under the perfect reign of Jesus Christ. Only when Satan and his followers have been removed from interference in human life, and only when the world finds itself under the direct reign of the Son of God (Ps.2; Rev.19:6) will the earth be "good" again, and it is important for believers to understand that without these two key factors of the devil's removal and Christ's return, nothing approaching paradise on earth is remotely possible.

The Millennium will see, through the perfect rule of the Son of God, the reclaiming of God's direct control over the earth, and of Man's as well in the person of Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, reclaiming that which was lost by the first Adam. Though sin will not disappear until the present heavens and earth are destroyed by fire and replaced with the new heavens and earth (Is.65:17; 66:22; 2Pet.3:7; 3:10-13; Rev.21:1), the Millennium will be a period that begins and ends with winnowing and purification (i.e., the seven thunder judgments of section I above, and the final judgments of men and angels covered in sections IV-VI below). Like the seventh Genesis day, the Millennium will be a time sanctified (i.e., made holy) by God Himself, who will provide mankind with a world of true justice and righteousness enforced by the Son of God Himself (Ps.2; Rev.19:11; cf. 2Pet.3:13). According to Deuteronomy 5:15, a major purpose of the Sabbath day was for Israel to remember their deliverance from Egypt by God's mighty power. It was to be a day of rest so that even those without other recourse, servants and animals, might have some repose (Deut.5:14). Just so, the Millennium will be a time to remember God's deliverance of the world from the devil's grasp, so vividly and horribly experienced in the Great Tribulation which immediately preceded it (Rev.20:1-3), a time to enjoy the rest and blessing of the Christ's perfect rule, and to celebrate the great deliverance God has wrought from the worst period of human history:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in

garments of praise in place of their faint spirits.
Isaiah 61:1-3a

1. The Unique Physical Conditions of the Millennium

a. The Millennial Rule of Christ:

1 Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
2 He will judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
3 The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
4 He will defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
he will crush the oppressor.
5 He will endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
6 He will be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
7 In his days the righteous will flourish;
prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.
8 He will rule from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
9 The desert tribes will bow before him
and his enemies will lick the dust.
10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
will bring tribute to him;
the kings of Sheba and Seba
will present him gifts.
11 All kings will bow down to him
and all nations will serve him.
12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.
15 Long may he live!
May gold from Sheba be given him.
May people ever pray for him
and bless him all day long.
16 Let grain abound throughout the land;
on the tops of the hills may it sway.
Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon;

let it thrive like the grass of the field.
17 May his name endure forever;
may it continue as long as the sun.
All nations will be blessed through him,
and they will call him blessed.
18 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel,
who alone does marvelous deeds.
19 Praise be to his glorious name forever;
may the whole earth be filled with his glory.
Amen and Amen.
Psalm 72:1-19 NIV

Old Testament prophecy is replete with passages which anticipate the Messiah's coming reign, for He is the fulfillment and focus of all God's promises to Israel (2Sam.7:14; Jer.33:14-17; Lk.1:32-33). In the psalm immediately above, penned by Solomon who, as David's son, is here a type of David's greater Son, the Messiah, we see expressed many of the most salient aspects of Jesus' millennial rule. While that time will be one of blessing in every conceivable way (and all the more so given that it will follow immediately upon the absolute worst of times during antichrist's tribulational rule), certain particular features of His reign and kingdom are continually emphasized in prophecy:

1) The Exceptional Joy and Gladness Occasioned at its Establishment: The day of our Lord's return will be one of delight for the entire world and especially for Israel, but also for everyone else (that is, apart from those who have opposed Him: Is.9:3; 12:3; 12:6; 35:1-10; 42:11; 44:23; 49:13; 55:3-11; 60:1; 61:3-7; 65:18; Jer.31:4-13; 33:9-11; Zeph.3:14-20; Zech.8:19; 10:7).

(7) How comely on the mountains are the feet of the one who gives the good news, the one who proclaims peace, who gives the good news of fair tidings, who proclaims salvation, saying to Zion, "Your God has become King!" (8) The voice of the watchers [is heard]. They lift up their voice. They rejoice together. For [all] will see [Him] face to face when the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) returns to Zion. (9) Break forth [in song] and rejoice altogether, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has had compassion on His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord has uncovered His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God!
Isaiah 52:7-10

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce **the year** (i.e., season) **of the Lord's favor** [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place of their faint spirits.
Isaiah 61:1-3a

2) Its Exceptional Justice and Righteousness: The righteous rule of Christ will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our own experience (e.g., crime and war; cf. Zech.5), meting out swift and perfect justice upon all malefactors and on behalf all who are unjustly oppressed (Ps.2:9-12; 72:1-2; 72:12-14; Is.1:26-31; 9:6-7; 11:3-5; 16:4-5; 32:1-8; 33:5; 42:1-4; 51:4-7; Jer.23:5-6; 33:15; Ezek.34:16; Zech.9:9).

But the Lord shall be seated as king forever: He sets up His throne for judgment, to judge the world in righteousness, to render justice to its peoples.
Psalm 9:7-8

Justice will dwell in the desert, and righteousness in the cultivated fields.
Isaiah 32:16

No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.
Isaiah 60:19 NIV

3) Its Exceptional Peace and Prosperity: The Millennium will be a time of true peace and prosperity, of security and plenty such as has not been seen on earth since the garden of Eden (Is.11:6-9; 32:16-20; 65:25; Jer.33:16; Zeph.3:15b; cf. 1Kng.8:56). Indeed, the Millennium is the penultimate Eden.³⁶

For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer.
Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Mic.4:3-4)

(6) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called "He whose counsel is wondrous", "Mighty God", "the Father of Eternity", "the Prince of Prosperity". (7) To His dominion and its prosperity there will be no limit or end. He will establish it and lay its foundation on David's throne and over his kingdom, in justice and righteousness, now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.
Isaiah 9:6-7

(4) Then He (i.e., the Messiah) will arise and will shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they will dwell [in peace], for then He will be great to the ends of the earth. (5) And He will be their peace.
Micah 5:4-5a

He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.
Zechariah 9:10 NIV

4) The Most Profound Blessing of All: The Presence and Personal Rule of Jesus Christ (see also Ps.2; 45; 48; 72; Is.2:1-5; Ezek.48:35; Dan.7:14; Zech.14; Lk.1:32; Rev.19:11-20:6):

The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.

Isaiah 24:23 NIV

In those days and at that time, I will make a Branch of righteousness sprout forth for David, and He will accomplish justice and righteousness on the earth.

Jeremiah 33:15

(13) I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity.

Micah 5:2

Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness".

Zechariah 8:3

As discussed previously, the 2nd Advent followed by Christ's millennial reign is the capstone of phase two of God's plan for replacing the devil and restoring the world to complete harmony and perfection.³⁷ In phase one, God created a new order of creatures, mankind, as the ultimate source for completely replacing Satan and his angels. The original man, Adam, and his spouse were capable of sin, and their eventual exercising of this capability plunged them (immediately) and their progeny (at birth) into a natural state of sin. Contrary to the devil's design and expectation, however, God provided the means for redeeming Adam and Eve along with any and all of their progeny who would desire redemption through the gracious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, and in every generation before and since believers have been enlisting into the roles of His Church. Christ's assumption of true humanity and His sacrifice on the cross opened the way for the next stage of replacement, the resurrection of believing humanity, with the way already having been led by the "Prince-Ruler of our salvation" (Heb.2:10):

When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:3b

Phase one laid the ground work for replacement, providing a new Ruler (Jesus Christ) to replace the present ruler of the world (Satan), a new kingdom (the Kingdom of Heaven) to replace the present kingdom of darkness (Col.1:13), and new subjects (believers

bought with the blood of Christ) to attend the King in place of the devil's angelic followers (Phil.3:20). During phase one, these replacements are essentially such in principle only as they await the fulfillment of the two further phases: Christ has been glorified, but has not yet returned to commence His reign; the Kingdom is here in principle (in the persons of believers and the Spirit of Christ: Lk.17:21), but is not yet functioning in practice (cf. Matt.11:12); and the Church is coming rapidly to completion, but has not yet been resurrected. During phase two, Christ our King will return (the Second Advent), and will lay claim to His Kingdom (Rev.11:15), while His Church (His Body of believers called out during the first six days of human history) will be resurrected to share in His millennial rule (1Cor.15:23). As the rightful King, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ replaces the devil as the ruler of this world from the time of the 2nd Advent, and will rule until the end of time when eternity commences at the Millennium's end.

a) His Kingship is **founded** upon His victory on the cross:

- Through the cross, He has overcome and will terminate the devil's *kosmos* (Jn.16:33).
- Through the cross, the Father has in principle already triumphed over the devil's forces and stripped them of their power (Col.2:14-15).
- Through the cross, He has in principle already put an end to the one having the power of death (i.e., the devil: Heb.2:14; cf. 2Tim.1:10).
- Through the cross, therefore, He has the right to bring on the final epoch of Satan's direct rule (i.e., the Tribulation), thus opening the door for His direct millennial rule (Rev.5:5).
- Through the cross, He has led condemned mankind to the victory of eternal life (Matt.12:20; cf. Col.2:12-14; Heb.2:10).
- Through the cross, therefore, we share in His victory over death (1Cor.15:54-57).

b) His Kingship is **confirmed** by proclamation, resurrection, ascension, and session:

Proclamation of His victory to the demons previously imprisoned in Hades (i.e., in the Abyss: 1Pet.3:19; cf. Rom.10:5-7; Col.2:15; Eph.4:8-10) confirmed the success of His mission and the imminency of His reign. It was also an indication of the coming superiority of His followers over the angels (1Cor.6:3; Heb.2:5).³⁸

Resurrection confirmed the prophecies of His coming reign (Ps.16:10; Acts 2:24-31; 13:30-38), confirmed His status as heir of the Kingdom (Acts 5:30-31; 10:40-43; 17:31; Rom.1:4; 1Pet.1:21), and confirmed the effectiveness of His sacrifice (1Cor.15:13-19; 15:21; Phil.3:10; 1Pet.1:3; 3:21), which forms the basis for His followers to share in that resurrection (Rom.6:5; 8:11; 8:34-35; 10:9; 1Cor.6:14; 2Cor.4:14; 5:15; Col.2:12).

