

The Bible Is a Parable: A Middle Ground Between Science and Religion

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The Courage to Commit

We are all related—by ink, if not blood—to Walter Mitty.

We all have dreams of glory:

Aspirations, plans, schemes, and designs.

Why then are so few of them executed

and why do only a small number

come to fruition?

It is because too many lack the nerve it takes

to step out of line—¹

It is toward the borrowing of “this brand of courage”

that I now take a hesitatingly

uncertain step forward.

Arise, shine, for your light has come

And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

—Isa. 60:1, NKJV

Note: An Intimate Memoir by Garson Kanin

Overview

You have studied my creation through your “Ignorance” and I have given you
“Visions”

You have studied my creation through your “Wisdom” and I have given you
“Insight”

You have studied my creation through your “Intellect” and I have given you
“Theories”

Throughout all this time, you have quested for “Answers” and I have given you
“Parables”

The opening quotation in this “Overview” is taken from one of the last chapters of this
work titled simply “Dialogue.”

Against all the understanding derived from his senses that should convince Man of
his singularity, somehow he could never feel totally alone in the world. Even considering
his felt need to believe in something more able to control the raw forces of his
environment, there were still those times when he felt led by something more than his
own experience. Religion provided a form in which to enclose that something.

Many an original and seemingly logical interpretation of the world that he came into
contact with has found its way into the memory of Man. Cherished to the point of
worship, they have been recited across the centuries as valued articles of the *Wisdom of
the Ancients*.

Out of this background, many stories have been told and retold until they gained
ascendancy in the mind of Man. And then, after an uncertain interval or because of some

circumstance, disappeared into the fog of an unremembered past, leaving only bits and pieces to be borrowed anew by its inheritors.

The Bible appears to bear witness to this process. Its stories, some apparently ill-remembered borrowings, are accompanied by accounts of the following: the heroics of a people's champions, their genealogies identifying their uniqueness, a chronology of their special history, as well as time-tested *Words of Wisdom*.

All these, put together with a seemingly otherworldly vision, have allowed it a longevity rarely equaled by any other literary endeavor. The apparent skill with which these have been assembled lends to the assumption that they were meant to be seen as the parables that they appear to be to this author. The orders of succession in Genesis match rather well with the chronology of discoveries made throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' scientific method.

My experience with the study of this method (science) convinces me that the constant testing of its answers, while aggravating when a favored one is overturned, is the surest method to keep the answers relevant with the most recent discoveries regarding the earth and the cosmos that the earth resides in.

Still, because of the uncertainty inherent within these testings, science offers no firm ground to build a system of belief upon, to explain those verities that seem not to have changed over the ages, as well as to satisfy the questions that still have no apparent answers.

Religion is the platform upon which those things can be contemplated; where surmise (supposition) can lead to a seemingly logical answer, the foundation of which lies far enough beyond generationally current ability to verify as to seem without resolution. Man's ability to extrapolate learned experience into a new but similar-appearing circumstance is a unique gift apparently offered to no other life-form. Because of this many things have been passed on through an understanding called belief, about things that work to Man's advantage, before any knowledge of why can even be contemplated.

Religion in today's world, when it offers answers that seemed to be complete hundreds of years ago, when it insists upon continued belief in the relevancy of the interpretations that provided them, and this in an ever-changing world, risks a certain loss of credibility.

Yet *religion*, systems of belief, exist primarily because Man has always felt that there was more to this world than the eye or mind alone can perceive.

Modern *experimental* science came about largely through the inquisitive efforts of clergy who attempted to understand the *Mind of God* through the study of the nature of His creation. When their answers began to diverge sharply from those of older more static belief systems whose ancient origins were partly "visionary," the stage was set for confrontation. *Authority* in the quest for stability stood in evermore-direct challenge to the answers of *intellect*.

History is replete with instances where differences of opinion within systems of belief have led to schismatic separation and, many times, disappearance of one or both contending opinions. From biology we learn that all living systems seek to maintain *stasis* an unchanging equilibrium. A limited life span seems to be nature's answer to the lack of ability or willingness to change in response to changing conditions.

We may be witnessing that very thing playing out today between *science* and *religion*. Each *contender* seems to be moving toward evermore-untenable extremes.

Some members of science now are in denial of that “Something” which lies just beyond the reach of their many answers. All the while, clerics, content to live off the myriad benefits of scientific discovery, continue a challenge that robs them of what is left of their credibility. This, while the clerics harbor the *Answer* that only their limited ability keeps them from understanding, has no need of their puny defenses.

It is theorized that science’s dinosaurs became victims of an environmental disaster. They did not survive it largely because of the slowness of biological change. Must we suffer a similar fate while we wait upon another external agent? Or will we be smart enough to exercise our unique gift to extrapolate the experience of the *old* into another *new* situation? My *mission*, as I see it, is to provide the vehicle as well as the roadmap that is meant to point us in that direction.

In this book I have sought to identify the real-world events with their biblical counterparts, when those portions of the Bible are viewed as parables. I posit these to be abbreviated accounts as might have been conveyed through the medium of *visions* etc. to a people ignorant of the kind of knowledge of the world common today through the scientific method. Within the body of this larger work there are several purely fictional stories meant to depict how real people might have reacted to the events that seem to be the *big picture* that these parables might be meant to point us toward.

The larger work also seeks to depict Man’s attempt to understand the nature of that *Something* which appears to have always lain just beyond his physical senses. An evermore-complicated *understanding* of this *Something*, this *Essence*, this *Spirit*, this *God* even, seems to have enlarged ever so slowly over that long, long journey to have become the singular power behind the whole created universe that we think that we know of today.

Some within Science deign to investigate what is perceived to be *provable* and then to consign all else into that realm they label *chance*. Yet *Creation* seems to expand before them more rapidly than the fineness of their ability to measure.

Religion, seeking the stability of stasis, seems unable to avoid the straitjacket of terminal rigidity. Seeking unchangeable *truth*, Religion mistakenly finds imperfect *belief* and sets it in the permanence of stone only to have belief weathered away by the sands of time or *circumstance* into something unrecognizable when compared with the original promulgation.

If each would remain cognizant of the limits of its ability to perceive and join in a respectfully cooperative, complementary effort, far more than the sum of each separate effort could be realized. May God forgive us for the result if we don’t.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5, NKJV).

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Foreword

A **considerable** length of time ago, I was given the five-word phrase that is the title of this work, *The Bible is a Parable*, along with an inherent challenge: attempt to comprehend its meaning in the fullness of the knowledge available to the world of today and make a literary witness of that effort.

Thinking the thoughts that led to a very preliminary understanding of this phrase sent

me on a wonderful mental adventure into a view of the Bible much larger than I could have ever imagined possible; however, committing these thoughts to paper—the literary witness—I shied away from for too many of those years. My thinking, upon the impossibility that this part of the challenge presented, was fully as convincing as all previous thought had been productive.

I had never written anything lengthier than an essay. I had little scholastic background relating to literature or experience in journalism. I did not possess the arrogance that it must take to presuppose acceptance of an unknown author, in the presentation of a more than likely controversial subject.

All that I could muster on my behalf, in the most self-celebratory of moods, was that I always had been an avid reader on subjects as varied as from the A of Adam and anthropology to the Z of Zeus and zoology. And I seemed to have the ability to learn to understand enough of what might command my attention to at least follow the author to the conclusion offered and be able to present a point of disagreement, if so inclined.

I have finally set aside all further argument for caution in favor of presenting to you my understanding of the phrase that became the title of this work.

I have had a long, argumentative flirtation with the Bible, that has put me at various times on each side of the argument presented in the introduction that follows, that is, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, and the Bible's historical authenticity, which if successfully challenged would seem to rob it of all but symbolic value.

I had also come to have a great respect for the conclusions of Modern Experimental Science. It came as a great surprise to me that it had risen largely from out of the fulsome bosom of established religion through the inquiring minds of those who sought to understand *The mind of God* through the study of the *natural world* of His creation.

Until that moment, I had always seen the two as standing at opposite extremes, offering competing answers to the inquiring mind of Man. With never a hope of finding a way to the commonality of a middle ground, the choice was stark. Either believe one or the other.

Answers, as found in the Bible, have always taken a *leap of faith* in order to benefit from the *Wisdom of the Ages* that it offers.

On the other hand, all progressive civilization seems to rest on the back of the answers that have come to us from the *scientific method*.

Yet, if my interpretation of this five-word phrase is correct, a door to a new understanding may be opened that will allow those extremes, that should have never divided, to converge.

This then is my challenge. I now set before you, the best of my thinking, in the terms of the layman that I am. I shall endeavor to convince you, as I have become convinced, that this five-word phrase can become the bridge to a new unity of thought concerning the world and how it got to be the way that it is.

But, one might ask, “How did the author himself come to be the way that he is, with the need to present to the world this understanding?”

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Preamble

I have looked at *life* many times and wondered what it was all about.

When I was a child, I looked forward, trying to imagine what it would be like when I was *grown-up*. I dreamed great dreams about becoming rich and famous, by having accomplished some magnificent deed that would transform me into a real *somebody*.

But, because of the vagaries of my early life circumstances, I have at other times felt consigned to an also-ran status. Always trying, but never really succeeding.

In my early adulthood, all I had to look back upon was a very ordinary, even humble beginning, and looking forward through the limits that appeared to confine me seemed to confirm the latter of my earlier feelings.

Many things have happened since then have tended to confirm, at different times, my childhood dreams as well as the fears. I have led a rather ordinary real-world life on the outside, accomplishing many things, none of which have catapulted me into the stratosphere of my early dreams. But on the inside I have led a very active mental life, always questing for an understanding of that earliest of all questions. "What's it all about?"

Now, from the high hill of seventy-eight years (and now almost eighty-four, as this work has wended its way through writing, rewriting, the roadblock of the publishing world chaos that brought gridlock for too long, then eminently slowly toward publication), as I look back much further than I can see ahead, an answer of sorts has come to me. It has taken a long time in impinging itself upon my perception. I've cast first one way, then another for answers that satisfy my yearning and my capacity to understand what I see and see through. Each casting, while at first compelling, had in the end, led to an extreme that caused me to withdraw, not totally satisfied that it, of itself, was the answer that I sought.

In my early years *religion* made its overwhelming presence known to me. Its answer was *authority* without *permission* to inquire into its basis.

Then in my late teens and early adult life, science offered me the broad avenue of its many intriguing theories and seemingly continuous discoveries. I was led like a bloodhound hot on the many trails offered, but one by one they grew faint with the desired objective still not within sight. In the end I'm left with the impression that any final answer from science is still in the process of being endlessly revised, which for science is as it should be.

From the dusty bookshelf of *time*, religion again called. This time in a small quiet voice, it invited me to once more inquire. This time it seemed to offer the choice to believe and then seek, or seek in order to believe that it held the answers to all the questions that I have asked and the many things that Man has seemed to discover across the ages.

But, I told myself, I must remember this time, to proceed carefully and not to be drawn unmindfully toward either extreme.

My experience with the study of *science* still convinces me that the constant testing of its answers, while aggravating when a favored one is overturned, is the surest method to keep the answers relevant with the most recent discoveries regarding the earth and the cosmos that the earth resides in.

Still, *science* offers no firm ground to build a system of belief upon, to explain those things that seem not to have changed over the ages, as well as the questions that still have no apparent answers. *Science* seems at its best in providing the *how*, regarding things of the material world, but *science*, almost without exception, retreats from even attempting to postulate *why* the material world came into being from out of what *was* prior to the *big bang*.

Religion, when it offers answers that seemed to be complete hundreds of years ago, when it insists on continued belief in the relevancy of the interpretations that provided those answers, and this in the ever changing world of today, risks a certain loss of credibility. Yet “religion,” systems of belief, exists primarily because Man has always felt that there was more to this world than the eye or the mind alone can perceive.

Against all the understanding derived from his senses that should convince Man of his singularity, somehow, he could never *feel* totally alone in the world. Even understanding his felt need to believe in something more able to control the raw forces of his environment, there were still times when he felt led by something more than his own experience. Religion provided a form in which to enclose that something.

I, for some time, have felt a need to strike a balance between these two systems. One that conserves all that I see to be good in each, while deferring the felt need to choose between their apparent conflicts. I must somehow exercise the patience to await what future insight might reveal. I must not close the door to additional understanding prematurely.

But my curious mind has been asking for some time, could there be a kind of unity that exists beyond our current understanding that would make these systems but different emanations of a common denominator?

Science searches ever more deeply for that unity of forces. Religion claims that it has already found what science still searches so earnestly for.

I've always been reluctant, for reasons that should become or might already be apparent, to share with others the kind of questions that I've asked as well as the answers that have come. But, it has become increasingly imperative of late, that I cast aside all cautionary reticence.

These understandings, so privately arrived at, and then sequestered, must not disappear for the lack of a willing witness.

*“He had left me a word,
tossed me a key to a door
that I never knew was there,
and had still to find.”*

Beryl Markham-- West with the Night

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Introduction

The Bible is the word of God, according to its *adherents* who avidly seek to practice its tenets; *believers* who accept most of its propositions, with a tentative kind of reserve for some; and *supporters* who cannot imagine a more comprehensive alternative. Many, but not all of the first group characterize it as literally inerrant, without error. A majority of the middle group would wonder at the need of such a strict construction, while many

of the third group, the supporters, feel more comfortable seeing the Bible only as a kind of symbolic representation of an ideal life.

It is admittedly a work by many authors, brought to its present form over the centuries. There have been many efforts to categorize it as to what form of literature it was meant to be.

It has been put forth by some as the history of a people. But, there are points of disagreement with other historical accounts regarding names of people and places that should be common to both. Elam, a middle-eastern city that seemed to have been mentioned only in the Bible was long thought to be an artificial construct, or possibly a case of misidentification. Archaeologists recently discovered Elam and determined it to be a real entity. Archaeological and similar processes have substantiated many other items originally known only from the Bible as also having historical validity.

Others have seen the Bible as theology. To them it represents a statement of belief that includes an account of a people, their origins, and their practice of the moral requirements that it advocates.

Within the Bible appear to be many non-literal stories that were meant to portray the rewards of adherence or consequences of resistance to its precepts. The Bible appears to have all of these facets and more, but there is still much resistance to perceiving it as presented by some among the leadership of its adherents.

The Doctrine of Inerrancy is a manifestation of relatively recent origin regarding the Bible. It was put forth in the early to middle 1800s as a clarification of belief at about the time that the discoveries provided by the *scientific method* began to diverge sharply from the traditional biblical statements.

This doctrine declared, in short, that the Bible represented the *literal* “Word of God” and was therefore inerrant (without error) from its smallest part up to and including its entirety.

I’m sure adherents felt this clarification necessary because of the increasing popularity of these new answers. And so, they resorted to a time-tested biblical method of corroboration by looking back into the Bible for earlier references that the Word, as adherents declared it, had also been so declared by others of their faith from the past.

Argument was offered, as on many other occasions, that any attempt to prove a statement by references to the statement itself were circular in nature and proved nothing without outside sources. Those answers, it was further stated, were only convincing to those who already believed by faith alone.

This newly minted clarification of belief troubled the minds of many otherwise ardent followers, who had been willing, over a long period of time, to overlook the “apparent” contradictions found within this work. Also, many unbelievers, who seem to have always avidly looked for any and all possible objects of derision, delightedly heaped scorn upon the adherents.

Among the unbelievers were the following:

Agnostics: those who do not wish to debate the reality of a god-based system.

Atheists: those who actively contend against that possibility, and

Converts to the Scientific Method: those who avidly profess that its answers have superseded the old knowledge contained in the Bible and other religious works.

Under such a devastating assault, some (including many nominal believers) preferred to interpret the Bible as having symbolic value only. This rubric was largely designed to sidestep the majority of criticism by agreeing with its critics.

There would now, they claimed, be no need to argue for a foundation in the actual history of the world. Within it, converts to this new explanation saw biblical stories as selected by their authors and others of high religious station to impart a code of morals and the wisdom of ages past to its readers.

The value of these stories need not depend upon being factual accounts of real-world events, but upon being able to impart desirable behavior patterns to those who became convinced of their value.

Into this maelstrom of controversy enters a new author bearing a gift of great insight given to him, he feels, from the most original of all sources. Five words, if understood in the completeness of the context that they were given in, would make further argument about the Bible's validity unnecessary.

*“A word grows to a thought
a thought to an idea
an idea to an act.
The change is slow,
and the Present is a sluggish traveler
loafing in the path
Tomorrow wants to take.”*
Beryl Markham--West with the Night

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Chapter 1

Toward a Middle Ground

A Choice Between Extremes Is Unnecessary

This new way of seeing the Bible as a parable gives me a measure of freedom that I was not aware of under any past circumstances. It need not pass the strict test of inerrancy, insisted upon by many adherents, to be what I claim it to be.

Every jot and tittle need not be seen as copied, as it were, from the *mouth of God* in order to support the claim that it represents the *word* of God.

Translations into most of the world's languages, along with the differing versions of the many Christian denominations, make some degree of errancy almost mandatory. Certainly within the Christian world, each version, in the newness of its presentation, has been open to challenge as to its authority.

Arguments that state that God would not allow this kind of error to occur under any circumstance is shortsighted and borders on totally unnecessary flights of fancy which tend to impugn the natural integrity of this work.

If the Bible is viewed as the parable that I claim it to be, then any error in translation, etc., that did not detract from one's ability to look toward the larger meaning—the true *Word of God*—would be irrelevant.

The Bible's message is large enough to accommodate that kind of error without diluting its meaning.

The Bible need not be reduced to the point of unrealistic symbolism in order to explain away its *apparent* conflicts, or to accommodate it to the newer answers of science. This testament, both old and new, needs no apologetics that sacrifices core principles of the message to curry the favor of worldly opinion and its attendant lack of real understanding.

The argument that many accounts of the people and places identified in the Bible have no historical basis has itself more recently been brought into question through the sciences of archaeology, linguistics, etc.

Errors of historical chronology, as might have been made by some of its many authors as they copied or filled in information from other more abbreviated literary accounts or traditional oral history recitations of events, need not be accepted as proofs that invalidate the entire physical reality of this great work. Neither extreme is necessary or even desirable.

The kind of total all-encompassing inerrancy, as earlier described, has been made increasingly more difficult to support, with the application of modern linguistic processes pointing toward many authors, whose contributions were made over a long period of time, with occasional *apparent* error.

The more recent attempt to retreat into symbolic unreality only removes from the Bible the very authority that it must have to allow a successful witness to it as representing the actual *Word of God*

If not totally one or the other, what then **is** the Bible?

The Bible, as I have claimed in the beginning of this chapter, is a **parable!**

So, What Is a Parable?

The American Collegiate Dictionary defines a parable as “a short allegorical story, designed to convey some truth or moral lesson. A discourse or saying conveying the intended meaning by a comparison, or under the likeness of something comparable or analogous.”

The Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary, International Edition, defines a parable as “a comparison: specifically, a short narrative making a moral or religious point by comparison with natural or homely things.”

(The definition of “homely” as used here is “ordinary, domestic, plain, unpretentious, not having elegance, refinement, or cultivation.”)

The Ark of the Covenant as described in Exodus 25:10–23 has been referred to as a *Type*, a *prefiguring symbol*. (An impression made by a stamp, as in coinage.) It is further defined as an “earthly example of a heavenly counterpart” that is impossible to accurately describe when limited by the linguistic symbols of Man, which appear to have been developed mainly to represent earthly reality.

This type, the Ark of the Covenant, is a simplified earthly example, a comparison made by using natural (homely) things to describe something of the nature of that which of itself is indescribable.

A **parable** is a word picture comparable to the physical structure of the Ark. As such it is another kind of *type*, very similar in its nature.

I contend that the Bible is also a kind of *type*, a complex word picture containing many other word pictures, a parable of parables, the most original of all simplified examples, the foundation from which all others derive their form. It is the quintessential narrative story told to convey a complicated message by using familiar things to illustrate

a communication many times too complicated for the limited understanding of Man! Because of this contention, my understanding of a parable as contained in the two foregoing paragraphs will be the basis used throughout the following chapters.

In the New Testament of the Christian Bible is the story of Jesus of Nazareth who sought to convey “my Father’s” message partly by the use of parables. Time after time his disciples heard the simplified example as the complete message. Jesus scolded them several times for arguing over the details instead of reaching for the greater meaning behind them. Finally, they pleaded with him to explain the meaning of the stories that he told.

It didn’t seem to do any good. How could they hope to digest the larger message if they couldn’t understand the story for the simplified example that it was? They never did seem to get it, until after being “touched by the spirit” after Jesus’ death and resurrection, which simply allowed them to accept his teachings by faith rather than by understanding.

Even after two millennia of having the parables that Jesus taught clarified as to what function they were meant to perform, arguing over the details still seems more popular than reaching for the fuller meaning.

Today, readers argue over the Bible just like people of old argued over the parables instead of reaching toward the deeper meaning intended. In this work I shall seek to grope toward that deeper meaning.

If the Bible *is* a parable, what is the larger meaning that it points us toward? If God is the *Omniscient Being* that the Bible announces and that all believers declare, is it possible that He has deigned to share a small portion of all knowledge, that He is the originator and keeper of, with us, apparently the highest or at least the most recent of all His creations?

Could this be a way of understanding the seemingly steady progress that has, as science extrapolates, raised Man from out of the ordinary world of nature, to become extraordinary? Or could it be, as the biblical story has it, from the “fall from grace” of Adam and Eve, through the stumbling lurch upward again, we have struggled toward what we have become today, the relative master of earth, sky and space?

Many other examples of parabolic language exist within the context of the Bible, but I do not intend to go any further than to state that they are all sub-units within the larger overriding parable that is the Bible.

My search (in chapter 3 of this work) must largely confine itself to an examination of the sub-units of the Bible, the Books, beginning with Genesis. But first, let’s look at the whole Bible in this new way.

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Chapter 2

The Bible as a Parable

Granted, the many books of the Old and New Testament would seem to be anything but a short narrative! But, let’s try a view of them in a different kind of context a much larger one, a much fuller one.

We might look at the Old Testament as being similar to the New Testament message that Jesus imparted to his disciples and through them to the world. The Torah’s five

books witness to the proposition that God created everything and chose a people. The remaining *Books of the Prophets* tell and foretell of the consequences of straying from the Torah's instructions.

The New Testament witnesses that God had fulfilled his people's desire for a Messiah and deliverance. We may now discern that Jesus' use of the many parables within the context of his whole message might be equated to at least the five books of the Torah in existence during his earthly lifetime. His claim to be the fulfillment of the "prophesies of old" drew deadly fire from the ruling priestly class who had grown tired of the *false* messianic declarations of anti-Roman zealots. But the *people* were purportedly amazed by his knowledge, wisdom, and miraculous acts.

If the Old Testament is but a parable of a larger message, what might that message be? If we accept this premise as a foundation upon which to build a new understanding, how then might we see the book of Genesis?

Can we see it as a complete account of the creation of our world? The universe? The cosmos? Should we construe it as a detailed description of the beginning and progression of all life down to and including the emergence of Man? Discoveries in the natural world and the study of astronomy seem to indicate something much larger actually occurred.

The answer then would seem obvious. The biblical story of Genesis does appear to take on the character of a "short narrative" meant to provide some small beginning familiarity concerning an extremely complex process.

Were the words actually spoken, "Let there be light!" eons before Man acquired language as postulated within scientific inquiry?

Or, does Genesis imply a *storyteller's* attempt to explain what might have come to him or to someone within his purview as an almost incomprehensibly complex *vision* of what we today understand as the hydrogen fusion ignition that gave light to our sun?

Within the *sub-parable* of Genesis are other *shorthand* references to complex processes such as, but certainly not limited to, the forming of the earth, the gathering of the waters, the coming into existence of all plant, and then animal life. Might these then be seen as other examples of a parable, within a parable called Genesis, within the parable called the Bible?

One may now view these narratives as overly simplified accounts of an interminably ancient *orderly progression of events* long within the purview of Man, since he has ascended from out of the world of all God's other creatures.

To gain some small familiarity, some meager understanding of the nature of these processes, Man has attempted to look back into the increasingly distant past, as well as the eternally unknowable future.

Artifacts, suddenly appearing at or near the surface of the earth, have persistently begged for an interpretation of what might have preceded its viewer. The myriad points of light in the heavenly canopy have long perplexed the mind of Man and tantalized the imagination to see some ordering in their distribution.

Many an original and seemingly logical interpretation has found its way into the memory of Man. Cherished to the point of worship, they have been recited across the centuries as valued articles of the *wisdom of the ancients*.

Much of present knowledge, built upon the verities of the past, has stood the test of time. Each generation has contributed some small portion to the larger whole, benefiting from that which it has heeded, learning anew from that which it has ignored or discarded.

Out of this background, many ancient epic tales, preceding the Genesis accounts, had gained ascendancy, and after an interval, disappeared into the fog of an unremembered past, leaving only bits and pieces to be borrowed anew and eventually inserted into literary tracts by its inheritors.

The Bible bears witness to this process. Its stories, some apparently ill-remembered borrowings, have been accompanied by the heroics of a people's champions, their genealogies identifying their uniqueness, a chronology of their particular history, and special words of wisdom. All these, put together with a seemingly otherworldly vision, have allowed it a longevity rarely equaled by any other literary endeavor.

The apparent skill with which these have been assembled lends to the assumption that they were meant to be seen as the parables that they appear to be to this author. The orders of succession match rather well with the chronology of discoveries made throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries' scientific method.

Some of these discoveries, at first glance, seem at odds with a traditional interpretation gleaned by ardent and careful study conducted by the Christian Church's clergy and other religious leadership over centuries of apparently prayerful scholarship.

But, are these differences real? Or, do they only take on the appearance of reality due to a certain lack of understanding by adherents on both sides of this controversy?

This new approach is meant to move the discussion away from the entrenched extremes, while hopefully adding a bit of that otherworldly wisdom to help in a renewal of the search for a common ground of understanding, which will respect both the new knowledge of the present and the uncanny *wisdom of the ages*.

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Chapter 3

The Biblical Account of the Beginning

Vs.

Science's Attempt to "see through" to how it all might have begun

Then God said "Let there be light." And light appeared. And God was pleased with it, and divided the light from the darkness. So He let it shine for a while and then there was darkness again.

—Gen. 1:3–5, TLB

(At this point I wish to reiterate: All my attempts to explain scientific discoveries, as earlier acknowledged, will be from a layman's perspective as gleaned from many primary and secondary sources.)

William Hubble theorized from his discoveries in the early thirties that the universe was expanding. Attempts by others within the scientific community to extrapolate a reversal of his proposed order of expansion brought them to a startling conclusion. The end result would leave them with a singularity, an extremely intense immeasurably small point of light. Beyond this, they felt that the scientific method could provide no provable precondition. Derisively inspired commentary brought forth the title, the *big bang theory*.

So, as close to the beginning that the scientific method was prepared to go, there was light whose brilliance would never again be matched by any heavenly display.

Concerning the closing phrase of the above quotation, “and then there was darkness again,” a follow-on theory of an initially rapid expansion, called inflation, caused the light to fade into an ever darkening soup of primordial particles from out of which the galaxies would form to bring a second order of light into the universe.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and [a] void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters [dark vapors]” (Gen. 1:1–2 NKJV& TLB).

This opening paragraph of Genesis might be a statement that is only meant to introduce the more well-known second paragraph that contains the phrase,

“Let there be light.” Or it might, as it seems to me, speak of a time before the beginning, some kind of amorphous condition that preceded the *light* or *singularity*.

A very few physicists, among the most advanced in their field of science, are only now tentatively trying to contemplate what kind of condition might have preceded the appearance of this *singularity*, this “beginning light.”

The ramifications of this tentative probing are so vast, its implications so unknowable, as possibly to consign it to be forever beyond the grasp of mankind.

This may be implied by the rapidity with which the latest most tentative theories, (string and quantum loop) are knocked down by already known exceptions that challenge their completeness as these searchers go in quest of a basis to extrapolate a time before time.

This opening paragraph might also be seen as the first sub-parable in Genesis. But the second paragraph (vs. 3–5) that this chapter opens with is my choice of a first effort to identify a parable that might be able to enclose Man’s scientific effort to discover how everything came to be as we find it today.

“In the beginning” there was light. Both religion and science since the ’30s seem in agreement with this statement. The closing two sentences of the second paragraph conclude the thought of the selected parable. *“He called the light ‘daytime,’ and the darkness ‘nighttime.’ Together they formed the first day.”*

Imagine, if you will, a person (probably a man with some time on his hands) from a primitive society trying to envision how everything got to be the way that he could see it to be. Suddenly, an insight so vast in its implications that he finds it too difficult to assign to his thought processes alone, mentally lies before him.

A vast moving panorama spreads out before him. As surely as he could see the babies being born around him had a beginning, and childhood memories implied that there was also a time before those memories, even a time before his birth, there was also an end. The death of his elders confirmed that all things seemed to be limited to a span of time.

Now, a myriad of similar examples floods his mind. Days that turn into night that end in day again, that lead to seasons of birth, growth, death and rebirth. There must be a beginning to everything in the world around him, even time.

Did he belong to an epoch where the strength of animals was revered, or a time that the forces of nature spoke in a crescendo of frighteningly loud earth-shaking sound that testified to the greatness of a power unseen but always present? Did he have an understanding of the usual beneficence of this *Presence* that was also the giver of all the good things of the earth and hunt?

Did he understand that certain people seemed to possess a gift of communication whereby they could impart a kind of wisdom far beyond what any earthly hero could acquire through a life experience?

Could something convince him that some circumstance had somehow *selected* him to share a magnificent understanding that language alone was insufficient to describe? Would his language have a word to describe this experience? A word similar to *a vision*?

Could he convince those around him that words were spoken to his mind similar to that which commences with “*in the beginning*”?

His excitement, as well as agitation over his inability to adequately convey that which had been visited upon him, might have led to great fame and fortune, or to an untimely death due in part to a shallowness of intellect of those that he’d chosen to share this gift with. Thus it always seems to have been with these pioneers of discovery.

“*And God saw the light, that it was good and God divided the light from the darkness*” (Gen. 1:4, NKJV).

Try to describe a period of time of unknowable length divided as sharply as light or dark concerning a subject with which there are no words in your language to define the images set before you. Might an earthbound observer, viewing a maddeningly complex scene concerning time and light, be tempted to find a counterpart in his earthly experience and limited language to describe something akin to, even though vastly smaller and simpler than what he had seen?

“*So, He let it shine for a while and then there was darkness again*” (Gen. 1:5, TLB).

Would the fuller meaning, that this oversimplified example had substituted for in the ensuing centuries, be recognizably similar to the periods of time that science has identified as the time it took for the bright point of light to become smothered in the darkness of the inflationary expansion of the cosmos? How could mere earthbound linguistic symbols ever describe such an unearthly scene? Yet Man in the early twentieth century has been able to lay out that scene, using the tools inherited from the *scientific method* of his predecessors, in terms more surely provable than that early vision.

“*Together, they formed the first day.*”

A vast but discrete panorama had been set before this observer. It had begun with light and had ended with darkness. It had started with something being done and ended with nothingness. He was only faintly aware of an immeasurably great period of time in which this event had occurred. How could he ever hope to share this with only such inadequate linguistic tools as might be at his disposal? He would, I imagine, choose the closest thing within his own limited vocabulary no matter how inadequate. It came to be described as a day.

During the Common Era (0 to 2004), also described as *since the time of Christ*, many have attempted to reinterpret this *God’s Day* as being as different from our understanding of a day as we are different from God. A favorite comparison has that first day being equivalent to a thousand of our years, but even that seems inadequate in the light of today’s understanding of time through the discoveries of geology.

If the latest scientific theory concerning the passage of time can be relied upon, the cosmos came into being between 12 to 14 billion years ago, and the earth, between 4.5 to 7 billion. If we use the upper range of the latter time frame, then God’s day would seem approximately equivalent to one billion earth years.

Based on that interpretation, if God “*took his rest on the seventh day,*” He must have inserted everything that He created on the earth in the last billion years into some kind of Godly *software program* that has been running at least semi-automatically ever since. If so, science’s theory of evolution might not be so far off after all!

Lest that last statement misinform the reader, a clarification follows.

To this author, *science* is not a belief system! It is a tool! It is a process with which to investigate the *orderly progression of events* that this *creation* appears to represent, in order to reveal the intent of the *Creator* of all that exists.

The closer that science gets to the unification of the forces that it seeks to discover, the closer it seems to get to the nothingness from out of which all of *creation* appears to have arisen.

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Chapter 4

Toward an Ordering of Events

The “seven days” of creation imply the passage of discrete periods of time. How rock hard should we be in addressing that number? There are seven days assigned to the period of time that we call our week. This ordering seems to have emerged from out of the mists of time from as far back as Man felt the need to number things. Ten digits, the sum of both of our hands, would logically imply that all numbering systems should have been built upon the base-ten system common today, but there have been other orderings.

A **base-twelve system** is implicit in the manner that we number the discrete periods of time in our year called months. Historical evidence indicates that some societies used that system, while others, by implication, used differing methods, including a base-seven. The Bible and other literary works mention the number seven often as a number of great mystical, even magical significance.

The **original creation story** that we still have some small evidence of even today, carried within it a sense of several passages of time. Seven may have always been the number indicated, or it might have been insinuated into the generational retellings as a memory guide because it was a terminal number or because it was considered a *lucky* number and would enhance the *value* of stories reiterated across the myriad of centuries.

If this “seven days” is a parable, a simplified version of a grander communication, then the number of the periods might have less significance than that there *were* several periods of time in which particular things transpired.

In geology the longest unit of time is called an Eon which seems to be a very long but indefinite period. It appears to be made up of two or more Eras, the next lower order of time. There are five identifiable eras within the geologic time scale. That’s as far as Man has been able to probe back into geologic history with any certainty. These probings largely rely upon life-forms embedded within rock layers. Very possibly, the earliest life-forms have left insufficient evidence of their existence for undisputed discovery. Any formative processes that preceded the advent of life would also have gone largely undocumented.

“Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament—’ And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and morning were the second day” (Gen. 1:6–8, NKJV).

A **current theory** in astronomy postulates that after the first light had been smothered in the dark soup of rapidly expanding primordial particles, some unevenness in that expansion began to form which coalesced into galaxies of stars which brought the second order of light into being.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear—’ So the evening and the morning were the third day” (Gen. 1:9, 13).

Astronomers have postulated that our Milky Way galaxy exploded into star-birth light approximately 14 billion years ago, with our solar system in a second or third generation of star formation coming into existence about 8 billion years ago. After the planets coalesced, then solidified, they cooled rapidly, as geologic time is counted. As the gaseous envelope around our planet dispersed the heat, one of its heavier constituents descended toward the surface and began to precipitate.

Our earth has been called a water planet with two-thirds of its surface so covered. One theory states that at one time water, which may well have been hot enough to boil for a considerable length of time, completely covered the earth’s surface. This direct contact with the hot rocky crustal portion would have facilitated the even more rapid cooling of

the interior. Eventually, the shrinkage would have buckled the now much more rigid shell, thrusting it up in some places above the surface of the shallow sea of water.

“Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the Heavens to divide the day from the night—’ Then God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day; and the lesser light to rule the night. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day” (Gen. 1:14–19).

Consistent with telescopic discoveries of other star-forming areas of the cosmos, a surrounding cloud of interstellar dust and particles of all sizes shrouds a newborn star’s light almost completely. When our sun ignited, it was most surely similarly shrouded. The in-falling cloud would have increased its velocity as the sun’s volume swelled. Its gravitational pull would have grown stronger and its nuclear fire burned hotter, as it gradually swept clear the inner reaches of its domain.

One by one its newly formed planets would appear from out of the haze that had made them possible. The sun now shone full upon each as it spun slowly on its axis, its sun-side brightly reflecting the increased intensity of that light. Day and night (light and darkness) had now come to our earth.

Meteorites of all sizes constantly bombarded the earth and it grew larger from all of the in-falling material. As the light-borne pressure from the blazing sun pushed out in all directions, it created counter pressure against its shroud, pushing it inexorably away from its inner reaches, the bombardment slowed but never quite stopped. At around this time, it is theorized, a Mars-sized body struck our earth a glancing blow, shearing off a portion of its crustal region. The foreign body embedded itself into the interior of the larger planet, as the shearing floated into an ever-more regular orbit. It slowly coalesced, finally turning into the pale lunar night-light that one sees today.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth—’ So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind—So the evening and the morning were the fifth day” (Gen. 1:20–23).

Geology is the study of the inorganic solid outer portion of the earth. One of its subdivisions includes paleontology, the study of fossils of the remains of plants and animals of the geologic past.

Paleontology is subdivided into two fields of study. Paleobotany concerns the fossil remains of plants, and paleozoology deals with the hard parts of animals, and more recently with some soft parts that have managed to leave some evidence of their earlier existence and function.

The consensus from paleontology seems to be that all life began as one-celled plant life that at first dwelled in the seas but slowly adapted to living on the land above sea level. Animal life, following a similar pattern, emerged somewhat later as environmental changes accommodated their needs.

The theory of evolution developed from these and other fields of inquiry. As I understand it, the simplest definition of this theory involves the continuous genetic adaptation of organisms to their environment. At times that environment has remained relatively stable over very long periods, only to be followed by a succession of rapidly changing environments and then another long period of quiet existence. This has recently been referred to by that well-known geologist Stephen Jay Gould as his theory of *Punctuated Equilibrium*.

During each time of rapid change a sometimes, apparently *chance* genetic mutation would favor one form of life over another, and these changing life-forms have left their mark to be discovered and interpreted. These evidences have led others to theorize that life has followed a path from the simplest single cell organism to ever more complex forms that has culminated in a form whose most prominent adaptation is an oversized brain.

*To think is to be human,
To know
is the province of Divinity!*

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Chapter 5

From Among Many

Then God said, "Let us make Man in our image—let them have dominion—over all the earth"

(Gen. 1:26, NKJV).

The first life on earth appeared, as far as can be discerned through scientific discovery, approximately 1 to 2 billion years ago. Many forms have gained dominance for a period of time and then have moved inexorably, it would seem, toward extinction.

The rise of the *mammalian order* seems to be the most recent life-form to gain dominance. It appeared in its most crude form approximately one hundred million years ago. Within this *order* the *primate* sub-unit arose that contained within it the *simian* and the *hominid* branches. The latter of these two branches made its appearance less than ten million years ago, with modern man, Homo-sapiens having been around less than one hundred thousand of those years. Somewhere in the time between the latter two events a bipedal hominid began its slow punctuated rise toward the life-form that became us.

All religions declare uniformly that when God made Man He gave him a soul. This unique gift, it has been asserted, has made us into a life-form different than all others. When the Bible states that God "made Man," it sounds like it happened in an instant, but did it? Once again, if we see this as another oversimplified example of what really occurred, what would be a time frame that could be equivalent to an instant?

If we represent all of geologic time in the shape of a twelve-hour clock, modern man would have been around for only the last second before twelve, with all his precursor stages up to the present time occupying only twelve seconds. It would seem that all of modern man's existence has taken but an instant in geologic chronology.

But wait, the transition between a bipedal hominid and modern man, as the best of science conjectures from its *reading* of the past, appears to have moved through several stages. There seems to be little agreement within the science of archaeology on the number of stages. But, to me, more important than clearly identifying each and every stage is identifying at which point the seeds of modern man sprouted.

Anthropologists generally agree that modern man, Homo sapiens sapiens, emerged from Cro-Magnon man, Homo sapiens. However, there seems to be disagreement on whether these two are even separate stages or just different facets of a continually

evolving last stage. Both fit the standard scientific definition of man as a thinking, tool-making, social animal.

Many will rise to take exception to the idea of man even being a part of the animal world. But, the bulk of archaeological findings as presently interpreted, along with the great mass of findings of biological inheritance just begs to find the exception that will disprove that we arose from out of the animal world to become something *different*. Even the Bible makes reference to Man's *carnal* or animal-like nature.

So when did mere hominid become Man? The so-called Homo erectus seems to have been a simple, tool-making *animal*, which assumes an ability to retain in memory certain procedures of manufacture along with an occasional fortuitous accidental improvement that he could then purposefully replicate. He was social and, it is theorized, the first hominid that walked fully upright with a striding gait equivalent to ours. But his remains show these traits apparently fully matured which would have taken hundreds of thousands of years of development based on the relatively slow process of biological inheritance.

Some where within that miasma of inherited change from an ancient hominid with arms almost as long and strong as his legs, who, it has been theorized, could only stand in a stooped crouch, to that of a fully upright Homo erectus, ancient man emerged. At what point can we say that proto-man became man?

From psychology we get the principle that Man is self-conscious. He is aware of himself as a separate individual within a group. From early childhood he recognizes his image, or reflection, as a representation of himself. Animals, it is easily shown, do not have that ability, reacting to a reflection of themselves instinctively as if another individual were intruding into their domain.

Could this then, be the gift that allowed Man to rise from out of the ordinary to become extraordinary? Awareness of self could have been the beginning of future abstract thought. But, if a gift, in what manner was it bestowed, and, when did He become aware of it?

Is the soul that *religion* tells us God gave to Man, the gift of self-awareness?

Man is the animal that knows,

And knows that he knows!

—Morris L. West, *Shoes of the Fisherman*

Chapter 6

Whither Comest Thou?

“Then the lord God planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and placed in the garden the man that he had formed. The Lord God planted all sorts of beautiful trees there in the garden, trees producing the choicest fruit” (Gen. 2:8–9, TLB).

Archaeology and that part of biology, the study of genetics, tell us that the hominid branch of the suborder of primates arose on the continent of Africa. Because we purportedly share a common ancestor with our blood cousins the simians, hominids most likely arose in equatorial Africa also.

That portion of the above quotation *“Eden, to the east”* creates a question. To the east of what? The difficulty with a parable, a simplified example of the real thing, is confusing the example with what might be the much larger reality.

This parable also speaks of Eden as having a river with four branches, the third and fourth of which are named the Tigris and the Euphrates. These names jump right out of the parable into a real historic context. What are we to make of this? The parabolic *story* has suddenly become *history!*

In a later reference to Eden, God evicted Adam and Eve and sent them “east of the Garden of Eden.” Here we now have two references to east. “Eden to the east” and “east of Eden” in the parable, the example. What larger understanding might these references be pointing us toward? The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers *are* east of equatorial Africa.

Anthropology tells us that when proto-man ranged out of equatorial Africa he went east and north to some degree. They went in the general direction of the biblical reference, “*Eden to the east.*” Is this the real story that the parable points us toward?

“*God planted a garden in Eden.*” And He “*planted many beautiful trees there.*”

Did proto-man, in ranging out from his place of origin, *find* a replica of equatorial Africa in the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley? If he did, that would have been far different from what we find in all historical accounts of a dry valley, green only where the water ran. In that ancient time was the valley growing, luxuriantly with “many beautiful trees”?

Proto-man spent *time* there. How long? All we know for sure is when *God* evicted *Adam* from the “Garden of Eden” he left as fully self-conscious Man. What happened there? The parable of the *Garden* tells us that “*suddenly they became aware of their nakedness, and were embarrassed.*” And from another translation, “*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked.*” They became conscious of their bodies and by inference conscious of themselves.

Anthropology postulates that fully modern man (Cro-Magnon Man?) ranged out of Africa in a wave that followed in the footsteps of proto-man. (Homo erectus?)

His ranging carried him east past *Eden* and spread into the Far East, even into what is now China. This would be demonstrably “east of Eden.”

We now appear to have two Edens: Africa, the Eden of anthropology where hominid turned into proto-man; and Eden of the Bible, the parable, where “God placed man” from, by inference, someplace *west* of there.

Might Equatorial Africa be the place where Man was *formed* by God in a far larger and longer context than He did as described in the Bible? And then caused him to be moved to a place east of there, that then jumps right out of the parable into the real world, and the rest is history?

The Bible tells us that *God* made Man, Adam, and that woman, Eve was *taken* from out of him. At first glance, it would seem that our storyteller was a man, and through this rendition might have been looking to put *woman* in her place. But if there is a larger context from which this was extracted, what might it have been?

From within the science of genetics comes a theory arrived at through the effort to estimate the relative age of different populations of the human community. The question was postulated: of the many diverse, separated population groups (races) in the world today could there be developed a way to determine which were older and which were younger, if that criterion actually had relevance?

Within the study of the characteristics of DNA there was discovered a form (mitochondrial) that was only passed on from mother to daughter. In this specific study it was discovered that there appeared to be a relatively steady rate of mutation that seemed

to leave a mark at the appearance of each transitional “daughter.” The more marks, they theorized, the older the population. Every *daughter* population had a *mother*.

Tracing back through these markers it was determined that the oldest had come from out of Equatorial Africa.

They had found, they theorized, the *Eve* of evolution.

But what about *Adam*? The only way, it seems, that he could have come before this *Eve*, is if Adam was proto-man.

*So it appears
That hand in hand
Adam led Eve,
from out of the land
that had bred and fed
our proto-man*

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Chapter 7

And Then He Made Man

The transition between hominid and man, as far as anthropology can discern, probably involved several intermediate stages that took place over several thousands, even hundreds of thousands of years. In geologic time it would be seen as only an instant, but geology can only inferentially concern the rise of Man. Here one needs a microscope, not a telescope.

In the parable of Eden, Adam (man) became self-conscious with one act. Although self-consciousness may have come in many small, subtle increments, sneaking up on hominid, as it were, there must have been one defining moment when an individual realized that *it* was different. Whether from a chance learning experience or genetic anomaly, or some combination of the two, *it* must have realized, some flash of insight revealed, that *he* had acquired a gift of understanding the things of his world—differently. That is a moment in time that all inquiring mankind might like to try to relive in some manner.

The following story, though totally fictional, postulates a defining moment from which a veritable cascade of complementary discoveries takes place. Of itself this story might be considered to take on some of the aspects of a parable also. A single incident, a defining instance may well have taken multigenerational repetitions to bring a new understanding that *it* was conscious, that *he* (or she) was now self-conscious.

So runs my dream: But what am I
An infant crying in the night
An infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry.
—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*
*And, knowing this: how should I
Interpret that infant's non-lingual cry
Mindful as we all should be
The Pre-lingual state of Humanity*

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“Becomin’”

The creature clung desperately to the twisted branch of the gnarled though young tree. It had scrambled up through the slender branches, instinctively choosing the most sturdy to cling to just above the springing ability of the raging predator below. All those above that perch, it sensed, were too slender to hold its weight for more than a moment or two. The grimace below revealed those gnashing teeth, beckoning it to become too weak from fear to hold on to its slim perch. The roaring cacophony of ear-splitting sound blew its tormentor’s foul breath and slaver of excitement up toward it.

The predator had almost grasped the creature, and now in frustrated desire, leaped repeatedly, clawing the bark just below the creature’s perch, breaking some smaller branches that its sharp claws tore loose at the top of each leap. Slowly the leaps became shorter until the winded slayer of the creature’s kind, settled into a steady pacing around and around the isolated tree that stood a short distance from the forest canopy.

A high-pitched shriek full of meaning for the creature, emanated from a frontline tree at the edge of the forest canopy assuring that its mate and her young had reached the safety of the larger trees. Deliberate slowness had almost cost—everything.

Great green slits of eyes swung from staring at its prey to where the new sound had come from. The pacing now swung in a wider course toward the larger tree, but then, just as suddenly doubled back, the large body coming to a stop where the jumping had taken place. Stretching, with a yawning gape of its great mouth, the hunter lay down. Only the great green eyes, gazing steadily at its final choice, gave any sign of alertness as the now lounging animal settled in for a long siege of staring.

They had gathered at the watering hole, each nervously taking a turn to drink while the others watched, alert for any sign, any hint, any smell. A single rustle and all was organized panic. The little one desperately clawed at the ground with four tiny paws at the sight of the predator emerging from the tall grass. The female streaked past, snatching the little one to her back in mid-stride, but it slowed her headlong flight noticeably.

The creature saw that its mate couldn’t possibly make the safety of the nearest tree, at the edge of the forest canopy. Slowing his pace, he crossed the path of the predator dangerously close to that toothy maw that now turned eagerly toward him. He rushed onward in great bounding leaps, but the frenzied predator still slowly closed the gap between them. The creature now would be the one that would not be able to gain the safety of the bigger trees. A slender one loomed just ahead. It put all the strength that it had into one last great bound. Grasping small branches as they flashed by, it had scrambled frantically up through them. The great maw closed with a horrible snap. Snarling lips brushed an ankle. The frightening contest had been almost terminally close.

The now stalemated contest wore slowly on. The sun sank steadily down toward the forest canopy. Suddenly from afar, the air was rent with the shriek of a trumpet-like sound. The creature knew the source well. Through the tall grass they came, shrieking their warning for any that might get in their way.

The predator turned its already raised head. The tail started to switch in small snapping movements, the only outward sign of the predator’s renewed irritability.

Now he began to pace again, back and forth in a line between the small tree and the huge animals, a coughing roar, warning of his own presence. The closer they came the more agitatedly he paced, pawing the ground into dusty swirling motion.

The trumpeting shrieks sounded more ominously now, and they turned as if to overrun him. The lead female, enormous tusks flashing in his direction as she rushed onward, charged into the narrow gap between the predator and the hapless creature in the small tree.

Suddenly the great cat bounded away from the rest of the charging herd. Just as quickly the creature leaped from its perch, legs already in the motions of running as feet hit the ground, scrambling the short distance to the excited scream-calling of its mate and young.

The fear-rush had already drained away as the creature fashioned a leafy bower for the night that now quietly descended over its world. Its mate, a little higher in the same tree cooed contently as her young suckled noisily at her breast.

Many points of light in the sky twinkled dimly through the last dusk of day, brightening slowly as the darkness deepened. The creature had of course seen these many times but never really noticed. Slowly, it was drawn to them now, in a manner that it had never felt before. They seemed different somehow. Maybe brighter, maybe clearer—maybe it could even touch them if it climbed to the top of the growth overhead.

Suddenly, one of them almost right over its head, grew brighter to the point of brilliance. A narrow shaft of light seemed as if it might reach right down to him. He stared intently, but not out of fear. He felt no fear! There was something, different. The hair on his back and neck stood up, but fear had not been the cause as it had earlier. He felt excitement growing in him as if he had found a large mound of ripe berries, but it was somehow different than that. It was, beautiful! After a while he closed his eyes as he relaxed his gaze, but it was, still there.

He was at the river, with his brother. His father and mother stood guard as they played, after drinking their fill. Suddenly her scream of fear laced with anguish drove a dreadful urgency into his little legs. He leaped for the shore without understanding the cause. A horrible loud, deep snap close by him threw water past him as a dreadful panic spurred his scrambling course up the wet sand. He could not see his brother! He was not there by him. He chanced a look over his shoulder as he raced away, only a swirl of water marked where they had been.

His mother grabbed at his hand as they hurried back toward where their troop had been foraging. He had grown too large to ride his mother's back as he used to, and now blind fear lent him the ability to almost keep up with her. She looked back several times as they hurried away from the water. A soft mewling sound passed over her lips each time and her body slumped a little further as she hurried along, slower now. He didn't even want to know what had happened to his brother.

He opened his eyes. That brilliant light, unlike the others that twinkled, still shone steadily. The shaft was still there, but it didn't seem as beautiful as before, and it didn't reach down as far. A pain shot up his leg into his body, the part where he lay upon it.

His legs were longer now and they didn't fit as well as they used to in the places that he picked for the night. He moved a little and it was better for a while.

A soft light began to peek up over the open land at the edge of the forest. He could see openness in the land under where it cast its pale light, as it loomed ever larger. A

shadow at the far edge of where he could see seemed like what he had seen when he looked back from the open land toward his forest, where he now reclined, only it seemed smaller, much smaller.

When he opened his eyes this time the big bright light had replaced the pale one. He heard a stir above him, and around in the other nearby trees. It was time. A small growl inside meant it was time to go looking. The pain in his leg was there again, but it would be better after he had walked for a while.

He ranged with his mate and his troop looking for tender tips, berries and small fruits. Occasionally he would find a tall green shoot. It would come easy when pulled just right and at the bottom was something tender and juicy. Its taste meant that no water would be needed for a while, and sometimes it was big enough to share with the little one.

He walked just behind the leader for a while as the other males ranged out in front always on the lookout, but the killer would not be back for a while. He never did come back soon after a visit. They felt free to range farther than usual into the open land.

The shadow on the other side of it looked a little bigger now than when he had last seen it. He wondered if it would get bigger as they ranged farther.

He was suddenly startled. What had happened? The hair rose up on his back and neck, but again, not from fear! It was like when the light reached down to him. His concerns had always been for what was right at hand before, or too close and unseen, not for what he couldn't hope to reach for or touch. What happened? Something was different now than before, the leader cast a quick glance in his direction, but the look didn't linger.

He was suddenly full of concern for his mate and young one. He hurried to find them. He wondered if they were safe.

Again—that feeling. He had always had to see before he knew. Now he felt, somehow, to where they were even before he could see them. This was something new and very different.

He bedded down again after another good day. This time he helped the leader make sure that they were all at a safe height before attending to his own needs. He watched as the leader looked over the scene. He wondered if the leader also felt this new, something. He seemed different, to *look* different, ever since he came to lead them after the old one disappeared some time ago.

There it was again! That new something. But, it didn't feel as strange as before, he was getting used to this, different way.

The new light shone down brightly from overhead, even through the dusk that turned rapidly into darkness. It seemed brighter than before; the part that reached down seemed to touch the top of the canopy overhead. It was even more beautiful.

Images floated past his closed eyes as he settled in. The pale light, the open land, the far shadow, that awful attack. His mother and father had disappeared some time ago. His brother, so quickly gone. Many things. Some he didn't remember having seen before. The light now seemed to reach all the way down to him.

It was beautiful. An endless parade seemed to whisk across the vision of his closed eyes. He stirred to erase the occasional mild discomfort, the things faded, slowly, until at last, they were gone.

He opened his eyes. The big bright light was almost ready to appear. There was something at the far end of the open land. He felt a sudden urge to know what it was. The

ordinary incitements to action were still present, but they now seemed secondary to what he felt that he must do.

They ranged even farther this time. He took the lead almost from the beginning. The leader gave him an occasional look from under a furrowed brow, but hadn't let him get out of sight. The others stopped repeatedly offering short, soft, timorous calls of alarm, then reassured by the leader's actions, continued to follow along.

Water again appeared only a little way off from where they foraged as they straggled along behind the leaders. There were trees along the bank. And in a lush green swale near where the waters ran, there were many of the tall green shoots bunched closely together. The waters seemed to be going somewhere; they were moving in the same direction that he was leading the foragers as they moved toward the ever-larger smudge on the horizon.

They rested a while when the big light was overhead. Many looked nervously back at their forest. It seemed much smaller now. Pointing fingers were joined by soft mewing calls of anxious distress. The leader walked back a few paces toward where they had come, and crouched down on his haunches. He issued a short sharp bark of warning. Many joined him, but some stayed, crouching around—a new leader.

The creature watched as the old leader and much of the troop turned back. Not him though, he just had to see what was up ahead. His mate mewed nervously as one or two more turned back, but the few that remained looked down, pawing small strokes on the ground, a sure sign of submission to their new leader.

Once more on the move, they never looked back; they had sensed their new leader's eagerness. They would have to chance what was up ahead for protection; they had already gone too far to turn back. They were full from earlier foraging, but curiosity made them sample growing things that they had never seen before as they plodded along toward the shape on the horizon. He had been on constant lookout for danger, but none appeared.

Slowly that which was up ahead became more distinct, as the big light moved across the sky toward their old forest home. They looked for reassurance as they passed every small stand of trees, but he had not moved closer to them. Many were tall enough for safety, but most reminded him of the one that he had clung to not so long ago.

His excitement grew as the image took on the shape of trees. It was a new forest but somehow different than the other. The branches spread out more widely than those they were used to and there was more space between them.

He looked back at the big light that now threw long shadows ahead of them. He wondered if there would be enough time left to reach the new place before the animals of the darkness came upon them.

Again he marveled at that new way. He wondered if his mate could feel this new thing. He didn't see any sign of a difference when he looked at her.

She appeared as she always had and he wondered why that should be. The others didn't appear any different either when he'd had cause to look in their direction.

Their new home loomed ever larger ahead of them as they struggled to reach it before the big light disappeared. There was more space between each of the many trees and the large branches seemed to reach out as if to touch the others.

Suddenly, a deep coughing roar of a sound came as if from afar. With fright newly awakened, the females grabbed at their young and rushed with renewed energy toward the nearest of the giants ahead of them. The four males dropped back in a line as the

others scampered away. Each of the males, in turn, would leap high as they loped along, swiveling their heads when reaching the top of the jump, as the cough-like roaring came ever closer.

They broke into a dead run as a screeching ahead told them that the females had reached safety. The wide trunks were harder to climb, but at last all were high enough. Looking down he could see the shadowy forms gliding through the deepening gloom toward them, but he felt assured that all were now safe.

They came on as if following a scent, the three arriving at the base of the wide giant that had been chosen. They prowled around below the small group looking up in greedy anticipation. The smallest of the three, in a quick muscular leap, aimed for the lowest branch, but instead of falling back down it clung on, scratching its way ever so slowly up the trunk toward them. The creature could hardly grasp what he was seeing. These killers could climb!

Two rapid, shrill barks of warning sent all looking for higher thinner branches as the lower ones were tested by the predator, ending in a slow careful crawl to the next higher set. This went on until the young killer was high in the tree where in a test, one of the branches, much smaller at that height, broke. He dropped to the next lower level, where clawing desperately he managed to stop his fall. There he lay within a leap of one of the males, but he did not try, and risk a further fall. His tail twitched jerkily as he lay there, daring any to move. The two below sat on their haunches looking up expectantly, emitting an occasional coughing roar of a sound.

Dark shadows of the night gave way to shades of gray as the pale light rose up out of the land. The small group clung to the more limber branches just beyond their tormentor hardly daring to breathe as they waited for what might happen next. The young, from even smaller branches drooping under the sudden weight and well behind their mothers, whimpered their fright. The females mewed their anxiety as the males in the forefront issued soft-clipped barks of warning.

Suddenly, from out of the night the screaming sound of elemental fright bellowed out from an animal in the knock-down phase of capture. Sounds of struggle quickly ended in a gurgling wheeze as violent death was dealt out to another of nature's unfortunates. The reclining hunters below bounded up suddenly, a growl rising from out of their throats.

The younger one started a mad scratching scramble down the large trunk as the others bounded away toward where the death cry had issued forth. It seemed to be all over for the small group. They were safe, for now.

The pale light bathed everything in its soft glow as each member of the small group made their bowers high in the branches above where the hunter's climb had ended.

The myriad points of light, softened by the large pale one, twinkled down at him as he relaxed his tense tired body. He wondered. Would his favorite still be there? He grimaced as he felt the edges of his mouth turn up and moved his head a little to one side to remove the branch that blocked the view. Ahh! His favorite! It was still beautiful! And it was still there.

It seemed somehow bigger, brighter than before. It seemed so near. If he could just reach up high enough he might pluck it to himself. He extended his arm. He felt the branch under him bend slightly and then steady. He closed his hand. His favorite disappeared from his sight. He pulled it down to him, but it reappeared where his hand had been, so near, yet so far, but he dared reach no farther.

Sleep began to close his eyes after he had stared at his favorite for a while, but it was still there, like before. But now, it seemed to move. It was coming down of itself. Its bright point slowly became a soft glowing orb. There seemed to be something within it, around it, throughout it. As it neared he felt as though he was rising. He could see the trees as if from above. The waters that they had followed flowed off into the far distance before joining a much larger body that he could see no boundaries to, except the land that went on and on until it disappeared into where the pale light had come from. It was beautiful. It was all just too wonderful.

He opened his eyes, his body suddenly alert. Had he heard something? There was a glow where the big light would come from. He could see the ground below as it stretched out before him. No hunters were there. He saw the waters and he felt thirsty. It would be good to go there if only he could see that it was safe.

Others were stirring now. Ever so slowly he climbed down looking around carefully as he descended. He saw a broken branch on the ground below him. He remembered the hunter's fall. He wondered if it had been that which had saved them. He smiled that the new thing no longer felt as new or strange.

On the ground at last, he looked it over. It was longer than his arm but not as thick. The tip had broken off in the fall and it ended now in a sharp point. He lifted it up as he wondered how to show that it seemed to him somehow special.

He gathered the others together as they came down. A yipping bark got their attention. He walked around the tree as the hunters had done. He now pointed the stick that he had carried around, up into the tree and brought the thicker base down hard again and again. He looked around for some sign, some look of knowing, but saw nothing. He repeated this several times, but even his mate only looked a little frightened at his display. He suddenly realized again that he was thirsty.

He led them to the nearest water, but the stick had not left his hand. The males formed a lookout on each side, but he would be the first to see if there was danger there. This was not like the other water. Here you could see down into it. Things moved through it but were small. There would be no danger rising up from *this* water.

He squatted down and leaned over to drink. Suddenly there was something, *there in the water!* He recoiled, startled, but now there was nothing. Cautiously he moved back and there it was again at the edge, and was gone as quickly as he jerked back. He grunted in surprise. He stood up to look around, and there it was again!

An animal in the water, but not *in* the water. Something dropped and caused the water to ripple. It was on the surface but not *in* the water!

He squatted down for a closer look. It was like the other males in the group! It had moved when he squatted down. It moved again when he reached out to touch the water! He saw an arm! It had moved when he had reached out! It moved again when he drew his arm back.

He reached way out from where he had drawn back and saw a hand in the water below. He opened his hand to touch the water again and the other hand opened. He dipped his finger in the water and the other finger reached up to touch his, but he only felt water.

What *was* this? It was on the water but not in it. It looked like one of the males and moved when he moved. Again he looked into the water and grimaced at what he saw. It also grimaced. He looked at the face that looked back at him. He looked into the eyes of

the other and saw, himself! Hypnotized by this amazing thing, his head bent lower, but his body was bunched for a spring back. His lips touched water. He drank deeply, of this image. It seemed to do the same.

He leaped up. He had seen something profound. Racing back toward the others he yipped and barked and screeched his excitement! They looked at him in growing consternation. He waved his hand at them, but only relief showed in their eyes. They saw no blood or wound. He pointed at the water, screeching in the frustration of his excitement, but they all drew back. He reached for one of the males, but a short sharp bark and a turn of his back was enough.

Now he reached for his mate, but she drew back flashing a sudden fright grimace. He dragged her toward the water as she screeched and clawed at him in a rising panic. He bent her over to look, but her tear-blinded eyes would see nothing. He pulled her back more gently, trying to comfort her, but she escaped his loosened grip and ran back to the safety of the others.

How? How? How? They must be made to know, but how? He issued a short sharp bark with each thought, but their only response was a look of suspicion. He picked up the stick that he had dropped in his own surprise. He walked back toward them very slowly, carefully, using the sounds, pleas for acceptance, that they all knew so well when someone new wished to join them. He circled around them, opening their way to the water, but they would have none of it. They huddled in a tight grouping while eyeing him cautiously as he moved to a small elevation of ground close by.

Without warning a throaty coughing roar issued from the taller grass farther away, quickly followed by the young hunter as he bounded from out of where he had stalked them. They were cut off from even trying to run as he moved between them and their trees. The predator saw something in the hand of their leader that made him momentarily cautious.

He circled them trying for one of the young, but even in their fright they pushed their young into the middle surrounded by the females, with the males on the periphery offering their bodies as an ineffective defense, their grimace of fright revealing their short canines, their only natural defense. They opened their mouths wide as they shrilled their fright-filled warning.

The creature, even though frightened beyond any sound, instinctively moved to keep himself between the killer and his own, the stick, still in his hand, unmindfully pointed outward. The killer now bunched his body for the spring that would take the nearest one of them down.

The stick felt suddenly hot in his hand as the killer sprang at him, mouth wide in a roar of conquest. He moved the only thing that he had, between him and the lunging body. The sharp end entered the wide-open maw as claws reached for such easy prey.

He stumbled backward, the heavy end of the stick struck the ground. The killer's momentum drove the point through the back of his mouth. The stick, while breaking under the impact, diverted the driving body where it crashed to the ground, twitching senselessly as life poured out of its great maw.

The shock of the attack was overwhelming, but even through it all he was astounded! He wasn't even aware of the claws that slashed across his body. The stick had somehow saved him!

He had been knocked down and those behind rushed to him, even while keeping a wary eye on the fallen predator. They mewed their relief and gratitude as they licked his wounds for what he had somehow done for them.

The males now quickly leaped to their feet and moved away, bounding up to look for anything that might indicate movement. The creature, though badly clawed, painfully rose up through his grateful attendants. He had to *show* them!

His body oozing blood that those around him still eagerly sought to lick away, he slowly removed the broken stick from the now lifeless body. He wiped the end across his arm, leaving bloody chevrons that crossed his own wounds.

He roared a new sound that startled all into instant attention. He straightened the stick where it had broken and with both hands he thumped its butt into the ground again and again. A strange murmuring chorus arose from those around him as he again attempted to share his revelation.

Between sleeps he now ranged through their new home looking for broken limbs. Some were too big and heavy, others too light and limber. The ones that seemed close to that which continued to hold all of them in awe, he gathered and brought to the others. He attempted to fashion them after that, which now reclined in a bower of newly gathered leaves.

Through trial and error, one by one, replicas appeared. They were immediately, though with great awe, taken up, as he had shown them, to jab outward from their bodies. Now, when their sleep trees were chosen, he would perch on the lowest limb. His *awesome* discovery, and those of the others would now make it more secure for all.

Every sound that issued from their leader was now given the utmost respectful attention. They tried to copy every movement as faithfully as they could without seeming to know the why of what they did.

As he labored, he often caught a glimpse of his mate looking his way. Was there a new look in her eyes? She seemed more attentive to his needs than ever before.

The fright that she had shown him earlier had been short-lived and now long gone, but there was something else that had taken its place. Had she found that new something? He wondered and grimaced with upturned lips as he labored to bring to his small group a new beginning.

Today would be different! He had resolved that this would be so as soon as he had awakened. He was again thirsty, but he would not allow them, any longer, to drink from the stagnant pools because of their dread of the place where he and the predator had frightened them. The time of the big light before the last sleep, he had almost led them there, but their mewling pleas had been too much. He didn't like his males to act like that, showing such obvious fear. It wasn't good for the others to see that.

This time he would just have to go on, with or without them. It would be dangerous to leave them in the open, but he could see no other way. They could not learn to use the new things if they shrank and ran from their fear of those who might lie in wait. They needed to learn to stand and face what they feared. This would also be a good time to show them that some of what they feared might not be as they saw it.

When they had all come down from their perches and gathered before him, he struck the butt of his new long stick on the ground—*thump, thump, thump*—and then turned and walked toward the water. He went past the stagnant pool without stopping. A chorus of

mewling pleas immediately erupted. He turned from a short distance away and looked at them, scowling his displeasure.

Thump, thump, thump. His arm pumped his stick up and down. He turned his back on them and walked away, only slyly looking over his shoulder. His mate broke from the group and came slowly after him, her young one ambling alongside as his mate screamed her distress at seeing him go.

Again he stopped and turned around, watching her struggle through her fears as she hurried toward him. *Thump, thump, thump* He pounded the ground again. A male, seeing a female that far ahead of him, broke free. With his female dragging at him, he moved with increasing urgency forward. Quickly now, the others straggled after the one who demonstrated that he would follow.

Again the creature turned on his heel and walked away toward the clear water. It was enough. He now knew that they would be somewhere close behind him.

This time he looked with anticipation as he approached the water. There was his friend again, looking back at him as he leaned over. He kissed the surface as he again drank in his image. He wondered, *How could it be that I'm here and there at the same time?* It was one more wonderful thing that perplexed him.

He dropped to his knees as he turned around stretching out his arms in invitation. His young one broke away from his mate and ran into his open arms, amid a tittering of little sounds.

He went through a similar process of discovery for the boy, and soon the younger one was looking at his image, to the accompaniment of a small trilling giggle of delight as he sought to copy his father's gyrations. Then, it would be his mate's turn.

She seemed to come easier this time, the anxious cast to her features showing her continued concern for her young as more important than her own safety. The boy's obvious delight with what he did at the water's edge seemed to pique her natural curiosity. Soon, she too had overcome her reticence and began to explore this new, rather startling thing.

Now the others came forward by ones and twos to be startled, and then in turn, reconciled to what they saw as somehow not being real. Each, in his own way, gained some kind of vague understanding that this was only a reflection, a kind of *self*, not a stranger, not even one of the *others*.

He had now withdrawn to lookout duty, eventually being joined by the males. The rest spent the time learning to enjoy playing with their new discovery, until the waters became too disturbed for reflection.

Later, in moving toward places of forage, they chanced to pass that awful thing which they'd purposefully avoided earlier.

The remains of the predator now severely lacerated by many smaller teeth, was covered and hovered over by myriad insects as they feasted on and disposed of the larger animal life that had been deprived of its essence. He jabbed at it with the sharp end of his stick as he went past. The other males were quick to follow his lead. Now he turned suddenly, curving his procession into a circle. Round and round he led the males, jabbing at the lifeless carcass, darkening the tips of each stick with the blackening gore that oozed slowly from each new entrance.

The females kept a respectful distance outside the circle, mewling anxiously as they witnessed the increasingly aggressive displays of their mates. The young ones tittered

nervously as they too watched this new thing. And then it was suddenly over and he led them onward.

The foraging had not been without its dangers. A smaller, though still dangerous, enemy, who would have retired only in the face of much larger numbers, was now harried into retreat by the sharp sticks, already bloodied by their newest ritual, that the males jabbed in its direction. These new aggressors learned to advance in a phalanx of protection behind which the females and young withdrew. Thus did the males learn to see themselves as now possessing large, if only artificial, fangs with which to assert a new authority.

At the meeting place, the males were full of themselves. As their facial expressions contorted in many new ways, they sought to show that *their* deeds had significantly changed things. Through gestures before their mates, each demonstrated again how *he* had been instrumental in driving off their enemy, as if they hadn't already witnessed what had happened. The big light had gone by the time they tired of it and retired to make up their bower.

It was good! He had done all he'd hoped to do. And now they didn't need to fear their enemy as before. He wondered where this might lead them. His grimace was upturned again, remembering how he felt each time that this had happened. Had any of the others learned of this? He hadn't seen any signs, but he would be patient. Patience worked better than frightening them with this new excitement that he felt.

Once again his light sparkled down at him as he relaxed in the bower that his mate had rushed in her eagerness to make up for him. Was it bigger still? Was this light somehow connected to what he had seen, when last his eyes closed? It *was* beautiful, and it was wonderful, *all* of what had happened. He closed his eyes and wondered how long it might last. As before, his light stayed, and again, as before, it changed as it came to him and he felt as a leaf before the wind only softly, easily.

He looked down, but he was in a new place, and he saw many things. He tried to understand them but they overwhelmed him with their strangeness and number.

Lands and waters beyond anything that he could grasp, bright things and dark things, and colored things, and strange things that seemed not to see him.

And as he came back he saw the lands and waters that he had seen before, and now small forests where he had not seen them. And the open land, only a small part of which they had ranged through, he now saw in a somehow larger sense. And the waters that ran through it. And then, as it grew dark, his new home was there again.

He opened his eyes. A strange urgency afflicted him. There were only the usual sounds of the dark, and not many of them. The pale light was close to where it would go down. A great sadness came over him. Why? Why should he feel this way after all that had happened?

His favorite was still where it had been, only now the shaft that had come down was no longer there. Was it getting brighter? Yes, much brighter. It suddenly swelled to a huge size and then was gone. He sat up rigidly erect. He stared at where it had been. There was only blackness now. He moved his head to see if he had stirred from his place, but he saw nothing. No light came through anywhere, only blackness where the brightness had shone.

He felt a great emptiness in the place where it had filled him with awe. Now, there was nothing, and he felt a yearning for his own kind. It had given him so much, he was

sure of that now, but it was gone! Gone! All the things he had seen, could he remember them? Would he?

Why had it gone? Why had it come? He began to understand the sadness that had come over him. Had it tried to show him something, not about now, but later? And now, what was he to do with what he had seen? How could any of the others be made to know what was only his and now only in memory? He fell back as a great sadness again overwhelmed him.

He opened his eyes. The big light was already almost here as bright rays from it reached up out of the land toward where the waters flowed. He could see that several others had gone down from the sleep tree already. The sadness had not left him, but he knew that he must try to do something before the experience became old, and while the others felt toward him like they now did. But how was he to show them anything of what he had seen?

By example he could show them about the shoots and how to pull them just right. How to know when the small fruits and berries were ready, and how far down the branch the tips could be eaten. He had been the first to see how the sharp stick could work, and now all his males were practicing what he felt that he knew about using them, and about making them, but how had he come to know this?

And how could he show them about the bright light that was no more? Had he been the only one to see it? And the things that had only been there when his eyes were closed, where had they come from and what did seeing them mean? Remembering, as he climbed down the massive trunk, how he had frightened them earlier, he wondered what part of this newest of new things he could show them. If only he could find a way, without *that* happening again.

He knew that they felt toward him now like they had never felt before, but he remembered that he must be patient and not try to share too much too soon. But how would he not forget?

He remembered how big the open land had seemed, and how far the waters had appeared to run before they met the big water. He felt a touch on his arm. His mate was there beside him. Anxious eyes looked at him. Was there something that had not been there before? She looked quickly toward where others had begun to move toward the openness of their new foraging places.

He wondered about these things as he led them toward the place on the waters where they all had *seen*. The young tittered with excitement as they neared the place. It was good, they had remembered.

One of the males dropped away to become the lookout. The others pushed the butt of their sticks into the soft sand near the water's edge. It was good. They all wanted to *see* again.

They were more relaxed now that they didn't fear their enemy in the way that they had before. If only he could find a way to show them now, but how? He must find a way!

He looked back at the forest near by: it was long and deep. He looked into the land toward where the waters flowed. It went on and on, getting smaller the farther he looked. But he remembered that it had seemed to go on so much farther than he could see now. He had felt so strongly that he must go into it. He was feeling that way again, like something was pulling him toward it. Was something of what he had experienced still

there? Some part that he could not see, but could almost feel? He felt the excitement well up again, but he must try to be patient.

The sharp end of his stick touched the sand where he stood watching them as they renewed their experience. It made a mark. Suddenly curious, he made another mark, and another, and another. He made a mark by dragging the stick that went around all the other marks. Then another, and then made it go straight. He looked at the forest. He made another straight mark, a long one, the way that the forest seemed to go. He looked at the waters, and made a mark in the direction that they ran, a very long one.

Some of the young ones saw him and followed, making the sounds that expressed their curiosity. He went back to where he had started as the remainder also drew near. He issued the high-pitched bark of attention.

He pointed his stick at the marks inside the round one. He beat on his chest and pointed a finger at them, sticking the sharp end of his stick into where the other marks were and hooted the sound of gathering.

His mate came to him slowly, a look of anxious questioning again in her eyes accented by her other facial expressions, but not quite fear this time. He reached out and gathered her to him, grimacing his approval as their little one raced over to stand close. He beckoned to the others, some of whom had already started. Soon they were all standing together. He thumped the butt of his stick three times, and then waved his arm around at them ending with pointing at himself as he repeated his grunting and thumping gestures. They moved in closer. He renewed his grimace of approval, as he wondered if they really got it. Did they understand even a little or were they just copying what he did?

He stepped out from among them, pushing his hand at them not to follow. He stepped behind the long mark that went in the same direction as the forest. Then, with the bark of attention, he made another long mark close to the first one.

When he had finished he pointed the stick at the forest, hooting for attention. Now he made another mark behind the first two repeating his sound and gestures.

The males now brought their sticks to him and helped make many more marks. The females, wearing the grimace of helpfulness, came to stand on the many marks as the young began to dance little jigs of excitement around their mothers and the marks as they were made.

He again slipped out from them as they busied themselves, and with another bark of attention, he hurriedly made a mark beside the very long one that went where the waters flowed.

Quickly the males followed showing the grimaces of pleasure at the game that they felt that he had led them into, with the young, trilling little giggles of pleasure as they raced after, scuffing sand out of the many marks as they were made. The females followed more slowly, the mewling sounds of rising anxiety growing louder as they went.

Suddenly he stopped and pounded the ground three times as he gave another hoot of attention. He pointed back along the marks toward the forest. Sweeping his arm across their outline. Now he pointed at the open land beyond where the marks stopped, pounding the ground again for attention.

Some of the females let out loud cries of anguish. He knew that they had understood. They pointed at the forest many times as they scuffed at the lines in the sand. His mate had suddenly stopped her scuffing and he could see the fear rising again in her, but she

had not looked back, although the males did, at their females and then in the direction that he still pointed, and back again.

He issued a loud bark of warning three times, slowly pounding the ground for emphasis. Again he pointed in the direction he wanted them to understand that he meant to go as he glowered at them through his scowl of disapproval.

Slowly, one by one the smaller females dropped into a deep crouch, an anxious sadness contorting their features as they slumped, the males still looking back crouched, not quite as low. Once again they pawed their small strokes.

It was over! He had won! He displayed the grimace of satisfaction, while giving a middle range hoot of invitation. He then headed back toward their newly favored foraging grounds, as a sign that what had been decided would not be happening before the next sleep.

It had grown dark and although he thought that the other cats were too heavy to climb, he posted a guard on the lowest limb. Now he relaxed on his almost extravagantly made bower. It took him a while to *want* to look up toward where it had been. A part of the sadness returned as he saw only a dark hole in the twinkling points of light that still filled everything, except where it had been.

He awakened immediately, suddenly realizing that he had heard the sharp bark of alarm. The piercingly shrill call instantly alerted him. That which he had thought improbable was most surely happening. Finally, perched on the limb opposite the other male he saw the green eyes laboriously clawing their way up the massive trunk.

The guard's stick had made the eyes blink several times but had not been enough to dissuade the persistent killer. He drove his own stick down hard at the green nearest him. A piercing screech of a roar burst forth as the green disappeared.

The shadow of a head snapped back as claws struck at the limb where he stood. His stick snapped away as the cat, having lost its grip, fell down the trunk to the ground with a huge thud accompanied with another screeching roar.

He grabbed at a nearby branch to steady himself as he tried to understand what had happened. The howling and thrashing down below finally subsided. Had the great killer slunk off wounded or—? He didn't quite know how to think about what had just happened. Only the pale light would be able to show him, but for now, he was without his stick, and if the other killer appeared—he hooted for attention and barked alarm. Another male suddenly appeared from higher up and he left them in charge on the low branches, after issuing a muted growl of caution.

He opened his eyes quickly, and looked intently over the open part of the land. Why did it seem to call to him so urgently? The memory of the visions haunted him from the time that he had closed his eyes. He remembered all the things he had seen and then, remembered them again. He would not soon forget.

But was he beginning to forget already? In his dream, each time, when he came back and saw the new forests that he'd not seen before, they had seemed not as clear, but the pull toward them got stronger! What was it about them, or was it just some of them? They hadn't seemed any different, but he had felt a difference. The first time he had missed them altogether. Only on the way back, had they called to him in some vague way that directed his notice. One of the forests came down to the very shores of the great water, and it had waters running from it. Had there been just one stream running into the great water, or were there more? Was this the forest that the light had intended for him to

notice? Why this one? But he couldn't deny it; the pull seemed the strongest when he thought of this forest!

Now the sign came to him that the big light would soon come. He'd climbed down to the ground as things brightened and then he saw a trail of blood. The predator had gone off into tall grass some distance from the forest edge. He and the other males followed after it and found his stick lying beside the trail of blood, just before the tall grass. Had their enemy crawled off into the grass and now was no more? He knew that others of its kind were out there. The risk to those who accompanied him seemed greater than the satisfaction of finding out.

The females and young were down from the tree and milling around nervously when he and the other males returned. They had also seen and smelled the blood. A picture of that far-off forest again came to him. Now would be a good time to venture out.

How far would they follow him this time? he wondered. He knew he would always have to keep them within sight of trees and there must always be a large smudge at the edge of the land where the big light came up that they could walk toward.

At first he led them as if only foraging, but the females were edgy. The snap of a small twig would bring a startled look back toward where they had come from. He saw a growing element of terror within the anxious looks. Now he knew that they knew they would not be going back.

They stopped to rest under the kind of tree that only the flying things with big thick beaks liked. It had round things that were hard on the outside that only the flying things could break open.

Broken shells littered the ground where they rested in the shade, away from the big light that now was overhead. Some of the round things had fallen and lay among the empty shells. He idly picked up a broken shell; the smell was strange but interesting.

He looked up and watched as a young big bill wrestled with a large one of the round things. He heard a cracking sound, but the round thing flew from the big bill's beak, landing almost at his feet. He picked it up. The smell was stronger, coming from something inside. He put it up to his mouth, but his teeth could not reach what was inside. He touched the inside with his finger. He used his nail and pried a small bit out. It tasted as good as it had smelled.

He put it into his mouth and bit down hard, but nothing. Shifting it around, he did it again. This time he heard and felt a small cracking sound. He looked at it again and saw a part of the shell, next to the other break, had fallen away. He put what was inside up to his front teeth and this time a much larger piece broke away.

He looked up as he chewed, grunting a little as he did. He had wondered about the round things in the tree. Now he knew what was inside, but how...how to get at it? He looked at the round things among the shells on the ground and he wanted what was inside...but how? He looked at the broken one in his hand and he wanted the rest of what was inside. He put it into his mouth and bit down hard again.

There was a loud crack, what was inside was now loose! He yipped with excitement! He saw some of the others, who had watched him, give him a curious look. He wondered if there were any more cracked ones on the ground. He hooted attention as he came down with the butt end of his stick, the first of an intended three. A loud crack came from the bottom of the stick as it hit the ground. He looked the stick over to see if he had damaged it.

One of the young ones quickly reached out and grasped something that had been under the stick, drawing it back he blew furiously on it and flicked little things from off the top and as quickly popped it into his mouth. Giggling with delight as the first chomp affirmed what his leader had shown, he grimaced his victory over the others who had been slower to comprehend.

The creature looked quizzically several times from the youngster to where he had pounded on the ground. Finally seeing the empty shells, he wondered as he yipped again with excitement. Had a round thing been under his stick when he had brought it down?

He picked up the empty shells, looking them over before dropping them, then searched the ground for another round thing.

Placing it carefully in the small depression where his stick had hit before, he brought it down again. A loud crack came, but not from under the stick. With a loud yelp of pain and surprise a male staggered back. It had happened so fast that few had seen the round thing as it flew out from under where he had struck. The creature's shocked surprise was countered by the injured male's glare of disapproval, quickly followed by a growl as the leader slowly approached, while making grooming sounds. He looked for any signs of injury, but only found a red spot high on the cheek that rapidly rose into a painful mound. *How?* he wondered. *Why?* He looked back, and then decided to try again.

This time everyone moved back behind him. He brought the stick down to a resounding crack, just like the first one. He picked up the thing, now smashed flat, and handed it to another of the young as he looked around again, but the females had anticipated him and had begun to gather what he needed.

With a self-satisfied grimace he brought the stick down again. Another loud crack, but this time the crack echoed back from the trunk of the tree. The insides ricocheted in all directions as the big-billed flying things flew up in startled surprise.

Another miss. He'd have to strike more carefully. Another strike, again a near miss catapulted the round thing out farther than he could throw his stick. He scratched his head in amazement, *farther than he could throw his stick*, if he had wanted to throw it.

Slowly but surely he learned and taught the other males, who one by one had joined in, that less vigorous thumps would make for a better aim as well as less crushing of the insides. Finally he got it. Just dropping the stick from half an arm's height broke the shell but left the insides largely intact.

Everyone ate until they couldn't stuff any more in. Only then did they discover that the big light had gone far over toward where they had come from. They wouldn't be able to reach their goal now. So, he chose the tree with the round things and another close by for their sleep trees. When the big light came again, they would go forth once more.

And so, they wandered evermore eastward, toward that which called them, to a destiny far different than anything they could have possibly imagined.

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*

*A creature rose,
from that one seed
From nature's chain,
Had he been freed
From all that nature
had decreed?*

*His rise,
like a slender reed.*

*But not above
his special need!*

—Al Gilding

Let science prove we are, and then
What matters science unto men.

No longer half-akin to brute.

For all we thought and loved and did.

And hoped, and suffer'd is but seed

Of what in them is flower and fruit

Whereof the man, that with me trod

This planet, was a noble type

Appearing ere the times were ripe,

That friend of mine who lives in God

—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*

The Man within

Who searches long

Finding naught

He gropes along

Finding aught

He casts about

For support

He cannot doubt

What he finds

He cannot see

For what he grasps

Just cannot be

For what he clasps

Seems a very thin line

Secured by what

May be only his mind

But no

*This must **not** be true*

For the inner Man

Has always sought You

—Al Gilding

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Chapter 8

Where in the World Is Eden?

Another View of an old Question

Across the ages many have quested concerning the whereabouts of Eden, but a satisfactory answer continues to prove elusive. The biblical story is vague as to where the recalled events might have taken place, except for two real-world clues.

While overall geographic clarity is lacking, some descriptions within the biblical account are helpful. Within “Eden” was a place with a garden-like environment in which there were trees of all kinds, many with fruit for the picking. The seasons are not clearly defined, but there were four rivers that ran through this early habitat of humanity that seemed to run “to the four corners of it.” Two of the rivers, described as within the vicinity of Eden, are the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, an ancient text about a heroic figure, whose adventures occurred within the Euphrates River system, contains a story about an all-encompassing flood, which seems to describe an event similar to that recorded in the book of Genesis. The ancient background that this story is set in (3,500 to 4,000 BC at least) implies that the Genesis account also occurred early in the journey of modern man.

The archaeological record traces the appearance of Man as a tool-making mammal to somewhere in the one million year expanse of the Pleistocene or glacial Epoch. It records his journey as a hunter-gatherer through the long Paleolithic Period (that takes up 98 percent of the Pleistocene Epoch); through the relatively short (four to six thousand year) Mesolithic Period; to the beginning of the Neolithic, at approximately 8,000 BC. The earliest evidence of settled existence, at approximately 5,000 BC, is in the eastern portion of the plain of the Tigris-Euphrates River system.

Over the broad expanse of this elongate double river plain that is modern-day Iraq, the interested observer can discern a variety of things.

Some are economic: Oil wells seem to march largely up the eastern side, all within sight of the lofty Zagros Mountains that form the eastern border of this plain.

Some are historic: This relatively flat valley is the birthplace of what is seen by many as the oldest of all civilizations. It has nurtured the city-state of Ur, in the south-central part, “the land between the rivers” and many of the successor civilizations including Babylon and Assyrian Nineveh, which arose at the base of the northern plateau and in the uppermost portion of this long plain. Today Baghdad sits astride the Tigris at the narrowest separation between these two rivers, and close to the middle of this riverine valley.

Some are geographic; Two rivers, the Tigris and its sister the Euphrates, meander over the width and length of this silt-filled valley before joining, then pouring over an extensive delta and into what is called today the Persian Gulf.

This plain lies south and east of the Anatolian Plateau, a highland that separates that flat expanse from the Black Sea, a large lake-like body of salt water, placed by some geologic process in the middle of the Euro-Asian landmass.

Others are geologic: These meandering rivers imply the last stage of sedimentation of a once lower, narrower river valley. The vast pools of oil that underlie the eastern portion of modern-day Iraq and extend the length of this plain would suggest that a far

different climate once existed here. Oil, it has been theorized, was created in what was once a heavily vegetative environment.

Although oil, it is estimated, takes millions of years to produce, its very presence strongly suggests that a far different climate once existed eons ago than is evidenced today. Further, it also takes millions of years to fill a valley system with silt, assuming stable environmental conditions.

It could be theorized that this land had existed over millennia of time in this densely vegetative state punctuated by geologically short intervals of glaciation as the earth cooled, then warmed again. At some point in the latter part of each deglaciation, torrents of meltwater, unimaginable today, could have coursed through this valley system tearing loose its plant life. Extensive mats of uprooted vegetation could have lodged in different places that, in turn, would have been covered over by the eroded rock ground to silt as an end result of this overwhelming disturbance of a geologic status quo. In possibly only hundreds of years, the life of this valley could have reestablished itself at a somewhat higher level than before, assuming no long-term climatic changes would have occurred as a result of these disturbances.

These geologic “punctuations” could have occurred with every cycle of glaciation that geology records, including the last one that ended approximately ten thousand years ago. Just prior to that last and most catastrophic of punctuations, a long-remembered oral cultural history could have described the area as a huge garden where every kind of tree and plant grew, where two rivers that had joined in the middle of the plain and then separated again gave the appearance of four, within the “editing” of generational recitations. That it seemed to have flowed to the four corners of that same garden-like environment might have been an artifact of later flawed interpretation. Of course other interpretations may become available as new information enters the mix, and if a more open grassland environment replaced the forested one, it would have been lovingly preserved in the collective memory of all who came after.

During the process of this last punctuation, something changed, and the “garden” climate was forever erased. In the aftermath this time, only a broad savanna of grassland emerged. Because it lies in a geographically north to south alignment, the beginning of the last retreat of the ice sheets covering the northern latitudes could have poured vast, sustained floods of meltwater over this double river system. Because, it is theorized, that the last warming took place over the longest span of time of all the glacial retreats, the destruction of the environment that preceded it has been the most complete.

This theory gains added corroboration in the discoveries made in places far removed from this scene of possibly deeply buried devastation. Consistent with a somewhat later episode of this last deglaciation, it has been postulated, similar violence-related changes occurred in those other places as well.

Cataracts of meltwater poured out of the Canadian Shield into huge holes gouged in the earth by the glaciers that were, at that time, in full retreat. Filling unevenly, the overflow from one would have torn through the narrow bridges of land that separated these huge cisterns, in the process, forming what is now known as the Great Lakes.

Overflowing southward this monumental flood could possibly have created the Mississippi River drainage system, while eastward, as the ice sheet retreated farther, huge volumes of water plunged down a valley-like depression until it erupted over a cliff-like palisade of rock.

This cascade persistently thundered down, roaring its displeasure as it dashed itself upon the rocky base. It tore into that solid rock and wore its way backward forming a canyon all the way back to a place we now call Niagara Falls.

Farther to the west the glacier melt flowed out from under a wider base in a less destructive manner and into a natural bowl-shaped depression between the Rocky Mountains and the High Sierras forming a vast inland sea that archaeologists have named Lake Lahontan. The mountains close to its remnant, the Great Salt Lake in Utah, attest to its great depth by the various lake-level lines etched high upon them for all eternity to see.

In the latter days of its filling, it began to overflow the lowest level in its gigantic rim, a natural dam that had held back this mammoth lake from the lower ground on its northwestern quadrant. At first it seeped through this rocky lip, and then, rolled leisurely over the water-softened rim as it eroded. Now, surging ever more urgently, it wore away the roots and soil, rolling the loosened rocks of the slope that had contained it, down its ever more swiftly moving course.

As the earth scoured away from under this now-raging torrent, it morphed into an ever more towering waterfall which, in its turn, wore away the base of the natural dam until, with an earthshaking shudder, it collapsed entirely.

An unimaginably huge wall of water now jetted through the collapsing breach blowing shattered rock ahead of it like so many pebbles. Down it roared, drilling through every hillock of land that sought to block its path, scouring a trough, known today as the Snake River Canyon, as it surged its way into the upper reaches of the Columbia River Basin. For months, or years of time, the mighty Lake Lahontan delivered itself of this avalanche of glacier-melt until it was no more. All that was left to tell of its passing, a wide area of still-barren land, Hell's Canyon, and probably a small rise in the level of the ocean that it had poured into.

Throughout this last deglaciation, as with all prior ones, the level of all the oceans and seas of the world steadily rose, this time higher than ever before. In the Mediterranean Sea, an almost entirely landlocked body of water, that may not have had a prior connection to the oceans of the world, this steady rise at first poured over, then tore through another natural land bridge, the ruined remainder of which is known today as the Straights of Gibraltar. The rapid addition of this huge new source of water drove Paleolithic, soon to be Neolithic peoples along its shores to ever-higher ground.

Along a portion of the uneven mountains that formed its northern rim, this flood intruded ever more insistently, inundating low-lying hills until it was barred finally by a narrow ridge of mountainous terrain known today as the Bosphorous. Beyond this lay a huge body of fresh water whose level, it is theorized, lay somewhat below the old level of the Mediterranean. Insistently the searching water climbed up and through this ever-narrowing ridge until, at last, it looked down upon that other body of water that now, it is estimated, was about five hundred feet below it.

Again a trickle turned to a torrent. Again it tore away the solid rock of the mountains and wore away a canyon all the way back to this geologically new saltwater sea. Again a huge wall of water roared through the canyon like a gigantic hydraulic jet as it blasted away the rock that had restrained it.

Shouldering its way through the mountain that shrank before this devastating onslaught, it thundered its way down, pouring an avalanche of mud, rock and salty water

into the lake far below. A tidal bore, fed by this massively increasing surge, rushed over the fresh water lake surface inundating the habitat of the culture that it had sheltered since time immemorial. The few survivors clawed their way up the surrounding hills and mountains, just ahead of the rapidly rising water behind them. Their world was drowning; their land was quickly disappearing under the water that seemed to be everywhere. The end of everything seemed near, and then, it stopped!

Up and over the hills it had relentlessly pursued them. Now it lay churning and boiling as it digested the mammoth meal of saltwater, rock, mud, and vegetation that had so greatly swelled its bulk, and had carried it into the distance as far as the eye could see. The lake that had once fed them, now threatened to poison them as they searched far and wide for what little was left that would sustain them in the danger of a new and dreadful beginning.

The folklore of most, if not all, ancient civilizations of the Middle East, including that which produced the Bible, describe a paradise-like beginning from which wandering tribes emerged into a different kind of much harsher world. Also, in the folklore of many cultures, their Genesis stories contain a memory of a flood episode.

There is evidence, on the floodplains of both the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates drainage systems, of mud-brick platforms having been built. It is theorized that they were raised to a level above the annual flood, where the inhabitants could find temporary refuge from the waters that brought the life-giving silt that sustained the fertility of these long-lived cultures. Could it be that an elaboration of the effort to raise an existing platform above each new and successively higher flood level was that which created the stepped pyramid form, the Ziggurat of Babylonian fame? Was an old folklore flood story behind their efforts to reach ever higher?

The Bible, seen as a kind of history, tells of Adam, being driven out of Eden for not having resisted the *serpent's* temptation, going east into a harsh world where sustenance was gained only by the sweat of his brow. Was this story, simplified by the varied retellings of oral history, meant to tell of the refugees from the destruction that occurred during that last great glacial retreat?

There is evidence of an ancient civilization that existed in a highland valley, east of the Zagros Mountains whose cultural heritage makes a claim to the biblical designation, "east of Eden." These same Zagros Mountains, as indicated earlier, form the eastern border of the fertile plain through which runs the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Martin Luther (q.v.), seen as the originator of the Protestant movement, taught that Eden was guarded by angels, from discovery and consequent profanation, until the Deluge, when all traces of it were destroyed.

Is it possible that somewhere deeply buried under the last and greatest siltation of this double river plain is the Eden of biblical lore?

*Where go these wanderers
From an earlier yore
Looking desperately
For any door
Looking urgently
For release
From such a
Devastating plight
Hoping for surcease
But is any in sight?
Their future looks bleak
What has fate in store?
Where can they run
Where there's need for no more?*

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Chapter 9

Cain and Abel

A Prequel to a Parable?

In a recent rereading of an earlier article under the title of “Cain and Abel,” by Elie Wiesel, within a periodical called *Bible Review* (Feb. 98), I became aware of a feeling of déjà vu. No, this was not the first time that I had read this article, although I had forgotten that I had. It was also not the first time that I had read the story of Cain and Abel. It was however, the first time that I had the feeling that I was revisiting a story told elsewhere in the Bible.

As I thought about this feeling, the parable of the Prodigal Son came to mind. *Now what does the one have to do with the other?* I wondered. The differences were clearly obvious. The story of Cain and Abel takes place in Genesis (Gen. 4:1–18, TLB) of the Old Testament, while the other was told hundreds of years later in Luke of the New Testament, a parable within the teachings of Jesus. (Luke 15:11–32) The first, as told in the Bible, although greatly abbreviated, sounds like a story of real people. The parable as told by Jesus, on the other hand, was a greatly simplified story meant to illustrate a complex principle within a philosophy of conduct and probably wasn't about real people.

So, I mused further, *What do they have in common? What caused me, while reading the one, to think of the other?*

First, they are about two brothers. Second, they are about *feelings*. They are also about *status* within a family, and its implied, anticipated, or actual change. There is a *father figure* that both brothers in each story are accountable to. In both stories the older brother displays some ill will toward his brother, after the younger one appears to have gained greater favor in the eyes of the *father*. The elder son resents the *father's* decision and becomes angry over the expected loss of his coveted position. He can find no joy in the father's approval and/or happiness that is the source of his brother's good fortune. In each story the elder son is a tiller of the soil.

The story of Cain and Abel is told in a short terse manner, using few words to convey much more than the simple interplay between the three main characters. It is left to extra-biblical sources to interpret into the story the things that would have logically been said and done that would give meaning to the sparse words chosen to convey the message.

Nowhere is the earthly father, Adam, mentioned. Also not mentioned is the fate of many firstborn children when brought into the world under less than ideal conditions. Parents who are immature and/or inexperienced in raising a child under tough conditions tend to unknowingly inculcate certain ways of reacting to unduly distressing experiences, especially if the child might be equated in some way with the conditions under which they all must exist.

The Bible indicates that “Cain was a farmer” while “Abel became a shepherd.” In many biblical stories, the lesser important, younger members of a family “tended the sheep,” leaving the “tilling of the fields” by implication and other references in the Bible to more important members. This leads one to conclude an inference that Cain, the firstborn, with the higher status of the two was engaged in that more important occupation. Cain’s work verified his position as *inheritor* within the family, whereas Abel’s work implied his status to be that of a *helper* in support of his elder brother, as the passing of generations left sons to replace their father’s leadership role.

A study within anthropology reveals that farming (agriculture) was a newer skill than shepherding (animal husbandry). Therefore, it appears that the practice of this *newer skill* led to an elevated status within the biblical family.

“At harvest time, Cain brought the Lord a gift of his farm produce, and Abel brought the fatty cuts of meat from his best lambs, and presented them to the Lord” (Gen. 4:3–4, TLB).

Neither the preceding nor succeeding texts seems to reveal much about how this practice got started.

Elie Wiesel, in an extra-biblical commentary, has this to say in his opinion on a closely related matter. “At first we become attached to Cain. He shares with his younger brother, Abel, the generous idea of offering gifts to the Lord. But for this, Abel might never have felt the need to do the same.”

This interpretation implies that the idea of presenting offerings began with Cain. Mr. Wiesel shares with us, in a later paragraph, the extra-biblical source that aided him in making this interpretation.

“As always, the Midrash comes to the rescue in our attempt to fill the gaps left by the biblical text.”

The Midrash, as indicated in a footnote, “is a genre of rabbinic literature that includes the nonliteral elaborations of biblical texts.”

This appears to have been a long-established practice in Hebrew theology that was meant to aid in the understanding of the parts of the biblical texts where more seems to have been left out than included. I’m sure that the lifetime studies of many Hebrew scholars went into these elaborations before they could be presented with any certain authority. However, I cannot agree with the suggestion, even while only implied, that Cain was the originator of the practice. There are a variety of passages in the Bible that could be used to present a different set of events than what Mr. Wiesel suggests.

From these we can conclude that the parents, Adam and Eve, “talked” to God while in the Garden of Eden, but there is no clear statement that they did after they left. However, separation from the Deity was not listed as one of the penalties for their disobedience. Therefore, it is quite possible to imagine that they initiated the practice of sacrificial offerings to assuage God’s anger toward them. The boys would have had this practice imprinted upon their minds and consciences as one of their earliest memories.

But, while sacrificial offerings have had a long-established practice in the earliest of biblical stories, and while archaeological discoveries indicate that this practice is among the earliest of the religious efforts of mankind, the Bible is silent on the subject regarding this particular story.

We can also conclude from the Bible, as well as from other sources, that shepherding was a largely solitary occupation that could lead to many hours of contemplative thought. *Visions* seem to have been the end product of at least some of this kind of activity.

Whereas, *tilling the soil* successfully required the active concentration on the part of the tiller. His mind, while having to be open to the nuances of nature, also had to be concentrated on the job at hand.

This combination allowed him to succeed in practicing his art, and, at times, developing new ways to achieve more with the same or less effort. The old adage of “keeping one’s nose to the grindstone” to achieve success, seems to support the notion that most of an agriculturist’s efforts were engaged in *busy* work.

As young children, Cain, the elder of the two, would have naturally taken the lead as they followed in their parent’s footsteps. But now, as young men already immersed in their separate skills, they would arguably have approached the understanding of what would have made the better sacrifice from very different points of perception.

“And the Lord accepted Abel’s offering but not Cain’s.”

Something about Cain’s offering made it unacceptable. Was it the offering itself? *If so*, I mulled, *that would present a line of thought worth pursuing for its own sake, but maybe later on*. Could it be that what is of utmost importance to Man, is not necessarily seen by the Deity in as urgently important a way?

In rejecting Cain’s offering, God brought on a perceived lowering of his status. From first son, inheritor, receiver of the double portion, doer of the most important family work, to *rejected!* Abel on the other hand was suddenly elevated to *most favored person* status. But Cain could not be happy for his brother’s good fortune; he could think only of his own misfortune and misery. This emotionally self-centered, first reaction to bad news is normal. Only when it’s allowed to fester does it imply a larger underlying problem.

“This made Cain both dejected and very angry; his face grew dark with fury. He was very angry and his countenance fell.”

Dejection is an understandable emotion and probably, by itself, would have been acceptable. But when “his face grew dark with fury” and “he was very angry,” this revealed his reaction to a judgment from authority. He was so thoroughly surprised that he couldn’t manage even a façade of respect. He was angry at God!

“And God said, “Why are you angry? Why is your face so dark with rage?” Cain’s look must have said it all.

“You have no right to do this to me!”

Because he did not present a “proper” attitude, God remonstrated, *“It [your face] could be bright with joy if you will do what you should!”*

What should Cain have done, and what could he still do? Show humility on the occasion of having been corrected, for having done something different? Was the rejection because he had offered something newer than the traditional animal sacrifice that had a long history of acceptance? Should he have asked forgiveness for not having done that which might have been required for acceptance of his offering? Should Cain have apologized for “doing it his way?”

He evidently could not, or would not, adopt an obedient attitude because God continued, scolding, “*If you refuse to obey, watch out! For sin is waiting to attack you, longing to destroy you.*” Then, ending on a word of encouragement, “*But you can conquer it!*”

If Cain’s pride got in the way of a proper, obedient attitude, what was its source? Was it pride of place, of position, that caused him to become angry when he appeared to have lost it? Did this pride cause him to have certain expectations that, when not fulfilled ended in a sudden uncontrollable eruption of anger?

All that we can conclude, as the scene abruptly shifts, is that Cain must have carried a grudge away from that confrontation. He then seems to have taken it out on his brother.

“*Now Cain talked with Abel his brother, and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him*” (Gen. 4:8).

Was there something in their conversation that sparked a renewal of Cain’s outburst of temper? We are not told, just that it happened.

“*And He [the Lord] said, ‘what have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth...When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you.’*”

Can we conclude anything from this?

Disagreements that lead to violent reactions are as old as Man! And, it would seem that expectations, warranted or not, and grudges make a dangerous load to carry! All sorts of mischief have resulted, including feuds, vendettas, as well as wars, from Man’s belligerent interaction with his *brother!*

From here the story and the parable diverge. The story goes on to indicate that an angry response to the loss of some status can lead to the loss of all status, except possibly that of pariah.

“*And the Lord set a mark on Cain.*”

The Parable of the Prodigal Son suggests that there is a better way, and by searching the more detailed wording of the parable story we may gain a more complete understanding of the background in which the story of Cain and Abel is told.

Jesus, by all indications in the New Testament, knew in detail all the stories of the Old Testament (the Torah, or more probably the Greek translation, the Septuagint). He may have had a little more elaborate reading of the story of Cain and Abel than is available to us today because of being several hundred years closer to it than we are. His Parable of the Prodigal Son (The Lost Son) appears at first glance to be an updated retelling of the story of Cain and Abel for the purpose of teaching a way to avoid the consequences of the first account.

“*A man had two sons. When the younger told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die!’ his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons*” (Luke 15:11–12).

A rather temperate response to an intemperate demand. How did the elder son feel about this disrespectful challenge to his father's plans? The only basis to imply disagreement with his brother's approach is that there was no like request from him.

"A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there wasted all his money on parties and prostitutes."

Easy come, easy go! There might be no fool like an old fool, but a younger one seems just as stupid.

"When he finally came to his senses, he said... 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and am no longer worthy of being called your son—' But his father said to the slaves, 'Quick, bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. And a jeweled ring for his finger; and shoes! And kill the calf we have in the fattening pen. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has returned to life. He was lost and is found'" (Luke 15:17–24).

The father felt only happiness that his son was alive and well and had come back to him.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working; when he returned home—he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and prepared a great feast to celebrate his coming home again, unharmed.' The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him but he replied. 'All these years I've worked hard for you and never once refused to do a single thing that you told me to, and in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.' [Translation, "You haven't ever treated me like that!"] 'Look, dear son,' his father said to him, 'you and I are very close, and everything that I have is yours. But it is right to celebrate. For he is your brother; and he was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and now is found!'"

What is the message in the parable? Is it, don't worry about who the party is for, just celebrate the good news?

How is this like the first story? The father honors the younger son in what is perceived as an undeserved manner. The older son sees a loss of status by his father's action, and reacts angrily. The father scolds him, although very mildly, "He is your brother!" implying, "You should be happy too!"

Then it ends on an encouraging note, *"Dear son—You and I are close, and all that I have is yours."* Leaving us to anticipate the older son's change of attitude in the face of this loving reassurance and his renewed willingness to continue to do what his father asks of him, to help him celebrate the good news. That another's good fortune need not diminish your own.

The story is of a confrontation with stern, judgmental authority, the *parable* indicates what can happen when that authority is perceived to be wrapped in the warm blanket of compassionate love. It could also be indicative of an evolution in Man's understanding from an earlier "storm god" deity occasionally wreaking little understood havoc, to a more personal "God of the Good."

Suddenly, it appears to me, that it is as easy to become guilty of the same flaw as Jesus' disciples were, that is taking the parable to be the message. At first I was led into it in comparing the story, Cain and Abel, with a known parable, the Prodigal Son, because

of my feeling that the two were connected. In the end I had dissected both, looking for the meaning as if it were within them.

But, what if the story of Cain and Abel itself is a parable? I have already discussed some similarities that seem to make a good case for that assumption. What then would be the *larger meaning* that this simplified example might be pointing toward?

First, it wouldn't necessarily have to be a story about real people. It could have been a story, like the one that Jesus told about the Prodigal Son (The Lost Son) in which the listener was supposed to reach for the larger meaning. In the case of Cain and Abel, what larger meaning might it point toward? Earlier in the chapter I asked myself the question, "Was it the offering itself?"

Could this story then, in its enlarged form, be viewed somehow as an episode in science's rendition of the long, long journey of Man through time and across the continents? A journey, such as that which is described in the discoveries related to archaeology and anthropology, all the way from the beginning of Man to the modern-day example? If so, what part of that journey might it refer to?

The answer to that question should become more clearly apparent after a short review of that journey through the ever-changing Pleistocene, as first referenced in chapters 5 and 6.

From out of the dim unmarked past comes an animal, quite unlike any other, elevated by some unseen fate to come to a place of primacy unmatched in all of earthly creation. For many eons of time he remained in the incubator of the natural world, slowly gathering the limited resources that were attuned to his ever-changing ability to manipulate. Perched always on the knife-edge of extinction, he sharpened his tools of survival throughout that crisis-laden epoch.

In the beginning, as primarily a vegetarian, it is theorized, hominid was a gatherer of easily available plant life. First, it was that portion which grew above ground. Then, the climate changed!

Many of the plants, that survived that drastic wrenching of their environment, concentrated on the storage of seasonal energy below ground. Homo fortunately discovered crude aids in his recovery of this additional nourishment. This alone might have given him the necessary edge to cheat the evolutionary "Grim Reaper."

When extreme hunger forced him to experiment with the addition of small amounts of animal nutriment, the adaptive process lurched in an entirely new direction. At first, it was the leftovers of others more adept in the hunt, kill, and devour process. Then, as this part of their diet grew in importance, they looked longingly at the living. They envied the long fangs and sharp claws of those who were so well endowed. Then, either by pure accident or the dawning ability to perceive abstractly, the sharp edges of that which nature casually offered up came to their attention.

Man's principal occupation, the search for food, evolved through several phases. From primarily *gatherer* to, as the chronology of time rolled slowly on, *gatherer/hunter*, then again with a sufficient passage of time, it became *hunter/gatherer*, as this *new* part of his changing diet gained ascendancy.

Over the millennia that followed, the abundance of nature's animal life slowly gave itself up to the burgeoning numbers of Man. An unknowable crisis gradually loomed, another of the many roadblocks on his path to survival.

Fortunately, as well as innocently, as Man had followed in pursuit of his favored quarry, he began to discern the patterns of their existence. In small ways Man learned to intervene to the benefit of those that he found desirable. As these interventions grew, Man found himself evermore in control, rather than just a follower of herds of ever increasing size.

The animals of smaller stature were the first to be domesticated, and as Man's skill in the new industry of animal husbandry grew, those of ever-increasing size also grudgingly fell under his control. As his power over the animal world grew, so also had grown the observations of powers that were clearly beyond his ability to know or predict.

At first, Man had invested in large animals difficult to control, powers that provided them with abilities far in excess of that which he possessed. He imagined that through a process of reverential ingestion, a portion of those powers might somehow come to belong to him.

Slowly, his awareness also increased, of those observed elements that were still far beyond his understanding, let alone his control. Powers both fickle, as well as fearsome, displayed themselves, often with disastrous results for mere Man.

Out of this fear grew a philosophy that posited only the sharing of Man's increasing bounty could decrease the likelihood of victimization at the whim of these entities that seemed so much larger than the life of Man's understanding. Also from out of these beginnings, spirits, essences, even gods, related to every element of the world and nature, in turn sprang forth, named for the powers that they seemed to influence.

The ways of the wild plant life, that Man had continued to gather, sometimes to a greater and at other times to a lesser extent, were even more difficult to understand than had been his experience in the animal world. Because of this as well as other vicissitudes, their domestication stretched out over a much longer period of time.

Again small perceptive interventions, selecting for desirable characteristics, brought forth from the bounty of nature new varieties more amenable to Man's manipulation and control. From out of this haphazard domestication, the art of horticulture and then agriculture slowly emerged.

Man's gods, that over the broad sweep of time had been brought forth, evolved in step with his own growing abilities to manage other forms of life to his benefit. At first the understanding of these gods had been largely influenced by the animal part of the world around him.

Then those forces of nature whose powers were of a level unmatched by any displayed by mere animals gained ascendancy in the fertile mind of Man. But, they grew to be many. And their propitiation began to absorb much of the time necessary for his own survival. Over the ages there began a consolidation of the various powers that seemed to have some similarity into ever fewer godheads that continues to this day.

That is the situation that we find ourselves in as we again take up the *parable* of Cain and Abel. The conflicting land-use needs of nomadic peoples—followers of wild, then gradually domesticated, herds—and members of more settled communities have created a friction between them that has had a long tradition. The large amounts of open land needed by semi-nomadic, shepherding societies have been periodically challenged by the needs of settled largely agricultural entities, for the exclusive use of the lands immediately surrounding the semi-permanent habitations afforded by this newer way of life.

In the beginning, it was not difficult to erase these small impediments to the free movement of large aggregations of precious, but not easily controlled, livestock. Then, for their collective protection and security, these settled peoples began the seemingly necessary banding together into ever-larger agglomerations. They continued to increase in size, until, in the course of time, these more substantial *thorns* grew more difficult to remove.

Many pitched battles were fought over ground that each side felt necessary for their survival. But ever so slowly, the tide began to shift in the favor of the endlessly growing settled peoples.

Warrior classes, emerging from them, began to drive the nomads from the disputed prime grazing lands and confine them to the less desirable hill country. This scenario has played out many times in the course of history, the latest example of which is the westward migration from the original thirteen colonies that eventually became the United States. First the settled peoples of the east drove the semi-nomadic Indian tribal societies before them in their westward movement, and then, the cattlemen among these migrants fought the *tillers of the soil* who had, in turn, challenged them for the use of the land.

Eventually, by a time somewhat before Abraham, a de-Marché had settled over this dispute wherein, when shepherding nomads wished to approach villages and towns (for purposes of necessary trade), according to Bible sources, they would send, ahead of that approach, an *ambassador* to assure of their peaceful intent.

The nomadic, shepherding people who appropriated this Genesis account of their beginnings must have felt it a sweet revenge that *their* God had preferred Abel's offering over their triumphant enemy's presentation as personified by the *evil* Cain.

It must have been an additional comfort to the inheritors of this morality tale as they viewed the remains of once viable *settled* communities that had succumbed simply because the land that *they had killed for* had refused to support them any longer.

The punishment that was the burden carried by Cain through the rest of his life, his inability to "till the soil" and his "mark," could also have had a parabolic inference.

The inability to "till the soil" could be seen as an explanation for the deserts where and when they appeared in the lands of the world. Or it may have been seen as a consequence of the unnatural use of the land, as in irrigation, through which a buildup of salts in the soil ended in the collapse of its ability to produce plant life of any kind.

Empty villages and towns were a stark reminder of the power of this process wherein a corresponding collapse of the communities dependant on that production was occasioned.

Alternatively, it could have been used to explain the rising importance of *traders* and *craftsmen* who plied their skills, first in the villages, then towns, and as cities came into existence, whole sections appear to have been reserved for these *specialists* who had *lost* their ability and/or desire to "till the soil."

The "mark" has a long cultural history of its use to set aside or identify one who has killed (murdered) another. The slow expansion of this meaning has come to include any person or group who can be identified by some unusual physical appearance or behavior. This *mark* was thought to identify those of lesser value, leading to a partial or total exclusion from the benefits of the community they resided in or were passing through. It carried a pejorative connotation indicated by special names like stranger, foreigner, and similar designations used to lower the status of the person it was applied to.

These are only some of the real-world cultural practices that the *parable* story of Cain and Abel might have been meant to depict as a way to help guide the casual *wonderer* to a better understanding of how they came to be.

If there's a *moral* to be gleaned from this *scientific* rendition of the Cain and Abel story, in short, it might be that envy in any form is the destroyer of cooperative enterprise.

So, the larger meaning of the parable story of Cain and Abel might be the friction generated between settled people and nomadic people, as ever-larger populations of each disputed with one another over land usage. Many of the wars of early history and in a more complicated sense many even today are, at their root, disputes over territory, or property.

Nearly all the wars in history may be categorized as one of two kinds. Nomadic assaults upon settled communities for the treasures manufactured and stored within them, and wars between settled societies as they attempted to present a larger, more dangerous front against those nomadic assaults, as well as the acquisition of additional treasure from those less able to defend themselves.

So, what lesson, if any, should we take from this “parable”? That we should treat the “stranger in our midst” as ourselves? Because anthropologically, we are still perched on that sharp edge of extinction? And theologically, we must learn the cooperation necessary to launch us into a little understood sense of the eternal?

The following is a story wherein I have attempted to fill in a context framing the conflict between a settled and a nomadic society as they come into conflict over land use. This fictionalized account would have to be seen as a parable in itself, as it of necessity has to be an abbreviated account of what any real-life encounter, or series of them, must have involved.

The tragedy of the history of all first contact seems to be that it is almost always violent.

Whither Goest Thou?

*What profit has a man from all his labor
in which he toils under the sun?
One generation passes away, and another generation comes;
But the earth abides forever.*

—Eccles. 1:3

Return, return, that we may look upon you!

*What would you see— As it were,
The dance of two camps?*

—Song of Sol. 6:13

*If you don't know, O fairest among women,
Follow in the footsteps of the flock,
and feed your little goats
Beside the shepherds' tents.*

—Song of Sol. 1:8

It had been a dull day, among many long, dull days. Keinalone (Kane-alone) had never felt really suited to this kind of work. She had been snatched away from her mother

who had been patiently trying to show her the intricacies of women's ways. She had also not learned these easily, and her father had always wanted another boy to add to his benefit.

She had finally been made to take the place of that greater undelivered treasure by tending the family flock of sheep and goats. The isolation from the concerns and affairs of the family weighed more heavily upon her as time slipped ever so slowly by.

Now, on the few occasions that she was with them, she felt more and more the stranger in their midst as they talked of the concerns that were close to them, that she could scarcely relate to any longer.

Was this to be her fate? she had asked of the wind that blew, the only sound to accompany her lonely spirit, so much of the time. Never to quite replace the one that she should have been, and never to be the woman that she might have been? Even her mother seemed more distant from her now.

Keinalone arose slowly from her morose contemplation to find the flock had begun to stray. She again repeated that simple task that required so many repetitions to keep such simple-minded creatures together and secure. The days had a certain sameness with only an occasional lion or wolf to scare off with bold noisy displays of bravado and an occasional well-placed stone from the sling that she had been, ever so reluctantly, taught to wield.

But the nights were different. One never quite knew what was out there until a sound of quiet movement or low growl brought one to a sudden frightened alertness.

That was when loud screaming challenges, accompanied by the *thump, thump, thumping* of her large staff, seemed an urgently required response. Occasionally these were interspersed by the sound that her staff made in the night air as she whirled it around and around. All these seemed to help her believe that she would make it through one more night without hurt to her or the flock.

Sometimes her staff would connect with a body in a glancing sort of way. A louder than usual bleating would often tell her that one of her charges wasn't bunched as tightly as it ought to have been, but sometimes it would be something else. A slow reduction in the nervous bleating would tell of the hunter who was no longer there.

It was only then that she could enjoy the huge expanse of the starry sky that only faintly lighted a moonless night. Its everlasting sameness always had a calming effect on her slowly settling nerves. As she would gaze up into the stunning vastness, she felt as if her body was slowly floating ever upward as if yearning to join with this heavenly scenery. A shiver of pure joy would sometimes course through her being, as that strange kind of oneness seemed on the verge of consummation. The feeling was something that she was little prepared to understand, but it was the only time that she didn't feel that everlasting loneliness. It was only then that she could feel a closeness to the God that her family only seemed to worship with ritual sacrifice.

The family had traveled over a long hard day that now was almost over. They just managed to keep up with the half-wild bison herd that they could only nominally make a claim to ownership of. Abelon's (Abe-elon) father had told him that the learning of this *herding* of such dangerous animals would make a man of him by the time they had come to their winter quarters, which he estimated was now less than two days away. It had been a long difficult summer, but Abelon had grown from it, as elder eyes of respect seemed to confirm.

He was cheered by knowledge that it was almost over. The men around him had managed to steer the herd from the sides and rear, but they had known better than to ever get in front of the animals when those beasts were in such an urgently demonstrated near-panic of movement. He knew that it would be some time after the herd bedded down for the night that the women would be able to catch up, as they carried all the provisions and equipment.

He remembered, with only a small unease of mind, that somewhere within that time of movement left to them, there was a place of the “settled people” that they would have to pass by, before it would be over. Some of the elders of his tribe had spoken of a time, before these settled ones had been there, and they were certain that each time that the herd had passed by, the settlement had grown. These *people* had known the magic of finding water underground and how to bring it to the surface. In years of dryness they’d had the only known supply in that part of the herd’s range. The animals could smell it from a great distance and had made it a stopping point on their way instead of waiting until they had reached the river that flowed through their wintering valley.

There had been trouble in those years until the wise from both sides had settled upon an uneasy standoff that had largely ended the injury and deaths that had been all too common before.

He would be glad to see his mother and sisters, although he tried to make little of it in front of them. He would be glad to see the others too, but his father had told him when he had caught him looking that it would be some time before he could take one for himself. There would be much to learn and do before that could happen.

The strong younger women were the first of the following train to come into the torch-lit circle of waiting men. They carried some of the large storage skins of their water supply, rather easily it seemed, over one shoulder.

The long thin serving end would be draped over the other with a spot near the end pinched off by their long supple fingers, ready to give a direct draught or a quick refill of the small skins that the men carried, most of which were now empty.

There was a small but noticeable jostling among them as each sought to align herself with one whom she had an eye for, as they paraded down the line of men. The long hair, looking as though it were made of the sun itself, parted to fall over each shoulder, was such a usual sight it almost passed without notice, except when it was tossed in a certain way.

It was forbidden for females to make eye contact with those whom they served, but many accidents seemed to happen and a quick look away revealed more than a bold stare might. A light touch of a hand to a wrist, to steady the delivery, seemed to go mostly unnoticed by those who might find objection. But a change in the steady rise and fall of young breasts under the exertion of the carry did not go unnoticed by the grateful ones so served.

As the quiet of night settled down upon all, Abelon found a spot with an opening in the overhead canopy. The seemingly endless minutia of the trail had kept his eyes locked on all the meanderings of the herd, but now he could just let the view draw him into its vastness. There were myriad points of sparkle, some brighter, some less so, and then some that just stared without so much as a blink. And these, you could never tell where they would be, sometimes here, sometimes there, then sometimes you could look everywhere and you wouldn’t find even one.

The old ones had many times spoken of their God who had created all this and more, so much more. It made him feel good to be a part of such an undertaking, although sometimes it did make him feel rather small, he thought, as he drifted off into a well-deserved rest.

He dreamed of the early rising that would take him well ahead of the herd, as he looked for the settlement and the water just over a low hill from it. It would be his to see if it was open to their temporary possession, and to warn those who might be there of the approach of the determined herd headed their way.

Keinalone had awakened early, for this was the day of the flock's watering. An early arrival at the well and storage cavity was the best guarantee of unchallenged access, she knew by past experience. She would be well on her way back before meeting up with any of the others. Giving them a wide berth usually kept her from having to listen to remarks about her *unusual* occupation.

She walked among the flock at the water's edge, moving the less timid away to make room for the others. Keinalone looked up in anticipated enjoyment at the predawn display. She had always liked to see the first bright edge as it appeared to rise up out of the land, but this time it would be something else that she saw.

Back-lighted by the dawn display, a figure in silhouette looked down upon her from a low elevation an easy distance away. It looked to be man-sized and powerfully built. There was no movement for some time and he was just too far away to make out features, but he was clearly no one she had ever seen before. There was the look of a stranger about him for reasons of perception that had somehow given him that mark.

Abelon had been awakened by some sense, while everything was still in dark shadow. He moved out quickly, knowing that the herd would be stirring and moving out all too soon.

He had guessed that he might be close to his objective as the sun revealed the first of its predawn light. He wondered, as he continued that loping gait that covered so much ground, if over that next hill might be the vaguely familiar place that he sought.

He had halted at its crest, chest heaving mightily trying to catch the breath that he had lost on the long run. The sun behind him was about to rise, showing off everything down the slight decline to good effect. There was a small herd, or flock as some would call it, bunched tightly around what looked like water. Someone moved among them of smallish stature, or was it distance that ruled the size that he saw? It did not seem to have the shape of a man, but more aquiline, like a large boy just before he had come into his manhood, but somehow different than that. He knew that only boys and men herded animals, but his mind inquired of his eyes, female? He stood for a long time trying to make out what his eyes should be well able to tell him from this distance.

Now the requirements of diplomacy took over as he ambled easily down the slope of the rise at an oblique angle to the figure, moving ever so slowly forward while trying to show in every way that his approach meant that no harm was intended. He called out, in a clear tenor voice, words as he went, some of which he hoped might be understood, like friend and peace.

Keinalone now saw movement and heard sounds as the stranger made a slow careful approach. He might be unknown, but his movement and some of his sounds were vaguely familiar. All who approached water did so as if asking to share that which the one

approached might be the possessor of. Hospitality rarely denied that request if the display was open and respectfully convincing enough.

Now she saw his difference, his hair was as if the sun shone upon it always. He seemed taller than the men of her knowledge, with a certain largeness of his upper body. There was a look about him that was, attractive? But her senses quickly went on full alert in a manner that seemed to instantly stop his advance. She had remembered the voice of her father as he had sternly warned her often, about *strangers*.

Abelon could see more clearly now. What he had only guessed to be female was now confirmed—but somehow, different. Hair, darker than he had ever seen before, hung in loose curls the like of which he had only seen once. The fur wrapped around her body, he guessed, was partly meant to lend to her a larger look than what was underneath. Her legs, although having a certain sturdiness to them were different in some subtle way. Her face was more roundish and had a kind of beauty to it that made him stare, too long. He saw the look suddenly change. He read an alarm in her eyes that stopped him instantly. He said his words several times as he, ever so slowly, sat down. It was only then that he noticed that she was armed with a shepherd's sling. The sight had a kind of incongruity to it. A female with what only a man should be allowed. He wondered how well versed she might be in its use.

Keinalone saw him purposefully reduce his size before her. Had he seen her alarm? Had that shown him a weakness? He had looked at her strength, the sling that hung at her waist. What should she do? Nothing in her past had prepared her for this kind of encounter. What did he want? Was it just water? Why did *stranger* have a connotation so unsettling?

The water skin at his side was not empty, yet he came as if asking to share. Should she kneel in response to his lowered posture, as her mother had always commanded her to do when serving the mature men in her family? Would he mistake that for something that was surely not meant under these conditions?

She took a careful step back and slowly lowered to a kneeling position at the same time folding her arms across her breasts as she held his look locked into her audacious stare. One hand was near the sling at her side. The very thought of what good it might do at this close range brought an involuntary upward curl to her lips. Her trusty staff was not close enough to be useful. He smiled in a return of this accidental, near-universal sign of approval. He was handsome, even if it was in a strange-looking way!

Abelon saw the look of puzzlement as she stood before him, looking down from a suddenly superior position. He guessed that she felt uncomfortable, having been forced to do so by his quick attempt to reduce any alarm that his movement toward her might have caused. He watched as she slowly stepped back and kneeled in apparent response. Even with her arms folded across her breasts in almost a sign of challenge, had she tried to subdue the gesture by a slight smile? He smiled broadly in return. He watched suddenly enraptured as her smaller one was replaced by a much larger smile. He wondered if she knew what a thing of beauty that she had just bestowed upon him. His thoughts seemed to challenge his better judgment.

She had *not* meant to do that! It had slipped out unbidden, faster than she could think! He was looking at her now in a way that no one had ever looked at her before. She could feel her face flush. Her body suddenly felt warm all over.

Keinalone fought to gather her senses. He was after all a *stranger!* And she still didn't know! "What do you want of me?" she asked, knowing as she spoke that he wouldn't understand.

Abelon saw her face redden. He had seen this before in one of the girls who had hastened to be the one to serve him. Could it possibly have a similar meaning now? Had she noticed how much he had enjoyed looking at her? He heard her strange words. Her voice sounded so beautiful, as if she was reciting poetry. She seemed to be asking about something, but what?

He suddenly remembered what he'd been sent out to do. Where to begin? Where to begin? "Water!" He spoke his single word hoping that emphasis alone could force its meaning over the gap. He only succeeded in making her smile dissolve into a look of incomprehension. He pointed at the place where her flock still drank and repeated, "Water!"

Does he understand what I said after all? Keinalone wondered. *He answered with a strange word and repeated it as he pointed at the sheep,* her thought continued. *Does he want one of them? Does he see that I am wrapped in one of their skins?* She fingered the edge of her fleece where it loosened as it descended from her neck and crossed over her breast, as she felt a smile of understanding begin to emerge. As suddenly, his face fell and he slumped back as his arms dropped down. She hadn't understood his gesture after all. "What do you want?" she almost screamed in exasperation as her whole body sagged in belated disappointment.

He was crestfallen, what had the movement of her fingers meant? Obviously she had not understood, but just as quickly he saw her sadness and heard her cry of exasperation. It was the first time that her steady gaze at him had broken as she looked down. They had understood only one thing; that neither had understood the other. His arms had dropped down by his sides. His hand brushed something that spoke to his mind, *Water*. It had touched his small water skin.

His strange word exploded upon her ears. She looked up startled. He was waving something in his hand as he shouted his word again. It was his water skin. His fingers seemed to tremble a little as he poured a little of the precious fluid out over them and spoke very clearly his word again. She stood as she reached for her own supply and poured out a little over her fingers in reply as she said, "Water!" He shouted his word again as he also arose. Now he seemed delighted, again repeating his word, now more slowly, carefully. She tried very hard to enunciate this strange word. The sounds were hard to put together, but she finally got out something like what he had spoken so easily. His delight seemed to know no bounds. He finally settled down enough to hear her as she spoke his word again and then she said very deliberately "water," and then again, "wah-ter."

Abelon was fascinated, watching as her mouth shaped the strange word. Her lips exaggerated the motions as he tried to follow her. She beamed as she said her strange word again and then with some difficulty his, "water." She said her word again, and now with less difficulty, his word. He said his word and then tried for hers again, but stumbled on the attempt. She led him through the sounds. Again, he was entranced by the fullness and suppleness of her pouting lips as she exaggerated the motions that went with the sounds. Her eyes sparkled as he followed her through; then her face broke into an open-

mouthed grin as he finished. He felt a flush start as he drank in all that was before him. *Like a dark-haired goddess!* The tantalizing thought stirred every part of his being.

He reached out tentatively with both hands to her. He looked deeply into the dark pools of her eyes. He saw her hesitate and draw back a little. Her smile started to dissipate as she looked down away from his eyes, but then returned as she reached hesitantly toward him. Her touch was soft but stimulating. He closed his hands over hers. Her eyes widened as again her face flushed pinkly. She moved to withdraw her hands, but his grasp was soft but firm. He didn't want to let go. They stood this way for a long moment, and then she turned suddenly breaking his grasp, and led him to the water.

He followed closely and had the almost overwhelming urge to reach for her again, but something stopped him.

Keinalone saw his expression soften even further as his face reddened. *He must be able to see the effect that he's having on me!* she thought as her blush deepened. She saw a slight change in the set of his body. He was reaching out his hands toward her. *Please, don't let him touch me.* She silently pleaded for control from she knew not quite where as she drew back. His look was too intent, she looked down and away, but her hands moved as if beyond her control. The touching confirmed the strength that she could see and then his hands enveloped hers firmly but somehow tenderly. She felt her eyes widen from the effect. She couldn't seem to draw back, she didn't want to draw back, and a long moment passed. A sudden imbalance parted them and she quickly turned toward the water that had been their first communication.

She pointed to her water skin and then extended her arm toward his as her sheep drew back from them. She hoped that it looked only like a utilitarian offer. *If he even touches me*—her thought trailed off, as with a shiver, she saw his hand begin to move.

Abelon reached for his water skin and raised it over her open hand. *Don't you even dare!* a voice like that of his father commanded his yearning spirit. It dropped through the short void as he quickly withdrew his arm. He saw her turn quickly from him and begin the filling.

How could I possibly begin to tell her, that's not all I want of her? He silently agonized as he tried to force his mind back to his mission. Now she turned back, offering its fullness to him. She would not look into his eyes, staring instead at the hand that would receive her gift. They had almost touched again as she released her grasp and it plopped into his, spilling a little into his cupped hand.

Then from over her shoulder he saw her flock. He pointed at it as the urgent need to communicate again took command of his being. Seemingly surprised, she looked, and then leaped up moving quickly among them.

It's good that he saw that they had begun to stray, she silently chided herself. *I certainly wasn't looking after what I ought to be doing!* She looked over at him as she quickly brought her flock back together. His expression had changed.

He seemed concerned about something again, somehow different than before. Was it more than the flock that he'd tried to direct her attention to? He had stood up to go with her, but she had moved too fast! He had squatted back down on his haunches again as she approached. Keinalone knelt quietly before him, again looking him full in the face. *It was good for me,* she thought. *The work has brought me back to myself.*

Again he pointed at the flock. A quick look in response seemed to confirm that straying wasn't his concern, probably hadn't been the first time either. He stood up over

her as he brought his arms up in a sweeping gesture, his hands meeting in an arc over his head. “Big?” she mused vocally. “Tall?” She looked up at him. She felt a slight smile of encouragement again moving across her lips. He brought his arms together in front of his body and then out in jerky movements toward her flock, until they were spread out at arm’s length. “Big?” she asked again. “Bigger?” she spoke the larger word. “Even bigger?” she asked at the last of his movements. *Bigger than my flock?* she mused. *Taller than my flock?*

“The seasonal animals?” she shouted. “Where?” Her arms did their own spreading inquiry. His hands again slowly lowered to his sides and gave her a look of incomprehension. “There?” she asked pointing toward the hills from where he had come. He made another strange word as he pointed to where she had. He dropped down and quickly drew an arc in the dirt with a circle in front of it. “Wah-ter!” The familiar word came slowly out as he tapped the circle lightly with his finger. He drew many lines coming through the arc converging on the circle. Many stories suddenly flooded her mind of other times when their water source had been occupied by her people and many large animals had come down upon them.

She *had* understood. Pointing first at him, then at herself, while taking several steps away from him and toward her settlement had said it all. Should she leave? Her strange words had meant nothing, but she had crudely signed with her very movement that she knew what he had needed to communicate.

The renewed yearning, she was sure, that shone in his eyes, said no, but his pointing arm had said yes. Now he was reaching again for her. His hands stretched out pleadingly. She touched them lightly, wanting to hang on but knowing that she must not. Her eyes searched into his as his seemed to look deeply into hers for another long moment.

A shouted call from a low hill somewhat south of them broke the spell. She instantly recognized the voice. His look followed hers as their hands fell away.

She suddenly felt as if she had lived an eternity, but the sun had only climbed a short distance up into the early morning sky. The standing figure hadn’t moved, but the call had been enough. It had come from one of the herders from the settlement. Her flock had watered and she must make room for another.

Her mind was troubled as she moved her hard-driven flock rapidly away from the water, and him. She couldn’t bring herself to look back at first, and then only quickly as the distance that separated them grew. He was moving toward the figure on the hill now in a manner similar to the way that he had first approached her. How long had they been watched before the call had been thrust between them, and why, just as they had touched hands again. Now he was hurrying toward the other herder. Would he try to tell him what he’d signed to her? *Good luck with that one!* she thought as a sardonic smile crept up one side of her face.

Keinalone remembered again how sternly that her father had warned her about not letting any man approach her, especially a stranger. It had been easy to keep her distance from the low-status men from the settlement for they were aware of the penalty of approaching without invitation, but he had been different. She had never been near one like him.

But he is a stranger, and I would be treated like the others who had been accused of welcoming them.

She remembered the stories about the young women who had disappeared when out of sight of the settlement. Now she wondered. *Had they met someone like him?*

Why had her father insisted on making her into what she was now. She had never felt anything even like simple kindness from him, like she'd seen him show toward her brothers. Had he been trying to cause her to *disappear* also?

"No, that isn't likely," she told herself reproachfully. "He has always prized his flock highly." Would anything of this get back to him? She was sure that she would only know that when they brought the flock in for the seasonal tally.

For the first time in her life a twinge of guilt entered into her thoughts. "Why?" she asked herself, again aloud. "Nothing happened that the world shouldn't have seen!" But she knew her thoughts, and now she remembered again, how she had felt, a little like looking up at the stars, but for the first time ever, toward a man.

Abelon had moved quickly to retrieve the weapons that he had dropped when he had first seen her. It had happened over such a short time, and now, it was over. He couldn't rely only upon her seeming knowledge to alert the settlement people of the danger to their flocks. Her direction wasn't even toward where he imagined the settlement to be, based upon the little he'd seen and what he'd been told.

His concern must now be for this new shepherd coming to water. He had to be warned or he might not be able to get out before the herd stampeded down upon him and his flock. *I probably will never even see her again*, he told himself as he hurried to cross paths with the new one.

It had not gone well. He had not been able to even start to communicate the danger as he had with her. Even crudely reciting her word had only brought a scowl of disdain and a wave away from the other's hand. *How wonderful it had been with her*. His thoughts reached out to her again as his eyes caught her rapidly receding form just as it disappeared from view.

The meeting with the other shepherd had seemed like a contest in belligerency by comparison. It had been as contentious as hers had been congenial.

No! he thought. *Much more than that! It had been, amazing!*

The glare of that other one had been malevolent throughout the now-aborted approach. *It's as if he thinks that he's caught me trying to steal one of his animals! Or was it more than that?* he thought as he backed warily away. *What am I not seeing?* he wordlessly wondered. *She certainly seemed anxious to run away from that one, and the look she directed toward him when his voice had startled her.*

Leaving his thoughts behind, he now quickly headed up the hill where he knew his herd would be, hoping to somehow turn it a little, maybe enough to give the stubborn one time to escape with his hide if not with his herd, or flock, as some would call it. "What an ass!" he shouted to the nearing tree line.

But the big herd had been insistent. It was clear that they had smelled water. It was funny how they could do that. They crashed down upon everything at the watering place. Only a few of the other flock had been able to scramble over the hill that separated them from the settlement. He had hoped for the best, but he couldn't see how that stupid shepherd could have survived such an onslaught. He smiled, as he again pictured her, scrambling away to safety, well ahead of any danger.

He felt an overwhelming gladness well up that this had not happened when he had been with her. Suddenly she was in his mind again, breaking his concentration altogether.

He had been called to task by the tribal elders for a job that they thought he had not done well. But his father reminded them that the difficulty of the language problem had always been there. Then added, "What is done is done, and talk won't change anything!"

His real worry, his father had told them, was that the animals that managed to straggle back would be enough to warn of the "catastrophe" that had occurred.

Abelon had not told them about her. Again, she was there in his mind! Her smile, her bold stare, the softness of her touch. Only the sudden look of wonderment from his father brought him back to himself. This was a secret that he well knew he dared not share, even if only by purely accidental revelation.

He had wondered if posting him, among others, as lookouts to warn of any movement coming their way as the herd was watered, was meant to show renewed confidence in him, or was it a punishment hidden behind an order that he couldn't refuse. It had given him another chance to look into where she might have gone. By some miracle none of the other settled people had shown themselves. And she did belong to one of them, he reminded himself.

Again, he wondered about her, what she might be doing, and in what way this relatively minor catastrophe would affect her life, her freedom of movement, and most of all, her feelings toward him and his kind. She had looked with some alarm when that shepherd's voice had been heard, but that might have been just surprise, unless—*of course, she was close to me, a stranger*, he reasoned.

Oh, she was wary of me at first, but then, something happened. We both got caught up in something, something wonderful. A hint of a smile curled the edges of his mouth; the pleasure of that moment lived again.

The water supply had been exhausted by the end of the first day, and the herd had been easy to move onward. He had been part of a rearguard that trailed behind the others, especially the baggage train and the women, all the way into their winter encampment. It had been a lonely vigil, but thankfully uneventful.

It had appeared from the very outset of their entrance into winter quarters that there would probably be no retaliation exacted upon them for the water-source accident.

"Maybe," one of the tribal council members had reasoned, "cooler heads had prevailed in their council, or whatever they called their governing body. While they might have far less experience with big animals, I'm sure that even they have found how difficult it is to turn a thirsty herd or flock away from water once they have smelled it!"

Abelon had been privileged to sit at the feet of his father, who had been appointed to the council for a season now. This had been granted so Abelon could observe the ways of those who protected and guided the lives of his tribe, his father had explained. He had looked forward to when his father spoke before that body. Now, he would hear once again, as his father rose to speak.

"Even though we have not seen them on our trail here, nor have they been seen to prowl around close to our encampment, this doesn't necessarily mean that they have let this thing go. They never have in the past and they probably won't this time. I don't trust those settled peoples."

The strong feeling etched into his father's voice gave Abelon a sense of foreboding as the speech continued.

"Therefore, I recommend that we stay alert. We should maintain a guard around our perimeter at all times. I know, I know!" he quickly added, in response to a stirring that his

words had caused, "We all have things to do to prepare for spring, but I feel that it is necessary! As for me, this will be done for my household, and I hope that others who feel as I do will join me in seeing that this is done for theirs also."

The upshot of his father's words was that he and others of the younger men took turns patrolling, hunting for game and the telltale signs of any disturbance of the ground nearby.

The herd slowly ranged through their winter grasslands, hardly ever more than a day's journey from the encampment. By spring they would be back about where they had started, except one ridge over in this land of narrow valleys separated by the many even narrower ridges. The smaller wildlife, temporarily evicted from their habitat by the meandering herd made easier targets for the inexperienced young hunters as they made their rounds looking for the still-absent signs of danger.

Slowly a kind of contest began to form with the return of each patrol, beyond the purpose of replenishing the tribe's larder. Bragging rights were successively challenged as the criteria was developed for the title of best hunter. Soon there was many an anxious volunteer awaiting his turn to participate in this exciting sideline to the more serious business of patrolling.

His father worried sometimes that too much emphasis was being placed on the fun side of a serious business, as he was wont to call it in his moments of exhortation. Abelon had made up his mind not to cause his father any further anxiety by not participating as eagerly as others in the trophies of the hunt, but to develop his skill as a tracker.

Then it happened! Where four had left, only one came back. Nearly hysterical in his screams of fright and anguish, his story was told between the many lapses of coherency, while he forced himself to relate what he could barely stand to relive. He had survived he felt, solely by his inability to keep up with the others as, in their excitement, they had chased down a wounded animal. They had been assassinated in mid-stride by three strangers who had stepped from ambush behind the three. All he could think of was to dive into trail-side underbrush, hoping that they hadn't seen him, and lay there quivering in cowardly fright, instead of trying to avenge this dastardly deed. They had only vaguely resembled those who'd been earlier described to him.

The families of the assassinated ones gathered together, screaming their grief amid shouts of vengeance and demands for retaliation. His father quickly organized two groups of the men who couldn't be dissuaded from some kind of retaliation. One, armed to the teeth, he sent to bring back the bodies, and the other he led speedily in a direction that he judged would cut off any retreat to the settlement, which he was sure they had come from. It was to no avail, the only tracks that were found were three, all giving the appearance of moving quickly, obviously, made by those who had been beating a very hasty retreat.

The elders had thought to convene the council to determine the wisest course of action to follow. "We must be sure," the elder leader cautioned in the stentorian tones of old wisdom, "of who our enemy is before we seek vengeance!" but his voice was drowned out in the bustle of angry preparation.

"There's a time for words and a time for action!" his father had told Abelon. "And right now the people aren't ready to settle for just words and promises. But the actions must be by mature experienced men, not boys! We've just seen what happens when we send out boys to do a man's work."

Abelon had seen it coming, and tried to head off his father's next words that would assign him to guard his family in his father's absence.

"Father, I have tried not to be like the others. I have concentrated on looking for sign and have not been as distracted by the *joys of the hunt* as the other *boys*. And no one knows the lay of the land close to the settlement as well as I do. Please, let me use those skills now in something besides just practice!"

He felt he had gained a qualified success. His father had subsided without ordering any action at all for him. He had just given a few grunts of understanding that usually took the place of "Let me think about it."

Of course he couldn't tell his father about his new concern, now or ever. It had to remain his alone. The angry preparations all around him to avenge those who had been his friends also left him with mixed emotions. Part anger, which he could show, in agreement with the anger around him, part anxiety for her, which must be kept secret, from even his father's very observant eyes.

How could he tell anyone that he had a concern for one of the settled people? It would isolate him from his own. He knew that she was not at all like others of her kind, but his people would not want to hear that an exception ought to be made based on what only he knew. And of course, they would think that he had only the most base of motives for his concern.

He must keep out in the lead of whatever his people would do. It would be his only opportunity to get out ahead of them to look for her. He had to tell her of the danger that she was in, if his people found her alone, as when he had first seen her.

Her face was suddenly before him with the look that she had bestowed upon him, just before she was startled out of it by that call. He shook his head. He could not afford the luxury of those kinds of thoughts. Besides, she had not looked at him like that when he had first looked upon her. He had just assumed the maleness of her position when he had first seen her and his people might make the same mistake, and then it would be too late.

He felt that he had made a good case to his father, so now was the time to stay out in front in all the preparations. He hoped that would erase any thought of excluding him from where he knew that he had to be if he was to have any chance to warn her. But what if she didn't feel the same toward him now, as she had seemed to show before? Well that didn't change the danger that he could see that she was in, and she needed to be told.

It had worked. His father had announced that his son, Abelon, would go with the men as a scout. But now, he would not let Abelon out of his sight. They had moved out, but the farther they went, the more his father talked to those around him about his *plan*. It would take longer, but it would be less dangerous for all involved.

"They will be looking for what we are about to do, and they will be ready for us," he had warned sternly.

Some had good-naturedly chided him about having second thoughts. Some had said, "The farther we go, the more you sound like the old men of the council."

"They have a wisdom that we here would do well to respect," his father had scolded. "My fear," he continued, "is that if we persist in what we do now, many of us will not return, and another kind of victory will be theirs."

His plan, he explained, would require learning how to better control the herd before the spring move north. He meant to stampede the herd right through their settlement at a time when they had lost their nervousness about reprisal. "And then," he concluded, "a

much larger victory would be ours! And we wouldn't have to worry about them for a long time, if ever again!"

They had listened to his father, but Abelon could tell that their mind had been set. To turn them now would be as difficult as it would when the herd smelled water. He had hoped that his father could persuade them, but now he could see that it was not to be.

He needed to convince his father to let him scout without holding on to him.

What do we need most? he silently mused, practicing the sounds of respect that his father commanded from all others. *We need secrecy most of all. We need to not let them know that we're coming until we get there.*

"Father," he said as soon as he found him, "what we need more than anything else is to know if anyone has seen us, moving as we are in such a large group."

"Yes, that has bothered me too! But what's to be done? It would be dangerous to be out there alone if they travel in packs of three or four."

"The last time that I was out," Abelon answered trying to put on a casual air that he did not feel, "I had shared the hospitality of a campfire with a few of their shepherds. I had gotten along with one or two who didn't seem to hold any great loyalty to those who lead their people. If I were to go alone to see them, I might be able to find out what they know and what they don't know about us and where we are."

"Just be very careful" was all his father had said. He seemed to carry the frown of worry all the time now.

Abelon had done it! He hurried to leave before any minds might be changed.

Abelon looked for most of the day. He had seen only one of them over next to the hills where the herd had come down, but this one had no familiar air at all to him, and Abelon had not revealed himself. Now he sat on his haunches, again looking over the narrow valley about where he had seen her, long before he had moved close enough for her to see him. He remembered that she had come on a path from the north, and in from the far side of the valley. He would try to find and follow it, he determined as he broke into that peculiar kind of gait that covered so much ground.

He hadn't meant to do it, but there he was, on the far side of a small camp before he knew it was there. He had been following the path from behind the clumps of trees along its side. He had just come through a very dense one. The ground had dropped away faster than he could see it go.

He had lost his footing and slid down a very steep embankment and out into the open without finding a sturdy enough branch to arrest his fall. He hoped that the long late shadows of sundown would be enough to hide within.

He saw a figure on the far side suddenly leap up. He heard a scream of challenge, which seemed too high and piercing. Now he saw and heard the whirring of a loaded sling. It could be deadly at this range. He made all his movements slow and careful as he laid down his weapons and palms up moved slowly from them, but not too far in case he had been mistaken.

The loneliness had been much harder to bear than ever before, since the one of the golden hair had gone away. Keinalone found herself distracted by it sometimes to the point of forgetting where she was. This had never happened to her until him.

A background of additional anxiety had come to dwell with her since she had heard of the water-hole happening. Prowlers other than animal, she had suspected, had kept her awake well into nights when sleep should have been possible, but they had eventually

subsided. That the one who could have betrayed her had himself been dispatched seemed of little consolation. Very little had been said at the fall counting, but the newly stirred upwelling of hatred for those *others* along with the renewed growling about watching out for *strangers* had increased the despair in her that she would ever be able to be closer to *him* than her secret thoughts.

Before, the loneliness had been preferable to the usual taunts when others were around, but now even her loneliness taunted her.

The clumsy entrance had taken a short while to register through the veil of disconsolation that sometimes distracted her, sometimes even threatened to engulf her. Her hurried shout of challenge, she felt, had sounded more like a scream of fright. Her breasts heaved as she sucked in air in readiness for the challenge ahead. Who or what she might have to face, according to the stories of what those *herding people* might be willing to do since her people's time of vengeance, caused that which lay deep within her to pound in an uncommonly heavy throb. Her sling had come into her hand without thought, but she didn't know if she could steady herself enough to aim well, and at this distance she wouldn't get a second chance.

It was with small comfort that she watched the single figure slowly lay down something in a vaguely familiar manner and, turning palms up, slowly walk away. She had seen this only once before! The pounding within her quickened. It shook her whole body, but her arm never slowed the swing of her sling.

"Who are you and what do you want of me?" she shouted her challenge at the shadow within the other long shadows, but the pitch of her voice was still higher than she had hoped for.

Abelon had heard the strange words before, but now they carried the pitch of fright within them. Had he been so fortunate as to stumble onto his quarry so soon? He tried the strange word that he had learned.

"Wah-ter." Keinalone had heard it, but she couldn't believe it. It had hit her like a slap in the face. All the long lonely nights, she had rolled that particular way of saying it over and over in her memory for the slight solace that it had provided. Was this just another of those dreams that she'd had and awakened from, the worse for having had it?

Timorously, and tremulous of voice she offered that strange word that she had learned, it seemed like such a short time ago. She could barely get enough breath to pronounce it. It had ended in an up-tone like a prayerful plea that expected no answer.

"Water." Abelon heard the same trilling way that it had been pronounced before. It had to be! He started unthinkingly toward her, for now he knew it was she. He watched her for any additional sign of fright or alarm, but her whole demeanor had changed. Gone was any alertness of posture. The sling had lost much of its swing and the pellet dropped harmlessly to the ground as she shuffled slowly forward in a seemingly trance-like state.

"Please, God," she moaned softly, as she started toward him, "if this is only another dream, don't let me wake from it, this time."

It was him of the yellow hair. Now she could tell as it glistened through the dappled shadows, but was he real? Tears began to course down her cheeks as renewing hope overcame unbelief.

Abelon saw the tears! He saw them flow more rapidly as the shakiness of her movement toward him increased. Now he rushed even more heedlessly toward her. He remembered how he had wanted to enclose her in an embrace the other time, but he had

dared not. This time it was right! This time it looked necessary or she would collapse at his feet.

As they came together, he easily swept her up. The time for that embrace was now! Their momentum started them spinning. He knew that she had lost all contact with the ground, but he didn't care. The faster he spun the tighter he clasped her to him. He could not have imagined a feeling this good. She seemed even smaller than he had remembered.

The spinning now made him dizzy and he was falling. Quickly he wrenched her body so that she would land on him. He lay there as the dizziness subsided. Then they stayed wrapped in each other's embrace even longer.

Now he wanted to see her face, but she clung too closely. Slowly with both hands he rotated her head so he could see her eyes, but they were tightly closed. It was as if she was trying not to wake up from a dream.

Her mouth was a pout of determination. He lowered his lips until they touched hers. It was a different kind of embrace, from which she slowly opened her eyes.

He's real! He's real! Keinalone's feelings swirled through her thoughts as her senses gave confirmation. Her eyes told her. Her lips gave assurance. Her body provided witness to his reality. She could die now and be forever happy. She slowly relaxed her grip on him. He would not disappear this time.

Suddenly something touched his heel. Startled, Abelon looked past her half-closed eyes. One of her flock had come to smell of his strangeness. It had broken the spell! He moved to sit up without wanting to alter her closeness, but now he felt embarrassment. He felt that he had violated her in some way, but her look did not immediately confirm the feeling. She looked into his eyes again and this time began a blush that turned crimson. She suddenly turned her eyes down away from his. Had she not wanted for him to read what was in them?

She moved away, but ever so little, and clung again to his hand. He remembered the look that she had given him the other time that they had looked into each other's eyes. Her face had flushed then a little, and she had looked away. He had affected her even then, now he was sure of it, and the assurance pleased him mightily.

The outpouring of such raw emotion suddenly felt somehow embarrassing. Something should follow that, but what? Keinalone hadn't held back anything from him. She had broken all protocol that might have enlightened her about *proper* behavior, in the sheer ecstasy of reunion.

What ought I to do now? What ought we do? she thought as she smoothed her wrap, picking a loose hair from the fringe.

What might he want of me? she wondered, *knowing all that he does now about my feelings? Should I care, as long as I can have him here with me?* The question lingered in her mind as she felt her face flush again. She squeezed his hand ever so lightly. She risked a quick peek. She saw his eyes rapidly shift down away from hers. He had been looking at her. She wondered if he was wondering what to do also.

They couldn't talk, having only one word in common. But they must find a way. They couldn't be together and continue, almost dumb, very long.

She glanced around trying not to move, but felt his body shift a little. *What would his word for my flock be?* she mused as her eye fell upon one of them.

It was good to just be this close to her, but Abelon knew that it could not go on for long. What might happen now? What ought to happen now? Was her deep blush and look

away from him caused by a sense of shame for such an open show of her feelings? Other girls of his tribe by their flirting had shown pretty openly how they felt about him, but no one had ever thrown themselves at him in such a desperate-looking surrender. What might she be expecting him to do after that? What might she be hoping for? He felt the light squeeze. Was she telling him that it would be—all right?

But it wouldn't be! That would be taking advantage. Her sudden glance up at him caused him to look away quickly. Now it was his turn to keep her from reading his thoughts.

Now she was pointing. One of those strange words came trilling out of her mouth, so much like singing. What was she pointing at? She glanced up and immediately was on her feet running to one of them. She spoke the word again. Was this her word for sheep? Abelon spoke his word and then tried hers. She repeated it again and he made a pretty good imitation of it this time. Her smile was as wide as he had remembered from before. She said his word and it came out so easily.

Again Keinalone pointed to a goat and said her word, then listened for his. She picked up a blade of grass and said her word and listened for his. Then a leaf, and then where a fire had been. Soon she was running from one thing to another and he had to run after her, looking to see her lips as she spoke her words.

He was amazed! His words came out of her mouth so easily. Some of hers, he noticed as they went, weren't as strange sounding as others.

What a turnabout! Abelon thought as he tried to keep up with her. *From clinging so desperately onto me, now she's managed to have me chasing after her! But who cares, she won't get away from me this time!*

And so, as the sun slipped slowly into the land of evening, teacher and student learned in a most urgently desirable way.

She gathered up kindling and said her word and listened for his. She struck her flint and he said fire as a flame leaped out of some fine fiber. The words that she used as she busied herself before the fire, while listening for his, made him realize that soon they would talk, that soon they would understand each other. They would! They must!

She bent over the fire to stir a small pot, using her words, listening for his. She didn't squat modestly like the women of his tribe as they busied themselves in woman's work. *She has been by herself so long, he thought, she doesn't even know.*

She turned suddenly. He averted his eyes quickly, while giving her a sign as if he hadn't heard her. She spoke her word again and quickly turned back to her work.

He had been, *looking*. It had been so long—and she hadn't remembered. *It will be all right*, Keinalone silently scolded herself. The accidental *offering*, she had made up her mind, would be made again, purposefully, when they lay down for the night. A feeling slowly engulfed her, akin to when she had gazed up at the stars all those lonely nights. Again, this time, it was different, even more than the other, far more than anything she had ever felt.

The fire had burned low and now she lay back in his lap, contentedly sucking the marrow out of a bone that she had cracked open. Abelon was glad that he hadn't done what had come to mind in such a rush of feeling. It had been better this way. He hadn't even had to hear his father's voice to know the right thing to do.

Now he wondered what the right thing would be for the night. Again the rush—it was hard to manage with her so close. He had seen her bed robe laid out, but not anything he

could use for himself. He felt it would be acceptable if he lay down close to her but outside. But how could he ask if it would be all right with her? She had pulled his arm across her waist just below her breasts and her other arm stroked the back of his hand. She didn't seem to want to be away from him at all, but how could he be sure? What was right? What would she want, beyond his closeness? And what did they even have beyond the moment?

Keinalone was more than content in the midst of all these new feelings. How far removed it was from her loneliness of last night. What a difference, even from the surprise of this afternoon. It was as she dreamed, but even the dream couldn't tell her how she would feel. It was as if an impossible, lonely prayer had been answered.

Abelon felt her sigh. Was it from contentment, or had she just resigned herself to some thought that had crossed her mind? His father had told him how difficult it was to know a woman's feelings, what was going on, on the inside. Well she would not have to resign herself to anything because of him, he'd see to that. But she seemed so at peace with everything now, he was pretty sure that he could tell that much. But there were limits, and he would have to figure out what they were, and maybe, what they might not be.

The fire had burned itself almost out. All that was left was the darkness of a moonless night. It was time! A subtle trepidation crept into Keinalone's mind that caused her body to tremble ever so slightly. She didn't know how to think concerning what she was about to do. She had no imagination, no dream, no thought, no mother to prepare her.

She was determined to do this for him. *It will be all right!* she tried to silently assure herself. But how was she to know what was right, what was pleasing, what was needed? She had nothing in her life before this that would prepare her, yet just the thought tugged at her whole body. The feeling made her shiver as she ever so slowly pulled away from him. *It might be better, she thought, if he would just hold me down right here, right now. It would be easier if I had no choice in what happens!*

Now she was on her feet, but she stood transfixed for a long moment. The shivering increased. The skin around her navel reacted to the slightest brush of her wrap. Her nipples were firm and sensitive like they had never been before.

What's happening to me? she asked inwardly, as she started slowly toward her bedcover. *Is this the demon inside that has caused some of our women to be driven away from the settlement?*

But I've already been sent away! And why would anyone care, except for the rules? Probably no one would ever know anyway! The thought settled her down, but now she could feel him close behind her.

Abelon dimly saw her start to move away. She had ever so slowly pulled away from him and it had made him wonder. Had that been a shiver that he had felt? His body moved more quickly than his mind could tell it to follow. She was walking so slowly that he almost bumped into her. Something about the shadow of her form changed. He stepped on something that felt wooly. Now she had dropped out of his sight altogether. He knelt down feeling for where the edge of the cover should be. He felt bare skin. Had she left it open for him? Had she done this before?

Everything about her had already told him no! He found the edge and pulled it down and closed, with him properly on the outside. He felt both good and bad, but he'd heard no voice of remonstrance.

What is he doing? Keinalone's mind screamed the question. It reeled with a confusion of thoughts and feelings, as she felt the cover close over her. *He touched my nakedness, and now this? Didn't he know that I dropped my wrap on purpose, naked before him and the whole world? He must have seen something, even in the dark!*

He knew where to lay down beside me! What more could have I done? I wish I knew something, anything! She agonized as she felt the cover being sealed with his body, on the outside.

Do I smell? she wondered, not knowing how to tell. *Did he not know until I dropped my wrap? Now I'm covered again, so the odor doesn't get out?*

Then why does he put his head so close to mine? she wondered anew as his hot breath blew over the hairs on her neck, making her ear tingle.

His body, and now his arm squeezes me like he wants me. Would he rather feel the cover? she struggled to roll toward him, but she couldn't move. She was his prisoner. *He can do as he likes! Why doesn't he do something, anything?* her totally unsettled body seemed to ask as the strange urging ever so slowly subsided.

That was the hardest thing I've ever had to do! Abelon thought, as her body, straining against his grip, began to relax. *Why was she so tense? Afraid of something? Afraid about something? Or straining toward something? How can I tell when we can't even talk! Maybe it was just not to be! Not this time. Not till I'm sure,* he silently remonstrated, as his body, ever so slowly followed after hers.

"You have a lot to do, before you can claim one for yourself!" his father's voice softly intoned as sleep slowly overcame his churning feelings.

Intrusion

*And it came to pass, when they were in the field,
That Cain rose up against Abel his brother
and killed him. (Gen. 4:8)*

Abelon awoke with a start to strange voices all around him. Something yanked on his hair, then on his arms as he felt his body being dragged across the ground toward the remains of the fire now burned down to only a small ember. He saw the red end of a brand close to his now wide-open eyes. The voice tones, vaguely similar to hers, but with a growl, rattled out their aggressive challenge.

He heard her scream of surprise, then fright. He brushed the brand aside, burning his arm, as he surged up toward the arm that held it. Almost to his feet, he collapsed under the weight of many bodies, pressing him down again.

He heard her scream again. To her voice of fright, something had been added. Recognition? He couldn't move. He felt a leg and bit down. Now he felt an arm as the leg was snatched away. Bodies squirmed as her alarm gave him the strength to surge once again. They tumbled away, but feet kicked as he got to his knees. Now fists were added to the feet as he was slowly pummeled into oblivion. *Is this to be our end?* a last thought flickered. A faint scream echoed as the black of nothingness descended.

Keinalone had screamed as she woke to confusion, then dread as she recognized voices and words. The cover was stripped from her naked body as she was snatched to her feet. She reached for where her wrap ought to be, but her arms were pinned behind her. She was lifted bodily over to where the last ember had just gone out.

She felt as though her arms would break. Then, she was dropped as her assailant joined the melee close by. As her feet touched the ground, she raced away, grasping for

her wrap as she went swiftly out into the night. Pounding feet behind her gave her wings as she flew across the ground, but her shorter legs were no match. She came to ground under a body that she bit, scratched and tore at. It wrenched away and she kicked at it, while trying to regain her feet. Her arm was grabbed and she was whirled around, then slammed down upon the ground. Dazed, she rose again, only to be slammed down even harder. The darkness of the night now looked all askew as she valiantly staggered up once more, then down, and nothing.

At first Abelon felt his arms. They hurt. They were tied at the wrists. Then he felt his feet. They were tied at the ankles. His groin was on fire with pain. He felt something between his wrists and ankles. A pole? He was being carried like game in from the hunt? He tried opening his eyes ever so slightly. He saw the pole and then the sky. It was just after dawn. He could see someone just beyond his feet, carrying the front. He rotated his head slowly to one side. Three walked close by, the last one carried her over his shoulder like a full sack. Her wrap was on, but it covered little.

Oh now, how he wished that he'd done different. What had it all been for, if this was how it would end?

But she might have felt different, the thought intruded, and that was all he could care about now. Something unnatural came into view *It must be part of a settlement*. He thought as he tried to interpret its distance.

The world still looked all askew. Up was down and down was up and the sides wobbled back and forth. Was she being carried? If so, it was like a sack. Her body ached all over, except—

If I move, the thought came amid the confusion, *it might get different*.

The gift that she had meant for him, rubbed uncomfortably on someone else's shoulder, but there was no pain. She felt an acute sense of relief, but also danger. She closed her eyes, to avoid further confusion.

Keinalone was now aware of conversation. At least one voice seemed familiar. Was it that hated owner of the call that had broken them up the first time? It couldn't be! He had been trampled beyond recognition someone had said, and he hadn't been around as far as she could tell. Had that someone been wrong?

It almost made her stir in the sudden anger that she felt. It could mean only one thing. She had been spied upon for some time, but by him?

"He looks like the one that I saw her with before," the hateful voice spoke with certainty.

"Trying to steal another of our women!" another observed angrily.

"She didn't look like she was being stolen!" a third opined tartly.

"She never seemed to be much of a woman anyway," a fourth voice spoke somewhat grumpily. "Her father had something to do with that," he continued. "His answer to everyone who asked was always no!"

"Another boy was what he wanted and another boy was what he almost got," an older voice intoned.

"What I got here doesn't feel much like a boy," she heard as she felt her weight being shifted. Her carrier's voice sounded like the occasional leer that she'd seen cast her way slyly, where men had gathered together.

Now she was glad that she hadn't moved, even if he had reached up to shift his load more often than necessary, it seemed.

“I wouldn’t let her father hear you talk like that if I were you,” observed the first voice. “I understand that he has turned more than one into a eunuch in the past.”

The garble of voices slowly dissolved as she closed her ears to that kind of talk. She had seen something at the side of her world as it had wobbled in her first look. Another confirmed that she’d seen him being carried on a pole.

His body only moved in concert with the carriers’ walking movements. What had they done to him?

If he were dead, they wouldn’t be carrying him back, she silently assured herself. *I hope that they were just talking*, she thought morosely, as she remembered how deftly that she’d seen her father move as he castrated some of the male sheep of the flock she tended.

Now, for the first time, there was a hurt inside that would not go away. *What have I done?* she thought. *But surely, they were just talking.* She tried for an assurance that didn’t convince.

“Well, here we are my *boy*.” her carrier offered as he patted her leg, “You can wake up now!”

“Better put her down before her father sees how you carried her,” observed one of the others.

“Or how often you all looked back to see how I was doing?” came the quick retort as the *voice* set her on her feet. She almost collapsed from the sudden weakness that she felt, but only sullenly brushed off his offered hand while looking long, and now angrily at the hardness of his face.

I will remember! the look had said, as she pulled her wrap more tightly around her.

They dropped him unceremoniously as she was put on her feet, leaving the pole to wreak further havoc on their load. Instead, Abelon grasped it with his upper wrists and the heels of his feet and swung it in a mighty arc, knocking her carrier sprawling forward, taking her partway with him. He could see her leap to her feet again, and with a snarling cry she placed herself between them as the one who he had knocked down came charging back. One of the others groaned loudly, pointing vigorously toward a man who was fast approaching them, as Abelon quickly dislodged the pole and struggled to untie himself.

He was not dead! He wasn’t even badly hurt!

He has avenged me before anyone was even aware that he could do anything! Keinalone thought. Now an awful sound came out of her mouth and the hair on the back of her neck raised up stiffly as she saw the other rise from his sprawl. It was far worse than any she had ever screeched at a wolf or lion. He charged as she now stepped between them. A voice of command barked loudly, and just as quickly the other stopped and turned toward it. Just as quickly she recognized her father.

She backed up close to where Abelon now stood, attempting to cover his struggle against the thongs that bound his hands. He appeared to be watching and listening as the others jabbered on of what they claimed that they had witnessed. Her father hesitated momentarily, then quickly came toward them. *If only there had been time to untie his hands*, she thought as she shrieked, “Father, it is not as they have said!”

“He is a stranger,” he answered, “and one of those who have killed ours at our watering place!”

“Punish me then, for he came as an ambassador, and tried to warn us, but there was no way that I could tell you.”

“Ambassadors don’t sleep with our women!”

“Then punish me again, for while I would have, he did not!” her blush was crimson with the shame of her public confession, but she stood her ground, as she shrieked her anger. “These men have done worse in carrying me back here!”

He struck her out of his way. Keinalone did not flinch or duck, but took the full painful blow hoping that it would assuage his fatherly anger at her protestation.

He had been told, but the short whip, that she’d only seen him use on unruly captive slaves, was out and she cringed at the expected snap, but it did not come.

Through her suddenly opened eyes she saw that her father had been knocked to one knee as a flying body brushed past to cover hers as it landed. Abelon was taking her lash as her infuriated father struck out at whatever was before him.

We could die right now and it would be all right, she thought. But suddenly, it stopped.

“Who are you?” Keinalone heard her father bellow.

“Father!” she pleaded from under her protection, “Abelon understands little of our language. He does not know what you ask of him!”

Something unintelligible came out of the man’s mouth as he appeared to make a demand of him. She had answered with that foreign sound, like a title, and then *my name?* Abelon thought. She had said it as easily as when they had practiced exchanging names. The man shook his head as he had heard her speak it. He seemed to be struck dumb, as he stared at her. Finally he was able to mumble something, again unintelligible.

“How is it that you can speak his language?” Her father’s tone had changed. He was asking her a question.

She pushed up and a little away from her protector and in her most beseeching, pleading tone she answered.

“Father, we have practiced until I understand a few of his words, while we have been together.” She flinched as she expected her added confession would bring another lash.

Instead, her father hissed, “Our wisest men have had great difficulty learning any of this strange tongue.”

“It didn’t seem difficult,” Keinalone answered hesitantly, not wanting to infuriate his sensibilities further.

Abelon quickly thought back on all that had happened. Everyone had deferred to this one as they gabbled in their strange tongue. This had brought a shouted reply from her, as this one strode toward her. She had bravely moved to put her body between him and the others, but now as this one approached, her stance changed. Was this a chief of their settlement?

She stood up to him in their strong exchange, but she did not scream her challenge as she had to the one who had carried her. Her neck and the parts of her cheeks that he could see turned red with her last utterances. Was it anger that some of her sounds indicated, or something else?

This one had struck her down! Still looking at her, he had reached for something at his side, a whip? Suddenly, all was movement toward this danger to her.

He had forgotten that his feet were still tied and tripped knocking her adversary aside, falling toward her. *Over her, not on her!* he commanded his body as they collided. The lash confirmed the whip, but it had landed on him not her. He could be beaten, but it would be all right as long as it wasn’t her.

The whip only landed once when her adversary shouted something. *Again she answered, from under me, but her voice sounded more pleading than before,* Abelon mused.

Again her adversary had shouted. *But this time it seemed to be directed at me!* Abelon mused further. Again she answered, as she pushed herself free. *That's my name, but she looks at him!* He remembered thinking as that lilting foreign way she had of pronouncing his name came to an end. Had her adversary been addressing him? *His sounds seem somewhat like those she used when she had called to me when I first approached her,* he thought as he struggled to make sense out of what was going on.

Now she was reciting all those words, his words that they had learned together. He tried to remember what hers were, and offered them in his slow halting way, when he could. She trilled those same sweet sounds of encouragement as he stumbled from one to another. Her adversary continued his look of astonishment as his jaw dropped even wider open than when she had made his sounds. *Now he looks at us both, as if we were some kind of shaman!* he mused, as he saw the wonderment grow.

Her father looked from one to the other of them with a kind of abject astonishment.

"How did you do that?" he could barely get the words out. "How long did learning those words take?"

"It didn't seem long at all!" Keinalone repeated herself, now more bravely than before, as she smiled her sweetest imagination of what a good daughter smile should look like.

"I must take you to those who have tried to learn this tongue." He was talking now in a much milder tone as he moved cautiously toward them.

"Father," she tried to more than match the change in his demeanor. "He has come as an ambassador. We must untie his feet so that he may go with us." She reached quickly to do this as if already bidden.