Ascension confirmed the acceptability of the sacrifice of our High Priest (Heb.4:14; 6:19-20; 7:26; 9:11-12), while His entrance into the true Holy of Holies opened the door for believers to enter into the presence of God (Heb.10:19), with believers who had died prior to the cross led to heaven by Him in triumph at the time of His ascension

(Ps.68:18; Eph.4:8; cf. Ps.68:24-27; 146:7b; Is.14:17b; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Jn.14:2-3; 14:6; 17:24; Col.2:15; 1Pet.3:18-22; Rev.1:18).

Session validated His status as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Acts 2:32-36; 5:30-31; Eph.1:20-23; 1Pet.3:22), made His ultimate rule only a matter of time (Ps.110; Acts 3:21; Heb.1:13; cf. 1Cor.1:7-8; 1Thes.1:10; Tit.2:13; Jas.5:8), and so became the basis for the reward of believers (Ps.68:18; Is.40:10; 62:11; Eph.4:8; cf. 1Thes.2:19; Heb.12:2; 1Pet.1:7; Rev.22:12).

c) His Kingship is **consummated** at the 2nd Advent:

- With the commencement of His reign, human rule over the earth lost by the first Adam will be restored in the person of the Last Adam (Ps.8; Rom.5:12-21; 1Cor.15:45; Heb.2:7-9).
- With the commencement of His reign, the final stage of reducing all God's enemies to complete submission will begin (1Cor.15:24-26; cf. Phil.2:10).
- With the commencement of His reign, there will also begin the final process of reconciling "all things" and restoring completeness and harmony to God's universe (Col.1:20; cf. Eph.1:10).
- With the commencement of His reign, earth will forevermore enjoy the perfect rule and presence of the perfect Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev.11:15; cf. Ps.2; 45; 48; 72; Is.2:1-5; Ezek.48:35b; Dan.7:14; Zech.14; Lk.1:32-33; 2Thes.1:6-10; Rev.19:11-20:6).

b. The Millennial Administration: The Millennium will present a unique situation in administrative terms in that it will be the first (and only) era of human history where earth will contain not only a (rapidly expanding) population of sinful mortals, but also a host of resurrected believers (the Church) who lived their previous earthly lives at various times during the preceding six thousand years; and both groups will be subject to a perfect, all-powerful and all-knowing Ruler. The precise extent to which the static number of resurrected believers will interact with the rapidly growing millennial population is not spelled out in scripture, but, as we saw in the previous section, it is clear that a part of our reward will be to share in Christ's millennial administration (cf. Is.32:1-2; Dan.7:22; 7:27; Matt.19:28-29; 25:21; Rom.8:17; Rev.1:4-6; 20:4-6; cf. Rev.22:5).

"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. "Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities."
Luke 19:17 NIV

(28) "You are those who have stood by me in my trials (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and

drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
Luke 22:28-30 NIV

(2) Or don't you know that the holy ones (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute? (3) Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters?

1st Corinthians 6:2-3

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, **we will also reign with Him**. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father.

Revelation 2:26-27

The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with My Father on His throne.

Revelation 3:21

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, **and they will rule upon the earth!**"

Revelation 5:9-10

These passages all establish the fact of resurrected believers forming the cadre of our Lord's millennial administration. It will not be angels who enforce law and order, ruling and administering justice during Jesus' millennial reign, but His Church, resurrected and rewarded, with the positions we hold during that thousand year period appropriate to the rank we have earned during our present lives on this earth. It can also be gleaned from the passages above that our enforcement of the law, our execution of justice, and our general administration exercised over the areas and territories entrusted to us will be perfect – just as we have been made perfect to serve perfectly our perfect Lord.

(1) See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. (2) Each man (i.e., resurrected member of Jesus' administration) will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

Isaiah 32:1-2 NIV (cf. Is.32:8)

As resurrected believers, incapable of experiencing physical or emotional pain or fatigue, our administrative duties during the Millennium will be a "labor of love",

"delightful work" such as Adam was given in the garden of Eden, only much more satisfying and devoid of trouble to the degree that our eternal state will infinitely surpass his pre-fall state. Once abused and discarded, once outcasts and sojourners on the earth (cf. Heb.11:36-38), we shall at that glorious time have "attained the promise" of resurrection and reward (cf. Heb.11:39-40). No longer subject to the world and the caprices of its present evil ruler (cf. Is.33:18-19), we shall rule the world with the Righteous One as His viceroys for a thousand years.

In your thoughts you will ponder the former terror:

"Where is that chief officer?

Where is the one who took the revenue?

Where is the officer in charge of the towers?"

You will see those arrogant people no more,
those people of an obscure speech,
with their strange, incomprehensible tongue.

Isaiah 33:18-19 NIV

As seen from these verses, the blessings of Christ's administration will stand in stark contrast to the rule of the evil one (most egregiously demonstrated by the reign of the beast) not only for us, but also for the millennial population which survives the Tribulation, and most especially for those of Israel whose future reaction is related directly above. Indeed, the government of Israel will be the most blessed and most unique in this regard. For Jerusalem will be the new capital of the world, now ruled by the Messiah Himself, personally residing there. Israel proper will be ceremonially ruled by David himself in resurrection in the capacity of her king (in fulfillment of the biblical promises: Jer.30:9; 33:15-17; Ezek.34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hos.3:5), with the routine administrative duties born by "the prince", a non-resurrected member of the Davidic line endowed with special privileges (Ezek.45-46).³⁹ The prince himself will likewise have under-shepherds to aid him in his tasks chosen from the non-resurrected population.

(3) "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. (4) I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 23:3-4 NIV

Herein we most likely see the pattern – perfect oversight but with a mortal interface – which is no doubt duplicated around the world. Resurrected believers, as we have seen, will participate in Christ's administration, but probably in a sort of super-executive capacity (in the fashion of David), as well as in a judicial capacity (Matt.19:28; Lk.22:30; 1Cor.6:2; Rev.3:21; 20:4-6), leaving the hands-on, day to day administration to our non-resurrected counterparts. Given the role angels currently play as messengers and intermediaries in God's plan (and specifically in regard to serving the Son of God: Jn.1:51), it would be strange if they too were not involved in the Messianic millennial rule, though no doubt continuing to serve Jesus Christ behind the scenes even more so than the Church. Finally, perfect, resurrected members of the Church will make the best

possible selections when it comes to choosing their mortal counterparts in every administrative venue around the world, so that even within the most fragile branch of the government, human beings with sin natures, here too we may expect the highest possible standard to be achieved (as the "code of conduct" in the Psalm below indicates):

2b I will walk in my house
with blameless heart.

3 I will set before my eyes
no vile thing.

The deeds of faithless men I hate;
they will not cling to me.

4 Men of perverse heart shall be far from me;
I will have nothing to do with evil.

5 Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret,
him will I put to silence;
whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart,
him will I not endure.

6 My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,
that they may dwell with me;
he whose walk is blameless
will minister to me.

7 No one who practices deceit
will dwell in my house;
no one who speaks falsely
will stand in my presence.

8 Every morning I will put to silence
all the wicked in the land;
I will cut off every evildoer
from the city of the Lord.

Psalm 101:2b-8 NIV

Finally, from some of the few details scripture gives about the millennial world government we can also extrapolate the essential administrative principle of the Messiah's rule, namely, that of a perfect central standard, accommodating local needs.

1) Language: The official language of Christ's government will be Hebrew. Not only does this make a certain amount of logical sense, for He will be ruling from Jerusalem with the Jewish nation as His unique possession, but there is scriptural evidence for this probability as well. The Lord states at Zephaniah 3:9 that, after unleashing His fury on the nations during the Tribulation (v.8), "I will give to the peoples a pure lip/language (*saphah berurah*), that they all may call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him of one accord". While this purification of the lips does not exclude forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, the context clearly suggests appropriate ceremonial behavior as well, and it is thus very likely that Hebrew will be the requisite language for the (sometimes mandatory; cf. Zech.14:17) worship at Jerusalem (see section III.2.c below). Isaiah 19:18 further informs us that "five cities of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan" (i.e., Hebrew). From this we may deduce that there will be an

eagerness in some pockets of exceptional responsiveness to the Lord and His truth to assimilate to the perfect standard as much as possible and in every way. However, the fact that this development is deemed remarkable also shows us that while Hebrew will be the official legal and ceremonial language, no attempt will be made to enforce its use worldwide. In all other instances, the nations will retain their own languages. Rather than stifling free expression, we may expect a flourishing of legitimate conversation, with only evil communication being restrained.

2) Economics: Ezekiel 45:9-14 establishes a perfect system of weights and measures for use within Israel proper during the Millennium, and we may glean from this that there will be perfect economic regulation not only in Israel but throughout the world – not an attempt to control legitimate human decision-making in any local economy, but rather a process of oversight wherein truly unfair and criminal behavior is prevented. As in the case of language, we may extrapolate that it is the principle which is universally enforced, not the specifics. Unique local weights and standards, along with diverse practices, will be allowed to continue with a resulting explosion of free enterprise prosperity bursting forth under the Millennium's blissful conditions – only dishonest behavior will be restrained.

3) Nationalism: We know of course that the Messiah's worldwide rule will restrict all the negative aspects of national competition, for there will be no war between nations during His millennial rule, as Jesus Christ Himself will settle all such serious disputes.

For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer.
Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Mic.4:3-4)

And yet there will still be unique and discrete individual nations as this passage itself shows, with even some of the most ardent of Israel's enemies restored to their own lands (Jer.12:14-15).

(23) In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together.
(24) In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. (25) The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."
Isaiah 19:23-25 NIV

Thus this principle of tempered control most likely sets the pattern for all other aspects of Christ's millennial rule. The nations will still be nations, and Israel will still be Israel. Antichrist had tried (albeit unsuccessfully) to destroy nationalism (Dan.2:41-43). Our Lord's administration will remove the problems inherent in a world full of independent (and sinful) nations, without at the same time eliminating national and cultural distinctions. After all, apart from those who belong to the resurrected Church, the rapidly expanding human population of the millennial earth will still be subject to sin, evil and crime, as the sin nature will still reside in all mortal human beings. It is most

enlightening to consider that the Messiah will not attempt to change what cannot be changed without destroying the present heavens and earth altogether, but instead will institute the perfect system of control for an inherently sinful world: not the eradication of choice through stringent, Procrustean homogenization, but the preservation of free will through a system of wise and judicious oversight. In the truly perfect world government to be instituted by our Lord, better regulation will actually result in more genuine freedom. For its object, perfectly attained, will be the restraint of evil (rather than what has often been the case in the devil's world, the suppression of freedom in the service of evil). For these reasons, the Millennium, the time of most complete direct control of a single unified government over the earth, will also be the time of greatest freedom to pursue all legitimate goals and aspirations. This will be so in no small part because of the effectiveness of Messiah's system to restrain crime and evil without at the same time unnecessarily hampering the freedom of action of those not involved in such antisocial pursuits.

c. Physical Blessings of the Millennium: During the Millennium, though human beings will continue to be born mortal and imperfect, yet the righteous rule of Christ (Ps.2:9) will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our experience (e.g., crime and war). The marvelous physical blessings of the Millennium will be due in no small part to the fact that the curse God placed upon the ground at Genesis 3:17-19 will finally be removed (to complement the rule of Christ and the resurrection of His Church: Rom.8:18-24; cf. Gen.5:29). For the first time since the fall, this curse which resulted from the disobedience of the First Adam's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will be removed – at the return of the Last Adam who paid for its removal through His obedient death on Calvary's tree (Rom.5:12-19):

(18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be **liberated from its enslavement to decay** at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved.

Romans 8:18-24a

Once the cursing that came as a result of Adam's fall has been reversed, the result will be a veritable heaven on earth, an environment as perfect as possible (given the limitation that it will contain imperfect human beings still subject to sin), a world overflowing with blessing in its sights and sounds, its prosperity, and in the physical and spiritual wholeness flowing forth from Jerusalem where the Righteous One Himself will rule. This will be the prophesied "year (i.e., season) of the Lord's favor" (Is.61:2); this will be the long-anticipated "time of restoration" (Acts 3:21).

(10) Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (11) Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; (12) let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; (13) they will sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit, "*has* come"), he comes (lit, "*has* come") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.
Psalm 96:10-13 NIV

The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert ***like Eden***, and her wilderness ***like the garden of the Lord***.
Isaiah 51:3

As this last verse indicates (and as we have intimated above), during the Millennium with the removal of the Genesis curse on the earth, the entire world will be a paradise. In the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the earth will truly be "Eden restored" to all its prior glories, save for the continued imperfection of the rapidly-expanding, non-resurrected human population. However, the sinful nature of un-resurrected mankind will not prevent the Millennium from being truly Edenic with Satan bound for a thousand years, with all demons likewise removed from the world, and with the Holy Spirit's ministry of restraint not only reestablished (after being removed during the Tribulation: 2Thes.2:6-12)⁴⁰, but now more expansive than ever before (since He will be "poured out" in a dramatic and unprecedented way not seen since the early days of the Church; cf. Is.44:3; Joel 2:28). When we add to these significant changes the perfect rule of the perfect Ruler administered by His Church, the blessedness of earthly conditions during Christ's coming kingdom are certainly understandable in spite of the flawed nature of its subjects.

In his (i.e., the Messiah's) days the righteous will flourish; ***prosperity*** will abound till the moon is no more.
Psalm 72:7 NIV

1) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Jerusalem: Jerusalem, the tribulational "rock of stumbling" upon which the Lord Jesus Christ caused the armies of the beast to founder, though subjected to terrible damage during the battle of Armageddon, will rapidly and miraculously rise from the ashes to become the capital city of the Messiah.

(1) Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. (2) It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. (3) God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress. (4) When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, (5) they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror. (6) Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. (7) You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. (8) As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever. Selah (9) Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. (10) Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with

righteousness. (11) Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. (12) Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, (13) consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.
Psalm 48 NIV

As mentioned above, there are seven "Edens" in the history of God's creation.⁴¹

1. The Original Earth (before Satan's fall)
2. The Third Heaven (before the creation of mankind)
3. The Garden of Eden (before the fall of Adam and Eve)
4. The Subterranean Paradise (a.k.a., "Abraham's Bosom" – visited by Christ: 1Pet.3:19-20)
5. The Third Heaven (now the abode of departed believers following Jesus' victory at the cross and subsequent ascension)
6. **The Millennial Jerusalem** (our present focus)
7. The New Jerusalem (in the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth)

Every biblical paradise shares certain unique features that mark it out as a place of extreme blessing, first and foremost of which is the physical presence of God Himself for the purpose of fellowship (rather than judgment). Just as in the garden of Eden, where our first parents Adam and Eve enjoyed sweet fellowship with our Lord when He habitually visited them "in the cool of the day" (Gen.3:8), so the millennial Jerusalem will be blessed with the permanent presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and all of the millennial blessings which mankind will enjoy on that great day will be a result of and will flow from His presence (as is always the case since all blessing originates with God: Jas.1:17).

(2) The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. (3) You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. (4) No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (i.e., "I delight in her"), and your land Beulah (i.e., "married"); for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. (5) As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. (6) I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, (7) and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

Isaiah 62:2-7 NIV (cf. Jer.3:14)

Though devastated by the events of the Tribulation, the beast's Armageddon campaign in particular, Jerusalem will be swiftly rebuilt in a supernatural way by the Lord Himself, to become the most impressive place on earth (cf. Is.11:10; 44:24-28; 51:3; 52:1-2; Mic.4:8), now to rest ever safe and secure under His protecting wings (cf. Jer.31:38-40; Is.54:14-15).

(1) He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; (2) the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. (3) Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: Selah (4) "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush— and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.' " (5) Indeed, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her." (6) The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: "This one was born in Zion." Selah (7) As they make music they will sing, "All my fountains are in you."

Psalm 87 NIV

And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

Isaiah 65:18 NIV

In addition to the ultimate blessing, the actual presence of God Himself in the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God, millennial Jerusalem will share other features in common with the most well-known Eden (and with all of the other biblical paradises as well):

a) An Exalted Location: Millennial Jerusalem will be a city of greatly expanded dimensions (Ezek.48:30-35), and will literally be raised up in elevation to an exceedingly great height (cf. Ps.68:15-16; Ezek.17:22):

At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be **raised higher** than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it.

Isaiah 2:2 (cf. Micah 4:1)

In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on **a very high mountain**, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city.

Ezekiel 40:2 NIV

(10) The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be **raised up** and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. (11) It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed.

Jerusalem will be secure.
Zechariah 14:10-11 NIV

b) The Living Waters and the Tree of Life:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.
Psalm 46:4 NIV

Proceeding forth from the millennial temple in Jerusalem will be a stream of "living water", a supernatural source of refreshment akin to the streams that watered the garden of Eden. The stream will grow in breadth and depth as it runs eastward and descends to the plain of the Arabah (while another branch flows west to the Mediterranean: Zech.14:8), finally emptying into the Dead Sea. Along the banks of this stream, "trees of life" will spring up, comparable to the tree of life of Genesis 2:9, and to the "tree(s) of life" in the final New Jerusalem (Rev.22:2). These trees will share the same purpose as the one which preceded and those which will follow, namely, to impart spiritual as well as physical blessing (cf. Is.41:19; 55:12-13; Ezek.34:27; 36:8; 47:7; Rev.22:2):

And on the bank of the river gorge on both sides will spring up every sort of food-producing tree. Their foliage will not wither, nor their produce fail, but every month they will yield a new crop, for they will be irrigated by the waters flowing from the sanctuary; their produce will serve as food and their foliage as medicine.
Ezekiel 47:12

The river on whose banks the trees described above will flourish will share important qualities with the rivers of Genesis chapter two and with the "river of the water of life" of Revelation chapter twenty-two:

1) It originates from a central source: Just as water flowed out of the garden of Eden, so the millennial river of living water will rise from a fountainhead at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (Ezek.47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8), a very similar situation to that of "the river of the water of life" which we find in the New Jerusalem (Rev.22:1-2).

2) It produces a miraculously fertile effect: The river is associated with agricultural fecundity and abundant fisheries in Ezekiel 47:1-12, while Joel 3:18 connects the fountain with the blossoming of the land in general (cf. a similar, symbolic reference in Is.66:12: "I will extend peace to her like a river and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream").

3) It has a life-giving influence: The river is one of "living water" in Zechariah 14:8, a title which, in light of Revelation 22:17, suggests the spiritual blessings it will confer (see also Jer.2:13; Is.55:1).

Just as the Messiah's Kingdom is likened to a life-giving tree (Matt.13:31-32; Mk.4:30-32; Lk.13:18-19; cf. Dan.4:10-27; Ezek.17:3-24; 31:1-18), so we find in the millennial kingdom literal trees of life flourishing on the banks of the river of living water for the first time since our original parents rejected the first tree of life for the tree of knowing good and evil. It is well to remember that none of these blessing could be possible but for the fact that our Lord Jesus bore all the cursing which was rightfully ours on that "other tree", for it is thus that we are eternally healed:

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed.

1st Peter 2:24

c) Unique Prosperity: The wondrous nature of millennial Jerusalem will be so exceptional to such an extraordinary degree that it surpasses our present ability to adequately imagine:

(11) "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. (12) I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.

Isaiah 54:11-12 NIV

Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you.

Isaiah 60:11

(15) "Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. (16) You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. (17) Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and iron in place of stones. I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler. (18) No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. (19) The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. (20) Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.

Isaiah 60:15-20 NIV

You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Isaiah 62:3

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.

Isaiah 66:12

Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.

Jeremiah 33:9 NIV

(26) I will bless them and **the places surrounding my hill**. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. (27) The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land.

Ezekiel 34:26-27 NIV

2) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Israel: The paradise-like conditions of the millennial Jerusalem will be duplicated to a great degree within boundaries of the entire expanded millennial state of Israel as well (and apparently to an only marginally lesser degree to the earth as a whole). The Millennium under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will be a time of agricultural bounty without scarcity, of flourishing environmental conditions without the hardships and disasters of previous eras, and of general prosperity and blessing beyond anything now remotely imagined – and it will begin with Israel:

(29b) "I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. (30) I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. (31) Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. (32) I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!" (33) This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. (34) The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. (35) They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become **like the garden of Eden**; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." (36) Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the Lord have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it."