"He is my prisoner!" the tone had instantly reversed itself.

Her fingers flew, as her answer maintained a tone of sweet reasonableness. "Father, he came to us in good faith."

"We have already discussed this! He is still my prisoner," he insisted, but his voice sounded less severe as he added, "But he must go with me, until I can remand him to the custody of another who might better understand the way he talks."

Keinalone did not answer, except to flash him a grimace of sadness, while continuing the boldness of her stare. She quickly grasped the hand of her father's new "prisoner" as she prepared to follow. This, she hoped, would show that the contest over the question of status was not yet resolved in her father's favor.

He turned quickly on his heel, appearing to accept her look of troubled acquiescence, as well as her move toward self-proclaimed *temporary* custody of his prisoner.

She had known little of her father's in-town activities and was surprised when he led them to the town's square and an open-air meeting that appeared to be already in progress.

The dour look of its participants accented by their frowns of worry was vaguely disquieting. The speaker, stumbling momentarily in his delivery at the stir occasioned by their entry, now addressed her father directly.

"We have disquieting news! There have been many strangers come within sight of our settlement. They appear to be the ones who trampled our water place, our flocks, and

our people. No ambassador has come forward with any assurances of peaceful intent. Our battlements have been manned in full view of their approach. They draw ever closer and still they send no one.”

Why doesn't father tell them? Keinalone wondered as she squeezed Abelon's hand. His look was one of uncomprehending questioning. *How can I make him know what is happening,* she wondered. *Or does he somehow already know?* This new turn in her thoughts disturbed her as she furtively looked for a change in his expression. A sign, any sign that he understood even the smallest part of what swirled around him.

“Father,” she whispered, “we need to tell them that he is already here among us.”

The challenge that had been on the face of the speaker, among others, now burst anew into words.

“How is it that you allow your daughter, whom we've hardly ever seen, attendance at such a gathering? We all know that it is against our tradition for females to be present at these meetings!”

“It is a lamentable lapse, I know,” her father answered in the words of apology, but his knowing look at the speaker rebuked the notion. “But it couldn't be avoided.”

“As you all know,” he continued as he waved his arm over the assembly, “we've had little luck understanding the bazaar language of these people that you now have seen before us. But my daughter here has been able to learn several of their words rather quickly, and she says, found it relatively easy. This young man has been her teacher, and has come to her, she swears, as a kind of ambassador of his people, these same people who are now gathered before us all!” There was a stir among the group accompanied by some mutterings of disbelief.

“I was on my way to look for those who have, with little success, studied this language, and as luck would have it, they are here. I didn't realize, until I had already entered the square, that a meeting was ongoing, but it is just as well that protocol be set aside on behalf of being able to offer to you a possible means to communicate with these people before we have to fight them.”

Abelon tried to guess at what was happening. He had seen the rapid change in her adversary's demeanor, toward them both, when his name had been spoken. Had he been introduced? She appeared to have spoken on his behalf as she untied his feet and taken his hand.

Now, he was in the heart of the enemy's settlement. Others had sought to crudely speak a few of his words to him. They appeared to want him to do something, but it was hard understanding what, with the few disconnected words they used.

Finally she took his hand again and was leading him toward another side of the settlement away from where they had come in. Many in the group who followed closely behind them frowned at him, as well as her. But they had all treated her adversary with an uncommon amount of respect, making way for him to easily follow them as she led him up toward where armed men stood looking out beyond their settlement.

Instantly he saw! His people were arrayed some distance away as if they meant to do battle, but seemed to be waiting for something. He remembered his father's reluctance to lead them here, but he evidently had not succeeded in dissuading them.

Now she made the sign to talk and she spoke his name “Abelon” while she pointed at his people. *What is it? Does she want me to say something?* he wondered.

He knew why his people were there, and surely these others must have guessed also.

Could they not have known about the young men, my friends, who were ambushed and slaughtered? he wondered.

Does she want me to call out to them? Yes, that must be it! I must try. He climbed to a high place in front of the armed men. He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted,

“Father! It is your son, Abelon!”

There was a long wait and then,

“Abelon? How is it that you are among them?”

“I was captured—it’s a long story!”

“You are able to talk? Why?”

“I’m not sure. They know only a few of our words! Can you come closer?”

“They are a treacherous people!”

“They’ve allowed me among them! Let me find a way to ask!”

“If they hurt you, they are all dead!”

“Don’t worry! They’ve had many chances and have done nothing—so far!”

How to tell her? he mused as he stepped back and down from his perch. She was right there, a big question in her eyes as she tried to ask, but he heard no words that he recognized. Abelon pointed to where his father’s voice had come from and then to himself. Then he made his arms go wider then taller, and then behind him, then said his word “Father.” He could tell, she understood that someone had answered but who? Her eyes still asked that, he was sure.

He moved her between himself and her adversary, her chief? Then he pointed at him as he splayed out his arms again. She spun around and looked and screamed a word exultantly. She pointed excitedly to where he had shouted his exchange and said her word again. Had she said the word for chief referring to who had stood behind her, and thought he had said chief not father? Abelon thought about it. The feelings that he’d seen exchanged did seem more like family than the respect one gave a chief or received from a subordinate. He decided it didn’t matter that much, as she danced around him over another word that she seemed sure that they had shared.

He had said his word for father, Keinalone was sure of it!

“He talked to his father!” She screamed excitedly at hers. Had some of the learned men given each other knowing glances? Had they doubted her interpretation, or was it something else? She was too excited to think about it further. They had shared another word!

She repeated his, as he, more slowly, hers. Then she repeated his to the learned men and they said it over several times, after which one remarked,

“I now understand why we have had little success.” He sounded haughty as he finished. “We didn’t know enough to dance like you, as we learned.”

She reddened slightly at the imprecation contained within his scoffing remark.

What does he suggest? she wondered. *Well it doesn’t matter, at least I’m learning.*

He talked and gestured and she talked and gestured, and in a slow, sometimes exasperating process, she felt sure he asked for some assurances that his father could, in safety, come closer to talk. She felt that her father had understood, and he passed the word to the guards, “Don’t shoot unless I give the order!”

“No! No, Father! You must tell them not to shoot at all!”

“You are the daughter, not the chief!” he sternly warned, and then amended the order. “Don’t shoot if he comes alone!”

Now she was pointing at him, then at where his father's voice had come from. She held up her first finger and with the other, again pointed at him, and then where his father waited.

"Father?" Abelon said her word for it as he raised his first finger. Her excited look and head movement must have been a signal for yes. She understood, but now he had a question without words for it. Pointing at himself he raised one finger, then where his father waited and then raised a finger of his other hand, bringing them slowly together. She nodded her head again and said her word for yes, he guessed.

Then a pained expression came over her face as she looked at where her father/chief stood. She asked a question. He gave her an answer. She turned back again and pointed at him, then at herself, her father, and at one of the others who had tried to talk to him, as she raised four fingers.

His suddenly shifted stance brought a worried look to her face as he raised four fingers on one hand and pointed with the other to where his father waited. Now he brought it back with four raised fingers and brought both hands together again. She asked something of her father and his answer was the same as she had just used with him to signal agreement. He would have to remember that word. It would be good to know when they were in agreement with him.

Eight people met in an open place in full view of both sides. Communication was slow and difficult with so few words of each language understood by the other. It was relatively easy to discern that the Nomad Tribe, connected with the seasonal wanderings of the herd of large animals that had recently trampled some of the settlement's flock and tenders, meant to do battle.

It was more difficult to communicate justification, but finally the story of the slaughter of the three tribal youths became vaguely understandable.

It was almost impossible for the settlement people to make clear their tradition that allowed aggrieved families to seek personal vengeance or compensation for harm done to one of their own, but a crude oversimplified version was finally acknowledged.

What was not acknowledged was the settlement's reason for acquiescence in the taking of personal vengeance upon those whose only sin was to be posted as lookouts for the tribe's winter encampment.

It was totally impossible to project the accidental basis for the one and the vengeful purpose connected with the other.

All that came clear was that each felt that they had a grievance against the other. One grievance had already been acted out and the intent of the bearer of the other was beyond question.

The tribe demanded that the settlement hand over those who had done the deed or they meant to take them by force. Even though the refusal was almost automatic, the leader of each side recognized in the other a certain reluctance to commit their people to a bloody battle.

Might a lesser contest be substituted? the settlement side suggested. Slowly the idea was brought forth of a champion selected by each side who would engage in a trial by combat. Right would be assumed to have prevailed as one life would be the forfeit paid for the saving of many.

Keinalone, standing near her father, saw him become rigid in his insistence that the other's son be retained as a hostage for the good faith performance of his adversaries. No

amount of tearful entreaties on her part, no argument of the inhospitality of treating an ambassador in such a manner would budge him.

Now she saw, fearfully, the sudden anger in the eyes of Abelon's father. She felt his look conveyed that he had gained some kind of understanding of what she felt that she had failed in. The end result could mean only one thing, a break down in all she had hoped for. A slight stirring behind her further alarmed her sensibilities.

In the despair of that moment, she leaped across the space separating the two sides and into the arms of a surprised and angry father. He grasped her roughly to him, showing with a quick movement of his arm what would be her fate if his son was not delivered safely to him at the end of the contest.

Abelon shouted a protest at his father. It had fallen on deaf ears, but at least his father could now guess at their relationship. She could hardly breathe with the energy of his tightened grip.

Her father stared, dumbfounded once again by his daughter's unspoken declaration. But, within that look she saw it. Had it been his son, he would have balked. But it was only this forward, irritatingly impertinent daughter who knew not her place! She had made herself expendable! His look made that clear, but the contest would go on!

Both sides retired a short distance and now. She saw and heard, from her new and more remote position, the arguments that led to her father's insistence that it had to be him. Her eldest brother vehemently protested that he had more vigor and quickness, but to no avail.

Abelon's father articulated in his own gruff almost incomprehensible words that he must be the one to champion his people. She understood little of what he said, but she was able to glean from them and his gestures, that a leaderless losing side would not be likely to break their agreement without considerable thought.

Suddenly he loosened his grip on her, and looked full into her eyes, and then at his son and back. She broke away from his stare, and felt that he now knew without much doubt why she had sacrificed herself to him. He released his hold on her completely. A short step back as he continued his stare told her that he had also guessed why she would not be changing her mind.

A shudder quietly coursed through her body as she wondered, *Might this man be the instrument of my father's downfall? A downfall I've sometimes even wished for, myself?*

Weapons had been chosen and armor strapped on, and now they faced each other separated from either side by a certain distance. An exploratory jab with a short spear was met with the flat of a bronze sword. Then another, and another as each tested the defenses of his opponent, looking for an opening. Round and round they circled each other in the defensive crouches that kept their weapons well out in front. Splinters flew as sword tips slowly whittled spear shafts.

Thrust and parry, thrust and parry. Now sweat beads began to stand out on brows as the exertions mounted. A nick to a suddenly unprotected thigh was quickly followed by a slice on an extended arm not quickly enough withdrawn.

Keinalone looked on in a prickly kind of terror as a quick spear thrust caught her father just above the knee causing him to limp into retreat, blood running down his lower leg. Abelon's father pressed a perceived advantage, getting a nasty cut on his spear arm as the only reward, but he aggressively pressed forward. Rattle and bang went the weapons as each looked for the thrust that would bring the other down.

Drenched with sweat and with labored breathing they continued, the one mostly retreating, the other receiving additional cuts for his boldness. Suddenly a high-arcing slam of the sword quickly followed by a determined thrust of the spear caught her father in mid-step backward.

For the first time she saw fear in his eyes as he thrust his arms up and out to ward off the twin assaults. Off-balanced he stumbled into a collapse, losing his spear. He was suddenly at the other's mercy. He who had shown so little, would be shown none now? She knew that she should feel some kind of encouragement at this gruesome turn of events, but she couldn't. This, after all, was her father.

In the very act of launching the killing blow, Keinalone saw Abelon's father suddenly falter and collapse upon his quarry. Her father's sword, already in motion from a defensive position was thrust quickly, deeply into the sagging body of his adversary, before he could even see the arrow protruding from his victim's back.

Now in open-mouthed horror, she followed back on the motion almost unseen out of the corner of her eye to where her brother stood, empty bow in hand. Paralyzed into statue-like immobility, she now saw as if in a dream, her love, snatch from the hands of a defender close by, a bow and an arrow, which was launched with a quickness almost beyond perception. Her brother dropped from a heart shot that had killed before he hit the ground.

Now in a frenzy of motion, Abelon scurried across the open space crouching low as he sped away from the settlement frontier. He seemed to scramble even harder as the murderous hiss of a hail of arrows grew louder as they chased swiftly after. They slammed into his body, cruelly shoving him on his now staggering legs. Wildly grasping hands reaching, his eyes locked onto hers, as he fell at her feet.

In a screech of agony, Keinalone dropped to his side, her mind trying to will away those horrid shafts that pierced his body through. She leaned over him as she drew his head to her lap. His mouth worked as if to speak as his eyes seemed to cloud over.

Moaning as she kissed his lips again and again, she felt his life ebb away and then, it was gone. A wail of pure agony rose from deep within as her eyes searched the heavens. "Why this? Anything but this! Please!"

It grew in volume and pitch seeming not to need breath to sustain it. It echoed through the trees and reverberated from the low buildings across the settlement.

Suddenly an answer arose from there, rising in volume in support of her anguished cry. It came from many of the settlement's young women, abused by the designs of familial insistence. It seemed to mourn for the loss of a life that could have been. It also grew until it seemed about to drown the world in the agony of shared loss, but then, it too, was gone.

The long silent cry

Where has your beloved gone,

Oh fairest of women?

Where has your beloved turned aside,

That we may seek him with you?

—Song of Sol. 6:1

An the lord set a mark on Cain,

Lest anyone finding him should kill him.

—Gen. 1:15

Keinalone wished for her life to end before the echo of her wailing scream could die away, but it didn't. And now, the cruel joke of longevity persisted. She lived on and on, as did her pain. There seemed to be no end to either.

She remembered how blindly she had, in her agony, groped for the voices that had joined hers. They had slowly come together in ones and twos, surreptitiously, frightened at possible discovery. Then emboldened by their growing number, they began to escape their former silence.

At first, only mutual grieving seemed possible, but that only seemed to aggravate the pain within. It was quickly found that only busy hands could save them. She'd learned few womanly skills, but all too well remembered the many lonely night-vigils of her life before, when the beauty of the heavens had beckoned. Now it was the beauty of art that enticed. For the others, it became the broad way of release, if only temporary, from the once secret pain, no longer endurable in the silence of their former submission. For her there would be no such hope.

They learned from the few, reluctant masters who could be bribed only by cheap labor. But it wasn't to last. Her father had chosen to ignore even her physical presence the few times that they had come within eyesight of each other, as he recovered from his wounds. Her burning hatred of him only grew with those reminders and it was fortunate that their apprenticeship was occasioned on the far side of the settlement.

Only in retrospect had Keinalone learned what had become of the tribe who had slunk away after a leaderless skirmish. The spring return of the migrating herd was vague, almost unremembered. The handlers had been quickly driven off, but the animals had been unmanageable. They had prowled around the area of the spring, trampling everything, until the water had been exhausted, and then they had disappeared into the northern reaches.

The summer had been kind to all, except for those who had gathered around her in a kind of cultic association. The fruits of the field grew bountifully and a huge harvest festival anticipated where much ornamentation would be a welcome addition. Excitement grew apace within the community, as they tended their outsized agriculture as the day of their reward drew near.

Keinalone awakened one morning vaguely disturbed. *By what?* she remembered wondering. A vague, ever-so faint vibration, like a silent grumble both felt and then, slowly rising to an auditory level, it became evident. From over the hills north of the settlement, it seemed like an echo of distant thunder. But it grew without hesitation or interval.

She hurried out, joined by other anxious faces as the sound and tremble grew. They all looked toward the source of the disturbance just in time to see an avalanche of horns and heads rise over the hilltop. As far as she could see east or west, they poured over and down. All of her women had cowered thoughtlessly behind her as visions of trampling brought looks of dismay and then despair to their faces.

"Is this how my prayers are to be answered?" she screamed her defiance into the billowing dust kicked up by myriad hooves. "My prayers were not for them, just me! Just me!" she shrilled as the dust blotted out her world.

Keinalone stirred, slowly realizing that she was still where she had so many times hoped not to be. The distant thunder of hooves moved rapidly away. Dust covered everything. It all looked different. "Where are the houses?" she asked of the changed

landscape. As she rose up, dust from her face swirled around her spoken breath. Nothing moved except a gentle stirring behind her. “Are we the only ones saved?” she wondered aloud. “Are there no others?” her words encouraged additional movement.

“Why me?” she screamed into the silence of the dust as the realization that she had survived even against her defiant plea. Only then did she become aware of the large stone that had been their place of ritual gathering after each day’s work. “Why here? Why only us?” she railed, as she perceived the agent of her survival.

Many a year would go by before she would begin to count the many times that her only answer had been more time.

Now, as they strove to rise to their feet, whimpers and wails from more distant parts of the destruction gave assurance that others had survived. Now, those who had been ostracized spread their wings of healing out through the ruined settlement, looking for those who might recover with some help. Those who had chosen to ignore them would not now be forsaken.

Few among them had seen their attackers. Their hateful enemy had come in behind the mass of animals. They had slain every adult who had shown any sign of movement. It was the tribe. They had finally wreaked a dreadful vengeance upon this settled community.

Except for an occasional dwelling none had withstood the assault, and some of the few that remained leaned dangerously. Only a tiny corner of their agricultural effort had come through unscathed. There could be no talk of rebuilding. Even with a mild winter, they would need the stores that had been ruined in the field. They would now have to seek out the larger settlement that had spawned their forbearers. It would be a long journey.

It seemed endless. They’d had only the little garnered from the unspoiled gardening and the gleanings sifted from the dust where the stand of golden grain had waved so luxuriantly such a short time before.

They had exhausted their meager supplies and had walked without eating all that day with no sure knowledge that it wouldn’t become their last, until the final rays of the setting sun shone dimly on that which they had sought.

They had been stoically welcomed as the bedraggled refugees that they were, but the spirit of hospitality could not be counted on for long. Many of their skills were in no need of the duplication that such an influx would cause, but the young women of Keinalone’s association had been especially welcomed. A disease had spread among some of the settlement’s younger females in the spring of that year.

When it was also found that her women were skilled in certain arts and craft work, they alone were shown to a place of abode near where that kind of work was performed and given an opportunity to earn their keep.

Keinalone was quick to notice that not all the ornaments worn at their host’s festival, that had taken place soon after their arrival, were of local manufacture. She took to the study of some of the less-complicated imported articles to try to discover their construction.

As the first years went by, some, then many were produced instead of having to be traded for. Now, rather than expend the valuable resources necessary to secure the precious icons and good luck charms desired by so many, they could be produced locally and eventually became a source of added wealth for the community.

Her perceptive skills, that allowed her to unlock these secrets, became a source of great admiration from those close to her. Their willingness to follow her lead even when some made no conceivable sense allowed them to share in a small way in her growing success. But that success had come at a price.

That time so long ago, she mused, the old thought, still clear after so many years, when the heavens were my only source of inspiration that offered a distraction from my lonely vigil. It kept me from being afraid of what my future might not bring.

Then after—the thought stopped short as her throat constricted. She could scarcely bring herself even now to approach that mental barrier that had protected her sanity from that destroyer of dreams. After—she struggled through—it was my work that has been my greatest distraction from what could never again be for me.

Even as she realized that she must be fast approaching the *end of days* for her, the memory was still unthinkable painful. “But why?” she asked of the heavens that opened above her solitary walk, “have I had to endure it so long?”

Again her memory wafted her back to those days of her lonely success. She had for some time known that her “girls” had insisted, against all protestation, on placing her on a high pedestal of adoration. Much of the goddess statuary that they could now so lovingly create carried more and more of her features as time passed. They hung on every word or thought as if it had been passed on by one much larger than their ordinary existence could produce.

The fame of her association spread far and wide with time, bringing many people whose beliefs were strange to her, yet they begged for one of her unique creations, and then, yet another line of revenue opened up for her people.

And now even more years later, she strained to remember what she couldn’t seem to hold on to as well anymore, but the pain was still there. And now that most unwelcome of all thoughts intruded once more. *I have all the wealth and success that anyone could hope for, but where is an heir to pass it on to?*

Again she sent her prayer up into the heavens in as strong a voice as her old mouth could manage. “Must my offering be made even larger in order to pass me on through the portals of this life?”

She had waited for some time after that, but no feeling came, no presence felt, not even a mental message, nothing. Slowly she allowed the adoration of those around her to supplant the need of an answer, and she did not ask again.

*I have seen everything in my days of vanity
There is a just man
who perishes in his righteousness,
And there is a wicked man who prolongs life
in his wickedness.*

—Eccles. 7:15

*All the labor of man is for his mouth,
And yet the soul is not satisfied.*

—Eccles. 6:7

*Do not be hasty to go from his presence.
Do not take your stand for an evil thing.*

—Eccles. 8:2

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Chapter 10

Noah and the Flood

And God said to Noah...Make yourself an ark...And it came to pass...that the waters of the flood were on the earth.

—Gen. 6:13–14, 7:10, NKJV

You know the city of Shuruppak, it stands on the banks of the Euphrates? That city grew old and the Gods that were in it were old...In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied...Enlil...said to the Gods in council, “The uproar of mankind is intolerable”...So the Gods agreed to exterminate mankind...but Ea...came to me in a dream...“Son of Ubara-tutu; tear down your house and build a boat.”...For six days and nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world.

—*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, chapter 5

For a long time Noah’s flood story was viewed by many as just another of those tales that lacked any corroboration from extra-biblical sources. I also wondered if it had been meant to be an account of a real happening, or was it metaphorical as the book of Job seems to be?

“In those days...when the...beings from the spirit world were sexually involved with human women, their children became giants, of whom so many legends are told” (Gen. 4:6 TLB).

Language like that in the preceding quote seemed to me more like one of those borrowings that I have referred to earlier, whose basis was more akin to mythological folklore. In the recent past, I have championed the idea that many mythological accounts take their basis from oral history where the retelling over the generations diluted the real experience at its core with magical and mystical add-on descriptions, and stories.

This Genesis account, it seems to me, is one of those kind of stories. It has a kernel of reality almost completely hidden by the unnatural puff of mythological imagery. If there is that kernel at its base, what is it?

Everything about the original story seems to me to have dropped off into unreality, or been omitted altogether except one instance. The most important piece of news, without which the telling of the story would have become pointless and would have disappeared from the lexicon of storytelling, was this: that there had been a flood of monumental proportions at some time in the ancient past of the original storytellers.

I call the reader’s attention again to chapter 8 (Where in the World is Eden) wherein was described geological evidence of other catastrophic deluges, a portion of which I repeat here.

“Throughout this last deglaciation, as with all prior ones, the level of all the oceans and seas of the world steadily rose, this time higher than ever before. In the Mediterranean Sea...the rapid addition of this huge new source of water drove Paleo-Meso, soon to become Neolithic peoples along its shores, to ever-higher ground.

Along a portion of the uneven mountains that formed its northern rim, the water intruded ever more insistently, inundating low-lying hills until it was barred finally by a narrow ridge of mountainous terrain known today as the Bosphorus.

Beyond this lay a huge body of fresh water whose level, it is theorized, lay somewhat below the old level of the sea. Insistently the searching water climbed up and through this

ever-narrowing ridge until, at last, it looked down upon that other body of water, now many hundred feet below it.

Again a trickle turned to a torrent. Again it tore away the solid rock of the mountains and wore away a canyon all the way back to the saltwater sea. Again a huge wall of water roared through the canyon like a gigantic hydraulic jet, blasting away the rock that had restrained it. Shouldering its way through the mountain that shrank before this devastating onslaught, it thundered its way down, pouring an avalanche of mud, rock and salt water into the lake far below. A tidal bore, fed by this massively increasing surge, rushed over the fresh water lake surface inundating the habitat of the culture that the lake had sheltered since time immemorial.

The few survivors clawed their way up the surrounding hills and mountains, just ahead of the rapidly rising water behind them. Their world was drowning. Their land was quickly disappearing under the water that seemed to be everywhere. The end of everything seemed near—and then it stopped!

Up and over the hills it had relentlessly pursued them. Now it lay churning and boiling as it digested the gigantic meal of saltwater, rock, mud and vegetation that had so greatly swelled its bulk, and had carried it into the distance as far as the eye could see. The lake that once had fed them, now threatened to poison them as they searched far and wide for what little was left that could sustain them in the danger of a new and dreadful beginning.”

While looking for a clue that would explain the underwater dead zone discovered in the western one-third of the Black Sea just north of the entrance at the Bosphorus, some researchers found what looked like the residue of a huge underwater landslide.

Beyond the reach of the area where a total lack of life of any kind was evident, the solid remains of saltwater marine life were found to be normally abundant. A few meters below that layer they found the solid remains of freshwater aquatic organisms, a sure sign, they reasoned, that the Black Sea at one time in the past had been a large freshwater lake. Searching further they came upon what appeared to be a remnant shoreline approximately five hundred feet below the present level.

At the beginning of this chapter are two quotes, the second of which is an account of a flood story quite similar to that of Noah's. It comes from the Epic of Gilgamesh. This seems to be a largely mythical story of a “hero” King of Uruk, located close to the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. His adventures took him all the way up the Euphrates River where he met Utnapishtim, revered survivor of a great flood. Some have interpreted Utnapishtim of the Epic to be the same character as Noah of the Genesis story.

The headwaters of that river lay just south of the mountain chain that separates the eastern Anatolian Plateau from the narrow strip of land that borders on the south shore of the Black Sea. That plateau and lands to the west of it was the homeland of the Hittite Empire. This great rival to Ramses II's Egypt contested for control of the Fertile Crescent lands of the Middle East for many centuries before it mysteriously disappeared from the historical record.

During the early history of that empire, aggressively hostile people to the north of their homeland repeatedly attacked, in periods of Hittite weakness.

Those attacks forced them, sometime before the end, to move their capital city to the southern part of the Anatolian Plateau near the shore of the northeastern Mediterranean.

Could these people-of-the-north be descendants of the displaced victims of that great flood?

Some of the Bible's critics suggest that the story of Noah had been borrowed during the Israelite seventy-year Assyrian captivity around 586 BC. I would suggest that if it was borrowed it took place at a much earlier date.

The first discovered copies of the Epic of Gilgamesh are estimated to have been written at about 1,900 BC as if copied from earlier sources. Later discoveries of the probable earlier sources progressively moved that date back in time. It is now thought to have been originally written at about 3,500 BC according to the most recent archaeological discoveries

The story of Abraham, by my estimate, took place around the middle of the seventeenth century BC. He was born in "Ur of the Chaldes." His family moved up the Euphrates River to Haran, which I would place close to the eastern border of the early Hittite Empire. This is similar to the journey of Gilgamesh where he went up the Euphrates to fight the "giants of the mountains" on his way to meeting Utnapishtim of the flood story. Based on the earliest discoveries of that Epic, my educated guess would have put these occurrences no more than two hundred years apart, but the epic turned out to be much older, as those later discoveries indicated. It would seem that Gilgamesh had made his journey sometime before 3,500 BC. The length of Abraham's stay in Haran is not certain, but with the long popularity of the Epic story, certainly it would have been told and retold more than enough times to have become a *tradition* long before the time when "God" spoke to Abraham about leaving for parts south.

If the biblical flood epic came into the Israelite storytelling tradition from that source, I find it more reasonable, because of its early position in Genesis of the Bible among other things, to believe that its inclusion came at this historical juncture rather than at the later date. It's reasonable to believe that the Israelite's rancor at their defeat and seventy-year captivity would have militated against acceptance and inclusion of any part of their enemy's belief system into such an honored part of theirs.

Even if they had been forced, during their captivity, to nominally accept and even ritually incorporate their captor's belief system into their own, once they had been freed by invaders, who had conquered their overlords, the natural reaction, as witnesses to their tyrant's humbling, would be to have thrown off all signs of that yoke.

In paragraph four at the beginning of this chapter, I quoted from Genesis 4:6 of the biblical flood story "*In those days...when the...beings from the spirit world were sexually involved with human women, their children became giants, of whom so many legends are told.*"

"Language like that," I said, "seems to me like one of those borrowings whose basis is more akin to mythological folklore."

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, there might be a basis rooted in mythological folklore which retains a kernel of a real experience. Gilgamesh might have actually gone up the Euphrates, but fighting the "giants of the mountains" sounds more like myth being added to an original adventure.

In the glossary of names, there is listed:

Gilgamesh: A hero of the epic; son of the goddess Ninsun and of a priest of Kullah (a part of Uruk).

Lugalbanda: The third king of the post-diluvium dynasty of Uruk, a god and shepherd, protector of Gilgamesh.

If these “Sumerians” are the survivors from the north (I referred to earlier in this chapter), they would have brought this version of the flood story with them.

All the evidences that I find—its position as a story in the Genesis account, its reference to “giants” and “legends,” etc.—point toward the earlier incorporation.

So, what are we to make of the biblical flood story? Is it a portion of the “history of a people” as I posited in the beginning of the introduction? A story of their “origins” or was it meant to illustrate a moral principle, the “rewards of adherence and consequences of resistance” to the precepts that it was there to teach? It seems that it is a good fit into all of these categories, but which one would have been the most important reason for its retelling over the many hundreds of years? It would appear that the moral lesson of what happens to people who obey as against what happens to those who don’t would be the larger meaning that it was meant to impress, as it was handed down from an older generation to the younger.

This then, I feel, more surely fits the latter dictionary definition contained in the second subtitle of the first chapter of this work. Instead of it being a purely “allegorical story,” not necessarily about real people and experiences, it seems more like “a narrative, making a moral or religious point by comparison with natural or homely (ordinary) things.”

So here we have the first appearance of the second kind of parable, a story of a real person whose *heroic* behavior exemplifies a larger moral principle well worth repeating. To me, much of mythology has a similar construction and was meant to accomplish a purpose akin to that in the biblical flood story.

Alternately, the moralistic story could have been grafted onto a much older story of a real-world catastrophe. Noah was the morally *good* man of the Hebrew saga who survived a great flood, while those of lesser moral standing perished wholesale. This story of catastrophe was told only by those who managed to survive. In suffering their share of “survivor guilt,” they (or others) might have attempted to moralize their inexplicably good fortune. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Utnapishtim survived a great flood and was granted *hero* status and eternal life. Were they stories of the same event? If so, when did it happen? According to the earlier estimate the Gilgamesh Epic appears to have happened sometime before 3,500 BC.

Noah’s flood takes place in the sixth of the fifty chapters of Genesis, which ends with the story of Joseph that leads into the Exodus after 450 years.

The story of Abraham begins in chapter 12 of Genesis. Knowing the date of the Exodus, then adding the 450 years of the Joseph story, and the three generations that retrace to Abraham, is how I arrived at the middle of the seventeenth century BC, also referred to earlier, admittedly a very rough approximation.

The thirty-eight chapters, moving backward from Exodus to Abraham took approximately six hundred years. Considering the apparent foreshortening of time as one searches back into biblical ancient history, the six chapters that it took to move forward to Abraham from the flood of Noah, might fit into the two hundred years’ difference between Abraham’s stay in Haran and the earliest discovered copy (1,900 BC) of the Gilgamesh Epic. But of course this can’t even be imputed to have been anywhere near to the actual time of the flood. That is the date assigned to the first evidence of a long-

copied saga that we now are assured was probably first written before 3,500 BC. In Abraham's time it would have already been a very ancient story.

Gilgamesh journeyed to a far place to meet a survivor of the flood who had been granted the gift of eternal life, as indicated earlier. So, the epic implies that the flood happened sometime before this journey, we just can't determine how long before, but there is a clue. There were no other survivors named and the implication is that Utnapishtim was the only survivor because of his gift, and by Gilgamesh's time he had already become somewhat of an oral history tradition himself. Now, let's try to figure out the time of the Great Flood from Gilgamesh.

This epic, it seems to me, is written in a style similar to Homer's 900 BC *Iliad*, which itself was told as if about a very ancient folklore tale. In Homer's time it had already gained mythical status. The *Iliad* (the destruction of Troy) is purported to have been written some time in the middle of the eleventh century BC. How many centuries of oral history recitations it took before it was actually written down can only be estimated by the already "classical" style it was written in.

The Gilgamesh Epic seems to have been put together from previous oral, then written, separate, earlier sources. How ancient these sources were when assembled into the epic can only be estimated by the "classic" style the epic also appears to have been written in. If the bringing together of these sources happened over a considerable length of time, then that could push the date of the actual flood back by perhaps many centuries beyond the first literary endeavor.

Assuming that I'm correct in the dating of the story of Abraham to the middle of the seventeenth century, the flood story now appears to be, thanks to Gilgamesh, much older than any beginning "guestimate."

The epic, which appears through archaeological discoveries, to have been an old story when it first appeared in written form (approximately 2,750 BC) was written in the language of Sumer. Discovered along with a later version was a king list that placed Gilgamesh as the fifth king (post deluge) of Uruk, the biblical Erech, known today as Warka. In excavating this city, a mosaic wall was found, dating to sometime before 3,000 BC. The wall appeared to be part of a larger ornate complex and Gilgamesh was known as a great builder. Even if the wall was no older than 3,300 BC, when the reign of five kings including Gilgamesh are added (a possible three to four hundred years) it gives an approximate date of around 3,600 to 3,700 BC as a possible date of the "deluge." And this is assuming that the "kingship" period didn't suffer a lapse in time after such a horrific event.

Earlier in this chapter, under the paragraph heading "While Looking for a Clue," I made reference to the Black Sea discovery that in its past seemed to have been a fresh water lake. Those who postulated this, according to their research findings, also estimated that the conversion to saltwater had taken place about 5,700 years ago. My calculations of the time of the biblical flood at around 3,600 to 3,700 BC, if added to 2,005 comes to 5,605 to 5,705 years ago. That's close enough to postulate that the Black Sea event was most probably the "Great Flood" of the Bible.

Of course all these prospective dates are at the least speculative, all that we can be relatively assured of by the many accounts, two of which I have used here, is that a flood of monumental proportions occurred somewhere north of the Mesopotamian landscape

and probably sometime within the early organization of the farming communities that eventually were to attain the complexity of small city-states.

“Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat” (Gen. 8:4, NKJV).

“Ararat: A volcanic mountain with two peaks in E. Turkey, near the boundary with Iran and the (former) Soviet Union. 16,696 ft.” (Amer. Collegiate Dictionary, 1967 Ed.).

It has been theorized, based upon other discoveries, that the Sumerians were themselves invaders from the north who displaced older inhabitants of the lower Tigris-Euphrates river lands where Ur (Sumer), Uruk, Shurruk, and Nippur cluster together.

Is it possible that these Sumerians were the survivors of that catastrophe who “clawed their way up the mountains” south of their old home and found a preliterate civilization advanced enough in their culture to be known for their beautiful oral poetry tradition?

What must it have been like to have lost an entire civilization, a distinct way of life, only to be obliged to usurp another? And, as an afterthought only, could these preliterate people that they overran have been descendants of those who may have seen the Garden of Eden?

In chapter 8, “Where in the World is Eden,” I refer to a people living in a valley “east of the Zagros mountains, whose cultural heritage makes a claim to the biblical designation, ‘East of Eden.’” Is it possible that their predecessors were refugees who fled the onslaught of the desperate survivors of the Great Flood? How ironic, to flee a great natural catastrophe only to become another kind of catastrophe for someone else!

In the following story, I hope to create something akin to what it might have been like to have lived through such a catastrophe, carrying a memory of all those who had died around them as they fled south over the mountains just ahead of the water that seemed to have covered the *whole world*.

*“This order of intelligence in a lesser animal
can obviously give rise to exaggeration
some of it persistent enough to be crystallized into legend.
But you cannot discredit truth
merely because legend has grown out of it.
The sometimes almost godlike achievements
of our own species in ages past
toddle through history supported more often than not
on the twin crutches of fable and human credulity.”*

Beryl Markham--West with the Night

What a Dammed Break

It has been a good season, Zoran mused. The hunt had been good! The bison were fat on the plentiful grass that grew out of proportion with any other time that he could remember. The sheep and goat flocks had multiplied wildly because of it, and the many twins among the newborn had been a good sign. It had never been difficult to find pasturage nearby for them in this good land, but this year had been superlative and he had gladly presented a much larger tithe at the harvest festival.

He gazed proudly at his son Mashu who was just now bringing the family flock back to shelter as the sun-god neared the end of his journey across the heavens. Mashu had

come of age in the spring of this season and had been allowed on the hunt for the first time. He had learned his lessons well and had come back a man.

His son's first trophy head had been carried around the village by Zoran's mate Hilkea and his daughter Nisaba as they bragged about their son and brother, of the great hunter who they were proud to claim as an important part of their family.

Nisaba had always been difficult, wanting to do everything that her big brother had been training to do, that had brought him to this place in his life.

Now, Zoran thought, she brags too loudly! Almost as if she needs to forget that it was not her who could have done such a deed. Will she never be satisfied to learn from her mother, the woman things that she will need to know? Well, there is still time for her, and Mashu won't be as close around her, to remind her.

A tiny sound of delight tickled his ear causing him to look down the low hill to the shore of the great water. The baby of the family, Ea, had been happily playing there most of the day, and had burst into noisy delight as a fish broached not far from him.

He had not been born strong which worried Hilkea as she filled her days nursing him into the healthy and happy toddler that he had become.

Zoran's gaze slowly took him out over the expanse of the Great Water. It seemed to go on forever with no cloud in the sky today to mark where the water ended and the heavens started. Of course it wasn't always so. He remembered the last time that huge dark storm clouds swept in, blotting out the horizon, and he remembered the wind that came with it roaring like a lion.

They had all huddled down in the strongest part of their shelter as Ea whimpered and Hilkea cooed her reassurance through a soft voice that quavered only a little. Zoran had gathered them all close to him, praying loudly, to be clearly heard above the howling gale.

He promised that they would listen even more earnestly to their wise shaman who would surely be able tell them what they must do to remove their God's anger from them. And then the fury departed just as quickly as it had come.

The festival had seemed the best among the many great ones that they had gone to. It was the only time that several villages close by would get together for a common celebration and it had been boisterous. No one had died for the many moons that marked the march of the seasons, from spring when those things most often happened, to the harvest good times.

There were all the usual contests and some new ones, from the spear throw to the axe hurling and the bow stringing and arrow making to a new thing called *swimming*. A trader had come in from the far-off western lands. He was the first that they'd seen since before Nisabe had been born. He had many stories to tell at the evening village-common fire, and many fine things to show them, including the new thing that would allow them to more than just wade into the waters.

They had always heard of great monsters that awaited those who went too far out and that fish jumped in fright at what they knew to be beyond them. But the trader had told them that others had lost their fear when nothing happened to those who practiced this new art.

He then told of a strange thing that happened much farther west than even his village. This had been some time ago, when he had gone to get some goods like the ones that he'd shown at the meetings. A chief had shown him a place where the forest had reached

up high into the sky and now water was pouring out of the heavens down into a big hole in the ground where a part of the forest had been. It roared with a sound greater than the strongest wind, greater than the thunder except when it was close by, and it did that both day and night.

The chief had taken him up to where they could see where a torrent of water poured out of the far side of a huge hole that the sky water had made. It had already torn away much forest and the ground under it all the way down to where the lake was trying to swallow all that swept down upon it. It had all happened in a part of the forest where few people were and was only discovered when the roaring had reached out to the villages closest to where it had happened. They could tell that it had been going on for some time before they discovered it and it seemed to be increasing more every day. The mist caused from the water falling from such a great height felt different. When he had wiped his now-wet face, his eyes stung and he tasted salt when he licked his lips.

“Salt?” Zoran had remembered exclaiming, “In water?”

“Yes!” his friend answered, “That puzzled me too until the chief remembered a trader that he’d met who had come from up in the hills under those mountains. He met another trader who had come from over the mountains and told him of a great water that he could see no end of even when looking down from a high place in those mountains on the other side. When he came down to it, he tried to drink, and was he surprised! It tasted too salty to even think of it.”

“Salty water there too?” Zoran mused thoughtfully. “Do you suppose that this comes from the same place?”

“How could it get up that high?” his trader friend remembered asking. “The other trader said that it didn’t seem like he’d had to go down as far to get to it, as coming down this side to the Great Waters, but he didn’t sound like he had seen it anywhere near the top!”

“Then where did it come from?” Zoran posed the obvious question.

“All I know about it is that the other trader said the big water on the other side looked different than it does here. There were dead trees sticking out of the water for as far as he could see either way, and what was on the shore, was more like mud than sand.”

It had been a wonderment that Zoran could scarcely grasp let alone understand. And it had come to bother him ever since. He was unaware that he had closed his eyes in the intensity of effort to picture the wealth of puzzling information before him.

Another little giggle of surprise quickly turned into a sudden piercing scream of fright! Zoran sprang to his feet, running down toward where Ea had been playing, even before his now wide-open eyes could take in what he saw. His little boy was struggling in water that was halfway up his body. Water, surging up toward Zoran even as he ran, suddenly lapsed and started its run back. Ea screamed louder still as he struggled to keep it from taking him along with it. Time seemed to slow down as the sense of urgency increased. Another scream, this time from somewhere behind him. Hilkea had heard and seen also, but was too far away!

After what seemed like an eternity of running in slow motion, Zoran snatched Ea up into his arms as the water slumped back, surging past his lower legs. *A wave?* his mind inquired within him, but where had it come from? There was hardly a stirring of air and no clouds in the sky, even on the horizon!

Hilkea snatched Ea from him and raced back toward their shelter, leaving behind a look that didn't seem to question how, but only that danger had suddenly been visited upon them. Somewhere hidden behind the look she shot his way in the exchange, there was gratitude, but the grimace of fear had frozen out any other sign of relief for his having been so close and so quick.

Zoran watched as the water receded back to where it had been. What he had just witnessed and what he had been trying to piece together began to become entwined, but he couldn't even begin to form a question of what the one had to do with the other. The wave had disappeared back into where it had come from, leaving no sign of its presence except for the dampness of the ground that it had run up over, and the ripples as they rolled across the surface growing smaller as they went away from him. Hypnotically they drew his stare as they disappeared into the deep. How? Where had it come from?

A darkness now rose out of the water, another wave! It too rolled past where he stood transfixed. It too licked at the same boundary. Four more times it happened as he marked the spot like a statue, pondering the magic of their existence. Now, even more spellbound, he anticipated the next, but it was late. Then, he realized, it had not come, it did not come. It would not come!

Six waves and then nothing, the spell had been broken. *Why six?* The question churned in his mind, and then he noticed. There was water standing, ankle deep where Ea had been playing at the edge. Somewhere in those six waves it had not gone back to where it had started. It was at a new level, long before the winter weather would raise it.

And then he remembered. His trader friend had said that he'd been shown where a torrent had poured down out of the hills into their Great Water. But that was far to the west of their village and some time ago, and the waves had seemed to come from out of the north!

But it must be connected in some way, for both things had been different than anything that had ever happened before. *Does this mean that our God is angry and will raise up our Great Water against us?* The thought sent a shiver of foreboding throughout his body as he charged up to the small security of their shelter. He remembered other times when the waters had risen, but never like this, at a time like this! It had always gone back down before. *Maybe it will this time.* But the thought seemed without any real assurance.

He had thought to talk of it to Hilkea, but her look, as she rocked Ea in her arms, told him that she should not be disturbed further, so he set out for the men's lodge of the village. Here, he was sure, he would find their shaman, and perhaps their village headman.

Their shaman through secret rituals and incantations had always made it go back down before. Zoran wondered if his rituals or their extra tithes had made the most difference. He chided himself once more as these thoughts sneaked into his mind. The shaman knew of these things and could probably make the waters return to their level again.

"Zoran!" he was greeted as he entered. "You look troubled!"

What luck, it was the shaman who greeted him. He noticed in passing, that the headman was also talking to another from the village.

"Is there any reason," Zoran finished his litany with the question of greatest concern to him, "why our God would be angry with us? I personally have given the greatest tithe

that I have ever presented, as many others have done,” he added hastily. “Would our God punish all for what the few might not have done?”

“Someone else has just brought a similar story to us,” the shaman answered, a slight frown of concern furrowing his brow.

“It might not hurt,” he continued, as his countenance lightened somewhat, “if we were to offer a little extra in way of propitiation, just in case of something that we are not aware of,” he added as a smile of seeming beneficent self-satisfaction spread across his face at such a wise suggestion. “In any case,” he finished matter-of-factly, “we should call a meeting of all the village before the end of the day—which is almost upon us!” He rose up suddenly, as if he had been unaware that time had passed. By this he signaled the end of their conversation.

The word spread rapidly and many attended. Everything had gone well until the end. Many pious offers of extra sacrifice were made by all who had already given much.

“I knew nothing good could come of it!” one of the usual bemoaners wailed mournfully. “That trader has filled us full of his wild stories and has now gone on to tell others!”

“Didn’t he leave us and go east?” another asked suspiciously.

“That is his usual way!” the headman answered peevishly, ending the meeting before any further sour notes could be offered.

Well, nothing much seems to have come of it this time either, Zoran thought ruefully as he started back. Except, I’m now a little less well off than I was before!

Then, scolding himself, this time aloud. “Why do I always have those kind of thoughts when things go wrong? He is a good man!” he added, defending his shaman against his own secret complaint. And he had promised to work on this all night if he saw that it was needed.

Zoran would have to try to help work things out, instead of just waiting for the shaman to do it all, *like some others I know*. He always felt better when he worked on these things for himself. It was what his family expected of him for their obedience to his usually good judgment. It was what he expected of himself he realized as a thought struck him.

What if the torrent had kept pouring into their Great Water all this time? It was beyond him to even try conjuring up what it might take to bring it to a stop. What if nothing could? The thought sent a renewed shiver up his spine. He would have to check the shoreline more often from now on, he resolved, and it might be well to look for a place to move their shelter a little higher up from the water’s edge, just in case.

He drifted toward where he had been as he walked back, hoping to see something, maybe the moonlight reflection on the water, that might tell him if the level had stayed up or had gone back down, but nothing in the night was of much help. *At least*, he ruminated disconsolately, *it doesn’t seem to have gone up by much, if any*, but it was hard to tell in the vague shadows of the deepening gloom

He tried to bring up the subject of moving in as breezy a manner as possible, under the circumstances. “The night air is colder now,” he greeted Hilkea as he stepped through the shelter flap. “I think that we have too much shade for this part of the season. Maybe tomorrow we could start moving up where it is more open.”

The quick look that he'd gotten before Hilkea turned aside to attend to other things told him that he hadn't fooled her. *Can she see my inner thoughts?* he wondered, as his now-strained smile turned to a slight frown.

"I can help!" Nisaba had spoken too quickly, too loudly, too anxiously, but it brought a smile as her reward. "What do you want me to do?"

"I hadn't noticed any difference," Mashu offered. "My friends asked me to go—"

His father's sudden deepening frown put a stop to any further comment. The quick look said it all without the need for words. *Just because you're the new big hunter doesn't make you immune from the hard work when I think it necessary.*

"I know just the place!" Nisaba offered early the next morning, again anxiously excited, as the new day found Zoran pondering the disassembly of their shelter.

"I've been up there lots of times!" she exclaimed while adding a little bouncing jump to her urging for emphasis. "There's lots of sun up there, and we'll be higher than anyone else around!"

Ea happily rode the frame poles as they were laboriously dragged up to their new place. Nisaba screamed her delight as she raced past with some of the lighter thatch coverings. *Her* place had been chosen and she wanted to be the very first to carry something of their shelter to it.

Now she looked proudly at the finished product of a long hard day's effort. Zoran could see it in her eyes. This was *her* place. She had been hard put to keep up the pace toward the end of reconstruction, but she had kept on even as her slender body sagged with exhaustion. She had almost put her brother to shame several times, refusing to rest until the job was completed.

Zoran was suddenly overcome with a loving tenderness as he stopped just behind where she stood. He encircled her middle tightly but lightly with his powerful arms. She caressed them all along their hairiness with her soft hands as she murmured, "My daddy can do anything."

It was then that he first took notice of the small sproutings of her emergent womanhood. He could remember when she had been as tiny as Ea. Time had gone by too quickly. His grip slowly loosened as he searched out her hand for a lesser kind of communion.

Hilkea sidled slowly, tiredly up to his other side. Her look was of anxious love as she crooned to the sleeping Ea slouched over her shoulder. He had ridden his way off into dreamland.

Mashu, looking a little embarrassed at such an open display of affection, busied himself with hanging his new hunter's bow over the reconstructed lintel.

What was that? An interrogatory thought awakened Zoran from a sound sleep. A low moan through the trees told him a breeze had come up. Sounds that rose to a low screech only to quickly subside announced that it was also coming in short gusts.

A storm coming up? The thought chased the sound through his head. *Wrong season for storms.*

Then he became aware of a kind of thrashing sound coming from the trees below his new homestead. Sometimes it was soft and then grew increasingly harsh, only to subside again. Throughout and above it were sounds of movement, and mumbling, like unintelligible words spoken from a distance.

He rose slowly so as not to disturb Hilkea whose tight grip on him had relaxed somewhat as urgently needed sleep had overtaken her. Outside, the sounds were more distinct and movement, as faintly seen in the half-light of predawn seemed all around him. The mumbling, many times rising above the point of distinction held a note of fear interwoven throughout.

“The village—gone!—no more!” The wail that had become words came from the headman, Zoran was sure. “There were many—could not—be saved!” Tears of regret seemed encased in the rueful utterances.

“The shaman is nowhere to be found!” another cry reverberated dolefully somewhere within the shadows.

Zoran swiftly made for the sounds, among the many other background noises, interspersed by the screams of anguish as the missing were tallied by the milling survivors.

“Tell me! Tell me!” Zoran shouted above the tumult. “What has happened?” he added as he came to the mournful leader.

“The village has been drowned! It came in the black of night!” The doleful words continued. “We had no time, but to run! Many who hesitated are now gone with it I fear!”

“The shaman! Please not the shaman!” another quavering voice implored.

“Water?” The word suddenly sounded so dreadfully useless as Zoran’s thoughts added to his words and he continued, “How high did it come?”

“It comes still! I don’t know when it will stop! We must do something before it comes upon us again!” The headman’s voice sounded beyond despair this time.

Renewed panic reigned supreme among the milling bodies at the words. Any kind of communication would be impossible in that miasma of fearful sound. Morbid dread tightened the muscles of Zoran’s midsection and hair stood up on the back of his neck as he suddenly reversed direction. He must see to his family above all else, and quickly!

There was a multitude already huddled around the entrance as Zoran pushed through. Inside he could see Hilkea dimly in the brightening predawn light, clasping the whimpering Ea tightly to her breast looking near to panic. Nisaba standing closer to the entrance quickly looked up at him, a defiantly fearful grimace upon her face.

“Daddy!” she sprang at him in a gratefully anxious response of recognition. “What’s happening? There’s so many people! What does it mean?”

“What’s going on?” a sleepy-eyed Mashu echoed from a little behind his sister as he peered querulously beyond Zoran.

“We must go even farther up! We must leave now! Quickly! Now!” Zoran finished after a short terse explanation. “Take only the most important things that we can carry as if on a long journey. I don’t know how far we must go, but it must be up to even higher ground! And we must do it quickly, we must do it very quickly! We have no time to talk.”

“I know where!” Nisaba shrieked, her face seeming to regain a little of its former brightness. “I found a path before we moved! It goes up toward the mountains!”

“Oh, how do we decide what to take and what we must leave,” Mashu ruminated ruefully, now more fully cognizant of the seeming greatness of their peril. The mask of barely controlled fear that he had seen in his father’s features as he spoke had been more than enough. The many villagers, milling undecidedly outside their shelter made him openly nervous about the seriousness of the decision that his question implied.

“We must take our weapons and our water skins!” Zoran explained, trying to maintain an outward calmness that he didn’t feel.

“Hilkea, you must take only the most important of your woman things! Nisaba will see to Ea!”

The protective motherly reaction was instant. A step back indicated clearly how she felt.

“Mother!” Nisaba’s voice quickly pitched up toward a shriek as she continued. “I am strong! I will guard him with my life! Please, let me do this for you!” She finished looking from her fearful mother and then to Zoran.

“Each one must do all that we can to survive this thing, this calamity, or none may make it! None!” Zoran said just short of a shout, hoping that he had been stern enough without causing the total collapse of his mate’s determination.

He quickly fashioned a rope harness around Nisaba’s waist and shoulders, so Ea could have some place for his little feet and something for his hands to grab onto. It would be easier on Nisaba for Ea to ride on her back, rather than have her try to carry him. He could only hope that he had made it easy enough. Ea thought it great fun when he first tried it. Hilkea could be heard issuing cries of anguish as each dropped item signaled the awfulness of the choices forced upon her by Zoran’s now rather baleful demeanor as he rushed through his own concerns.

A dreadful urgency had been forced upon them by the sounds of the rushings and crashings that drew ever nearer, and the desperate sounds of the milling mob. And now he knew for sure that they must be off before they could be prevented by the inertia all around them, or any thoughts concerning all those whom they knew!

There was no more time; they must leave all else behind, now, immediately. His thoughts need not be for any but his family now; others would have to do the best that they knew how. “Nisaba! Show us the path!”

It bothered Zoran more than he had thought it would, about the little that could be taken and all that had to be left behind, especially the animals. He hated the looks that he’d had to give Hilkea in her own agony of choice, but near-term fear was a necessary prod to avoid the unreasoning panic and paralysis that was all around them.

He mentally rehearsed the choices as he followed after Nisaba. She nimbly stepped around those vacant-eyed wretches who wandered the fringe as she led her family toward and up the trail out of the clearing that now seemed overrun with desperate, nearly hopeless humanity.

A few had sought to follow, as Zoran anxiously put distance between his family and the milling throng, but the others hadn’t seemed prepared. His loved ones, ahead of him was all that he could afford to think about now. They were *all* he must think about! Not a single backward glance could be allowed. “Look ahead! Look ahead to where you are going!” He tried to make it sound like cryptic advice, but it had been an order, he could tell by the instant obedience.

Ea was just too young. He was having fun with this new way. He giggled as he bounced up and down in his harness until Nisaba spoke sharply to him. He had looked totally crestfallen at the clipped tones of her uncommonly harsh rebuke. Hilkea, though burdened with the few woman things that she had insisted on keeping, beyond the bare necessities, fastened a worrying eye on the two up front as she followed close behind. He

and Mashu carried the majority of the limited choices in the quickly fashioned packs on their backs.

A quick glance toward the thrashing and churning sounds that rose up toward the place that they were leaving reinforced the urgency that he already felt. They just might be able to stay ahead of that awful sight even their limited vision told them of. They just had to!

I must keep thinking ahead! Only ahead! Zoran lectured himself, but the thought slipped past anyway. *What have we done to anger our gods so greatly? But it's not just us! It's all our people this has happened to. And not just our people! The great waters, have they risen up, upon all who lived around it? Everyone that the trader has ever known, or known of, everyone? There must be more to what makes things happen than I could ever have imagined!*

They had been making good time Zoran judged, by the sun rising high in the morning sky. Their trail had led up the side of the hills that sloped and then slumped toward the heights, but the valley that the trail angled up from was rapidly filling with the muddy slurry that rushed on ahead of the good progress that they had already made. They must reach the lowering of the hills where they joined the mountains before the water could rise high enough to cut them off, but their steady rush ahead would exhaust them too much to go on if they didn't rest. But, how could they afford to?

Already Nisaba tires but tries not to show it, but the strain I see on her face as she looks back tells more than she can hide! Zoran silently worried, And Hilkea exhausts herself with her anxious concern when she needs all of her strength just to keep moving. Everyone must get regular rest if we're to have any chance at all! he reasoned as he called a halt.

"I am not tired, Father! I am not tired!" Nisaba protested, her voice becoming more shrill with the repetition as she accosted him with an accusatory glance, but he saw the tears welling up.

"Daughter!" Zoran tried for the sternness that would fall just short of abusing her young sensibilities. "We do not stop just for you! We must all give ourselves a chance to regain our strength and wind! Now, all of us!" he added, "Lie down and make as much of a short rest as we can! We just have to chance it."

It was good for us, even if worrisome, Zoran thought, as they resumed their journey. *I can't believe it! Mashu, already getting up, ready to go, though it's hard to tell what's on his mind.*

"Come on, let's get moving again," Mashu had said.

He looked worried! Mashu worried! Well he sees things more like I do now and that's good, especially if something were to happen to me.

They were now way beyond where Nisaba had ever been. *She looks back more often now,* Zoran mused. *Being out in front with Ea makes her more anxious than when she'd known the way, and she didn't dare to show how tiring her load was, while she walked in front of me.* He had taken advantage of another short respite to move to the front. "It isn't seemly for the leader not to lead," he had explained. This time Nisaba had not complained too loudly.

They had made good time even with regular resting, but it worried him to see the color slowly drain from his young daughter's face from the strain of just not falling

behind. He had suggested that Ea could walk for a while after their last stop, and her feeble attempt to complain that he would slow her down didn't seem very convincing.

"The walking will be good for Ea," Zoran had assured her, "and we won't let you get out of sight before we stop again!" Hilkea's look froze his tongue, but she also seemed torn between her two concerns, Ea not being close enough and Nisaba straining herself harder than she had ever seen her do, and Ea's frightened little whimpers when he thought he was being left behind. But he had learned to hurry after them more than before. But his walking had been just what Nisaba needed, and she seemed to carry him much more easily after that. Mashu, he knew also strained at his heavy load, but their hunting excursions had made them used to carrying heavy things, carcasses and such.

The young ones alternated the walking and carrying without seeming to lose too much time, but Zoran couldn't be sure, and now a new concern slowly came into view. He had noticed the hills fall away far up ahead, but he couldn't see how far down they dropped before rising up into the mountains that he felt certain would assure them the safety that they sought. The water rushing up the valley along their side seemed higher each time that he looked and it had run far enough ahead of them that the crashing of its head wave was lost to his sight as well as his hearing.

Finally they stood on the hill that looked down toward the lowest spot that they must cross. The water had not intruded far enough to cut off their way, but it was higher and closer than Zoran had hoped to see it.

"We can still make it, but we'll have to hurry!" Zoran exclaimed trying to sound convincing, but Hilkea had a way of looking at him when he said things like that.

"We won't be able to rest at all until we get up to the higher ground on the other side," he continued. "Can we go on, or do we need to rest first? It will be a hard go, but after that it will be much safer to rest longer if we need to." Hilkea had not taken her eyes off him, but she said nothing.

"Father, we need to go on! We need to hurry!" The look of restrained terror in Nisaba's eyes was telling. She had also watched the water, Zoran had noticed. She seemed not as sure now of her father's past wisdom as she might have been earlier and he could see, etched upon her young face, the full gravity of their situation. "I am stronger now and I will carry Ea so that we may go faster!"

"I will see to her!" Mashu offered, trying for a look of assurance. "So that she does not fall behind!"

The look shared between them was vintage big brother and little sister.

"Keep an eye on your mother also!" Zoran warned, as they started down. "She may have need of more help than I can give her."

The sudden plunge downhill was refreshing after the continual if gradual uphill that the trail had provided till now. "Be careful" Zoran had called back. "Don't get ahead of your feet! Getting up will be even harder than falling down!"

And then they were on the flat ground looking up toward the safer terrain when he heard it, a huge booming crash of a sound in the distance ahead of them. Had it shaken the ground under his feet a little? Within his labored trot it was hard to tell. It seemed to come from up the valley far ahead of where they strained to move faster still. All had heard it and the startled looks and voices made him call again. "Watch your feet! Watch your feet!"

Then a moaning whistle echoed through the valley ahead of them as the trees bent before the onrush of air that blasted through and over them on its way back toward where they had come. Zoran could see, as they all leaned into the rush of air that visibly slowed them, that they were not in the direct path of where the air over the water rushed by, breaking branches as it surged onward, but eddies swirled close behind them blowing their hair and cooling their sweating bodies as they started the strenuous trek up from the flat ground. He could hear Nisaba's groan as she strained into the uphill climb, before it was drowned by a much larger sound.

What was that? he wondered, even as he heard the more familiar sound of water thrashing and crashing through the trees, a sound that had been in the background of their flight. But now it was coming from up ahead.

"Run!" he shouted hoarsely. "Put everything you've got into it!" His voice had ratcheted up a notch as he saw a cloud of steamy-looking air rushing after the first huge gust. "We've gotta get out of here!"

Hilkea's scream of terror almost drowned out Nisaba's smaller one as all saw the water rush in toward the ground they had just left. At that moment a stumble in the urgency of survival took almost all of Zoran's attention in an effort to stay on his feet. All eyes were riveted on the cataract sweeping in from the side of where all struggled to put his shrill order into action.

A piercing scream, suddenly and abruptly cut off, instantly drew him back to where Mashu struggled to clear the water that threatened to engulf him. Hilkea had turned at the sound, but where was Nisaba? Where was Ea?" All that could be seen was a small bundle entangled in the branches of an uprooted tree. It crashed across where they had just been at the front of a vicious tide that pushed it onward.

Maternal instinct drove Hilkea to rush at the water where her two youngest had just disappeared. Raw instinct drove Zoran to reach out and drag her back as he heard his own mournful wail, as if from a distance "They're gone! They're gone! There's nothing we can do!"

Still struggling against the crosswise surge that threatened to pull him with it, Mashu grabbed at her other arm and they dragged her up the hill as the eager-looking water licked at their heels for longer than Zoran thought they could possibly run.

At last they were above the tide that rushed urgently onward after that which it had already snared. Hilkea had collapsed in every way, a horribly mournful moan passed over her lips, continuing as if it needed no air to sustain it. But at last it came to an end and she didn't move. Alarmed anew, Zoran pulled her arm toward him and saw that she was still here, but her look told him that she didn't wish to be. Her look also drove his thought back to what had just happened.

Nisaba gone? Ea gone? How could I have let this happen? How? How? He felt his face contort as tears dimmed his vision. *I stumbled! I stumbled, just when I should have been looking out for them! Then I just ran!*

But now a new thought intruded, *If you had not done what you just did, you would have all been gone!*

"Thanks!" Zoran answered the thought acidly, "What a consolation."

Mashu looked quizzically at his father for a moment, but seemed already deep into his own thoughts, as they rested in the agony of selective survival.

It felt like an eternity, but it had not been. Mashu was the first to stir as he pulled on his mother's arm, forcing her up. The stricken look on his son's face told Zoran that he was not alone in his recrimination. Now he did the same and soon all three were on their feet.

At first they dragged her forward step by step, forcing her to walk between them as they held her tightly in their grip. Then slowly, listlessly she moved on her own as they mounted the redoubt that had been the hoped-for sanctuary for them—all.

The ground was uneven and the trail led them up and down, up and down, but always higher. Now Zoran was able to think about the need to rest, and to reinstate his role in the remaining family. Hilkea did as she was bid, whether walking or resting, but without any outward sign of motivation. Zoran had never seen this kind of behavior in all of their life together, a near panic hid within his furtive glances. He could have done better! He should have done better!

At last they surmounted the first height and looked down upon the scene that stood between them and the next high place. It was a canyon of sorts where the water had rushed through, tearing whole trees loose to batter others into huge piles of debris. It appeared that more water and similar detritus had entered in from the side of the main rush in some places. Had the hill that they were on become an island for a short while, surrounded by the rebuffed surge that took their youngest upon its cruel detour? Could it happen again? It was a question that he dared not even contemplate. And now, going on seemed less purposeful than it had earlier.

The avalanche of water had rushed back from its devastatingly bruising brush with the mountain rampart almost as urgently as it had rushed forward. The trail now led them ever downward it appeared, toward one of the now empty side entrances. They saw water still standing in pools here and there at the bottom of the descent. Broken trees were strewn around amongst the other devastation everywhere they looked. The path had been destroyed along with everything else across the bottom of the shallow ravine, but he could see where it took up on the other side. He marked a sight-point close to it for a guide across the trashed-up, now-disturbed gravel-and-mud low point.

Zoran called a rest on a bench of land just above the last short descent. *A good spot to look and listen*, he thought. *We can't afford to be surprised again*, he mused as he dropped his pack. The relief that he felt in his muscle-cramped shoulders and back was immediate.

After intently studying the disturbed ground over which they must travel, he looked back some distance on each side. *No sense in having survived all this and then get jumped by a desperate or wounded animal, or have a broken limb fall on us*. His alerted senses warned him.

Something caught his eye, over near where another side branch dumped in, close to where they had chosen to rest. Was it movement? *Couldn't be*. His thinking assured him, *No, air stirring*. But it was movement! Now he saw it more clearly. *Some small animal, trapped out here? It'll die or be killed by some hunger-starved thing. A shame to just leave it, but why should I care? Why should I take a chance, and maybe leave Hilkea even more alone?*

But his reasoning mind was overruled, *Just because mine are gone is no reason to leave some dead animal's poor little orphaned thing stranded!* A tear welled up in his eye, threatening to break out.

He spun quickly around. "Mashu!" He had spoken more sharply than he had meant to. "Look after your mother!" He hoped that he had made the rest of his order a little softer, but it didn't sound like it.

"There's some little thing caught over there. I'm going to see what it is and cut it loose if I can. Let me know if you hear or see anything at all."

Mashu gave him a strangely quizzical look, but only nodded his head in assent, as his gaze returned to his mother's sagging posture.

Zoran moved slowly, carefully but not entirely noiselessly. Movement became desperate struggle as he approached. Something brown, he thought. *Muddy fur*, suddenly slid off with the continued thrashing of legs. White suddenly shone through. *A bare body?* "A child?" he shouted as he leaped to cover the remaining distance.

"Mmmmm!" He heard a muffled sound full of desperation as another part of the brown flew up and then down, covering the bare part. Stringy hair? Muddy hair? *Golden hair underneath all that? Nisaba?*

"Nisaba?" he shouted as he cut the branch that held the head down as in a vise, at the same time shouting, "Mashu! Mashu!"

Zoran gently raised it to reveal, "Nisaba?" Gasping, choking, sobbing burst forth as she looked up. Her arms were tightly clasped around a cloth bundle, which she slowly released to him.

Ea? The name echoed through his racing mind. "**Ea?**" He heard his voice scream, as he gently lifted the limp bundle. Immediately it unfolded into a small body, ashen of face and blue of lip.

"**Ea!**" the name echoed across the ravine as it had in his head. "**Ea!**" he screamed again, clasping him to his chest more fiercely than he had meant to, as the thought tormented him. *Not here! Not now!* A small quantity of water passed over his shoulder. He snatched his small limp son out to arm's length as the little head bobbed back and forth, mouth open and wet. Again he clasped the small body to his chest, more savagely than before, as the torment cut at his heart.

A much larger amount of water passed over his shoulder, and his mind began to work. He quickly rolled his little son over his arm and pounded on his back. Now a large quantity of water was expelled as a smallest gurgle of air followed. Zoran unfolded Ea from off his arm and again clasped him to his chest as the tiniest hope flickered. A large sucking sound was followed by a reflexive jerk that caught him in the groin. Now he turned his little boy around and hugged the little back to his chest, forcing an immediate reverse of the inhalation. Another kick was followed by a quivering struggle.

Hilkea was suddenly there, snatching her little Ea away. *It'll be all right.* The thought assured as his arms were flung away. *A mother knows what to do when her baby strangles at her breast.*

Mashu was there, tearing at the branches as Zoran turned back to Nisaba. Her eyes were full of the horror of what she thought had happened.

"No! No! It's all right! You saved him! You have saved him!" Zoran crooned soothingly as he carefully cut away the twigs and thorns that had so cruelly gouged her slender body.

Slowly, carefully he extracted her from her trap. She winced at every place that her body touched his as he carried her, following after Hilkea who fought to contain and comfort a now-struggling, frightened little boy.

It had been difficult and time consuming, moving the precious ones up and out of any danger of a return of the savage water. But the danger had now apparently disappeared for good.

“Get me my woman things, I must care for Nisaba.”

Hilkea demanded urgently as a much softer look caught Zoran’s eye. He quickly, dutifully, left Hilkea cradling Ea who had reverted to sucking on a almost empty breast, as a grateful mother’s arm tenderly encircled her wonderfully, bravely determined daughter.

Mashu was way ahead of his father. He had gathered his mother’s things and his own pack and was on his way back toward the incline by the time Zoran had come back to where his own pack lay. Mashu seemed to gain strength with every step as he moved out across the ravine and up the hill toward where his mother anxiously awaited.

Zoran looked pensively across at the place of such a now wonderful gift as he wearily lifted his pack. *What if I had not looked?* his mind toyed with his feelings as he turned away, but he would not follow the thought. It would be enough now just to struggle after his suddenly fleet-footed son.

Evening had come upon them by the time that all were together. Zoran had decided that they could spend the night here, *even if it is on an incline*, he thought. They hadn’t heard any crashing sounds since shortly after their narrow escape, but going back wasn’t even a thought. All knew that their land was flooded, but none could even imagine how deep and how lasting. They only knew that the old life was gone, forever, finished.

Hilkea was a very different person. She moved just short of a run, up and down the side hill that was to be their overnight camp, making sure that everyone had something to eat from what was left of their pack. She petted and patted everyone until she was assured that they were as comfortable as conditions permitted. All the while Ea never left her arms, nor did he want to. He was more baby now than since before he had been able to walk.

Nisaba got only slightly less attention. Her poor scratched and gouged arms, body and legs were constant sources of pain and discomfort, but still she tried not to show it. She would reach up to stroke Ea’s dangling leg as Hilkea passed by, or his head when salve was applied to a place on her body that had cracked and started to bleed a little. Hilkea seemed as full of energy as Mashu, whereas Zoran felt on the verge of collapse.

The sun came up to a clear sky except in the north where a massive bank of clouds covered everything, boiling constantly within itself. Zoran thought that he had heard Nisaba whimper in the night, but movement in the darkness close to him assured that Hilkea had already heard. Was it her poor scratched body or had she relived the horror of being snatched away? Ea seemed to have never left Hilkea’s bosom, but Zoran thought he had also heard a whimper quickly smothered as his little son had slept.

Hilkea lay next to Nisaba with Ea common to them both, hands touching as they sought to give *their* baby comfort.

He looked up the slanted land. They would have to find some kind of high ground for the next sleep; there was no telling what lay in store for them in the uncertainty of this strange forested highland.

Although mostly uphill, the day’s journey turned out to have been uneventful. Ea had been coaxed into walking again “like the big boys.” He still coughed some but not like when he had first arisen.

There would be no packing anything for Nisaba, not for that day, or any day soon. She was sure that she could carry Ea if he tired, but the occasional wince as she walked along said more than she could deny.

Late in the day they found a small pond where everything from the day before was washed. Eagle-eyed Mashu had set off tracking a small gazelle on one of the many rest stops and had come back with meat and a pelt. Nisaba teasingly bragged about her brother, the family's *great hunter*, who was certainly now earning his earlier plaudits.

Impulsively taking her hands into his, he said, "Father and I might be the hunters but you are the one who gave life back to our family!" He held her hands a long moment as they looked into each other's eyes. Hilkea's smile appeared frozen in time as she seemed to absorb such a tenderly unusual moment.

Tears had threatened to brim over Nisaba's eyes as she quickly pulled her hands away. Trying to retain a teasing sound she answered, "One part will, and two parts luck!" Zoran could see by the looks exchanged that things between them would be different than they had been in the past.

Just before sunset, he found the high ground that he had searched for. Few places were higher than the one he had chosen. As far as he could see, rows of east-west ridges marched into the south as the land ahead fell slowly away. Would they find a new home in one of the narrow valleys between them? A fire was finally kindled that allowed them the first hot meal since before they had left their home, now gone forever.

The next day, he had arisen at sunrise, looking for the telltale sign of at least temporary habitation. He knew from past experience, or knowledge of it, that there shouldn't be any. As they had traveled, he had seen too much good land that had never been settled, to cause anyone to venture very high beyond the foothills. But now, much of that, if not all, was gone.

He didn't want to even think about it. "How many of our people have escaped?" he wondered aloud. "Some? Maybe none?" The question hung on the early morning air as he remembered the panic of those he had left behind. Had he been right to think only of his own? "There was no time to tell others!" he exclaimed in his own defense. "My family is here only by the greatest of good fortune and the haste that was my doing."

"I heard you talking, Father." Mashu suddenly appeared sporting a wry smile. "I thought you might have met up with someone that I might need to know of."

"Just talking to myself. Going over what's happened, wondering if anyone else—" A sigh of resignation cut him off in mid sentence.

"I know," Mashu observed suddenly looking rather forelorn. "There was a girl—but she—and all that's gone now too! Everything! Well, maybe not everything," he added as Zoran saw his son's gaze move beyond him.

Hilkea was suddenly beside them. "I don't see any smoke, does that mean—?"

"I don't know!" Zoran cut her off, much too testily he thought. Quickly encircling her shoulder, he gave her a small tug, reminding himself of how very fortunate he had been. "I don't know!" This time he had made it sound much milder.

"Good morning!" Nisaba's soft voice seemed to ask permission to join them as she led Ea forward. "He wanted to come find Momma, and see what all the talking was about," she finished, smiling sweetly. Now pointing in the direction that the others had been looking, she asked, "Will we have to go over all those?"

“There’s no way of telling what’s between them or over them,” Zoran answered. The trader, who told us of the cataract that poured water out of the mountains far off in the west, also told of many people who lived in places on the other side of those mountains, but that’s also in a far-off land.” He hesitated a moment and then, “I seem to remember, a long time ago, one of the old ones told of a place a long way beyond these mountains, a big land where many people lived, like we did.” He could tell by the sudden change of expression on their faces that he shouldn’t have added that. “We need to keep our minds on what’s up ahead!” He tried to sound hopeful, not too severe. “Only on what might be in store for us, as we go exploring into new places! Seeing things we’re not used to, finding things, maybe strange things.”

They had wandered for many moons, up one ridge and down another, always trying to keep their star-of-the-south in front of them. Only rarely had smoke been seen and it was always far off from where they ventured. The valleys, each time, seemed too narrow for a single family to feel really safe.

Over the last few ridges they had caught an occasional glimpse of something different in the distance. To the east, but very far off there were very tall mountains of another kind. Some seemed even higher than those they had come through, but it was hard to tell. Ahead of them the land seemed to fall slowly away, and the ridges didn’t run all the same way anymore.

Then they came upon a small water course. It was easier going, walking along its banks, narrow and churning in some places but wide and placid in others, and there were fish, different than any they had known but not hard to catch. In some places the river ran steeply downhill over many rocks and it seemed to be shallow, but they had to be careful not to get out in it for it ran very fast. It was all so new to them.

After what seemed like the last of these rapids, the river was joined by several smaller streams as it ran through the lowering hill country toward what in the haze of great distance only indistinctly indicated might be a flatter land. Then, for the first time, a thin wisp of smoke was seen in the distance, curling up in the early morning air.

Zoran had studied it for some time before he became aware of Mashu. *Had he been waiting for his father to talk to himself again?* Zoran mentally chided himself, remembering how many times this had happened lately.

“Is this one close enough to be of concern to us?” Mashu asked, in way of acknowledging his father’s awareness of his presence.

“It does seem to be in the way of our following the river.”

“Maybe I could scout it out before we decide what to do.” The slight scowl attending the offer told Zoran that his eldest son also was aware of the mixed blessing attending a first contact in a land that they were strangers in.

“Alone, you might look like a hunter far away from home, or worse a spy,” Zoran mused as he tried to put himself in the place of a person who might feel intruded upon. “If there’s more than one there, someone might trail you back to see how many are with you. Whatever they decide might come as a surprise to us.”

He hesitated a long moment before continuing. “Together, we would quickly reveal ourselves to be a wandering family and of no consequence to their security, if they are peacefully inclined.

“If they are a single family, they might feel the need to rebuke us in some manner before we can get close enough to tell them of our misfortune. If they are more than one

family, they may seek to capture us, or take advantage of us in some way.” Zoran rubbed his chin after reviewing the options for his son’s benefit.

“The first way would divide the family’s protection. The second might put us all in some danger.” He hesitated again looking for some sign of Mashu’s attitude about the gravity of the decision that must be made.

“I think,” he continued, scratching a line in the dirt with his foot, “that it would be better if we all stayed together.

The forest cover had been getting thinner as they had wandered south. The grassy open areas had grown larger and the stands of trees more open as they explored their way into this new land.

Now they stood at the edge of a large meadow. The curl of smoke at the far end came from a shelter much larger and more permanent looking than what Zoran was used to seeing. Was this a community meeting place like what theirs used to be? If so, where were the personal shelters for the families? The smoke seemed to be coming from somewhere inside the edifice, but before Zoran had time to wonder about this, a man came out and turned suddenly, looking intently in his direction.

He sees me, he thought, and stepped purposefully out into the open, calling Hilkea and the others to do the same.

“Mashu!” He spoke to his son calmly but measuredly. “Do not follow what I am about to do. Do not move, but make yourself ready for the worst.

“Nisaba, keep Ea close to you, in case he mistakes what I do for play.” Ea had grown in their long journey but still tended toward playfulness. And Nisaba had herself blossomed into quite the young maiden.

He took several steps forward, slowly raising his spreading arms with his hands palms up, watching carefully for any sudden movement. He removed his bow, laying it down, but never losing eye contact. Slowly raising his arms again, palms up, as others suddenly joined the object of Zoran’s attention, gabbling strange sounds.

He now removed his arrow case and placed it in front of him alongside the bow, and saw a hand go up stopping the movement and sounds around the other. *That’s good*, Zoran thought as he unslung his axe and laid it with the other weapons. Then he took several slow steps forward and a little to one side, and did it again in the other direction and called what he hoped would sound like a greeting and then stood still, waiting and watching.

The other spoke something to those behind him and took several steps forward. When those who were spoken to reappeared they were armed. *Good!* Zoran thought, *he doesn’t want to take any chances either.*

Now he again walked slowly forward, hoping to generate a similar reaction. He did. As they neared each other, Zoran saw dark curly hair covering both head and lower face. It made him suddenly conscious of his own facial nakedness. His condition had been normal in the men of his memory. Only the very old ones had anything growing from their chins and that had been thin and scraggly.

He appeared somewhat shorter but more heavily built.

I must look as strange to him as he to me, Zoran mused, as a sound issued forth from the other, vaguely similar to the one he had used.

Was that a greeting? he wondered as he marveled at what covered the man’s body. He had seen something like this only once. The trader had shown him a small woven

square that had been far too expensive for Zoran to even give any thought at all to, and this man was covered with it.

“Zoran.” He slowly mouthed his name as he pointed exaggeratedly at himself.

“Homulkar” came the reciprocal answer.

It had a vaguely familiar ring to it. Where had he heard something that sounded like that? Was it when he was a child, and heard the stories told by the very old ones? He had almost forgotten. They hadn't been told for a long, long time. When he had been a young hunter, a very severe season had taken most of the old ones, and the stories of ancient times had not been told any longer. Some of the great ones in those stories had been from strange-sounding lands. Could this have been one of them? He looked at the other, longing for an answer, but he knew that it would not come from that one anytime soon.

The curly haired one suddenly stepped forward, breaking Zoran's silent soliloquy. There was something in the hand of his extended arm. A gift? Of friendship? Yes! The trader had done this often in his presence. And then he would step back expecting something in return. *But what do I have in return?* he mused.

The hand thrust the gift out repeatedly as if impatient for Zoran to take it. *But I have nothing!* he silently agonized. *My weapons have already been laid down and anyway, they are necessary to me.*

The amulet that lay upon his chest felt suddenly warm. It had been given to him long ago by the shaman, to ward off harm and bring good luck. It had been so much a part of him that most of the time he would not remember that he had it.

I wonder, he thought as he slowly removed the smoothly shiny blue stone that hung from the thin leather thong. *Has this brought us safely through the bad times, or was it insufficient to ward them off?*

The questioning look in the eyes of the other quickly turned to a smile of acceptance as the exchange was completed. The arm now beckoned him toward the abode, and then stepping to one side, it waved again as if in invitation to all to partake of his hospitality.

They sat quietly polite at the places offered. Zoran watched and listened intently, trying to hear anything even vaguely familiar. Within the gabble of sound around him, he felt that he could discern orders and questioning, and the behavior of the participants seemed to confirm that. He also thought that he had read the hand signing relatively well.

Hilkea was instantly attentive in the presence of the strangely inviting aromas as food was brought forth by the mother and her daughters.

Nisaba sat quietly transfixed. She had grown almost to womanhood during their long journey. The blossoming had added delightfully to her slender form. The object of her fixation, the darkly curly mop that framed equally dark eyes, seemingly more widely open than necessary, unblinkingly returned her gaze. Zoran thought he recognized the looks. A quiet sense of discomfort unaccountably settled over him.

For a moment he was transported back to when he and Hilkea had first met. He had been instantly smitten, and she could not return his stare very long without shyly looking down. Her blush had told him even as the heat of his face must have told her.

But she is so young! Zoran's thought rebuked the image.

Ea had become a sturdy boy in the long moons of constant walking, but he had not lost the giggle of delight when something tickled his fancy. And it was returned by another big-eyed curly mop that framed the face of a boy of about his size.

Mashu just sat there, a tower of seemingly unobservant maleness as the several platters were brought before him, along with quick but demurely coy glances as eyes met in the serving. He must have seen, but Zoran could detect no sign that he had even noticed. How he too had grown, the very image of the warrior-hunter that he had long yearned to be. His very aloofness seemed to add to his mystique, as judged by the coy-looking efforts to engage him.

Now the host stood up and offered his name again, pronouncing it slowly, carefully. "Homulkar" and seemed to invite Zoran to repeat it. After stumbling a couple times he repeated it acceptably well.

Hilkea seemed to have little problem with it, and it flowed smoothly over Nisaba's lips ending with a slight trill in imitation of the owner's own smooth delivery. This brought a small smile adding to the continued look of wonder from across the circle. Ea giggled as he stumbled over each sound, but was rescued by his counterpart who shepherded him through each part until he was able to put them all together.

Now for the first time Mashu seemed to engage himself, saying the name credibly well as he looked at his host, with only the slightest reddening of his cheeks to reveal how he felt he had done, or was it the quick flashing of other approving eyes from across the circle?

Now Homulkar seemed to be introducing his eldest son, "Nimrud" the "curly mop" that had held Nisaba's rapt attention.

Not waiting upon protocol, Nisaba pronounced it smoothly, almost effortlessly it seemed to Zoran, again with the small flourish that their host had finished with. The result seemed as though she had caressed him in some way. His father reached down and abruptly pulled him to his feet, breaking the spell that had enveloped the two all this while. Zoran glanced quickly from Nisaba to Homulkar, hoping that some protocol among these strangers had not been breached, but Homulkar's look had seemed focused only on his son.

Zoran's look had been wasted on Nisaba, she hadn't even seen it. She watched Homulkar intently as his seeming agitation quickly subsided, as if she was trying to gauge what her action had done to their welcome.

And so it went, until all their names had been exchanged and practiced and all were again relaxed. Then the food was served. The mother seemed to hover over Hilkea offering her the first portion out of each dish as it was served, to the slightly disapproving glances from her husband. And their girls of several ages seemed to quietly vie for the opportunity to serve Mashu, who had tried to resume his reserved attitude, but without as much success as he'd had before.

Nisaba, as suddenly, changed her mind. Instead of staying seated by her brother, she moved toward her mother, seeming to ask with her eyes for some sign of encouragement, all the while, trying to give Zoran the impression that she hadn't noticed that it was just a little closer to Nimrud of the curly hair.

But Ea easily slipped over to sit by the smaller curly locks now known to him as Picca. Their exchanged looks seemed to be able to convey more than any of the small amount of language they now shared.

The meal was slowly but appreciatively consumed with Zoran imitating the noisy approval that Homulkar seemed to exhibit, accompanied by the hesitant, then more confident smile of the hostess as the meal progressed.

Ea and Picca had quickly eaten and made off toward something that hadn't been shared well with word or gesture. Now, Nimrud sought to engage Mashu in a communication that seemed to imply that the same thing would be of some interest to him also.

Nisaba, suddenly breaking her polite interest in what was being shown to her mother, declared that she wished to accompany her brother. And just as suddenly all the family of girls, who had also been showing obeisant attention to their mother as she proudly showed off her domestic wares, now noisily seemed to request a similar privilege. The mothers looked nervously toward their husbands. Zoran saw the slightly puzzled glance of his host shift from him toward Homulkar's wife, who suddenly issued a guarded string of sounds similar in body language expression to Hilkea's terse, "Don't go too far!"

The sweetness of Nisaba's smile of reply was enough to melt Zoran's heart, as he suddenly remembered Hilkea's once playful reaction to his setting aside of the traditional approach that a woman must use toward her husband.

Now Homulkar and Zoran industriously set about drawing images in the sandy soil trying to express with signs what they had few words to illustrate. For Zoran, from where they had come, and the catastrophe that they had survived, while Homulkar tried to indicate what might be ahead for them.