Ezekiel 36:29b-36 NIV

(21) "In that day I will respond," declares the Lord— "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; (22) and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. (23) I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'. 'I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

Hosea 2:21-23 NIV

(16) The Lord their God will deliver them on that day (for His people are to Him as a precious flock, like jewels in a crown set prominently in His land). (17) For how fair and beautiful they will be. Grain will make the young men flourish and new wine the young women.

Zechariah 9:16-17

It will, in short, be a time of the veritable rebirth of Eden, with Israel being preeminent in the experiencing of all these blessings (Jer.31:2), as evidenced by

a) an end to the ferocity of wild animals (contrast to Ezek.14:21):

(6) The wolf also 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. (7) And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (8) And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. (9) They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9 KJV

I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety.

Ezekiel 34:25 NIV (cf. v.28)

In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground.

Hosea 2:18a NIV

b) miraculously improved physical and agricultural conditions:

The mountains will bring forth prosperity for the people, and the hills righteousness.

Psalms 72:3

Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field.

Psalms 72:16 NIV

(23) He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows. (24) The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel. (25) In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. (26) The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days (viz., a hyperbole literally fulfilled in the eternal state), when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

Isaiah 30:23-26 NIV

(1) The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, (2) it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.

Isaiah 35:1-2 NIV

(18) I will make rivers spring forth on the barren heights, and fountains in the valleys. I will fill the desert with pools of water, and the arid places with springs of water. (19) I will set cedar trees in the desert, acacias, myrtles and olive trees. I will place cypress, elm and box trees together in the Arabah, (20) so that [all] may see and know and take it [to heart] and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this, and that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Isaiah 41:18-20

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.

Isaiah 44:3a NIV

The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert like Eden, and her wilderness like the garden of the Lord.

Isaiah 51:3

The mountains and hills will let out a cheer and the trees will clap their hands. Instead of thorns, cypress will grow, and instead of thistles, myrtles.

Isaiah 55:12-13a

Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me.

Isaiah 65:10 NIV

(12) They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. (13) Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. (14) I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:12-14 NIV

I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.

Ezekiel 34:26b NIV

I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations.

Ezekiel 34:29 NIV (cf. Ezek.34:27)

And it will come to pass on that day that the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills run with milk. And all the watercourses of Judah will run with water.

Joel 3:18

Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when the one who ploughs will catch up with the reaper, and the one who treads the grapes will catch up with the sower. The mountains will drip with sweet wine and the hills will be liquid [goodness].

Amos 9:13

For there will be prosperity for what is sown: the vine will yield its fruit, and the land will bring forth its produce, and the sky will give forth the [necessary] moisture.
Zechariah 8:12

c) general peace and prosperity (cf. Ps.68:6; Is.9:4; Jer.31:22):

Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.
Hosea 2:18b NIV

(14) In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. (15) If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you.
Isaiah 54:14-15 NIV

Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor.
Isaiah 60:21 NIV

(3b) They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. (4) They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. (5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.
Isaiah 61:3b-7

(38) "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. (39) The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. (40) The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished."
Jeremiah 31:38-40 NIV

d) the expansion of the territory of Israel: During the Millennium, the territory of Israel will finally be expanded to the boundaries she was always meant to have, and her land will be newly allotted to ensure a bountiful inheritance to all of Abraham's offspring. Her Kingdom now united under Messiah's rule (Is.11:12-13; Jer.3:18; Ezek.37:15ff.; Hos.1:11), she will possess the full grant of land God originally made to Abraham (Ezek.45:7-8; 47:13-48:29; Zech.9:10). In those days, Israel will be exalted to the premier position among the nations for the first time since Abraham received the promises (Gen.12:2-3; 15:5-21; 17:4-19; 22:17-18).

(1) For the Lord will cherish Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and place them in their own land. Foreigners will join with them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. (2) Nations will take them and bring them to their [rightful] place. Then the house of Israel will receive them by lot in the land of the Lord [for use] as servants and maidservants. For they will take their captors captive, and rule over those who oppressed them.

Isaiah 14:1-2

e) the special enrichment of Israel: In an era of intensive blessing, Israel will be doubly blessed (Is.61:7; Joel 2:25; Zech.9:12), and will be a blessing herself to the whole world (Zech.8:20-23; cf. Gen.12:3). One of the distinct blessings prophesied to fall to Israel's lot during the Millennium is that she will be bountifully enriched in a variety of ways. In addition to the facts of the presence of the Messiah Himself, her status as the new world capital, and the special blessings upon her agriculture and environment examined above, she will also benefit from "plundering" the nations, both through reaping the benefits that will come from recycling the vast treasures of antichrist's recently annihilated armies (Ezek.39:7-16; Zech.14:1; cf. Ps.68:12-13; Is.9:3-5)⁴², and also from direct tribute from all of the other nations, the "double portion" of spoils which will come to her as the Messiah's special possession (Is.23:17-18; cf. Ex.3:22; 12:36; Deut.6:10; Rev.21:24).

(29) Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts. (30) Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver.

Psalm 68:29-30a NIV (cf. Ps.72:15)

(5) Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. (6) Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord. (7) All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.

Isaiah 60:5-7 NIV

Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you.

Isaiah 60:11

You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Isaiah 60:16 NIV

(5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a **double portion**, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a **double portion** in their land, and

everlasting joy will be theirs.
Isaiah 61:5-7 NIV

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.
Isaiah 66:12

The wealth of all the nations round about will be gathered up, their gold and silver and clothing in abundance.
Zechariah 14:14

3) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanded longevity, health and happiness: The improvements in the physical health, longevity and general well-being of human beings during the Millennium will likewise be extraordinary, and we may take scripture's focus on Israel in these respects as a result more of its concern with the fulfillment of the promises to the Jewish people than as any indication that the rest of the millennial world will be left out. We may well expect these effects to be most pronounced in Jerusalem proper and in Israel in general, but the whole testimony of scripture taken together seems to suggest that disease, poverty, and even death to some great degree will be removed as serious concerns worldwide under the blessing of the Messiah's glorious world rule.

In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.
Isaiah 29:18 NIV

(5) Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (6) Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Isaiah 35:5-6a NIV (cf. Is.32:3-4)

No one living in Zion will say, "I am ill"; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.
Isaiah 33:24 NIV

The passage immediately above is informative regarding one of the more controversial aspects of the Millennium, namely the question of whether or not human life spans will expand to their remarkable pre-flood lengths – or even beyond. To put it more directly, will anyone die during the Millennium?

(22) No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. (23) They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants **with them**.
Isaiah 65:22-23 NIV

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age.
Zechariah 8:4 NIV

(19) I will rejoice over Jerusalem and be filled with joy for My people. The sound of weeping and the cry of distress will no longer be heard in her. (20) No longer will there be there any infant that perishes in his youth, nor any old man who fails to live out his days in full. For a man will be accounted but a youth should he die at a hundred, even the sinner a hundred years old who suffers this curse.⁴³
Isaiah 65:19-20

This last passage in particular is sometimes taken to mean that no one will die of natural causes during the Millennium, but verse twenty contains an important caveat: "even **the sinner** a hundred years old who suffers this curse (i.e., will even so be accounted to have died early)". Given that near millennium-long life spans were indeed commonly achieved before the great flood (cf. Gen.5), and outside of the garden of Eden at that, it is certainly not impossible that with the restoration of Eden-like conditions on earth we should expect even greater physical resilience and health under the perfect conditions of the reign of Jesus Christ (the Genesis curse on the earth being finally removed as well). However, Isaiah 65:20 quoted above does state that death will occasionally occur nonetheless, and indicates that the key factor in bringing it on will be "sin". After all, even in pre-flood days, people did die, and it is well to consider that the exceptionally long lives recorded in Genesis chapter five apply to believers of exceptional spirituality. In Isaiah 33:24 also quoted above, we are told that illness will be absent in Zion, for "the **sins** of those who dwell there will be forgiven". Thus we may conclude that spirituality versus carnality will be a determining factor in this regard. For as Isaiah 65:19 says, it is "the sinner" who dies at a hundred who will be thought so accursed.

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."
Zechariah 13:1 NIV

As the verse above suggests, the life-giving waters which emanate from the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek.47:1-11; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8), giving rise to medicinal trees which spring up along its banks (Ezek.47:12), would seem to have not only healing properties but also the power of spiritual cleansing from the physical side-effects of sin. We may thus indeed expect believers who are walking with the Lord to live exceptionally long lives, with even the possibility of reaching through the entire Millennium not to be discounted. On the other hand, we may expect those who are, in addition to being unbelievers, spiritually reprobate ("sinners") to have their life-spans curtailed as a result; even so, as Isaiah 65:19-20 suggests, their lives will be long by contemporary standards. Between the two extremes, that is, between essential righteousness and inveterate immorality, there will no doubt be many points along the scale (with a variety of life-spans resulting). We may also expect a number of deaths as punishment for criminal activity to occur during the Millennium under the Messiah's perfect administration of justice wherein there will be a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to crime. There are some passages which may point to the possibility of deaths from

natural causes, as in the case of Ezekiel 46:16-18 where regulations are given to the prince concerning the assignment of inheritances (which could, however, be alternatively explained; see section III.1.b above). We should also recall that at least the original millennial "seed-stock" will come from human beings who have lived a portion (and in some cases a great portion) of their lives under far less than ideal conditions (most recently the seven year Tribulation). It seems best to conclude, therefore, that people probably will still die during the Millennium (in spite of greatly increased health and longevity). After all, even in the case of uncommonly responsive believers, everyone not yet resurrected will still have a sin nature.

Finally, there is also the question of the disposition of believers who may die during the Millennium, whether from natural causes, or from crime or accidents. Even if these are unusual occurrences, or possibly even especially so, it seems out of place for these individuals to be thenceforth excluded from the millennial kingdom, and we find no indication in scripture that they will then find themselves in the third heaven for the duration of the Millennium, a place which though by far not unpleasant will now otherwise be empty of other saved human beings. It seems better to suppose that in such cases either 1) such individuals will be resuscitated immediately (as in cases of murder, et al.), or 2) given an interim body so as to enjoy our Lord's presence – precisely as is the case today with all departed believers – with the main difference in the millennial regime being that they will enjoy that presence here on earth rather than in the third heaven as our departed brethren are currently doing.

4) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanding population: In addition to the vast destruction of Armageddon, and along with the purging out of Jews who though regathered still refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah (the sixth thunder-judgment), the fifth thunder-judgment will also punish with destruction all unbelievers who took the mark of the beast (and that most likely constitutes the majority of tribulational survivors). Taken in conjunction with the enormous loss of life for many other reasons during the Tribulation, therefore, it is virtually certain that the Millennium will begin with a very small population relative to the current seven or so billion human beings who inhabit planet earth, a population which could very well be pushing some ten billion at the time of the Tribulation's commencement. But even if this figure be reduced to one percent (and we are told that mankind will become "rare as gold of Ophir" as a result of the tribulational judgments: Is.13:12; cf. Is.24:6; Zeph.1:2-3; Mic.7:13), the remaining 100 million survivors under the conditions of millennial blessing and enjoying expanded human life-spans would be certain to rebound to the previous level in very short order (and to surpass it significantly by the Millennium's end). That is no doubt true even if the figure of 100 million survivors turns out to be far too high. This would also seem to be borne out by the rapid expansions of both the pre-flood human population (which began with only two, after all), and of the population after the flood (from a seed stock of eight), both under sub-millennial conditions. Starting with what must be at the very least some millions more than this (judging from the facts that "we who remain" in 1Thes.4 is a sizable enough category to deserve mention, and that the regathering of Jews from around the world at this time is one of the most prominently emphasized scriptural prophecies), even this small "seed stock" will no doubt prove more than sufficient to surpass current population levels in very little time (so that by the time of

the final event of the Millennium's end those who will oppose the Lord will be as numerous as "the sand of the seashore": Rev.20:8). The place where this expansion of population will be most pronounced is within the land of Israel (Is.9:3; Jer.33:10-13; Ezek.36:13-15):

(19) "Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. (20) The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, "This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in."

Isaiah 49:19-20 NIV

(1) Rejoice, O barren woman who has never born a child! Break forth with rejoicing and shout for joy, O woman who has never given birth! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than those of the married woman, says the Lord. (2) Enlarge the place for your tent. Let your tent curtains stretch wide and don't hold back. Lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes. (3) For you will burst forth on the right and on the left. Your offspring will possess the nations, and the deserted cities will be inhabited.

Isaiah 54:2-3

The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time, I will do this swiftly.

Isaiah 60:22 NIV

I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pastures where they will be fruitful and increase in number.

Jeremiah 23:3 NIV

(18) "This is what the Lord says: I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. (19) From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained."

Jeremiah 30:18-19 NIV

(8) " 'But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. (9) I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, (10) and ***I will multiply the number of people upon you***, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. (11) I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the Lord. (12) I will cause people, my people Israel, to walk upon you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children.

Ezekiel 36:8-12 NIV

(37) "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people **as numerous as sheep**, (38) **as numerous as the flocks** for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 36:37-38 NIV

d. Spiritual Blessings of the Millennium: During the prior period of the Tribulation, Satan had attempted a most vigorous suppression of the knowledge of God (Lk.18:8; cf. Amos 8:11), through his instigation of the greatest apostasy in world history (Dan.8:12-13; 11:33-35; Matt.24:4-5; 24:24-25; 2Thes.2:3; 1Tim.4:1), the greatest persecution in world history (Matt.24:9-12; Rev.6:9-11; 7:13-14), and his most direct control over the earth in world history (through his minion, antichrist: Rev.13). By way of the most stark possible contrast, during the Millennium, when God reigns directly in the Person of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of God will be more bountifully available than ever before in the history of the world (Is.12:3; 19:21; 54:13a; Jer.31:34; 32:38-40; Ezek.11:19-20; 36:25-27; Hab.2:14; Heb.8:10-11):

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

Isaiah 2:3

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord just as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:9b

Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.

Isaiah 29:24 NIV

(3) Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. (4) The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.

Isaiah 32:3-4 NIV

(5) The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. (6) He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.

Isaiah 33:5-6 NIV

All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace.

Isaiah 54:13 NIV

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2:14 NIV

(33) "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (34) No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:33-34 NIV

1) The Presence of the Messiah, the True Object of Worship: When our Lord reigns in person in Jerusalem, there will no longer be any reasonable doubt about who He is, the glorious Son of God and the Messiah, worthy of worship as God in His own right and for what He did for us in dying for our sins in His humanity:

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:1-3

"And the name of the city from that time on will be: The Lord is There ."

Ezekiel 48:35b NIV

And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be the only One and His Name the only Name.

Zechariah 14:9

And while Jesus will be the clear focus of all true worship, false religion will no longer be tolerated in His kingdom (cf. Is.1:27-29; 46:1; 65:16; Jer.16:19; Ezek.34:25).

(17) Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. (18) When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. (19) And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 11:17-19 NIV

(2) "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. (3) And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. (4) "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. (5) He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' (6) If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my

friends.'

Zechariah 13:2-6 NIV

And in that day, the Lord will provide an abundance of worthy teachers who will provide true teaching for salvation and spiritual growth.

Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

Jeremiah 3:15

2) The Pouring out of the Spirit: Ever since the day of the Church's first Pentecost, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, critical to spiritual growth, progression and service in **all** eras of human history, has been more vividly and dynamically felt. That is because while the Spirit has always been "with" believers, Christ's ascension has made possible the gift of the Spirit whereby believers are baptized with the Spirit so as to have Him on the "inside" (a benefit which even before the close of the apostolic period came to be experienced by **all** who believe in Jesus: Rom.8:9; cf. Jn.14:17; 1Thes.4:8; 2Tim.1:14; Heb.6:4). The Millennium will constitute a third phase in the Spirit's ministry wherein Jewish believers, at least (cf. Ezek.37:9), will not only be indwelt by Him, but dramatically empowered in the manner of the first Pentecost and the early, apostolic days of the Church. As is evidenced by their lack of (genuine) occurrence today, the empowerment of those earlier, dramatic "sign" gifts was a temporary phenomenon designed to bridge the gap between the incipient Church and the establishment by the apostles of local churches around the Mediterranean world, governed by the teachings of faith and practice set down in a completed New Testament. During the Millennium, however, this miraculous manifestation of the Spirit will not only be universal among the community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Israel, but will also be a permanent feature of the Messiah's Kingdom (rather than a temporary, inaugural phenomenon).

(14) The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks, (15) till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.

Isaiah 32:14-15 NIV

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

Isaiah 44:3b NIV

(20) "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord. (21) "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord.

Isaiah 59:20-21 NIV

(26) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit in you and

move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
Ezekiel 36:26-27 NIV

"I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord."
Ezekiel 37:14 NIV

"I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God.
Ezekiel 39:29 NASB

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication . . ."
Zechariah 12:10a NASB

(28) "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. (29) Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."
Joel 2:28-29 NASB

In this last passage we see most perspicuously the dramatic effects of the millennial outpouring of the Spirit, an event foreshadowed by the parallel fulfillment at Pentecost at which time Peter noted the comparison: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). In each case, the wondrously overt manifestations of the Spirit are unique markers of the inauguration of a new era in commemoration of Christ's victory (on the cross and at Armageddon respectively), the difference being that during the Millennium these gifts will endure just as the Messiah continues to abide in Jerusalem (*n.b.*, Joel 2:30-32 shifts the subject *back* to the events *preceding* the Second Advent).

3) The Resumption of Jewish Spiritual Leadership: The above special gift of the Spirit to Israel is a sign of another major millennial trend, namely, the refocusing of God's economy upon the Jewish people. For not only will the number of the Jewish people expand massively and the proportion of Jews within the world's believing community come to dominate as it did in the age of Israel (see section III.1.e below), but we shall also see the leadership of Christ's Church come again into the hands of a predominantly Jewish cadre as in apostolic times. As we have already seen, the first new wave of millennial believers will be Jews, who, when confronted with the reality of the returning Messiah, will turn to God (Jer.31:31-34; Joel 2:30-32; Zech.12:10; Rom.11:12; Rev.1:7). Secondly, Israel and, in particular, Jerusalem will not only be the political nerve-centers of the Millennium, but also its spiritual focal points and for precisely the same reason: the presence of the One who combines the offices of Great High Priest and King of Kings in His own Person:

(14) "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. (15) Then I will give

you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. (16) In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. (17) At that time they will call Jerusalem **The Throne of the Lord**, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord.
Jeremiah 3:14-17a NIV

A key function of the "shepherds" referenced in verse fifteen above will be spiritual leadership, and we find this theme of the special divine provision of spiritual guidance a prominent one in millennial passages as the gift and office of prophecy are once more empowered for the edification of the people of God:

(19) People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. (20) Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. (21) Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (22) Then you will desecrate your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"
Isaiah 30:19-22 NIV

(9) "For I am the Lord your God – since [you dwelt] in the Land of Egypt [I have been so]. (10) I shall again make you dwell in tents as in the days of your festival (i.e., Sukkoth representing the second advent regathering). At that time I will [again] speak to your prophets and will multiply [their] visions. Indeed, through the prophets I will provide you with intelligible teaching."
Hosea 12:9-10

The result of this expanded teaching of the truth, coupled with the special pouring out of the Spirit, will be the ubiquitous presence of the knowledge of God, especially among His people:

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
Isaiah 11:9b

"For" says the Lord, "this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!', because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more."
Jeremiah 31:33-34

The chief venue for the propagation of truth will likewise be Jerusalem and, specifically, the millennial temple.

(26) I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. (27) My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. (28) Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.' "

Ezekiel 37:26-28 NIV

Just as the second temple whose construction was originally unimpressive compared to the first temple (Hag.2:3) was later elaborately expanded and impressively ornamented, so the tribulational temple, after ceremonial cleansing and repair, will be marvelously embellished and adorned, so as to take on the full form and beauty recorded in Ezekiel's description (i.e., in Ezekiel chapters 40-47).⁴⁴ The temple is itself a form of palace (i.e., the Hebrew word *heychal* means either "temple" or "palace"), just as the ark in the Holy of Holies is a representation of a throne (and battle chariot)⁴⁵. Furthermore, antichrist, it will be remembered, actually "took his seat" in the temple of God precisely so as to "represent himself as being God" (2Thes.2:4). These facts in conjunction with the return of the Shekinah glory to the temple invite us to postulate that our Lord will indeed be enthroned in the Holy of Holies (Ezek.43:1-12), ruling the world and administering from that very place the one true faith – the worship of Himself as the Savior of the world.