All too soon the shadings of the coming night slipped into their surroundings as joyful sounds heralded the return of the younger ones. Once again Ea and Picca led the way, followed closely by Nisaba and Nimrud now walking together, much too close for Zoran's comfort. Mashu brought up the rear, still surrounded by admiring girls, toward whom he now showed increased comfort concerning their presence.

Zoran felt a small irritably rise within him as he pondered what kind of parting protocol might be expected of guests as they made their departure.

The gloom of evening had deepened as his glance toward Nimrud revealed that he had chosen to sit close to Nisaba. Their rapt attention seemed to exclude all else around them. Zoran fought the slowly rising irritation as Nimrud's fingers inched across the grass ever closer to his daughter's.

Suddenly Zoran was on his feet. He forced a smile and gestured in a manner he hoped would convey his appreciation to their host. He indicated his intent to withdraw for the evening as he quickly grabbed the hands of Nisaba and Ea, pulling them to their feet. Nimrud looked saddened but remained where he sat for a short while before rising.

The smiles of farewell all around told him that Homulkar had been relieved that Zoran had been the one to suggest withdrawing for the night. Nisaba had cast only one quick backward glance as she obediently let her father lead her away. But her increasingly downcast expression told more than words might have. Hilkea seemed to purposefully look only at Ea transferring his hand to hers as they passed the bramble fence that seemed to surround much of the domestic enclosure.

Now Zoran found himself rambling on about the danger posed by not knowing the traditionally allowed behaviors of their hosts. How innocent-looking expressions and gestures might be interpreted, in a manner not intended, by those of a tradition that was strange to them.

The usually voluble Nisaba remained silent, her expression seeming to sadden as Zoran continued on about the need for all to get plenty of rest before deciding which direction would be best for them to start out on in the new day.

The weapons that they had left beyond the perimeter earlier, were retrieved, but the rest of the jaunt was made in silence as Zoran suddenly felt at a loss for anything to add to what had already been said, while everyone else seemed absorbed in their own thoughts.

Suddenly, a coughing roar of a sound rent the evening air. Zoran instantly hefted his spear as he instinctively turned into the direction from which it had come, only to quickly settle back down as he realized that it had come from a considerable distance. Nisaba's hand had slipped from his own and she now drifted over closer to her mother, who, suddenly alerted, looked to gather in her brood, but of course Mashu was too big for that now.

Zoran noticed a certain small wetness on Nisaba's cheek as her mother's arm settled over her shoulders. The threat of danger had never done this to her before. Had Hilkea's sympathetic gesture caused it? But why? There would always be some ways of females that would continue to puzzle Zoran.

The sound had emphasized the need for a night watch and Mashu had offered to share the duty with him without having had to be asked, and the night slipped by uneventfully.

The rapid movement of leaves, reacting to a breeze as they reflected the rising sun's light, played across Zoran's closed eyelids. Morning had come much too quickly after what seemed like only half a night's rest.

A breeze should mean a change in the weather, Zoran thought, at least where we came from, no telling what it means here. Where they had come from again entered Zoran's thoughts, a kind of grieving for all that had been lost to them.

They had again chosen high ground as they always did on their long journey. The view was encompassing. High mountains to the east, and even closer high mountains to their west, part of which they seemed to be coming through before they had come upon the river and its narrow valley. The river looked to be running down toward an ever-widening landscape that appeared as if it opened up in the far distance onto a broad ever-flattening plain. Zoran had only been able to vaguely follow Homulkar as he seemed to try to describe what was up ahead for them, if they continued on in the same manner as they had come.

If he could trust his understanding of Homulkar's map drawing and gestures, there was a great water far, far away down the immense flatness ahead of them. If they indeed decided to travel toward it, they would have to go through the lands of many fierce people who fought among themselves and also, against many of those who had chosen to cross their lands.

But the way south seemed to beckon Zoran for reasons that he couldn't understand. This he tried to make clear to everyone as Hilkea, and now Nisaba readied the morning meal. Of course they would stop to say good-by to Homulkar and his people and thank them once again for their hospitality.

Had Nisaba perked up ever so slightly at his words? He couldn't tell for sure as her back was mostly turned to him as she went about helping her mother, but her activity seemed to go a little faster, or was it just his imagination?

They had been seen right away this time as friends and enthusiastically welcomed. Zoran was at great pains to assure Homulkar of their appreciation of his hospitality, but that they must continue south toward whatever awaited them.

Hilkea was made a gift of food and spices that Homulkar's wife pressed upon her as they hugged their farewell. Ea, now much less giggly, wandered aimlessly with Picca as they awaited the parting of their ways. Sad-eyed girls each shyly offered Mashu a small trinket of remembrance. Nisaba now boldly held the hand of Nimrud that she had been denied the day before. They slowly walked around the open court of the strange abode of these people, casting only momentary glances at each other as they went.

Homulkar, finally, even if tentatively, grasping the meaning of Zoran's gestures and signings, tried mightily to convey that there was a group, a community, a village down the ever-widening river where they might receive a similar show of hospitality to what he had offered, and ought truly to be considered as their next destination.

The touchings of farewell turned into the hand-wavings of good-bye as the small distance between them slowly grew.

Suddenly Nisaba, in a desperation marked by the anticipated loss that was etched upon her features, leaped across the narrow divide, throwing herself into the surprised arms of Nimrud, hugging him with an intensity that caused him to stagger back a step. She kissed his lips with a fervor that knew of no tomorrow, nor had any shame for today. The first that she had ever bestowed on any male, and done in a manner similar to that which she had seen her mother do with her father at the height of some emotional occasion. Just as suddenly, she thrust herself back from him with an intense urgency and whirling, she fled down the path of departure without a backward glance. The end of that, which had only just begun to have life.

They went to the village, staying a short while, learning a smattering of the strange language, then on to another and then another. They slowly learned to tell the story evermore completely of how they had survived the great catastrophic inundation, even the "Great Flood."

Of course there had been others who had survived to tell of it, but their stories had not been told to as many, and so had not been spread as widely. But there was one story, more unusual than any of the others. It told of a family, very similar to this one, having been saved by a boat.

"Cush begot Nimrod: He began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod the mighty hunter...' And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar." (Gen. 10:10 NKJV)

And Nimrud strode restlessly across all his vast land hunting for many treasures! Was one of them called by the name of "Nisaba"?

*Where go these wanderers
From an earlier yore
Looking desperately
For any door
Looking urgently
For release
From such a
Devastating plight
Hoping for surcease
But is any in sight?
Their future looks bleak
What has fate in store?
Where can they run
Where there's need for no more?*

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Chapter 11

How High, the Sky

Why, a Tower, Build?

“Now this is the genealogy of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And [other] sons were born to them after the flood” (Gen. 10:1, NKJV).

A son of Japheth was Javan.

*“The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. From these the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, **everyone according to his language**, according to their families, into their nations” (Gen. 10:4, 5, all bolding, mine).*

A son of Ham was Cush.

“Cush begot Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord...And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Gen.10:8–10).

*“And it came to pass, **as they journeyed from the east**, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar [Babylon] **and they dwelt there**” (Gen. 11:2).*

“And they said, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4).

The foregoing excerpts from the biblical account seem to agree rather well with the scientific logic that interprets the record of geology. Science portrays *hominid*, evolving into Man, radiating out of Africa, east toward what was later called Mesopotamia, and then into the whole world in some, as yet to be fully accounted for, manner.

The Bible, in short, has God “making Man,” planting him in “Eden to the east” and then driving “Adam and Eve” from there farther to the “east of Eden.” After the destruction of “the garden” a “people” (descendants of Noah?) “journeyed from the east,” found a “plain in the land of Shinar,” and settled and began to build a “city” there.

According to science, the waters of the last Interglacial Period began to flow slowly from under a northern ice cap approximately 10,000 years ago. This cap was formed in the last Ice Age, which had covered much of northern Europe, the lands of the Crimea, and the Steppes of Russia. This increasing flow would have formed the Caspian Sea (if previous ones hadn't already accomplished that), and would have run down into a landlocked depression that is today's Black Sea. This depression would have slowly filled (if not also partially filled earlier), to form a large freshwater lake. These depressions were formed by the extreme weight of the ice cap itself forcing any weakness in the land that they had overridden to sink farther than the surrounding terrain.

With no outlet the volume of this lake would have increased. But, if the surface area increased faster than the volume as it filled, inundating low-lying areas that lay to the north and west of it, the increase in its surface height might have been negligible. It might not have even been noticeable to the largely hunter-gatherer populations that lived in mostly temporary shelters around the areas most prone to suffering the slow steady intrusions.

If the climate changed sometime before 5,700 BC, warming up more rapidly than it had before, which I think that there is support for in the environmental record, the ice caps might have melted more rapidly, even catastrophically. If this happened in other major parts of the globe, the rise in ocean levels could have outpaced the increase in the levels of the precursor (Black Sea) lake, setting up the conditions for the disaster described in chapters 8 "Where in the World is Eden," and 10, "Noah and the Flood."

My feeling is that this scenario finds support again in the environmental record, in that the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are reported to have emptied into the Persian Gulf farther inland than they do today. The increase in the annual flooding of this north-south river valley from the polar ice-cap melting of the northern hemisphere could have produced consequences far enough upriver to have caused *flood platforms* to have been built approximately where the "Tower of Babel" was said to have been erected. These platforms might have been heightened (and indented for stability and/or easy access) in seasons of unusually high annual floods.

The trigger for the building of these platforms may have been the climate change that would have raised all sea levels somewhat, maybe not to the extent that it did in the Mediterranean, but the pre-Mesopotamian hunter-gatherer-evolving-into-agricultural communities of people may have had their own separate *flood-story* experience.

This could have been caused by a rise in the Persian Gulf level from other "seas" pushing in, or from the large meltwater release that would have rushed down through the mountain valleys and into the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Later, as the meltwaters abated, the platforms might have been ritually maintained and occasionally heightened as an offering to appease their God of the Flood until it was felt unnecessary, or until it had reached its natural apex, forming the step pyramid which came to be known as a Ziggurat.

Also, this same condition of sometimes severe flooding could have caused an at least geologically temporary, conjoining of the two rivers at their narrowest approach near modern Baghdad. This might have been why it is seen by some that the Bible mischaracterized rivers that "*ran through*" the "*Garden of Eden*" as four instead of the two that seem to have always been there.

The Mediterranean Sea, being largely landlocked, may have been more greatly affected by large inflows of meltwater from all over its north-shore drainage basins, particularly the lands north of the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. This would have diluted the salinity of at least the surface waters that flooded the low-lying lands bordering the southern or African part of the Mediterranean. These waters would most likely have been more of a quality of brackish than salty water. Still the damage to the existing environment would have been similar, even if it had occurred over a longer time frame.

Saharan Africa is said to have been grassland through much of its Pleistocene era, fluctuating from wet to dry over much of that period. The salting of much of that area, from a rise of the Mediterranean sufficient to push it through the Bosphorus to fill the lake north of it as mentioned in chapter 10, would have produced wide-scale damage to an already precariously balanced environment that the Sahara was and is. This might have started or contributed to the insistent dieback that seems to have been attributed to successive droughts in the lands surrounding Egypt's riverine civilization.

The periodic strife from overcrowding in the narrow confines of the Nile River Valley as implied in ancient Egyptian folklore may have been the result of a continual, persistent withdrawal of human and animal life from the African Sahel and Sahara regions as a damaged environment continued to cycle from wet to dry.

Of course, the Nile Delta would have also suffered a disastrous, if not catastrophic flood, for at least one season, but very probably more. There are records of unusually high annual flood levels there on the Nile in its early to middle history that caused famine-related die-offs, and even civilization-damaging disturbances. This might have been seen only as a greater than usual one, or from a different direction, and it just might have been the beginning catalyst for the contest for food resources that evolved into the institution of government-controlled food apportionment as implied in historical, as well as mentioned in biblical accounts (the story of Joseph, Gen. 41:40–50).

The depression east of the Nile River Valley and delta where the Sinai desert begins and where today's Suez Canal is located would necessarily have been flooded, maybe for a considerable length of time. For these Trans-Saharan refugees, the Nile River Valley would have been the end of the line. The isolation of this valley from the rest of the Middle East might be why Egypt's early (pre-dynastic) history was mostly about the consolidation of many small original communities into fewer larger principalities until Narmer, the first of the Great Pharaohs, unified all of Egypt into one kingdom.

The continued variability of the climate (wet and dry cycles) complicated by the resultant overcrowding may have made the private storage of food-stuffs increasingly hazardous and the maintaining of order more difficult. These disturbances might have led to increasingly state-sponsored management of these and other affairs as is told in the parable-like story of Joseph as earlier indicated.

Archaeologists have discovered what they perceive to be artificial elevations in the Nile Delta lands. Could they be, they posited, flood platforms similar to those discovered in Mesopotamia, where people could have retreated to safety, in the face of a faster and/or higher than usual flooding episode? Egypt's step pyramid does resemble Babylon's Ziggurat. It also looks like it could be the end-result of the flood-platform building in response to the many high-flood episodes of their earlier pre-history that was later co-opted for religious purposes.

As a separate phenomenon from the Black Sea flood story, what might have been the cause of the Mesopotamian version? I've already said that it could have come from beyond the headwaters of the Tigris-Euphrates river system as a catastrophic release, an incidental causative from the rapid retreat of the northern ice cap. This would have produced a flood somewhat similar to the Egyptian annual flooding from the upper reaches of the Nile River, only much larger. It would most likely have carried large amounts of silt and other debris, depositing it upon the flooded lower reaches of the twin rivers, but washing much of it into the gulf where it would have extended the delta lands ever farther from its ancient beginnings somewhere just south east of Ur, in the land of Sumer (Babylonia, Akkad of old). Could "Shinar" of the above biblical passage have turned into the Sumer of archaeological discovery?

How long that this excess flooding process went on isn't as important as the changeable weather patterns that would have inevitably accompanied it. People trying to live close enough to benefit from the rich overlays of the silty loam, and sometimes being surprised by higher than usual amounts of water, would of necessity looked for quick escape routes that could take them up and away faster than the water could rise to engulf them. Running across relatively flat delta land would have quickly proven to be a fatally bad idea, and this could have led quite naturally to those raised "flood platforms."

But these platforms would have themselves acted somewhat like dams that would have trapped silt on their upriver side. This would have washed away at a square platform's corners, rounding them and possibly giving rise to the erection of them diagonally to the river's flow, if future discoveries prove to be suggestive of this arrangement.

An upriver origin of the floodwaters could have given rise to these platforms, but they would have presented problems with surviving a relatively rapid flow down toward its sea-level end of journey.

And so we come to the alternative, a sea-level rise that would have put the gulf headwaters at a close approach to Ur, as some geologists have theorized it once was. Worldwide sea-level rises have been seen to be relatively slow processes, so what could have been the cause of a rise rapid enough to be seen in the Persian Gulf as a flood coming in from the sea?

As I've indicated earlier in this chapter, "the Mediterranean Sea, being largely landlocked, may have been more greatly affected by large inflows of meltwater from all over its north shore drainage basins particularly the lands north of the Adriatic and Aegean Seas." If a catastrophic runoff from the northern ice cap deglaciation had favored a western direction, it could have caused the Mediterranean to rise rapidly enough to breach the Bosphorus in the north through some earthquake-caused crack in the narrow, eighteen-mile isthmus of hills that separated the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles from the lake-land (Black Sea) area.

Huge amounts of meltwater would also have flowed toward southern Mediterranean shores and would have overflowed the lowlands beyond the Gulf of Suez, east of the Nile Delta. Pouring down through the narrow Red Sea, it would have built up a tidal surge of monumental proportions as it emptied into the Indian Ocean. When that mass of water blew through the narrow exit of the Red Sea, and then spread out around the southern Arabian landmass, its northern flank would have naturally flowed up toward and through the Persian Gulf.

The ancient agriculturists in the south of Akkad of old would have witnessed an insistent supplemental surge added to the regular tidal ebb and flow, which would have easily covered large tracts of the marshy delta lands at the mouths of their twin rivers. In the initial surge, the survivors would have fled upriver toward Ur, the city (most probably a much smaller entity at that early time).

“And they said, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower.’”

Instead of a choice between the two ways that the “flood” could have happened, I wonder if it might not have been more likely some kind of combination of both? Trying to put a time frame on it, as the glacial melt quickened, those waters would most likely have reached the headwaters of the twin-rivers of ancient Shinar (Babylon) sometime after the time that the Mediterranean would have begun its rise. It would have overflowed the eastern Egyptian lowland somewhat before or at about the time that the Bosphorus breach occurred. That means that the downriver floods of the Tigris and Euphrates most likely came before that which came from the sea.

When it started, it could have looked much like the annual flood, and only slowly would it have dawned on all those in harm’s way that this one was going to be larger than usual, much larger—much, much larger.

Only those who had been fortunate enough to have been on its periphery might have had the opportunity to escape the first peril, and all too soon they would learn that the gulf at their back would be the source of an added, possibly overwhelming, surprise.

This might well have taken some time before the periodic, higher than usual floods would have started to slowly abate. If these were the ancient people who first drained the marshes of lower Mesopotamia, at first, some may have survived by climbing the elevated banks of those canals that were at the edges of the flood plain.

This may have given rise to the idea of building the “flood platforms,” first out of mud and silt and then faced with brick that might have been the precursors to the biblical “Tower of Babel” later theorized to be the Ziggurat, near Ur, of Babylonian and the Hanging Gardens fame.

“Then they said to one another, ‘Come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’”

What must it have been like to survive such a horrendous catastrophe, and then to go on to a greatness unknown or little understood by those early begin-againers?

Come, let us step once again, through the “looking glass” of imagination.

Lord of the Flood, Hear My Plea

The Royal Feast of the Harvest had been practiced and was ready. This was a ritual as old as time. Even the oldest and the wisest could not remember hearing of a time before it had begun. The harvest was plentiful, much more than it had been two seasons ago, and the gaiety that the overflowing bounty produced was infectious.

Ninsan was excited, and yes, a little anxious too, as she sat there all by herself on the sedan chair as it lay cradled in its rack. She tried to picture how she might look in the procession. She had come of age this season and this would be her first time. Her older sister had always been the one, or so it seemed, as she had anxiously awaited her turn,

and now, it was to be. She wondered if she could rise to the performance that had been her sister's.

The part required a maiden and her sister was now with child. She tried to put off having a child as long as she could after she wed, but circumstances had a way of complicating any plans, and so now the festival part would be Ninsan's to do.

Traditionally the part was reserved for the king's daughter if he had one, and if not, she was told, a contest would be held. She shivered as she suddenly felt the envy of all who would not get a chance, because of her. How many, even now, might be wishing that she had never been? She shook off the feeling as she remembered the excitement of her friends, all of whom she had personally chosen to be her handmaidens.

It has always been so! She tried to relax the pout that her lips formed at the thought as she remembered. Her father had told her. His father had told him and his father's father, into the generations. Even before there were kings, the chief's daughter were chosen. Now it was her rightful place, to represent the Goddess of Fertility and Fecundity. And now, she could just lay back and dream of tomorrow. She would exchange her wraparound for a flowing white robe and golden bracelet, at least for formal occasions.

He had always been an orphan. He could not remember a mother or a father. In his first memories he had been on the street of the poor place.

And today, he had only meant to beg for a scrap of food, as he had always done, but this time he became entranced. This time he had gone to where the men worked on the canals, and now on the new platform that had been authorized the season before. They were paid better than other workers because of the importance of the work that they were doing, and might be more generous.

There were those who had digging tools. How proudly they carried them to their workplace. Some had carrying tools, and then there were others who had measuring tools. They measured everything. They were the ones who showed the diggers how deep or how wide, and in what direction they must go, and where the carriers should fill.

Somehow he had grown strong. How nice it would be if only—*but it cannot be*, his mind remonstrated as desire flickered into an uncertain existence momentarily. His kind were never chosen. He was tolerated, yes, but only if he didn't get in the way of more important people, those who had *family*.

He watched for the few who might look in his direction with a little sympathy. His sad-eyed look would grow, in the hopes that it would touch something deeper, but most would look away too soon to do any good. This, along with the hunger, had been his fortune for as long as he could remember. But today was different. The older measuring man had watched him out of the corner of his eye. Loran pretended he hadn't noticed, but he had learned to see without appearing to look.

Suddenly the older man called in his direction. Surprised, he looked around and behind him, but there was no one there. The call had come again. Was it he, Loran, whom the call had been meant for? No one had ever spoken directly to him, that he could remember! And, he could remember. The teasing, that was only torment to him. Throwing what looked to be a small scrap of food, and when he got there it would only be a pebble, and then the laughter when he had been too hungry to ignore even a possibility.

Now, he was actually moving, even if only slowly, toward the older man, waiting for the cruel laughter that would reveal that he was the butt once again. But his desire for this

to be true was too great. He waited for the slap of reality to strike as he stumbled forward. Now, tears of incredulity sprang into his eyes, nearly blinding him, but he was closer, and the older man spoke again, to him!

“My tools are too many and I am too tired to carry them!” he said, as a friendly smile appeared as if by magic, replacing the frown that he had given to others. But an arm was stretched out and a tool bag was in his hand.

He was offering, *but what?* A silent suspicion rose only to die aborning, as he desperately grasped for what was offered.

Now the ugly laughter started as eyes leered in mock desire, but the older man had not changed his expression, he even brushed his arm as the exchange was made. Loran didn't care about the laughter now; he couldn't even dare to think what it might possibly mean. He was filled with that friendly look. He had finally been chosen! The dream of a lifetime seemed at hand. He followed like a puppy after the first “friend” that he'd ever had.

The procession started out from her father's house. The people liked to call it a palace. She couldn't see that it was all that grand, but of course, she had never been to the poor place.

She knew that she was beautiful sitting so upright on the sedan, and the people confirmed it as they jostled each other to be where they could reach out to her, with the hope of a touch from the hand whose wrist was enclosed within the bracelet of the Goddess. Her sister had been so good at this. Ninsan hoped that her anxious longing to be as good didn't show through her “pretty girl” smile. Their upturned faces seemed to reveal the same thing she felt, only theirs were from such a much lower level of existence. Did all people have the same feelings and only different circumstances? It seemed like she had always had questions. Far more than any of the others around her had answers to, except for her sister.

Her sister had shown her how not to touch all who reached out, just those who looked especially deserving, especially anxious—especially persistent.

It was exhilarating to see such devotion, and so easy to forget that she was only the proxy, the stand-in for the real thing, the Goddess!

Now the procession approached The Great Platform. It had been built up just in the last two seasons as a safe place, from something like what had happened from before, of which she had no memory. Of course it was not very high and still rough, mostly mud that was still drying, but it was edged with the new brick, the kind that was burned by fire to make it harder. Water couldn't get through that kind of brick, but it was more expensive to make them this way.

“It will be well worth it!” her father had said. “It holds the mud in place while it's drying and it'll keep the water away during the flood times.”

This was a new part of the ceremony, added just this season. Her sister had wanted to do this as a parting experience, but things hadn't been made ready and her time had come early. The disappointment had shown on her face as she modeled for Ninsan the ways that she had practiced. Her condition had made it seem funny somehow, but she was a good sister.

The procession would make its way all around the four long sides, offering prayers

and sacrifices to the “Lord of the Flood” petitioning him to exempt this place from his watery wrath. And she, Ninsan, beautiful stand-in for the Goddess of Fertility, was to be the one to offer the flower sacrifices, things of beauty to calm the raging beast of the flood, and to seal their promise to add levels as they could, using the people The Great Platform would save from the next disaster.

“Be sure that you toss them far enough, but make it look easy, make it look easy!” Her sister had ended her last instruction just before things had gotten under way. There was a kind of anxiety in her words that made Ninsan ponder, *Does she wonder if I will do it as well as she could? Well everyone cheered when I threw the first one!*

Her arm was tired by the time that the procession came back to the broad way that led to the feasting place, but she still smiled sweetly. And now, they were reaching for her hand even more earnestly, even more pleadingly, as if she was, the Goddess herself! But of course, she, Ninsan, knew better.

And now they would review the workers and the engineers who had done all the building and measuring as they stood proudly to one side of their work. But who was that poor wretch that crouched timidly behind the older engineer? *And what is he doing there anyway? They all know they're not allowed!* Grandly, she threw her last flower, seeing it land so fittingly at the feet of the older man.

Not only had Loran been chosen for a day by the old engineer, but he had at the end been led in a state of increasing bewilderment, to that engineer's house. How could Loran even try to explain that this was too much to even dream of, let alone have happen, but the older man was insistent. Either Loran would stay with him or Loran wouldn't work for him. What was he to do? Loran threw himself down at the old engineer's feet kissing them in a frenzy of the gratitude that overcame him, as he promised that never, ever would this man ever have cause to regret having made such a wonderful choice.

He soon learned that the engineer lived alone since his wife and children had all been taken by the last flood. The old man had tried to get used to the loneliness, but he had given up. Now, he would have company again. Loran worked hard to please him and tried vainly to make no mistakes at all, but when the few happened, the older man seemed not to notice, adding only more kindness as his reward.

And now it was festival time, and again the engineer was insistent. He seemed not to hear that Loran's kind had not ever been allowed to even look. He had pleaded that the older man would get into trouble because of him, and that they both would be worse off if Loran was seen with him.

But here he was, worried but in a world of wonderment. What a magnificent scene passed by, and now such a beautiful Goddess approached, and a flower was tossed, landing at the old man's feet. Of course it had not been meant for Loran, but she had looked in his direction, and smiled. Even the thought that this was possible was amazing, and now he had been given the flower by this oh-so-kind benefactor.

The feast looked outstanding. They all cheered as she tossed a new bouquet on a model of their most recent engineering project that occupied the highest point surrounded by the great mass of delicacies. And now if only she would be allowed the time to eat of the feast as all of the others around her were doing with great abandonment.

Ninsan was constantly interrupted with requests for advice that she could not give with the proper wisdom that came only with experience. Her sister was beside her quietly whispering advice, "Tell them that all will go well, that's all they wish to hear."

Women, older than her mother, who had died at her birth, asked for her blessing. *What if things don't go well for them?* she silently worried as she smiled her benefaction upon them.

"And what about you?" she asked her sister as the day wore on. "What can I say to you that you don't already know? How can you take comfort from me?"

"If only you will stop worrying, I will already be consoled!"

It had truly been a great day for Ninsan. The procession to the festival had gone better than she could possibly have hoped for. Her father had beamed with utmost approval at his beautiful goddess of a daughter. The feast itself had been enthusiastically devoured by the great throng who surrounded her central position. Now it was time for her return procession, home to that highest point of her people's existence. The cheering of the throng that lined both sides of the route and followed after her sedan was boisterous and constant. The rays of the setting sun cast long shadows toward where a magnificent future seemed to lay ahead for her.

The days passed by quickly as one by one the drainage canals were repaired and upgraded. Loran learned and had taken over much of the strenuous work involved in the measuring, leaving the older engineer free to do the planning for the next layer of the platform. It had not seemed that hard for him to learn, and work on the platform had been started even earlier than hoped for.

Glances of envy replaced those former leers of derision, but he learned to ignore them as he had always done. His past condition seemed to recede from his memory as he strove to accomplish all that presented itself to his eager attention. His anticipation of what his future might possibly consist, lay in the back of his mind to relish in those moments just before sleep overtook him.

He came to understand from the old man that all the promises made by the *Goddess*, through that beautiful creature who flitted daintily through all of Loran's dreams, would come to nothing, if the work could not be finished on time. That alone spurred him to learn and work even harder. The image of her loveliness had taken over Loran's mind. It was an impossible image, but that beauty would not be dimmed, would not be erased by any *reality*, any common sanity. Not even the hardest of work could dim the vision that he had stolen of her.

Time only sharpened his *understanding* that she had also looked at *him*. Crazy as it sounded, his willingness to contemplate that impossibility grew with the many small kindnesses shown him by his benefactor. And now, even the other workers looked at him differently. He had come into a world that his wildest imagination could not have constructed. If this was only a dream, he hoped that he would not have the misfortune to awake from it.

The seasons passed by and another was upon them. The weather growled its restlessness, more so than Ninsan could ever remember. Had not their newest ceremony been enough to placate the great Lord of the Flood? She had taken to watching the construction of the new level from the highest parapet of her father's house. They had seemed to be well ahead until the early season sickness.

She worried for them as she watched the work go more slowly. The young man that she had seen looking at her so furtively that day of the festival now seemed to be everywhere doing the many things that had lain undone by the sickness. But even so he could not do enough, and so they had fallen behind.

The last rays of a dying sun set ablaze the golden tan skin of him who had at last stopped, seeming to enjoy its multi-hewed departure. She had not been aware until now how much his activities had concentrated her attention. It was as if a champion had recently entered the fray on her behalf, *or more correctly*, she thought, *her Goddess. But who is he?* the practical, status-conscious part of her mind haughtily inquired, then answered, *A nobody!*

But, the feeling part countered, *He certainly behaves like somebody now!*

Loran watched as the last rays disappeared. No matter how hard he worked, they had fallen behind. The old man had tried desperately not to show his disappointment, but it was there.

“Not with you! Not with you, my son!” he had assured when he had been caught vocalizing his dissatisfaction.

“The weather seems to work against us. I fear that this coming season will not be as good as the last one. I only hope that the storm god relents and gives us a little more time, but I don’t hold out much hope.”

Until now, Loran had learned to feel as if the eyes of heaven itself had looked approvingly down upon everything that he had been doing for his “earthly” savior. An “angel” had also been noticed in the distant high tower and he had worked even harder just knowing that he was noticed by such a one. Or was she only interested in the new platform? Well, nothing that he had worked at had gone awry, but it still hadn’t been enough.

And now, the morning came full of clouds and the dawn mist refused to lift.

The far-off mountains rumbled their displeasure almost continuously and the overcast from the sea scudded fitfully first here and then there. All the crews had to work hard just to keep warm. Their sidelong glances at each other and the skies told more about their concerns than any words could have evoked.

The mud fill was ahead of schedule but the brick-baking seemed as if it would never catch up. That was one thing that he had not been *allowed* to learn. But he had *noticed* when he was close by, and the engineer had talked about the method *to himself* many times, near where Loran worked.

Grain storage had already been built upon the upriver part that was sealed, but it would do little good if the rest were left unfinished.

“But worry alone will do no good,” the older one had observed. “What we need is to stay with the work and do lots of it, from sunup to sundown, and the rest will just have to take care of itself. What you do is all to the good, but without those who do the lifting and carrying, what we are able to accomplish is of little consequence.”

The worry in the mountains, worried the plains, and that, worried the marshes and water rose up in them. “It comes early this season,” the old man grumbled. “I only hope that it doesn’t mean that it will come higher also!” But it did.

Ninsan, again high in her parapet, was the first to see it. Her high-pitched scream of alarm turned into a shout of warning from others that spread across the settlement. Those who were at work in and on the marsh canals ran for the higher ground of the levees.

Those on the levee tops ran toward the higher ground of the settlement, while those of the settlement ran for the higher ground of the platform.

The friendly jostling for the added security of the grain storage's roof and the ramp leading up to it became a spirited contest for the advantage conferred by the finished portions that the second-level offered. The spirited jostling turned into an outright brawl for all that was left unoccupied of the longer ramp between the second level and the platform base, which itself had been overwhelmed with humanity. Also overrun was the even longer ramp that came up the platform's side from the ground. And still they came. Boats that had lurched down the overflowing rivers rushed to where they could come to ground disgorging people who ran, as for their life, toward anything higher than where they were.

Loran had heard the scream from on high and suddenly realized where that feeling of "heavenly approval" had most likely come from. His "angel" on her parapet had sounded the alarm! She had done her father's work for him by just being there, no matter how idle her curiosity might have been. That scream alone had already saved many lives. Now he must look quickly to the safeguarding of the precious tools for other work and other seasons, before the overflow of people overran him.

Ninsan was, with the rush of frightened humanity below her, suddenly uncertain what to do. The crest of another torrent, dashing urgently over the older swells toward her in her lofty perch, rushed down upon all in a wide swath of ever-faster moving water. She was sure that this one would cover all the ground as high as the settlement, but how much higher she wasn't as certain of. What would the people do who couldn't gain the safety of the platform?

Could she still get down onto the ramp and over to the platform before the water cut her off? She had earlier decided to stay where she was, it had seemed the only safe thing to do with all the crowding down there, and now the time of choosing, she was sure, had already come and gone.

Looking again at the wild milling around on the platform, she was sure of it. She had chosen the right thing to do, after all her *Goddess* would not let anything happen to her! Not her, and certainly this splendidly massive bastion was secure! A sudden spasm of trembling assaulted her slender body, as her eyes took in what appeared to be the beginning of a massive tragedy for her people.

She watched transfixed as the platform stood firmly against the torrent that rushed against it. Swirling water picked people from off the platform's edges and ramps as torrents of water spray shot heavenward and over many others who had fared little better. *How awful!* she thought, but she couldn't avert her eyes. She wondered how many of those unfortunates had sought her blessing the day of the last festival.

But it is well, her better judgment countered, as the rushing flood overtopped the first level, and only sloshed vainly against the unfinished second, *that they had started the second level on the upriver side without having finished all of the first.* The water mounded up, its forward progress stymied, before falling in a rush, away and down both sides of the first level, creating raging whirlpools as eddy currents spun away against the brick facings.

The partially blocked flood in front of the platform pushed against itself, then picking up speed as it sloshed away and around the corner, tumbled over itself toward and then against the stone facings of the palace wall with a booming sound. Overtopping, it now

assaulted the tower's base creating a mild tremor in the parapet. Now the scream was one of terror as Ninsan grasped for the cornice stone clutching it to her breast as the parapet creaked and then groaned.

Loran heard the scream and instinctively launched himself toward it across the first level on the far side of where the torrent piled up, shouting vainly into the raging sound, "No! No! No!" Now he saw the water pile up and launch itself against the palace wall, feeling an overwhelming sense of dread sweep over him as he ran. Suddenly the current was running through. The thick stone wall had collapsed, and the raging, foaming mass now tore at the foundation that supported the parapet. It shuddered as one massive stone after another of the ruined wall was shouldered out of the way of the torrent, slamming into the tower's foundation.

He redoubled his speed as a sardonic laughter escaped his lips. What difference could his puny effort make. Another shriek of pure panic quickly turned to an infantile plea, "Mamaaa!" The tower lurched backward breaking apart as it fell. The shrieking plea was drowned as the tower disappeared. Now he was at the edge of the flood platform. Without hesitation he threw himself into the swirling mass of motion, her dying plea ringing in his ears as he floundered among the many others who had been swept away.

The water had swallowed her up, cutting off her cry as the stone platform fell away from under her feet. She felt her body as it spun first this way then that. Dirty water forced its way into the open mouth that she hadn't been able to close in time. Her wraparound flapped and snapped as the driving current pulled it away. Now water forced its way down her throat. One quick cough and it smothered her lungs. She reached for her throat, but her hands wouldn't move. She sent out one last thought plea to her Goddess, *I wasn't supposed to die!*

Water tore at his loincloth as he went down into the boiling, roiling mass. Down, down, down he went as the swirl caught him, then up, up, up, as a bubble almost blew him out of the water. He clutched at a large limb as he came to the surface, hanging on for dear life, as he was swept along. *What a stupid thing to do!* his mind remonstrated. *How could you hope to find her among all the others you saw swept right off the first level, even as you went in?*

A glistening whiteness on the surface caught the corner of his eye. *Movement? Floating!* His mind asked and answered. He thrashed at the turbulent water as he slowly, clumsily guided his limb toward it.

Yes—it's a body, but limp, he thought. *Grab an arm and tow. Where? A bracelet? It's her; it's her! But so limp. So limp.* "I didn't save her!" Loran mournfully shouted across the surface of the moving current. How could I? *How could anyone?* his thought soothed.

Swim? Tow? Where? I must take what's left back to her family—what's this, a log? No! A raft? "A Raft!" His voice was swept away by the roar of the torrent as it swept them along among all that a society thought it had needed to live. *Try to get to it!* The thought picked up where the words had left off. *Don't lose her! Forget the limb! Get her! Swim! Swim! Nobody on the raft? No help there. Now push her body up.* He continued as the effort instantly drove him down under the surface. *Whoa! Don't drown yourself!* he mentally scolded, as he clawed his way back up. *Grab the raft with one hand and lift her up with the other.* The mental instruction continued, as his free arm encircled her waist just under her breasts.

The slickness of her skin slid up over his body as he strained, drawing his arm slowly up. Her head fell loosely to one side as it passed up over his shoulder. Water spewed from her slackly open mouth. "Can't get her up any higher," he groaned under the effort. *Grab lower, anything, leg, knee, thigh! Quickly!* he thought. His new grip on her mid-thigh caused her limp leg to start the pivoting up that would end in a collision with her breast. *Pull!* the thought ordered as her body started the slip back and away from his, that ended with a splash back into the water. *Hang on! Hang on! Grab anything! Gotta get up onto the raft,* his thought raged on through the frustration of the failed attempt, as he looked for a handhold that would get him up with a one pull.

The first attempt had broken his grip on her thigh, purple now where his grip had bruised. She began to drift away. *Grab something. Grab anything! Her hair! Her hair! Now, try again,*" he mentally remonstrated as he hooked a foot up over the edge and levered himself onto the raft with his arm. Now on his knees, Loran pulled her up half out of the water by her hair, quickly snaking his arm around her waist he flopped her up onto the raft, but her lower legs still dangled in the water. The starkness of her naked condition startled him.

Roll her over; this is not for you to see! a scalding mental voice commanded. *What's the difference? She's dead! She knows nothing! She feels nothing!* his practical mind leaped to the defense of the eyes that could not divert themselves. *So smooth, so soft, so beautiful.* Sudden tears blurred his vision. He rolled her over, as the thought continued, *What a shame! What a waste, And her last scream, Mamaaa! How can I ever forget that? And I couldn't save her. How could I save her? I couldn't even save myself.*

"But something did! Something must have!" he muttered aloud as he relived the feeling of being bodily blown up and almost out of the water.

In his haste to do as bidden, and as her body completed the roll he had initiated, her lower legs came up out of the water. Suddenly unsupported, they put pressure on her thighs raising her hips and lower body slightly.

Her head flopped loosely down over another side as a loud gurgle announced the release of more fluid. The raft began to tilt from the shifting weight.

"Don't lose her! Don't lose her!" he growled angrily and accusingly at the inner voice, as he quickly rolled her onto her back again, shifting her weight toward the middle of the raft as he did. Retreating enough from her body to strike a balance in the overloaded raft, he paused long enough to let his breath catch up to his exertion.

An aura of redness in the visual field...feeling of floating...no, being on something afloat. A memory of movement, then floating...being raised...a gurgling sound. Floating on something. A coldness...being warmed. A thought, *Is this what it's like?*

Eyes...open! Just a little, just a little...sky...lower! Breasts...navel. Nothing on them, over them. Legs? Nothing! Feet? No sandals, nothing—naked?

The thought again, *Is this what it's like? Someone?*

A head...a body...male? Looking? Seen! I am seen...in my nakedness? Who?...Talking?...Think! No movement, eyes closed. Think!...What to do?

"Maybe it was meant to be this way. Who can tell about these things?" he excused himself vocally as his gaze returned to oversee her whole being. "If I'm lucky I will get her body back to her family, if any of them still live. And if not, or I am not able, then there's no harm done. There was no harm intended," he assured himself. "Certainly,

throwing yourself into the flood after her was intended for good not harm! But who's going to know about that!" he shouted to the emptiness around him

"If she was alive," he continued, "I would gladly be groveling at her feet for some small sign of her approval. Oh, if only that could be!"

He started up suddenly out of his sad reverie; did he see a flutter of eyelids?

No! Wishing won't make it so, he thought as a small movement of her breasts went almost without notice.

And then another. His eyes suddenly became glued to them with an incredulous eagerness. *Breathing?* The thought held him breathless and spellbound as a tiny movement continued. A ragged cough suddenly exploded from her lips as her eyes flew wide open.

She couldn't tell when it had started. A shallow breath had been manageable, but she instantly needed more. The urge to take a deeper breath had become irresistible. And now this had come upon her too suddenly to keep from exploding. And now he could see that she could see that he had been staring at her. Who *was* this person? But somehow, she knew that she knew him.

"You?" she gurgled, as recognition came amidst the almost continuous coughing, burping and spitting out the ugliness that had invaded her body. His desperate fumbling grasp helped bring her to an erect sitting position. He shot his arm across her middle as he pushed her head forward. Her long hair now covered most of what had been uncovered. Her head lurched further forward from the effort to clear her breathing. "With the engineer! Yes!" she squeaked the identification amidst another gargling try to clear that which refused to allow her breath to come more freely. "My head," she finally got out. He quickly released the pressure, while bringing her upper body erect.

"Loran is my name, Your Highness," he answered as he dipped his head uncertainly while quickly removing his arm from her middle. He waited patiently, as slowly she settled down into fairly uninterrupted breathing.

"I am so glad! I am so glad!" he repeated himself, full of the gratitude of the moment. "I thought that I had not been able to save you."

"But you did," she answered rather tonelessly, moving again into the crouched position for the meager coverage that her posture and hair had offered, as a thought intruded.

An obligation that cannot be repaid. How long might it be before he remembers, how my body must have felt to him, when he thought me dead. Still, he tried to rescue me, didn't he? But the way that he had been staring, so boldly. Well, is looking so bad after the brave thing that he did? Then what? her proper side inquired. How was he even in the water? Do I dare ask?

"Where did you come from?" she inquired hesitantly, breaking through her thoughts. "I hadn't seen you anywhere, after I watched you finish your work." The thought of what had come so soon after caused a violent tremor to course through her body.

She kept her head down. She couldn't bear to see if he still looked at her. She felt so naked in his presence, more than just without clothes. How would she ever be able to stand on any kind of protocol with nothing but her bracelet? And did it matter any more? Was there anything to go back to?

"When you screamed the second time, that was when I knew that it was you who had been looking down upon me all along."

A thought intruded, *How could she know and why should she care what you were thinking?* “I could hear your fright in your scream!” he continued doggedly. “I came running, I know not why. When I heard your last cry, I had to come to you; I knew not how.”

How could I have picked a better champion, she wondered. *Throwing himself willingly into that maelstrom? Maybe, it will be all right. Maybe just looking will have been enough. But the debt, what about the debt?*

“Where are we?” she asked, hoping to redirect his attention.

“It is hard to tell,” he answered simply.

She could tell by the sound of his voice that he had begun to look around.

“The flood has drowned many ways of telling, but we float toward the Great Sea that our rivers flow into. I must find something to help move us toward any dry land that we may come near.”

She felt his movement and chanced a fear-filled peek. His back was now toward her, as he stood looking in a ranging manner.

In unreasoning relief she blurted out “If you see...cloth, anything to cover—” she broke off as he almost turned around, but seemed to think better of it.

“That also.” Again his husky-sounding answer was abbreviated.

She thought that she saw a flush begin to creep up the back of his neck, thinking, *He knows that what has come to pass is beyond all protocol. If only he would continue to feel that the way he has behaved till now is right.*

He knew that he must be looking toward the means of survival and probity, but he had needed her reminder to galvanize him into action. He tried to imagine the vulnerability of her situation but could not begin to understand how she must feel, to have to ask for that which had always been within easy grasp of any of her retainers.

She felt the shove and heard the splash of water. She looked up quickly, momentarily forgetting her discomfiture. He was nowhere in sight. Oh yes, there he was swimming away! Why? She watched as he closed on something on the surface of the water that did not rise above it. Now he raised it above his head. Cloth!

“Bring it here!” she shrilled her excitement over his find, lapsing into a past manner of speaking, before adding, “Please.”

What an odd word for me to feel the need to use to one such as him, she mused. *Father was the only one to hear that from me, and then not often.* She was suddenly overcome by the thought of her father.

One such as him, a voice spoke to her mind in rasping remonstrance, *has just saved your life! A debt you have already acknowledged cannot be repaid, and you well know what tradition tells you about that!*

What good fortune! he thought as he happily swam back, reveling in the excitement of her reply. And then, “A piece of wood?” he fairly bellowed the delight of his added discovery. Again, that feeling of something looking down upon him as he swam back with his two trophies.

She could hardly wait. Reaching out eagerly, she snatched from him a small flimsy cloth wrap. Quickly turning her back on him, she examined it.

She had seen something like this only on the rare occasions when she journeyed near the poor part of her father’s city. Her eager look of anticipation turned rapidly to a frown

as she recognized the single wrap of the lesser class of women who were not accustomed to covering anything above the waist. *But it will do, it will have to do! Better than the nothing I had till now!* she thought as she quickly whipped it around her middle.

He now contemplated the branch that he had thrown up onto the raft ahead of clambering up after it. It seemed to have been wrenched from where it had branched, tearing a piece of trunk off with it, making a flattish surface at its base. *Not much*, he thought, *but it might make a kind of a paddle! Better than having to use just my hands.*

Although her lower body was now clothed, Ninsan still felt bare. The wrap, even doubled over, was so flimsy it was almost see-through. And the top, she still felt vulnerable to the probability of staring at what she had been accustomed to having covered. Even a quick glance under the present circumstances would be unnerving, she felt sure, but what was there to do?

A sudden thought, *My hair covered most of what had been uncovered when I first sat up. If I part it at the back and bring it forward over my shoulders and down each side of my face—*

It did cover, not very well, the slightest breeze or body movement caused the nipples and sometimes part of a breast to peek through, but she did feel as though she was more covered now. She felt a small movement that brought her out of her self-contained musings. She had been looking, without really seeing him, as he tried out the crude paddle. Now he appeared to apply himself in a serious attempt to move the raft forward. She settled back sitting on her lower legs, content to watch as his well-muscled body bent to the task.

At first the craft lurched from side to side as he seemed to try to use the full extent of the sweep of his arms, but the raft was built more for towing in a canal, as she'd seen many times, than being paddled on open water.

If he tries to keep this up, she silently worried, *he'll quickly wear himself out, no matter how strong he is*, she continued, watching the muscles of his back and arms ripple with each powerful stroke. But soon she noticed that he was easing back to a more sustainable effort, and although the raft moved slower, it seemed to glide more smoothly along. Now she began to notice the many things in the water as they came into view. The trees and branches were easy to pick out, but others that floated past in the distance lay too low in the water to identify. Looking ahead, she saw swirls in the water and wondered why. Hoping that a quick question would not distract him from his efforts, she asked. "What do those swirls in the water mean?"

His quick sidelong glance at her reminded her that she shouldn't have chanced asking. But it had been such a quick one, and the immediate look away told her that he realized that she had not favored this kind of response, and she thought, *It wasn't a stare. Either he wasn't looking or he didn't see anything*, she mused looking down quickly to discern what might have been within his view of her.

The forward motion, though slow, stirred the air and her side-to-side movement to see all that floated by had been enough. Her hair lay neatly on each side of her breasts and she moved to rearrange what had moved.

Did he see them and look quickly away? She flushed at the thought. *But I had felt covered.* Preoccupied, she almost missed that he had begun to respond.

“While the flood still covers everything”—his words seemed careful, measured, almost hesitant—“the drainage canals run across the flow. Their banks would be closer to the surface, and that might cause the water to swirl as it rises to go over them.”

“Could we stand on them?” The question had come too quickly. She had not meant to encourage another response, but she just had to know.

“No! The swirls show that the water moves over them too swiftly!”

He looked straight ahead while he answered, even though traditional protocol demanded that those of subordinate status not turn their backs on authority. He can be forgiven under these circumstances. *I certainly won't complain.* He had known and understood. He must have seen, but he had purposefully not looked back. She began to relax in the knowledge that an unspoken understanding might have been reached between them, but the feeling of helplessness continued to unnerve her.

The strain had begun to tell on him. He had not wanted to admit this even to himself, but he could feel it slowly creeping up on him. His muscles were sore and needed a respite, even a short one would help, but he didn't dare to stop. She seemed able to do nothing for herself. She was too used to someone just being there, doing everything that needed to be done.

She must be suffering right now because no one's providing a shade for her head! he thought. I don't dare to even look when she speaks to me. Once was more than I should have. She is so beautiful, but I must not even think those thoughts.

She seems nervous enough already, needing me, but not knowing if it is possible to still exercise the prerogatives of her position. But who am I to even be looking directly upon her. If things weren't the way that they are, I could have a whip in my face for such insolence.

But, things aren't the way that they were, are they, an unfamiliar voice spoke to him. She has no one else to help her. She would die if not for you! She would have been dead already if not for your willingness to throw your life away like you did, almost! That is not worth something? Some kindness of word or deed? Even permission to look upon her would not be too much to grant, but even the caste of her face shows that she still looks down upon “your kind,” while the fear in her eyes tells you that she feels absolutely helpless before you and your strength! Why do you even hesitate to exercise this new position?

I must only be of service to her! he shouted inwardly to the evil that so spoke to his inner being. I could not stand for her to look at me with more fear in her eyes than she already shows! Or the look of horror, knowing that there is nothing that she could do to resist.

But the reality was again upon him, that his muscles could soon fail him, and then she spoke again. “There are many things in the water. Does that mean that everything that we knew is—gone?”

He could tell the momentary catch, the tightening in her throat that the last word had caused. Did she wish that she could have taken back her last question?

“I wish that I could offer some assurance to you that this is not so, but I would lie if I tried. Many of the things not so clearly seen in the water around us are the bodies of many who were not so fortunate as we.”

As soon as he had said it he wished that he could have taken it back. The “oh” that formed the small scream in her voice told him that she had no idea, that her mind hadn't

even arrived at that rather ordinary conclusion, until his words required it of her. He stumbled on, trying to take her mind off the ugly thought that his unguarded comment had forced upon her awareness.

“But there are many useful things that we can take from the water. Why,” he mentally scratched his head, trying not to mindlessly make matters worse, “there’s the...raft...and...my paddle.”

“And this...wrap.” He could hear her implication in the way she sounded the word. Not only the discomfiture of having to wear that something, so far below her station. But now, the vision of the unfortunate who had donated that scrap of cloth, at the vicious insistence of that Dgin of the water who had so mercilessly stripped it from her as he snuffed out her life as though it had been nothing. The forfeited hopes, however drearily ordinary they might have been. All so someone of her exalted station could cover her nakedness.

Her nakedness! the vision exploded from his memory. Immediately he was back when he had first slid her body over his, trying for the raft. He had not even been aware of the feeling as he had struggled so determinedly to raft her, but now—everything. And when he had pulled her bodily by her hair up onto the raft, and the nakedness, so close, so—*beautiful!* The vision again overpowered his sense of probity.

He had momentarily lost his coordination and found himself slapping uselessly at the water, as he came back to his present reality.

But again she rescued him from further introspection as she exclaimed, “I think I see something above the water over there!”

He felt a lurch that accompanied her excited announcement. Expecting to hear a splash he swiveled around. She had bounded up in her excitement and so, presented him again with a full view of her loveliness: her rearranged hair, and the shortness of the wrap, around such a slender waist. He looked away quickly again, in the direction that she pointed. A line of swirls in the water disappeared into the distance. A thin line of something rose just above the swish of the redirected flow.

“It looks like the levee bank of a drainage canal,” he observed, without expecting her to understand. “Some of them were piled up pretty high to make the canals wide enough to keep the marshes drained.”

“Might that be connected to dry land somewhere?” she asked, the desperate hope obvious in her pleading tone as she pointed toward the thin line that disappeared into the distance. “Oh please! Please say that you can get us there!”

Had she understood the strain that he had been under after all, and misinterpreted his sudden lack of coordination as exhaustion only? He dared not look back at those almond eyes, so full of the forlorn hope that his obvious condition must have convinced her of. He redoubled his effort as he called upon that which he felt had looked down upon him for the endurance to somehow grant her wish. She sat quietly back down on her lower legs as she watched his renewed effort to close this new gap that seemed to stubbornly stand in the way of their survival.

Where could he possibly get such renewed strength and determination from? she silently asked of herself. *Such a champion, anyone would feel fortunate to claim! Maybe he’ll save me yet, even if my Goddess wouldn’t.*

You might inquire, that voice again spoke to her mind, but now in a softened tone of reassurance, *as to who it was that might have sent him.*

My Goddess? her thought asked in a perplexed renewal of worshipful contrition. *My Goddess is more powerful than the Great Lord of the Flood?*

“**You** have saved me? And you will not forsake me now?” she squealed suddenly, loudly in her praise-filled amazement.

Somewhere in the back of his concentrated attention, he heard the praise, even if in the interrogatory, so joyously heaped upon the back and arms that strained so mightily for her. To be so appreciated by one such as her, renewed his determination, even if it could no longer redouble his effort. He must not fail her now! He felt the tingle of new strength course through his body from out of—where?

The gap closed slowly. They entered the current that raced around the end of the thin strip, at a narrow angle. Suddenly all forward motion stopped and the raft spun around listing at a crazy tilt. The paddle was almost torn from his weakened grasp as the current spun them away from the end of the strip and around into its lee. He reared back, his only thought that he might somehow keep her from being thrown off.

The back of his head sank quickly into her lap as his arms flying out over his head struck the raft on either side of her body. In the swirl of the raft and the force and fright of the moment, her upper body reflexively bent suddenly over his head as she seemed to grasp desperately at his under shoulders for some kind of counter to the backward pull. He lay, momentarily smothered in her hair and breasts as the raft glided lazily away from the vicious swirl of the current. Quickly she straightened, away from such close contact, but suddenly seeming loath to break away completely, he felt her rub the sides of his face as he gasped in the effort to recover from such an exhausting effort. There they stayed in that kind of close communion as his heaving chest slowly subsided in its urgent quest for air.

“We’re drifting away,” he heard her say, a sob evident in her voice. If only he could just lay there one more moment, but it was neither proper nor provident. Slowly he raised his head. They were drifting away along that thin line of earthen dike work. There was now little current to blunt his efforts. With a great show of will, he resumed his position and effort that brought them finally into contact with the firmness of land.

Finally it had happened. She had come into sentient physical contact with him. He of the lowest underclass, but whom she owed her very life to, stirred conflicting feelings within her. A forbidden kind of pleasure was mixed with the dread of proscribed contact. She had felt compassion for him as he lay gasping for air. But the tingle that the momentary contact with her hair and breasts made, she had nothing that could have forewarned her, of why that should be so.

Tradition prescribed that those who saved a life could insist on taking a kind of possession of it. Sometimes marriage had even been agreed upon because of such a circumstance, but never between classes of such great disparity.

However the tradition of proscribing certain kinds of contact between classes had been around forever also. Her inner voice reminded her of her obligation to tradition, but which one took precedence over the other. Certainly proscription wouldn’t be a fitting reward for an act of heroism, but how might one of so high a class treat a debt that cannot be repaid to one of such a low class? Just what part of her saved life must she recognize as an unredeemable debt? And what kind of homage was required to recognize a debt that cannot be repaid? Must a princess consort with a commoner if the commoner insisted?

These were the kind of questions that she had never heard any answers to. And what difference did it make if her whole society had been destroyed? And at what point might she be justified in trying to look after her own personal welfare?

It was at that point in her ruminations that she saw and felt the raft touch the thin line of earth, and saw him reach out for something that lay across the top of the levee wall. It was a piece of rope. He quickly tied the loose end to the raft and gingerly stepped out onto the muddy earth of the barely exposed top.

Loran pulled at the rope to see if the other end was tied to something on the far side of the levee. It pulled loose after a couple of tugs. Coiling the loose end in his hand he squatted down, tying the other to the raft. He felt out of place even looking in her direction, let alone at her directly, in such skimpy attire, but he must be sure that she understood what he intended to do.

“I want to see how far I can walk the levee top, but there’s no need for you to do that too, so I’ll push you out and pull you along with this rope.”

“No! No! No!” she screamed in a sudden fright, leaping up and off toward the muddy bank. “I want to be with you!”

It had been too quick. Her leap from the raft had pushed it away. She slipped on the slick surface of the bank and sprawled at his feet. He grabbed her arm roughly as the raft now tugged strongly at the rope, nearly knocking him off balance as some of the coils slipped from his hand. His feet clawed for added purchase to help in her struggle to keep from slipping into the water and pulling him in after her. All while hanging on to the rope end as the raft tugged again.

She had muddied herself and him thoroughly, but they were finally on their feet. The raft still tugged at the hand that held the rope, and suddenly he understood her frightened reaction to his concern for her ability to follow what he meant to do. One slip of the rope and she could see herself out there and alone.

The mild current pulled on the raft as he set out. At first she shadowed his every move as he followed the thin line of the slick levee top path. In his exhausted state the pace that he set for himself was easy, but soon she began to fall behind. He dared not take his eyes off her for any length of time, but it made him uncomfortable each time that he looked back. Even in her muddied condition she was beautiful. *Might she think my look that of impatience only?* he wondered, but somehow he knew better, impertinence was probably more like what she perceived.

Finally he asked, “Do you need to rest?”

“I’m all right,” she answered, as she seemed to try to renew her effort to keep up.

He could see the perspiration begin to stand out on her forehead, arms, and other parts open to his view, as he thought, *Thank the Great God of the Sky that Father Sun is hidden by the overcast, or it would have gone even less well than it has.*

“What fair skin she has, even through the mud,” he mumbled aloud softly, smiling at the glimpses he’d had as he plodded along. *Not much like a princess now!* he mused. But still, beauty peered through the mud with every backward glance, and it felt good. But her bracelet, muddied though it was, spoke a well-remembered caution to him.

He stopped suddenly and she stumbled as she looked up to see why he hesitated, and would have fallen had he not reached for her arm to steady her. Once again he hadn't kept his eye on where they should be going, not that they had much choice. Her shoulders drooped and she wilted even as she stood there swaying unevenly.

"You must rest! Please lay down on the raft. You are not made for this kind of thing. I will not let go of you!" he exclaimed. But she was already beyond argument. He quickly pulled in the raft and helped her onto it. She lay on it in as complete a state of exhaustion as he had felt when he had laid back on her lap. He remembered the feeling as she had stroked his face.

The feel of that accidental, but forbidden contact. But was it really just accidental? She had not just brushed against him in the course of some other movement as far as he could tell. He glided the raft away from him as the thought gained currency in his mind.

She lay as flat as she had that first time he raised her naked body up on the raft. Now she had the wrap that only thinly covered her womanhood, and her uncovered breasts pumped up and down as she sought to catch up with her exertion, but certainly not the quietness of the state she had been in when he had first *seen* her, and he was filled anew with a confused sort of gladness.

He again walked the slippery path of circumstance as well as conscience while the raft glided along at the extremity of the rope, pulled only lightly by the ever lessening current, as those exhilarating thoughts tempted the very depths of his being.

After some time, as he trudged mechanically along, he imagined that he saw something more substantial than this thin unbending line in the far distance. Even through the haze he could tell that the sun was now well past its zenith. His arms and legs began to experience a certain heaviness as he plodded doggedly along.

He had for some time felt the hunger pangs of old as they gnawed at his middle. They'd never been a friend, but he'd had a long familiarity with them. *But now it's different*, he thought, wincing at the feel of the growling as he trudged ever forward. *If I don't keep moving, we could die on this thin strip of safety*, he continued as his hungry eyes searched every piece of vegetable trash that continued a slow steady pileup along the other side of the thin line of rather slick earth.

He looked quickly back, but the slight tug he'd felt hadn't been from her movement. She lay uncommonly still, he thought with the quick glance he'd taken, and it startled him, but a longer look confirmed a very shallow rise and fall of her breasts as they peeked through her muddy but still satiny hair. A sleep of exhaustion appeared to overtake her as the urgent need for air lessened.

One hand lay idly across her slender waist. He remembered how the warmth of his hand had lessened the pangs when nothing else could be done and he wondered if she, in her sleep, now felt them. They would have been long overdue considering the background of her pampered existence. He wondered how she would manage when they became painfully persistent.

As if in answer she stirred slightly. It caused him to miss a step and stumble into a dangerous slip. He must not stare too long. He could ill-afford the energy it took to recover.

Something within the background he'd seen in the distance became more convincingly outlined and somewhat closer. He thought he saw something bob at the water's edge. Or was he just wishing too hard?

He remembered all the things that he'd tried in the desperation of those earlier times. Barely edible, they'd wretched his middle far worse than even the emptiness had, but many times they'd ended up soothing his hunger and his expertise in recognizing wild edibles had grown.

Another tug and a quick glance back. She'd sat up and was now hunched over with both arms wrapped tightly around her middle. It had started. He remembered the feeling and knew it was far worse for her in the newness of the experience.

He tried not to watch as the writhing motions of her agony began to grow. He'd remembered those long hours before the numbness of starvation had set in. There would be no detour for her, and because of her formerly high station the agony would seem far worse.

She had awakened from out of the sleep of exhaustion, she felt weak, as if from a sickness, but the pain was too persistent. It was like when she'd eaten something a long time ago and her screams had brought her father to her. He'd wrapped his strong arms around pressing her middle inward and it had helped, but the pain had only gone away after she had heaved up the offending substance.

But she knew that there had been nothing eaten since before the tower collapse, and the pain grew steadily worse. Even her hands across her middle hadn't helped much. Now she felt one so excruciating it made her catch her breath, sit up quickly, and hunch over. She clasped her arms around tightly as the hunch-over movement of her lurch forward drove them deeply into her middle. It felt like something must break, and then it was over, but somehow, she knew it would be back.

She'd heard babies from the poor section sound like she now felt and wondered. But they had done it so often, that she had stopped listening, but even then, sometimes it got through. Had the regularity of their cries meant that this had been their usual lot, but the pain's sudden return wiped any thoughts of others from her mind as she braced for another round. She tried not to cry out, his stumbling gait told her of his exhaustion, but she knew that she would not be able to hold it back forever.

That something in the distance now gave reassurance that it was more than a shadow moving within the overcast, and the bobbing that he thought he had seen seemed to be real after all. He'd remembered sitting for long periods at a bend in a canal, hoping more than looking for overripe fruit that might have fallen from one of the many trees that overhung its banks.

Some were able to float just above the water's surface, and this looked more encouragingly like that now. He knew he was wishing, but his eye had been trained by hard urgency to see detail at long distances.

Somehow his step quickened, and now a soft whimper from the raft. He could tell that she'd tried not to let on, but he knew the pain that could force a sound beyond any ability to control. With the distance shortening encouragingly, he now forced himself into a staggering gait ruled by the conflict between eager anticipation and leaden exhaustion. His arms flailed awkwardly in the attempt to maintain his balance and he felt the rope slipping through his hand as his grip loosened.

Hold on to the raft! that inner voice screamed its urgent command. His retightened grip was more than his balance could tolerate, and he covered whatever ground that remained on all fours. The raft had tugged at his hand or his hand had tugged at the raft, he couldn't be bothered with the difference. At last, groveling over the slickened surface

on the far side of the embankment at the water's edge he came within grasp of his prize, a small melon.

He heard the muffled wailing of her scream in the background of his efforts. The agony had burst forth through whatever control that she could muster.

She tried to hold on as the spasm ratcheted up the pain and was surprised as she felt her mouth form the plea "Mamaaa!" It was more a softly sustained moan than words that escaped her tightly pursed lips this time. The first time it had been the unnerving terror at looking into the very pit of her mortality, screaming for the mother that she'd never had. A ragged tugging on the raft brought sudden alarm.

She looked up through her pain-teared eyes and couldn't see him! And then she did. On the ground, writhing. Had he been hurt? *Oh please no!* Her alarm grew. No! Not writhing, moving like a lowly kind of dog, but moving toward something roundish in shape!

And then the pain redoubled. Her slight movement had cost her. She looked down to her tightly clenched arms to see if she was still whole. And then a shriek burst through beyond all effort at control. A scream simply beyond the forming of mere words. And then again, it surprisingly, subsided. She was still whole, nothing broken as far as she could tell.

She felt a tugging again. He was scrabbling back toward her pulling on the rope as he came. He clutched that something in his hand and forearm. Was it a melon? Now he hooked his heels onto the raft and, appearing to bow he handed it to her.

"A melon!" The shriek was now in the relative absence of pain, but that awful strange feeling of hunger was still lurking. She snatched it out of his hands and dashed it onto a part of the raft, grabbing hungrily at pieces as they ricocheted in all directions. She felt herself stuffing them into her mouth in a frenzy of activity. Everything, rind, flesh and seeds, she could feel herself gorging on them in animal-like haste, without let up and without thought, as she looked through the top of her eyes at him. He was looking at her with a slight smile but hadn't moved from where he had made his offering.

Why is he smiling at me? she wondered, and was suddenly ashamed. She picked up the largest remaining piece and offered it back. She felt the flush of embarrassment rise in her face as she made her return offering. The unfamiliarity of this role reversal was overwhelming in its irony.

He had watched her eat savagely in the urgency of her hunger, with a familiarity that he could never forget. He well knew the feeling and smiled in mixed pleasure as well as surprise. No delicacy, no protocol, just the animal pleasure of being able to gorge.

Even in this frenzied urgency, she was beautiful. He saw her looking through the top of her eyes at him, *like an animal guarding food*, he thought. He knew that feeling too, the urgency to eat all before someone bigger could take it away. But the way that she did it was kind of—cute. It made him almost forget his own gnawing hunger. Then she suddenly stopped and he saw her eyes widen.

She saw my smile. Did she think that I was laughing at her desperate condition? Not at you! Not you! he thought as he broke his gaze with her. He followed her motion down and saw the largest remaining piece picked up and it was being handed to—him.

To me? To me? he mentally inquired as he saw the flush rise in her face.

She, is serving me? The thought paralyzed him into inaction, as she made another little move for him to take it. He felt a monumental violation of all the established past

protocol of his life as he fumbled in his attempt to humbly receive in return what he had offered, and he now felt his face redden in embarrassed confusion. *She blushes in the shame of what she has felt the need to do for me. But I would have let her eat her fill. Can she not see that?* he thought, while beginning to eat as if partaking of a votive offering, but the abdominal growl of first food was painfully familiar.

You think more of yourself than you should! the voice of his inner master scolded. *She only offered back a small portion of what was already offered to her. A part of protocol that your position has had no experience in.*

But, the voice of his innermost demon chided, take this as part of your due, for she knows that she owes you a debt that she can never repay. She served you as a token of her acknowledgement of that. Besides, she knows full well that she needs you to be able of body, if she is to survive. You save her with every move that you make, and the debt builds up. Nothing she could offer, even of her substance, would be enough.

To which the other replied, *Entertaining this kind of effrontery is how you begin to think too much of yourself.*

She picked up every last edible piece of what was still close to her and only then did she look over at him again. She could see that he tried to eat slowly with an almost desperately reverential cast to his features. She knew that he must be as hungry as she, yet he seemed to eat with doggedly unhurried movement. It was no consolation to her that at least one of them could still observe some form of protocol. She had lost all of her grace and style and he had seemed to take on what she had so easily cast aside in her desperation. She blushed again as she watched him, but he would not make eye contact with her, and now she felt bound to honor him for that.

He was nothing like what she had feared or even imagined in her vulnerability and now she began to feel a certain safety in him, even while she realized that she owed him more than she could ever repay.

He is sufficient of himself, but I am not, she silently observed. He serves me, but I, on the other hand, can only feel the need of him. I'm like the jewel on the top of my fountain, but I do not produce the water. My only ability or utility was to dazzle him as he looked up. But now my fountain is gone and I have been brought to the ground. What is there now to look at that is any different than any other polished stone? And he is still able to serve, but I have been shown to be a useless ornament, except for what—might still dazzle him.

You would do well, the now familiar inner voice spoke to her mind, to rethink any impetuous behavior. You serve him by what he imagines you to be, not by what you, in your new circumstances, see within yourself. If you take from him his imaginings, what a cruel way to try to repay a debt that you cannot. Your bracelet is the touchstone of his imagination. You would do well to clasp it to your bosom tightly and wear it wisely!

The setting sun was now bringing into silhouette the shadow that he had guessed about. It now appeared to be a line of foliage, small trees like the many he'd seen along other canal banks. He wondered if he would have enough stamina to make it before the blackness of the night overtook them.

He moved to disengage himself from the raft and turned to crawl up the slick bank to its drier center. She anticipated him and was there almost before he could stand.

"How do you feel?" was all he could think to ask, averting his eyes after another quick glance.

“Much better than I did,” she answered, as a crooked smile caused one side of her mouth to lift. He knew that she had set herself to follow behind him, and he turned doggedly toward the outline in the distance.

“If you feel a weakness, tell me right away,” he offered over his shoulder as he moved forward. “It could come onto you—very quickly.”

He tried to set a pace that she could follow, knowing full well that they also needed to find more to eat soon, and the trees looked like their single hope. After only a short distance a slight tightening disturbed his middle.

He had known as he had eaten it, that melon on an empty stomach sometimes could do that, but experience told him that this kind of distress would be a lesser problem than the previous discomfort, unless he had overeaten.

Uneasily, he stole a quick glance at her but only saw the frown of exertion upon her forehead. Trying to anticipate what the foliage ahead might be able to produce, he became lost in thought, as he trudged along.

He remembered it well. He had sat by the side of the path too weak to go on. He had seen them coming along past a tree, when one reached up. Now alongside him he had seen something in a hand. They passed him by seemingly without notice. He strained to try to summon up the will to move on, just a little farther down that path. Near fainting, he stumbled on, but the ground seemed to tilt to one side then the other, and then he was down. He knew that he would go no farther. He rolled over on his back for one last look at the blue of his sky, and there it hung.

Suddenly he came back to himself, glancing nervously back. She had fallen behind, head down with one arm wrapped around her middle again. He should not have let himself be distracted by a long-gone memory no matter how sweetly it had ended.

She weakened with every step as she came to where he stopped. Only his reaching out had kept her from falling. His strong arm had been added to hers that clutched her middle as he had taken control of her collapse. Crouched over on her knees a low moan built up from the depths of her throat, as behind her he added his other arm for the comfort and balance that it might offer as memory from his background coached him.

The pressure and added heat of bodily contact had speeded the spasm on through, but no sooner had she seemed to relax than another was upon her, and then another.

The strong arms seemed to have reached around as they had before. It was then that it seemed that everything would be all right. The spasms came and went and she felt the urgent need to just lie down and let him hold her until it would be over. The thought of her father being so close again allowed her to slowly drift off into a dream-filled sleep.

Her sister was there, and they talked animatedly about the flood. It had never been so great before, her sister had said, and Ninsan would have no advice to rely on. She would have to find a new way among those few who would survive, but others had done it before as the old stories had told of. And Ninsan had been chosen, her sister had assured her, for just this moment in time. She might still become a real Goddess in the memory of others yet to come.

He felt her body slowly relax, as the spasms grew more faint and sparse. And now as he lay close to her almost fetal position, he felt exhilarated and uncomfortable at the same time.

The other time that her body had been this close, he had thought her dead. But now, even her distress spoke of life whose vibrancy and closeness thrilled every fiber of his being and filled his mind with an odd kind of dread. It would end all too soon and then what? The two extremes of his inner-self warred with each other as he held her with a grip that would not loosen.

His dreams were filled with the many consequences of discovery by all the authority that he presently flouted. They could die in some manner and might face some kind of hereafter that he knew almost nothing of, except for the idle chatter of others, not meant to be heard by the likes of him.

But he had learned that each moment was all that he could rely on for any kind of comfort or distress that might be his to experience. And each moment that he lay thus seemed like what others had tried to picture with their words for the heavens of his blue sky, filled with the clouds meant to waft them off to some kind of place of perpetual happiness. He had found his, and only wished that it might be eternal, but the dread of temporary occupancy lingered in the inner reaches of memory. His experience reminded him that all good ended all too soon, and one had to be swift to not be caught up in the many kinds of distress that stalked the world.

He slowly came to himself, and his body felt cramped from the hardness of the ground upon which they lay. His grip had loosened as he slept, but still her slim waist was smothered within his arms. His fingertips felt the slight roundness of ribs on each side of his firm hold, as they moved to the smooth rhythm of her breathing. The roundness that lay firmly within the hollow of his lap attested to the reality that the demon of his inner-self had survived the night and was still alive and insistent.

But now he must move before she came to an awareness of the prison of his flesh that she was so securely held within. But how without awakening her to the condition and significance of her confinement.

He withdrew one arm and hand slightly from under where her hip had lain upon it and awaited discovery, but her breathing remained regular and unhurried. He removed it a bit further and found his palm had come to rest on her navel.

The startle response to that most accidental of touches was only barely smothered aborning, and now he began to loosen his other arm as he marveled at the depths to which her sleep of exhaustion must have taken her. But she lay on her side upon the one that he had just tried to move, and extracting it must surely awaken her. What to do? *What to do*, he dithered as the palm resting upon her navel itched to move. It did, as his rational mind in grim determination guided the other to the shoulder that pinned it. He raised it ever so slowly as her body only seemed to grow more limp, much more than necessary for sleep, and he wondered why that should be.

She knows! That inner voice of his desire crooned suggestively. *Hers is the "sleep" of submission.* It continued.

Lust is the animal that devours respect! the voice of probity protested but with a volume diminished as if by a greater distance than before, but his arm suddenly came loose. Touching hers as he began the slow careful extraction, his hand brushed over the

metal of her bracelet that lay low upon her hip, as if on guard. The touch was almost electric. He dropped her shoulder in the shock of the encounter, and she stirred but then amazingly lay still again, as his disentanglement became complete.

She had been minimally aware for some time that the arms that held her were not those of her father. She had *known* from the beginning but had *wished* them to be his, whom she longed to be near again.

How could she throw off this closeness meant only to comfort her in the beginning, without making him suddenly aware of their continued embrace, and possibly resentful that she might have misconstrued his intent? Lying still was probably the best thing to do until she could work out how she might extricate herself.

It felt comfortable, to just lie there and continue to make believe. She was surprised by the small shiver that passed through her body at the thought that she might be incapable of breaking loose from such a powerful confinement. That was when he first stirred. A paralysis of coma-like lassitude overcame all movement as she felt his growing awareness of their bodily closeness. What would he do if she showed no sign of movement? What would he do if she did? Would his motivation be any different either way?

She remembered her sister telling her of a way of men that had an urgency that was difficult for even the good ones to keep under control, and why she, in that exalted position that she had finally attained, should keep a certain distance from those who would approach her, until it was time.

She felt his arm begin its slow extraction. His hand suddenly came to rest on her navel. She could feel his surprise, the small hesitation before it was lifted clear. She felt a prickly kind of tingle linger where his hand had touched.

She was right! He was one of the good ones that her sister had told her of in the dream. Now she felt her shoulder lifted up as the other arm pulled loose. She concentrated on limpness and hoped that she wasn't overdoing it. It touched her bracelet arm as it was extracted. She felt his sudden tensing as her shoulder dropped. The sudden urge to move was irresistible, but only ever so little, please.

He was clear now, and it would be reasonable for her to begin to *awaken*. She stretched as she wondered, why that twinge of small regret? Disappointment?

"How do you feel?" His words were stiff and his voice full of ill-disguised tension.

"Better now!" she answered as she slowly sat up, a stretch became irresistible. A quick glance caught him in the act of quickly looking away, as had she also.

He stood up as she tried to do something with her hair, and the crackling of her mud-splattered face. Another quick look caught his reflexive head movement as if his glance had been suddenly drawn toward the raft. An added tension seemed to have divided them, as if he knew that somehow, she knew.

He took a step toward the raft. Something was different between them now. He had always looked quickly away, which was only right for someone in his position, but now, she also had begun to do the same. It was as if she knew, that he knew that she knew. Had he kidded himself? Had she been aware all along, and had not resisted?

He picked up the rope and started out, glancing back as he saw her rise to follow. This time he steeled himself to hold on to his glance and their eyes met a long moment before she looked down as she began her move to follow.

He strode off into a new realization and feeling. He had not felt the need of a display of gratitude for having been *allowed* this time. He could look at her now and feel the inequality of their positions slowly slip away.

The smudge in the background was confirmed. They were trees, and some along the levee somewhat closer still had a smattering of fruit that fairly shone in the haze of morning sun. Along the way he found a more substantial wrap for her and the old one was now pressed into service as a carrier. There was bad on the occasional fruit that bobbed at the water's edge, but they ate what was good and now saved what little fruit that had been gleaned from the trees for toting.

Their narrow path intersected a wider one that veered off at an angle, and the larger presence in the background held the promise of finally becoming solid ground.

The new levee top began a slow rise above the water's surface as they walked through the late morning haze. Trees began to show above the water. At first almost completely covered, they began their slow march in time with the levee elevation. It was more difficult to pull the raft now, but he had thought it unwise to abandon it before they were able to perceive what lay ahead of them.

He was gratified to see her able to walk farther now between restings, and looking at her as she walked ahead of him was easier than it had been the day before.

The occasional glance back from her sometimes carried a hint of a smile. Had she become more comfortable with the new thing between them? Her quick look away sometimes, made him wonder, but the latent hint of fear in her eyes seemed to almost disappear. And now, solid ground seemed to be forming ahead of them.

The hazy sun was now low in the afternoon sky. The foliage ahead of them looked more dense than before. Shadows within the shadows implied more than a single line of trees. The regularity suggested that it was a purposefully planted grove, but something deeper in, darkened the shadow too much to identify what was there.

His experience told him that the grove was nut not fruit, which could be good for them, except others would have been attracted to it also. And memory reminded him of having been run off before, but now he was older, and responsible for more than himself. And while he recognized the authority of her bracelet, others might not be so inclined.

Now, he decided, was as good a place as any to secure the raft, it might be of use later on, and it would probably still be there. She trudged on for a distance before noticing that he had stopped, and he hurried to catch up before she could decide to come back.

"You left the raft. Why not the paddle also?" she asked, looking at him a little diffidently, and then breaking her stare to look down at the branch-paddle.

"It's not clear what might be up ahead," he answered, trying to choose his words carefully so as not to bring that look of alarm to her eyes again, but she looked away before he could tell.

It was clear that she hadn't asked from a position of authority, and she had looked quickly away as she had all this day. He, by that simple decision and observation, had assumed the role of her protector and she fell in behind him once more as he resumed their journey. He had not looked away, but watched her for any sign of her feelings, while she only glanced quickly, averting his now more confident stare.

It had been difficult all day to even glance at him without remembering, and she wondered if she had somehow given away that she knew. His behavior had been as

different as hers, and she felt his eyes on her all day, and her few glances only confirmed that awareness of the change in him.

The uncertainty ahead was difficult for her to judge and his manner now indicated that he wasn't about to ask her permission before acting.

Somehow she felt reassured even as she worried what this change might portend for her, for she still felt like the jewel, only now, might it be that he would feel that this jewel was—his?

The high-water mark of the flood described its uneven line a short distance from the grove. What was now at the water's edge had been at an elevation somewhat higher than the rest of the flat plain, and this levee had been constructed along a line that would bring its liquid life to the surrounding land.

He looked back past Ninsan to view the vastness of the domain now under the thrall of the Lord of the Flood. It was immense.

"Will it ever go down?" she asked. A sadness had come into her eyes at the overwhelming view. This monster that had almost claimed her seemed to jealously guard all that it had stolen, her birthright, only the edge of which had escaped its clutches.

"It always has," he replied, hoping to inject a note of hope into his voice,

"But it has never come this far before." The look was still there, but he'd felt that he had to be honest.

"We'll just have to be more patient this time." The look that she flashed at him seemed to imply many things, but none of them suggested anything like happiness.

Walking into the first line of trees, he felt something different under his feet, dry ground, the first since he had dived into that disaster. A shiver went up his spine at the thought. But it had been worth it, watching her sad eyes now for any change, he was just thankful that they could still see. That rash unthinking act had brought him more, far more than he could have ever hoped for. A nobody turned into a somebody by that choice, but had it really been his?

She looked past him at the park-like view. Column-like trunks, all with a sameness that was unique, and no understory growth; grazing had seen to that. Behind it lurked a deeper shadow, with a kind of *wild* unevenness to it.

He stopped, peering around in all directions intently. He could see things more quickly than she, and she marveled at it as her gaze shifted up into the many branches overhead. From twigs she saw husks hanging. Nuts. Her eyes confirmed that which her feet had felt in the soft duff they had walked through since entering the grove. Almonds. Her mouth watered at the thought of her favorite among all the others, all of which had always been so easily available.

She squatted down and retrieved a few that had fallen out of opened husks. She had never had to contend with the shells before. Her fingers could find nothing to pry against and she experimented with a bite. Bearing down ever harder it finally shattered and the familiar taste was in her mouth, but so was the roughness of the shells. Removing them bit by bit quickly was seen to be insufficient, so she spit the contents into her hand and became absorbed in their separation. She was suddenly aware that he was beside her, registering a slight smile.

Again, he would have to show her that which she didn't know. And there were so many things that she in her jewel-like innocence didn't know. The right kind of bite to bring a crack that wouldn't shatter.

How many times she had eaten without the least understanding of one who might have cracked without the pleasure of the taste. The beginning of tears welled up in her eyes again at the thought of the unknown unfortunate who'd supplied that skimpy wrap to cover another part of her innocence, until something better could come along. But she *would* learn, and his smile would change.

He watched her as she managed to get the hang of it. Such massive ignorance, but she was learning quickly, and soon she would have a belly full and so would he. He stayed alert, but there was no one within his farthest sight, and that seemed unnatural, unless—no one had made it this far.

They walked through the grove-like surroundings toward the sun that began to backlight the shadow that he'd kept in front of them. His head swiveled with every step, looking, always looking. He felt uncomfortable with her walking behind him and partially out of his sight. Finally, caution overcoming reticence, he took her hand in his, bringing her to walk only slightly behind and to one side, but now in personal contact. That was better, and it also felt good. Her look was difficult to fathom.

She wondered why he'd done that, but she'd had the good sense to not offer resistance. His hand felt strong. Here was one of the two that had saved her. She remembered when they'd held her so firmly as she had come awake. The same kind of firmness it must have taken to save her. She remembered the bruise on her thigh, and imagined the desperation that it had implied. She blushed pinkly, and in the moment of her gratitude squeezed his hand minutely. His sidelong glance made her feel as if he had *seen* her one more time, this time though, it was her emotional nakedness that had been glimpsed.

He'd seen the pinkness and wondered what thoughts he had intruded upon. The slight hint of a squeeze seemed like an invitation, or had he just imagined the pressure? Her hand had felt even better than he'd expected. The hand, the hands; the ones that had touched her as they saved her. The *looking*, too. So forbidden that death should have come to him except—and the hands that gripped her in her agony, that had held her as she slept. Had she only guessed, or did she know about that after all? Whatever it was, he was not supposed to *know*, and that was all right too. And, his new unrestrained need to *look* might take some getting used to. Anyway it couldn't be helped.

More looking and less thinking is a good idea in a place like this! he thought as something at the edge of his vision caught his eye.

He studied it but saw nothing. Their walk had taken them close to the wilder part, and as he examined it for what it might hold for them, there it was again, and then it wasn't.

Now he kept a more careful eye in that direction without appearing to look—and he saw something dart between trees. And then he saw two more. They had come from the wild part and appeared to be trying to circle them. He squeezed her hand and headed for a small clearing where a tree or two were gone. There was questioning concern in her eyes but not alarm. He tried to give the impression of studying something as he watched them move in from the corner of his eye. They came as close in a semicircle as they could while he slowly shifted, putting his back to the wild part.

Her hand was squeezing his urgently just before the one in the middle stepped out into the open.

He spun her roughly half around as he growled, "Watch my back! Watch my back!"

The other two now stepped out on either side. His paddle was in his hand, but he hadn't raised it when the leader spoke.

"Our fight need not be with you. We just want the woman!" His voice was stridently arrogant and his eyes shone like a predator's with his quarry at bay. He was not a large man but larger than the other two.

"Her safety is my first concern, and you would do well to move on!" Loran hoped that his growl would sound like that of an angry bear caught out in the open, as he now raised the paddle for all to see clearly. The other two hesitated momentarily as the leader took a small step forward. All had short clubs like sticks.

"She will be ours and you will be dead, if you don't give her up!" The added rasp in his voice bespoke the added tension of a last bid to threaten his way to his prize.

"You will be dead, if you try!" Loran hissed as he also took a small step forward.

She was paralyzed with fear for him as the two closed quickly from the sides, and the leader matched Loran's step with a larger one. Suddenly Loran seemed to be all motion. A lightning move to his left, a vicious swing of the paddle sent his victim sprawling before he could raise an arm in defense. And a backswing with his moving body adding momentum to the power of its direction caught the leader full on his club, driving it into his head and bringing him down almost senseless.

But the other one comes at me! Her thought turned into a shrill scream of alarm as she was fastened with a chokehold that left her feet dangling loosely as her scream was cut off. Her eyes couldn't believe what they saw as Loran charged at her with his paddle in an overhand swing that caught the club arm of the brute who still held her in a chokehold as her champion's airborne body collided with the flesh of her and the bone of her assailant.

She was suddenly flying through the air but the chokehold had been broken. Loran had just missed hitting her directly in the collision. Dimly she saw him raise her assailant's body up over his head and slam it into the nearest tree. She heard a loud crack. A life had suddenly ended, she was sure. Loran had looked, to her, like a demon possessed when he had charged and destroyed, but then he was quickly on his knees checking to see if something was broken, all concern. The first victim crawled off into the wild underbrush. She broke into hysterical sobs of relief.