He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever.

Ezekiel 43:7a NASB

(12) And He said to me, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – 'Branch' is His name (i.e., the Messiah; cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Zech.3:8). And He will branch out from His place and will build [up] the temple of the Lord. (13) For it is He who will build [up] the temple of the Lord. And He will raise up [its] glory. And He will sit and rule [as King] upon His throne. And He will [also] be Priest upon His [kingly] throne. For there will be a [unity of] consultation between the two [offices]."

Zechariah 6:12-13

The temple rites which will take place during the Millennium will constitute a form of worship which while similar to that of the first and second temples will be significantly different in one very important respect: the animal sacrifices and other ceremonies of the past were shadows which represented and looked forward to the coming of our Lord and His death on the cross on our behalf; by way of great contrast, the millennial rites will be **memorials** of what He has already done (e.g., according to Ezek.39:13, the Day of Christ's glorification will be a special "memorial day"). For as Hebrews 10:18 tells us, following the reality of Christ's work in dying for us on the cross "there is no longer any sacrifice for sin". Therefore these millennial sacrifices will not be the means of any sort of atonement, even ceremonially speaking, but instead they will serve as a kind of group "communion" to teach and remind of what Jesus has done for us all. While Jesus will be ruling in person as the King of Kings, it will still be helpful for people to remember that in the past He was the Suffering Servant who died for all of their sins. For even revering Jesus as the Ruler of the world will not bring salvation; the adherence to the gospel will still require accepting His work on the cross in washing away our sins as well as

appreciating Him as the unique God-Man. This memorializing purpose (as opposed to foreshadowing) could never have been achieved while the second temple was standing, because the rituals practiced there even after our Lord's resurrection followed the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. As such, they continued to "crucify the Son of God afresh" (Heb.6:6) even after He had already suffered and died for our sins, making participation in them a terrible blasphemy (for which the Jerusalem believers are soundly rebuked in the book of Hebrews). With our Lord present in person and actually enthroned *in* the temple, we may be absolutely certain that the meaning of the millennial sacrifices and rituals will be seen for precisely what they are, namely, memorials to His work on the cross, rather than shadows of what is to come. The difference in meaning will also result in significant if somewhat subtle differences in procedure between the Mosaic Law and the function of the millennial temple rite. There will be no ark of the covenant in the millennial temple, no doubt because Jesus has already fulfilled everything it and the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement foreshadowed:

(16) "In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made." Jeremiah 3:16

And there will be differences in the millennial regime of animal sacrifice, reflecting the memorial aspect of that future practice in contrast with the forward-looking lessons of the Old Testament. Only one lamb will be offered as a morning sacrifice, representing the "new day" Christ's reign embodies, even as the evening sacrifice is no longer required because all judgment has passed for those who believe (Ezek.46:13-15). Significantly also, the gentiles will now be included in this worship, representing their full inclusion into the family of God (Is.56:3-8; Ezek.45:13-46; cf. Ps.104:6; Is.60:7), the enmity having been dissolved by the cross (Eph.2:15-16). Indeed, the feast of Tabernacles, for example, will be a festival to which all the worlds' peoples will be required to send representatives, and it is further reasonable to suppose that all who consider themselves followers of the Lord will want to assemble before Him in Jerusalem once a year (Is.19:18-20; 66:23-24; cf. "three times a year" in ancient Israel: Ex.23:14-17).

"On that day I shall stand David's fallen booth back up, and repair its holes and everything else which has been trampled down I shall [also] stand up. And I shall rebuild it as in days of old, so that the remnant of mankind and all the gentile [nation]s which are called by My name *may seek Him*, declares the Lord who is going to accomplish this."

Amos 9:11-12 (cf. Acts 15:16-17)

The feast of Tabernacles is significant in this regard because it is the festival which looks forward to the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah (for the Israelites will dwell "in booths" when they re-enter the land, just as that first generation in the promised land had done). Therefore this feast will be a memorial and a celebration of the Messiah's reign (and of Israel's return to the land – God having fulfilled all of His promises to them in this regard). As far as other nations are concerned, failure to be represented at

this festival will constitute a grave offense for suggesting by their absence that, in effect, they are displeased with the King's rule (cf. Lk.19:14; 19:27).

(16) Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (17) If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. (18) If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (19) This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

Zechariah 14:16-19 NIV

4) The Evangelizing of the Gentiles and their Response: The Millennium will also see the greatest explosion of evangelism in history (accompanied by a substantial response: Is.19:18-20). Radiating out from its spiritual center, Jerusalem, Jewish evangelists, in the main, will cover the world and bring to fulfillment the prophecy of that great time, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea":

And I will place a sign among them, and I will send survivors from among them to the nations, to Tarshish, and Put, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubhal, and Yavan, the islands far away who have not heard my Name, and have not seen my Glory. Thus will they proclaim my Glory among the nations.

Isaiah 66:19

Nor will this traffic for the sake of the truth be one way only, for many whose hearts are drawn to Jesus Christ will come to Jerusalem to worship at His footstool and to receive instruction in His Word of truth, even going so far as take up permanent residence in Israel so as to be closer to Him and so as to drink more deeply and directly from the waters of truth (cf. Micah 7:11-13; 7:17).

"I will record Rahab (i.e., Egypt) and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, "This one was born in Zion." Psalm 87:4 NIV

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

Isaiah 2:3

The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.

Isaiah 14:1 NIV

(14) This is what the Lord says: "As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. (15) But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own

country. (16) And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives' —even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal—then they will be established among my people. (17) But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the Lord.
Jeremiah 12:14-17 NIV

(21) "You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. (22) You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. (23) In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance," declares the Sovereign Lord.
Ezekiel 47:21-23 NIV

"Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people."
Zechariah 2:11 NIV

(20) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, (21) and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.' (22) And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him." (23) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.' "
Zechariah 8:20-23 NIV

(20) In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the Lord", and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar. (21) Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts in that day.
Zechariah 14:20-21 NIV

e. Millennial Believers: These gentiles along with the great number of Jews who will turn to the Lord after His glorious return will constitute a complement or filling up of the family of God above and beyond the fulness which is the Church at Christ's return. That is, the millennial believers are given to Christ over and above the number needed to replace the devil and his followers on a strictly one for one basis (for that will by this point already have been accomplished by the resurrection of the Church at the 2nd Advent).⁴⁶

The post 2nd Advent believers who are "invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (the uniting of Christ and His Church and its celebration throughout the memorial time of the Millennium: Rev.19:9), will, along with all of their spiritual off-spring, share and enjoy the world-wide blessing and bounty of Christ's millennial reign. Thus the believers of the Millennium constitute an *additional* blessing for Christ, a "double portion" blessing that is traditionally the right of the first born (Deut.21:15-17; cf. Gen.48:22;

1Sam.1:5; 2Kng.2:9; Job 42:10; Is.61:7; Zech.9:12; 1Tim.5:17). This is most appropriate for the "First Born of all creation" (Col.1:15; cf. Ps.89:27; Col.1:18; Heb.1:6), so that He might truly be "the First Born among many brethren" (Rom.8:29). Given the dramatic and unprecedented repopulation of the earth during the Millennium (treated above; cf. Rev.20:8b), and given that the already resurrected Church constitutes a one for one replacement of the devil's followers (see previous footnote), it is likely that the Millennial echelon of believers, being Christ's double portion, will match the Church precisely in number (a thousand years of perfect environment being more than ample time from the standpoint of population growth).⁴⁷

IV. The Gog and Magog Rebellion: Revelation 20:7-9

(7) And when the thousand years were completed, Satan was released from his prison, (8) and he came forth to deceive the nations which [reside] in the four quadrants (lit., "corners") of the earth, Gog and Magog (whose number is as the sand of the sea) in order to marshal them together for war. (9) And they went up to the plains of the land [of Israel] and encircled the encampment of the saints and the beloved city [Jerusalem], and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Revelation 20:7-9

The first thing to notice about the last major event in human history before the commencement of eternity is that the Gog and Magog mentioned here bear only a symbolic relationship to the Gog of the land of Magog addressed in Ezekiel 38:2.⁴⁸ The latter reference is to antichrist with the context of Ezekiel chapters 38-39 describing the vast coalition the beast will bring against Jerusalem during the final days of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon. This last human rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ and His millennial rule will share much in common with that earlier attack. Both are instigated by the devil's deceit, both seek to unseat God, and both will draw unprecedentedly large numbers of troops from around the world in order to do battle with Jesus Christ at Jerusalem. For these reasons, John's sanctified use of this well-known appellation, "Gog and Magog", makes perfect sense as a generic phrase to indicate the involvement of the totality of the gentile world in this assault. It seems evident from the verses above that the process of Satan's enlistment of the nations to attack the Great King will be as rapid as it is successful. In spite of perfect government and a thousand years of blissful prosperity more blessed than the world has ever seen, the devil's efforts will meet with a most enthusiastic response on the part of the vast majority of the millennial population. The fact that what appears to be the entirety of the unsaved population of the world at that time will jump at the chance to rid itself of the absolutely fair and just rule of Jesus Christ only goes to show that free will is not a function of environment. The determination to reject God "no matter what" is deep-seated in the heart of unbelief and cannot be coaxed into genuine change no matter how many material blessings are bestowed. This should not really surprise us, because if the forgiveness of our sins at no cost to us through Jesus' death on our behalf and the offer of eternal life through faith by grace are not enough to satisfy those who reject Him, why should their dissatisfaction with His perfectly fair and abundantly prosperous millennial reign seem at all odd? Arrogance and avarice can never be satisfied. This Satan knows very well, and his new "platform" of freedom from the temporal rule of Jesus Christ

whom his audience has already rejected for salvation will cause a wildfire revolt whose appeal will be so intoxicating to all unbelievers that the devil will be able to muster them for the final battle of the world almost effortlessly and even in spite of a lack of support from his legions of imprisoned fallen angels. The description of Jerusalem at this time as "the camp of the saints" also suggests that despite the rebellion's rapid growth, there will be sufficient time for many who have chosen for Jesus Christ to make their way to Jerusalem before the Gog-Magog invasion and assault begin.

(24) Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. (26) But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. (27) The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' (28) And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' (29) But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. (30) Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (36) Then He left the crowds and went into the house And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." (37) And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, (38) and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; (39) and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. (40) So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, (42) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:24-30; 13:36-43 NASB

The parable of the tares describes the pollution of the millennial kingdom during its last days along with the manner of the divine solution: rebelliousness is allowed to come to fruition, which in this case means the actual assault upon Jerusalem, the Messiah's capital city. After the destruction of the attacking force, the remainder of those who set their hearts against Jesus in response to the evil one will be "uprooted" and "burned" (a metaphorical reference to the last judgment and their final end, the lake of fire; see section VI below). In all this we see a very clear parallel to Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Like our first parents, the millennial population will find themselves living under marvelous circumstances, and yet will still be vulnerable to the offer of something more, not "knowledge", as in the case of Eve, but "freedom" as the devil will deceitfully frame the issue for them (Ps.2:1-3). Thus, the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ will be the third and final paradise which Satan will corrupt, having first suborned one-third of angelic kind and having thus brought about the destruction of the original earth,⁴⁹ and having next deceived and corrupted Eve and through her Adam and having thus brought about their expulsion from the garden. Each such action has of

course only furthered God's plan, bringing about the creation of mankind in the first instance and initiating the process of human history in the second. At the conclusion of the Gog-Magog rebellion, history will be brought to an end, and the eternal state will commence – following, that is, the final disposition of Satan and his followers (section V), and the final reward of the millennial believers along with the last judgment of all unbelievers (section VI).

As can be seen from the short description in Revelation 20:7-9 (of the complete and instantaneous annihilation of the vast multitudes who will attack Jerusalem in those days), the devil's representations are, as always, mere lies and deceit. For the utter folly of opposing the power of God is something which only blind arrogance can fail to see, and that folly born of arrogance comes through very clearly in the other major passage to treat this revolt, Psalm 2 (cf. Ps.46:6):

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) “Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!” (4) The One enthroned in heaven will laugh. The Lord will mock them. (5) At that time He will speak to them in His anger, and in His wrath He will throw them into confusion. (6) “But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.” (7) I shall relate the Lord's decree. He said to Me, “You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. (8) Ask of Me and I shall give [You] the nations as your inheritance, and as Your possession the ends of the earth. (9) You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, and You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel. (10) So now, O kings, learn prudence! Take warning, you judges of the earth! (11) Serve the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling! (12) Kiss the Son (i.e., pay homage to Him), lest He become angry [with you] and you perish for your [insolent] behavior. For His anger may blaze up in an instant [if you do not]. Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.”
Psalm 2:1-12

Finally, this rebellion and the disaffection and dislocation it will temporarily cause worldwide, conditions to which the millennial population will be otherwise entirely unaccustomed, will also serve to provide a litmus test for the essential spiritual status of all those inhabiting the earth at that time, soon to be brought up at the final judgments which precede eternity.

(31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him (i.e., after that millennial reign), and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see

you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."
Matthew 25:31-46 NIV

For this time will truly be a time of testing for the entire world, and those not directly involved in the military aspects of the rebellion will still have to face the issue of how to treat believers being persecuted, opposed, or hindered by satanic forces in their journey to Jerusalem. For their actions towards "the least of these" will be a clear indication of their faith or lack thereof.

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.
Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV

V. The Final Disposition of Satan and his Angels: Revelation 20:10

And the devil who was deceiving them (i.e., the millennial rebels, a.k.a. "Gog and Magog") was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet [already are], and they will be tormented day and night for all eternity (lit., "to the ages of the ages").
Revelation 20:10

Satan here meets his final end, joining in the lake of fire the beast and the false prophet who have likewise been deprived of the benefit of any last analysis of their cases or formal pronouncement of sentence.

By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So ***I made a fire come out from you***, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching.
Ezekiel 28:18 NIV

The devil's instigation of the Gog-Magog rebellion constitutes an extraordinary act of rebellion against the perfect rule of the Messiah similar in its egregious temerity to the

instigation of the Armageddon campaign (different only in that the latter was designed to resist His return rather than to overthrow His rule). But while the beast and the false prophet are denied any further "last judgment" or process of adjudication because of their non-human status (being nephilim not created in the image of God), and are subjected to this summary though entirely just judgment instead, Satan has already been judged.

(8) "When He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will call the world to account regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: (9) regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; (10) regarding righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you are not going to be seeing Me any longer; (11) regarding judgment, ***because the ruler of this world has been convicted*** [already]."

John 16:8-11

Man was created for the glory of God (Is.43:7; cf. Eph.1:5-14), and a large part of that glory is won in the responsiveness that some (though sadly far from all) human beings show in coming to God through faith so as to be saved by grace on the basis of Jesus' death to sin. This is so because human history as seen from our Lord's perspective rather than from our myopic human viewpoint was always meant to be the means by which God's condemnation of Satan and the fallen angels would be demonstrated as just. For, as we have previously had cause to consider at length (i.e., in the five part Satanic Rebellion series which serves as an introduction to this present series), Satan's case was already adjudicated by the Lord before human history ever even commenced (that is, prior to the reconstruction of the earth during the seven Genesis days and the creation of Adam and Eve).

In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub.

Ezekiel 28:16

With the successful redemption of mankind at the cross and subsequent belief in the work and Person of Jesus Christ by His Church, God has demonstrated not only the willingness of creatures possessed of free will to repent and return to Him, but much more importantly His ability and willingness to provide the means for their salvation at a cost beyond imagination, the suffering and death of His own dear Son our Lord. This is the victory God has won over the devil in human history, not his physical defeat (which God could have accomplished in the blink of an eye and with no discernible effort), but the demonstration of His love and of His justice, of His ability to be true to the one without compromising the other – by means of the cross of Jesus Christ.

(31) Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the prince of this world be driven out.

(32) And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself.

John 12:31-32

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in

[Christ].
Colossians 2:15

Inasmuch as Satan's conviction predates human history, his execution, otherwise known as "the second death" (Rev.20:14; 21:8; cf. Rev.20:6), has long since been prepared for him and his followers in the form of the "lake of fire", an eternal place of cursing which all creatures who have rejected God the Father and His Christ will share forever.

Then He will say to those on His left, "Away from Me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire **[already] prepared** for the devil and his angels."
Matthew 25:41

Although the book of Revelation does not say so, the passage immediately above, Matthew 25:41, indicates that the other fallen angels will share the devil's fate (Job 4:18; 15:15; cf. Jude 1:13b). But while Satan will not have the benefit of a last, official hearing, and while neither their consignment to the lake of fire nor any final judgment for the fallen angels is described in the book of Revelation, other scriptures indicate that this process of their disposition will be the next eschatological order of business:

Will anyone teach God knowledge, since **He will judge** the high ones (i.e., angels)?
Job 21:22

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but plunged them into Tartarus with its gloomy pits (i.e., the Abyss), preserving them for **the [day of] judgment** . . .
2nd Peter 2:4

And the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in anticipation of **the judgment of that great day**.
Jude 1:6

So while for the reasons discussed above, Revelation 20:10 singles out the devil for consignment to the fiery lake at this time, there is no reason to suppose that Satan's followers will be granted any further stay of execution.^{49b} Since the last judgment of human beings follows next in the eschatological scheme of things, it seems certain that the rest of the fallen angels will follow their leader, the devil, into the lake of fire in short order if not immediately after his relegation to the eternal flames. For the eternal state will be a place "where [only] righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13; cf. Dan.9:24), and it is consistently described as being free of every trace of uncleanness (Rev.21:8; 21:27; 22:5; 22:15), a condition that most certainly entails the prior removal of all of the fallen angels. Therefore when we are told that "death and Hades" will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev.20:14-15), we are certainly meant to understand Satan's legions as being included (inasmuch as Hades, and specifically the Abyss or Tartarus, is the present place of incarceration of a goodly number of demons, and their likely place of residence during the Millennium; cf. section I.4 above, "The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons").

The Lake of Fire: Though the Bible uses a variety of terms to describe both the interim and the eternal, self-selected place of condemnation for unbelievers and fallen angels (e.g., "the grave", "Topheth", "Sheol", "Gehenna", "Hades", "torments", etc.), the final "hell" to which all reprobate creatures are condemned is a very real and distinct place, called at Revelation 19:20 "**the lake of fire which burns with sulfur**" (Matt.25:41; Rev.20:10; 20:14-15; cf. Matt.13:42; 13:50). The interim "hell", or "torments", is one of the three sections of Hades below the earth (Lk.16:23; the other two being the now empty paradise where departed believers resided prior to the ascension of Christ, and the Abyss, the place of incarceration for certain of the fallen angels), and it is there that all deceased unbelievers will remain until the time of the last judgment. As we are told at Revelation 19:20, antichrist and his false prophet will be the first to be thrown into the lake of fire (at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon), with the devil following at the end of the Gog-Magog rebellion some thousand years later (Rev.20:10), and with his fallen angels following him immediately at that time (as discussed above; 2Pet.3:13; Rev.20:14-15; 21:8; 21:27; 22:5; 22:15; cf. Dan.9:24).

Even though it is presently unoccupied, the lake of fire nevertheless already exists. It has "[already been] prepared" – "for the devil **and** his angels" (Matt.25:41; cf. Dan.7:9-11). But while the lake has been prepared for Satan and his followers, we see very clearly in Matthew chapter 25 that unbelieving mankind will share this same fate. For in the judgment of "the sheep and the goats", men and not angels are the ones being judged, and the "goats", human beings who have consciously chosen to reject the Father's gracious offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, are likewise commanded to depart into the lake of fire at the conclusion of this "last judgment" (cf. Rev.20:14-15; 21:8). So while neither the fallen angels nor deceased unbelievers are presently in the lake of fire, it is this lake which will be the place of eternal residence for all who deliberately reject God and His love by refusing Jesus Christ.