It was over so quickly, or was it? Grunting and groaning noises suddenly came from the direction of the erstwhile leader. She turned her head and through her tears of relief saw the first challenger slowly sit up, then quickly grab for something on the ground. Had it been her eyes that warned Loran, or had he already heard? He was all motion again. The first clubbing hit the stick that the leader had raised over his head for protection. The second, coming in rapid succession, was a vicious sideways swing. The sound, like a coconut breaking, then blood spraying almost to where she still lay. Was this the same one who had just touched her so tenderly? And now another life had been snuffed out?

Loran raced back, only to be confronted by eyes wide with fear, as she tried to crawl away on all fours. "From me? From me?" he found himself shouting. He roughly grabbed at the wrist of one arm and propelled her to her feet. Rushing through the grove at a fast trot, he dragged her along after him. She seemed like a lamb that had just caught the scent of the slaughterer. His eyes needed to be on everything. Would the one who got away

bring others? He knew now that there could be many confrontations like the one just ended. He had been lucky this time; there was no sense inviting more by lingering.

She was terrified. Her better judgment told her that she had nothing to fear from him, but her mind had been overwhelmed by the violence. And now she was being dragged after him like some captured prize that she remembered hearing her father talk about when he had come home from a campaign.

Was this like it had been for those whom he had brought home? She stumbled and then stumbled again. If she fell, would he just drag her along? She must not lose her footing. This was more humiliation than she had ever known—except the *nakedness*.

The voice of her inner mind suddenly intruded into her panic, *And who would be dragging you now if he had lost? And to where? And for what purpose? And for how many?* But her troubled mind was in no condition to hear, only to react. She was afraid that his humanity had suddenly been taken from him by the suddenness of the slaughter. Had he come to the end of his tether and this had broken it?

He rushed along trying to look in every direction at once. She now followed after him with a meekness he'd thought impossible for one such as she. He felt sure that he had done something immeasurably shocking to her sensibilities, but dealing with it would have to wait, but he would try to talk to her about it, later, *if we get the chance*. Their lives and her honor depended on the kind of decisions that he made in the here and now, and he must do whatever needed to be done without thought for anything but security.

They passed the edge of the north side of the grove and into open country before he felt safe in slowing his pace. He lessened his grip on her wrist and let it slip down to her hand, but it was limp, no feeling, compared to what had been there before. Her eyes seemed to be watching her feet, and her face looked stricken beyond fear. Maybe she had never had anyone treat her so roughly, except the one who had grabbed her in that chokehold. He ground his teeth anew at the thought, but also contented himself in the justification for his savage revenge.

Whatever I did, it couldn't be helped, he silently reasoned, as he veered toward the distant canal bank where a small knot of trees grew. *I couldn't take the time to talk sense to her in the condition she was in! Afraid of me? It doesn't make sense! I just saved her again!*

Remember the first time? his inner voice queried. *There was fear in her eyes then too, and you had taken great pains to reassure her. This time you moved so fast and violently, how could she be certain, in the shock of her panic, that she would be somehow immune?*

But she should have known!

How could she tell when you flew at her with your club raised as if to strike her. How was she to know whom it was meant for? How did she know whom it might strike?

She should have known.

But in your eyes, she saw murder! And when you snatched her to her feet, like a sack of barley, you took what little was left of the status that she was born with from her.

But it couldn't be helped.

That's true, but she is no reader of minds. And now she is as much as your captive.

That's not true!

Are you now a reader of minds? Feel her hand.

He chanced a quick glance at her as they neared the small group of trees. She looked like the lamb who was now thoroughly assured of her fate, and helpless to avert it.

She stayed on her feet, although she didn't know how. Would they stop at these trees, or go on? She felt numb in her uncertainty. The voice spoke again to her dazed mind.

He did what he thought he had to!

I know.

He took no pleasure in it!

I know.

Who might be leading you now if he had even hesitated?

She only shuddered in response, as he came to a stop amongst the trees. He abruptly let go of her hand and she collapsed to her knees, as she watched him pace agitatedly, looking in all directions. She saw fear in his eyes. For himself? No, it was not like that. Again her inner voice spoke.

He is not certain even now that he has saved you!

She looked up and their eyes met. Hers filled with new tears at what she saw. He was suddenly before her on his knees as he wiped at her tears, and she knew again, what she thought she had known before.

Darkness descended like a shroud over all. He sat down behind her with his back to a trunk. She felt the slow, easy tug as he pulled her toward where he sat in all his alertness. She tried not to think, as one after the other, his arms slowly encircled her midriff. The exhaustion of the shocking experience tilted her head back until it touched his chest. She felt his nervous breathing and the swiveling of his head, to look at what? The darkness was profound, even with the myriad stars in the vault of the heavens above them.

Vaguely, she remembered having curiously studied them from the parapet of her father's palace home. The constellations that she had been taught by the elder soothsayer, were still there. She knew that now, even if she couldn't see them as clearly. Some things never changed. But now, all she could see around her *was* change.

Her parapet was gone, and the *jewel* had almost been lost for all time! A shiver coursed through her being at the thought. What did equity demand of her, as compared to the smallness of the price that might be, just now, being politely asked for?

You would do well to remember your bracelet, even when that seems all that you have!

He had wanted to just wipe that sadness in her eyes away. He was certain, as he looked into their depths, that somehow she now understood. She knew, that he knew what she knew, again. No word need be spoken. He just wanted to feel her closely personal contact, to know where she was, just in case.

She slept only fitfully, and now she knew that it had been because he had also. A small lightness had been added to the eastern sky heralding the day that was to be. Dark shadows lay across the land that was now just becoming visible. She felt him awake with a start at the slight stir of her cramped body. Quick shallow breaths slowed to regularity as his movements bespoke rising awareness of his surroundings.

“Are you awake?” she heard him ask unnecessarily. She had stirred more in response to his first movement, but all she said was, “The sky!”

“If we can see shadows, then others can see to move.”

“Then we should go? But where?”

“Farther away!”

That seemed only too obvious. “But why?” she pressed.

“To find our people.”

Our people? she thought. *Does he not remember that he was never a welcome part of our people?* But she only asked anew, “But why, should you—?” Immediately, she wished that she had not even started to ask such a thing.

“They must not scatter!” It had been short, but already thought out beyond her ability to even picture.

They had walked long. The sun was up, and there would be no protection from its burning rays this day, except for a thin scattering of foliage. The constant vigilance toward their rear had shown no indication of pursuit.

So, what’s ahead of us? she silently mused. More ruthless survivors or might there still be real people? If so what do I tell them? The weight of her *office* descended upon her once more after such a short respite occasioned by her resurrection. The dream of her father and sister hovered silently in the background of her newly revived concerns.

A single figure slowly came into sight. After a short interval he began a slow drift in from their western horizon. Had he seen them as they had him? Loran couldn’t be sure, but there was no hesitation of sudden recognition in his walk toward them. He had just come steadily on.

Loran shouted a challenge and watched as the walk instantly paralleled theirs at the distance challenged, but no answering hail returned. Loran studied the walker. The length and strength of his stride marked him to be of average height and endurance. After a while the drift toward them resumed.

Loran tried to keep himself between the walker and Ninsan, but the stranger had surely seen her, and seemed of a mind to move toward them again. He pondered. They could speed up, so that the walker would fall in behind them, giving the impression that they meant to run away from him, or slow down and present the possibility of a challenge to their direction. He glanced again to the right and saw no one, and decided to deny the walker both outcomes. He was armed only with a large stick as had been the others and Loran turned slightly toward the other in his own way of challenge.

“Keep me between you and him,” Loran warned, as the distance shortened more rapidly. “What is your business?” he demanded loudly in vocal challenge.

“Looking for food.”

At least he speaks the language, Loran thought, then answered. “There is some behind us.”

“Why do you flee it?”

“There are many behind us who would seek to hinder us—some of whom are already dead,” he quickly added, hoping for effect.

“I seek only sustenance for those ahead of me.” The answer seemed curtly framed.

“Who are they?” Loran felt his brow knit together in sudden concern.

“My people! And I look for those who would join with them,” the stranger added after a short hesitation.

“We look for our people also!” Loran confirmed his mission, hoping that he now talked to someone who might become known, might be trusted. He had stopped short in his surprise, and Ninsan had not. The sun suddenly sparkled off her bracelet.

“Princess?” the other shouted suddenly in seeming consternation, as he dropped into a low bow, and repeated more respectfully, “Princess Ninsan?”

“Yes!” she answered simply, and then more regally, “Yes, I am Ninsan!”

He now scrabbled toward her in a posture of abject servility as he wailed in disbelief, “We saw you swept away!”

To Loran her answer sounded solemnly royal, but suddenly ominous. “And now, I am returned!”

She had felt the sudden need to become regal again, to throw off all that had happened. She had survived to come back to her people. She had been certain that her answer had sounded a reasonable note of relief, but the other had suddenly looked to her as the Goddess herself, that she had, until now, only felt that she represented. She, in Loran, saw a look that was hard to understand, as she stepped again into a role as old as their tribal nation.

Loran watched as she grew in the eyes of the other with every step. The jubilation of her new subject was beyond expression. She had somehow moved beyond his, Loran’s, ability to deliver her as he had imagined it would be.

As they neared a campsite of many, looking of a temporary nature, the other ran ahead shouting the joyful tidings, well ahead of her entry. Loran saw her look at him as if ready to express some kind of assurance, or apology, or regret. It was difficult to tell with the change that had so quickly come over her, what she might be thinking.

“Loran! I will not forget what you have done!” Already she sounded like the princess that he’d only been able to see from afar. This time, would the flowers be for him? But still only for a job well done? She seemed on the verge of adding something, but the sudden uproar ahead of them diverted her attention.

She was suddenly engulfed in a wave of adulatory celebration that swept her into their midst and into the encampment. Loran was left to bring up a very solitary rear guard, as he mused, “I have saved her from danger only to lose her to her destiny?”

Returning her was your rightful duty, the voice of reason chided. Was it not also your purpose?

Your duty? Your purpose? the spirit of self spoke slyly. *Is this anything like the reward that you could have had, that is your rightful due?*

She wasn't certain when or how that she had lost control, but when she was being carried through the jubilant throng she realized that instead of leading, as she had planned, she was now just part of a frenzied mass of revelers. Loran was lost from her sight, before she could speak of what was on her heart. For him to even feel as if she would cast him aside so lightly, as she thought she could see in his eyes, had not been her intent or desire, but his look had said as much.

A makeshift sedan-chair was produced and they whirled her around the encampment in a wild and joyful festival of thanksgiving. The happier they sounded, the sadder she grew, finally it ground to a halt at the insistence of an older matron, who asked with all the respect that she could muster, "Why does our happiness make you sad? Should you not be elated to be restored to your rightful position? What is your wish for us?"

Ninsan, looking carefully from the matron toward the multitude beyond, gathering to herself all that had happened in so short a time, answered "My wish, is that you would honor my savior as you have me." She felt the slight tremor in her lower lip which had accompanied her words.

"You were restored to us miraculously, by our Goddess whom we prayed to through every day of our misery!" A hint of haughtiness crept into the old matron's voice and features.

"Was not the one you were found with," asked another, "the lowest of all the poor section that we had never been quite able to get rid of?"

"He was the chosen instrument of my Goddess's miracle," she said as she rose slowly out of the sedan. "He was the witness who pulled me dead from the depths, and I was restored to life through his strong sure hands." Ninsan's throat constricted once more at the thought and stamped her foot, adding extra emphasis to the expressive waving of her hands as she spoke.

"He has guarded that resurrected life, as well as my honor, with his own, until I have been restored into your presence." She took a deep breath and plunged on.

"His many deeds are like unto the heroes of our old stories who have done impossibly marvelous feats and have been remembered for all time." She looked out over the attentive throng a long moment, as she remembered her father and sister, and how they had addressed the people. She drew herself up as if in imitation of what was now only memory.

"If I am to be restored to my *office*, I cannot, I will not help one, if I am not allowed help all. I must be able to lead the way to restore the outcasts among us to a useful place of respect. We must stop robbing ourselves of the carelessly cast-aside talent that could be the means of our very survival. In this massive flood, we may have had our last warning of the need to change our ways." She felt her lower lip and chin quiver anew at

the import of what she had just declared and was inwardly amazed. Where had she come by such wisdom?

“The head of authority cannot live without the effort and support of the body! All of the body! Within him, lives the skill and wisdom of our *master builder* who had, while he was still with us, chosen him to bequeath his legacy to. I must have him beside me, if I am to bequeath my legacy to my posterity!” She raised herself to the maximum elevation that her slender stature would allow. She, an inexperienced neophyte princess had just thrown down a most serious challenge. Her eyes brimmed as she let her arms fall quickly to her sides. For the first time ever, her bracelet slipped off her wrist and fell to the ground. A resounding gasp issued forth as the throng fell back away from where she now stood. They seemed aghast at what they thought that they had just seen. She had not meant to do this, it had just happened.

He had followed behind them suddenly disconsolate in his musings of whether there would be a place for him among them after all. Even a place such as his mentor had courageously carved out for him. Would he even want it now if it was offered, after such a show of ingratitude? She had leaped in one quick bound from him to her new multitude and was suddenly away from him.

He had not seen her closely as they had carried her around in circles. He was suddenly angry at her, for her selfish acceptance of her good fortune. But then unaccountably, he felt a kind of gratitude that at least one of them had been restored.

But as the cynicism of old returned full-blown, he decided that regardless of what happened now, he would look elsewhere for whatever fortune might bring his way. Then the festivities stopped suddenly and an old woman was speaking.

He wondered what she was saying and slowly moved closer through the standing throng. Then Ninsan was talking, and it seemed to be turning into a speech of some sort. Was he hearing correctly? Was she scolding her people, and praising him? He had heard the verbal challenge thrown down, had she thrown down her bracelet as well? The only thing that had stayed solidly with her through such a monstrous experience? The only thing she'd had to her name such a short while ago?

The people had gasped and fallen away leaving her within easy sight. She looked on the verge of another tearful collapse, but she remained standing as tall as her slender frame would allow. He suddenly wanted to rush to her and again wipe away her tears, but he knew that he must not. Somehow, he knew, this must play out without the interference of his masculine concern.

He felt moved to go ever so slowly forward. What should he do when he got there? Would others try to stop him?

Once you said, his inner voice spoke to him in a kindly counsel of wisdom, *that you would have gladly groveled at her feet for her acceptance.*

In front of him now, he saw her brimming, questioning eyes glisten as she now turned

slightly in his direction. Ever so slowly he knelt low in front of her and kissed the tops of each one of her feet. He heard the movement, and out of the corner of his eye he saw everyone bowing low in a reflection of his example.

She bent low over him and picked up her bracelet, having to push firmly before it would slide over her wrist and fall into its proper place. Now she tousled his hair and drew him insistently up to stand with her.

The spontaneous explosion of joyous relief carried everyone toward them. They were lifted to shoulders and carried around in a resumption of the general enthusiasm.

After a resumption of their gloriously grateful celebration, the ad hoc procession restarted at the center of the encampment. The makeshift sedan chair, made only for one occupant now held two. Her presence again overpowered him as she sat squeezed tightly in front of him. The ceremony of marriage had been solemnly performed, but not before the ceremony of his ascension to the office of *master builder* had taken place. Now he hugged her with the arms of pure adulation, as they traveled the weed and greenery-strewn path, carried by the eyes of imagination, into the flowers that once had been hers to strew along her path. But this was sweeter, far sweeter for him.

He had been chosen, at her insistence, by her people, who were now his people. But greater still, and far sweeter, she had chosen him. The impossible dream that he had not even dared to imagine had become reality. The gift to her posterity was his to bestow.

Many seasons of disruption would come to haunt their quest to rebuild their settlement. The flood platform would grow, at first haphazardly and then more regularly as the violence of the seasons abated, but they persistently fulfilled the promises of their prayers.

Many generations would follow as their settlement grew into a city and became great in the land. Their wide-based many-tiered tower reached impatiently toward the heavens. Flowers garlanded the rim of each level. It was a beautiful thing to see.

The dynasties came and went as reforms and improvements persisted until there was a greater one whose leader was named Hammurabi, the Law Giver.

The Lord giveth
and
The Lord taketh away
but
The Lord
Is Lord
Forever

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Chapter 12

The Story of Abraham

In trying to plot the chronology of the flood story, I used Abraham as a stepping stone, as it were. That's how he came to appear before his own story was examined. Now we need to work out *his* chronology. As you will probably remember, my determining the approximate time in recorded history that the Exodus occurred, which has been historically identified, was the basis that allowed me to travel backward toward the time of Abraham.

The first move took me through the story of Joseph that preceded the Exodus by approximately 450 years. Then came the two generations of his father Jacob, and grandfather Isaac, the son of Abraham, and as a consequence, I made an estimate of the proximate time of the flood story according to Bible sources from that semi-historical platform. I indicate semi-historical because the Bible has nothing to say about Abraham's early life. All that there is available for that period comes from the Jewish Midrashic, and archaeological sources. The latter only gives hints through its discoveries that seem to support the former. These then are the relevant excerpts from that story as it related to Abraham.

"The story of Abraham, by my estimate, took place around the middle of the seventeenth century BC. He was born in 'Ur of the Chaldes.' His family moved up the Euphrates River to Haran, which I would place close to the eastern border of the Hittite Empire. This is similar to the journey of Gilgamesh (of the Epic) where he went up the Euphrates to fight the "giants of the mountains" on his way to meeting Utnapishtim of the (Epic's) flood story... The length of Abraham's stay in Haran is not certain but with the long popularity of the epic story, certainly it would have been told and retold more than enough times to have become a *tradition* long before the time when 'God' spoke to Abraham about leaving for parts south."

Therefore Abraham probably was aware of the epic's popularity and its flood story might have been incorporated into his people's own epics somewhere during their trek to where their "God" was leading them, if it didn't have a more original source.

"The story of Abraham begins in chapter 12 of Genesis." It took "six chapters" to get from the flood of Noah to Abraham. From chapter 13 to the end of Genesis, chapter 38, took approximately six hundred years. Knowing the date of the Exodus, then adding the 450 years of the Joseph story, and the three generations that retrace to Abraham, is how I arrived at the middle of the seventeenth century BC.

Is the story of Abraham also a parable? This biblical account seems to be much more than a story about of a single man's epic journey in response to his "God's" direction. It is in a larger vein, about the movement of an apparently long-settled people who took up the ways of nomadic wanderers for a considerable length of time. This appears to have been a reversion to anciently old ways as archaeological and historical accounts place a Semitic incursion into Mesopotamia from Arabian lands to the south, either during or somewhat after the time of Sumer.

In looking for a new land and a new life, much the same as that which occurred in the Exodus, their story takes on the aura of a "prequel," as their "Exodus" journey seems to foreshadow what would take place many hundreds of years later.

It seems to reflect anew, the tensions between “herding” and “settled” peoples as suggested in the parable story of “Cain and Abel” in chapter 9 of this book.

It also seems to fit the first description under the second subtitle of chapter one. “*The American Collegiate Dictionary* defines it (a parable) as ‘a short allegorical story designed to convey some truth or moral lesson.’”

As an aside from the primary topic within Abraham’s story, another parable-like experience is embedded, and a conundrum that could offer a tie into a character in the Gilgamesh epic.

There has been much made about the almost sacrifice of Abraham’s son Isaac.

Is this a *real* episode in a personal life story? If not, what principle had this biblical account been meant to convey?

This takes place after Abraham’s sojourn in Egypt, the rescue of his nephew Lot; the meeting with Melchizedek; and Sodom and Gomorra, among others. He was living, by many accounts, at Beersheba, fairly close to Egypt, a place where he was to spend much of his life.

“*Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham...then He said, ‘Take now your son...whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you’*” (Gen. 22:1–2, NKJV).

Many think the mountain God directed Abraham to is the Mount of Olives, next to where the much later Temple Mount would be erected in Jerusalem, the Salem of Melchizedek. In the end, God excused Abraham from actually committing the child sacrifice that had been a common practice among the Canaanites and many others in the surrounding lands for unnumbered generations before him.

“*And He said, ‘Lay not your hand upon the lad, or do anything to him’*” (Gen. 22:12).

Why is this episode even in the story of Abraham? It would seem to invite a point of confusion: an omniscient God, changing his mind? It is simply excused as a test of faith.

“*I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son...from Me.*”

Child sacrifice has had a longstanding history, and under some circumstances, it had a utilitarian value to many Middle Eastern societies, that were at the mercy of quickly changeable natural conditions. Too small a flood bringing too little water could cause drought and famine as crop failures occurred. Too high and prolonged a flood deferred plantings bringing similar, many times, greater results such as disease and lack of carry-over food resources.

Riverine societies were periodically subjected to these extremes. When this happened, many were the petitions that went out to their understanding of the gods that they had worshiped thankfully during the *good* times.

Mankind has never had a very certain understanding of that “Something” that “Presence” that seemed to lie mostly beyond his ability to experience directly. When animals came into his growing ability to manipulate, the difficult, dangerous ones were invested with a power beyond that which could be seen and accounted for.

It was thought, if Man could somehow acquire a portion of that power, it would tend to balance the physical disparity, making the danger of the hunt less overwhelming.

Ritual ingestion seemed a logical way of putting that overabundance of strength within Man’s body. Great respect was accorded the invisible essence in the ritual sacrifice of eating the animal’s physical remains.

In the animal world, when put under impossibly difficult conditions of survival, many species have been known to kill their young, and in really desperate straights, eat them. It did not escape Man's notice that the animals that he domesticated unknowingly *sacrificed* their young toward the benefit of his existence. As the ages passed by, and he grew beyond the challenge of his *animal* unseen essence, he began to wonder about the vagaries of the natural world beyond the newly perceived *limits* apparent in his animal counterpart.

Man's observation of the capricious nature of the far greater powers displayed in the geological and weather-related phenomena so far beyond his puny abilities, invested in them the power to punish him for totally unknown grievances. His observation of the domesticated animal's sacrifice of their young to him on the altar of their larger survival, warranted only by Man's ability to protect, struck a harmonic chord.

If he could find a way to propitiate those larger forces, a sort of warranty might be fashioned for him. As his observations of these powers grew so did their multiplicity. Among the whole, there were good and there were bad. The good tended to serve his needs with only occasional lapses, but the bad seemed to be with him always.

The confusion occasioned by his thoughts of the good that gave, from his older understanding, and the bad that took away, of the newer one, slowly brought forth a strategy. He need but offer a portion of his bounty, *gifted* to him by his previous belief, in the hope of buying favor with this larger more powerful entity.

The first offerings were of the excess of his animal *gifts*. Only much later would he be able to present those additional fruit, vegetable, and grain sacrifices. But they would never seem as generous as the older more traditional ones (see Cain and Abel). Only when conditions grew dire would he entertain the offering of the most precious gift of all. Then as more time passed, his willingness to offer even this came to be seen as an indication of his devotion, and generosity to his newest *Master*, and the ritual became institutionalized.

But the gods, over time, grew to be many, and more time and resources seemed to be demanded, and were devoted, than even his ingenuity could sustain. He must find a way to consolidate them into fewer representations. His conventions for the sharing of females among his kind offered a way. As individuals combined into families, who in turn combined into clans, etc. so too *marriages* among his gods began to shrink the number even as the complexities within each pantheon increased.

Was the earlier background behind the story of Abraham, Man's attempt at shrinking that pantheon toward a personification that seems to have been well advanced by Abraham's time? And now he was to complete the process? But had the complexity of that entity become too great for man to fully grasp? Abraham's God-above-all Gods had been known and accepted for generations before him, but only as a head of many. But he had been overthrown, even before Abraham's insistence that his "El" be the only one. Was that first attempt, a bridge too far?

The furor within the society which had bred Abraham, directed toward the overthrow of their "God most high," seems to indicate a "point of trespass" that they were unwilling to tolerate. Was the end of child sacrifice the reform that they were unready to accept? Was the exodus south meant to draw those who would follow this "God most high" toward another attempt at this reform?

As Man's ability to visualize this *Singularity* has grown, *God* has seemed to feel the necessity of reforming some of Man's past practices, his incomplete interpretation of this God's desires, thus the warning;

"Do not lay a hand on the lad, or do anything to him."

My understanding of this passage is that God has said in effect, "The offering of your children has never been my condition of your acceptance. Your own conventions have become your *master* and that must end."

I previously stated the following about Gilgamesh:

"The epic, which appears through archaeological discoveries, to have been an old story when it first appeared in written form (approximately 2,750 BC) was written in the language of Sumer. Discovered along with a later version was a king list that placed Gilgamesh as the fifth king (post deluge) of Uruk, the biblical Erech, known today as Warka."

And earlier in chapter 10, I inserted a quote concerning the genealogy of Noah, his son Ham and Ham's son Cush.

"Cush begot Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one on the earth" (Gen.10:8–10).

Looking up Nimrod I found this:

"All that is definitely known about Nimrod is that he was a Cushite, that he established a kingdom in Shinar, the classic Babylonia...In the Chaldean Epic of the deluge Nimrod has been identified with Gilgamesh" (Amer. vol. 20; Nimrod).

Then I remembered that he had been mentioned in another source:

"Not surprisingly, Sanhurfa is rife with legends about Abraham...His faith in a single God led him to smash figures of deities and idols. Furious, King Nimrod ordered Abraham burned" (Nat. Geog. 12, 2001 p. 110). Does this indicate that point of trespass?

Gilgamesh was the fifth king, post deluge according to the epic. Nimrod was four generations removed from the biblical Noah. Pretty close but not a perfect fit. Did the biblical Nimrod know Abraham? Probably not, but kings have been known to take the name of illustrious forbearers, therefore a King Nimrod, further down the line of succession, might have known of Abraham. When this king became angry at Abraham, did this have any influence on God's directing Abraham to go south into Canaan?

What does this have to do with Abraham's story? It does seem to tie him in with the flood story, even if only imperfectly. Legends do seem to have a way of expanding from an original point of reality, but connections can be evinced from them. Sometimes a speculative guess as to what that point of reality might be is the first step in putting the rest of the puzzle pieces together. Where are the rest of the pieces? They might be right under our collective noses. Sometimes a guess through the *eye* of imagination called fiction might help illuminate the process.

Here then, I present to you an allegory, similar to the flood story. This one is framed in the Masoretic Midrash style: an imaginatively described story of a *real* person of whom we have little in the way of biblically based background. It is a follow-on that takes us from the sometimes unreal quality of the flood story to a largely untold episode in the life of a biblically historic figure.

Within this narrative, I also hope to convince you that the name of a Mesopotamian "God-Most-High" known as EL, as revealed through discoveries in archaeology is the same as that implied in the name of the high priest of Salem in the biblical story of Abraham, M-EL-chizedek (see also ch. 13).

Israel is another example, only this time the name of a god is not enfolded within a personal or family name, it seems to be embedded within a larger context, but is it? Israel has the god El within it as with the other example, but where did the name Israel come from?

“Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padam Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name...The land I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you and to your descendants...’ So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where God talked to him, a pillar of stone...And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel [vs. 5 El Bethel, because there God appeared to him] ...And Jacob set a pillar on her grave...Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder” (Gen. 35:9,10, 13–15, NKJV).

So God changed Jacob’s name to Israel and by inference a whole nation called Israel. So what I extrapolate the most likely meaning in the singular is “Isra-El, follower of God and the plural, followers of God.

Is it possible to imagine that there has been only one God all along the long, long path toward understanding, from the first Paleolithic representations to those of today, where only the names have been changed to protect the relative ignorance of the namer?

As God has once been known to have said:

“If Man sees me, only as he wishes to see me, and not as I Am, that is a problem of Man’s own making, a problem of his limited perception!”

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope
—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*

A Very Long Journey

He felt old and very tired as he lay down for his nightly rest, after such a complicated, event-filled day. Sarah had hardly been laid to rest, and now there were these others, so much younger, rushing around in his life. It reminded him of his younger days when his sweet Sarai had been like these young ones, but he was old now and tired and they were only confusing him, and confusing to him, and only made him remember a time when he also had been different.

A sudden yearning for the simplicity of those long-ago childhood days washed over him. He remembered his mother telling him how small a baby he had been when he was born in the old city of Ur.

She’d always had that worried look whenever she told the story. It was as if something was there in the back of her mind that she could not talk about, and it had comforted her to pet him and draw him close to her in the middle of the telling, or sometimes as her story drew to a close.

As he grew, his father had told him, he became strong and unusually bright. His uncles had seemed to take great delight in teaching him the many things that were good to know about their world and life. He learned from them some things about their family God named EL.

He had also learned that some of their neighbors as well as many other people who lived in the city all around them did not share their belief anymore, but worshiped other gods, many with different, funny-sounding names.

When he laughed in hearing them, one of his uncles told him, very sternly, not to do that in front of those others because they might feel insulted and become very angry. Why, those people might even hurt him if his uncles were not there to protect him. He remembered the looks that he had gotten sometimes, after his father had talked to some of those others. He had asked, "Why?"

"After all," he had added, "I never laughed at them even once when they shouted those funny-sounding names at you!"

He remembered his father looking sternly thoughtful as he sat him down, saying, "It is time that you were told some things." After a pause, he began.

"Long ago, our God ruled over a very large and powerful city. When He went out to other cities the people there didn't like Him and He had to conquer them and their cities so that they wouldn't be able to fight Him.

"After He had demonstrated His great power, they had pleaded with Him to let them keep their own gods. He took pity because of their looks of such great sadness, and agreed, telling them only, 'But you must hold Me to be first among all of them! I must be your God-Most-High in every thing that you do!'

"They gladly agreed that this would always be so for them. But when our God became old-in-the-land they did not want him to be first anymore. When fighting broke out again, our God was not strong enough to prevail as he had in the beginning. The other gods, who had always been jealous, pushed Him down further and further with every chance that came to them. Finally they wanted him to just go away and not even be in the land anymore. We have fought many difficult battles for Him."

He remembered how his father shrugged his shoulders as if resigned to something that he didn't like.

"But we have become fewer each time until now we know not what is to become of us. We will probably have to leave before fighting breaks out again, because it only gets worse for us each time!"

He remembered the look of great sadness that had come over his father's face as he stopped talking.

"But Father!" he remembered pleading, "Why must we be the ones to leave? Their Gods are the ones that make them do all the bad things that cause the fighting!"

It hadn't seemed fair, but there it was, and nothing seemed to come along to change it. That was a long time ago, but he still remembered, it had been partly about him and some clay figurines.

He recalled another time. He was older then. He had been with other boys about his age. They had all bragged about things, as boys will. They had been learning about believing, and were encouraged to bring one of the small family representations of their belief; *idols* his father had called them. He could still see the curl of his father's lip and the disdainful arch of his eyebrow as he mouthed that awful word.

Of course, he had nothing to bring in. "You don't need to!" his father had told him. It had seemed almost like scolding. "Ours is the God-Most-High. He is unknowable, indescribable! Why any god would need an image in clay or wood or anything else is beyond me! How could anyone even imagine trying to make something that might look

like Him!” his father had said with a sneer, at the prospect that anyone would think of himself so highly that he might try. “Your teacher should be told! That kind of teaching will bring him nothing but trouble!” I hadn’t meant to make my father so angry, and I went to school knowing that I might some day have to fight for our God-most-High.

“He has nothing because his god is nothing,” one of the boys had taunted, and then suddenly all of them were chanting the same thing. He flew into a rage. Even now he could still see his father’s face when he had been insulted in a similar manner. He had swung his long stout staff all around him, driving those who were closest back several paces to keep from getting hit by those forceful swings.

At school, he only remembered grabbing at the first thing that had come to hand. He swung it round and round in his blind rage. He could hear crashing sounds, and then he ran home without looking back even once. But he had heard the whimpering of those who had taunted him, and he had felt good, like now he was *really* his father’s son.

He had not been allowed to go back. They used words like idol smasher and troublemaker. Not long after that, his father announced his decision to move the family to another place, far away from this evil city.

Many of their people came to his father’s house when they heard of his decision. Some pleaded with him to stay, some asked to join him, a few made short polite speeches of farewell, along with a comment on the brashness of his son’s deed.

Then, he remembered like it was just yesterday, the meeting of a great group of his people, while the city was distracted by one of the many festivals to Baal, Sin, or one of the many other lesser “clay-gods.” Even now he smiled at his father’s demeaning reference to the uselessness of their representations.

“Terah!” one of the guests had begun the dialogue, “Is there no way that we can convince you to stay? You are our ‘rock’ against which they have dashed all of their efforts to coerce our families. If you leave, what will become of us?”

“They will persecute us even more if we separate ourselves,” another cried out suddenly. “Look what happened to those families who have already tried to leave! Many are no more!”

“They failed because they ran away in fear!”

He heard again his father’s voice. He had spoken so bravely.

“We need not separate! But as you all have witnessed, things have gotten steadily worse! They have only been waiting for a sufficient excuse, like my son might have innocently provided, to injure us as we go about our separate affairs. My brothers and their sons, like me and mine, can no longer abide their insults and mindless chatterings.”

Again that haughty sneer. And then, with a look of stern determination, he continued.

“We must all leave this evil place. Our God, El has spoken of this, and now, we must obey for our own good!”

He had been convincing, as usual, Abraham thought, for the time came when we all left that place.

It had been so exciting, at first! They walked the wide avenue out of Ur that turned into a dirt path some distance away, but the wide cool Euphrates was always at their side. The sun seemed to race them as they went, only to get ahead of them as they neared Uruk and its wide esplanade that followed the river with the many beautiful trees that stood firmly rooted at the very edge of the water itself.

But they had not been welcomed into that city. He remembered the many hostile looks emanating from the dwellers who gathered to watch them pass by. Many of his people, having tired of the long day's journey, wanted to stop and visit with relatives, at least for the night, but the gathering throng, by look and shouted epithets, accompanied by pointed gesturing, convinced most that they should not tarry long.

Word must have gone ahead of them. So they encamped some distance farther up-river from the city, and they even posted a night guard for protection.

He had just awakened to a new sunrise, as a shout of alarm went up. Someone discovered that their guards had been slain in the night, even as his people slept. His father fumed the rage of impotence, even as he realized that only assassins had been sent out to harass them into moving on.

And so they set their sights upon the next city in the hopes that they would be allowed to settle there, or at least rest for a while under the obviously fractured tradition of hospitality. They gathered many more of their people from Uruk by the time that they set out on the road of that day's journey.

In small town or large city it was the same. Hostile looks from the many, as new additions of frightened people-of-their-faith were added to them. But the looks slowly abated, although the additions did not, as they journeyed up the ever-so-slowly narrowing river.

The towns and villages thinned out as they continued onward until at last they saw the outlines of tall mountains in the far distance. They had grown into a multitude, out of which some told of a city somewhere within those mountains that would surely welcome them. It was called Haran.

He grew to manhood there. It was a city of trade, balanced between two empires, each of which were growing equally in strength, leaving Haran free to seek its own way, at least for a time. He became smitten by the beautiful maid Sarai of his clan, and felt himself fortunate indeed to become betrothed of her. His father had sought the marriage for family reasons, but his father was glad to see his son yearn rather obviously for her also.

The people of Haran seemed to have acquired a certain freedom of thought that was good for his people, although the followers of the evil god, Baal, along with some of the others had in recent times begun to insert themselves into that niche of opportunity. At first they had shown a peaceful nature to those around them, but of late they displayed the beginnings of a stridency reminiscent of the Ur of his childhood.

He made many friends both within his own people and those of the city as he grew into manhood. He became acquainted with other gods with strange names that he had not known of, even in his young days in Ur. It was during a festival some city friends invited him to that he first heard a recital of a most famous epic poem. It had been known in Haran since the beginning of time. Oh, he had heard a bit and a piece here and there, but this was the first time that he'd heard a professional recitation of it in its entirety. It was beautiful. It told of a time in the early days of cities. It told about a hero king named Gilgamesh and his epic adventures, one of which had taken him from his kingdom at Uruk to somewhere near Haran, it was thought, by some whose families had been here a very long time. But the part that he liked the best was the story of a monstrous flood, in a place and at a time before the beginning of cities, at least as he would recognize them. It didn't seem very real, but it was beautifully told.

He had been thrilled most by the lines of that poem, “Man of Shurruk, tear down your house and build a boat.” It had such a ring to it! A house was always in one place, but a boat could take you places. Some of the elders of his family thought that they had heard a story similar to it long, long ago.

None of the later generations had any real memory of a retelling except the very oldest and so it had been largely forgotten. His father had known of the city. He’d not been sure if it still stood, somewhere north of Ur.

And now a memory of a time came to him when his father had gathered together with some of the wisest of the wise of Haran. He, Abram, had been allowed to sit at the fringe of the meeting, for he had learned at an early age to be quiet in the presence of his elders.

One of the very oldest among the group regaled them with a story from his youth, of a survivor of a flood who had been such a good man that his god had granted him eternal life. “He is said to still live somewhere in the mountains north of us here!” he finished, waving his arm in that direction, as he beamed down upon them in fatherly condescension.

“Of course,” he only reluctantly admitted, “it has been a long time since anyone even claimed to know just where that might be!”

And now, he remembered thinking, as he had felt again a copy of his father’s sneer etch his face, *those new arrivals try to claim that story as their own only on the strength of the closeness of Shurruk to Ur.*

It was almost with a start that he remembered, the time, some years later, when his father had not come home from a meeting like that. They found him at the bottom of a bank, on the top of which had been the path that he regularly used. He had broken his neck, some surmised, from a misstep in the dark. He was weakened by the many years that had passed, they said, and should no longer have ventured abroad in the dark of night.

Sometime after the shock and grief of the loss eased somewhat, a suspicion began to grow in his mind. There had been that bruise on the back of his father’s neck. The surmise was that it had been caused by falling on the rock that they found close by where he was found. But it seemed out of place on the grassy sand of the riverbank.

It was as if those around him had been afraid to even think of what was a growing ever more clear picture in his own mind. Their grief seemed to paralyze his younger brothers, who turned to him more and more for the everyday decisions necessary in the operations of their household.

His father was gone! Just as suddenly gone was the sense of security that his father had always provided. Gone also was his greatest source of the advice that he had taken for granted would always be there.

Now there would be no one else to look to, except the God of his father, his God, the God of all his people. And many were the prayers, as with his father before him, beseeching the greatness of El, for the wisdom necessary to secure the safety and wise direction of the family that he had now been so cruelly thrust into the foremost position of.

He stirred in his tiredness as he again remembered the vision in the same fullness that it had originally come to him. It had been as if in a dream that his God had spoken to him. Him! He had been dumbfounded! Why him? Even though he was the eldest of the sons,

the inheritor and protector of his father's name and fortune, he had not thought to expect that he would inherit this also!

“In you, I am most proud!” The words had rung like an eternally vibrating gong!

Who am I? he thought, *that such a great God would take notice of me?*

“You have been a most faithful servant to Me and My ways!”

The words seemed to arise from out of the still-vibrating others.

In his dream he had lain fully prostrate, and still felt at an uncomfortable height before his God-Most-High. His singular thought? *I have been, and will always be your servant.*

“Gather My people, and take them to a land that I will show you!”

It had been accomplished, but it had not been easy! It had been impossible to convince all, but, after all these years, he was not sure whether a remnant had left, or only a remnant had been left behind.

The long journey toward that great land in the far south had seemed endless. Some feared that they might be warred upon by these strange chariot people, but somehow they had been left to wander about the land. They had been a “city people” for so long, only a few had any memory of their ancient ways, but they learned anew. He had been careful to send ambassadors well ahead of their movement to those outposts of the strange people announcing their peaceful intentions, and asking permission to graze and water their ever growing flocks.

But all hadn't gone well for them. Some of these strangers had not been peaceful. Some had tried to steal their bounty and kidnap his people, but his God-most-high had dealt with them sternly.

And farther to the south they had come upon a city full of peace and good will toward them. What a delight to have found that it was ruled by a priest-king of their very own God-most-high. And there had been so many more good things that had happened. Sons when he and Sarai had given up all hope. Those two evil cities that his God had destroyed. And so much more, they all seemed more like the dreams that he had so often now.

He stirred anew in that strange solitude of some duration, as a thought intruded, *I have settled my people, buried my Sarah, and blessed my heir! What is there left for me to do that hasn't already been done?*

Well done, my good and faithful servant!

*And I found that though God
has made men upright
each has turned away
to follow his own
downward road.*

—Ecclesiastes 7:29, Living Bible

And still

I stretch lame hands of faith and grope
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

—Alfred Lord Tennyson, In Memorium

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Chapter 13

A Snake in the Desert

A Parable vs. the Literal Word

According to the Bible (Num. 21:6–9), “*The Lord cursed the people of the Exodus for disobedience*” during their sojourn in the desert by afflicting them with, by implication, a multitude of poisonous snakes that moved among them, biting many, a considerable number of whom died. They pleaded with Moses to save them.

“The Lord told Moses to raise a snake up on a pole so that all who looked upon it, would not perish. He made a snake of bronze and mounted it on a pole that he placed in their midst.”

In looking through the Bible for source material for another work, this reference to a bronze snake on a pole caught my eye. It stuck in my memory for some reason. At another time, in reading through Genesis 3:1, I was again reminded of it obliquely in its reference to the *serpent*. In the beginning of chapter 8 of this book, “Where in the World is Eden?” I made reference to the environment that the original Genesis story was set in. The serpent in the “garden” seemed similar to snakes in the wet delta of Egypt, but what was a “snake on a pole” doing in the desert?

If their long-held belief concerning the *serpent* was as a symbol for evil, why would these people feel more secure in the understanding that this representation was produced to *protect* them? Yet the Bible insists that *God* told Moses to do it. Something seems to be missing here.

Could this be another example of the shortcomings of oral history, a story told and retold countless times until only a parabolic shell is left of what really happened in the desert of the Exodus? If I’m correct in my understanding that the Hebrews of the Exodus who fled Egypt of necessity reverted to an oral history tradition, as well as pastoral ways, then this story after a myriad of repetitions would have lost much of the context out of which it arose. If this then is a much foreshortened version, a parable as it were, using symbolic language to replace a much longer recitation that could not be as easily remembered, was the snake a stand-in for something else that was well understood within their historically religious tradition?

The earliest biblical reference to a snake (serpent) as a symbol occurs in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as referred to earlier. There seems to be agreement among many sources that here the snake is a symbol representing the evil of the world sometimes referred to as Satan.

This would have been a well-understood term of long standing, reinforced by the Egyptian influence during the 450-year stay there.

“In the ancient temples of the East the living serpent was used in the rites of healing. In time it gave place to the serpent symbol. Into the hieroglyphics of Egypt the entwined serpents were woven. On the walls of the temples of India are the opposed and balanced serpents, male and female, the bearers of life and healing. The Hebrews had the emblem—the brazen serpent raised on a pole by Moses so that the people might look

upon it and be healed. From ancient Babylon the symbol, a rod wreathed with two serpents, was carried to Greece.

For long centuries the symbol disappeared, then reappeared. Mysteriously it made its way across Europe until it reached England. In its long journey at times doves hovered over it, once griffins, and in Greece the wings of the herald were added. Sometimes it was a bare staff, but always serpent entwined. Finally tipped with wings, it came to America” (*The Serpent Wreathed Staff*, by Alice Tisdale Hobart, Foreword).

Is it a realistic interpretation to believe that a multitude of poisonous snakes suddenly and unaccountably appeared en masse in a desert environment where scarce resources should have naturally limited their numbers? According to some accounts, the plagues of Moses, followed by the Exodus, could have been brought on by an environmental disturbance. (See also my novel, *The Exodus According to G.*) Might that disturbance have extended into the deserts of the Middle East?

It doesn't seem likely for at least two reasons. First, the Exodus went south into the deserts of the Sinai peninsular. It would seem logical that their first reaction would have been to flee from the northern locus of that environmental disturbance. Second, there are no tribal folklore tales from that area of uncommon disturbances within their oral history tradition.

If the desert's carrying capacity had not radically changed, then it increases the likelihood that the *snakes* were a symbol pointing toward something else. The biblical account seems to imply that it indicates behavior antithetical to the instructions that they had already received or were in the process of acquiring. (As in the *Garden* reference?)

In the Exodus account there seems to have been regression to habitual ways each time that the people faced what seemed to be another insurmountable obstacle. Their seeming lack of faith, that one more miracle could be performed on their behalf, tempted them to revert to earlier, more familiar ways.

In Egypt they had been surrounded by the worship of many gods, among whom was the Egyptian god of the underworld, Osiris; another, Horus, god of the present world whose earthly symbols were the succession of living pharaohs; and Seth, the god of chaos and disorder. There was also the crocodile god of the river Nile as well as the most ancient and important god Re who was represented simply by the sun disk. In a later convulsion sometime between the Hyksos invasion and the Exodus, there appeared Amon-Re whose symbol was that same sun disk, around whose outer rim was a coiled serpent.

There are indications that the Canaanite god Baal was introduced into the Egyptian pantheon, possibly brought in by the Hyksos invaders of the Nile Delta. This seems to have taken place sometime around the beginning of the biblical story of Joseph, or earlier during the time of Jacob or even Abraham himself, who also sojourned in Egypt for a time not clearly specified.

Baal was an ancient Mesopotamian god of fertility whose raucous and earthy rites were objectionable to the God of the Exodus, the God of the Hebrew forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For a better understanding of the dichotomy of opposition between Yahweh, God of the Exodus and Baal, an amplification of what preceded it seems necessary.

The God of Abraham was originally referred to as the god EL! On what grounds, you might ask, do I make this assertion?

First, among several I shall cite, scholarly investigation seems to indicate the biblical account of the Exodus has come down to us from three earlier sources that are no longer in existence.

One of these has been called a priestly source, often the letter P is used as a shortened version. They feel that the early Aaronic priesthood was the most likely purveyor of a version of the story, which would have been told from their point of view. These stories might have been passed on either orally or might have been from a written source no longer in existence.

Another, probably written down sometime during the period referred to as “The Book of Judges” in the Bible (Jawist, a Germanization of Yhwh, later shortened to J), appears to be a compilation from more secular sources.

The third is called simply “Elohist” and is purported to be the most ancient of the three sources which represented the traditions that the Hebrews carried with them on their sojourn into Egypt and largely forgotten during their long stay. But there has been a long continuous memory of this tradition that has supplied us this earlier name for God.

EL was never quite forgotten, and even today we find in various hymns, that one of our many names for God is Emmanuel, “God with us.” A comforting thought for those who were forced out of Abraham’s Promised Land by drought-caused fear of famine to seek greener pastures in far away Egypt.

The second reason that I may make this statement comes from an account in the Bible (NKJV). When Abraham rescued his nephew from some warring kings who had captured many people and possessions somewhere around the northern end of the Dead Sea, “Melchizedek, King of Salem (later to be known as Jeru-salem)—Priest of the God-Most-High,” blessed Abraham for his valor and generosity.

In many Middle Eastern countries of that time, the names of people and things had within them the name of a god that was worshipped by the owner of the name or property. It would appear that M-EL-chizedek would fit that construction. If memory serves, there has been at least one other source that has made that construction. If I am found to be correct in this, then it would serve to bolster the assertion that the name of the “God-Most-High” that Melchizedek was the high priest of was EL. In another confabulation of a name in which EL is a part, Elohim, whose meaning was described also as “God-With-Us.”

Last, but not least, the many archaeological discoveries in the “Land between Two Rivers” that includes ancient Ur of the Chaldes were of a nature that would lead to the assumption that there had been a differently named god for each of the cities that developed over time.

As unification gradually transformed them into the nations that succeeded each other, a whole pantheon of gods emerged. The “Dance of Dominance” among these gods was governed mostly by the success or failure of these cities in their wars with each other.

Many were the names of those gods, but in the shakeout of time, the competition for dominance became confined to a few. Among these was Baal, the popular overall god of fertility; Sin, the cultic goddess of the moonlight sexual rites-of-passage; and EL the God, undefined, except that He had become “Most High” in that pantheon for an extended period of time.

Eventually, for reasons as yet undiscovered, his position was challenged and then overthrown by followers of Baal. The archaeological time line has been estimated to be

approximately consistent with the biblical time line of the account of Abraham in Genesis 11:27–32.

For some reason Terah, Abraham's father moved his family from "Ur of the Chaldes" far away from the power centers of the "Land between Two Rivers" all the way up the Euphrates River to Haran, a place near the land of Canaan. Was that move made imperative by the turmoil involved in the overthrow of the "God Most High?"

"Now the Lord said to Abram: 'Get out of your country...to a land that I will show you' (Gen. 12:1, NKJV). These two moves were made in a relatively short time period, biblically and archaeologically speaking.

From extra-biblical sources it has been theorized that "Abram" (Abraham) as a young man had engaged in the destruction of clay idols and that may have been why the move to Haran was necessary. Archaeological digs have unearthed many representations of the god Baal by way of small household idols of clay.

Could the short introduction to the biblical story of Abraham then be a parable representing the movement of followers of EL, the "God Most High" away from the religious power center of Ur? Because it was the eastern anchor of the Fertile Crescent, it would have made more sense to flee up the Euphrates River than to try to escape into the harsh desert environment that was the southern limit of their land. As they fled up the river it would have been natural to "gather in" other members of their lost cause as they went, and then as they might have been pursued, if they were, settling into the hill country of Haran, at least for a time, until they were again driven out. With the mountains of the Hittite Empire to their northwest and the Mediterranean Sea on the west, Canaan, the center of the Fertile Crescent, would seem to have been the natural route of least resistance.

This would also explain the references in the Ten Commandments given through Moses, of their God being "a jealous god" and the warning "have no other gods before Me."

Why the transition from the ancient name for their god EL to Yahweh (YHWH)? Sometime before, during, or shortly after the Exodus the people became fearful of directly calling upon their god by name. A substitute was devised, derived from the message given to Moses. He had asked "If they ask me, 'what is your god's name' what shall I say?"

"I Am that I Am" was his answer which is represented by the Tetragrammaton (Greek: four-letter word) YHWH which in Hebrew seemed to be understood as Adonai.

So it seems that EL, the "God Most High" migrated south as his people carefully ventured into a new land, occupied by many small kingdoms, led by what was more than likely tribal, or clan chieftains, who fought each other periodically over land and water rights. Why didn't the followers of Baal, newly ascendant in the Land between the Two Rivers (also known as Mesopotamia), continue to harass Abram and his followers as they moved through the new land? The Bible is silent on this. Maybe the followers of Baal had even greater difficulty extending their influence past the hill country of Haran.

After suffering an earlier destruction a newly resurgent Hittite entity (or their possible precursors the Hurrians) probably concentrated the attention of those Urrian followers of Baal on their western borders. Abram did seem to lead his people south toward a land that was probably under some kind of protectorate status from another great power, Egypt. Any large, well-organized movement in their direction conceivably

would have been met with a response whether it was Hittite or any other actual or potential foe.

Egypt, even in a weakened state (the Second Intermediate Period, approx. 1,600 BC: between the Middle and New Kingdom dynasties), as was indicated by the many, rapid successions of pharaonic leadership, each of which was of extremely short duration, still would have made the effort to defend its existing foreign possessions. These short-term successions might well have been a result of unstable climatic conditions that interrupted the annual flood levels that later would lead to invasions of Asiatic opponents such as the Hyksos (Hittites?) during that time.

The Bible does record that Abram was very careful when moving close to any town or encampment, always sending ambassadors on ahead to announce their peaceful intentions to who, local chieftains? Or, at least in larger communities, Egyptian governors?

Word would likely have spread ahead of them as they migrated south, that they were peaceful and that they were, in effect, only fleeing oppression.

How does Melchizedek fit into this story? The encounter between Abraham and the “King of Salem” seems to have taken place only after Abraham was well settled into the land. Melchizedek would hardly have been one of those who had followed Abram into the land. Was he instead, an indication of the widespread earlier popularity of this “God Most High” that had spread as far as the hill country of Canaan?

Was this why God had directed Abraham to go into Canaan? Because there were other followers there, in places, but maybe not well organized into a single physical overall entity?

How would the leaders of Egypt interpret the information that Abraham and his people, worshipers of one god, were moving south through Canaan? They probably took little more notice of them than any other nomadic people provided that they didn’t cause any unsettling of the pharaonic status quo.

The Egyptians, for much of their history, worshiped a pantheon of gods, but it was not always so.

The history of Egypt’s gods reads quite like that of the Mesopotamian kingdoms of the Two Rivers. At first there were isolated settlements along the length of the Nile River. Each had its own local god. Then the competition of belief systems came to the fore as these settlements began to overlap, leading to conflict, which on each occasion was settled in favor of the god whose city had won the contest.

On each occasion the losing god, as in the history of Ur, didn’t disappear he just dropped down to a lower level of importance. As these contests continued there slowly emerged two larger kingdoms, that of the south whose principal god was Re, and the kingdom of the north whose principal god was Amun.

Re was the most ancient god-of-all. In the collision of the two kingdoms, Narmer, pharaoh of the southern kingdom, of “Old Dynasty” times (approx. 2,200 BC) the great uniter, worshiper of Re, won.

But by the time of the defeat of the Hyksos, the god Amun had overthrown all the others including Re. But not so fast, he might have finally won, but he had to take on the dual name of Amun Re in order to solidify his place as top-dog. (It would be as if Baal had to compromise and admit to a kind of co-rulership taking on the name of Baal-El.)

Even that didn't seem to guarantee Amun-Re's place, for Re made one more bid to restore his ancient premiership through the office of his devoted worshiper Pharaoh Akhenaten (approx. 1,500 BC, by the standard chronology). So, because of this, the worship of one god for the Egyptians would not have been a uniquely foreign concept.

And now, in another example of people's names taking on the name of the God they worshiped, the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten had as part of his name Aten, a form of the god Re, but immediately following him, his son first named Tutankaten had incorporated into his name the god Amun therefore Tutankamun. Although Akhenaten overthrew the worship of Amun-Re, it was only a short-lived revolt, as his son was forced to take on the name of the final victor.

But Akhenaten tried, even though vainly, to foster the worship of one god. Is it possible that by the time of Abraham and his great grandson Joseph, with his influence on a pharaoh, the ancient idea of a single god was reignited in the Egyptian consciousness? There was, after all, only a little less than three hundred years between them. Was Akhenaten's mistake that he rekindled only an ancient misunderstanding in worshipping a created thing, the sun, instead of its biblically declared creator?

The sun god Aten, represented by a solar disk (the rising sun at dawn), a specific attenuation of the generalized sun god Re (Ra) seems to be the single exception to the rise and fall of all the other Egyptian gods who always seemed to persist at one level or another.

Aten arrived full-blown as the principal state god through the influence of Pharaoh Akhenaten. There seems to have been no commentary on the status of the god Horus (a more generalized representation of the sun), who Akhenaten was supposed to have been the living representation of. Akhenaten pushed aside all others in favor of the worship of a single godlike entity, the solar disk. When Akhenaten died, Aten disappeared, never to be mentioned again.

The god-head Amun-Re however, came back resurgent to a premier position that lasted as long as even a vestigial representation of the Egyptian entity existed.

Aten, in the form of "Re" the solar disc, would forevermore be "compassed round" by the Amun-ian Serpent. So as far as Aten is concerned. "When you don't get it right, you drop out of sight?"

And what of the God EL? He did disappear from Ur of the Chaldes, but Abraham's people carried Him into the land of His promise. But then, within the life span of Abraham and his sons the land failed them twice, it is thought. Drought forced Abraham, and again during the life of his grandson Jacob, to sojourn into Egypt where the story of Joseph unfolded.

But did EL disappear like that portion of the sun god Re, called Aten? He did almost seem to disappear into Egypt in the 450 years preceding the Exodus, but did He?

What about the Salem of Melchizedek? It was still there in the tenth century BC when David, the second king of the Exodus Hebrews, according to the biblical account, felt the need to make it his capitol city. Why did he feel that need except that there was a remnant of the followers of EL in it and other places, that the followers of Yahweh felt a strong need to take, or was it really to retake? Jebusites had settled there or taken it by force at some time between the time of Abraham and David. (The name Salem probably changed around this time to Jeru-salem. The "city" of the Jebusites?)

It seems that EL, although buffeted by circumstances serious enough to cause a name change, came through it to become one of the premier belief systems of the Common Era. Was it because His followers worshiped the Creator and not just a part of His creation, as Akhenaten had done? I guess when you get it right you don't have to drop out of sight.

So, what does all this have to do with the snake on a pole?

Egyptians during ceremonial processions often carried the representations of their various gods on tall standards (poles). There would have been many replicas of a sun disk with a serpent coiled around it in every procession.

The people that made up the Exodus would have had a clear understanding that the serpent was the major symbol of the principle god of the Egyptian pantheon.

Why then was there *magic* in the "serpent-on-a-pole" that Moses constructed? If this story is a parable, what are the elements of it that would direct us to something larger?

The people complained about God and Moses having brought them out of the wet and moist Egyptian delta into a dry and arid desert land.

The "Lord" afflicted them with snakes for their ingratitude when they complained. A simple lesson that might be taken directly out of this story could be that they were reminded that the moist and abundant delta also had snakes that had worried them every day of their lives, especially the brick makers.

The moral? Don't look back at what was, because memory, in the face of difficulty, is usually biased toward clinging onto that part of the past good, at the expense of forgetting the bad. The serpent-on-a-pole could have been a reminder of what, in their present misery, they had *forgotten* about their past situation.

Good interpretation, but we're supposed to be looking for a larger meaning, right?

In Egypt the *serpent-on-a-pole* wrapped around a solar disk was the emblem of the tyrant god Amun-Re, and his physical representation, pharaoh. Had that *serpent-of-the-garden*, wrapped as it was around the source of light, kept the Hebrews in the dark as it fed them falsehoods about who they were? And, only as they could remember what they had found intolerable about their past in Egypt could they survive the rigors of their present situation.

In the ancient past of the Hebrews was also knowledge that the serpent in their Genesis story was the source of all evil. Their God had removed their ancestors (Abraham) from it by taking them on an exodus similar to what they were even now on. The end result had been that their predecessors had become a nation because, as the Bible tells us, they had believed and obeyed.

Therefore, complaining in a crisis, only adds extra danger to an already difficult situation, and when there is *no going back*, it is of little use to look back. (Remember the pillar of salt?) OK, that would have helped them, but might that larger lesson be aimed toward succeeding generations all the way down to us? What of that might apply to us today?

The whole human race is on a journey of unknowable length through unfamiliar territory. Our ancient GPS positioning system (the Bible) can help us locate where we are and can be trusted to lead us on the best route to get us where we want to go. All we have to do is trust its guidance and follow where it leads us, right?

All well and good. But taking any easier-looking detours, we find only after the point of decision, becomes rougher than they had, in anticipation, appeared to be. The *evil one*

it seems, will always be “biting at our heel” in the hope of getting to “compass us round about” also.

But no sweat, that trusty old GPS can show us the way back no matter how far afield we have gone! Right? Well, only up to a point, that is. Because, if our *antenna* becomes broken or disconnected, no amount of *signaling* will be able to reach us. And if we don't realize that this has happened, a certain hopelessness might begin to settle in, as we try one *do-it-yourself* repair after another. If we don't get this connection fixed by someone qualified in this kind of communications breakdown, then no amount of quick fixes, sold to us on a “do it now pay later” basis, can save us from paying later.

Is this then the larger meaning that the parable points us toward? That's anybody's guess, but maybe this is as large as our present understanding will permit.

We started out with Moses and a snake-on-a-pole in the desert, and by an odd circuitous route ended up all over the lot of time and place, discovering in the process that Yahweh, the Hebrew God of the Exodus, at an earlier time was called EL. The same EL as had been found in ancient writings unearthed by archaeologists digging in and around the ancient city of Ur. This seems to be a case of *science* clarifying what the Bible had left uncertain about some of the many names that it has used to identify its Creator.

We have made more sense of the exodus of Abraham by tying it to circumstances known to have existed through discoveries made by the archaeological process. We have also added to our understanding of a possible effect that the belief in the single “God of Abraham” might have had on a later revolt in the Egyptian pantheon of gods. In addition we have come to a different kind of understanding of the nature of the story of the “snake-in-the-desert.” It would appear to be more in the mode of another parable than a literally true-in-every-detail story.

*A serpent, for heaven's sake
by any other name
is still a snake*

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Chapter 14

From Job to Jesus

A Seed of Abraham to the Son of God?

Metaphorical Figures vs Real People in the Bible

The book of Job appears in the Bible (NKJV and later) between Ester and Psalms. Based on its location it appears to have been written during or just after the Babylonian exile. To me the actual writer seems to be using a much older source. Because it seems to be included in the “Wisdom Writings” portion of the Old Testament, it implies an older source. While this is only a guess, its style seems to me to take on the flavor of a recitation, as if it were already a product of an old oral history tradition.

I found it kind of difficult to read the Book of Job without the feeling that I was reading some sort of morality tale as in the much earlier book of Noah, rather than a story of real people doing real things. The major part of the book was a kind of debate between *friends* that was taking place upon the “stage of life.” Each *friend* offered points of view

toward the proposition that his opinion was the superior way to order one's life, against a background of a view of values that they professed to have in common.

Toward the end of a debate that was going nowhere, the Bible's God scolds the *friends* for misinterpreting what He had been trying to bring to their attention over ages of effort to simplify the subject enough to fit into Man's limited range of understanding, and to reclarify what Man's well-intentioned *tinkering* had done to confuse the issue. Job, He stated, had gotten it closer than all the others, but even he had not understood that he couldn't please God within only his own strength and understanding, and that a ritual show of piety or forbearance was insufficient to acquire what he appeared to have fallen short of gaining in other ways.

Of course that's only my understanding of this complicated piece, but it seems to me that the moral of the story might be that Man cannot do the will of God within only his own strength, standing as he would be in his ignorance of the "forces" that might be arrayed against him. Pride in his own perceived perfection of loyalty to his Deity seemed to be where he had fallen short.

I'm not sure where in history this story entered into the canon of the Old Testament, but it would seem that it might be centuries before God was to offer the perfect example of fealty to His will in Jesus of Nazareth. Here He seems to be saying that it takes more than the strength and intellect of Man to perfect the spirit of man. It takes a "spark of the divine" to close the loop, so to speak. Jesus, the apostles witnessed, seemed to have had that spirit. The Gnostics were interested in Jesus. Was it because they felt that they had seen this difference also, and had assigned him to an elevated place in their "Gnosis"?

Their Aeons, "Divine Ones," it would seem to have been understood by them, had this spark. But among the "Followers of the Way" it was stated that their Jesus was the single exception. The Gnostics said that there were many within the world at large, totally unaware of this gift and had to be sought out and relieved of their unconscious condition through the test of knowledge acquisition. So they became the seekers after knowledge to determine who was who.

Was the Book of Job within the currency of information during that time? If so, this alone should have disabused them of that notion. If any mere man could have had that "spark" it ought to have been Job, with his obviously vast knowledge of things of the world and those of the spirit. But even at the end of his diorama his *knowledge*, he seems to have discovered, informed him that he hadn't quite measured up, and could never hope to on his own, if I have understood this parable correctly. There was no way that he, within himself, could grasp the understanding of what God was all about, and how everything had come about.

In the *parable* of Abraham and his "sacrifice," a chapter in this book, God seems to be asking, does Abraham love God above all else to the extent that he would be able to give up everything to retain it, as Job's story seems to be saying that the "test" was at least partly about. Would he be able to stand firm beyond any understanding of why it might be required of him? Could he give up the son that he had thought impossible, and the promise of his seed turning into a nation, even into a vast numberless throng of people, in essence give up the "whole world" rather than God's favor? Could he do this even beyond any attempt to understand why, as Job had finally had to admit was his problem? Only when Abraham seemed ready to irrevocably commit to this proposition, was he told that it would not be necessary, that it would not even be desirable.

Could it be that the *larger picture* might be pointing toward, as I saw it when I wrote Abraham's chapter, the long-held practice, within much of the ancient world, of *child sacrifice*?

It did seem to be Man's incorrect understanding of His nature, God seemed to be saying, through Abraham, that had caused this practice to begin. And Man's long-term insistence that part of his God's nature was the capricious examples of it in the natural realm that Man had to contend with, was part of the confusion that Man himself had ritualized into his incorrect understanding, as was also indicated in Job's story, that had led Man away from God's real purpose concerning him.

If Job's story came into the Old Testament after Abraham, it might have been His way of offering a reminder that Abraham had gotten something right in his time, but Man's longstanding rituals had insisted upon confusing the real message once again. And those "chosen" people who had come after him, would suffer more than once because they couldn't seem to part with "traditional" ways concerning their "judgmental" God, and their "knack" for "straying," even when they had already been shown many times to have been wrong.

Now, if Job's story came into being in some manner commensurate with a mythological style of folklore before Abraham, it might have been His way of leading Man toward a change in his *traditional* ways. Abraham's story, as a kind of *prequel* to Jesus, might have been meant to show that someone had finally gotten it right.

But Abraham's *seed* had gone astray only generations after his time, as environmentally tough times drew them into the "safety" of the Nile riverine delta. It wasn't historically long before they found the "exit sign" removed from their decision-making prerogatives.

Then God intervened through Moses and took them "out of the land" toward "a land that I will show you" reflective of Abraham's Exodus toward "parts south" from Ur and Harran.

Eventually it appears, God's spiritual guide, the Ten Commandments, given toward the beginning of their journey, appears to have been Deuteronomically expanded into the three hundred *laws* that Jesus seemed to have complained about. They had done this, he said, in order to not have to practice obedience. But over those generations they had only meant to *clarify* them as it was felt that these Ten Commandments *ought* to have been *understood* in each of a myriad of instances. And then they came under the *thrall* of a new and more terrible kind of *overseer*, called the law.

Was Jesus sent to free them in a different way this time? Once again their *vision* had become so clouded by their many *clarifications* that their vision of a messiah being a restorer of their physical kingdom led them, in their disappointment, to feel *obliged* to kill him. This time instead of following the *one* who had been sent to save them, they killed their Savior. And the "mantle" seems to have shifted to all the "spiritually unclean" that "God's People" had been, in their error, trying to stay apart from.

The metaphorical Job had searched toward the source of a truer meaning. Those who much later searched only within themselves seemed to have "fallen short of the mark!" Once again real life by itself seemed to have gone astray.

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Chapter 15

Jesus

A Living Parable?

The Bible, among other sources, tells us that the Hebrew people (Israelites, Jews) have, at least three times, suffered the consequence of exile for straying from the provisions of the Covenant they had made with their God at the holy mountain, usually identified as Mount Sinai.

In 722 BC, the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It had been created, following Solomon's death, when the unified state of Israel broke into two parts, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Many of the people of the Northern Kingdom were taken into captivity. The biblical account of this sad saga I will call the "First Exile." Many have come to associate this experience with the story of the "Lost tribes of Israel."

In 586 BC the Kingdom of Judah was defeated, occasioning the first destruction of the Temple that had been built during Solomon's reign. The biblical account of this Babylonian Exile is contained in the stories of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

The third episode took place between AD 66 and 70, the date of the final destruction, by the Romans, of the Temple that Herod had enlarged after it had been partially restored seventy years after the second exile. This resulted in the third exile, the Diaspora. Then again in AD 135 the Bar Kochba revolt caught the Romans by such a surprise that these "rebels" gained their freedom for a short while. This evidently encouraged attempts by others to also break free from Roman domination.

By the time that the Romans called on their best generals, put a large enough army in the field to quell all the uprisings, they were ready to take the sternest kind of revenge. They fell upon these "miserable firebrands" with all their assembled might. They were determined to make the kind of example of such defiance as wouldn't be soon forgotten.

These two events separated by approximately sixty-five years brought on a massive displacement and then the massacre of a whole nation. The "Israelite" state of old, ceased to exist.

Less than ten years after the revolt of AD 66–70, a sudden catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum, Roman resort cities, smothering them under more than a six-foot blanket of volcanic ash, deposited by a superheated pyroclastic flow from the mountain. Talk about hell, but it did preserve a museum, a slice of life as it was lived at that time, especially among the upper classes of a pagan society.

Did anyone ever attempt to make a connection between these events? History is silent where this is concerned as far as I can determine. If anyone did, it didn't rise to a sufficient enough level to leave any literary trace that I know of.

Each time of exile, except the last, a prophet pronounced their coming punishment. In the final episode, Jesus made the prophetic pronouncement. Was he speaking as the *Son of God*, the Messiah, or was he speaking as a prophet when he predicted that "no stone would be left upon another" regarding the Temple?

Jesus, on several occasions referred to himself as the *Son of God*, but on many others he referred to himself as the *Son of Man*.

When the God of the Bible spoke to the Prophet Ezekiel, He referred to him several times as the *Son of Man* as in Ezek. 2:1 “*Son of Man, stand on your feet.*” Again in Ezek. 3:1, “*Son of Man, eat what you find.*” Also Ezek. 13:10, “*Moreover, he said to me: ‘Son of Man, receive into your heart all my words.’*”

When Jesus referred to himself as the *Son of Man*, was he wishing his listeners to understand him as speaking, as one of the *Prophets of Old*? Why else would he ask “Who do the people say that I am?” and his disciples answered, “Some say that you are Isaiah, some Jeremiah, and others say Ezekiel.”

At other times was it his hope that the people would hear him as speaking with the authority of God Himself? As when he said “I am come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly!” Or “I am the way, the truth and the life, I tell you truly, no one shall come into the Kingdom except through me!”

Also, he seemed to speak “with the authority of God” about the principles by which his listeners were meant to understand the message of the coming Kingdom. Did he wish to separate these pronouncements from the other times when he spoke as, *The Son of Man*, about things that would come to pass in the future?

I am now ready to propose that Jesus spoke as a prophet when he predicted the destruction of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. (Even Muhammad, in his writings, referred to Jesus as a prophet, and all of Islam dared not elevate their fallen leader any higher than to call him “The Prophet of God.”)

I feel that “Jesus wept,” more for what this would mean for the history of Judaism, than he did for the loss of that faith’s most important edifice.

But what of the people themselves? What had they expected when they had heard him proclaimed as their long awaited Messiah, an “Anointed One,” a “Deliverer” a “Liberator of the People”? By Jesus’ time they’d had a long history of expectations, eventually fulfilled. Their *Book* was filled with these *stories*.

In the ancient, almost prehistoric past was their story of Abraham. His “God-Most-High, EL” delivered them from out of the hand of their enemies into a land “that I will show you.” When *circumstances* took them into the land of Egypt and eventual subjugation, Moses, through the strength of his God, the great “I Am” demanded of pharaoh, “Let my people go!” And Joshua led them into the “Land of their Promise” (or was it really back to “the land that I will show you?”).

Then there were the *judges*, a *champion* of the people, called to deliver them out of their “sinful” misery and back into a renewed covenant. There were fourteen of them during the Hebrew “pre-dynastic” history. Now came the kings. Saul gathered them together as one people, David united them into a kingdom, and Solomon led them to a temporary greatness, all too quickly extinguished by the *good* and the *bad* of his successors.

The *prophets* were there during this time and the times which followed. Those advisors to the kings, whose warnings were too many times rewarded with being terminally dispatched, as their history spiraled down through the debacles of 732 and 586 BC.

The Persians released them, but the Greeks “Hellenized” them. The Hasmonean *rebels* seemed to come as a latter-day *champion* but were all too soon deceived by their Roman *allies* who became the *overlords* that they chaffed under by the time that Jesus came upon the scene.

The mass of admirers who ushered Jesus triumphantly into Jerusalem was quickly replaced by the mob who demanded his death. Why? Was it because their history had taught them to expect a *champion* who was supposed to restore their physical kingdom, and Jesus' message and manner, though ill-perceived, spoke of a very different kind of future?

As with the *prophets of old* Jesus was put to death. But, unlike the prophets it was not by stoning, but by the Roman method. The destruction of his bodily life prefigured the later destruction of the Temple, which occurred approximately forty years later. Jesus' death by crucifixion also prefigured the death of the Israelite nation by dismemberment in AD 135.

I additionally propose that Jesus' death upon the cross, was and is a parable, a simplified example, standing in place of something of far wider worldly significance. Was it meant, among many other things, to point toward the death of a nation?

Both were Jewish. Both died at the hands of the Romans. Both deaths were meant to end the dream of the coming of a Kingdom.

The Bible tells us that Jesus died upon that cross as a kind of atonement for the sins of the world. The Jews of the last and greatest Diaspora seem to have been hung on a different kind of cross for almost two millennia.

In their ancient beginnings they declared that they had been chosen by their God to be separated from the world around them. In the beginning of the Roman Diaspora they were perceived pretty much as they had been in the ancient Egyptian world of the Joseph story or the Babylonian and Assyrian Diasporas, a people who originally separated themselves by choice became a people separated by the most severe kind of subjugation.

Their purportedly "principled" stand against the remarkable expansion of Christianity in the approximately 450 years following its birth made them as unwanted, but necessary, as in their pre-exodus days in Egypt.

In AD 625 they appeared to offer little or no resistance to those "raiders" from out of the deserts of Arabia, and were seen as being cooperative with them as the Christianized Roman world was cut in half. Was it because the Muslim invaders had promised to rebuild their Temple that the dominant Roman, then the successor Christian Authority had denied them the right to do? And what did they get, for what was seen by Christians as the worst kind of treachery, a third desecration, a Muslim Mosque on their hallowed Temple mount?

In the Black Death of the thirteenth century AD, the Jews were suspected by some of having caused that catastrophe in Europe by poisoning the water wells. And one of the elements of their Roman-turned-Christian Diaspora Cross eventually turned into mandatory separation from those whom they were sent to live among. Did Ghetto-ization and worse come about because of a common feeling that they had become the carriers of all the sins that the Christian savior had been crucified for?

After Jesus died upon the cross, the Bible tells us that he rose again in three days. The initial result of this resurrection was that he first spent forty days on earth preparing his people to become "Followers of the Way." Then, the Bible tells us, "he rose into heaven" (or the heavens), taking his place "on the right hand of God." The post-Exodus Hebrews dared not call their God by his ancient name "EL" for all the centuries of their succeeding history, substituting the Tetragrammaton, Yahweh (YHWH). What did Jesus call his "Father in Heaven?" The Bible again tells us that when

Jesus hung upon the cross, in the extremis of his mortal condition, he asked the question “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” He spoke this in the lingua Franca of his time, Aramaic. “Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani!” Note: Aramaic—It is generally believed to have appeared in Aramaic Language).

In other words he called his Father-in-Heaven by the most ancient of all names for Him, EL! Jesus was the only post-Exodus Hebrew who dared to be on a first-name basis with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

If Jesus’ death and resurrection is a parable, what is the meaning we are meant to take from it, beyond that already implied?

The destruction of the Temple was the end result of the prophet who prophesied, or was it? Is that all there was to it? Those who, by faith, accepted Jesus’ words as revealed truth were rewarded forty years later when, as old men, they saw or heard of the utter desecration and razing of the Temple to the very ground. “No stone” had been left upon another. Those who witnessed his resurrection firsthand went out to proclaim Him in repeated defiance of the authority of the “Jewish” state. Those who witnessed the destruction of the Temple proclaimed Him anew, while repeatedly resisting the overwhelming power and authority of the mighty Roman Empire to conform to another way.

The ancient Hebrew state (Israel) came into being sometime after its progenitors wandered in the “wilderness” for forty years, the Old Testament tells us. After Jesus’ crucifixion, the Jewish leaders wandered in a different kind wilderness for forty years trying to resurrect their kingdom on earth, only to have it result in the wholesale slaughter and worldwide dispersal of their people. Their Temple was finally and utterly destroyed in their revolt of AD 66–70 and their *worldly* state in AD 132–35, but the end of the old made way for the new, it might be said.

At the end of three days Jesus was resurrected, the New Testament of the Bible teaches. Proceeding from that event, the “Followers of the Way” struggled through seemingly endless torture and persecution until in approximately three hundred years (AD 30 to AD 325) a Roman general *saw* a vision that resulted in the permanent establishment of this new belief system.

Does three days have some parabolic relationship to three hundred years? I’m not sure. There is no reference that I know of, either in or outside of Bible sources, that makes equivalence probable, even so, it does seem to have a certain small example—large event symbolism.

But let’s start at the beginning of the end for the Jews, or was it the end of the beginning for the Christians? When Jesus was crucified, his cross is said to have been one among three, Why? Among the last words that he was said to have spoken was “It is finished.” In three days it was witnessed that he had been resurrected. This is a series of three events, a “Trinity of trinities?”

Within those first three hundred years the subject of the plural “Natures of God” were avidly, even violently debated. At the end they were codified as being three. The Father; His son, “The Prince of Peace,” and his gift to his disciples and to the world of believers who would follow, the Holy Spirit, the “Comforter.”

The Trinity of God’s natures had been clearly exemplified then, and now just as clearly, reasonable support for them has been herewith offered. The *Trinitarian* understanding of

God's *natures* appears to have been the intent from the beginning, and the "Parable of Threes" appears to have been the instrument of communication!

But, also in 300 years from Constantine's institution of the *new* faith in AD 325, a source of extreme threat arose to smite Christians who seemed more diligent in their warring with each other than they were with those who surrounded them.

However, getting back to the *End of the Old*, in 1948 a minute rump state of Israel was resurrected containing only a small portion of what the *Jewish* state was, even at its death. AD 30 subtracted from AD 1948 leaves 1918 years, nothing about this seems relational either except any equivalence would have to be in thousands of years, which means approximately two millennial measurements. That sounds like the nearly two millennia-long cross that the Jews had been forced to bear, in the saddest of all their Diasporas.

Should they be made to suffer even longer? I would hope not. There is a reference within Bible sources that has it that "a day to God is like a thousand years." If this were to be the equivalence that is relevant, then something should be happening in about AD 2030 that would be much larger and more complicated than the resurrection. What could possibly be a greater event than the resurrection? The "End of Days"?

Now, what might science have discovered in a way of contributing to this? In looking forward to the conclusion of chapter 17, The Revelation, there is a description of an event that seems evocative of John's visionary experience. It concerns a man named Louis Alveras and his discovery of something akin to Revelation's description of a burning mountain falling out of the sky. Of course that has been theorized to have happened 65 million years ago, but it has also been speculated that there is an extremely long cycling process seen within many geological discoveries. Does that mean, within that framework of time, something is about to happen again?

"Then there will be strange events in the skies—warnings, evil omens and portents in the sun, moon, and stars; and down here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. The courage of many people will falter because of the fearful fate they see coming upon the earth, for the stability of the very heavens will be broken up" (Prophecy of Jesus. Luke 21:25–26, TLB).

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Chapter 16

Who Is this Jesus?

The New Testament part of the Bible, a major repository of a more recent "Wisdom of the Ages," some would say a distillation of all that it is, says that Jesus is the "Son of God."

"God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that we should not perish, but have everlasting life" (TLB).

It is my contention that the son is a diminutive of the father, at least genetically speaking! How so? Don't many sons grow up to be bigger? Physical size is not the only, or most important measure of a man.

When a man becomes a father, he gives of his genetic essence, a portion of all that he is, to the child, through the mother. But the mother, the carrier of the burden, has something to say about that which she carries. Being a chromosomal equal in the process of conception, according to science, a child she conceives will carry only half of the sum of what makes up the father. Many of the traits that make the father what he is will not be expressed in the child. A son, being a sexual replication of the father, of necessity tends to express more of the masculine traits that the father has offered than will a girl-child, but there are exceptions.

So, what does this have to do with who Jesus is? Again, according to biblical sources (or perhaps in part extra-biblical) his mother, Mary, had an unusual experience. She testified to a visitation upon her body of an *essence* from God. She, a professed virginal woman, betrothed to a man called Joseph, then carried to term a male-child, whom “she had been instructed to name Jesus.”

Logic would strongly suggest that if God decided to appear in human form, that He would have allowed Himself to abide by the genetic rules that He had set up for all of mankind, even for all of life. Under those circumstances, the essence of God would have been divided with the genetic essence of a woman. This female genetic essence would have carried some unexpressed flavor of her father and to a lesser extent all the male line of her father’s family.

For God to have pushed this aside as an unimportant appendage in this special situation argues against the special creation that the Bible tells us that we are in His eyes, that allocated to us the power of choice between good and evil, right or wrong, belief and unbelief.

If God had left a provable trace of his divinity within the re-creation of himself in Jesus, the *game* would have been over. The first to discover that provable trace could have argued that we had never had a choice, that God had only given the appearance of granting this to us.

Once predestination could become a provable fact, the whole structure of history would lurch in another and less predictable direction. Someone would be able to crow that we really had always been the automatons that they’d been trying to tell us that we were. And instead of a special creation we would have had to see ourselves as only another variation within the rest of the nature that God had created.

In science, it only takes one exception to disprove a rule. Then the rule must be adjusted to accommodate this exception. And once the theory of choice is qualified, it can no longer be called choice, it must be called something else to recognize this exception.

If this logic holds, then it tells us that Jesus can be seen to be a *diminutive* portion of the essence of God, who must have, by genetic description, shared His essence with the inherited traits of Man. Thus Jesus can be described as having less than the full essence that is God.

But, one might argue, since the decision at the Council of Nicaea in AD325, the standard Christian belief states that God is a Triune God, made of three co-equal parts.

So isn’t the assertion of an *unequal* Trinity a blasphemy against Christian belief? Some would argue so, but I will offer a counter-argument.

The very existence of the Godly Trinity, as well as the equality of its parts had been a hotly debated proposition over a long period of time in the early centuries of the Christian

experience. A resolution of the challenge was had, in AD 325 it seems, mainly by force of arms in support of apostolic authority, rather than superior logic alone.

However, the logic supporting the view of the challengers, that the co-equal parts was a later interpretation overlaying the original teachings, and not original doctrine seemed to have not convinced the majority of the clerics who decided the issue.

Were they aware of the “Trinity of threes,” the three crosses, three among his last words “it is finished,” and the three days of the resurrection, that I presented in the previous chapter? Or were they given a *gift* of insight into this matter that might have taken some time to fully understand, promulgate and accept?

In AD 325, it was proclaimed again that God was the Father, Jesus was the Son, and the Holy Spirit was just what it was, a combination of the complex “Wisdom of the Father,” and the physical reality that the Son experienced in this world. As I understand it, this relationship was declared to be co-equal largely to escape the problem of the competition to place greater emphasis on one over the others, as human nature seems to insist on prioritizing the importance of information.

Imperial triumvirates seemed to have been prone to this kind of competitiveness, including Constantine’s, which led to his victory over two other *co-equal* partners. These kinds of arrangements have almost always created a competition that destroyed the very unity desired because of that need to seek superiority.

The combined expertise of both Father and Son, in the form of the Holy Spirit, was made available to the followers to make up for whatever they lacked, to carry on the mission assigned to them, following the crucifixion of Jesus.

He never taught that he was the co-equal of his Father, but that he was here to “do the bidding of my Father.”

But, was it necessary or even desirable, in God’s view, for the parts to be equal, to do what was required of them? What does the Bible say?

In the little that has been mentioned, mainly in apocryphal works, about his early life, there was nothing that would have forced those around Jesus to acknowledge such a vast difference between him and all others as to have circumstantially revealed his Godly qualities. He was even raised in a carpenter’s family where expectations would have been much lower than an elite family atmosphere, and still, was only seen to be unusually knowledgeable of scriptural prophesy, by some, or maybe more correctly, many of those around him.

On the occasion of a warning to his mother, as it has been recorded in the Bible, it didn’t take much to keep his *real identity* secret.

“For my time has not yet come,” he is said to have told his mother.

Then, after he did *declare* himself in his hometown, all were not forced by their intimate knowledge of his activities into a belief of his assertions.

“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?” was asked by some or, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” was the *mocking* interrogatory of others. Even his younger brothers remained unconvinced for some time in the beginning part of his ministry.

When he was at the height of his ministry, the best and brightest of the priestly class around him saw him more as a danger to their position, than their belief.

And of those who *were* convinced, many could offer only suspicions of their conviction. His reference to himself on occasion as the *Son of Man* might be seen as a corroboration of his at least partly *manly* inheritance.

Throughout his ministry, the Bible tells us, Jesus prayed to his “Father” for guidance, as if in his earthly form he lacked some of the senses that had earlier been his, and now he needed guidance wherever he went, to do his “Father’s” will. That alone argues for the earthly condition of a certain perceptive *diminution* of capacity.

And at the end of his ordeal, his life “en extremis,” the Bible tells us that he asked, “Eloi, Eloi Lama Sabachthani,” (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?). Doesn’t that sound like someone, blinded by his earthly circumstance, not being able to “see” what he should have known was there?

But wasn’t it in just this frail human capacity that He successfully finished what his “Father” had for him to do? Who among us would have dared to try to crucify a man-like-looking God, instead of just a godly behaving man? Just as in the fantasy of “Goldie Locks and the Three Bears,” Jesus was just the right size to do the job. In my book, that’s a *Father* who knows what he is doing.

Now, as I see him in a smaller, simpler, earthly version of *the Father* I am led, for me, to an undeniable conclusion. Just as the *Arc of the Covenant* is an earthly *Type* of artifact not of this world: Just as the Bible is an earthly example of the word that is, “Not of this world”: Jesus is a simpler, more understandable version of our God, “Not of this world.” As I’ve stated in the previous chapter, Jesus has to be the “Parable of God!”