John answered them all and said, "I am [symbolically] baptizing you with water. But One who is more powerful than me is coming, [One] whose sandal thong I am not sufficient to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit . . . and **with fire!** His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His threshing floor and gather the grain into His barn, but **He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**"
Luke 3:16-17

The fire itself, besides being literal, is also a symbol of the judgment under which all human beings find themselves for their sinful conduct (Jn.3:18; 16:5-11; 1Jn.3:14 – and no one has ever been completely without sin save Jesus Christ; cf. Rom.3:9; 3:23; 5:8). We are given to see this intimate connection between divine judgment and the fire which fills the lake of damnation in both Isaiah's and Daniel's accounts of antichrist's final end:

(33) Topheth (i.e., the lake of fire) has long been prepared (cf. Matt.25:41), it has been made ready **for the king** (i.e., antichrist). Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord **like a stream of burning sulfur**, sets it ablaze.

Isaiah 30:32-33 NIV

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A **river of fire** was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and **given over to the burning fire.**

Daniel 7:9-11

The lake is thus filled up by a fiery river of divine wrath and judgment (cf. Is.66:15-16; Matt.3:7; Lk.3:7; Jn.3:36; Rom.1:18; 2:5-8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; Eph.2:3; 5:6; Col.3:6-8; 1Thes.1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Rev.6:16-17; 11:18; 14:19; 15:7; 16:1; 19:15), a river of fire which "flows" forth from the throne of God (with this portion of the scene in Daniel 7 referring through prophetic conflation to the Father's judgment of Satan and his angels in eternity past; cf. Jn.16:11). In Revelation chapter 14 we find this now fully prepared lake of fire positioned before Christ's Great White Throne at the time of the last judgment of human beings (which at the point of our present context in this study is about to commence immediately):

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's **wrath** which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur **before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb.** (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

The passage above portrays the act of execution as part of the process of the final judgment of unbelievers. That is the meaning and the force of the phrase in verse ten above, "before the Lamb". Just as the lake was initially filled directly from the Father's throne during the prehistoric judgment of the devil and his followers, so the final judgment for the human race will likewise take place directly in front of the lake of fire (cf. Dan.7:9-11; Matt.25:41). Upon the passing of sentence, those whose names are found to have been blotted out of the book of life for the cause of unbelief will be summarily cast in "before" or "in the presence of" the Lamb and all of us His followers who will attend the proceedings. We therefore should not take the passage above to mean that the place of the lake of fire will be the New Jerusalem where the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ will reside with us forever, for we know from elsewhere in scripture that "hell" will instead be far removed their glorious presence:

(6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the

gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction **away from the presence of the Lord** and the glory of His power.
2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9

Through the grace and mercy of God the Father, the horrible fate of those consigned to the lake of fire will not trouble us for a moment in the blissful eternity we shall spend with Him and our dear Savior, Lord Jesus Christ (Is.25:8; 35:10; 65:17-19; Rev.7:17; 21:4; cf. 2Cor.5:17; Heb.12:27). That is so even though there are scriptural indications that the lake of fire and its inhabitants will indeed be visible to us in eternity.

(22) "For just as the new heavens and new earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue. (23) And it will come to pass that from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh will come to worship before Me", says the Lord. (24) "And they will go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh".
Isaiah 66:22-24

Since it already exists, since it will be visible in the future (standing as an eternal memorial to the folly of rejecting God and His mercy: Rev.14:10), and since it will be no part of the New Jerusalem (or the new heavens and new earth), the lake is in all probability located within the subterranean realm of the present earth. This location has much to recommend it. Firstly, the prehistoric filling of the lake in Daniel chapter seven (quoted above) and the adjudication of Satan's case which accompanied it (Jn.16:11) must have taken place after the devastation and inundation of the original heavens and earth within the Genesis gap (that is, following Satan's rebellion which occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2; see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion Series: The Genesis Gap). After this supernatural darkening of the original universe, apart from the third heaven (technically a separate place from "the [twin] heavens and the earth", and, as a paradise in its own right, inappropriate for the location of the lake of fire), only the subterranean earth would have remained unaffected by the judgment upon initial creation stemming from the devil's revolt. For this reason, it would seem to have been the only place available for those proceedings, as well as the only place available for the positioning of the lake of fire, whose filling is described at Daniel 7:10. According to this interpretation, the third heaven was made and has always remained perfect; the [twin] heavens and earth are the place where creature free will produces imperfection in what was originally created perfect, thus necessitating the choice between mercy and judgment; and the subterranean earth was made as the place for containing and restraining those who choose the latter over the former. It is more than a little interesting to note that while the devil and his angels were not deposited into the lake of fire at the time sentence was passed upon them (it being God's good pleasure to demonstrate the justice of His decision and the mercy which could have been theirs through the process of creating and redeeming mankind), yet He gave them to see the horror of their final end well ahead of time – and yet they made no effort to repent (trusting instead in Satan's ability to defeat the Lord in the contest ahead: human history).

The last judgment (covered directly below) will likewise take place in a very similar interlude, **after** the destruction of the present heavens and earth (Rev.20:11), but **before** the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Rev.21:1). In this instance too, only the third heaven (inappropriate for the presence of evil or the final place of condemnation) and the subterranean earth will remain. It is within the latter, directly in front of the lake of fire, that the final judgment will take place. Finally, after the creation of the new heavens and new earth and descent from the third heaven to earth of the New Jerusalem (Rev.21:2; 21:10), Isaiah chapter sixty-six above indicates that there will be some sort of visual access to the lake of fire from the new earth (along the lines of the heavenly sea in the third heaven today which acts as a viewing-port for observing events on the present day earth: compare Rev.4:6 with Rev.15:2-3; and cf. Job 1-2; 1Kng.22:19-22; Lk.15:10; Jn.8:56; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; 1Pet.1:12; Heb.12:1; Rev.6:10).⁵⁰ But just as there is a "great fixed-chasm" between the subterranean paradise and the interim hell of "torments" which prevents any access from one place to the other (Lk.16:26), and just as there was little interest on the part of the departed believers in the just fate of those who rejected God in this life (Lk.16:25), so the lake of fire and final end of all those who arrogantly and deliberately chose to oppose our Lord will be of little moment to those of us who are enjoying the ineffable blessings of eternity in the presence of our dear Savior Jesus Christ.

The quotation from Isaiah above and many other such in scripture put the lie to the evil heresy which proclaims oblivion for those who oppose God in this life and trample the precious sacrifice of Jesus Christ underfoot. The torment and cursing to which all who have no use for the Lord in this life will be subjected is very real, and it will be never ending (e.g., Matt.8:12; 13:42; 13:49-50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; 25:41-46; Lk.13:28; Rev.14:10-11; 21:7-8), consisting of four essential afflictions: 1) fire, 2) sulfur, 3) darkness, and 4) separation from God. The first two "active" forms of cursing are what is doubtless meant in the Isaiah passage above by "their worm" (quoted by our Lord at Mk.9:48). This is an extremely vivid image which evokes the consumption of the present body in the grave by worms, teaching that, in contrast to the finite nature of the decomposition of the present body, the body with which the unrighteous dead will be resurrected will endure forever, but for cursing rather than for blessing.⁵¹ Literal fire and sulfur will form the environment in which unbelievers and fallen angels will pass eternity, the former producing tangible physical pain, the latter generating an unpleasantness affecting the senses of taste and smell. The result will be an agonizing state of suffering which the image of the undying worm brings graphically to mind, resulting in "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk.13:28). But there will also be passive suffering to experience in the lake of fire: darkness (Is.8:22; Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30), itself a cause of pain and discomfort (Rev.16:10; cf. Ex.10:21-23; Rev.8:12), and a complete separation from the blessed and glorious Persons of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ whose presence defines what paradise truly is. It is more than fitting that those who rejected the light and loved the darkness in life (Jn.3:19-21; cf. Jn.1:3-9; 1Jn.1:5-7) should dwell in darkness forever (cf. Lk.16:24; 2Pet.2:17; Jude 13), and that those who rejected God and His mercy should spend eternity apart from Him. For those of us who have dedicated ourselves to being near to Him through Jesus Christ, this curse of being deprived of the Word, even more than the fire, the sulfur, and the darkness, is the most appalling thing to

contemplate of all. And while their terrible fate rightly causes us to shudder, there are no grounds for sympathy for those who rejected the blood of Christ. They chose the lake of fire by rejecting the only One who could rescue them from it. As a result, by their own personal acts of free will unbelievers will be separated from God in eternity, the very God for whom they had absolutely no use in this life. Herein we find the essential significance of the etymology of the most common Hebrew word for hell, "Sheol". Derived from the root *sha'al* (שאל), whose essential meaning is "to ask", this word for "hell" indicates that unbelievers are getting exactly "what they asked for", namely, "freedom" from God, and would no doubt ask for it again and again in precisely the same negative way, even if they had a thousand life-times to reconsider.

VI. The Last Judgment: Revelation 20:11-15

(11) And I saw a throne, a great white one, and Him who was sitting upon it (i.e., Jesus Christ). From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, both the great and the insignificant, standing in front of the throne. And books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done. (13) For the sea gave up the dead which were in it, [that is] death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and each person was condemned according to what they had done. (14) And death and Hades (i.e., all unbelievers) were cast into the lake of fire. And this is the second death: the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15

The verses above take us rapidly through all that remains of eschatology up until eternity begins. That is to say, they conclude God's plan for human history, with the exception of His blessed creation of the glorious new heavens and new earth and the commencement of the eternal state (covered in chapters 21-22). The Great White Throne or "last judgment" described above is the final event before darkness, tears and sorrow fade into nothingness forevermore, washed away by the brilliant light of God in the everlasting Kingdom of the Father where we shall enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and our Lord Jesus Christ, world without end. Following the melting away of the old heavens and earth (described in verse eleven), the last phase of the resurrection will take place, wherein all millennial believers will be raised and rewarded with eternal life, while all the unsaved dead will be raised for the judgment described above and the second death. Since the theme of the book of Revelation is one of our Lord's just judgment upon the forces of evil and His total victory over them, it should not be surprising that these latter events, related elsewhere in scripture (and discussed immediately below), give place here to the disposition of the unsaved in order to emphasize the last judgment itself. And there most certainly will be a last judgment of the unsaved dead as the passage above makes clear (along with many other scriptures, e.g., Matt.7:21-23; 16:25-27; Mk.8:35-38; Lk.9:24-26; Acts 24:25, etc.).

Every human being who attains adulthood with normal mental capacity is accountable to God for their free will choices, both their sins and their decisions in regard to seeking out His mercy (or failing to do so). Therefore, just as all are aware of God's existence and