And what of the third leg of the Trinity, “the Comforter,” the Holy Ghost, or Spirit? If God divided himself into three co-equal parts, couldn’t any of the parts have intervened at their own discretion when it appeared that another was in danger of some kind of collapse?

On another point, why was it that the Holy Spirit seems to have come on the scene only after the resurrection of Jesus? His “Father in Heaven” was the only one there to comfort Jesus during his time of trial. So when did the Triune nature of God come into expression?

Was the promised *Comforter* a part of Jesus’ spirit that he left for his followers during his absence? As in his parable of the “talents,” the “owner” left his “servants” the “talents” and knowledge to survive and prosper while He was gone, with the implicit assurance that he would surely return. Jesus has done his parable one better, he made the promise explicit! And his disciples who became his apostles seemed to, within the parable of the talents, be the ones who were given ten, and look what they were involved in bringing to pass.

And lastly, why argue at all over the *specific* natures or essences of God? It’s, to me, like arguing over the idea that many more planets might still be out there, undiscovered, but no one has been willing or able to look out that far beyond the atmosphere to discern their existence.

The Bible strongly implies, if not actually stating, that there is no way that we may perceive the inestimable breadth of the essences that describe the wholeness of His nature or natures. A Triune Godhead might have been God’s way to allow his followers an easier way to understand his complex nature.

In science, being able to break a complex problem into smaller parts for separate study, and then reuniting them seems to have given greater insight into its structure than addressing it in its undivided entirety.

Early science was only dimly aware of the division of the whole of their study into the many parts that they delved into. And this probably was why they seemed to despair at times of understanding how to bring those parts into a kind of wholeness.

Earliest man, in the confusion of the many perceived *essences* that seemed to surround him in the natural world might never have conceived even the principle of the singularity that they blindly confronted. But, in an eminently long, piecemeal manner he has stumbled ever so slowly but persistently toward that singularity.

And today in all of our vaunted *enlightenment*, we easily take offence at the proposition of even entertaining an hypothesis that each of our many versions does not represent the wholeness of the *essence* that each version seeks to claim for itself exclusively.

The Hebrews once ritually declaimed, “There is but one God and His name is Jehovah” (a German translation of the Hebrew Yahweh). But the name Yahweh itself is a post-Exodus Tetragrammaton (four letter word), as close a substitute as they dared to get to the real name of their God, whose ancient name they dared not speak upon pain of death (they thought).

The anciently professed name for their God-above-all-gods as late as when Abraham’s grandson Joseph was sold into Egyptian servitude was EL as in *Melchizedek*, *Elohim*, and *Emmanuel* as I made reference to in chapters 12 and 13.

And why were the Hebrews so insistent that there was only one God among the many who had been worshipped from the beginning of their history? And, how long had this insistence been a part of their ritual declaration?

When Rome *liberated* the Hebrew homeland, they brought the worship of many idols with them. When the Greeks before them, wrested the *land between* from the Persians, they came bearing many *gifts*. When the Assyrians and Babylonians destroyed and then devoured the “Divided Kingdoms” of the heirs of Solomon, they did it in the name of Baal and his entourage of lesser gods. When Joshua led his people into the *Promised Land*, the Canaanites all around them worshiped many gods.

When Moses led his people out of Egypt, it was away from a land that worshiped a multitude of gods. When Abraham led his people out of the land of Ur, it was away from a land that was *ruled over* by a pantheon of deities.

Their insistence was a felt need over the centuries, a reminder not to break ranks. And in the *last of days* of that Hebrew nation was it a renewed declaration against that upstart cult of *Followers of the Way*, and their *Triune* God?

Or was the Trinity a proposition that had not yet been understood well enough to be entertained at that time?

The worshipers of Islam, in part a copy of Judaism, exclaim even now “there is but one God and his name is Allah!”

However, their version of the one *God* hovers remotely over them, requiring only slavish adherence to ritualistic practices, at the center of which is a huge polished black stone (of possible meteoritic origin) that was also at the center of their pre-Islamic pagan ancestry.

The only originality that appears to be expressed here is the change of name. But was their singular point of seeming originality, their insistence upon a corrupted version of a much older name, one that the Hebrews dared not use for so long, really just another copy? *EL* and *AL* (ah) does seem close.

In Islam (also partly copied from Christianity), they recognize Jesus, but not as part of the Triune Godhead that its followers claim for him, but to be a prophet only.

In Egypt, one of the lands that the Christians inherited, that later came as an easy prize to the invading Moslems, an *aberrant* version of Christianity called Gnosticism held out against the majority view of Jesus' Deity. They *saw* a separation of his *dual* natures at the point of his crucifixion. In other words God's *nature* in Jesus went back to the *One God* at the point of physical death.

The present day Coptic Christian-Egyptian entity appears to be the modern counterpart of the earlier Gnostic belief system. It was largely this internecine warfare over the natures of Jesus and his "Father" that allowed the forfeit of much of the Christian patrimony to a relatively small cohort of "Desert Raiders"

Shorn of its largest dissenting base, the "Followers of the Nicene Creed" successfully overrode all other opposition as to the question of the natures of their "Lord and Savior."

They felt that he had proclaimed it, they believed it, and that settled it, for them. Any and all protestations to the opposite were declared heretical and the works of those in opposition were consigned to the pit called Apocrypha. The Catholic Inquisition, many centuries of single-minded insistence later on, was an unintended consequence of that exclusionary declaration.

So where does that leave us today? What can be said of who Jesus is to us in the here and now? In the previous chapter I discussed Jesus as a Parable (symbolizing or prefiguring a larger occurrence), and how that idea had worked regarding past history.

Is his value as a parable already used up in reference to occurrences long gone? Or may His-story still refer iconically to the events of today?

Jesus came into a Romanized world of paganism. He was the antithesis of the Judaic understanding of their Messiah and their God. Within the general paganism of the Romans, there were the "mysteries" cults. These offered a special *knowledge* to its adherents, which was said to be unavailable outside of the cult intelligentsia.

When Christianity first came to the attention of the surrounding world, Gnosticism was a larger, more well-known "mysteries" cult that sought to incorporate the major teachings of the "Followers of the Way" into their belief system.

"With the decline of the pagan religions around the time of Christ, a conscious movement to syncretize (smoothly merge) all religions was in progress...In the early years of Christianity, only loose boundaries were formed between the Church and contemporary cults; the syncretic movement did not exclude the new faith, nor did the Christian community fail to absorb elements from foreign beliefs.

"The Gnostic movement dates from somewhat before this period when Christianity was adopted into the syncretistic system.

"At first this union met no resistance, but as the effectiveness of the Church began to be endangered by a multiplicity of beliefs and the encroachment of foreign influences, the Church Fathers branded Gnosticism as heretical... Evidence points to Samaria as an early center of Gnosticism, which probably existed there before the year 30 BC" (Americana, vol. 12; Gnosticism).

Gnosticism tried but failed in its attempt to subvert the major teachings of Jesus. But later it did succeed in splitting Christian unity at a crucial moment in its history after it had "Gained the Whole World" in AD 325.

The ghost of Gnosticism's former influence can still be seen in the rejected apocryphal writings that are being *rediscovered* today, largely it would seem by "conspiracy theorists," and through *popular* books that seem to propose similar *wild* imaginings as had been done in Jesus time.

More recently, the major contender against the Christian Triune Godhead doctrine seems to be Islam. It declares, on a plaque fastened beside a doorway of the "Dome of the Rock" mosque that sits astride the platform of the ruin of the Temple Mount, that Jesus' declaration of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is a false doctrine. That Islamic Dome of the Rock is as close as the Jews ever got to the rebuilding of their Temple as had been promised them earlier. Yet during the time of cooperation with their *new* master Islam, many convinced themselves that their Temple was actually being built until, it would seem, close to the very end of construction.

Today the resurrected hulk of Judaism has been helped to an uncertain footing primarily by the Christian belief of the necessity of this rebirth. Their *compassion* for the tragedy that Christians have been historically complicit in, has allowed the overly generous physical support that has been offered, but only reluctantly, and suspiciously accepted.

This Judaism is thus still able to offer, if only halfheartedly, its present rebuke to this *Trinitarian* idea by the still insistent *One God* slogan. On this point of belief it also finds itself in an unwilling league with its archenemy and self-proclaimed exterminator. So the question just begs to be asked; who is trying to cheat Judaism out of any kind of future, the "Followers of the Way" or a most imperfect impersonator?

Today the *syncretism* of Jesus' day is expressed in the New Age spiritualism whose many *cults* vie for popularity largely through the *wildness* of their claims to personal self-actualization and *knowledge*. The only evidence of this *self-actualizing knowledge* seems to be the ritualistic repetition of meaningless words and phrases, and the robotic repetition of postures and gestures, that appear to bring on the seemingly mindless disconnect of consciousness from the conscience.

Today we, here in the United States, observe the *government* in a modern reiteration of the old Roman attempt to reduce Christian influence even if only by a more subtle persecution meant to silence their witness to the superiority of *The Way*.

Will it succeed where the other failed is a question that is being answered in a piecemeal fashion every day in many, if not every way. How can this be, in a nation so founded as we have been? The Israelite proclivity toward serially *falling away* from its *belief system* seems to be more indicative of a form of *human nature* rather than just a *tribal* or *nationalistic* fault.

From out of the motherhood of Europe a new nation was born that has become the envy of the world, much as Rome had. We have, along the 225 years of our existence, many times been referred to as a new *Promised Land*, full of "milk and honey."

We have taken on a certain resemblance to Jesus' *Great Slave Religion*, bringing the *Gospel* of redemption first to the castoffs of European "indentured servitude," and then more recently to the *Black* slaves of the American equivalent.

It has taken less than 300 years for this entity to "Gain the Whole World," but now we are face-to-face with those "Arab raiders" from out of the deserts of the Middle East, but time seems to be running much faster.

Will we suffer a great defeat, as did the Christians of AD 625, only to stumble onward to another kind of greatness unimaginable even in today's expansion of knowledge? Or will we mimic the Great Carthaginian debacle because we have sacrificed our *prospective* children to that great god of convenience?

I'm sure that the future was no more discernable to the early Christians when they were blindsided by those denizens of the desert, and they might have counted their sins as they wondered if another redemption was possible. We have more recently been treated to a smaller though similar experience, with similar advice to count our sins, right after 9-11.

The Bible tells us that Jesus' way is still the best way, but will we have *ears* to listen with, regarding the great multiplicity of distractions of the many competing *spiritualities*? Will we Christians have the foresight to give our modern institution of investigation, science, a respectful hearing for its *new* answers? Answers that appear to be well grounded as reflected in the parables that are in the Bible and are the Bible as iterated in the early chapters of this book? And will their counterparts in science reciprocate?

It seems that only time will tell, but we all would be wise to constantly check the path that we follow as we grope our way toward our destiny. For the Bible also tells us that the "mighty will be brought low." Has it already happened? Was 9-11 some kind of prelude, or just a warning?

Is it possible, among the multitude of today's Christian denominations that challenge each other for dominance in the *correct* carrying of the *Word*, of those long-gone days, to agree to disagree instead of *warring* amongst each other more ardently than we are willing to confront a common enemy on what history might see as trivialities?

Might it be possible for our Jewish cousins to allow us our compartmentalization of their, and our one God? It might allow them to look again at the Messiah that we think that they missed the first time around. But we Christians must also attempt to resolve our own differences such as, but not limited to papal primacy, iconic imagery, as well as imaginative indulgences. And within "the protest" we find other *serious* concerns that might divide our loyalties even further.

As Lincoln once observed, "A house divided cannot long stand." How much longer might our Judeo-Christian houses stand so disagreeably separate? I'm sure that there are others in our world, with some acquaintance with Lincoln's proposition, who are waiting watchfully to see if we are as aware of its implications as was "The Great Emancipator." The Judeo-Christian understanding in common is that God is the wellspring of all creation, the "Axiom of Existence" upon which all reality rests. "Axiom—A recognized truth. An established principle. Such as, that the earth represents objective reality as science seems to insist, or that God exists, as theology proclaims, among other useful propositions that might be propounded that seem today to be beyond objective proof.

So? We Christians are the ones who wish to add that this Jesus is the one who declared that he had come to do "His Father's" work. Hadn't we all ought to be about the same thing? Somewhere there is a commonality to be had in all of Man's quests for erudition. Shouldn't we try to raise ourselves above our separate *battlements* of disagreement enough to try to discern where it might be?

Numen vel dissita iungit

(A divine power unites even opposites)

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Chapter 17

The Revelation

As a Parable

“For the Time is near”

So wrote the John of Revelation. But how near was it in John’s understanding of time? Looking forward from the approximately AD 70–90 time frame from which many scholars believe the last book of the Bible was first compiled, not knowing, as we do now, how many centuries would lie ahead, what might John’s understanding of *near* have been?

Following the first Jewish rebellion from AD 66–70, Rome razed Solomon’s Temple, as Herod had rebuilt it, down to its foundation, the Temple Mount. There the empty platform stood for several hundred years as a stark reminder to all would-be rebels. But there was a single exception. The temple to Apollo, the “Abomination of Desolation” was built as an additional insult to the rebellious Hebrews of the uprising of AD 135.

John might have witnessed or knew of this most complete destruction and also of the carting off of much of this stonework to help in the building of the Roman Colosseum, constructed in AD 72–80, according to some sources. This practice had been an established one from ancient times: the building upon the foundation of a destroyed temple of a defeated god, and/or acquiring the sacerdotal instruments of the fallen faith for public display of a defeated people’s humiliation. This may have been the background that encouraged John’s frame of mind when he received his revelation.

Nero and his successors, it is said, reveled in the sacrifice of Christians in Rome, and then in the newly built Colosseum. In the original Jewish Temple, the Passover lambs were sacrificed in commemoration of the Hebrew God having saved his people in Egypt. If in truth, some of the stonework of the Temple was incorporated into the Colosseum, might not Nero’s successors have felt, in some slightly deranged mental equivalency, that they were sacrificing the all too successful successors of the hated Hebrew rebels in order to *save* their pagan people?

In a twist of irony, these “Lambs of Christ” saved the Colosseum from complete ruin when “Pope Benedict XIV AD 1740–58 stopped (any further) spoliation by consecrating the Colosseum to the Passion of Christ, in commemoration of the martyrs’ blood shed there.”

Were these “Lambs” even minimally aware, that by their sacrifice on the altar of paganism, within sight of the hallowed stones of Solomon, that they would be agents of the saving as well as the building up of the most progressive civilization that the world has ever seen? Probably not, but it is said that they had faith that their God would make of their deaths, some good thing.

But what about John? He couldn’t have had a clear understanding of the possibilities that future generations would bring about, but he was given a vision. He saw something truly awesome!

It would take every linguistic artifice at his command, metaphor, simile, parable, and other kinds of word pictures to translate into *human-based* language, that which he had seen, heard, felt, or mentally witnessed. But even his best, spiritually mentored efforts would not be enough, as he probably was well aware at the conclusion of his best efforts.

It reminds me of the man that I pictured in chapter 3, “The Parable of the Beginning,” who had been given the gift of a vision into the Genesis of all things.

“Imagine, if you will, a person...trying to extrapolate how everything got to be the way that he could see it to be. [Suddenly]...a vast moving panorama spread out before him...Did his people have an understanding that a certain few of those among their generations seemed to have a gift of communication whereby they could impart a wisdom far beyond what any earthly hero could have acquired through a life experience?...Could he be convinced that he, among those few, had been selected to share a magnificent understanding that language alone was insufficient to describe?...A vast but discrete panorama had been set out before this observer...How could he ever hope to share this with only such inadequate linguistic tools as were available to him? He would, I imagine, choose the closest things within his own limited vocabulary no matter how inadequate that he felt that they were. He would have to use the symbols of his time that might best simulate what he had witnessed with the aid of qualifiers such as; ‘It was as if, it felt like, it sounded as though,’ in order to impart some small understanding of the vastness of what he had been privileged to witness.”

Do we understand, to any small degree, even in our advanced state of knowledge, what John saw? No! Can we try to understand that he saw something hugely magnificent but far beyond his ability to even visualize, let alone describe in any small oversimplified manner? We can try!

“He had been made only faintly aware of an immeasurably great period of time in which this had occurred.”

How had John perceived the “vast panorama” that he had viewed when he said in his introduction, “*For the time is near...*” (NKJV) “*when all these things will come true*” (The Living Bible).

Did John mean that the end of *all* time was near, as many believe today, as well as others have believed down through the generations after John’s time? Or was he trying to indicate that the *beginning* of all he was to prophesy was at hand? Was he trying to foretell the beginning of the end, or the end of the beginning?

In a part of his prophecy he speaks of a millennium of a thousand years more than once. When the end of the beginning (The Jesus millennium) was at hand in the year AD 999, many thought the end of time was also at hand and didn’t waste their effort planting crops in the year AD 1000, so there was a great famine in the lands where this belief held sway.

In 1999 just prior to the year 2000, historically the end of the second millennium, many thought that none of their computers would be able to accurately indicate the first year of the third millennium and all computer-dependent businesses would crash and burn, figuratively speaking. It’s a good thing that they didn’t throw away all their computers or they would have had a great famine in communications.

So historically, if the end of the beginning was in the year AD 1000, then after that must have come the beginning of the end, the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy. Then why are we still here in 2006 reasonably well into the third millennium?

Just how many millenniums did John predict? Or, was the use of the term millennium only meant to indicate a very long time as ancient sources seem to imply.

John said, *“Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666”* (Rev. 13:18, NKVJ).

Many scholars believe that John was referring obliquely to Nero because according to Hebrew understanding, the numeric value of the name Caesar Nero was 666.

But if that is so, then John was busy writing earlier than predicted because Nero is said to have died in AD 68, the victim of “assisted suicide.”

“He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:15, NKVJ).

So Nero found a way to exterminate those who would not worship him as a god, as many Roman emperors had insisted on, both before and after his time.

“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation” (Rev. 13:7, NKVJ).

He did kill many Christians, blaming the burning of Rome on them, purportedly to justify his own evil deed, but I doubt that John would have been so afraid of a dead and very disgraced leader that he would refer to him only in such an oblique manner. So the identity of the “Beast” seems to be open for debate, which goes on even today.

But once again, I think that I’m attempting to decode the parable, the simplified example and not looking for the larger picture. What is the larger picture that John’s Revelation seems to be directing us to?

After telling us that “the time is near” John indicates that the first part of his vision is a message to seven churches, which he names: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Was John unknowingly using familiar, lesser examples, to stand in for only vaguely understood larger entities?

Four of these cities, Pergamos, Smyrna, Ephesus, and Laodicea, were located on or near the southwestern coast of Anatolia where it fronts the eastern side of the Aegean Sea. Sardis, Philadelphia, and Thyatira were located more inland with the latter on a common road between Pergamos and Laodicea.

Four of these cities, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Sardis, were founded by the Ionian Greeks as they settled the area in ancient times. The other three, Laodicea, Philadelphia, and Thyatira, were founded in the post-Alexander period when his generals ruled. All were closely connected commercial trading centers.

Sardis and Thyatira were hit by a violent earthquake in AD 17. Today, Laodicea, Sardis and Thyatira no longer exist except as ruins, the latter of which had been settled by Jews and had a large colony of them throughout the centuries of its existence.

It is thought that the Apostle Paul started his mission to the “Gentiles” in about AD 40 and was beheaded in approximately AD 80. A forty-year missionary effort in which he is credited with being the author of letters to guess what? Seven churches. Only one is represented in both instances, Ephesus.

Paul’s list is, “Letters to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and the Thessalonians.”

Is that just coincidental? In the Hebrew understanding of numerology the number seven is seen as representing completeness, perfection, and may have some bearing in its use in both instances. But Paul did not choose the letters credited to him. That was

probably done for him a couple centuries later at the Council of Nicaea in or about AD 325. And John didn't choose his either, his vision did. But why Ephesus as the single correlation between the two lists?

The synopsis of the message from John's vision regarding Ephesus is "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

In Paul's message to the Ephesians he says in part "*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and **revelation** in the knowledge of Him*" (Eph. 1:17, NKJV, bolding mine).

And again: "*If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given me for you, how that by **revelation** He made known to me the mystery...that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ*" (Eph. 3:2, 6, NKJV).

In short he seems to have hoped "that God will give you the gift of **revelation** as He has to me." And John seems to have said, "That you have given up the hope that Paul had for you."

So we have two outstanding apostolic men each of whom had a life-changing vision.

Paul's was on the road to Damascus, we are told. It turned his life around 180 degrees from being an ardent *killer* of Christians, to a most successful proselytizer on their behalf. He took the *Word* that they were to spread to the Gentile world. He, among others, was so effective that in three hundred short years they were well on the way to overcoming the mighty Roman Empire that had tried to smother their movement with the hundreds of thousands of *sacrifices* that they'd had to endure during this time.

John's vision was experienced at Patmos, where he had been exiled toward the end of his life, possibly to cut him off from those whom he had so successfully preached the *Word* to. But what effect did John's last best effort have on his world? His "Revelation" seemed to have been so controversial that, in drawing together the Canon of the New Testament, it was rejected several times as unsuitable. It only squeaked in at the last possible moment of the council, whose responsibility it was to codify a uniform work that would be able to be used to present the *Word* to the world of that and succeeding generations.

So, how was John's "last best effort" meant to be understood? It would seem not at all literally. It was, of itself, an interpretation of a very complicated vision that he had great difficulty, it would seem, fitting into the limits of the language of his time.

His great use of symbolic representation to try to "draw back the veil" of understanding of a "time, after his time" seems so tortured, it's no wonder that it almost didn't make the cut into Canon.

It is said by some, that John was engaged in the retelling of the vision in the book of Daniel. This was seen to be an apocalyptic prediction of the end that all worldly forces, powerful as they might be, would come to.

Was John's vision, when he was confronting what looked like the certain defeat of a persecuted minority, meant to give comfort and assurance to those who were facing, as it were, an end similar to their crucified leader? The message to his people, as in Daniel, was that at the "End of Days," through our God's will, "we shall prevail!"

Again as in past chapters, I ask the question: If this was meant to be viewed as a parable, then what's the bigger picture? Revelation is cast, metaphorically I believe, as the end of the final battle that brings on the end of time. It begins, John believes, as the

last chapter is about to be written. When, in the history of the real world, might it come about? John is told, "For the time is near." In the opening paragraph, I asked "What might John's understanding of *near* have been?"

If John's vision took place between AD 80 and 90, or anytime close to those numbers, the end of the first hundred years of God's unique intervention in history was drawing near. If this was the *near* that John had thought that he was making reference to, then either all that had come before was prelude to the last century of a single millennium, the "end of all things" If so the *beginning of all things*, the single millennium, would have to have been 900 BC or near the reputed beginning of the Israelite Kingdom.) or those hundred years were an introduction to the next 900-year part of it. The beginning of the end, or the end of the beginning? Choosing one over the other from this latter-day point of view seems like splitting hairs. The end of the first millennium would either come at AD 100 or it would be at AD 1000. But John seemed convinced that "the end is near," really near.

"And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking to me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this'" (Rev. 4:1, NKJV).

My first impression was that the overall message was meant to be seen as historical. If this is so, then what of the other references to cities (Babylon) and times past? Were they also meant to be seen as historical, or maybe as I now feel more likely, parable-like representations of previous history and even prehistory?

"Then another angel followed, saying. 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink the wine of the wrath of her fornication'" (Rev. 14:8, NKJV).

"So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood" (Rev. 13:15). (Babylon in other references is referred to as a "harlot" or sinful woman. Also Babylon had been subject to periodic flooding, even the great flood. Was this indicative of a last one that it had not been rebuilt from?)

"Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared" (Rev. 16:12 NKJV). (Was this the Persian conquest of Babylon?)

"And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth" (Rev. 16:18, NKJV).

"And islands vanished and mountains flattened out" (Rev. 16:20, TLB).

"Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers, and on the springs of water" (Rev. 8:10).

Of course there are other interpretations of why these quoted passages appear in this work. But this arrangement does seem to lead backward in time from a symbolic representation for the earliest effort at an organized civil society, oblique references to a flood of some sort, an earthquake of a magnitude never seen "since Man appeared on earth," rising sea levels, mountain erosion or some kind of catastrophic leveling, and a devastating meteoric impact with the earth, as we understand these events from our modern "scientific" perspective.

Now what about the Seven Churches? Were they meant to be literal references to real churches or were they meant to indicate the various conditions of the same church at different times of the first millennium, or possibly after? If so, the order of succession

would have to be adjusted because the first church would have to be the church of the time that John was living in.

The “**Persecuted Church**” Smyrna: (as John Maxwell’s Leadership Bible (NKJV) makes so easily identifiable to us as a heading).

John of Revelation’s vision tells it best, literally. *“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)...Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer...Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rev. 2:9–10).

I have a tendency to want to see each church as equal to 100 years in time, with church being taken in the larger sense as Jesus saw it, but there could be other interpretations, such as geographically or conditionally different parts, of the same church in the same hundred-year span. Certainly there was the:

“**Faithful Church**” (Philadelphia).

Was this the church of the martyrs whose physical life had already been expended on behalf of fidelity?

“I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it...Because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world...Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I shall make him a pillar in the temple of my God” (Rev. 3:8–12).

I’m sure that there was also the:

“**Lukewarm Church**” (Laodicea), which might describe those who couldn’t bring themselves to publicly deny Caesar’s claim of deity.

“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you...Be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him...To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne” (Rev. 3:14–21). And then there was the:

“**Dead Church**” (Sardis):

Those who were afraid to give voice to their belief because of what others might think, or do.

“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent...You have a few names...who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me” (Rev. 3:1–5).

Historically the “Door” (of the Philadelphian quote) did not close. Survivors slipped through in some manner and those Apostolic Christians marched forward into the second century of John’s future in all their imperfection. But what about the other three churches?

The “**Compromising Church**” (Pergamos).

“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you did not deny My faith...But I have a few things against you, because you have...put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols...you also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans [a sect given over to idolatrous practices and impurity of life], which I hate. Repent or else I will come to you quickly and fight against

them...To him who overcomes...I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it” (Rev. 2:13–17).

“In AD 325, Constantine the Great became sole Emperor of East and West” (Encyclopedia Americana, 1959 edition).

He had come a long way over a rough road to get there. His life was full of many battles, through all of which he seemed to have led a charmed life.

“Taking the field against Maxentius in 312, Constantine crossed the Alps with a well trained army, captured Verona and marched on Rome. During this campaign, it is said, he saw a flaming cross in the heavens beneath the sun bearing the Latin inscription (In this thou wilt conquer). Maxentius was defeated along the Tiber River at the battle of Milvian Bridge and was drowned in the river (Oct. 28, 312). Constantine’s conversion to Christianity apparently dates from this time...In 313, Licinius having also disposed of his rival, the two Augusti met at Mediolanum (Milan), where Licinius married Constantine’s half sister, Constantia. A memorable result of this meeting was the edict of tolerance in favor of religious freedom for all sects. Confiscated property was to be restored to the Christians and they were made eligible for public office. In 314 however, war broke out between the two emperors...During the years which followed, Licinius turned against the Christians, finally renewing the persecutions, whereas Constantine, from conviction, policy, or both, interested himself in their controversies and by his intervention attempted to restore peace between the various factions, summoning two councils (at Arles in 314; Milan in 316) in unsuccessful efforts to heal the breach between the Christians of the Roman Church and the Donatists, whose strength lay mainly in North Africa.

“(Donatist: A schismatic movement in the Christian church in North Africa which started early in the fourth century and continued for about 100 years. [It] arose out of dissensions at Carthage over readmission to the church of those who, during the persecutions of Diocletian, had denied the faith by counseling moderation or by giving up the sacred Christian books.

“The Donatists were extreme rigorists, holding that a priest could not validly administer the sacraments if he were in a state of sin, emphasizing purity as an indispensable quality for church membership.)

“In 324 war again broke out. Constantine was victorious in a rapid campaign, besieged Byzantium, and crossing to Asia Minor, captured Licinius.”

Thus, in 325, Constantine became sole emperor of East and West. In the same year he summoned a council at Nicaea in an effort to bring the followers of Arius and Athanasius to agreement on a common creed.

(Arius, author of Arianism the anti-Trinitarian philosophy that has survived into the twentieth century as Unitarianism.)

(Athanasius, “Of the 46 years of his official life, he spent 20 in banishment, and the greater part of the remainder in defending the Nicene Creed...His voluminous writings which are chiefly controversial and dogmatical, treat of the mysterious doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ and the divinity of the Holy Spirit.”)

“In 326, Constantine undertook to transfer the capital of the empire from Rome...the traditional seat of Paganism in the west to the strategic crossroads of the East where Christians formed perhaps half the population in the more important areas...In religious matters, since he himself was not baptized until he lay on his death bed, Constantine was probably attracted to Christianity, whose advance had been so remarkable, as much by

the political use he could make of it to restore unity to the empire, as by personal conviction. Moreover, it is probable that he believed that all the monotheists in the empire could be brought eventually to worship a single god in which would be the Father-God of the Christians with the Sun-God of the followers of Mithras, the traditional Roman Paganism, of which as pontifex maximus, he remained head, continued to be tolerated, and a modified emperor-worship was encouraged.”

And that was why, from the Tiber River victory onward, his standards always placed the Christian Cross under the Sun Disc.

Now what does this have to do with the “Compromising Church”?

Until the beginning of the fourth century (AD 312) the apostolic church had been periodically persecuted, but it had grown amazingly.

“Constantine was probably attracted to Christianity, whose advance had been so remarkable.”

This struggling, but amazingly successful church had been continually beset by schisms as subsets of it dropped off during the bad times, only to be conditionally allowed back during the good times. This liberality created rancor among the *faithful* who had borne the brunt of the whip of persecution as others had run for the cover of denial. There were compromises, seemingly necessary, that caused consternation among certain of the *faithful*, fueling the need for additional compromises, as they (Donatists, etc.) tugged against the tide of *unfaithfulness*.

In AD 312 Constantine fought and won under the banner of the “flaming cross in the heavens under the Sun.” He had accepted the help of the Christian cross, all the while remaining Pontifex Maximus of the Mythrian worship of the sun god. The majority of the people he ruled were pagans, and while the Christians were a fast growing sect they were still a minority for the totality of his reign. The Christians *had* to accept a second-place compromise on the Roman totem if they were to gain the added privileges and restoration of properties Constantine was willing to negotiate with Licinius in AD 313.

Constantine called three councils to forge compromises between the warring Christian factions. One at Arles in 314, one at Milan in 316, and one at Nicaea in 325.

He forged many compromises on the road to creating a unified Canon, forcing many, who dearly wished to reject, what others had only reluctantly accepted. A most notable example of this process was the Book of Revelation itself.

It was, according to some sources, rejected many times by a majority of the council, until at the end and possibly at the insistence of Constantine himself, it was said to have been ever-so-reluctantly included. If that turns out to be an accurate account, why would he have been insistent upon its inclusion? Is it possible that Revelation, being so full of symbolism and metaphoric references seemed rather similar to the Mysteries of the Mythrian belief system, and would have been of interest to newly recruited acolytes from paganism?

“Nevertheless, Christianity was gradually advanced at the expense of Paganism.”

Regarding the reference to “Where Satan’s throne is” in the quote from Revelation under the heading “The Compromising Church,” Rome had also been referred to as “The traditional center of Paganism” during the many centuries of its popularity, and then domination.

And as to the promise as also quoted above, *“To him who overcomes...I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”*

Was the “new name” that of the highest Christian leader, the bishop of Rome, which seemed to mysteriously morph into the title of “pope”? And might the “white stone” be metaphorically the headpiece and vestments put upon the newly anointed as he ascended to the highest office in the Catholic (universal) hierarchy, in the name of Jesus? And regarding the “new name that no one knows,” does this explain the many challenges to the later addition of and legitimacy of the “Office of the Papacy.”

And talk about *overcoming*. They overcame the Roman emperors, they overcame each other, the pagans, and every other obstacle including those “Desert Raiders” that had been placed before them on the way to becoming the most numerous religious sect in the whole world.

And then there was, **“The Loveless Church”** (Ephesus) as I had briefly touched on earlier.

“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And that you have tested those who say that they are apostles and are not, and found them to be liars...Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp-stand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (Rev. 2:2–6).

The *Followers of the Way*, as the Christians were called when they began as a radical offshoot of the Jewish religion, were originally persecuted by the *Mother* religion as it sought to stamp out this “blasphemous” belief system. Even as the Roman Imperial elite took over the main persecutorial role, the Jewish minorities in many different places and times found it expedient to cooperate in the suppression of this growing, then burgeoning challenger to their primacy in the Hebrew world.

Even after the Roman destruction in AD 70 of the primary landmark of their faith, Jewish leaders felt the urgent need periodically to appeal to Roman authority for help in resisting the growing number of proselytizers of this “false faith.” They were being harassed in their synagogues even as the *Gentiles* were in their *temples* by members of this “slave religion” who, like weeds, seemed to sprout anew even from where they had just been removed.

The agitation that this caused is attested to by an occasional reference in the writings of the Apostles, especially in those writings of Paul and John of Revelation, concerning the anti-Christian attitude of the Jewish leadership in various places and times.

“And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a Synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9).

But they were overcomers, and by the age of the *Compromising Church* (AD 325) they were well on the way to becoming the second most influential belief system in the Roman world. Then as they entered the fifth century (AD 400), their *Golden Age* took shape. But the *backbiters* still bit back even as their own influence declined.

Well before the sixth century (AD 500) the whole Roman world seemed to have become a largely Christian enclave.

But, as it came to a close, they'd had to fight off Avars, Huns and Visigoths in the north as well as the Persian Empire in the east that the earlier Romans had fought to many an inconsequential stalemate.

"The empire after Constantine became increasingly subjugated to the interests of the military establishment and the imperial officials. Thus the crushing burden of taxation on the general population was only one reason for the decline of its will to defend the empire against barbarian encroachment" (Encyc. Amer. 1959 ed. vol. 7; Constantine I). Be it ever thus? Or is there an opportunity to learn?

"Theodosius (I) was the first to prohibit the practice of the Pagan religion altogether, and he brought the Arian controversy to its final conclusion at the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople 381)...His grandson Theodosius II...brought together the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus 431), which anathematized Nestorius for separating the divine in Christ from the human...In 450 Pulcheria, sister of Theodosius...married Marcian...who made it his business to summon the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon 451) and secure the condemnation of both Nestorius and the Monophysites, the latter of whom taught that there was only one nature in Christ—the divine. Angered by this decision, the Monophysites became hostile to the Byzantine government, and therefore offered little resistance to the Persian and the Arab invasions of Syria and Egypt in the seventh century."

Then in AD 625 (the early seventh century), it happened! A hurricane of despoilment and destruction swept in from the deserts of Arabia. At first it hadn't seemed like much, at an earlier time it had just appeared to be caravan raiding that the Eastern Christian and Persian *enemies* tried to ignore, as they exhausted each other. But then by AD 630, the ancient Jewish homeland as well as a large part of the Eastern Christian province of Syria was quickly absorbed by these "Desert Rats." By AD 641 the Sassanid Persian Empire collapsed and was no more, and the rest of Syria and much of the Eastern Christian empire east of the Euphrates River was conquered. Finally, by 664 much of the Western Christian North African territories had been separated from them by these Arab marauders.

How had it happened? Why had it happened? Had the Christians fought among themselves too hard for too long, after having overcome so many enemies?

A brand-new hybrid *religion* had done the job. According to some sources, it was made up of parts of three disparate belief systems.

It had made a good imitation of many of the Christian beliefs that Mohammad had studied, under Christian clerics, only to be dismissed when his rather unique interpretations proved to be unacceptable. It also appropriated some differently interpreted Jewish rituals, some time after Mohammad and his followers had been rejected as equal partners with them. And, this movement called "Islam" had come up out of an idol-worshipping Arabian cult whose most important symbol of worship was a huge black polished stone (a meteorite, according to some opinions). Finally, it was the visionary conglomeration of all these and more, put together by its *prophet* Mohammad.

It had moved into the old Jewish homeland almost without opposition. It absorbed one of the two empires that had exhausted themselves warring against each other for generations, and then, renewed its assault upon the remaining eastern lands of the survivor, whose capital Constantinople was observed by its founder to be the cultural and economic center of gravity of the whole Roman Empire. That center was slowly

diminished in size and importance until it too disappeared many centuries of conflict later (AD 1453).

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp-stand from its place” (Rev. 2:5).

The Eastern Christian entity of the seventh century (AD 600) was far removed from its apostolic origins. Instead of, in all honest humility, following the titular leader, the bishop of Rome, religious heir of the Apostle Peter, already chosen, according to the Bible, by their crucified leader as head of his church, and by extension any other bishop chosen as his successor; the Eastern leadership, following Constantine’s move of his capitol eastward sought to contest that authority, trying instead to negotiate a kind of co-ruler-ship, similar to that which had brought Constantine to the fore of the pagan, Roman Empire.

There had been many examples of this kind of rule already tried in the Roman Empire’s history. Some were a questionably temporary success, while many led to fratricidal failures, ending in vitality-draining civil wars. And this similar constant challenge to settled authority was also draining the vitality out of the Christian movement. Their very success turned into their biggest failing. Their unwillingness to do “the first things” that John had warned of would leave them out of the circle-of-protection of their “First love.”

But why did John pick Ephesus as an example of having lost doing “the first works”?

It had already been a cosmopolitan city for a long time before the Romans, “under whom it eventually became the capital of the Province of Asia and so increased in importance that its only Near Eastern rivals were Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople. Ephesus was an early Christian center, counting Saint Paul as the founder and Saints Timothy and John among its early bishops. It became the chief Christian community in Asia Minor and served as the site of several church councils” (Encyc. Amer. vol. 10; Ephesus).

And now; “In [AD] 430 Celestine I...demanded the recantation of Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, who had refused the title ‘Mother of God’ to the ‘Virgin Mary’” (Encyc. Amer. vol. 6; Catholic Church).

“Nestorius was a presbyter of Antioch who in 428 was made patriarch of Constantinople and was charged with teaching that there were two persons in Jesus Christ, of which one is the word of God, and the other the man Jesus, and that Mary His mother ought not to be styled mother of God (Theotokos) but mother of Christ (Christotokos). Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, accused him of teaching the dual personality of Christ, a view which was formally condemned and anathematized by the Third Council of Ephesus, 431...The controversy lasted for two centuries” (Encyc. Amer. vol. 20; Nestorianism).

If Saint John of a previous quote is the John of Revelation, then he knew personally what was the state of faith of the Ephesians during his time as bishop, and had used them as an example to warn others within the factions who had already begun to stray.

Could it be that these stern warnings to the Ephesians, who seemed to have gone on in the direction that John had preached against, might have been what caused his exile to Patmos? Of course, this is conjectural logic, but if the Romans had meted out his punishment, it would most likely have been execution of some sort, as they had done with the other apostles.

Did John feel that he was warning the Ephesians of his time what their near-term future would be, or was that warning a little understood look forward, toward a longer term? As the future played out, Ephesus became the site of many councils whose main argument seemed to be over who had the right to determine the correct path to follow.

I wish to take no position on the subject as quoted above, the Marian question, except to note that the contestants seemed to have gotten further into *religiosity* than the far simpler path that their crucified leader had tried to direct them toward. They seemed to be more interested in picking apart the parable, the earthly example, the messenger, than trying to understand the message that he brought. This was similar to the problem that Jesus had with his disciples in interpreting parables, as referred to in an earlier chapter. And in the years that elapsed in apostolic history, things hadn't seemed to have changed that much.

Now, at the end there is, "The **Corrupt Church**" (Thyatira).

"And as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless...you allow that woman Jezebel...to seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality...and those who commit adultery...[will suffer] great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and the hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works...And to him who overcomes, and keeps My works...I will give him the morning star" (Rev. 2:18–26).

Although this is the last church mentioned, according to my rearrangement, it wasn't meant to be the least; although it is the least well known of all the churches in John's vision.

If this warning has a parable-like inference to the church-at-large within a specific time frame, I admit to some uncertainty. It seems to have wide application over the extent of the Christian church's history, with the latter part seeming to have had a multiplied application over the earlier part.

I wonder if John had a similar problem understanding at what group or age he was directed to invoke this particular warning? After all he did seem to understand that the vision had directed him to issue an advisory, "For the time is near" as introduction to the whole message. His feeling about the approach of the *End Times*, the *Last Chapter*, seems to reflect what the other apostles were also presenting as *Revealed Truth*.

Thyatira was founded as a Jewish enclave in western Anatolia in the age of the Greek *generals*.

Only very recently in its history had it supported a struggling, *minor* cult of Christians. But against all odds they had persisted. Is this what John referred to as "the last works being more than the first"? John himself had some strong opinions concerning the harassment by that *hateful mother* church. And the earthquake of AD 17 might have diminished in advance the long-standing Jewish ability to influence the activities of the surrounding communities.

Therefore, his bias might be viewed as having granted to *his* people greater significance than might have been obvious to those around them. His vision might naturally be seen to apply to his present and near-term future, but his reference to Jezebel takes me back to the "Northern Kingdom" and a pagan, Jezebel, who seemed to have had undue influence over the last Israelite king. The obvious conclusion would be that he

made reference to the Pagan Roman and Gnostic influences surrounding all Christian efforts to remain true to the *Word*.

So does the past and the present seem to augur the future circumstance? In other words, does history tend to repeat itself? The further that John advanced into his written interpretation of what he experienced, the greater use he made of metaphoric and other symbolic language.

It was as if he couldn't *see* as clearly the meaning of the latter part as he had in the earlier portion. His descriptions of war and the things of war were cast in the vernacular of his present or the past, as if the future would not change appreciably. His *view* of pestilence, disease and other tribulations, all things *seen*, were similar, but on a far grander scale than ever before experienced. The horse, translator of power and motive force, both before as well as in his day, was as ubiquitous in his vision as it was in the hierarchy of power in his time, while today we deal regularly in multiples of that force applicator in our everyday life situations.

But the main theme of this warning seems to me to be temptation.

1. Temptation toward the corruption of the *Word* with all the imaginative additions meant to explain and expand it, or justify avoidance of its strict observance.

2. The corruption of leadership, as they were tempted to bend the *Word* to enhance their individual condition above that of those whom they had governance over.

3. The corruption of trust as those leaders are *found out* regarding their *secret* bias, which example is all too easily replicated in the population at large.

4. The corruption of morals, as leaders are tempted to excuse the failings of others, for a consideration.

Which leads to the corruption of the faith itself that is the foundation to any belief system.

Might it be that the depth John had to peer into his vision for the merest of an understanding was what caused him to couch his interpretation of temptation in the idol-worshipping sexuality more akin to his day and in prior times, a kind of parabolic reference to the sort of temptation that might be prevalent in a future that he was grossly ill-equipped to envision?

John saw all too well the corrupting influences in the churches of his day. People who attempted to *leaven* their newly found faith with some of the old, as well as the *Mysteries* of other intriguing ideas, both ancient and new, as well as the differing beliefs of family, friends or acquaintances. Even various interpretations within the Christian faith, fostered and solidified by the slowness of communication between large population centers such as Alexandria, Antioch, and Ephesus. Weren't they all really, consciously or unconsciously, simply vying for a preeminent position of prestige and influence?

Even the Apostle Paul periodically warned against becoming followers of the teachers rather than the *Word* itself. This led, later on, to groupings such as the Nestorians, Monophysites, Gnostics, and the many others that are sprinkled down through the later history of Christianity.

This caused the gradual weakening within the movement, opening the way for intruders who seemed bent on competing with, even destroying it, if necessary, or capable.

So, by the opening of the seventh century, an attack was mounted from the east by an old enemy, Sassanid Persia, and from the north by the barbarians. To this was added the

feelings of disloyalty of the Gnostic-leaning Christians of Syria and other southeastern sections as well as Egypt and North Africa.

Also, to this, add the unrest of the overseas Jews and those in their ancient homeland, Judea, having been denied for centuries the *right* to rebuild their Temple by the Christian heirs of the Roman Empire purportedly for reasons of scriptural prophesy.

So, by AD 625, rapidly increasing attacks by caravan raiders from their *outback* could no longer be successfully withstood.

The general collapse brought on by those onslaughts initiated the greatest of all the tribulations that the Christians had, in one way or another, weathered up to that time.

The slowly growing disunity had finally defeated them like no enemy could have, or should have been able to. A new group, initially small but unified in their purpose, had blindsided those who had become mighty, but distracted from their original purpose.

Their *lamp stand* had been jarred loose from its *firm foundation*. The *promise* of the *Morning Star* would go begging for a long, long time.

But what of the rest of the vision?

“Of the Seals, there were Seven.”

The first Seal (as John Maxwell so conveniently styled): “**The Conqueror.**”

“*And he went out conquering and to conquer*” (Rev. 6:2).

Was John of Revelation able to see all the “wars and rumors of war” that the world has never been without clearly enough to make a short reference to it? Or had he relied on his Master’s teachings that he had heard firsthand? There would be many wars in the eighth century (AD 700) after the initial sorting out of the seventh, as the Christian “center of gravity” shifted toward the northwest. Was John’s warning “*The Number of the Beast which is 666,*” predictive of this particular sorting out? Was the number 666 meant to have an historical connotation, as chapter 18 seeks to determine?

“*Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard...The dragon gave him his power...And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world followed the beast...saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’ It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them*” (Revelation 13:2–4, 7).

“During the first century after the Hegira (AD 622–722); the Arabs, in ongoing campaigns, many lasting years, conquered Syria (AD 634–642); the Sassanian empire of Persia in 642; Armenia and Mesopotamia in 644, and part of northern Africa in 645–692...by AD 664 the Islamic empire had reached its greatest expansion. After that it ground against its Christian [Byzantine] adversary with little effect until the first Christian Crusade in the 11th century caused them a temporary setback” (Encyclopedia Americana; Mohammed). And of course there was the fall of Constantinople in AD 1453 to the Islamic successors of that first Caliphate.

And the Second Seal:

“*And it was granted to the one...to take peace from the earth*” (Rev. 6:4).

What of the “barbarians” who continued to *come down* from the northeast during all this time?

Then, following that, there were the *competitions* as the European vassal provinces (the former barbarians) vied for preeminence after the final *fall* of Rome. For a very long time after that, Europe seemed intent on crippling itself endlessly, even up till the two *great* wars.

And also, there were the wars that had been encouraged by the weakness that followed the many crippings as attested to in the following:

The Third Seal: "**Scarcity on Earth.**"

"And I heard a voice in the midst...saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine'" (Rev. 6:6).

In approaching the *End of the Age*, farmers in some of the Christian countries in AD 999, it is said, sure that "The End of all Time" had come, refused to plant crops for the next year.

And of course there were other famines caused by unusual weather and the devastatingly sudden plagues of insects, among which the locusts were by far the worst.

From the "*mark of the beast which is 666,*" if it is seen as historical, to 999, the end of the first millennium is 333 years, approximately equal to the historical chronology of the apostolic *persecuted church* if we mark the beginning of the age as the birth of Christ, which has been variously ascribed from 4 to 6 BC.

And then there were the 300 years that I will call the Constantine Ascension years where the *Church* bloomed bigger than anyone could have predicted. In the first millennium at least, things seemed to have happened in multiples of 300, struggle, ascension, then struggle and ascension.

At the beginning of the second millennium there were the crusader years, then the Mongol menace of AD 1225, the Black Death and the end of the Eastern Byzantine Empire with the fall of Constantinople in AD 1453. Then began the slow climb of the *Enlightenment*. Are these some kind of parabolic signposts? Or are they nothing in particular? I haven't quite figured that out yet.

The Fourth Seal:

"And behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was death. And power was given...to kill with sword, with hunger, with death" (Rev. 6:8).

In the early part of the thirteenth century (approx. AD 1215) a mounted horde swept from out of the east spreading death and destruction wherever they went. They were the Golden Horde of the Mongols, "The Devil's horsemen," as named by the Christians who felt that they knew them from the warning in their book of the Revelation.

This sweep of Mongols collided with the easternmost portion of the old Roman Empire, and parts north, after having brutally absorbed the ancient Persian Empire then occupied by "the Moslems, the Christians in the Caucasus, and Slavs of southern Russia" (Amer.; Mongols).

But Genghis Khan's initial aim was "to be victorious in wars of extermination against the Islamic peoples, notably the powerful Shahs of Khwarazm in the Caspian region."

There have been many *reasons* put forth for this animosity, but generally it seemed to have something to do with trade disputes.

"And I heard a voice in the midst... saying..." (Rev. 6:6).

Regardless of why, pestilential war had come to the Moslems, which split their empire almost in two, as they had done to the Christians 600 years before. The Moslems had taken from the Christians by force what the Christians had peacefully absorbed largely through the sacrifice of their martyrs.

The Moslems had lived by the sword and many of them had now died by the sword, while the Christians, who had grown up through, and then held sway for the first 600

years of the initial millennium, lost when they had not remained true to their “first works.”

And what of the Mongols? They seem to have been the first “viral” infection of the second millennium. Some aspects of their unique organization of the captured European and Middle Eastern lands were still in existence into the eighteenth century, or about 600 years, while some signs of their past presence is visible even today thanks to the gift of genetics.

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” (Rev. 7:9).

“So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation’” (Rev. 7:14).

Each generation since Revelation’s John has seen something of their time as descriptive of the great tribulation. Could it be construed that a part of John’s Revelation included a great tribulation that was meant to include supporters of Islam? And what of the earlier Christian victims of Rome and the Israelite priesthood?

And there was the symbolism of the “Bowls.”

“So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men” (Rev. 16:2).

“So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind” (Rev. 9:15).

*“Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord **from now on**’”* (Rev. 14:13, bolding mine).

John’s prediction, *“For the time is near”* was made as he approached the end of the first century of the first millennium (as I now prefer to view it). The *tribulation* of the *sacrifice* was at hand or had just begun. Was this the “Great Tribulation” or only the first?

The *falling away* of some of the *faithful* in the second through the fifth centuries caused great schisms within the movement. Was that the “Great Tribulation,” or just another?

In the early seventh century many were *struck down* by the “Sword of Islam” that had sundered half of the empire that the Christians had fallen heir to. Was this the greatest of all *tribulations*, or might there be another even greater one to come?

For 600 years Islam grew, prospered and became mighty, while Christianity declined and was threatened repeatedly with total eclipse largely by the *firebrand* of this new aggressive faith. As the first millennium slipped into the second, the Christians had every reason to fear that this would be the time of the Great Tribulation, if it indeed, had not already occurred.

Then, from out of the east came the “Four horsemen of the Apocalypse.” The mighty “Shahs of Khwarazm” were crushed down into the sands of their conceit.

They, who had seen themselves as unbeatable were utterly destroyed, or so it seemed. Whole cities were totally depopulated as its inhabitants were mercilessly put to the sword. The economics of many areas were completely disrupted.

Genghis Kahn meant to be victorious in his “wars of Extermination against the Islamic peoples” (Encyc. Amer. vol. 12; Genghis Kahn).

All Christendom trembled on the verge of their realization that this might be their greatest tribulation ever. Then it happened!

The great leader of the Horsemen from Hell died suddenly, from *natural causes*. The Christians seemed to have been spared from the fate of their worst fears.

The Mongols could have had all of Europe, but they withdrew because tradition dictated that they pay a final tribute to their great leader who had been unhorsed at the height of his worldly achievements. Was this, perhaps, by a power far beyond his ability to comprehend?

Many Christians thought that time would come to an end at the close of the first millennium, but they were wrong.

Many more thought that their time of "Great Reckoning" had come when the Mongols descended upon the world to the east of their homeland, but they were saved by geography, as well as a single physical death.

Widespread thanks were offered in many unique and imaginative ways as they *witnessed* to their deliverance. Scholars peered back into John's Revelation for some insight into why the Mongol horsemen had not been evocative of the horsemen of Revelation.

Many now *saw* within the seeming historical ambiguity of John's "For the time is near" declaration a new understanding. God's time was not Man's time, therefore the *near* that John had spoken of was probably many centuries in the future. "Alleluia!"

In AD 1347 a double-barreled pestilence erupted, it seemed like, everywhere. In Europe alone 25 million people had expired in a most gruesome manner by 1350. The term "Black Death" was quickly attached to the twin plagues, one of the Pneumonic variety and the other of Bubonic origin. Never had the world seen such a devastating pestilential assault.

Asia and Africa were devastated, while one-third of all Europeans were erased from the roster of the living. In England alone, as many as 50 percent of the people perished.

Economic activity was threatened with total paralysis as the sudden scarcity of labor doubled its value in the *blink of an eye*.

And on a darker note, "on the Continent, the horrors of the time were heightened by fearful persecutions of the Jews, suspected of causing the epidemic by poisoning public wells" (Encyc. Amer. vol. 4; Black Death).

Just as the Christians had begun to take heart in renewed thoughts of the future, the "Great Tribulation" had descended upon them! Or, was even the totality of this awful catastrophe not to be considered the fulfillment of John's prophesy?

He had written as if history had come to an end, and he had been given the privilege of writing the last chapter to tell how it had all come about. When he wrote about Babylon, it was in a kind of historical metaphor. Babylon, it seems to me, had been used to stand in for all of previous history, and beyond.

From out of earlier prehistory had come the first settled way of life that led to organized communities, then cities, then city-states, then empires. From ancient Ur, to Babylon with its magnificent tower, to brutal Assyria, Babylon again, then the Persia of Cyrus, and his heirs, Alexander's Hellenism, and last but not least Pagan Rome.

All of these Nemeses of the Hebrew's self-declared example of the way that their God-above-all-gods would have civilization organize itself was the rock upon which God's *first choice* in people had foundered. They had lost their way and had suffered cruel and inhuman treatment from all those worldly powerful entities.

And now a new Covenant had been given, and this time God's chosen new-people would, under His direction, become victorious. The End of time, that would bring judgment upon all, was at hand, out of which a New World would arise.

John probably wasn't very sure from what place in this history he was writing. How much was the ancient past and what part of their recent past should be considered prologue? Also how much was prophecy, against that which ought to be seen more as prediction?

In a vague sort of way, he may have tried to describe the destruction of the old, and glimpse the new world as he had been allowed to *see* it. But he knew that the entire vocabulary of his time was insufficient to describe what he had *seen*, or in some way *witnessed*. But he would have to try.

The sun had changed:

"Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire" (Rev. 16:8).

And then an earthquake:

"And a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven...And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth" (Rev. 16:17–18).

"And hail and fire followed...And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up" (Rev. 8:7).

"And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea...And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed" (Rev. 8:8–9).

"And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water...and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter" (Rev. 8:10–11).

"Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened" (Rev. 8:12).

Was John's reference to "something like a great burning mountain, thrown into the sea," and "a great star falling from heaven, burning like a torch" meant as a witness to an extremely ancient occurrence or was it meant as prologue to a catastrophic event that had yet to occur? Or maybe to both?

John saw a new city coming down from above:

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:10–11).

He saw a sea as smooth as glass:

"And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire" (Rev. 15:2).

There has been an ongoing controversy over what effect Man's activities are having on the environment. The argument sharpened when it was discovered that there was a hole in the ozone layer over the South Pole that hadn't been noted before. In looking for a possible cause, it was also noted that there was an alarmingly rapid buildup of an industrial chemical, fluorocarbon, in the atmosphere.

It was posited by some that there was a direct correlation between the fluorocarbon buildup and the increase in the size of what has become styled as the ozone hole over the

South Pole. This has come to be seen as a danger to mankind, as well as all other life that is harmed by the ultraviolet light radiation, from the sun and other sources, that the ozone layer reacts with. The hole over the poles is seen as evidence that the ozone layer is thinning worldwide. It was theorized that if nothing were done, the end result could very well be an entire collapse of the ozone layer and the end of life for much of the planet including mankind.

Was John's vision good enough to have predicted this new kind of *tribulation*? Will all of us who carry the economic "mark of the beast" have to suffer as *God* puts His *celestial* mark upon us?

"He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:16–17).

"Now when the thousand years...expired...They went up on the breadth of the earth...And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them" (Rev. 20:7, 9).

"His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4).

Archaeology (pertaining to the oldest part of earth history during which the earliest forms of life presumably appeared) is an interesting field of study. It, among many others, has held my interest for as long as I can remember.

Paleontology (the science of the forms of life existing in former geological periods, as represented by fossil animals and plants) is another.

Several years ago a scientist within these studies, Louis Alveras, was seeking information in an effort to understand the disappearance of the dinosaurs. It seems that all fossil evidence of them disappeared at the end of the Jurassic and the beginning of the Cretaceous Periods.

In his digging, he came upon what he felt was a puzzlingly anomalous condition. Right between the two periods was a narrow layer of a white substance that seemed to be a point of separation between not only the two geologic strata themselves, but the differing fossils of the two periods also. Analysis indicated that it was composed largely of a substance identified as iridium.

"To him who overcomes...I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

What was most puzzling about this discovery was that iridium was well known to be mostly foreign to earthly geological composition, while it was known to be a major component of some asteroids. Further research, investigation, and study indicated that it uniformly appeared worldwide between the layers of these two periods.

"It would appear," he tentatively asserted, "that an asteroid might have been involved in the disappearance of the dinosaurs!"

But hypothesis is a long way from proof, and there were no identifiable craters of an age consistent with, and at or near to the original site of his discovery.

Another kind of digging at that point in time in the Gulf of Mexico—oil was the primary goal—did reveal shocked quartz, a common byproduct of asteroid impact. This had not been found at other places where the iridium layer was thinner than at his original dig in New Mexico. That meant, he theorized, that his original point of discovery was within the Ejecta Field of an impact crater, but only if it was a really huge one. But, no

landforms even faintly hinted of the presence of anything like it, except Arizona and it was much too recent and much too small.

Serendipitously it would seem, additional information came to his attention from other oil-well drilling test cores in the Gulf of Mexico further narrowing a beginning investigation.

The presence of shocked quartz was high in these cores, and the hint of underwater landforms within them, which were taken in the gulf east of the Yucatan Peninsula, seemed to be consistent with the above-water portion of that part of eastern Mexico. If he were right in his synthesis of these indicators, there was a huge crater, mostly underwater, and largely buried under massive silt deposits, off Yucatan that was well within the radius he needed for confirmation of his theory. The formation was named Chixalub after some entity within the Yucatan Peninsula.

In the years following his first announcement, I have heard many scenarios of what it must have been like when this mountain-sized rock fell from the *heavens*, a bright “*star that burned like a torch*” as it made its hyper-thermal way through earth’s atmosphere. Its collision with the earth and the ocean took place beyond what is now the eastern tip of the Yucatan Peninsular. Can you imagine the height of the wall of water that must have moved at hypersonic speed away from such an impact? Can one even imagine something like that happening in today’s near future?

Krakatoa, in the area of the island of Java in Indonesia, exploded in the early twentieth century creating a tsunami 120 feet high that inundated the neighboring island of Sumatra. Continuing on, where it met with no obstruction, it traveled 10,000 miles across the Pacific where it struck the western shores of America with a recordable wave front. This was infinitely tiny by comparison with that which hit Yucatan.

When the island of Thera in the eastern Aegean Sea exploded in 1628 BC, it took most of the island with it, as well as destroying a mighty island nation. (See *The Exodus According to G.*)

It is estimated that it also developed a thermal blast ten times the size of Krakatoa, and one must assume the several walls of water were at least ten times the size of that Pacific tsunami. It was great enough to disrupt all of the nations of the Middle East in that ancient time of man’s historical development. But, compared with the Chixalub disaster it was like a pebble hitting the water.

Upon impact, it was theorized, huge quantities of earth, vaporized water, and most of the asteroid was hurled into the upper reaches of the atmosphere, some of which, it is thought, may have reached escape velocity. The heavier shocked quartz and some of the iridium fell back to earth in an Ejecta-field pattern, but much of it was fine enough and lofted high enough to spread around the globe to come raining down for hours, days, weeks, months, even years.

The effect this must have had on all life seems to have been catastrophic. The geologic record is clear. All Jurassic fossils seem to end at the iridium layer, while all those above it are of a different sort. Considering the foregoing, it has been estimated that 90 percent of all life, plant and animal disappeared from the earth.

But, you could argue, birds have been claimed to be direct descendent of dinosaurs and they are still here. To which I might add, so are mammals, and those who seemed to have *gotten through* had one thing in common, they were all quite small.

In other examples of environmental disturbances, the larger species have gone extinct more rapidly than the smaller ones. The smaller specimens who only filled niches around the periphery of the dominant species seem to have been able to survive that which had brought down the major players. It seems to be a case of the *fringes* having had benefits, as well as corroboration of the biblical admonition “the mighty shall be brought down.”

But this happened 65 million years ago, so what does it have to do with John’s Revelation? Possibly very little, but, according to my parabolic interpretation, his vision did seem to take him back symbolically to the earliest of settled life, and more. But how much further did it take him back into the dim reaches of the prehistoric past?

In a reference to a large earthquake he did reveal that it was “*such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth*” (bolding mine). That might be seen to imply that he, by inference, *saw* a time before *men* were here.

And if one were to take paleontology’s definition of Man and his precursor hominid to be equivalent, that would be about 10 million years ago, so why not a glimpse further back to give John some understanding, that what had already happened, could very well occur again.

And speaking about earthquakes, can you imagine what kind of an earthquake a mountain-size asteroid would have caused? Halfway around the earth from Chixalub is a formation in India called the Deccan Traps. It’s a huge zone of what is called flood lava. It is theorized that this area was formed not by lava, as would be poured out from a mountain or several of them, but from some kind of breach of the earth’s crust.

It seemed to have released a great flood of lava, and that it might have taken place over several million years. There has been much debate of when in the geologic record that this might have taken place, but some assign it to a generally equivalent time frame as that of the Chixalub disaster.

But, could it happen again? In the world of the third millennium (2005) there is a much better understanding of the possibility of an asteroid colliding with the earth than John could have gained by any means other than a visionary one.

There is evidence in the geologic record of many great die-offs of species, the last major one being 65 million years ago, but there have been others at earlier times. If the figuring that I did a few years ago when the subject first drew my interest is approximately correct, then the other die-offs took place at approximate multiples of 65 million years, 130 million, 195 million, and 260 million, etc. years ago. If that holds true, are we in for another one sometime soon, and would it then be the one that John’s Revelation tells us that will usher in the “End of Time”?

In 2004, I believe, an astronomer associated with the Near-earth-orbit asteroid watch had seen and calculated one that he predicted would impact earth. It caused quite a stir, but in recalculating its orbital path, he posted the corrected figures that showed a near miss instead. But by the time that he had finished, it had already passed us by, at a distance less than that between the earth and the moon.

Man has been a good student, and today understands as naturally occurring, many things that even many generations ago seemed mystical and magical. He has looked up into the heavens and learned to calculate the track and/or orbit of many celestial bodies. But, did he need a “shot across the bow” as it were, to remind him that “time’s a-wastin’”?

John's vision predicted that a "*third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass...and a third of the living creatures in the sea died.*" This does not comport well with the 90 percent estimate for the Chixalub event. Does this mean something of lesser size could bring us to the "End of Days"?

His prediction also includes, "*And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened.*" Whereas in the other example, there would have been no sun, no moon, and no stars to be seen for many years, even perhaps, centuries. Does this mean that our newest *near miss*, if it came closer next time could become the agent of our destruction? Its orbital path is predicted to bring it closer for a possible hit in 2029 or if not that time, again in 2036 (these figures might not be as accurate as those originally given out by the astronomer himself, but in this case will probably suffice).

(Note: In a much later reiteration of the above incident, the July 2006 edition of the *Planetary Report* contained the following information on page 8. "Roy Tucker...co-discoverer of Apophis, the asteroid that will come closer to earth in 2029 than our geostationary communications satellites and that still has a small chance of impact in 2036.")

So, did our *calling card* alert us as to the day of *reckoning* when "all things" will become subject of the judgment that John warned of?

And then, what of those, if any, who might survive the *Judgment*?

"*And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass*" (Rev. 15:2).

When scientists tested the first nuclear device in White Sands New Mexico, ground zero became crystalized. The sand turned to glass in a wide area around where the device was ignited, a small "Sea of Glass" as it were, but only after the fireball of the explosion.

At Chixalub, the sand, rocks and mud turned to shocked quartz which, as I understand it, is like a form of finely broken glass.

If our *Messenger* would have an effect somewhere in between those two extremes, it might be that the survivors of the *Judgment* could be the ones who would be standing on the "Sea of Glass" without harm coming to them. This might indicate something about the kind of *bodies* that they might have acquired as their reward.

And about the other observation, "*Jerusalem descending out of heaven...Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper, clear as crystal*" (Rev. 21:10-11).

Right now we are building a space station, learning to survive outside the earth's gravity and atmosphere. At some time in the near future it might become the core of a much larger one that could support many occupants as well as long-term docking of craft like the space shuttle.

What if that *Messenger* were to return, but this time intent in *docking* with this great *Mother ship* earth? Imagine what the people on the station would see and feel as they watched the devastation from the safety of their ringside seat.

Imagine the anxiety as they came back to earth in their shuttlecraft. The trepidation as they looked for a safe undamaged landing site.

Imagine the awe mixed with relief any survivors of such a cataclysm might feel as they watched the approach of such a wonderfully bright and shining craft, landing lights ablaze, as it slowly descended to earth. Like a city of light, a shining jasper jewel, bringing with them the perfect crystal of hope.

“Over the door in one room of Hellbrunn there is a painted Latin motto, *numen vel dissita iungit* (“A divine power unites even opposites”) (Smithsonian, 2-1-06; Mozart p. 95).

Visionary religious understanding along with Man’s “scientific method” and the worldly progress that it has brought must be diligently urged to co-exist in this rapidly changing environment, until the perception is gained that they ought to be seen as being mutually complementary.

Patmos

Introduction

The John of Patmos and the John of the letters preceding the Revelation in most Bibles appears to me to be the same. The letters reveal that he both traveled to churches and wrote letters to those whom he intended to, or could not, visit. It appears to me that he was headquartered in Ephesus, an important center in early church history, where he was presiding bishop following in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. The seven churches that he sent letters to in the “Book of Revelation” appear to have been within his purview as “Overseer” during the active phase of his ministry.

He appears to have exhorted his “Little Children” to obey God, follow Jesus, and love one another. He also appears to have fought against corruption of the *Word* by those who wished to follow, but within their own idea of what that Word really was meant to elucidate. He also warned against giving in to the temptations of the pagan world all around them, and from which many had just come, carrying in many cases, the baggage of old familiar beliefs. His references to “False Teachers” probably indicates his difficulty with the Gnostic influence, as well as the people from a Jewish background who wished to claim or reclaim neophytes away from this *new* way.

His was in a dangerous missionary field with many, if not all of his contemporaries, martyred either during Nero’s reign or shortly thereafter. It must have been a heavy burden to become the “last” of the original apostles, never knowing when his *turn* would come. Then, his ministry settled into a time of *lesser* persecutions, as the Caesarian succession proceeded, apparently away for a time, from the extremes of the likes of Nero. Yet there were problems, as parts of his letters seem to indicate.

“Having many things to write to you, but I did not wish to do so with paper and ink: but I hope to come to you” (2 John, 1:12, NKJV).

“I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face” (3 John, 1:13, NKJV).

Then following this, nothing—until his Revelation was revealed.

He must have rankled other power centers with his faithfully clear doctrinal teachings, but the *easier* times bred lesser martyrdoms, as someone that he probably well knew of caused his exile to this small and lonely, rocky outcrop of an island.

The story that follows is a totally fictional imagining of what it must have been like to have been suddenly cut off from everything and everyone that one felt responsible for, and yet not be able to give the “last great measure” for the *Faith* as others had done.

Isolation

It had been a cruel blow to John, this judgment that removed him from his people, even all people, if he insisted on attempting to keep in communication with those who had been around him. The loneliness was truly double-edged. Banishment to this tiny almost barren isle, of itself, would have been difficult to bear, but this seemingly sole survivorship among his fellow apostles doubled the agony of his continuing existence.

So many of his friends had given themselves up to the most extreme of sacrifices, but it seemed his fate only to endure in miserable isolation.

First, there was Stephen, long ago and early on in our ever-so-grand mission, John ruminated. He brought a reality to what we imagined ourselves to be doing. I don't think that we actually saw the danger in what we were about until then. Yes, our blessed Rabbi had been crucified, but that didn't somehow seem as real as the stoning of Stephen.

He had grasped the Word so quickly and so thoroughly. Stephen became like one of us, even though he had only recently been called, and then only to relatively mundane service, John reflected as memory rolled on. He had not seemed to flinch at all, from witnessing to the "Good News" that was ours to spread. All of us had run for cover, when our learned Rabbi had been crucified. But when it had come his turn, Stephen had stood tall and strong. He had put all of us to shame by his sacrifice.

And that Saul-of-Tarsus had been there, by his own admission, helping in the stoning, even as Stephen upbraided them with the Word that he'd so newly laid hold of.

And then, again this according to Saul himself, his own miraculous turnabout. I had not understood how my fellow disciples could have even let this Saul-Paul in among us, let alone trust him, and I for one, hadn't.

But Saul had changed, truly changed, as his life ever after had proven. Especially to me, John's memory again accused. Even now he didn't like the feeling of how wrong that he, and all the others had been about this "new" Paul. He had been as zealous for us as he had been against us, even more so, as time has shown. He had hurried around here and there the rest of his life pulling together groups of believers as he taught them to be followers of the Way, not the man. And there were plenty of "teachers" who tried to lead the "flock" astray, with their posturing and pretensions.

John winced as he once again realized this "roaming through his memories" had been like talking to himself. He had been doing a lot of that lately, verbally as well as mentally. He looked up from his favorite perch overlooking the dock, the inlet and the islands. *A pretty view, I suppose, if I hadn't seen it all so often, but it is the only thing that I seem to have.* A small breeze from the north touched his cheek.

"But all I've got to keep me company most of the time are memories and wonderings, as to what has brought me to this miserably lonely place. Oh, I'm pretty sure I know who, but the how surprised me. And now there's only me here anymore to listen, and to talk. But I **must** remember!

Yes, I know. I've gone over this many times already, but how am I going to remember if I don't talk about these things?"

Arguing with yourself now?

"But I've got to try to make some kind of sense out of what's happened! It doesn't seem to make much difference whether I talk or just think."

But inwardly, he felt that he had a little more control over his thoughts.

"I can steer them into the memories that take me out of this place!" His voice boomed out again into the silence that surrounded him, but his mouth always seemed to bring him

back to his present woes. Again memory mentally enfolded him in an all-encompassing embrace, as the sound of the gentle surf noises soothed his troubled soul. *There are so many questions, but where are the answers, if they aren't here in my memory?*

Paul had insisted all along, as had all of us original "Hearers" in one way or another, that we were only meant to be the bearer of the good tidings that was ours "to take to all the world." Even in Ephesus Paul had succeeded, and in such an unstable community. In their towering ignorance these Ephesians had thought to "know" better than those who had personally heard the Word, as had been taught by our beloved Rabbi.

He remembered again the feeling of gratitude mixed with a kind of begrudging envy when he, John, had been asked to succeed Paul in heading up the church at Ephesus after Paul had felt called to move on to other things.

Even I had come under attack by those who followed the teachings of the Judaic party within our gathering at Jerusalem. They attacked Paul then, and now me! Was it because I changed my mind?

He looked a long time out over the sea to the south from his perch just above and overlooking the small dockage, the only link to a world that had been beyond his grasp for some time now.

A small number from Jerusalem even followed Paul to Ephesus, and then failing to dislodge him there they had moved on to other places where Paul had earlier organized communities of faith. They tried to re-Judaize the Jewish Christians and are still having some success, I heard. And without me there anymore? He watched as a gull glided smoothly down, coming to rest on a rail at the far end of the landing. Wings were the bird's freedom. Wings!

I thought that all the questions had been settled once and for all at the meeting in Jerusalem when Paul had first been challenged! he plunged on after the visual distraction.

I myself had taken the part of the Judaites in the argument, in the beginning, thinking their point had been well taken, until Peter had so eloquently turned things around! Was it because I had seen Peter himself, not so long before, ambivalent about the need to uphold the Law, especially that of circumcision? The memory still bothered him.

Peter witnessed to us that his mind had been changed by a vision that was the basis of an eloquence that I hadn't seen in him since the original gathering of the Pentecost. Only then did I realize that my own smoldering resentment of Paul had been because of my original hatred of that Saul of Tarsus.

Our Savior had changed all of that for Paul, but I had not been willing to let go, until I heard the eloquence that wasn't Peter's alone, but our glorious Rabbi in absentia. I'm just as sure of that now as I was then.

He remembered his confession in council, of this problem with forgiveness. *How uncomfortable I felt, bearing my soul like that. But everything seemed to instantly turn around for me.* Now he was sure, as he reflected again, that this had been why he, John, had been asked to follow Paul to Ephesus.

It wasn't long after I came here that I had cause to understand Paul's challenge in just holding such a polyglot of people together. How had Paul ever hoped, even expected to bring them into one mind about anything, let alone God's Word? But he had tried! And so have I, but to what avail?

I still remember the feeling. Over the many years I'd been in Ephesus and had never gotten them to be of one mind on anything that I had preached. Paul had confessed to me in a moment of personal reflection, of a "thorn" that he had felt incapable of removing.

Is mine the still sharp edge of envy that I only thought I had overcome? a sudden uninvited thought intruded, like an inner voice. Conscience?

And then the flames of false teaching that would sneak in when Paul would be called onward to new places. They had run him around so unnecessarily, keeping him from the real work he felt that he must do. Those flames burned all too brightly, still do! And Paul had been unable to subdue them like he seemed to feel that he'd ought to have been able to. Well I didn't seem to have been much help there either.

Then, there always seemed to be those who "knew" the "secret things" that they tried to add the Word to, and failing that, add to our blessed Rabbi's teachings. Those "Mysteries" that left people so confused that they didn't know what to think or believe! I tried to help, and took to rotating around as many of the gatherings as I could manage.

As I remember, some had even begun to call themselves "churches." Can you imagine that? Some, still little more than houses while others had grown to be almost as large as the synagogues that Paul had always seemed to begin with.

"At least until they threw him out!"

John winced as he again realized that he had vocalized his thought. None of the many that Paul started turned out perfectly, but they had all grown, some much faster than others.

Then in the middle of it all, Nero put an end to Paul's struggles, may God bless him for all that he has done for us, for our Savior, bless his holy name! But it had been the Judaite Christians who had first sealed his fate, with their last Jerusalem confrontation that brought that blessed man all the way to Rome for trial.

It all seemed to go so fast after that, or has it just been the workings of time? Peter had felt the need to come to us, to Paul, in his time of desperate peril, for he felt that he had judged rightly the peculiarly treacherous insanity of the emperor.

But he made it very clear that I should continue my work here and protect what Paul had become so notorious for having accomplished! "Yes, I remember that well! They went on to their sacrifice, and I just stayed behind." He smiled wryly at having shouted this so loudly that the gull leaped up into the air and then slowly flapped its way toward other parts. Yes, so easily!

*And then Nero **executed** Paul! Actually executed this holy blessed man! Why? And then Rome burned! Nero blamed it on us Christians and started a great persecution. And then Peter too was gone. He had been crucified! "Yes, I felt that the whole world ought to come to an end right there, but it didn't." And I had to carry on alone. Well not alone, but that's what it felt like, the last of those who had known Him!*

Then the revolt that had smoldered so long in our homeland erupted into the open and Vespasian was sent to put it down. And what had Nero done, besides rebuilding Rome even bigger if not better? The memory, so vivid, was almost like reliving it all over again.

He went to Greece and granted them the gift of political freedom just because some sycophant had written a poem comparing him to the gods.

But that was the last straw! Even the Romans were through with that crazy persecutor.

Africa, Gaul, and Spain, they all added to the revolt of our former countrymen and Nero committed suicide before his Romans could get the chance to assassinate him.

“Good riddance!” Again it was shouted words not just thoughts.

And then Vespasian, forced to rush back before he could “finish the job with those miserable Jews,” as he’d been known to call them so many times. Others had contended for the throne that was his to claim, their efforts had met with little success, but he had to go anyway, to protect his prerogatives. “Yes, I remember being told. We’d been gone so long from our homeland by that time, it seemed like hearing about some foreign country, not real at all.”

Vespasian wreaked havoc upon “those Jews,” but he hadn’t crushed them, and had to leave the job to Titus who destroyed everything that he touched including that magnificent Temple, that Herod had rebuilt.

Even after all this time, a sadness still overcomes me as I try to imagine such a horrific thing. It happened exactly as our Rabbi had prophesied. No stone was left upon another. And many of our brethren, some have called us “Followers of the Way,” had been driven out of Jerusalem along with the rebels, many of the poor souls had even been killed. Others had been dispersed, along with the “lucky” Jews who had hidden among them trying to somehow survive.

Some even came here to Ephesus!

Then Titus stationed his main body of troops there next to the ruin of the Temple! On such sacred ground!

He felt a sudden mental twinge, as if he had sinned in his very sadness for what had been lost. *I remember, I remember, our Rabbi had tried to teach us that it wasn’t the things of this world that mattered. But how could we hope to understand something like that? The Temple had meant so much to us for as long as time had been, it seemed.*

And whose fault was it, really, that it was gone? They should have known, we should have known. That wasn’t the way it was supposed to happen! But who am I to say? But they should have listened, and they didn’t!

“Those stiff-necked Pharisees thought to establish God’s kingdom on this earth, but under their own terms, and they lost everything, Was it because they had crucified the very one for whom they had looked so long?” Again the thought was out loud as well as agonizingly angry. He hadn’t overcome as much as he had thought, after all.

But their loss was our gain, wasn’t it? his memory contended against the loyalty that he once had for his former faith.

Many of these same Jews, having fled Jerusalem ahead of the butchery of Titus, he reminded himself, had turned, by dire circumstance, to the cloak of anonymity within the very “cult” that they had tried so hard to strangle.

Commentary, June 2007, p. 30, “If Israel Ceased to Exist” p. 33, “It is a commonplace for historians today to observe that many people in this period [67 CE] left Judaism for Christianity, or chose Christianity over Judaism because of the stigma of being associated with a failed and unpopular Jewish nationalism.”

His gaze now took him to the east with the dots of islands, some not much larger than his “little rock.” And then the mainland in the distance, so near, yet so far. He looked quickly to the north as he felt the wind rise. The north, where in the winter sometimes, the wind blew a great gusting gale.

All the many ships that sailed this part of the Great Sea had always had to run before this kind of wind no matter where it took them. As long as collective memory could recall it had been so, John remembered being told on his trip here. They had almost missed their run to the dock. The wind had just started, and it had already blown them almost past the inlet. Then once landed, they'd had to hunker down for days. Even the food supply had run low.

"Enough already!" he bellowed into his loneliness, and turned purposefully back to his mental escape.

Mount Vesuvius erupted, and buried those evil Roman resort towns, Herculanium and Pompeii. I wish that I could have taken some justifiable satisfaction from this Roman disaster, but I was appalled by the tremendous suffering that all the people must have gone through who had been trapped and smothered in such a hellish burial. A "mountain," as it were, seemed to have "fallen upon them." I remember our Rabbi saying something like that, but how could we have known what he meant? It was so difficult to understand the things that he told us, especially the parables.

"None of them seemed very real then." He was talking again, but it didn't matter. "And even now, much of what he told us seems so hard to even try to grasp, let alone understand."

After that, things had seemed to settle down. And the *churches* that all the apostles and so many, many more had given up their lives for, had grown and expanded in all the imperfection of their devotion.

The Pharisees tried to overcome us, and have themselves been overcome, John thought in a kind of reflection tinged with a bitter-sweetness concerning the justice of it all.

The pagans might overcome us, but they haven't yet. And the Gnostics, tried to swamp us with their "Mysteries," then tried to come on board with us in order to turn the "Word" into something more to their liking. And always they pollute us with their false "Gnosis," but we've ruled them out, and we'll keep shutting them out until they give up, if they ever do.

And now, here we go again! Domitian is about to become emperor and times are already getting bad. Some are saying that he is Nero reincarnated! And all because, I suspect, of what Nero himself had threatened when there were rumors that someone might try to kill him.

"Christians hear this!" *someone had told me who had been there, and had heard him scream this, sometime in the beginning of the great persecution.*

"Even if that were to happen, I'd come back to haunt you. If ever anyone gets resurrected it will be me!" *He screeched this blasphemy at a sullenly silent mob, like some I've seen myself, who knew that all they could do was hear and not heed.*

Of course that just sounded like more of that pagan posturing, but time does seem to turn back on itself sometimes.

Now John lapsed into a more silent kind of pictorial reverie. He remembered that he had been exiled just before the reign of Titus ended and that was probably why he had just been exiled rather than executed as so many of the others had been. But who had really been behind it all?

"The ones that I first suspected couldn't have had that kind of influence! This emperor hadn't taken any great notice of us Christians, well, Followers of the Way, or

whatever else they might want to call us.” He smiled again at his involuntary vocalization.

Even though we’ve multiplied like flies on dead meat!

A sardonic one-sided smile creased his face again at the thought of how someone had put it.

Of course, all too many have been “put to the sword,” and all, I suspect because Titus was told that there were Jews hiding out among the Christians!

“Honest” Titus has shown that he could be manipulated by anyone clever enough, but few in authority have taken much notice of the church recently, except those miserable Jews and the Gnostic “worms” within.

The “real” Gnostics, of course, seem to be going their own way, except those who still pretend to be Christian.

But there was a group that had sought to challenge my witness, the musing continued.

And with God’s blessing I managed to defeat their purpose each time, and they finally left us for a while. Some worried because it had been rumored that the mischief-makers had gone on to Rome, but I said let them, and may they all just stay there!

He felt the wind on his face rising again, threatening to turn into another gale, it seemed.

And then they were back, with some official in tow. But they said nothing and had left quickly. Suddenly I was clapped in chains and dragged here, and no one would or could say why, just, no visitors! But some have found a way, he reminisced laconically.

Most never came back after a first visit. A few managed to return, but none had ever made it a third time.

The news that fitfully filtered through was more disheartening each time that some of it managed to get by the censors. The few letters allowed either way had to be carefully written. Innocuous prattle had to somehow hide the meaning of what must be conveyed, but the exercise was time consuming. *Those not clever enough paid a price. And all because of me and my blindness. I hadn’t listened to those who tried to warn me.*

But—he felt his mouth curling at the thought—I’ve had nothing but time, and have pretty well learned to speak in the parables of a supposedly meaningless dogma. Sometimes, I think that I got too clever, I suspect, and those who were meant to understand were only confused. Of course I don’t know this for sure; most never seemed to write more than twice.

As the permanence of his stay was gradually made known to him, John had walked the difficult road of not losing heart, but there were times in the course of regular nightly prayers a desperate plea inserted itself.

My Lord, my Lord, have you forsaken me? Why must I sit here so uselessly while the “true word” that we have so earnestly spread is vilified and corrupted by those who have crucified you as well as those who never knew you? Never before have I felt the weight of your cross as I do now, but I do not hang as you did. I am condemned to forever sit waiting for I know not what!

He could “see” his churches begin to stray in small ways and sometimes large, and it bothered him in his helplessness. Messages, in this kind of code, were so slow and uncertain, but it was all that he had to resist the enemies who surrounded his brave but unprotected little encampments.

Lord, all my prayers seem to go unanswered! he had mentally beseeched in his nightly ritual monologue.

“Please, give your servant some sign that you have at least **heard** him!” he bellowed to the seemingly empty countryside in the distress of his lonely vigil.

And then, a vision came to John so powerfully magnificent that his spirit quailed before the awe of it.

I remember, I remember, something like an angel coming to me, or was it words spoken, I wasn't quite sure, all my senses had been so filled up with that awesome presence. I wasn't really certain as to how it had made its existence known to me. But of one thing I'm sure, it wasn't any “ordinary” dream.

I'm sure that I heard those ancient words, “Fear not, for I bring you good tidings of great joy.” Or was that just something that had been on my mind, something that I had wanted to hear?

Then I was told to write, but not to reveal what had been written until directed to. This didn't make any sense to me, but who am I to judge. This “Presence” urged me, so strongly, to be diligent in my witness.

“For the time is near!” I had been told, or was this also something that I'd had on my mind?

I had felt this to be true for a long time but always before only in a vague sort of way, but now I knew that this feeling had been verified.

But near to what? Near for what to happen? Is it an end of everything, or just me? Sometimes I would have almost welcomed it, to be worthy to go like the others have gone before me.

Was it an end of the churches that I had been instructed to write to? Or was it the “End of the Age” that Jesus had exhorted us to carry the “Word” out to? All I know for sure is that I was to write to seven churches, those which have been within the radius of my poor reach from this island prison.

Everything that's been on my mind for so long, that I ought to have already written to them, has now been set before me as an urgent necessity.

“For the time is near!” Yes, I was told this again, I'm sure of it.

In the background of the visitation, had I been given a hint of where my “Messenger” had come from? It seemed only like suggestions of other times, other places, other things, other personages.

Did I see these things? Might I have heard actual words?

I felt all these things as if they'd been within me for some time. I “knew” them. I “believed” the truth of them. So, I felt a compulsion to write, like I had never written before.

Now, try as I might, I can't seem to remember how much time the writings took. I just very carefully laid each one of the seven aside as they had been completed until I could discern somehow what must be done with them. And now at the end, must I just resume my routine of watchful waiting? What's to become of them, and when will I know?

These and many other questions have nagged at me from the inner recesses of my mind, as time again seems to be passing me by, but still ever so slowly.

My nightly prayer vigil now always seems to include the question, when, until I've despaired of ever getting an answer. But, I continue to feel the need to ask anyway. After all, my prayer has been answered once, so I'll just keep on keeping on. Who knows?

Lay this old body down on your bed of straw, same as usual, except somehow something makes me feel a little more anxious than usual. Just close your eyes and try to rest.

Then, it happened again as before, but somehow it was all very different. Again, this was at the end of the Lord's "day."

Yes, I remember. A soft light seemed to begin as a tiny dot somewhere in the small cubicle that was my resting place. It took a while for me to even become aware of it, and then immediately it spread out seeming to envelope the stone walls pushing them back even into the heavens! But how could that be? And the light was everywhere and within it somehow there were lesser lights that moved within and all around. It was impossible to make anything out, nothing was clear. These old eyes couldn't do justice to such glory.

It's as if I'd become blind but could still see something of what was all around me, and over me, and beside me and yes, within me!

Like the physically blind that I had seen so many times before, my mental fingers seemed to be plucking at the edges and textures of that which surrounded me, hoping for confirmation of what these old eyes only dimly "perceived."

The dreadful foreboding that I felt as I had finished those letters have consumed my thoughts for some time. The sense of "judgment about to be exacted" on the many who had strayed from my exhortations gave me little consolation concerning the "righteousness" of the words as I had repeated them, it seems endlessly. I've been only too aware of the "Word" as it applied to teachers being held to a higher account.

But now, an everywhere magnificent rumbling seemed to shake the very fabric of my mental imagery. It gave me to understand that a most awesome "Presence" had come upon me.

I felt as if I were flying, without understanding how earth-bound existence could know. A certain lightness of spirit suggested the direction as up. It was as if there were clouds within clouds within clouds, as other realms seemed to pass by in apparent transit toward, where?

Words seemed to echo across these "heavens" far more thunderously than the "real" thing.

"Come, I will show you what must take place after this!"

I remembered wondering. Have I been taken up into heaven? But where is the throne? Where are the angels and the Host that the very wisest of wisdom have told us of?

Again, a kind of brilliance started to grow in the far distance. Had I seen it this time a little sooner? From the tiniest of beginnings it seemed to swell through endless layers of billowing cloud-like gauziness. I couldn't tell if I was moving toward it or it toward me!

It expanded, growing in brilliance until it overflowed every portion of my mental capacity. I was filled to overflowing! What an awesomely wonderful feeling! Mere words just can't express what I felt as it seemed about to consume me.

It was overpowering in the magnificence of its presence. It shone with a soft glowing that became more intense than any sunshine that I had ever seen, than anything that had ever been seen. Yet it did not burn! It did not burn me!

A "feeling" beyond any wisdom ever collected by all of mankind seemed to surge toward me as mental images of things like ages gone and ages not yet come engulfed my every faculty and carried me as if on an endless journey and yet I had felt no movement!

A wonderful harmonic, more varied than any sound or melody that I had ever heard, swept through my entire being as if all languages ever spoken or ever to be spoken had engaged me in an incomprehensibly complex conversation. My mind could not take it all in.

The smallest of snippets of all these “sounds?” seemed to be endlessly descending upon my inner mind, as snowflakes on a windless winter, seeming to tell me of things beyond that of even the most vivid of any imaginary guesses.

I desperately sought to stretch my grasp of even the smallest portion of that which passed before me as in a whirlwind without devastation. I was where all had ever wished to be, and I knew that I had to try to tell of it.

I felt undone somehow before such an Omniscient Magnificence. But I also felt encouraged beyond the limits of all blessings.

I seemed to be drifting onward through a timelessness beyond all memory and forgetfulness.

And now, awake with a start. It had instantly become the morning of the next day.

John, desperate with an overpowering uncertainty, mulled over his dilemma for days, wondering where to start, wondering how to start.

But I “knew” that I would start! I must start, for it had to be told of, it had to be written. I had been blessed far beyond anything that imagination could have ever conceived.

The words of my long departed Rabbi suddenly came into my mind again. I know! I know! Didn't I just see him in my vision? But this time he was different, somehow. Back then, he had spoken about blessings to those close to him. It had been such a powerful, far-reaching wisdom that he had expounded. I now know that those words had been beyond my understanding, or that of any of the others who were there. The multitude all around such eminence had been overawed by the beauty and power of words so well chosen. I remember like it was yesterday. He had said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”

I wonder now, just how poor in spirit had I been, if I had even grasped what “poor in spirit” really meant?

But I couldn't deny that what I had seen in the “vision” was far beyond what I had ever expected that Heaven might be.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

I remember how I felt when I first heard about the manner of Paul's death. I had surely mourned for all my fallen comrades as each had been sacrificed for carrying the Word to the very end of their life.

And in the end they had not flinched either! Whereas I, stuck on this rock of an island, have certainly bemoaned my own poor example of a fate. And what have I sacrificed except my freedom to continue to carry that Word as they had done?

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

It had been said in a voice filled with such kindness. The crowd had looked around, and at each other. I had felt their self-conscious lowliness, their wonder. Could this be them that Jesus had spoken of? Was there a poverty of spirit awful enough to deny entrance into heaven all of itself? But no! He had long ago told us differently! Hadn't he? But what does it mean, “inherit the earth”?

Now, as I remember again watching their anxious questioning glances. What were they thinking? Had they really understood as I thought I had? Even now, do I really understand what he was trying to reveal to me?

I feel the shame all over again. How meekly it was that I submitted to my arrest and exile to this small plot of ground. But hadn't he also as they took him away to be crucified?

But I had been so surprised that I couldn't even think what to do until it had been too late. Now the only earth that I am likely to inherit is this forsakenly small plot on this very small island. But isn't it here that I have just been blessed beyond all comparison?

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”

Those words, so strong, so powerful! Even now I remember how I felt when I first heard them. I had determined then and there to live by them in every way. I wonder even now, just how much that I might have hungered and thirsted. There was a time when I had thought that mine was the finest of examples. But now I'm not so sure! Might I have insisted too much on my idea of what our Rabbi had exemplified to us?

Now I couldn't even begin to deny that I have been filled, really filled to overflowing. All the fullness that I thought I'd felt before seems like emptiness by comparison. And now if I can only remember even the smallest part of it, but where are the words that can fit such thoughts? And there was so much! There is so much! And it was all so—abstract, so—otherworldly.

That was it! Where will I ever find words that would even start to do justice to what I have seen, have witnessed. Have—?

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”

Our Rabbi had spoken, as if he had just quoted from a greater source. Have I been sufficiently merciful to those that I have warned, and warned, and warned again? And those letters that I wrote such a short time ago certainly didn't seem so. But I was told to write! So, how much of what I have written in those letters were my concerns, and how much was what I had been told to write? It's hard for me to separate the one from the other, but I feel as if I had obeyed.

And now, I certainly have been shown the ultimate in mercy, for which I will be forever thankful! Blessed is the Lord, my God.

But I must not let myself become so thankful that I forget to give a good and accurate account of what I have seen. But how can I even begin to think of accuracy when there are just not enough words to describe so much?

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” Jesus had continued, “for they shall see God.”

For years I thought myself able to justifiably claim that distinction, even with due regard for the bounds of all proper humility. I've been persistent if nothing else, in trying to maintain the purity of the Word against all the Gnostic's “mysterious” knowledge, and those Jews' arrogance concerning their precious “tradition.” But now, ever since the Romans threw me onto this speck of rock, I must admit that my thoughts at times have been anything but pure, unless it was pure frustration, pure animosity, pure isolation, pure—loneliness.

But if I hadn't been so lonely, if I hadn't called out so often, so anxiously, would so wonderful an experience have been mine to be blessed by? And that wonderfully wonderful Eminence, that Purity; that just had to be my blessed Lord, my God! Alleluia!

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” *he had added, “for they shall be called the sons of God.”*

Some peacemaker I’ve been! I couldn’t even keep the peace in my own little family of believers. They kept reaching out for the excitement of those foolish “Mysteries”! All the while they’d had the greatest mystery, the greatest excitement of all, right before them and they had not understood. Well, how long had it taken me before I understood? Do I understand even now? And the “vision,” all that was there. I had not been prepared, I am not prepared, will I ever be?! But it is mine to tell of. How can I do justice to so much, to such magnificence?

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. For theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”

I’d not known that our beloved Rabbi had come to the end of his soliloquy, and I had waited for more. When it hadn’t come I began to think upon what I’d heard.

I used to think that I had understood what he spoke of. Now, the only thing that I’m sure of is that I haven’t. But I do have to try! Certainly with all the others taken as sacrifices in Nero’s great persecution, there is only me—and You, my God! You haven’t forsaken me! You will not forsake me! Somehow I will find the words! I will fulfill what there is left to do!

But, even now, are there signs of another persecution brewing? Will we survive this one? Ought we to? Will I have time to finish? Will too many lose heart and just consign themselves to Roman imperial swaggering, even arrogance, as many have done before? They must be told! There is hope beyond now!

It was difficult then to know how to treat those who had failed their faith that way. Scorn them? Forgive them?

When someone had asked about limits on forgiveness, our Rabbi had said seventy times seventy! Should the limits be any different now? Was that even a kind of limit in itself, or had he just meant countless times?

Some could not understand, would not understand! But how hard it must be to have to choose, confess and die, or deny and live. It’s so difficult to understand what forgiveness really means under that kind of pressure. Will we do any better this time? Or the next?

It’s so difficult to see the righteous die in their righteousness while so many of the unfaithful are left to carry on! But, should one ignore honest contrition?

Just where is it that being judgmental begins? How could one have told the true from the false? How can one even now? Might we do any better if there is to be another “testing”? And what if there’s no more time?

But the “vision” seemed to imply a time beyond now, or is that just wishful thinking? I was told, “the time is near,” but near to what? The end? Another beginning? Everything that I witnessed seemed to have the air of victory to it. And doesn’t all of our wisdom-of-old tell us that good will prevail in the end? And isn’t that what the vision was all about?

I must find a way to make this known to those who need to take heart, that their sacrifice will not be the end of it all. That “the time is near” for God’s will to prevail over all opposition, no matter how great, no matter how powerful, no matter how evil!

However thrilling all these thoughts have been, that’s all that they are, unless I can, somehow come down from that marvelous “high-place,” and try to find the words.

The challenge before this servant must be engaged, while this feeling of victory is mine to grasp. But where to begin? How to begin?

Some of what I saw seemed to have something to do with the past. A small part of it seemed to give me the feeling of a very ancient past, but it was hard to tell, my mind was so full of everything.

Much had to do with the present, especially the letters to the churches. Some of it seemed to prophesy about what was to happen soon, but underneath it all, was there a vague hint of a more distant time to come? But why do I still feel the urgency in the warning. "For the time is near!"

And then there was this odd feeling that seemed to stay with me, that still stays. It was almost as if I had been told,

"Speak in the language of today, that the people within your time may understand what you bear witness to."

Well then, stop just talking to yourself, John, and settle down to think. Part of what appeared to be ancient seemed to come out as Babylon but somehow, older than that. But people would find it difficult to think of anything older than Babylon.

The story of Abraham had taken hold of my mind sometime during the vision or visitation. But this would have come out of the mists of very ancient times when storytelling would have been about the only way of preserving memories of a people's forebears.

But evil had seemed to surround everything about it, except Abraham and his journey. My grasp of Jewish history on the other hand marks Babylon as the earliest capstone of all that was evil.

The two Diasporas came from there. The second one had destroyed the Temple, the first destruction, that is.

So my primary way of thinking would always have been Babylon, "the land between the rivers." But now, even as then, I get the impression of an old, old, an unknowably old story, about how cities came to be. It didn't seem important that I know the story itself; just that it had been about "first things." Either old or ancient, Babylon has always seemed the focus of evil, until these latter-day Caesars.

"Tyrants all, each worse than what had come before." Again! I'm talking to myself again! Well some things just need to be shouted out loud!

And now the whole Jewish nation has been virtually destroyed and there's been the greatest dispersal of our people ever!

Again a twinge caught the thought in mid-stride.

Well, they used to be our people and they still count for something, don't they? Even though they seem to have lost their way, what happened to them was horrible. And, will it now be the Followers of the Way who will lose their way, our way, my way? And will we deserve what's coming to us, in our turn? Or should there be mercy for more than just me?

But the vision seemed, to my understanding, to reveal that my God had already won over evil, but I'd had the feeling of other times, and other places. And then there was the numerology of that mark, 666. What did it mean? Who or what was it supposed to point toward, or warn me of?

In the mysterious Jewish mysticism of Kabala, he remembered having heard, numerology had a great significance. It was so complex that it just confused most who tried to study it. Some even went mad, it was said.

Others had declared that the number 666 identified Nero as the greatest source of evil that the world had ever known. *But he's already gone, so why would I be told of this now?*

That part was all so confusing. What was it all supposed to mean? And now there's Domitian. Was the mark supposed to include him also?

Nero had said that he'd come back. Will Domitian be Nero, come again? And what about us? Are we marked in some way that we don't see or think about? Of course we are, but that's supposed to be to the good, isn't it?

And the vision had warned, "For the time is near." There was also the feeling of other times, other places but it was all so hazy. Was "near" not as near as I had first thought? It's all so hard to try to picture.

I will just have pray and try to sleep on it. Maybe something more will come! I certainly need all the help that I can get! I don't have enough words, and there are just too many thoughts! How do they all fit together? Will I forget something important? But I just have to try! I will try! I will do it, somehow.

And so, again John began to write! And as the words came into being, they also seemed to instruct him on where he ought to direct himself. They seemed to allow all that he had *seen* to take on the visage of a kind of reality, and became more *understandable* to him.

Just maybe, I can make my people understand also. But too many of them already look to the "Mysteries" to inform them. Well, have I got something to show them now! But first I have to make sense of it myself without getting carried away with the wonder of it all.

"At last, at last, it is done! It is finished!"

Had it taken years?

But John had felt for some time that he didn't have years.

Had it been just months? It was hard to remember. It had felt as if time had stood still until he had completed his mission. But of course, he had known better.

And now, God willing, someone might be able to be told that I, John, have so written. "Alleluia!...Amen!...It is well with my soul!...Thank you my most wonderful, wonderful Lord!"

"How does a man become wise? The first step is to trust and reverence the Lord" (Proverbs 1:7, TLB).

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Chapter 17 (a)

Revelation's "Last of Days"?

Are We There Yet?

The Scriptures tell of events that are to take place during the time of,

“The conclusion of the system of things.”

What did Jesus have to say?

“Now as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these things are the beginning of sorrows” (Matt.24:3–8, NKJV).

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And many will be offended and will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Rev. 24:4–14, NKJV).

The *“beginning of sorrows”*

Wars: “Three times as many people fell victim to war in the 20th century as in all wars from the 1st century AD to 1899...An estimate for the period from 1900 to 1989 is that war killed 86 million people.”

Famine: “Despite the fact that the world produces plenty of food. [Researchers say that over the past thirty years food production has outpaced population increase.] In developing countries, some 1.2 billion people subsist on a dollar [U.S.] a day or less. Of these, about 780 million suffer chronic hunger. According to the World Health Organization, annually malnutrition plays a major role in the deaths of over 5 million children.”

Pestilence: A U.S. National Intelligence Council document states: “Twenty well-known diseases—including tuberculosis, malaria, and cholera, have reemerged or spread geographically since 1973, often in more virulent and drug-resistant forms. At least 30 previously unknown disease agents have been identified since 1973, including HIV, Ebola, Hepatitis C, and Nipah virus, for which no cures are available.”

Earthquake: “According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the number of earthquakes powerful enough to destroy buildings has averaged 17 a year since 1990 alone.”

“Earthquakes have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in the past 100 years...since 1914 many large population centers have developed in earthquake zones.”

There have been many times in the last 2000 years when the end has been prophesied, following Daniel’s and John’s prophesies. How will we *know* if the real *end is near* this time?

“There will be changes in attitudes and actions of people living in the last days.”

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:1–4).

If the *shoe fits* this time, we might be the ones who will have to wear it!

The “Good News”?

“A great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!’” (Rev. 7:9).

“The good news (of recent times) God’s kingdom is being brought to 230 lands.”

How are we, in today’s world doing? And, how close are we to our time of reckoning?

“And seal up the book until the time of the end...many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase...and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished” (Dan. 12:4, 7).

Who are the *holy people*?

In Daniel’s day, he was told to *“seal up the book,”* so probably we don’t have to decide whom that meant in his day.

But, who might have been seen to be the *holy people* in Jesus’ day? The Pharisees and Sadducees *were* the priestly class appointed by tradition to attend to things theological. And Jesus *did* array himself against the shortcomings of their efforts. And their Temple *was* destroyed in AD 70, and they *were* scattered into the world in order to *destroy* the practice of their brand of theology. But the *world* did go on, and here we are today.

If we are the ones that the prophecy was meant for, then who are the *holy people* whose power will have to be *“completely shattered”*?

God’s Word *is* being carried to the *World* by His Christian agents. So, are these the “holy people”? They are at least *spreading* the Word. But what of those who stand against it and its spread?

Militant Islam declares that it is dedicated to the destruction of all Western influence. Most of the *Western World* of their perception is Christian.

Are the Muslims then, the *“holy people”* referred to in Daniel’s revelation? Are they also the object of Jesus’ warning that, *“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many”*?

Are these similar to the ones that the Apostle Paul described as, *“Blasphemers, slanderers, despisers of good, having a form of godliness but denying its power”*?

They are killing us for His name’s sake. So, should we wake up to the real danger, or just allow ourselves to be led into what might be the last of all great tribulations, as Jesus foresaw when He warned, *“Take heed that no one deceives you.”*

This does seem to be a time, as Daniel describes, when *“many shall run to and fro...And knowledge shall increase.”*

Our freeways do seem to be filled with people *“running to and fro,”* and scientific *knowledge* seems to be increasing by leaps and bounds in a rather boundless way!

So is John’s prediction finally going to come true in his prophetic warning, *“For the time is near”*? And, should we count the rest of our time as dear, as well as near?

Or is history destined to repeat itself at least one more time without a conclusive terminal point? In this, we may be presented with a major problem of prophecy! Events do seem to be the most predictable from the seat of the “Monday morning quarterback”! Will we have to wait until then to know what we should have done? God help us if we are not any smarter than that!

Those who know, and know that they know, are leaders.
Follow them!
Those who know not, and know not that they know not, are fools.
Shun them!
Those who know, and know not that they know, are asleep.
Awaken them!

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Chapter 18

666

Is “The Mark of the Beast” Historical?

Shortly after our 9-11 attack, I felt like a *Johnny-come-lately* to the Paul Revere business of communicating warnings of imminent danger. What I would have tried to do then, it would seem, was as if that *Man on Horseback* had waited to ride out with his warning until after the British had landed and were already well into defeating any opposition to them.

It had all started sometime before then, probably around 1998. I was looking through one of the magazines that I subscribed to. It contained some material supporting another subject that I had started to do some writing on. In idly thumbing through the rest of the magazine, I came across an article commemorating the death in AD 680 of the founder of the Shi’ite portion of Islam.

I had already been made casually aware of them from many sources, some historically oriented, as one of two major schismatic entities of the religion that was founded by Mohammed (Mohammad).

In propounding their version of the history wherein the Shi’ites view themselves as the rightful heirs to follow on after their founder, a short account of the original movement was given that led up to the fateful date that they have commemorated ever since.

A mild curiosity of long standing, whetted by the more current reportage of their opposition to Saddam Hussein following the first Gulf War, was probably why the article held me to more than just a short fleeting perusal. As I read through it with increasing interest, I saw that it filled in a few of the blank spots in my previous knowledge of this belief system.

Some time after that, something encouraged me to look for more detailed information. The *Encyclopedia Americana* (1959 edition) was already in house, not very up to date, but it had the advantage, as I was later to realize, of having been published before the intrusion of the *political correctness* movement, and therefore probably more reliable than some more recent sources of information. More importantly, it contained items, under various headings, about an age that preceded my magazine source by enough centuries that there would have been little new information come to light about that subject since the encyclopedia’s date of publication. At least that was my line of reasoning.

The article had given me the date of AD 680 and left me with the question of why Mohammed's grandson Ali had been slain. The article's quick synopsis of the history that had preceded that most important Shi'ite date added two others, when Mohammed had died in AD 632 and when he had started his *real estate* acquisitions in AD 625.

The encyclopedia added an additional date of AD 622 as the traditional start of his prophetic office and their calendar, and it had, in addition, explained that AD 625 was the date of the first wounding of their leader in one of the early but significant victories.

Readings from other histories are rife with the rivalries of ruling families within which competition and conflict regarding succession of leadership are a major concern, especially in the beginning of dynasties.

Death appeared to have removed Mohammed, in mid-stride, from his ministry and his marauding manner of conquests. Before it happened at age fifty-two, there had evidently been little thought given to succession. For a few short busy years (either seven or ten) he had been its founder and unchallenged leader. He'd only had time to write the verses that established him as a prophet in the eyes of many, organize a new paradigm of success in battle, and surround himself with able commanders selected largely from family and tribally related affiliations. Because of them, his mission was successfully carried forward long after his untimely departure.

But also (I was to find out later), because of family and tribal rivalries his movement was to split, only twenty-nine years after his passing, into the tribal faction who became the Umayyad dynasty of Sunni Moslems and the familial faction who became the Shia schismatic opposition.

Something had happened between AD 632, the date of his death, and the assassination of his grandson in AD 680. I pictured it as a time similar to what had happened after the death of Alexander the Great, where able generals carved out their own spheres of influence. But, unlike them, Mohammed's military leaders had much of their history of conquest ahead of them.

So, these two competing groups, able to negotiate the allegiance of at least some of these powerful military commanders began the dance around an ethereal throne where only one would be able to sit when the music stopped. What had happened during the time that the music had played on, I wondered?

Like a bolt out of the blue, a mental impression communicated itself to me. "Six-six-six is the mark of the beast!" It had never occurred to me until that moment in time, that Revelation's message might have had an historical interpretation!

At first it was a somewhat revolting thought. I couldn't understand how I could have been afflicted in such a manner considering the theme of what I was beginning to write about, a new way to view the biblical story of the Exodus.

Largely because of this feeling, I had lain that article and experience aside for a time, giving only an occasional thought and /or verbal witness to it among close friends. Within those occasional thoughts began to grow a curiosity. What might have happened *while the music played on*, especially with the 666 date practically in the middle of the other two? The question went unanswered for some time, during which 9-11 happened!

I remember tuning in, as I usually did, for the morning news when a reporter came on, excitedly talking about a fire in one of the twin towers, those two American equivalents to Egypt's towering obelisks. I'm sure that many others had tried to contemplate the impossibility of fighting a fire in any of such extremely tall buildings.

I sat there spellbound and in a state of ever increasing shock as everything played out scene after scene. From the first *accidental* fire turning into two, with reports of others in the Pentagon and elsewhere, tiny figures appearing to leap out into nothingness, the towers coming down one after the other, and hundreds running from the choking billowing clouds of dust and debris. Through it all the ridiculous thought reiterated as the unbelievable scenes followed one after the other. *This only happens in the movies!*

The information came in slowly but surely as to who was most likely responsible and it was not good. Moslems appeared to have been the active agents on behalf of Osama bin Laden's organization of terrorists. It took some time for the shock, indignation and anger to subside.

During that time, a few, both from the political right and shortly after from the left, suggested that *we* had somehow brought this upon ourselves. After the initial resurgence of indignation from that morose observation had worn off, and still very few good answers were put forward to make the charge seem to be as preposterous as later it would be shown to be, the memory of my Shi'ite experience returned almost in the form of an accusation. I wondered then, had this been the thing that the unwelcome message had sought to forewarn me of?

Again I put the whole idea out of my mind as almost as preposterous as the earlier one had seemed to be. After all, even if I had understood it as a warning, what could I have done about it, except to make myself look like just another fringe conspiracy theorist, and a rather wild one at that?

"We don't need additional voices of division at a time like this!" my better judgment chided me. I all too easily laid the whole idea aside once again.

But it wouldn't stay put aside! The on-again off-again public debate over the relative violent, or peaceful intent of worshippers of Islam kept bringing this tidbit of the history of its beginnings to mind.

Some additional time after that, it seems like just the other day, it happened again. In an article in volume 61 #5 of Human Events (Feb.7-05) titled "Islam for Dummies Indeed," by Robert Spencer. The gist of the article, as I got it, is that there are just too many voices trying to assure us of the peaceful intent of all proponents of Islam.

Too many of those voices of original dissent, as I had remembered them, were the same ones that accused us of bringing 9-11 on ourselves, especially those on what I viewed as the political *left*. When there is too much of a concentration of attention on one extreme, I tend to look toward the other for some kind of balance.

That's why I have dusted off that which had brought about such a jarring experience, and again, once and for all, sought to determine if there is any validity to this biblical as well as historical oddity.

What follows is the product of that search, beginning with relevant excerpts.

"Two years before his death," (Mohammed) "had dispatched an expedition against Syria which proved to be the first act in a struggle that did not cease until the empire of Islam had encompassed a large part of the then civilized world" (all quotes, Encyclopedia Americana, 1959 edition, under appropriate headings).

"On June 8, 632, Mohammed fell suddenly ill, and passed away complaining of a severe headache."

"During the first century after the Hegira (AD 622-722); the Arabs, in ongoing campaigns, many lasting years, conquered Syria (AD 634-642); the Sassanian Empire of

Persia in 642; Armenia and Mesopotamia in 644, and much of northern Africa in 645–692.”

“Othman, third Caliph of the Moslems, had done away in 651–652 with all existing copies of the Koran except that of Abu Bekr [Bakr?], which itself was shortly afterward destroyed by Marwan, Governor of Medina.”

Othman: “He had been a relative and lieutenant of the prophet Mohammed and had married in succession two of the prophet’s daughters. In 644 he was chosen caliph by a board of six electors supposedly named by the second caliph, Omar (Umar), before his death...His (Othman’s) substitution in important state positions of his own favorites and kinsmen for the officials appointed by his predecessors left a rejected group with considerable power and prestige plotting against him.

“These men, many of them early converts and relatives of the prophet, formed a nucleus of a revolt, which ended with Othman’s assassination by Muhammad, a son of the first caliph, abu-Bakr.

“Othman was succeeded by Ali, the last of the so-called orthodox caliphs of Medina, who soon gave way to Muawiyah, a member of Othman’s tribal family, the Umayyads, and founder at Damascus of the first hereditary caliphal dynasty and the Umayyad empire.”

Umayyad Empire: “A caliphal dynasty which ruled in Damascus from AD 661 to 750. It derives its name from Umayyah, cousin of the Prophet Mohammed’s grandfather and ancestor of its founder Muawiyah I (661–680). Muawiyah wrested the caliphate from Ali, the prophet’s son-in-law and last of the orthodox caliphs whose seat was in Medina.

“The Shi’ite sect did not crystallize until the Ommiad (Umayyad) period (661–750) but the underlying issues go back to the time of Mohammed...On his death in 632 the all-important question arose as to who should succeed him.

“Those who later became known as Shi’ites (partisans of Ali) maintained from the beginning that such an important office could not be left to the whims and fancies of the people, and that God had designated through Mohammed a successor (caliph) who was none other than Ali, husband of his only daughter, Fatima.”

Earlier Followers: “On the higher level, the first to believe in him were his wife Khadija [and] Ali, his cousin...and his future successor, abu-Bakr.

“They further held that the office of successorship...should be hereditary, limited to the progeny of Mohammed. The murder of Ali in 661 and his two sons and successors al-Hassan (c. 669) and al-Husain (680) did not dampen the zeal of their followers.”

The music appears to have stopped in AD 661! Muawiyah the ancestor of Mohammed’s grandfather’s cousin (Umayyah) had won. Ali the son-in-law, and his progeny al-Hassan and al-Husain the grandsons of Mohammed, had lost.

The first caliph (successor) was named abu Bakr (Bakr?) (AD 632–634, early follower of Mohammed).

The second caliph was named Omar (Umar) (AD 634–644).

The third was Othman (AD 644–656, married two of Mohamed’s other step-daughters; tribal relationship was through Umayyah, cousin of Mohammed’s grandfather).

The fourth was Ali (AD 656–659?, son-in-law of Mohammed, father of al-Hassan and al-Husain).

The fifth was Muawiyah (AD 661–680, governor of Damascus, ancestral heir of Umayyah, founder of the Omniad Dynasty AD 661–750).

The military campaigns of Mohammed seem largely to have secured Medina, then Mecca and its lands to the south.

The campaigns of the first caliph, abu Bakr, dealt with defeating, then uniting all the tribal groups of the eastern Arabian peninsula who had been only nominally under the suzerainty of a previously weakened Sassanian (Persian) Empire.

The campaigns of the second caliph, Umar (before he became caliph), seemed to have been an expedition to Syria (AD 630) at the behest of Mohammed, then as caliph, conquering it in AD 634–642, as a follow-on consequence of this campaign he caused the collapse of the Sassanian Empire whose capital was Ctesiphon on the Tigris River (AD 642), then north to Mesopotamia and Armenia (AD 644).

The third caliph, Othman was the first to have success against the remaining lands of the Roman-Christian Eastern (Byzantine) Empire of Constantine, expanding farther into the Persian (Iranian) heartland, and finally beginning the move west of their homeland into North Africa (AD 645–690).

All these lands were obtained at the expense of the two major powers in the Middle East, who had fought long and hard against each other until exhaustion of their resources made them easy prey for a newly emergent Arabian unity (open Christian disunity was also a major factor). Through swift and sometimes bloody warfare, they quickly absorbed all of the one (Sassanian Persian), and major parts of the other (Eastern Christian) entity.

Early in his adult life Mohammed was thought to have studied under a Christian monk and had contact with a Jewish sect (around Medina?). Each seemed to have rejected his interpretation of their religious books (the Bible and Torah).

Did this have something to do with his foray, five of the seven years after the beginning of his ministry, into Christian-held (Jewish) territory (Syria, AD 630)? Parts of the Koran appear to be largely copied from these two sources (with the addition of his interpretations). These ideas may add some relevance to the apparent animosity that has been directed over time toward the Christian and Judaist-practicing world.

In the final subjugation of Syria (AD 634–642), did Othman (the third caliph) and Muawiyah play a significant enough part that Othman would have been chosen by electors to fill that post? Electors supposedly picked by Omar just before he died? And then was Muawiyah one of those officials that he appointed to a high place (governor of Syria), instead of one of the old guard from Medina? And in AD 651–652 he destroyed all copies of the original Koran, except one, which was destroyed shortly after by Marwan, governor of Medina. Was there something in the original that would have lent support to the hereditary claimant's position?

There were other selections such as this that appear to have led to Othman's assassination by Mohammad, son of abu Bakr. Was Marwan, governor of Medina, one of those selections? Was the successful destruction of the Koranic originals a leap too far for Othman? This appears to have led, in turn, to Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law, being selected as the fourth caliph. Then, after Ali's short disputed reign, Muawiyah used the assassination of Othman as his excuse to usurp the caliphate in AD 659. And with those originals would have Muawiyah's usurpation have been revealed as without legitimacy? Then, following the suspicious death of Ali, he took the caliphate for himself in AD 661,

just five years short of the date that I seek. On the other end we have the assassination of Mohammed's grandson, al Hassan, in AD 669 just three years after the date in question.

Something must have happened in those eight years that would have conveyed to them the assurance that even killing the founder's heir would not bring them down. What could that have been?

The North African campaign took a long time (AD 645–692). It was started one year after Othman was "selected" as caliph in AD 644. Of all Mohammed's military commanders, who would have been charged with or responsible for that campaign?

If Othman and Muawiyah, his nephew, were among the ones that were sent on the northern campaign that succeeded in distinguishing them in some manner by the time of its hugely successful end in AD 644 with the acquisition of Syria, Persia, Mesopotamia, and Armenia, and if they were the *tribal* relatives of Mohammed, was the North African campaign launched to distinguish the *familial* relatives as a counter to that earlier achievement?

The more successful that they were, the farther away from their home base of Medina they would have been drawn. Was this what gave Othman and his supporters the false assurance that they could safely uproot the Medinese from their places of power? And were the familial relatives so engaged by 661 that they couldn't threaten enough force to have countered the usurpation engineered by Muawiyah?

Whatever happened, by AD 661 something had kept those who were described as "having considerable power and prestige" from bringing it to bear in a manner similar to what they had done with Othman.

So the music stopped, the seat was occupied and those who could not renew their grasp upon it were ground underfoot in such a convincing manner that those who had quickly occupied it would feel secure enough to dispose of any competing heirs without fear of reprisal.

Let me end this section with an observation. The last heir, al Husain, who would give to the group that the magazine article was about, their name Shia, was assassinated in AD 680. The reign of Muawiyah ended in AD 680. Did he die, or was he assassinated also? My material does not say, only that the last direct heir of Mohammed was assassinated and the usurper's rule ended in the same year.

It appears that this is as far as I can go in drawing conclusions from the material that I have already gathered without getting so far into the area of speculation that it becomes detached from any foundation supplied up to now. I will have to cast a wider net for the information that will answer the question that is still outstanding. What happened in the eight years between AD 661 and 669?

To resume, at that later date implied in the previous paragraph, having been drawn back once more to the quest by some unidentifiable feeling, my first attempt at having cast that wider net mentioned at the end of that earlier time, came up with little of additional value except that by AD 664 the Islamic Empire had reached its greatest expansion. After that it ground against its Christian (Byzantine) adversary with oscillating consequences until the first Christian Crusade in the eleventh century caused them a major if temporary setback, and the Mongol invasion in AD 1228–1245 caused them the loss of all their territories north and east of their desert homeland.

But the question is still unanswered. What had happened, that we should take note of, just two years after they had reached the limit of their expansion, or had it happened

already and only the resultant consequence became apparent by 666? Whatever it was, Muawiyah was ensconced in power so securely that he reigned until AD 680.

But, was his move against Mohammed's last grandson a *bridge too far*? All we know for sure is that the grandson's assassination and his rule ended in the same year.

As a side note that may have little to do with my main search, I was rereading an article in *Bible Review* (June-04) titled "Dealing with the Devil," by David R. Cartlidge.

It had to do with the difference between the Western (Roman Catholic) and Eastern Orthodox (Byzantine) interpretations of Adam and Eve's original sin.

In the "Western church and its Augustinian view... we are creatures who suffer from personal sin and guilt because, in Adam, we broke a divine commandment... The Cheirograph legend holds a different approach." (This is an Eastern Christian group of apocryphal writings that held long-term popular sway over early Byzantine church thinking.) "In its theology, we are a deceived people, no divine edict was transgressed, and our ignorance of the deceit holds us in bondage to a usurper lord of the cosmos, Satan... the struggle is against a false lord of the world."

In an earlier part of the article, "the Eastern Church images of the Resurrection... depict Jesus beating down the doors of Hell and rescuing Adam, Eve and other souls."

In other words, Jesus crucifixion defeated the *false lord of the world*.

However, it didn't seem to have happened all at once. As elaborated on in chapter 17, the struggle of the martyred saints (the Apostolic Church) from approximately AD 30 to Constantine's sanctioning of the Christian sect in AD 325 brought the nearly three-hundred-year struggle to a victorious conclusion. But within the victory the seeds of disunion had already been sown, and *weeds* seemed to spread against the many efforts to uproot them.

Constantine had reunited the Roman world after defeating his rivals, with the help, he claimed, of the Christian God. Then he built a new capital on what he must have seen as the empire's geographic center, the Bosphorous, close to ancient Troy, straddling Europe and Asia. Rome, on the other hand, the traditional one that the apostolic church had gravitated toward was slowly but surely bypassed. Within the larger church itself there had grown differences in the beliefs that should matter most. Different schools argued among themselves and between each other. Had each thought that they would be ready to claim dominion over the others with the collection of enough believers? Was this the *Great Commission* somehow gone awry?

Rome's claim rested largely upon the Apostle Peter's martyrdom there, along with the *biblically based* claim that Jesus had chosen him to head His Church.

The Eastern Church over time attempted to insinuate itself into a sort of dualism with Rome based largely on the claim that Constantine had rebuilt Byzantium into a *Christian* capitol of the Roman world, and unlike Rome, at least half of the people around that geographic hub were Christian.

The Eastern (Byzantine) church's triumph eclipsed the Western (Roman) church's successes to such an extent that it (the Eastern church) became the dominant theological force for the three hundred years from the beginning in AD 325 to Mohammed's challenge to it in AD 625.

The Book of Revelation, believed to have been written by the Apostle John during Nero's reign, depicts, among many other things, antichrist's rise to a success that he felt

the need to warn the early Christian churches of. One of the ways, he told them, that they could identify the resurgence of the forces of evil was that its people would carry the “mark of the beast, that is the number 666.”

Mohammed arose from out of nowhere, from among the Arabian Desert’s sparse Bedouin tribes of caravan raiders, to lead them from AD 625 to his death in AD 632.

His heirs went on to become such a force that by AD 664 they usurped a large part of the Byzantine Empire’s real estate and diminished much of its influence in the formerly Roman world.

How had they been able to do that? The Cheirograph legend might hold an answer. It held sway over popular church thinking in the eastern (Byzantine) church. To me there is a strong Gnostic influence as illustrated in the description given earlier. Gnosticism has a *False God*, Jehovah, who rules this physical world, with their *Higher Divinity* in charge of the spiritual cosmos. In the supposedly *Christian* legend, Satan is the false Lord, who rules the “cosmos” from his capital, “hell.” With *Jehovah God* overseeing the *heavenly realm*.

Gnosticism sees a *personal spark* of divinity within many of us that only secret *knowledge (Gnosis)* will reveal and make possible our release from the *prison* of our physical bodies and the evil false God Jehovah.

The *legend* has Adam and Eve, among others, held in the prison of *hell* with only the *spiritual* Jesus being able to rescue them from the *false ruler* Satan. Between the Gnostic interpretation and the Cheirograph legend the lord of the underworld (hell) is named both Jehovah and Satan. How the Moslems could play on that conflict isn’t certain, but if 666 represents the antichrist in some manner, then the conflict might represent a subtle kind of deception that might have attracted the Gnostics. Mohammad studied under a Christian monk somewhere around Antioch in Syria, and probably knew of the popularity of, and differences in this version of Christian belief from that of Rome. Had he wished to interject some even more radical interpretations only to be rebuffed?

The Apostolic Church had fought Gnosticism in one form or another since its beginning. The Christians of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire seem to have had more trouble fending off this insidious influence. Why this should be so is unclear, but Arianism, the anti-Marian, dual nature of Christ belief, also had been much stronger in the eastern provinces as the apostolic age came to an end before the AD 325 watershed event took place. The Council of Nicaea appeared to start turning the tide against the Gnostic Christians, or Christian Gnostics, but as they gave ground they did so with such an extreme reluctance, that they still were an exasperating influence into the seventh century AD.

And the *poor* Jews, they had been denied the right to rebuild their Temple by the Romans after AD 70 and 135, and through the long Christian era this denial seemed to have been carried on as a convenient source of revenge for the Jew’s earlier treatment of the *Followers of the Way*. Of course I could be wrong in this, but the logic alone seems convincing. But maybe I digress.

Into this boiling cauldron of particularism jumped Mohammed and his followers, promising the Jews the rebuilding of their Temple and possibly the Gnostics that their doctrine would be the favored one under their rule.

Is it any wonder that the *gift of the white stone* (as described in chapter 17, The Revelation) looked more like the iridium layer that separated the dinosaurs from

everything that came after? And the lamp stand of the Ephesians, as well as those around them, was knocked loose from its firm foundation so many times that it finally broke altogether in Constantinople's collapse in 1453? And the gift of the *Morning Star*, the universality of the Christian Church so smothered by the pollution of the competing belief systems of Catholicism and the Protest that it refuses to shine through even today?

So now the question might be phrased like this. How close did John, of the book of Revelation, have to come historically to be seen as foreshadowing the rise of Islam and the overthrow of much of the Christian world in the figurative way that a parable is meant to do?

Two years in my book is on the order of almost perfection!

But the question still rankles! If the number 666 *is* historical, then what happened in that time frame which was of such importance that the vision of "The Revelation," the drawing back of the veil of understanding, felt the need to forewarn us by calling it the *mark of the beast*?

"And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2, NKJV).

"Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword" (Rev. 6:4, NKJV).

"And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed" (Rev. 13:3, NKJV).

"And they worshiped the beast, saying 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'" (Rev. 13:4, NKJV).

"It was granted to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (Rev. 13:7, NKJV).

"If anyone has an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 13:9, NKJV).

Do any of these quotes sound anything like the Islamic experience? Mohammad's *Desert Raiders* were horsemen, they "went conquering and to conquer" for well over sixty years in their initial conquests (632–690).

They did "take peace from the earth" for a very long time. And if one considers today's conflict any kind of continuation, then it has continued in an intermittent manner for well over a millennium of time.

Of course Mohammad died from a severe pain in the head, but his generals (his other heads?) carried his mission to a conclusion probably far beyond even his wildest imagination.

His Islamic warriors did seem unbeatable at least until the "horsemen from hell" intervened.

And he and his generals did "make war with the saints and overcome them" for a very long time. In AD 1492 Columbus' patrons had just recently, before his departure for the new world, thrown back the last of Islamic influence and occupation of Catalonian Spain.

So is anyone listening, or have we again turned a deaf ear to history? Hearing aids anyone? Maybe before another repetition? Well, by then maybe a "mountain will have fallen" upon us all!

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Chapter 19

Does History Repeat Itself?

Experience is a hard teacher. The test comes before the learning. Those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it in some manner.

There are those who would argue that it is impossible for history to repeat itself; that each generation is presented with a set of problems that is unique to it and that history is of little use in addressing them.

“There are changes in the environment that makes the repetition of a solution less satisfactory than its first application,” they would submit. “There are also changes in the levels of knowledge, community organization, and cultural practices that prevent the successful reuse of static, traditional, unchanging solutions” they aver.

I don’t agree with that proposition. While these and other things tend to change over time, their cumulative effect is not such as to make a current problem unrecognizable with those of past ages. If any of these influences or a combination of them is *seen* to render past practice ineffective in any major way, the cultural entity thus afflicted does not usually survive.

History does teach us that human nature has largely remained unchanged through the broad sweep of time. Because of this, cultural rules of behavior and taboos against certain practices have been passed from one generation to another under the rubric of a moral code. Any efforts to ignore these guideposts have imposed such a burden of unsatisfactory consequences as to have discouraged any permanence to these floutings. That’s why these *moral* practices have been called the *wisdom of the ages*.

I contend that there are elements within the broad sweep of history, from prehistoric, to oral, then written, that seem to repeat themselves. It is the things that *are* changeable which seem to require adaptations of these tried-and-true prescriptions that have given rise to the saying, that “the devil is in the details!”

I think that I have discovered some of these elements within the Bible. I feel that they are broad and also subtle enough as to have remained largely unnoticed until now. It has only been the accidental juxtaposition of two of these elements that have piqued my curiosity to look more widely. And so, now that I felt that I knew what I was looking for, I went all the way back to the beginning.

The biblical Genesis story, borrowed or original, seeks to describe what even our most modern efforts through science have only been able to vaguely imply. Imagine how proud that original author of this first of all stories, that storyteller-of-old, would be to find out how well he had described what he had *seen* through that spiritual journey he’d had the immensely good fortune to have gone on. To have come that close to our present-day scientific theory when nothing obvious, in the ancient world of his day, could have prompted him to that kind of understanding, is nothing short of amazing. But isn’t that why “belief” is employed? Why it is important? Some way of accepting and learning how to use what is way beyond our understanding?

There seem to be elements, some come as a closely coupled pair while others occur in a trilogy, all periodically repeated, that are to be the subject of my inquiry.

“In the beginning,” the Bible tells us that God made the cosmos and all that’s contained within it, including the cradle of humanity called Earth. Into this subsidiary but teeming environment, He seems to have introduced the *first* hominids (Adam and Eve?) eons after the first life began. The Bible tells us that they arrived, and stayed as innocents, until *temptation* proved too much for them.

In chapters 5, “**From Among Many**” and 6, “**Whither Comest Thou**,” I introduced my understanding that *Man* became self-conscious, probably during his occupancy of *the garden*. When he left, or was *evicted*, they came out into the larger world, far different creatures than had ever before been produced.

After the “first couple” ventured forth, *the garden* seems to have disappeared with hardly a suggestion of where it might have once been. Was it engulfed in a natural catastrophe, as I aver in, chapter 8, “**Where in the World is Eden?**” Or had its work been done, leaving no further need for its existence.

Adam and Eve had children, two sons called *Cain and Abel*. They seem to me to epitomize all that is *bad* and all that is *good* in humankind. In a larger sense they seem to represent the instinctive survivalist spirit of self (pride), as opposed to the learned spirit of cooperative association (selflessness). Was *Cain* mentioned first because man’s carnal (that is, self-serving) nature came into being before it was ameliorated by a painfully long, gradual recognition of the primacy of a *Creator*, in whose name and through whose teachings *we* seem to have learned the greater good of sharing, as with Abel?

As I see it, the first trilogy is complete in the person of the *Prime Mover (Creator)*, the *first couple*, and then, the *first man-made generation*. From perfection, to temptation, to assertive reaction, time has only incrementally improved seemingly endless repetitions. What seems to repeat itself with little change is human nature. Instinctive reaction breeds instinctive reaction unless modified by learned behavior. The problem is that within this story, this *parable*, there seems to be the implication that the *good* do not survive, at least not in this world. But the advantage brought by the learned response of *sharing* seeks to improve that condition.

The second instance, I feel, is to be found in the biblical story of “Noah and the Flood.” First comes the catastrophe (the wrath of God?), second the man who overcomes it (with a little help from a Friend). Then there are three sons who helped him build the *boat* that became the agent of their survival. After their family succeeded in riding out an unprecedented storm, it is largely left to them to repopulate the world in some manner.

Here I see another trilogy; the *obedient* (moral) *Man*, those who live through, and share in the fruits of his moral rectitude (learned behavior), and then there are those who come after, who tend toward a kind of forgetfulness of the purpose of the original experience.

So again, we have the catastrophic *flood*, the *man* who survived it, and the *sons* who are the biblical ancestors of everyone. Everyone?

(“*From Noah, came Shem, Ham, and Japheth...From Japheth came...Javan. From Javan came...Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. From these the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, every one according to their families, into their nation*” (Gen. 10:1–5, NKJV).

Now we come to the story of Abram, who linguistically metamorphoses to Abraham sometime after he follows his God’s directive to “go out” from the land of his birth to a “land that I will show you.”

He leads his people from Ur (Mesopotamia), the “land between two rivers,” that many believe to be the nursery of civilization, to Canaan, the “land between” two civilizations, which has been contended over by all the major powers of the ancient as well as the modern “Middle East.”

The “land of his promise” doesn’t seem to have lived up to expectations. A severe drought forced him to move on to Egypt, the “great power of the south,” the “oldest civilization” that seems to have exercised some sort of *protectorship* over the land of Canaan at that time. Egypt was the ancient “sanctuary of last resort” that was sought out by the peoples in the many lands surrounding it who were afflicted by the periodic droughts as that part of the world entered a long drying cycle.

According to the Bible, Abraham had two sons, Ishmael the elder and Isaac the younger. These two half brothers became the biblical progenitors of two lineages: for Ishmael, the Arabs, and for Isaac, the Hebrews. They have historically contended with each other over the land of Canaan and others around it, and do so to this day. Like Cain, Ishmael was the older brother, the emotionally more volatile, the one closer to nature, while Isaac the younger, was the more *civilized* in his behavior. His sacrifice (restitution) seems to have been for the *sin* of artifice, contributing to his brother’s loss of his birthright. The herds that were his offering seem to be equivalent to Abel’s animal, or meat sacrifice, but were accepted by his brother, not God.

Isaac had two sons. Twins. The technically firstborn was named Esau. The one that quickly followed was named Jacob. Esau was a “great hunter.” He had a certain wildness of physic and nature. He was called “the hairy one.”

Jacob was of a milder nature, preferring camp life to wildlife. In his maturity he was a skilled herdsman and farmer.

In these two, the story of Cain and Abel is retold, but with a twist. Like Cain, Esau was the *elder* son, and had a more volatile temperament. But unlike him, Esau was a hunter, which skill came before shepherding and long before farming.

Like Abel, Jacob was the younger and had a similar mildness of nature. Unlike him, Jacob survived a confrontation with his elder brother. The second story seems like a sequel to the first, as if to indicate what might have happened if Abel had lived to spread his *goodness* into the whole world, as did Jacob whose lineage reached all the way down to Jesus of Nazareth.

Once again we have the primary figure in the trilogy, Abraham. Then, we have the sons of two different natures, Ishmael and Isaac and thirdly, we have the grandsons, Esau and Jacob, replaying an earlier scenario, while also giving us in the succeeding generations the opportunity to partake of the offered inheritance.

Abraham like Noah was a “moral” man obedient to his God’s direction through all manner of life’s vicissitudes. The sons witnessed their father’s odyssey and largely respected its meaning. However, they were only able to pass this witness on by word of mouth to their progeny, who seemed to be unable to avoid the conflict of their fathers. Additionally, they were able to be enticed toward the easier living of the Egyptian delta, as a prelude to all that denigrated the spirit in the following generations.

The fourth occasion concerns the story of Jacob. He had several sons, the youngest of whom was named Joseph.

A very long episode of involuntary servitude that introduced Moses to history was brought forth almost by accident. A practice of long standing in Egypt was the buying of foreigners who were sold into slavery by their own people.

Egyptian traders regularly moved through the lands that were subject to an Egyptian protectorate status buying what was offered.

Joseph, the youngest son of Jacob, suffered this fate when his half brothers, envious and bitter over Joseph's favorite-son status, rid themselves of him in this manner.

Again we seem to have a replay of Cain and Abel, except Joseph's brothers hadn't quite dared to kill him, and he survived and in the end, like his father, prospered. But ever so much greater was his worldly success than his father's.

The Bible tells us that Joseph persevered with God's help, and, through an attitude of honesty, loyalty, and integrity, all selfless, *giving* natures, was "greatly prospered," gaining high office among the Egyptian hierarchy.

A drought again brought his people into Egypt and possibly because of Joseph's high position, they were at first welcomed as honored guests. But as with guests who overstay their welcome, time as well as "envy," brought a gradual lessening of that feeling. Long after Joseph's day, a pharaoh "who knew not Joseph" brought them into a condition similar to what Joseph had experienced when he was first brought into the land of Egypt.

The trilogy this time includes Jacob, the "elect of God," and the "brothers," the youngest of whom was Joseph who in a vision "saw" himself to be the "chosen of God." Then there were his successors in the land of Egypt who had "forgotten" their God.

The fifth trilogy concerns Moses, Joshua, and another generation who fell away from "the Word."

In a previously written story, *The Exodus, According to G*, I told how Moses might have pulled off his feat of saving those people who had *forgotten their God* and did it without the aid of a large army. The Egyptians seemed to have had no peer during this time in their military history.

Even the great Hittite army had been fought to a stalemate in northern Canaan at a place called Carchemish. Moses had only the forces of nature, according to my Exodus story, and that Great Supernatural Force, according to my story and the Bible, to aid him in that endeavor.

The second leg of the trilogy involves Joshua and Caleb. The first introduction of them in this biblical story seems to be when they were selected among several others to spy out the Promised Land that resided somewhere within the bounds of the "land of Canaan."

This *Exodus* story tells how Moses might have become acquainted with them during the beginning phase of this epochal adventure. It also implies how their skills might have been honed during the long years of their wanderings. In those years they had become his trusted lieutenants. During that time, Moses had learned to rely on them enough to send them on a mission to assess what kind of resistance he might expect from the inhabitants of the land they were expected to invade and claim.

By the time that the Exodus had "entered the land," Joshua had become the lead figure who planned and carried out the assault and destruction of the first city that they encountered. It was called Jericho.

The Exodus According to G also tells how this might have been at least partly aided by a natural catastrophe as attested to by geological and archaeological discoveries.

The third leg of this trilogy involves the heirs to the land that Joshua's generation had subdued. They had not witnessed the miracles of Moses as had the first generation and their children. Whether these children of the Exodus understood what little that they had seen firsthand along with the stories that their parents probably told and retold to them is a question that the Bible is silent on.

But the children of these *children* only recognized them by the rituals that represented them. They had only remembered *hearing* of the great victories of Joshua's generation. Because of that distancing, as told in the biblical account, the third generation strayed from the faith of their fathers, and grandfathers.

They seemed to have lost the mystique accorded to them by the Canaanites who lived around them and whose forebears had been assaulted and terrorized by the amazing deeds of these *new* people. As the third generation after Moses worshiped their God less and began to accept the gods of those around them, the seemingly undue fear also subsided. Their familiarity had begun to breed contempt, and that very contempt led to the opportunity for revenge. Now the heirs of the assaulters of old became the assaulted, as old scores seemed ripe for settling.

"Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them" (Judg. 2:16, NKJV).

"And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers" (Judg. 2:19, NKJV).

In the biblical account, when Moses led the Exodus into the wilderness of the Sinai, he was their spiritual leader. There was no organized military wing to protect that migration. Although there were individual efforts and tribal protectors, the Bible tells us that Moses' efforts relied entirely on his God to see to the safety of His people.

By the time that they were ready to cross the Jordan River, there had already been many occasions where defense was necessary, and while all men in that migration were considered to be soldiers, some were eventually chosen above others to fulfill that obligation.

By the time that Moses was ready to hand his spiritual mantle to his successor, it must be presumed, as implied in the text, that Joshua was at the head of a well-seasoned defense force.

When he led the multitude across the river he was the military leader who had inherited the moral authority, as well as the physical tokens of spiritual leadership. After Jericho, he had occasion to demand of his people, *"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Josh. 24:15, NKJV).

He must have already seen the tendency to stray, but he had pulled them, the second generation, together and elicited from them a renewed declaration of faith. This allowed him to lead them on a campaign that earned them the respect, the envy, and the fear of all the organized kingdoms that they were to invade and occupy.

According to the biblical description of a *judge* as a leader who *delivered* his people from "out of the hand" of their enemies, Joshua was the first judge.

He became the pattern upon which "the Lord" would rely, when called upon to choose fourteen others, who spanned the period of time, which came to be known as the pre-dynastic part of the post-Exodus history of the Hebrews.

With this, the Exodus trilogy, one of the two that had originally piqued my interest into whether the broad brushes of history repeat themselves, is also complete.

First we have, larger than life, the “amazing Moses” who brokers the rescue of a people, while giving them back their identity.

Then Joshua, who takes the faith that he received at the feet of his master, and translates it into a string of magnificent victories through the military prowess learned in the field of hard experience. He never once veered from the faith that was the basis of everything that he was chosen to accomplish.

The third leg of this trilogy, the third generation, veered from that path of faith that was exemplified rather well by those who had come before them. They suffered the ever more severe consequences of the folly of their experiment with infidelity.

And those who followed in their footsteps didn’t seem to have learned from the *good* and the *bad* of their predecessors either. In the selection of “*Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, as Judge over the people, the successes of Joshua, to a lesser degree, were repeated*” (Judg. 3:7). But, by the third generation after his selection, the people were in a similar condition as that which had caused Othniel to be called forth.

This sad scenario repeated itself fourteen times so that by the time of the prophet Samuel, who was the last judge (I Sam. 7:15), the people desperately asked for a “*king, to rule over us,*” so that they could live “*like all the nations.*” They evidently just could not live up to the example that they had been *chosen* to be without some kind of compulsory goad.

I was about to go on to my final example anchored in the New Testament, when something in my review of the chapter, I Samuel, drew my attention to young David and his exploits. Here, I suddenly discovered, was what looked like another element, another trilogy. The primary figure might not be “*writ as large*” as those of the other examples, but the overall view of the other legs seems to follow a familiar pattern.

Some might think that the biblical first Hebrew king, Saul, would have been the natural choice. But he was all that Samuel was told that the people’s choice of kings would be, and his reign ended in failure through his “*loss of faith,*” which would make him different than all the other primary figures. Also, Saul was of the same generation as the last *judge* and first *prophet*, Samuel. According to the biblical account, Samuel anointed Israel’s first “*God-fearing king.*” Although this is not as clear-cut a choice as the other first legs, it does appear to have the most in common with them.

In the Bible story, when David was chosen to succeed Saul, Samuel did it surreptitiously because Saul, like other kings, did not “*suffer successors*” easily. At their first meeting, Saul, ignorant of David’s elevation, exasperatedly allows the insistent David to *sacrifice* himself to the Philistine champion, Goliath, in that well-known biblical story.

Amazed at David’s surprising victory, Saul elevates him to a favored status, presenting him with many additional opportunities to show how long that his particular kind of *luck* might last. When David finally becomes, in the eyes of the people, mightier than the king, the honeymoon turns sour.

David was loyal to his God-chosen king, and even though he was anointed as the successor, he was loath to do anything that would hasten his own elevation. So he waited patiently, trying to stay out of Saul’s clutches while some other agent arose to do *God’s* bidding.

When that finally happened, David set about finishing Saul's work of reforming a loosely associated tribal confederation into a closely-knit kingly nation. He overcame a final resistance from Salem, the *City of Peace*. Then he chose it to be the capital city of his newly consolidated nation, and brought the "Ark of the Covenant" to a final rest within its environs, preparing the way for the building of the "House of God," the original Temple.

Solomon was David's youngest son, but Absalom had been his favorite. He like Cain, "showed not" a proper respect for his father's position. Absalom couldn't seem to *suffer* his subordinate status easily, trying on more than one occasion to usurp his father's authority. David unaccountably turned a blind eye to these efforts until almost too late, having had to finally rely upon his general to save the kingdom for him. Unlike Cain, Absalom did not survive.

Solomon on the other hand, as David had, waited for time and others, to make the choice for him, only asking the God of his youth for the gift of wisdom, that he might rule wisely when his time should come. Like Abel, his *sacrifice* had been acceptable, but unlike him, he lived to a successfully wise, but saddened old age. Also as in the story of Jacob and Joseph, God seemed to have *prospered* Solomon to a greater degree than He had allowed David. Even considering David's great success, his son outshone him.

Like Joshua, Solomon was devout, in his youth. But his successes seemed to distract him to where in the end, unlike Joshua, he had experimented with the beliefs of the many wives that he had taken because of his *worldly* associations.

Saul had only been able to begin to consolidate the "Land of their Promise." David had finished that work and had gone on to unify it. Solomon had brought greatness to the "Land Between" the two great nations, but at a cost.

His heirs, eager to become the *chosen*, as in the story of Joseph, contested with one another until they had caused the kingdom to split into two parts. Then, each newly minted but lesser king, in his own way, strayed further afield than had the father, Solomon.

The third generation had wandered far enough to set in motion the disaster and enslavement of the Assyrian conquest (722 BC).

So once again, this version of the trilogy is complete. Biblically, David though not perfect, retained the "favor of God." Solomon, treading in those footsteps, brought Israel to its historic though temporary pinnacle, but in the end he also spiritually stumbled. His heirs, seemingly a lesser breed, strayed to the point of destruction.

Between the desolation brought on through the agency of the heirs of Solomon and the Israel of Jesus' day there were two Diasporas, one Assyrian and one Babylonian.

Each time the Israelites, God's chosen, were exiled to the pagan land "between two rivers," the same place, the land of Ur, that Abraham had not wanted to return to.

The first Diaspora involved the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which disappeared from the historical record during that time, and bred the legend of the "Lost Tribes of Israel."

The second concerned the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Somewhat before, between, as well as during these two times of Hebrew travail, the "age of the prophets" seemed to have taken place.

This appears to have been a time roughly analogous to that of the *judges*, with some differences:

The first was a time where a *champion* “rose up” to rescue the people from the folly of their spiritual infidelity. The other could only prophesy the consequences of similar behavior, a situation in which, many times, the prophetic sounder of the alarm paid with his life for his moral concern.

The first took place within a loose confederation of tribes or peoples. The second took place amid the rubble and rabble of a nation that was destroying itself through the agency of others.

The Bible tells us that they both took place as a consequence of the degrading of moral behavior, a straying away from the *wisdom of the ages*.

By my count there were more prophets than judges. Was Israel then long overdue for a major consequence sometime between the last prophet and the appearance of John the Baptist? Was this correction the seemingly sudden appearance of the Greek juggernaut (323 BC) that utterly destroyed the Persian entity that had let God’s *chosen* go back to Jerusalem? Had these Israelites had the time to stray from the post-release praise of their God who endeavored to reconstitute their moral rectitude?

If not before, then certainly when this great pagan horde who had brought their own foreign idols and practices with them, had descended upon this *resurrected* remnant nation, the *victors* had directed ever more insistently that all must do as the Greeks did. It was not long, historically, before many Israelites would be known only as *Hellenized Jews*. This unusual kind of Diaspora seemed to have been conducted “in situ.”

It was not historically long before many were also beseeching their God, through their prophets, for the Messiah that had been prophesied by those whom these people had earlier sought only to silence. But their *pain* was not to go unnoticed.

The Roman entity, far to their west, might have been seen by many Israelites as the answer that they had hoped for, as earlier the Persians had seemed. It had, over a long period, been putting constant pressure on that side of the empire of their overlords, as the Greek Alexander had done to the Persians. Now it was the Greek heirs of Alexander who seemed more dazzled by the riches of their *newly acquired* eastern provinces to notice, until it was too late. And the Romans *had* offered to help the Israelites in their efforts to liberate themselves.

And the Hasmoneans did seem to look like new *champions* similar to the judges of old, but once in power seemed to act more like those ancients who had been called “kings.”

Then, the Romans (63 BC), slashing rapidly across the fragmented and fragmenting empire of the Greek overlords, finally revealed themselves to be only the newest edition of Israel’s oldest enemy, invaders.

And now we come to the Jesus story, the other part of the pair that had first piqued my interest, and had gotten me started down this line of analysis.

When Jesus came onto the scene of this ancient diorama, he was an instantly polarizing distraction to the *Jewish* yearning for the appearance of another *champion*, the new *judge* who would resurrect their national entity, and identity once more as the Hasmonean Maccabees had seemed to accomplish for a while, during the interregnum in which the Greeks tried to fend off Roman incursions into their fractured Hellenistic world.

There had, over time, been a plethora of “false prophets” claiming the mantle of Messiah (an expected deliverer, the Anointed One). The priestly class, tiring of these

pretensions, had ruled that any further claims would be treated as blasphemy, and would earn the penalty of execution.

To the Jews, Jesus seemed only an interesting replay of an old production. He seemed eminently sincere in his protestations and convincing to many in his *proofs* of authenticity. To the priestly class, he seemed only an immediate danger to their status as well as their state.

The Romans, they feared, would use an uprising, any disturbance of their dictatorial status quo, as they had many times in the past, to upbraid their truculent subjects additionally, in their sullen acquiescence to the rule of this abhorrent “invader.”

It was almost with a sigh of relief that they had caught Jesus and executed him so easily. But their troubles had only multiplied when other, self-proclaimed *witnesses* testified to his resurrection from the death that the priestly class had indirectly inflicted upon him.

According to the Bible, these “Apostles” were suddenly speaking boldly of the message learned at the feet of their beloved “Rabbi.”

Pursuing them and persecuting them only seemed to spread their *message* more rapidly. This *Word* settled over the land like a deadly plague on the “House of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” who struggled on helplessly, and then hopelessly as it spread even into the lands of their conquerors.

Many *Believers* were sacrificed to no seeming avail as many more thousands rose to replace them. Shades of Joshua, they seemed to be a new generation of undefeatables, regardless of how easily they seemed to be able to be killed individually. Their God seemed to visibly lengthen his stride with every such *sacrifice*.

Then the hated Romans turned once again upon this recalcitrant “remnant nation” as if to blame them for the spread of this pestilence. Forty short years after they had *killed* this Jesus, the Romans descended upon them bent upon a *final solution*.

They utterly destroyed and desecrated the sacred Temple in AD 66–70. They massacred many of the priestly class, who had stood aside so many times before, as these *invaders* had dealt out their idea of “Pax Romana” to “these unruly people,” who’d had the audacity to try to revolt in the name of reestablishing their relatively short-lived freedom under their Hasmonean “champions.”

Sixty-five years later, in AD 135, they tried it again scaring the Roman Caesar badly with their temporary successes that had spread widely among other restive provinces.

This time the Romans destroyed the *Jewish* nation and dispersed its people in the final, most cruel, and long-lasting Diaspora ever seen. As these people were taken away in chains to the many far-off lands of the Roman Empire, they were witness to the freely swarming “Christians” who seemed to accompany them everywhere these “Jews” were made to go in a last and most sad Exodus.

Jesus obviously is the stand-in for the *Prime Mover* in the original trilogy, faithfully carrying “His Father’s Word” to his small portion of the globe.

It was also this “God Incarnate” who had dropped the *pebble* that would cause the rings of reverberation, his followers, to spread “into the whole world.”

The second leg of this trilogy were the beginners of this ring of reverberation. His twelve disciples (learners), became His apostles (missionaries). They had spoken out *boldly* at a time when the *priestly class* had thought these men had been threatened into silence by the example made of their beloved *Rabbi*.

They had survived this first *Jewish* threat to their lives only to succumb, in the fullness of their mission, to Roman reprisal. But the example that they had set gave unstoppable power to the *sound* “heard round the world.”

Might they be equated with the Adam and Eve leg of the first trilogy, “who had come out of the *Garden* far different creatures than had ever before been produced”? This *garden* of the “first couple” seems to have disappeared into prehistory, with only a believer’s understanding that it had ever been *real*.

The garden of their “Pentecost” (Israel) that the apostles *emerged* from disappeared into history from which it took two millennia to be *rediscovered*, and that in a rather truncated form. Should that give us hope that the first *garden* might someday reemerge in some recognizable form?

The first comparison that started all this was with Moses and those who had followed him. He had, according to the biblical account, faithfully carried the *Word* to God’s people. He had tried to teach the people to understand the *Word* in the fullness of the meaning intended. And he had given up his life to the task.

Joshua, as did the disciples of Jesus, the apostles, modeled how the *Word* affects those who implement it in their lives. And he, like they, were faithful to the end.

But the third leg, the *heirs* of Joshua who fell away from the “Word,” who might we equate them with in our Jesus story?

Joshua could see, in his day, some who could be persuaded by others to look at things differently, and he remonstrated mightily against that influence when he challenged, “*Choose this day whom you will serve.*”

The Apostle Paul recognized this drift also when he warned (in I Tim. 1:3, 4, 6–7, NKJV) “*that you may charge some that they may teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause endless disputes rather than Godly edification which is in faith...from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things that they affirm.*”

It must have been a great time in this new movement, all in all, with hundreds, and then thousands of the underclass, and others who were spiritually hungry, flocking to this new and different message of hope.

But many from Jewish backgrounds or the secret *Mysteries* cultic societies, not wanting to part with the old in order to take on the new, sought to meld the two together.

Paul also warned not to consider one’s self as being a follower of “Apollos, or Paul” or any of the apostles, for all were, in fact, followers of Jesus.

The seeds of the movements that would later author the books of the Apocrypha and would found organizations such as the Gnostic Christians and the followers of Arian must have already been apparent to such earlier leaders as the “Apostle to the Gentiles.”

Many must have been eagerly talking up this *newest* message from the tapestry of their varied backgrounds, causing the pollution of the original message that worried Paul.

His warnings, like Joshua’s challenge, might have deterred the alteration of the message during his lifetime. But by the fullness of the lifetime of the *third generation*, the beginning of the second century AD, there were many contenders for the primacy of their version of the Christian Message, and it only grew worse with the passage of time.

During the hurly-burly of the persecutions of Caligula, Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, and Trajan, among the others that were to follow; many hearers, and also speakers of the

true as well as the polluted versions of the *Word* were haphazardly selected out (winnowed) from the arena of ideas.

Many more, for the sake of survival, fell away from their new faith, outwardly accepting the paganism of Rome. Are these then the third generation heirs of the apostles' faithful sacrifice? But many must have been the prayers of the faithful for a *champion*, as they stood condemned to certain oblivion. A champion to save the *Word* as well as its followers?

But the new idea was not destroyed in those who had fallen away, just buried to sprout anew during easier times. These alternations of fortune are all well recorded in the traditional histories of those times, all the way up to and through the fourth century AD.

So, is the newest trilogy complete?

We have Jesus faithfully doing his "Father's" work, bringing forth a new covenant, offered first to "His Father's" chosen people, the Jews.

And, we have the apostles, faithful to the end in carrying the "Word" to the "whole world" as their beloved Rabbi had commissioned them to do.

Then we have the generation that fell away, before the God of secular necessity, the emperors who had insisted on recognition of their own asserted divinity.

So, are we now at an end of these trilogies?

My thinking had not gone much beyond this point when I had first begun this thought process. But then, after a short hiatus, I had to give a qualified answer! "I think not!"

Instead we seem to be at an interval, the end of one and the beginning of another set of elements, for they do seem to go on further than I had first anticipated.

In the Old Testament, when the wayward people cried out to their God for an end to their oppression, He sent them someone to be a judge over them. When their attitude was *right* he became their champion, relieved their persecution, and defeated their oppressors.

Here, going into the fourth century (AD 300+), we have a wayward people. Some, faithful carriers of the *Word*, others, polluters of the message, and the many who have denied it crying out to their God for relief of their persecutions. Was Constantine someone "used by God" to be a *judge* over this people?

If he was, then he seems to have been a rather ambiguous choice, to my mind. He was among several candidates for Caesar at the death of his father Constantius I in AD 306. Having allied himself with another winner, they cleared the field of all other contenders.

Before the most memorable of his battles, one in which he must have had an unusual feeling of uncertainty of winning in his own strength, he *saw* a "vision of a cross" in the heavens. He had evidently been so impressed that he equipped his army with crosses as their main battle standard, and then gave that *vision* the credit for having won.

His and his new partner's first act in AD 313 was to grant the mightily struggling Christian sect legitimacy in all of the Roman territories and to return previously confiscated property to them.

Seemingly under God's tutelage, he had been placed in a position to relieve the oppression of the *hallmark* that his newly accepted main battle standard represented. But his partner went back on their agreement concerning the Christians, so Constantine fought him and won, again decisively and quickly.

He seemed to have *miraculously* relieved their oppression, but did that make him their *judge*?

By AD 325 at Nicaea he had set them on the road to a singular kind of greatness, but did this make him their *champion*?

He had not required the reformation of their waywardness before he had relieved their oppression, although they had started the process. And, he had to struggle with them to accede to his requirement to settle their differences so they might go forward in a unity that they would need to accomplish the destiny that still lay before them.

In the era of the *judges* a *champion* had been selected from among the people. Constantine, by the time of Nicaea, was the undisputed, *first* among the Romans within a *pagan* empire. An odd choice, but apparently effective.

And there were other differences. But times change, and dependable solutions must be adjusted to meet the times. Once again, does it bear repeating that “the devil is in the details”?

Granted, Constantine was a great general, a Caesar, but he was also an intelligent politician, wise in the ways of necessary compromise in the gaining of an objective not possible through the force of arms alone. He was the titular head of a majority pagan religion, but also, it was one that slowly gave way to this new Christian entity under his leadership. He certainly wasn't of the moral caliber of a Moses or Abraham, but he was there and he delivered. Like David, Constantine was a king, but unlike David only delivered after he had become one. He was the central figure in a paradigm shift that set Christianity on the road to material success, as his massive “church-planting” program would attest, although in that, he reflected, rather eerily, a vision of Solomon and his vast building program.

So, Constantine appears to be a modestly appropriate choice for prime mover, the occupant of the first leg of the newest trilogy. Untidy as this choice may be seen to be, he does seem to fit at least some of the essential variables.

Here also the trilogies of the past seem to have taken on the aspects of a kind of parable. The larger picture seems to be, straying from the previous generational structure and *wisdom*.

So then, who, or what group might be the equivalent of the next *second leg*? In the beginning we had the *first couple*. In Abraham we had the *sons of two different natures* and the grandsons who were the progenitors of two peoples. In Moses we had Joshua, in David we had Solomon, and in Jesus we had the apostles.

By Constantine's time, the bishopric structure had already been in place for some time, but the bishops, previous to his time, only had authority over Christian followers, they had not yet been given the “gift” of the “white stone” (see Revelation).

Either during Constantine's time, or sometime historically soon after, they came to rival the rapidly diminishing authority of the Caesars themselves.

But the Romans had already become used to the duality of twin-ruling Caesars, and sometimes, even Triumvirates, three-legged imperial authority. So when the power of the bishopric became second only to the Caesarian office, it wouldn't have been seen as totally strange by those so ruled.

But still, they were strange bedfellows indeed. A partly pagan emperor and a wholly Christian archbishop (or pope), historically vying quietly but continually for supremacy, *like two sons of different natures*.

Now we come to the third leg of the trilogy, a *third generation* who *fell away* from the faith: the bishopric, following that accession to primacy who could not seem to live up to the *gift* of the *white stone*.

Constantine moved his capitol to the Bosphorus, the “gateway to Asia,” it is suspected, largely because there were more Christians there (50 percent, Americana) than in the pagan west (Rome). In the generations following Constantine, the bishopric of Rome (the traditional city of St. Peter) and the bishop of Constantinople vied for supremacy of the “faith” they were supposed to share, while together they contested for supremacy in the secular empire as it sank into chaos.

Thus we have a mirroring of the earlier split in the teachings and “being” of Christ between the Arianism of the East (Constantinople) and the Athanasianism of Rome that Constantine, in his lifetime, had sought to heal or smooth over into a unified canon. (Didn't he consider what the moving of his capitol would do for the Arianism that he had seemed to oppose at Nicaea?) In this we also seem to have had a reenactment of the brothers of *two different natures*.

The earliest *falling away* concerned the Gnostic-influenced Christians. Gnosticism, as indicated in the previous chapters, is defined in the following paragraph.

“The name of a many-sided movement in the 1st and 2nd centuries of the Christian era which combined the mythology and symbolism of several pagan religions with the teachings of Christ...had two characteristic features: a metaphysical dualism of matter and spirit whose origins are to be found in the physical dualism of darkness and light in the Parsic (or Persian) religion; and a doctrine of redemption, by which those who devote themselves to *gnosis*, or a higher knowledge, may proceed from the former to the latter realm...Much of Gnostic literature was falsely ascribed to such authors as the disciples of Jesus, Jewish prophets, heroes of antiquity, or imaginary personages...With the decline of the pagan religions around the time of Christ, a conscious movement to syncretize (attempt to smoothly unite) all religions was in progress...In the early years of Christianity, only loose boundaries were formed between the Church and contemporary cults; the syncretic movement did not exclude the new faith, nor did Christianity fail to absorb elements of foreign beliefs.

“The gnostic movement dates from this period when Christianity was adopted into the syncretic system. At first this union met no resistance but as the effectiveness of the Church began to be endangered by a multiplicity of beliefs and the encroachment of foreign influences, the Church Fathers branded Gnosticism as heretical...Evidence points to Samaria as an early center of Gnosticism, which probably existed there before the year BC 30” (Americana, 1959, vol. 12; Gnosticism).

Because its influence was exercised early in the Christian formative period, it may have been what the Apostle Paul warned against in I Timothy 1:3–4 “*that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies [chain of angels], which cause disputes rather than Godly edification...from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*”

And again in I Timothy 4:1, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy.*”

Apparently from out of this Gnostic-influenced background came Arianism.

“The common designation for the teachings of Arius (c. AD 256–336) and his followers denying the divinity of Christ. It had its roots in Greek theological speculation beginning with Gnosticism, and may be regarded as an elaborate attempt to define the relation of Christ to God according to natural reason...During the greater part of the fourth century, its most flourishing period, it enjoyed the strong support of the imperial government and had a special appeal for the intelligentsia...

“The discussions at the Nicene Council (AD 325) revealed the fact that there were three parties present: the Strict Arians, the Semi-Arians and the Alexander-Athanasian party...The latter party, with the help of Constantine and the Western bishops secured the adoption of [the] creed...The sons of Constantine continued to favor the Semi-Arian party, which included a large majority of the Eastern bishops, but the Western Churches generally adhered to the Nicene creed...The distracted condition of the Orient, due to the war with Persia, and the demoralized state of many of the bishoprics under Arian leadership made it relatively easy for Theodosius the Great to espouse and support the Nicene party...Arianism was soon suppressed within the empire, but it continued for a long time to prevail among the Barbarians” (Encyc. Amer. vol. 1; Arianism).

Even as the Christian church matured under the overlordship of Constantine and his immediate successors, there were those who continued to fall away.

There were the Donatists, previously described as purists (from about AD 311– 429) who were unforgiving of those who had fallen away from the faith under the pressure of the various persecutions. They had especially despised the leadership that had failed their office in their fear of immediate consequences. The Donatists had a regionally major influence, but it was mostly confined to North Africa.

The Monophysites: “those followers of the opinion in the early Church which ascribes but one nature to Christ...[they] were mainly confined to the Eastern Church and obtained no footing in the West...The edict...issued by Emperor Zeno in 482, was not able to quiet the long and bloody contests incident to this controversy, and the orthodox (Eastern) Church, by its sentences of excommunication, occasioned a formal secession on the part of the Monophysites.

“This separation took place in the first half of the 6th century (AD 500+)...About 560, a Monophysite, Askunages...a noted Alexandrian philosopher...conceived the idea of styling the three persons of the Deity (as) three Gods. [Those followers who championed this doctrine] were the occasion of many Monophysites turning Catholic...(Other variations) formed the independent churches of the Jacobites (Syrian) and the Armenians...From their national character and superstition, [they have] received variations which are most striking in the religious constitution of the Egyptian Jacobites.”

And then, there were the Manichaeans: “The followers of Manes...a gnostic teacher whose opinion prevailed in western Asia and Eastern Europe during the 4th and 5th centuries of our era. Manichaeism is generally considered to be the Persian type of gnosis, as it is distinguished by Zoroastrian dualism and other features of that system. Hebrew elements of religion and Buddhistic doctrines were also found in Manichaeism, which appears to have been an eclectic jumble of wild fancies, among which the soberest and strongest dogmas of the Christian creed were sometimes seen to be embedded...The practical side of Manichaeism appears in the condemnation of marriage, or sexual indulgence of any sort...There were two classes of disciples, the initiated, or *perfecti*, and

the *auditores*, hearers, or novices. St. Augustine of Hypo (354–430) was, for nine years before his conversion to Christianity, a Manichaean hearer.”

And last, Pelagianism: “A religious doctrine taught by Pelagius, a British monk of the late 4th and early 5th centuries [late AD 300 to early 400]...[he] was a contemporary of St. Augustine...[Who] opposed these views...[which were] that the will is free only as it is influenced neither toward good nor toward evil.

“Sin then becomes an act and it has no existence apart from the act...[Therefore] that Man was endowed with original perfection, not tainted with original sin...Pelagianism was condemned by several Synods held between 412 and 418, when Pelagius was banished from Rome, and the condemnation was confirmed by the Council of Ephesus in 431.”

From its inception, the *Followers of the Way* incubated within and around larger more substantial cults. It contributed its principles to, and *Followers* subconsciously drew from these other cults, precepts at variance with the teachings of its founder, Jesus of Nazareth.

It was *born* when its apostles declared the largest and most pervasive of those influences, Gnosticism, a heretical doctrine. Their striving against these sources of imperfection of the *Word* has been preserved within the record of their teachings.

The writings of those who followed after, as the Christian experience evolved, indicate to me that it had been a continuous battle that had never been completely lost or ever quite won.

These were the subtle influences that drew many innocents away from the *True Belief*. They had increasingly become the *followers of men*, not the *Word* as the Apostle Paul had warned against many times, and their strivings divided the very strength of the movement into warring factions that weakened the core around which they orbited.

If these influences were the subversive contest, the frontal assaults were the many persecutions. The choice was stark, die now, many times horribly, or live through the humiliating serial recantations.

Thus a kind of *dualism of survival* arose. In public, “do as the Romans do” became the watchword of those who had *failed the test* all too publicly, while in private they wept the regret of their *cowardice*. Yet they too followed in their imperfect privacy. Their only consolation? Peter had denied his savior also, but kept on in his own way.

Thus also was bred the division of the “righteous,” the Donatists among others, who refused to forgive that *failure of faith*, and in the doing, failed to observe one of the most important teachings of their beloved Rabbi, to “*forgive that you may also be forgiven.*” Yet, many of them were the ones who had borne the brunt of that sacrificial offering.

Many others, who had become imbued with the subversions of the *Word*, held tightly to their “apostasy.” They divided the empire that they were rapidly inheriting into warring regions more anxious and adept at fighting each other than those who surrounded them.

Mesopotamia, Syria, the Levant including the remains of the Jewish homeland, and Egypt were under the nominal control of the Gnostic-leaning Christians who tightened their grip ever more firmly through the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.

Several attempts at “going their own way” while failing, succeeded in concentrating the attention of the *true* believers, who also failed to dislodge these influences completely. Thus were sown the seeds of an impending catastrophe.

By the beginning of the seventh century, the almost continuous struggle against the Sassanid Persian Empire on their eastern frontier; repelling the incursions from the Goths along the Danube, and Huns prowling their northeastern borders; the heavy taxation made *necessary* by these and other disturbances; and the periodic clashes between the *Believing Brothers*, sapped the physical and moral strength of all involved.

Desert caravan raiders from the “empty space” on their southern border began to find their predations less costly and more rewarding as attention was directed toward the larger threats elsewhere. Fewer troops were assigned to protect those centers that were in almost open rebellion to the *central* government and belief. The eastern patriarchy, in its increasingly differing dogma, practices, and claims to leadership, drifted further away from the west in the church.

Then, those desert raids became ever more daring, penetrating deeper with each thrust until the shattered, rather vacant homeland of the Jews, and the porous southwestern borders of the Persians collapsed completely, and the danger to the surrounding lands went unrecognized until almost too late. By the time the dust settled on the beginning dissolution, the eastern portion of the Christian lands had been shorn in half. The many small bands of desert raiders, faced with incalculable opportunity, quickly coalesced around a charismatic leader and the rest was Moslem history.

The third leg had strayed too far. The center of gravity of the remaining Christian/Roman lands shifted inexorably west as additional shearings took place.

Attacks came from all sides as the weakening Roman Empire began its slow descent into oblivion. But the Christian movement in the west was still vibrant enough to leapfrog into the barbarian lands of Europe as their original base inexorably shrank.

Had the *people* turned to their God for physical salvation as in times past? The waters of more recent history become increasingly muddied the closer one looks toward present times, and the broad sweep cannot be seen with the same clarity as earlier viewings seem to have allowed. Oh! John, John! Brothers at last! Has the recent past for me and future for you always been so fraught with dimly perceived shadows?

In the midst of their “great tribulation” as the tenth century came to a close (AD 999) many saw within it Revelation’s end times. When that didn’t happen during the changing of the millennia, new understandings had to be grasped. The *world* seemed condemned to struggle on, somehow.

Are we then again, at the beginning of a new trilogy? The addition of this new *European* energy slowly set the stage for hope of reclaiming lost lands, as well as revenge for new persecutions suddenly heaped upon Christian pilgrims, and it came in the form of the counterattack of the “European Crusades.”

“In 969 the Fatimite dynasty extended its rule over Egypt and Palestine and with this change of rulers there came an end of cordial relations. The insults, and even injuries, that Christian pilgrims suffered aroused bitter feeling in the west. Finally Pope Sylvester II (999–1003) one of the best known popes and famous for his practical character, issued a call for volunteers for the purpose of freeing the Holy Land” (Amer. vol. 8; Crusades).

“**Decline of the Fatimid Power**—Al-‘Aziz’ son and successor al-Hakim (r. 996–1021) indulged in monstrous atrocities including the killing of Visiers, the destruction of Christian churches and the imposition of humiliating disabilities on Christians and Jews. His destruction of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was one of the many contributory causes of the Crusades” (Amer. vol. 11; Fatimids).

At first blush, the Crusades would appear to be an unlikely equivalent to the prime movers of the past, but maybe it has only been made to be seen like that because of the “bad press” the Crusades have gotten from media outlets of the modern era.

These outlets have given the impression that the Crusades were unwarranted invasions by aggressive mercenary armies, whose only aim was the looting and pillage of the traditional lands of others.

But **honest** history will record it [at least in its early part] as an attempt at restoration of stolen Christian/Roman lands and the relief of persecution of innocent pilgrims whose only wish was to visit the many shrines built during the many centuries of previous Christian occupancy.

Was this *God* answering the *pleadings of His people*? Was this anything like when Constantine came to the aid of persecuted Christians? It is difficult to discern. The Crusades did lift the onus of persecution of Christian pilgrims for a time. But it, in its imperfection, would not be sufficient in and of itself.

Then came the Mongol *horsemen!* (AD 1228) (Revelation’s Apocalypse?) Could this be a second leg needed to shore up the failings of the first, like the brothers of different natures? It had been clearly announced that they had come to destroy the arrogant shahs of Khwarizm, and all who might come to their aid. Their scythe of death grimly succeeded in shearing the Moslem Empire in half, and all that seemed to keep the other from sundering was the *heroic* decision of a crusader general.

He couldn’t seem to discern which was the least onerous choice, but decided to side with his Moslem counterpart who had ironically become the new “defender” of the Holy Land.

It eventually became apparent that the Golden Horde’s primary intent was to avenge the murder of their ambassadors who had been sent in peace to the courts of Islam. The Christians, for all that they had done, apparently had not been slated for extermination also. The Great Kahn had suddenly died in his palace, and his armies withdrew homeward only out of respect for their fallen leader. A great collective sigh of relief issued forth in response to the deliverance of all those who had felt threatened.

But for whom was the deliverance meant? The Christians would have to fight many long costly battles to imperfectly hold the Holy Lands, for a time only.

The Moslems lost half of their empire as a result of their haughty arrogance, but would be *saved* by the *enemy* whose lands they had stolen.

The Russian and Polish *Christian* princes would lose most of their lands from the stupidity of rushing out to defend them from an enemy who hadn’t intended to invade them except that their army’s flank had been threatened. And those *foolish* people would carry the “mark” of the “horsemen” in perpetuity.

The Europeans in heartfelt gratitude for their *deliverance* fell away even more quickly than any of *God’s* people had ever done before.

“The Inquisition created earlier [1184] [was meant] to counter the wide infiltration of heretical teaching [Catharism] into Catholic thought and behavior.

“With the last third of the thirteenth century (AD 1260+) France increasingly occupied Papal attention. From conflict over clerical taxation, between King Philip IV and Pope Boniface VIII (r 1294–1303), culminating in the latter’s capture at Angani (1303), relations passed to Papal capitulation at the Council of Vienne (1311–1312) to the monarch’s demand for the suppression of the Order of Templars. In 1309 the Holy See

took up residence in Avignon, France, where it remained until 1377...But the struggle of Pope John XXII (r. 1316–1334) and Emperor Louis IV damaged the prestige of both, while the growing luxury of the Roman Curia and its need for finances brought in a system for bestowing clerical office which caused harm for many years...At Rome and Avignon rival pontiffs reigned. With negotiations at a standstill, in 1409 the Council of Pisa deposed both claimants and selected the antipope Alexander V (d.1410)...Constance had condemned heresy in the teachings of John Wycliffe (d. 1384) and Jan Hus (executed at Constance, 1415). Conciliarism (the theory that a pope is subject to a council), however had been affirmed at the synod as it would be anew at the Council of Basel (1431–1449) which in 1439 deposed Pope Eugene IV (r. 1431–1447) and elected the antipope Felix V. Schism proved Basel's undoing and led to the resignation of its pontiff (1449), while Eugene's own Council of Ferrara, Florence (1438–1445) stoutly reasserted Papal Supremacy" (Amer. vol. 6; Catholic Church).

In an historically short period of time, as Catholicism seemed in a political dither among its popes and secular kings (AD 1184–1449), and while the Mongols were still settling in on Islam's former eastern provinces, a scourge of Black Death descended upon the whole world, exterminating from one-third to one-half of each population center that inhabited its many environments (AD 1446).

If that's the result of the *falling away*, of the latest trilogy, where does that leave us? What of the many elements left, yet to be enumerated in more recent history? What happened to those ring-like *echoes* through time, from the *pebble* that this Jesus *dropped* that started us on our latest Christian trilogy? Have they already cycled past our observation, or are we still riding the crest of these reverberations? Are there more behind us, just now coming within our view? And what about those that might be about to, as well as those whose time is yet to come? These cycles, as referred to earlier, that had begun in the time of Jesus, seem to sweep past ever lower the further from their *source* in time that they are when observed, and the closer that they are to this observer, the less able they are to be seen at all, with any clarity. Oh John! You think you had problems with perception!

What of the Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (AD 1300–1400) and the invention of movable type, and Martin Luther's protest against clerical excess in the early sixteenth century? The rise of the *common man* and modern science in the seventeenth, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and the beginnings of experimental science? Then there's the explosion of scientific discoveries in the nineteenth and twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century?

Are they only like reverberations in time or are they more? What part of a trilogy might they represent? Is the trilogy model still intact? Or is it here, but no longer discernable submerged as it might be in the deep currents of time? And might it rise one day, tsunami-like, from out of those depths to dash upon the shores of a distant time and place as evidence of its mighty power to influence ancient paradigms?

The Renaissance was a time when the *true* answers of the Church began to be tested by the divergent ones of the "men of discovery." In those early times the latter were forced to recant their beliefs at the threat of their lives, mirroring the recantations of the early Christians as they faced death by persecution.

In the long "protest" initiated by Marten Luther and carried on by others, the heretofore monolithic *Church* was now challenged on the *basis* of its answers, they must

accord with the Bible, members of the “Protest” declared as they appealed to the hierarchy to reground their answers. The discovery of modern printing methods facilitated the spreading of the knowledge of the biblical basis of those challenges. One of them was against the institution of the papacy along with its more questionable promulgations.

Not for the first time had the basis for this institution been opened to serious question. But all other challengers had been defeated or had only prevailed for a limited time.

The Bible tells us that the Apostle Peter had gone to Rome during the latter part of his missionary work. His purpose was to consecrate an already functioning group of *Followers of the Way*, which probably had been started by the Apostle Paul, although that interpretation has more recently come under challenge.

Peter’s primacy in the early church had been well established and respected by the many retellings of the story in which Jesus had asked of his disciples, “Who do the people say that I am?” He received several answers among which earlier prophets were mentioned.

Then he asked, “Who do *you* say that I am?”

The Bible tells us that Peter’s answer was almost immediate. “You are the Son of God!”

Jesus was said to reply, “Man has not told you this, but only My Father has revealed this to you, and upon this rock I will build my church!”

“The earliest picture that we have of the Christian Church presents the community rather than the bishop. The writings of Clement I (AD 88–97), the fourth heir to the prerogatives of the Apostle Peter) seem to point out the community as the seat of authority: The letter ascribed to Ignatius of Antioch addresses the church of the Romans; and Pope Soter in 170 speaks as in the name of the community, rather than in his own” (Amer. vol. 21, p. 252).

Sometime after Peter’s martyrdom in Rome, the office of bishop of Rome became established and over time became viewed as “First among Equals.” As later disagreements among other bishops were referred to this source, Peter’s successors began to become aware that a higher kind of primacy had been aggrandized by unplanned circumstance.

“After the fall of Jerusalem (in AD 135), Rome, the political mistress of the world, soon became the center of Christianity; other bishops began to consult Rome on ecclesiastical matters.”

Just when the title of pope was attached to this office is not certain, but in all probability it happened toward the middle of the second century AD. (It appeared to be a borrowing from a list of imperial titles.)

It had a bumpy existence throughout all of that first millennium as respect for the office fluctuated according to what its occupant brought to or removed from it. Why was it not seen as supreme from the beginning?

“It is not now maintained that the full significance of the Petrine primacy was manifest from the first in the life of Christianity; but rather...for certain reasons [it] did not at once show itself on the surface of ecclesiastical affairs, but rather with the expansion of the church, and in response to the needs of the times, developed into full vitality” (ibid).

Could it be that the office started out as a kind of executive head, overseen by a council of the community, to deal with urgent matters concerning communities further afield, and as these grew in volume became an ad hoc judicial reviewer of those matters seen as of lesser importance?

In time, many things were declared as doctrine by papal decree alone, according to those who occupied this office, the nominal head of all Christendom. Some declarations were accepted but many others were the subject of contest throughout that first millennium.

“In [AD] 194, Pope Victor took steps to enforce the Roman discipline by the excommunication of recalcitrants.

The pope’s power was much amplified by the impotency of persons condemned or extruded from their places, whether upon just accounts or wrongfully, and by faction.

Many other instances of papal interference for the restoration of bishops or the appointment of new bishops and the designation of others to act as vicars of the pontiff are also cited by Barrow” (ibid.).

Thus had the struggle for primacy engaged in by the papal office, the Roman general council, and the secular emperor, continued into the latter part of the fifteenth century when Martin Luther was born in AD 1483. His early life was rife with many signs of the brilliance with which he would challenge his world as he grew into manhood.

“For several years he had been engaged in a struggle for salvation...In connection with an exegetical (critical explanation or interpretation, esp. of scripture) pre-occupation with that particular passage of Romans 1:17.

“[For (in the gospel) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written ‘The just shall live by faith’]” (Amer. vol. 17, p. 857; Martin Luther).

“He discovered (most probably in the period between November 1512 and July 1513) what he regarded as the true meaning of the Christian Gospel: That God’s righteousness is not the standard of perfection to which the believer must conform but the divine action by which God renders the sinner righteous.”

This discovery launched him on a road that he was already well qualified to travel, into the paradigm of a new order of belief at sharp variance with long-established Catholic doctrine.

“This new faith permeated Luther’s lectures. It caused him to become ever more sharply critical of Scholastic theology because of its failure to be centrally oriented to the Bible...Luther replaced, after 1515, the sick priest of the city church of Wittenberg. In this capacity he could observe the harmful effect of easily available indulgences upon the religious life of his people.”

Just when the Doctrine of Indulgences was first promulgated I have not ascertained beyond an entry cited as *Code of Canon Law*, Can. 911, but it had been a long-established part of the Catholic version of the Christian message into the beginning of the sixteenth century. In a more recent addition to this rather skimpy knowledge base, an entry in the *California Political Review*, Mar./Apr. 2009, titled “What Really Led to the Crusades?” p. 30, the following can be found: “In the year 1394, eight years before Bajazet’s misfortunes, Pope Boniface the Ninth proclaimed a Crusade, with ample **indulgences** for those who engaged in it, to the countries that were especially open to the Ottoman attack” (bolding mine).

It would appear that indulgences were given to those who had previously engaged in less than holy actions, in order to *sanctify* them before engaging in the pope's *Holy War* of reprisal.

"In his Bull he bewails the sins of Christendom that had brought upon them the scourge that was the occasion of his invitation. He speaks of the massacres, the tortures, the slavery that had been inflicted upon the multitudes of the faithful" (ibid.).

It appears to me that these were given in this instance to qualify possibly unrepentant sinners for engagement in a holy enterprise. Might it have been seen at that time as an unusual but necessary exception? If so, by Martin Luther's time (1515) they appear to have been *granted* to anyone for a consideration (i.e. money.)

"When the offerings of the indulgence agent Johann Tetzel appeared to him to interfere with the regular confessional discipline of his parishioners he decided to act. In the night of All Saints Day (Oct. 31, 1517) Luther tacked to the door of the Schlosskirche (Castle Church) in Wittenberg 95 academic theses 'On the Power of Indulgences'... The point of his theses was that indulgences made sense only as release from temporal penalties imposed on the faithful by the priests; but if indulgences were understood as release from the temporal punishments of God or from pains...from guilt, they ran counter to the very spirit of the Christian religion which, Luther said, according to the teachings of Jesus, enjoins the believer to practice repentance throughout his whole life" (ibid.).

Thus had a gauntlet been unthinkingly thrown in the face of long-established ecclesiastical prerogatives.

"On this occasion he interpreted his theological presuppositions...in which he criticized Scholastic theology on biblical grounds for its reliance upon Aristotle and its defense of moral freedom.

"The Papal Curia opened an ecclesiastical trial against him (Aug. 7, 1518). Luther...appeared before Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg (Oct. 12-14, 1518) and refused to recant a sentence...which Cajetan interpreted as implying a rejection of the teaching authority of the pope...He [Luther] undertook historical studies and concluded that the authority which was claimed in the Roman church for the papacy could be supported only by Papal decretals of the preceding four centuries. (A papal document authoritatively determining some point of doctrine or church law.)

"And that it was contradicted by the tradition of the first 11 centuries of church history and especially by the Council of Nicaea. Luther defended these views in a public debate...at the University of Leipzig" (July 4-8, 1519).

After which he, "became...more strongly convinced that the Bible was the sole authority in the church, and he went on to conclude that the religious authority and particularly the primacy of the papacy blocked the relationship of the Lordship of Christ in the hearts of Christians and that the pope was therefore the antichrist.

"Henceforth, he considered the institution of the papacy (as) the enemy of Christ, confound(ing) Christianity by pretending to rule it."

Would Luther have gone on to *discover* such a glaring flaw in the ecclesiastical structure of this *Catholic version* of the Christian church had he not had his honor and life so threatened by this new *priestly class*? Had they, as he accused them, fallen away into this "new perversion" of those *First Works*?

“After the Leipzig debate, Luther called openly for a reformation of the church...On biblical grounds he denied the validity of the principles on which the papacy based its rule in the church; the supremacy of the church over the state; the supremacy of the papacy over the general council; the right of the papacy to regard itself as the authoritative interpreter of the Scripture.” (Triumvirates never seem to last do they?)

Thus is seen the consequence of the continued drifting away from their *First Love*, during the reign of the successors to the Apostolic church of Christ in the millennium-and-a-half of their suzerainty. The *gift of the white stone* had not been enough to anchor them. Instead the papacy, like an inchworm, had slowly drawn to itself, all authority within the church, to become a “clerical dictatorship.”

The *One who will return* would be *surprised* at how this *servanthood of the overseers* had been skewed into the direct opposite of what he had taught.

The promise of the *Morning Star*, the universality of the Christian institution, had imploded upon itself in the afternoon of its ascendancy, leaving its fractured remnants to careen across the *heavens of Man’s infidelity!*

The rise of the age of the *common man* and the birth of modern science brought about a diminished ability of the *Church* to dictate the limits of behavior of the populace that it oversaw. Certain other hypocrisies within clerical behavior became increasingly more commonly known due largely to the rapid spread of printed communications.

And now the *men of discovery* invaded the walls of institutional belief in the form of priests who sought to discover the true “mind of God” through the study of the evidence within the natural world of His creation.

In the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the *common man* began to appeal for a share of the right to dictate the environment surrounding his range of personal and political behavior. An appeal that ended in his demand for the right to judge those who would govern over him, and choose those appointed to set the limits of his morality.

And what of the new science of proof through testing, whose answers would be tested in the court of public discourse. Those answers would now more insistently set the course of public discourse.

And what of those institutions, with the myriad discoveries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, upon whose elephantine backs were transported the hopes, the expectations, and the problems of the societies of the whole world it would seem? Some of those institutions’ members would now arrogantly protest the need of even a *co-regency* in the sourcing of the answers that ought to be addressed concerning the solutions applied to all life.

The arrogance of the young rebel answers the arrogance of the past dictates of the ancient patriarch.

“Who ever needed you?” is flung across the furthering distance between them, like a young son full of his new physical powers declaring that now, only *he* should choose the way forward for all.

Have we now come to that distant time and place where the tsunami of Man’s intellect rises up to dash upon the shores of that ancient edifice of belief, to challenge the further need of that system at all?

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them

thoroughly. They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth' (Genesis 11:1-4).

I've referred several times through the earlier chapters to the title, "The Bible Is a Parable" and within it, illustrating other lesser parables, of which the Tower of Babel is one. In chapter 11, "How High the Sky," I depicted a real-world event that this parable might make reference to, a catastrophic flood, and the building of a platform as a place of safety. This is what I call the physical event that the parable reflects.

At this time I feel additionally called upon to present an alternative, an intellectual condition that this biblical story might be meant to warn to us of.

It comes, it would seem, in the form of another parable-like story.

Halfway through the fifteenth century (AD 1446) a "catastrophic flood" of a different kind took place. A pestilential flood overwhelmed the whole world, for a time. Many households just disappeared, many villages died, tribes were decimated, many cities were severely wounded, and whole nations tottered on the brink. Mankind had not the knowledge to even try to prepare itself for this, and millions succumbed quickly and gruesomely.

Yes, there had been plagues before, but not, it would seem, of this magnitude. Something was needed that would serve as a bulwark against a recurrence. Knowledge into the cause and prevention of such disasters became an urgent necessity, from which modern medicine was born.

Slowly, over the broad expanse of cultural time, an elevation of information both old and new began to be constructed. First, a crude *base platform* of discovery was organized and erected. One that might *save* many who otherwise would have been swept away by a recurrent visit of that curious *horseman* that "The Revelation" tried to warn us of. It was a *Renaissance* of critical observation into the physical world and how it was organized. Investigations into the nature of disease and the agents of its spread began to finish off the crudeness of the original construction.

A plethora of other knowledge was added to *this base* without an understanding of its relevance, and the groundwork was laid for the erection of a *second level*. The age of *Enlightenment* began to rise upon that *earlier foundation*.

Now, many kinds of knowledge streamed in, at an ever-increasing velocity making haphazard cross-connections with seemingly unrelated fellow occupants. The *engineers* had little understanding of their *edifice*, but continued to build regardless of their limited ability to perceive its purpose.

Then an avalanche of discovery rolled in called the *Industrial Revolution*. This *third level* had brought a *quickenning* to the entire entity, attempting to organize all activity into a singular whole, while bringing forth a material cornucopia of unimaginable proportions. This new *level* stood out in sharp relief to those below it, as if dressed stone had been set upon a *lesser base*.

Another level now arose in rapid succession, higher than all the rest, with a gleaming finish that boasted of the many facets of the perfection inherent within its construction. The *Communications Revolution* had arrived, roaring its magnificence to the ethos that closely attended it.

And finally, *the level* that can boast of its quickness to attend to the every whim of its myriad parts. Aably lofting itself into the stratosphere of intellectual perfection, and launching Mankind from out of the cradle of his birth into a much larger creation, has now appeared upon the scene.

The *Computer Revolution*, the promise of placing a *heavenly mien* upon Mankind, proclaiming that the arrogance of knowledge is sufficient to all things temporal and eternal, has arrived and is master of all that it surveys. No need to look further afield for a higher attainment. This most brilliant *apex* is sufficient to all concerns. The *Alpha and Omega* has descended upon Man's shoulders crowning Him Lord of all things for all time!

"Who needs You?" this heedless *apprentice* shouts to the cosmos.

"Man does!" might echo the answer. "If he has the ears to hear with."

"Are you sufficient to prevent your own extermination?" a critically important question clangs loudly within the *tower* of Man's technology with no presently affirmable answer.

Might even this mighty *tower* come tumbling down due to an *extraterrestrial* catastrophe, with the puny insensate remains of Man strewn widely afield as the price of his arrogance? It has, according to science, happened to the dinosaurs, masters of a different kind of arrogance in a bygone age.

How many times has the *tower* of Man's civilizations collapsed before the tempest of his God's *nature*?

In the beginning, Man's first hint of the *Presence* that he became so minimally aware of was like the softest touch of a whisper.

Was that *whisper* meant to eventually turn into the roar of a "*burning mountain*," as mentioned in the book of Revelation, when another asteroid is predicted to bring on the end of days, as it did to science's dinosaurs?

Or, will this ancient *whisper* be the final confirmation of the power that undergirds ageless theology, while allowing the theory of evolution to be one among many explanations of how the Creator might have gone about the business of Creation?

The wisdom of the ages reminds Man that he is not alone in this world, and that his science is a sword that can cut two ways. These two juxtaposed sources of intelligence must combine in their search for the *Unified Force* that Man's science still seeks.

He would be the wiser if Man could recognize his apprenticeship position for what it is. He, for all of his brilliance, cannot be a light unto himself. He must come to the *Perfect* knowledge that the highest that he can attain to, is to be an effective reflector.

This time, and for all time, let us remain mindful that God is Creator and that Man, for all his accomplishments, is only His imitator. Does history need to repeat itself even one more time for us to get the real message? Will there be anyone left to *hear*?

"Over the door in one room of Hellbrunn (Austria) (an elaborate Baroque palace built by Salzburg's archbishop Marcus Sitticus in the early 17th century) there is a painted Latin Motto, *numen vel dissita iungit* (a divine power unites even opposites).

It is my hope that somewhere within these words, so painstakingly transcribed, this *power* has, in some way, ministered to your understanding.

The following excerpt is from Wm. Tyndale's Prologue to the first printed English New Testament, published in AD 1525.

“For we have not received the gifts of God for ourselves only, or for to hide them; but for to bestow them unto the honoring of God and Christ and the edifying of the congregation, which is the body of Christ.”

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Chapter 20

Do We Know Where we are Headed?

A Contemplation of Soul, Spirit, Mind, and the Brain And Where They Might Take us

If, as psychology implies, the age of the beginning of the consciousness of self is approximately three years, then my earliest awareness was filled with a combination of a slightly exaggerated metaphor of motherly love, from one young enough to still feel that doll play was equivalent to the nurture of the real thing; and the still childish desires of self.

My mother, by the time of my arrival, already burdened with my older brother and sister, and still bereft of any clear understanding of the physical processes that produced us, seemed to oscillate uncertainly between self and the servant-hood thrust upon her by circumstances beyond her ability to comprehend or knowingly accept.

To compound this I, sometime around my second year, came down with a sickness that would command more of her attention, if I were to survive, than it was in her nature to produce with any consistency.

The first year of my newly *self-conscious* condition seemingly was filled with the alternate nurture and neglect that I could *feel* but would not remember.

How this affected my later expectations of what life ought to be like is difficult to discern, but as far back as I can remember, I have felt a certain caution toward entertaining anything new or uncertain.

I have often been told that I am just like my father in many ways. He was young when he married my even younger mother. He had been the reluctant economic head of my widowed grandmother's household from the age of fourteen until he married.

The concept of *soul*, as early as I can remember encountering the term, was a gossamer kind of something that everyone seemed to *know* was there somewhere but didn't fully understand how. It was supposed to help us to behave as expected, as a curb to our *selfish* nature. It was a kind of gift that *God* had given only to us out of all His varied creation, for a purpose that we were meant to discover.

In my world, many everyday references to it were in the form of clichés like “Bless my soul and body!” These seemed not to be meant so much an outright request as a term associated with wonderment.

My earliest serious encounter with the concept of *soul* probably came from my paternal grandmother. There was a spiritual kind of *battle* going on that engaged much of her thoughts, attention and linguistic efforts as she daily read from the *Good Book* during the time that she cared for us, evidently hoping to alter the perceived effects of our earlier

upbringing. Alas, she was far better at using these *strange* terms than she was at explaining them to us.

An understanding of *spirit* seemed to have come somewhat later. Similar to *soul*, but somehow different, it came across as something separate from our bodies that might have been meant to endure longer. This helped me to understand the concept of *ghosts* when I became aware of that rather frightening possibility, as the common vernacular presented it. My grandmother's youngest son, still being raised by her, provided the most graphic examples of these *apparitions*, in the stories that he delighted in scaring us with, especially the *gotcha* ending to all of them. Would we ever learn? Apparently not, and my fear of the dark most probably came from this background.

Mind seemed to be something more tangible, but still an intangible repository of memories, dreams, thoughts, and desires both expressed and silently contemplated. It was where thoughts that just came to us were stored, later to be savored or surrendered. It was where we were supposed to work things out before we tried them out in the real world.

In an early interpolation it was seen to somehow be connected with the brain's repository, the head, which was what we were supposed to use before we acted, as we encountered things that we were already supposed to know about. The *mind* was something that everyone knew that they had, but no one had ever been able to prove what were the conditions of residence, or even if the *brain* was its certain receptacle. The *mind* was somehow in the *brain*, but was it of the brain? This was entertained with a hopeful kind of certitude but gave hints in a way little understood, that it was inexplicably divorced from it. The *mind* kind of floated within the cellular structure somehow, but nothing has ever been known with any certainty.

But the *brain*, as everyone knows, is an organ of the body, a kind of coordinator of all that the body is able to do. Memories are stored in it in a way connected with the *mind*, but no one, until the advent of modern *science*, seemed to be able to define how that connectivity works, and they've only just begun to consider the *wonder* of it all.

The first two terms, *soul* and *spirit* seem to have come to us through the insight of religious interpretation, the *wisdom of the ages*. The *soul* appears as an explanation of the rather remarkable difference between humans and the rest of the living entities of the world.

The latter of the two, the *spirit*, appears to attempt to define a certain essential, non-physical element, an *essence* that seems to be common to all life, and apparently disappears at its end, or dissociates from it as some would describe an otherwise puzzling process.

The *mind* seems to be an intellectual construct that appears to have been with Man a long, long time. As far back as the dimmest of species' memory can carry us, it has been a recognizable entity; a kind of thinking machine that has made us somehow different than any other kind of life-form. It has been used as a term in some ways synonymous with *soul* and sometimes, to a lesser degree with *spirit*.

At this juncture, dictionary definitions may, in a way be helpful, as they seem to give a spread of meanings, how they're generally understood, in the many ways that they have been used.

Soul:

1. the principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in man, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, and commonly held to be separable in existence from the body; the spiritual part of man as distinct from the physical.

2. the spiritual part of man regarded in its moral aspect, or as believed to survive death and be subject to happiness or misery in a life to come.

3. the emotional part of man's nature, or the seat of the feelings or sentiments.

4. high-mindedness; noble warmth of feeling, spirit, or courage, etc.

5. the animating principle or essential element or part of something.

6. the inspirer or moving spirit of some action, movement, etc.

7. the embodiment of some quality.

8. a disembodied spirit of a deceased person.

9. a human being, a person.

Spirit:

1. the principle of conscious life; the vital principle in man, animating the body or mediating between body and soul.

2. the incorporeal part of man, the soul as separate from the body at death.

3. conscious, incorporeal being, as opposed to matter.

4. a supernatural, incorporeal being, esp. one inhabiting a place or thing or having a particular character.

5. an inspiring or animating principle such as pervades and tempers thought, feeling or action.

6. The divine influence as an agency working in the heart of man.

7. (in biblical use) a divine inspiring or animating being or influence.

8. The third person of the Trinity: Holy Spirit. The Spirit, God.

9. The soul or heart as the seat of feelings or sentiments, or as prompting to action.

10. To carry (away, off, etc.) mysteriously or secretly.

Mind:

1. that which thinks, feels, and wills, exercises perception, judgment, reflection, etc., as in a human or other conscious being.

2. *Psychol.* The psyche; the totality of conscious and unconscious activities of the organism.

3. The intellect or understanding, as distinguished from the faculties of feeling or willing; the repository of intelligence.

4. a conscious or intelligent agency or being.

5. (*To mind something*) to pay attention to, heed, or obey (a person, advice, instructions, etc.); to look after, take care of, or tend; to be careful, or wary.

(There are many seemingly synonymous meanings applied to this word implying the use of rational thought to guide decision-making in the everyday as well as critical-point crises that arise in experiencing life.)

Brain:

1. The soft convoluted mass of grayish and whitish nerve substance which fills the cranium of man and other vertebrates.

2. (*usually plural*) understanding; intellectual power; intelligence.

(To "use your brains" is to weigh the possible advantage against the probable consequences of actions contemplated, both mundane and irreversibly important.)

(Note: all unbracketed descriptions under the four title headings are from *The American College Dictionary*—Random House, 1967 edition.)

In the beginning, as I have come to understand it, when Man first became aware of that *Something* just beyond his ability to sense directly, he was wont to associate it with an unseen predator. When he began to replace that predator in the world of the hunt, that unseen *Something* began to take on the form of an *Essence* of his still dangerously large and powerful prey that gave them abilities that he recognized that he did not possess.

He *imagined* his way into rituals that would allow him to feel it possible to possess some part of that *essence*. He went in pursuit of the *spirit* of the envied animals. But these *essences* became many, and this presented a kind of aspect that bred confusion.

Only much later would he be able to extrapolate a kind of *spirit* as the source behind the powers of climatic disturbances. But then, as he progressed in his understanding of these forces, he realized that even they were not the sources of that *Essence* that he had always seemed to feel, but oh, so imperfectly.

“Then (God) said ‘Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.’ And behold the lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks into pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice” (I Kings 19:11–12, NKJV).

Then, as his search widened, he looked up into the heavens, and it became much easier to picture that bright *Spirit* that appeared with such regularity as being what he sought. But, the heavens also produced many lesser *points-of-light* that moved with some kind of regularity. Again those spirits became many and his increasing knowledge of them left him uncertain.

The *heavens* still beckoned but that *Essence* eluded him. The evolution in his thinking would not allow the many objects within the heavens to be more than the heavens themselves. The *spirits* therein could not be what he sought and the memory of all the other attempts to understand this *Essence* haunted him.

This *Entity* that he continued to *seek* was a *Singularity*, of this he was slowly becoming ever more certain, but what form it should take is still a work-in-progress.

Early on, as man experienced life and death in its many forms, within his ever-increasing ability to dictate these two extremes upon other life-forms, he learned to ascribe a certain uniquely natural *spirit* unto himself.

As he learned to thrive beyond mere survival he began to discern this *special* spirit as in a way superior to those that he had once so ardently pursued in the world of the hunt. He began to call that special quality his *soul* as compared with the *spirit* that was thought to be in all living creatures.

Somewhere within this progression of being, possibly associated with the development of linguistic symbols, man began to wonder about the construct of *thinking*, that thing that he did as he looked at something, or sometimes at nothing in particular. That wondering that usually preceded attempting to do something different; that remembering of what had gone before; that *seeing* something that wasn't exactly there. Again, what was *heard* without coming to the attention of others; sometimes *felt* when all that was occasioned by it was a certain quickening within the body. Probably because of this, thinking began to be associated with either the head or the heart. And the thing that

did this *thinking* become known as the *mind*. And this, over time, became as real to man as the other bodily senses.

That *Spirit/Essence* that had so long teased around the fringes of his five physical senses, could only be more fully contemplated by the *sixth sense*, that construct labeled *mind*.

Again, over time, it became understood that there was more than one kind of thinking. There was the kind that galvanized the body to action associated with a specific desire; and then there was that which became associated with some new way, of contemplating, of believing, of doing. The first became associated with the terms, feelings and temperament, while the second became identified with intelligence, creative ability, or imagination.

The brain was early on seen as an organ of the body, like the heart, liver, lungs and kidneys. All were interconnected in some way through the blood, but what was their function? The kidneys, the producer of urine, was a remover of a waste product. The lungs took in air, a vital function, for being deprived of it quickly brought on death. The liver's function was more difficult to work out. It was, like the heart, a singular organ, centrally located, and tied closely into the blood system. Unlike the heart, whose function seemed to be to move the blood, the liver's function remained unknown, but was thought to have some kind of magical property and was used at times to attempt to foretell the future.

The brain was another puzzle. Critically connected to the blood system, it is located atop the bony spine in man and in the forefront in all other vertebrates. It was in close proximity with two vital senses, sight and hearing. It was discovered early on, that deprived of it, an animal lost all ability to coordinate the actions of its limbs even before the death that quickly followed.

The heart seemed to be connected to the reactive kind of thought known as *feelings*. But was the brain, so close to two vital physical senses, somehow connected to the *seeing* and *hearing* of the other kind of thinking?

The *mind* was a "thinking machine." Its function seemed to be known, but the only clue to its location seemed to be this association to the brain called *thought*.

Spirit seemed to have a "source" that it went back to. *Soul* seemed to reach out toward that *Something* just beyond man's physical senses. Was *mind* an entity that was bound within the five physical senses of the individual, or did it too, have the quality of association with something outside of this physical existence?

Its apparent uniqueness to humankind appears to have given man the ability to reach out, in his all too successful attempt to control his environment. But is the *mind* trapped in some manner within the cellular processes of the individual brain, disappearing when its host fails?

The Bible and much of man's philosophical writings seem to lend some kind of synonymous existence to the three terms, *soul*, *spirit*, and *mind*, as if they had some kind of commonality. But *mind* also seemed to have had a kind of ephemeral connection to the brain. Is it possible for it to invoke some kind of condition that could render it capable of a separate existence beyond the brain, as has been postulated for the *soul*?

This is a question that seems to have had no answer beyond belief, in the life and knowledge of man until recently. Science within its study of neurology attempts to delve into this question whether it is fully aware of its function as investigator or not.

Its probing into the seat of cognition; memory, emotions, as well as all the sensory connections to bodily function are already well advanced, but the connection to the functions of mental capacity as it may be associated with the understanding of *mind* are still only in the initial stages. The neurological investigations into the cellular seat that must support that construct still evades certain definition.

In Kevin Shapiro's article in the May 2007 issue of *Commentary*, he, in reviewing Marvin Minsky's book, *The Emotional Machine* gives a good example of current thinking on how the mind works.

"In addition to emotional thinking, then, we learn to apply strategies like imagination, logic, and reasoning by means of analogy...For example, in order to remember what worked in the past, we need mechanisms to form and retrieve memories; in order to imagine what might happen in the future, we need to be able to make predictions based on our commonsense knowledge. The power of the human mind, for Minsky, lies in its vast repertoire of different ways to think, and in its ability to switch among them in order to pursue its goals...[He] acknowledges that it is useful for us to conceive of our goals as originating from our 'selves'—mental constructs that embody our personal identities. But, in his view of the mind, no single set of resources can be identified as self. Instead, our minds contain different models of ourselves at different levels: some models represent our basic needs, others our aspirations, and still others various aspects of our personalities. In reality, says Minsky, there is no central executive in charge of our minds. Rather, there is a collection of diverse processes, with critics that interrupt each other and compete for control. The 'self' is merely a convenient fiction that enables us to get on with our lives without worrying about our various goals all at once."

On the other hand, Shapiro says, "One of [Noam] Chomsky's best-known ideas is that a system as complex as language cannot be learned from scratch. Instead, the human mind must be pre-programmed with the ability to acquire and utilize human language, including the capacity to represent sounds, words, and the rules of grammar. By studying how the process of language-acquisition unfolds, Chomsky believes that we can gain some insight into how the human mind works."

(However) "most psychologists would agree with Minsky's postulate that our basic intuitive theories in many domains can be revised and revamped as we acquire more knowledge and develop new modes of thought," Shapiro continues.

"[He] acknowledges that we have very little introspective insight into the thought processes we were born with...as for the larger mysteries—like the nature of meaning and the origins of consciousness—it is not clear that Minsky has much to say beyond identifying the solutions that he thinks are bad."

At this beginning stage in the study of neurology, delving into that complicated construct, there seem to be more questions than answers, which of course is normal. If the future proceeds as scientists have done in the past, there will eventually be many more answers.

But answers come from many kinds of *thinking*, that product of the mind that only humans seem to have, or is that just the vanity caused by the great difference that separates us from all other life? Why did they seem to stop while we kept on keeping on?

And in the long journey that this very construct has helped us to navigate, we seem to have progressed from *wondering*, the questioning that seems to have no immediate answers; to *believing* where some answers did come, but not enough to prevent new

wondering; to philosophy, that contemplation of life to discover its possible meaning; to the *proofs* of Experimental Science, that only seemed to have launched our wondering into new realms. Has this truly come about by the merest of chance, or has there been a kind of purpose behind it all? Just wondering.

Meanwhile, the more mature parts of science in the past unknowingly organized itself for the study of physical life and how it came about. Geology, archaeology, biology, anthropology, among others, within the narrow goals of their specialty, developed large amounts of information toward what few if any understood would become a much larger search.

Only as these specialties began a process of overlap did synthesizers serendipitously arrive upon the scene with the practiced insight of putting the two-and- two from the various lists of information together. Slowly, and seemingly haphazardly, they stitched together the fabric of a theory of how life might have come to be as it appears today. It eventually became known as the theory of evolution.

Simply stated, it attempted to trace physical life from its earliest observed beginnings as simple one-celled organisms that seem to have eventually evolved up through ever more complex varieties culminating in the line of mammals one branch of which became humans. The process that appeared to accomplish this seemingly haphazard process eventually became known as genetic mutation.

A spirited discussion erupted on all sides shortly after the original promulgation of the theory of evolution in the early through the middle of the nineteenth century (the 1800s). From the immediate and abject negation by religious authority, some branches of philosophy, and organizations of the laity, to eager acceptance by many of the branches that make up science, a sometimes mean-spirited dialogue continues even now.

Many of the objections challenging a specific portion of this scientific proposition were eventually answered by the research necessary to restore the order of the theory, until it stands today as the preeminent answer, in the world of Man's knowledge, as to how we came to be as we are today.

Man's *mind* has constructed a "virtual reality" almost as convincing as the "natural" thing. And this, out of the bits and pieces discovered separately and seemingly haphazardly, then painstakingly pieced together by the same *construct* that has made serendipity appear to approximate the miraculous. But have we gone too far? Will the arrogance of our intelligence carry us where sanity would otherwise hesitate to go?

From the extreme of acceptance that declares that Man's science has become supreme, with there now being "no need" for the "superstitious" dogma of religion, to the angry declarations to the opposite, I stand in independent and apparently lonely opposition.

As I've stated in earlier chapters: those who seek to impose a theory, no matter how complete it appears, as if it were fully proven fact are dead wrong. While many proofs have been developed in support of this elegant theory, there are still questions that need answers. Turning this theory into a system of laws by the fiat of denunciation of its competitors discourages the very research necessary to obtain that objective, if indeed that is ever possible.

Accepting it as the best answer yet is not the same as declaring it the only answer. This is the mistake that religion has already made, to the sad diminishment of the many truths still apparent within its works.

Any answer that has stood the test of time should be granted the respect that its longevity deserves. The newest of answers that stretch man's perception toward the goal of the ultimate reality must be at least respectfully entertained. Anything less is the commission of the most senseless of all suicides. The *mind* is an awful thing to waste because of any kind of mental prohibition!

In the Bible there is a passage that says it all, "Let him who has ears to hear with, Listen!" There are none so perfect that they have no need to heed this advice.

The newest of answers coming from science has convincingly posited the most likely process that has brought us to where we are in this physical world. The oldest of all answers that declares that we are not alone in this world, that there is still something beyond our best efforts at detection that seeks something from us, or for us, is still the most eternal of all truths.

Science presents us with the parable called physical evolution. Is the larger meaning that we are meant to reach for also the one which religion has forever strained at directing us toward, the *heaven* that is its ultimate goal? Can we trust our mind alone to help us go where no one has ever gone before, and tell of it?

And, does this same *religion*, unmindful of the similarity to its own quest, direct us toward that evolutionary "leap of faith" that it "girds our loins" with, that's meant to ensure our best effort? Is it possible that "they know not what they [really] do"?

Can we, without the ancient guidance of *science's* Siamese twin, *religion*, muster the foresight as well as the fortitude necessary to make this last or at least next evolutionary leap into an existence as strange to us as that which faced the first fish that ever tried to breathe air?

The mind seems to work in mysterious ways, its answers to acquire. But without it where, oh where would we be? Up a creek without a paddle, or maybe still in a tree?

While bi-pedalism freed Man's hands to manipulate his environment into the tools of his survival, his brain was the organ whose unnatural development appeared to foster his virtual escape from the confines of the world of nature that he apparently arose from.

His *mind* having developed in some manner from the unusual activity of his *brain*, over *eons* of time, is a construct that has become so *real* as to take on at least some of the aspects of another physical sense. It appears to be the element that has raised Man so far above the rest of *natural* life as to make him seem as if he were a *special* creation.

The concept of *soul* far more ephemeral than the seemingly solid idea of *mind* appears to be a *bridge of being*. Was it intended to carry Man from out of the natural into a contemplated realm more *real* than *our physical reality*? Might it be thought of as a *life preserver* to *save* Man and raise him up out of his meager, linear existence?

And then there is *spirit*. From the beginning Man was not quite sure what it was, only that it seemed, in the eye of his mind, to *be* there. The earliest sense, that it was something like a predator, was soon supplanted in Man's long search for a likeness to attach to this surreality. The feeling that it was something like the *essences* associated with the hunt taught Man about the good and the bad of life's experiences.

Then as he tried to *see* its likeness in the forces of nature this duality was extended to these *gods* who were many times seen as capricious and needed sacrificial offerings to assuage the *bad* or *evil* side of their natures.

Finally as he elevated these *spirits* to the celestial realm he began to understand a kind of hierarchy among them, but they seemed too remote to have a care for the needs of mankind. A sun god, the epitome of this elevation was unapproachable without a strong feeling of the danger that a physical observation always exacted. This appalling vision of a god so uncaring eventually led to a kinder gentler representation that progressed through a chimera of previous animal versions, finally leading to a more humanlike, then more approachable human stand-in. But other representations became too human and bred the contempt of familiarity.

So today we still mentally stand in the presence of this *Spirit* this *Essence*, wondering if it is possible to envision a *Creator* superior to, and outside of His creation and yet able to *reach* in toward us in a most personal way? Man, still blinded by the veil of his linear imagination, gropes toward that *Presence* never quite sure that his halting steps bring him closer or take him farther away from this omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent magnificent obsession.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all
And faintly trust the larger hope
—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memorium*

“As (CS) Lewis wrote to one correspondent who had thanked him for the strengthening effect of his Christian-themed books upon her life, ‘As for my part in it, remember that anyone (or anything) may be used by the Holy Spirit as a conductor. I say this not so much from modesty as to guard against any danger of your feeling, when the shine goes out of my books (as it will) that the real thing is in any way involved. It mustn’t fade when I do’” (excerpted from a review by James E. Peterson, Washington Times, 03-26-2007).

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Chapter 21

The “Book” and the Brain

Science Plays Catch-up?

I was casually perusing my latest issue of *Healthy Years*, from the UCLA Division of Geriatrics (vol. 4G), when two short articles caught my attention, “The Brain Benefits From Exercise and Good Habits” and “Calorie Restriction and Carb-cutting for Alzheimer’s.”

The first announced that “a brain hosted by a healthy body and given its own ‘fitness’ routines works more easily and efficiently, according to a recent study led by Gary Small, MD, professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral sciences, at UCLA.”

It went on to indicate an exercise and dietary regimen that would lay a foundation toward accomplishing that goal, adding that “stress management techniques and brain

stimulation exercises like cross-word puzzles should be part of a mental exercise component.” It concluded that, “the group who followed the healthy longevity routines showed a decrease in brain metabolism, suggesting that their brains operated more efficiently, with less glucose fuel. They also performed better than the control group in verbal fluency.”

So, what does this mean? I wondered. My brain, already in gear, began to follow the ghost of a larger conclusion than what the article seemed to be witnessing to. A healthy body can supply the brain with a more steady supply of glucose, and if the brain isn't a *couch potato*, it can more efficiently use what it's been given to work with.

But the brain instructs the body on how it will react with the surrounding environment for the purposes of survival. It can also instruct the body on how it will supply the brain above and beyond the desire to satisfy its somatic self. But what instructs the brain on how best to do this?

We've been taught that experience while a difficult teacher is a sure one. But sometimes, experience comes at the expense of the individual. If others are present though, they may profit from it if memory recall is able to be invoked in an appropriate venue. If this can be institutionalized in some manner, the memories of elders, genealogies, oral and then written history, there can be reference made to more than personal experience and a code of appropriate conduct can be tabulated and taught. A *book* of rules can then be constructed as a ready reference and an institutional *memory*.

The second article dealt with “the topic of brain maintenance, [in] new studies from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine [which adds] to the growing body of evidence that nutrition plays a significant role in the development or prevention of Alzheimer's disease (AD)...researchers found that restricting caloric intake overall, and carbohydrate intake in particular, triggered [the kind of] brain activity associated with longevity, reducing the build-up of beta-amyloid peptide, the main component of the plaque build-up in the brains of AD patients. On the other hand, a diet high in calories and based on saturated fat caused the build-up of beta-amyloid.”

If I may use the example of automotive performance as a metaphor, it sounds as if this describes the ideal in a car motor that runs on computer-controlled carburetion where lean-burn is the standard regime.

A change toward maximum performance is required for only relatively short periods of time, which requires an instant change to *richer* carburetion. This change is instantly supplied by the computer *brain* that controls the ability to change performance requirements as conditions dictate.

The previous regime, before computer control, was an unchangeable setting for *average* performance. When less performance was required, a condition of *richness* of fuel supplied was in evidence wherein incomplete oxidation (burning) left a residue of carbon that slowly coated the burning chamber and exhaust piping, shortening the lifetime of the *engine* that supplied the *umph* of performance. An engine left running on idle over a long period of time then would develop carbon clogging that at some stage would begin to interfere with performance in the median range where it was set for average efficiency and performance, something akin to cholesterol buildup in the body. Whenever greater than average performance became the normal requirement, a regime of diminishing returns would be invoked. The greater the performance required the greater the fuel quantity expended to overcome the partial clogging. But with each incremental

increase in performance comes a lowering of the efficiency of converting the fuel to motion. So pressing toward the maximum attainable would cause a greater amount of partially burned fuel to escape the process, settling on the chamber and piping walls. From either extreme a median was required for longevity of reliable performance. Needless to say since computer-controlled carburetion, fuel efficiency has become many times better than the old *manual-setting*, middling-performance regime.

With this metaphor in place it appears that, like the computer controller, the *brain* can demand whatever it needs for the body to perform in whatever manner it desires or is needed by exterior circumstance. The computer controller in the metaphor has its variety of regimes programmed into it, but how does the brain acquire its various regimes? Experience would be the first and most logical answer, but desire is an eminently older control mechanism, and other less ancient sources have come into existence, creating cooperative control and inhibitory impulses.

With the foregoing in mind, if the body has been in a regime of extended idling performance, no amount of signaling will drive it efficiently much beyond its usual level of performance. If commands are urgent and persistent enough they will build up a stress that can shorten the life of the body it commands. If fuel intake (appetite) is higher than performance requirements, fuel storage will take place along the transportation corridors, meant for future availability. If the bodily piping itself is subjected to this clogging (cholesterol, etc.), the commanded supply cannot be met and bodily performance drops to a level that matches the restriction.

It appears that something similar happens within the brain itself. It can cause the body to exercise, but if it does not exercise itself, pathways can become clogged (Beta-amyloid?) and function diminishes (dementia?). When this happens, the brain cannot choose the optimal operational regime for itself or the body that it commands.

Desire, while normally associated with the body, is actually a function of the brain. It is a series of operational controls that the brain uses to direct bodily function toward survival activities.

Experience when recalled expeditiously can instruct the brain on the limits of the use of any desire modality for the good of the whole. But experience can only add up as activities repeat themselves. Mistakes are made.

Many times a brain/body system does not survive long enough to benefit from what personal experience alone can caution it away from repeating. Language itself seems to have developed as a way of institutionalizing experience. An understanding of what was *good* and what was *bad* began to be separated out as this institution enlarged itself.

At first, oral recitation was the only method of broadcasting what must be shared. Ages would pass before this was improved upon. Then symbols representing the sounds of language were etched indelibly upon stone, and then on other more portable surfaces.

Broken pottery was used but could not be easily gathered together and collated into requisite collections. Animal skins were an improvement that eventually evolved toward the thinner paper successors (papyrus, etc.).

This led to books, volumes, then collections, and libraries, as experience was archived exponentially. Some of it became confusing, as what worked in one area seemed of somewhat lesser use in another.

Ways of *seeing* things developed into tabulated philosophies of behavior, one of which became the Bible. It tells of the history of a whole people and their experience with what worked and what did not, and why.

Long-term *good* has always been more difficult to discern, but when institutional *memory* is available and studied, what was *seen* to be effective, beyond the lifetime of any single individual to experience, evolved into *the wisdom of the ages*. It was averred to be more effective than any other *Master Control* regime and would free up areas of the brain for other more creative concerns.

But many brain/body systems try to operate without being plugged into the *Master-programmer*, and a long-idling brain and/or body may find it next to impossible to change its regime on its own. Similar results may occur when the desire modality is commanded to perform too often. What may seem beneficial in the short term many times turns out to be detrimental over a longer time frame.

Instead of just letting experience alone inform, would it not be better to download from the *Master-programmer* all those regimes which would allow the maximum of information to be applied to every life situation?

It is amazing what can be extrapolated from simple, small pieces of information in a *Health* magazine. Now we can imagine a brain/body system operating close to maximum efficiency, with a knowledge system far greater than individual experience alone can provide. The *Book* is where the great variety of *Control Regimes* may be found, and works well, especially when that Master-programmer is invited to take full control!

If at first you don't succeed
Try reading the instructional manual

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Chapter 22

Two Beginnings?

Genesis and Jesus

The Old Testament story in Genesis opens with a portrayal of the beginning of creation, the origin of everything. The New Testament's *Beginning*, while different, reveals an interesting kind of parallel.

In the first, *God* said "*Let there be light!—And the light was good.*" And from something within the light, the light itself or beyond it, God created everything.

In the second instance Jesus, God incarnate, entered his Creation, and brought with him a different kind of "*light unto the world.*"

In the first, everything that the light shone on was called *day*.

In the second, every one that the *light* of understanding was cast upon, just before and during Pentecost, were called apostles, who were to carry that light "*to Judea, Samaria, and to the whole world.*"

On the one hand "*God made man...and called him Adam.*" The Bible tells us that he was made "*in the image*" of God. He was a *reflection* of the original. If God does exist somewhere beyond our physical senses, in some kind of non-physical, non-material,

supernatural realm, then our *material* bodies are not necessarily that reflection. Might it be that something *within us* is that reflection, that image?

On the other hand, Jesus chose men and called them to rise above themselves, to reflect Him within their lives, and to take that reflection and cast it upon "*the whole world.*"

Adam (and Eve) *sinned* in the garden and were cast out into the world to become *common*.

Peter and Judas sinned against Jesus in different ways. One got the opportunity to become uncommon, while the other reputedly paid with his life.

Adam was the progenitor of all people.

The apostles were *the parent* of all Christians.

The Bible tells us that God caused the sea to come into being, from out of which Man's most ancient ancestors (according to scientific theory) arose (were born) to a new kind of life.

The New Testament tells us, if a person accepts God's salvation through Jesus Christ, he/she comes up out of the *waters* of baptism, reborn to a new way of life.

When "*man is born of woman,*" the infant *rises up* out of the amniotic fluid (birth waters) to a new *individual* life.

When a person *rises up* out of the waters of baptism, they become new again, (reborn) to a life of higher possibilities.

When "*God made Man*" He directed, "*Multiply* [fill the world] and subdue it!"

Jesus, through his followers, has *multiplied* and they, through modern (experimental) science have (largely) subdued the world (but this subjugation has consequences, that are open to interpretation as to the quality of stewardship).

In the first example, God made the world.

In the second, He came into the world.

In the Old Testament, God, that not quite definable *Presence* in the limited world of Man's physical senses, introduced himself once again to a new people.

Down through all of Man's prehistoric experience (according to science) and all the ages of history, that *Eternal Presence* seems to have made the effort many times. In a look back through man's history, there seems to have been many *systems of belief*. Each has displayed a kind of evolution, or more correctly devolution, as all have seemed to slip slowly away from their "*first things.*" Finally they succumb to that oldest of all plagues, seemingly endless ritual repetition and periodic *enhancement*, more for the sake of man-made *enlightenment* than any original intent.

Each time, someone seems to have been given the opportunity to attempt to understand something far more than experience alone could possibly have imparted. Each time, where it was well accepted, it seems to have followed a familiar pattern.

From the ecstatic excitement of discovery, to the enthusiasm of acceptance; from the reverence of insightful interpretation, to the worship of stable dogma; then the merely ritual observance of traditional declarations that eventually slide into only dutiful obeisance to form. Very slowly and subtly, enters a casual objection to a no longer well-understood guide that increasingly seemed to lack fitness in an ever-changing world. And finally, overthrow by a new discovery that held the promise of reigniting the excitement that had long ago drained out of the elders' more rigid and progressively intolerant frame of reference that had left little room for individual discernment. The path has been

endlessly repetitive as both the Old and New Testament and their probable predecessors seem to bear witness to.

Each time, clarity of meaning seems to have slowly given way to the specificity of observance. Each time the uniqueness of discovery seems to have been effectively smothered by the quiet contempt of familiar surroundings.

Each time though, some small residue remained to be included in the next effort at discernment, in a long and uneven odyssey of uncertain breadth and depth.

In our turn, will we fare any better?

In the New Testament, God seems to have finally felt the need to appear in person, the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Was this to remove the temptation to try to imagine an unimaginable form one more time, as the idols of old testify to? Did it work?

What of *saintly statuary* and *iconic emblems* of celebratory events? What of the construction of great and *beautiful cathedrals*, and other magnificent Houses of Worship? Man seems unable to resist the tempting resort to physical reminders of an unphysical *Presence*. His apparent need to reduce to physical proportions a more than physical Being seems to have taken on the aspect of addiction.

Where will this latter-day attempt end up? In another unremembered ash heap of history, where all others have, or seem to be in the process of going? Or, can we do better this time? Will we be able to shift to a mind-over-matter attitude in time to alter the course of history so it needs not repeat itself again? Can we rise from out of the usual to become another kind of exceptional? It appears that only time will tell, but time, once again, is of the essence!

And, once again that *Essence*, that *Spirit*, God even, seems to be waiting patiently to see if Man can rise to this oldest of all challenges as none have done before. Can he learn to look through, to see beyond, to sweep aside this stultifying veil that has led him astray so many times? Will we really *get it* this time? Will we be able to keep it if we do?

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Chapter 23

“God of the Gaps?”

A relatively short while ago (probably the last days of March, 08) I had just received my April copy of *Commentary* magazine. Quickly scanning down the front cover, as was my wont, since I first began having it delivered to my home, I came across an interesting title halfway down the list of articles, “The God of the Gaps” by David Berlinski. The title had a more familiar ring to it than the author’s name, *I’ve seen this somewhere before!* I thought.

But time had passed and only the title was still vaguely familiar. If memory served, it had been used in reference to a point being made by a not-quite-atheistic, agnostic scientist. He was being *generous* enough to *allow* God to still have some small part in the makeup of things concerning the huge treasure trove of discoveries made by *Man* within the last two hundred-plus years. There were still *gaps* in Man’s knowledge of everything knowable, he had theorized. So, he had left an opening, small though it seemed to be, in his scheme of things for this “so-called God.”

“*Eureka, I have found it,*” I thought as I began to delve into Berlinski’s article. A man who was unwilling to sacrifice his traditionally based belief system upon the altar of his newer scholarly scientific erudition. This would be the kind of balance that I was looking for, I concluded as I began a quick perusal of his credentials. After getting into what he had to say, that idea turned out to be a very preliminary and misleading conclusion.

As I read further into it I became groaningly disappointed in the discovery that his obviously learned effort seemed only a different kind of example of the divide that I have witnessed over the years between science and religion. Only this time there seemed to be a unique imbalance. A man of science seemed to be arguing the *authoritarian* point of view of *religion*, even, it seemed, against well-grounded scientific theory. While unique, I could readily see that this would do nothing to dampen the fratricidal combat between the two sources of discovery seeking to answer the *what and why* of our existence. The damage would still extend to both sides while helping neither.

As any *good* religionist would do, the author, a scientist/mathematician himself, brought up the most divisive argument first, that of the purported similarity between the simian classification and us.

“If human beings are as human beings think they are, then questions arise about *what* they are, and so do responses. These responses are ancient,” he asserts.

One of those *ancient* responses largely unspoken in his article is that the tremendous biological gap that stands between *human beings* and our *simian cousins*, as many biologists like to style them, leads to the seemingly logical conclusion that there must be *no* connection between them. And then, also from the ancient roots of the Judeo-Christian Bible, seems to come the comforting assurance that *we* are a “*special creation*” made in the “*image of God.*”

As I’ve proposed in a previous chapter, if God is not of this *material* world, then His image by definition is not either. So whether or not Man’s physical body has come down to him through a process called evolution should not be seen as destructive of the special place that we feel we have within our higher nature.

But the *newly minted literalist* interpretation also referred to in another previous chapter seems to have been made without reference to the “God is spirit” declaration made within the context that it was taken from. Either we are a physical image of God, which some would say is anthropomorphism at its worst, picturing God as we see ourselves; or we have within us, in some manner, an image of God, that is not *material*.

Therefore, to demand that faith be placed in this kind of literalist interpretation is unwarranted on its face. St. Augustine (354–450) was right when he advised “that the Bible is the word of God I firmly believe, but in what manner this is true, is a burden that we should not place upon the believer.” It appears, from recent history that this is exactly what has been done through this ill-advised dogmatic interpretation.

It may seem, to literalist proponents of this highly revered book, that this also newly proposed understanding from science, that biological evidence clearly indicates there must be a connection between us and our “lesser cousins,” is insulting to what they are required to believe. But replace the literalist understanding of the Bible with a *parable* understanding and their embarrassment would disappear, and so would much of the argument of their detractors.

And *science*, in part from criticism of long standing, feeling *goaded* toward the opposite extreme by the *authoritative* insistence of the current representatives of this ancient belief system, states that there is *no* significant difference, which makes no more sense than its opposite.

Thus the morphological argument, as Berlinski uses Alfred Wallace's "objection to his own thesis concerning evolution, the differences that troubled him," In an attempt to leave the impression; "that there was confusion within the scientific community regarding the reliability of this [very beginning] understanding, of the premise underlying the almost concurrent theory of evolution as propounded by Darwin."

In the beginning of any paradigm change, there are always more questions than answers, but the quest for answers should not be characterized as confusion concerning the validity of the premise that developed them.

"In an essay entitled 'Sir Charles Lyell on Geological Climates and the Origin of Species' (1869), Wallace outlined his sense that evolution was inadequate to explain certain obvious features of the human race," Berlinski continues.

"*The difference in brain size*" was Wallace's first problem.

But more recent discoveries have shown rather conclusively that the basic structure and physical organization of the chimp brain have been found to be similar to ours.

"*Then there is the difference in the hand, being shaped to perform different tasks.*"

But the basic five-fingered bone structure is also similar and could have been shaped by the difference in usage that survival seems to have dictated for each species.

And he quotes Wallace further, "*...the external human form with its upright posture and bipedal gait.*"

Compared with the ape's crouching, knuckle-walking gait and animal-like posture I presume. But an at least partially upright posture could have been inherited, within the heavily forested environment, of a tree-dwelling *common ancestor*, of which orangutans and gibbons, both arboreal apes, seem to be modern examples. Whereas our knuckle-walking simian implies a partial readjustment toward an older animal posture more in line with open-forested habitat. On the other hand, Man with his unique bipedal stride seems to have walked right out into ever more wide-open environments, grasslands even, without my proposed simian partial reversion.

Both limb-structure differences and rib-cage orientations are easily answered by the different modes of survival placed upon them by the demands of these unlike environments.

The rib cage placement in man, obviously not opportune for maximum protection of the organs within it, was quite similar to the arboreal apes. The similar diaphragm muscle arrangement, the only guarantor against abdominal slippage beyond the protective rib cage, seems to indicate that this upright, originally arboreal posture, through time might have turned directly into bipedal locomotion on the ground. This arrangement must have offered a survival benefit that outweighed the compromise demanded.

But its obviously similar original configuration places hominid's and then Man's physical forms well within the rest of the animal world, contrary to what the objectors to similarity appear to insist upon. If Wallace had the benefit of this later knowledge, he might not have been perturbed.

Berlinski further disappoints me in his implied assumption that Darwin was the last significant word on his theory of evolution, and then proceeds to use later understandings as evidence to refute Berlinski's atheist opponent's assertions.

He indicates that, "King and Wilson [Genome researchers] assert, human beings and chimpanzees do share the greater part of their respective genomes." Then he asks, "But should we therefore conclude that if our genomes match up so nicely, we must *be* apes?"

Of course, this was very similar to the characterization of the original opponents of the theory, as they attempted to indicate that this is what Darwin's theory demanded belief in, which was totally opportunistic nonsense. The implication from the beginning was that both species must have shared a common ancestor. But of course there was little indication how far down the asserted line of progression that this *sharing* might have taken place. This was a discovery that was only uncovered after some considerable length of time and effort.

First, there were only tentative guesses. Only much later did they turn into the present postulation which places that point at about 5 million years, quite a long walk into a past far beyond any understanding of ancient. The surprising thing is that there wasn't more change over such a long period. So we ought to assume, what seems to have been shown in many other ways, that biology is a very slow change agent, much too slow for any rapid environmental upheavals.

"No one doubts," Berlinski states further, "that human beings now alive are connected to human beings that lived thousands of years ago... And no one doubts that human beings are connected to the rest of the animal kingdom... Why, then, has the kinship between human beings and the apes been so avidly promoted in contemporary culture?... The reason is that it functions as a hedge against religious belief, in particular the belief in Man's uniqueness."

Obviously this *hedge*, this insistence that there is little difference, is a motive among some groups who seem to champion the opposite of uniqueness. They may have taken this view partly as a counter to what they see as an exclusionary view, that there can be no possible connection. An extreme perception usually breeds an opposite extreme.

They understand, as Berlinski offers, "no one doubts that human beings are connected to the rest of the animal world." But this is incorrect. Many who champion the exclusionary view *do* believe just this assertion. They, like the Hebrews of old, God's chosen people, breed contempt for elevating themselves above others. They also believed that the Earth was unique.

Now the opposite *gong clangers* try to postulate that there is nothing unique, that the Earth is common, that the sun and solar system is ordinary, as is our galaxy, etc. Seldom do extreme assertions reflect reality. A middle ground usually comes closer.

Therefore Berlinski's statement seems accurate. We do seem to be connected to the animal kingdom, but how? And with such a tremendous gap, if there is a connection what is it? What members of the animal kingdom are we closest to? Would the prideful exclusionists rather be seen to be connected to dogs, or cows? There was a time when Man would have given almost anything to be like any one of his animal totems, so why not an ape?

Berlinski now quotes from another source, "'Chimps and gorillas have long been the battleground of our search for uniqueness,' wrote the late Stephan J. Gould. 'For if we could establish an unambiguous distinction—of kind rather than degree—between

ourselves and our closest relatives, we might gain the justification long sought for our cosmic arrogance.’”

But today’s best efforts still leave us with degrees of change, while the basic *kind* of structure remains similar.

So, once again one shouldn’t attempt to answer an extreme position with its opposite. I can understand Berlinski’s reluctance to *see* a connection, I also am reluctant, but that is no excuse to deny what appears to be an obvious conclusion. Again, if as he states, “no one doubts that human beings are related to the rest of the animal kingdom” through what route, I reiterate, are we connected? Of all the survivors in this *nature’s ark* the chimps seem to be our closest living genetic counterpart. Even those two upright arboreal apes are not as close genetically.

And what about that important Christian ethic, “humility”? Is our “cosmic arrogance” going to be allowed to blind us to the consequences of our lack of being able to humble ourselves before this well researched piece of evidence? After all Jesus is known to have taught that the “*lowly shall be raised and the mighty shall be brought down.*” I rather like the idea of having been raised from the lowliest of all life-forms and, through the providence of that *Presence*, elevated to a station greater than any other that physical life has been able to attain! Truly, that makes me feel “*just a little lower than the angels!*” But I digress, and shall return to the commentary on the text of the article.

Again Berlinski appears to be drawing conclusions from King and Wilson, in an effort to refute similarity.

“It is entirely safe to assign the differences between human beings and the apes to their regulatory systems. But nothing is known about the evolutionary emergence of those systems, and we cannot describe them with any clarity. Whatever the source of the human distinction, however, its existence is obvious, and when it is carelessly denied the result is a characteristic form of inanity.” Well said, but the inanity belongs to both extremes that I have already argued against here.

In another instance he has Wallace say, “These characteristics include...the organs of speech and articulation.”

With this he appears to deny vocal articulation to any but humans as he connects this with speech or linguistics, that is, the symbolic representation of specifics of the environment through an agreed-upon combination of sounds.

Again, the basic structure of the larynx is similar. The difference once more seems to be in an expansion of usage occasioning modifications to that structure. This is different than a change in basic organ construction.

The apes seem to have been satisfied over the millennia to use their *voice* to indicate specific emotional states, in defending territory and access to females. Could it be that they didn’t have to contend with as rapid or numerous environmental changes as Man, who radiated out into many differing climatic zones and exponentially expanding dangers?

In another reference he has an English professor, Jonathan Gotshall, recounting his experience reading Homer’s *Iliad* while under the influence of Desmond Morris’s *The Naked Ape*. “It was a drama wherein naked apes—strutting, preening, fighting, and bellowing their power in fierce competition for social dominance, beautiful women, and material resources.”

Berlinski enjoins, “Actually, social dominance and material resources are not quite to the point.”

But it seems to me that it is the major point. Social dominance gives the power to access food and females, which is the dominant theme in all mythological and historical accounts of love and war. So what if the apes did precede our complicated choreography with a lesser one?

The *alpha male* and associates is the underlying structure of most all animal societies and plays out in all human societies as well, only in a much more complicated cultural ritual.

So what it actually boils down to, regarding Berlinski’s term of reference, is the relatively simplistic revelation of that *desire* regarding animal maneuvering toward advantage, and the complicated sham activity meant to hide evidence of a similar desire until too late to thwart its accomplishment in the human equivalent, which as Berlinski concludes is, “namely everything that is of interest in the *Iliad*.”

In another vein, he defines a miracle as, “exactly what it seems, an event offering access to the divine.” Included in his definition, concerning the “Ancient Hebrews—they did what they could, they saw what they could see. But we have other powers. We are the heirs of a magnificent tradition.”

Exactly! So why should we seek to ignore a more recent manifestation of that same “magnificent tradition”? After all we, even in our advanced state of knowledge, only do what we can do, only see what we can see.

Among those “other powers” that we have become heir to is an information-gathering system called *experimental science*. But the basic foundation underlying the edifice of that science was the older belief system from which it sprang. Somewhere within that subject there should be enough humbling evidence of just what each owes to the other, to create a basis for mutual respect!

His definition of a miracle, “an event offering access to the divine” leads me to a rather different one, but different only in tone. A miracle is an event that gives us access to an understanding that there is still knowledge beyond what we know, and should give us an incentive to inquire further.

Many of yesterday’s miracles have become today’s discoveries that have led to an understanding of how those *miracles* came about. Just because we have learned to understand the basis upon which they appeared does not diminish their status in my eyes. After all, they happened before we collectively learned how to make them happen, so another agency must have been their initiator.

If the discipline that brought about those discoveries had been successfully stymied, we would still be seeing them as unfathomable mysteries. I really don’t think that our God should be happy when His invitations are refused. He has given us “eyes to see with,” as well as “ears to hear” with. We should use both gifts, relentlessly as well as religiously.

Which leads me to the commentary of Hitchen’s “God of the Gaps.”

I agree with Berlinski that this is a rather condescending admission by what seems to be an agnostic scientist willing to grant that God may still preside over that *small* part of all knowledge that is still unknown.

As with Berlinski, I feel that Hitchen’s “God of the Gaps” is the same “God of Old” whom he has only a small passing acquaintance with.

And the *gaps* upon closer inspection with instruments of measure finer than anything that we know of today will appear far larger than all the vaunted knowledge that we may be seen to have acquired up to now. Already, science, in dealing with dark energy/matter has admitted that it seems to consist of about 90 percent of everything. If we have only found a way to *see* 10 percent of what's there, that's *one big gap!*

True wisdom, as an old saying goes, begins with an understanding that the more you know, the more you realize, there is more out there yet to know. In the egocentric world of the atheistic scientist, what is not known only *seems* small. Possibly that could indicate the quality of perception of the viewer. That would also seem to indicate that the *blindness* in use by either side does nothing to *widen* the view of the beholder.

Because, with *eyes* blinded by the bright light of *self-generated* knowledge these gaps cannot be *seen* with any clarity. The darkness within them cannot be *measured* and are therefore assigned the arbitrary designation, *small*.

Now, on to the reference to Intelligent Design. Berlinski seems as perturbed by Emile Zuckerkandl's description of it as was I. And I felt that now I would at last be treated to a knowledgeably positive presentation of it.

In the past when I was first introduced to the phrase, I thought, '*Finally a presentation of what we know that supports the proposition of "Intelligence" accompanying the beginning and progress of all things.*

Instead, through each engagement with this idea its proponents simply satisfied themselves with attempting to refute science's take on Darwin's theory rather than presenting and supporting an alternate proposition of their own.

That shortsighted tactic placed me in semi-opposition to them rather than being able to enjoy like-minded company in my belief that an Intelligence both preceded and accompanied the *march of life* up to the present form that we represent.

But again I was to be disappointed as Berlinski turns to Daniel Dennet, who *answers* the proponents of Intelligent Design as they try to offer as negative proof the uncertainty that still clings to an otherwise rather well proven theory. Berlinski italicizes what he appears to most strenuously object to within Dennet's affirmation. *Beyond all reasonable doubt*, and *automatically*.

If I leave these out Dennet agrees with my understanding almost as well as Berlinski does with his *faith* in that "God of old" that I also *see* behind all that was, is, and will be.

Dennet describes the "plan" that seems to me presumes that which produced it when he says, "Contemporary biology has demonstrated *beyond all reasonable doubt*, that natural selection—the process in which reproducing entities must compete for finite resources and thereby engage in a tournament of *blind* trial and error from which improvements *automatically* emerge—has the power to generate breathtakingly ingenious designs."

I have italicized *blind* as the additional word that I would leave out of Dennet's statement. It would then read as follows.

"Contemporary biology has demonstrated that natural selection—the process in which reproducing entities must compete for finite resources and thereby engage in a tournament of trial and error from which improvements emerge—has the power to generate breathtakingly ingenious designs."

To me *blind* is a perceptual admission that the process is so complicated, with so many of the variables immeasurable or undetectable, that it gives the *appearance* of

happening by pure chance, with *chance* being seen as synonymous with randomness. *Tomorrow's* measuring tools most certainly will provide different results!

I also don't agree with Berlinski that Dennet's statement indicates misplaced self-confidence. His use of *beyond all reasonable doubt* has to me an element of desperation about it.

He appears to imply that all doubt concerning his statement should be *judged* to be unreasonable. His use of *automatic* implies a process that repeats itself without exception, and exceptions to what is felt to be *known* has been the cornerstone of experimental science's progress. Many a paradigm shift has occurred upon the discovery of why an exception exists that seems to falsify that which we *thought* we knew.

Berlinski states that "the God of the gaps occupies a very considerable comfort zone in biology."

Agreed!

"We know better than we ever did that a great many aspects of biological behavior are innate," he continues.

In other words, inborn: selected through the office of genetic variation as mankind has *waltzed* through the *garden* of survival is my reply.

"They arise in each organism. They are part of its nature," Berlinski continues.

OK! But how did each organism acquire this *nature*? How did this nature arise in them? The very word seems to imply a process that is *natural*, that is part of nature.

Man's best guess to date is that they evolved, through a process called natural selection. And why can't we prove this out any better than has already been done? Because the only ones alive today are the survivors!

Those who were selected out have disappeared with only minute traces of them remaining to tease us about who they were, and what they were. Some of these *teasings* occurred as a byproduct of the massive extinctions evidenced in the geological record. Because these evidences are not complete does not argue against an existence and chronology for those long-gone entities. "The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence!"

Berlinski goes on to critique another observation, "This is widely seen as offering dramatic confirmation of Darwinian evolution. It is easy to see why. What is 'innate' in an organism, so it is claimed, reflects its genetic endowment, and its genetic endowment reflects the long process in which random variations were sifted by a stern and unforgiving environment."

Exactly! Even though Berlinski doesn't seem to wholly agree with that postulation, the evidence of massive extinctions in the geologic record seems to indicate that the environment has, at times, proven to be very unforgiving.

And the scythe of extinction has swept most brutally among those large successful entities most well adapted to a long stable environment that suddenly changed. The "mighty shall be brought down," indeed!

Then he begins an attempt at refutation of that statement by adding, "If we are born with an ability to acquire a natural language..."

Wrong! Language is not a naturally acquired trait. To the opposite of the linguist Noam Chomsky, whom he cites earlier, "Just as children are not taught to walk, they are not taught to speak." Tell that to any mother or father and they'll laugh you out of the house!

The three most important requirements of survival are a food source, the ability to articulate emotional states, and mobility. A human baby is said to be born with a sucking reflex, but in many cases this reflex remains uncoordinated until the mother moistens the baby's lips with milk and places the nipple in contact with them. When it tastes food it learns with alacrity the coordination necessary to acquire a purposeful supply. But still, it is largely a learned experience, as any mother will attest as she watches her infant so quickly increase the efficiency of the suckling process. The organic structures are there but the coordination needed to use them is learned.

In its first moment of awareness after birth, an infant is surrounded by upright creatures looking down upon it, helplessly lying upon its back. Much later it will learn to crawl, and then walk. And all this time it is surrounded with examples of upright posture, that it first desires to, then seeks to, emulate. All that it has been biologically given is the bodily structures that have evolved in order, through learned behavior, to acquire that posture which it has seen since birth, and the sounds, the results of which it has seen and heard all during that time. The learning process is so subtle that it only seems natural or instinctive. Our subdued instincts do not give us the ability to do, as often seen in the animal world, just the ability to look, listen and learn. Most all of our *do* comes from practice, only the inherent ability of this organic structure has been imprinted.

"This is widely seen," as I have already quoted Berlinski in his critique, "as offering dramatic confirmation of Darwinian evolution." Then he continues, taking pains to reveal that he does not agree with that previously quoted perspective, "The view is common; it is also incoherent...If this were so...it would represent a connection that we don't understand and cannot grasp. The gap is too great."

Yes, the gap does seem to be growing not decreasing. The only ones who do not seem to *understand* the general circumstances which allow this confirmation are those who refuse to entertain more than past or present knowledge.

Those who are afraid to extend themselves beyond their present *grasp* fearing to reach toward the fringes of the unknown, and by extrapolation move that which is unknown toward the knowable, would stall us all behind that fear.

To search with a perception too dim to make out anything more than vague outlines, and then through the increased light of *reason* or *logic*, secure that which had been beyond understanding, is how all progress has been made. Extrapolation seems to be our special gift, but it also begs the question, as well as an anticipated smile from Berlinski, "From what source did we receive it?"

But there are hazards that come with our progress. With success may come the *arrogance* of intellect as Berlinski relates, "When Richard Dawkins observes that genes '*created* us body and mind' he is appealing essentially to a magical connection."

He has also gone to a silly extreme. The physical body is basically made repeatable through the process of genetics, but from out of where did that first genetic endowment come? The *mind* as I've earlier indicated, seems to be, as we extend our grasp toward a better understanding, an intellectual construct and seems to reside within us in a manner that we still cannot clearly grasp. But to not try, using this very *intellectual construct*, would be worse than silly, it would be stupid.

And then there are those who just become confused by complexity too great for them to grasp, as in the quotes from the Physicist Steven Weinberg, that Berlinski uses, "The more comprehensible the universe becomes, the more it also seems pointless."

“Weinberg’s arena,” avers Berlinski, “is Elementary particles...A rather depressing place...Over *there* (in the Standard Model of particle physics), fields are pregnant with latent energy, particles flicker into existence and disappear, things are entangled, and no one can quite tell what is possible and what is actual, what is here and what is there, what is now and what was then, solid forms give way. Nothing is stable.”

But this is the way that it always seems in the beginning of delving into a new field of inquiry. At first there are many questions and few answers. It is confusing when postulations prove false and theories are challenged by repeatedly discovered exceptions.

Might it be that particle physics is just now delving into the most essential building blocks, the basic structure of Creation, where the deeper we dig the less of everything we find? Then, as we approach the nothing from which God is said to have made everything, we are confused by the very vagueness of the landscape that we travel in.

Should our “audacity of hope” be that this *Presence*, this God even, has led us here for His own purposes, and that it would seem almost impossible to gain even the smallest understanding of that most elemental construction without at least a beginning belief that He exists?

The “God of the Gaps” that Berlinski distills from Hitchen’s work titled “God Is not Great” speaks to us through Berlinski’s pen.

“You have *no idea* whatsoever how the ordered physical, moral, mental, aesthetic, and social world in which you live could have ever arisen from the seething anarchy of the elementary particles.” Berlinski complements this with his own reworded, less comprehensive observation, “No one has the faintest idea whether, in particular, the immense gap between what is living and what is not, between the organic and the inorganic, may be crossed by any conceivable means.”

The difference between those two statements is immense. The first is unarguably authoritative and concise in its clarity. The second sounds like Man’s attempt to restate the first within his limited perceptual imagination. If he had said “by any *humanly* conceivable means,” he would have clarified his understanding of that difference between God and His human understudy. Instead, it begs the following question.

By any conceivable means? That sounds like an individual who has just stepped beyond the limits of his own imagination. He then curiously opines that, “The National Academy of Science has taken pains to affirm that it [that immense gap] has *already* been crossed.”

And Berlinski continues the quote, “For those who are studying aspects of the origin of life, the question no longer seems to be whether life could have originated by chemical processes involving non-biological components but, rather, what pathway might have been followed.”

Berlinski leaves no clue that I can detect whether he is critical of that statement or whether he put it forward as an indication of his support. Whichever way that he meant it, to me it sounds like a forward-looking statement of belief in the form of an hypothesis, a scientific word indicating an educated guess based on extrapolating from what is known into an area that is presently unknown. This is usually accompanied by just enough tentative proof to start the process of argument.

Belief, because of the lack of the availability of knowledge attendant with that *process*, is required to even tentatively imagine what might progress from that point.

Science has tried to take that a step further by complementing belief with extrapolation, and like an inchworm is moving incrementally forward by trial and error.

I would guess that Berlinski, without really understanding what he does, seems to offer a beginning, or early argument as he quotes Gerald F. Joyce and Leslie Orgel from their book *The RNA World*.

“The de-novo appearance [*Latin* from the beginning: anew] of oligonucleotides [some of the indispensable building blocks of life] on the primitive earth would have been a near miracle.”

Berlinski adds, apparently from his own personal fund of knowledge, “A near miracle is a term of art. It is like a near miss.”

Well that’s all right, a near miss is almost as good as a hit in that it provides information on any correction needed to make the next guess “right on”! And a near miracle would indicate a certain lack of information that keeps an unknown from being more nearly knowable.

“The theories that we have in our possession do what they can do, and then they stop.” Berlinski continues, “They do not stop because a detail is missing, they stop because we cannot go on.”

But that’s just the point; they *do* stop because a detail *is* missing. A detail that suddenly appears to falsify part of the foundation upon which a theory stands. The whole is brought into question until new information can show how the detail fits into the existing structure or the structure must be restated to include that new information. This creates, for all intents and purposes, a new theory, which picks up where the old one left off, answering questions until another exception shows up. During that time scientists occasionally think to pose questions that previously had seemed to have no answer within science. When an answer under the new regime agrees with the theory as reconstructed, a paradigm shift is said to have occurred.

The theory of evolution is like that, with the aggregate as it stands today showing little resemblance to the original, except in its basic structure. Modifications have been made to incorporate new discoveries, which cause a change in form, but the basic structure remains recognizable.

So “what it all boils down to” is the “devil is in the details” and until those details are worked out, progress is slow and sometimes seems impossible, even reversible, but they always seem to have been in the end, additive.

So we don’t “stop because we cannot go on” as Berlinski states, but science hesitates, like at a *pit stop* in a race, to gain additional understanding or direction before proceeding.

How life started always seems to have been at least one step beyond the best of what science has been able to extrapolate, up to now. The how of what causes inanimate chemical structures to admit life into them has always seemed a fundamental kind of miracle, but the basic physical foundation of all animate life is this inanimate chemical structure. Every instance of cremation is proof of this. Heat applied to a once living body *distills* the life component, releasing it from its inorganic chemically elemental base. “From ashes to ashes.”

What is *distilled* out is that unique combination of interacting chemical compounds that have combined in the presence of that universal solvent H₂O, water. But there is a

still *mysterious* component within that matrix that allows automatic recombination, the self-replication that leads to animate life.

This seems to be the opposite of the entropy that governs all inorganic organization where concentrations of energy move toward an even distribution, whereas life seems to be a collector of energy, depositing and holding it within the various organic structures that make up the many forms of life.

What has always amazed even scientists is how this lumpy distribution of organic matter can *unthinkingly* develop such complex organic structures as the various organs of sight. Many others ask, how can the theory of evolution explain the development of such a complicated structure as this?

Berlinski, in describing Darwin, writing about the eye in *On the Origin of Species*, as having “confessed that its emergence troubled him greatly. He was nonetheless able to resolve his doubts in his own favor... The solution that [he] proposed and defended was to point to countless examples of intermediate visual structures scattered throughout the animal kingdom. His argument is interesting,” Berlinski adds, “but it did not touch the central issue. The eye is not simply a biological organ, although it is surely that. It is a biological organ that allows living creatures to *see*. If we cannot say what seeing comes to in physical or material terms, then we cannot say whether *any* theory is adequate to explain the appearance of an organ that makes sight possible. And this is precisely what we cannot say.”

How convenient! He presents the question, then gives what he feels is the only possible answer. (Kind of like Dennet?) But once again I feel that he “doth protest to much”! Also once again “What it all boils down to,” is *sight* is somehow the product of seeing, and *seeing* is what the organic structure, the eye *does*! The eye, in such close proximity to the brain appears to be a specialized extension of it.

The brain receives and transmits electrochemical signals. This input is the only way that it can do the job of interpreting the surrounding environment and instructing the body on how to react to it. In sightless worms, the many parts of the body transmit input to the brain concerning the immediate environment that surrounds it. The eye seems to have evolved as a more efficient way to transmit that input at greater depth, or distance from the organism.

The eye receives light frequency input that is reflected off structures within this environment and converts this into electrochemical impulses, which it sends to the brain. It is as simple as that! *Sight* is what the brain does with this input! Attempting to make anything more of it than this is approaching a philosophical explanation of what *sight* means within the *experience* called living. The way humans have learned to use *sight* as a metaphor for understanding everything else, including the experiences that we encounter all around us, is that complicated choreograph that I referred to in the *Naked Ape* portion of this essay.

Kevin Shapiro provides an excellent review (titled: How the Mind Works) of Marvin Minsky’s book *The Emotion Machine* in the May 2007 issue of *Commentary* that may help us in how the brain and the senses work together to govern how the body will act and react.

“The book’s title refers to the idea that our emotional states are themselves examples of what Minsky dubs ‘ways to think,’” Shapiro offers, as he continues quoting Minsky: “...general methods of problem-solving that our brains use to tackle the tasks of

everyday life...Rather than being impediments to reasoning,' Minsky argues, 'emotions can actually help us to focus our attention in ways that are relevant to our immediate goals...They do this by changing the "resources," or processes, that our brains use at any given moment. A state of fear, for example, might switch on resources that heighten our speed and awareness while switching off resources devoted to reflection and the pursuit of entertainment. Such a mechanism would surely come in handy for our evolutionary predecessors, who needed to respond quickly to the dangers and opportunities they encountered in the wild...But emotions like fear and infatuation (and other 'ways to think') can also serve goals that seem distant from such biological imperatives as avoiding danger.'"

Shapiro adds, "To accommodate all the mental procedures necessary to deal with these various goals, Minsky divides the mind into six levels. These range from basic instinctive and learned reactions...all the way up to self-conscious thinking and reflection...In the middle are the processes of deliberative and reflective thinking...which mediate between the conflicting goals of the top and bottom levels. Although our primal emotions may originally have been intended to operate at the level of instinctive reactions, they can also influence procedures at other levels...Minsky imagines that each of his six levels of mental procedures is populated by special resources called 'critics' which recognize various kinds of situations. One kind of critic, for example, might identify a threat (a physical threat at one level, an intellectual threat at another). The critic, in turn, activates 'selectors,' which in turn activate resources corresponding to ways to think... 'Naturally, our thought processes are not limited to emotions'. Minsky proposes, indeed, 'that the construction of each higher level of the mind during childhood and adolescence is accompanied by the development and application of new critics and selectors. These utilize strategic resources like breaking down complex problems into parts, making comparisons, retrieving memories, and relying on progressively more intricate mental models of the world and our own minds. In addition to emotional thinking, then, we learn to apply strategies like imagination, logic, and reasoning by means of analogy.'"

This construct (as I have termed it), the *mind*, this *thinking machine* appears to me like another kind of eye, an inner eye allowing the brain to interpret more subtle influences than the physical structures that the eye responds to.

The brain processes input from the eyes and the other bodily senses in order to give direction on how to react to the physical environment that surrounds it. The mind seems to have evolved to respond to the ever more complex world that Man has been making out of that environment.

Concerning the eye, how can the theory of evolution explain this complex organ's appearance as Berlinski seems to ask by implication? If one removes the philosophical description of everything called *sight*, then the "countless examples" of incremental advances that Darwin uses to answer his own doubts, work very well. If light energy can be converted to biomass, that is, living structures, then becoming aware of the direction from which this energy source comes has a survival advantage. I touched on this in another chapter from which I now quote:

"Science has *pictured* the very beginning of life as one-celled *things* existing in a *soup* of finite hydrocarbon complexes from which they extracted their *being*. As the Earthly prenatal overcast gave way to sunshine, it penetrated into this *soup* to a certain

depth. Some of these one-celled *things* eventually became aware of this added *good*. Inevitably also it would seem, some developed the ability to discern the direction from which it came, and they reaped an abundant advantage.

Science has extrapolated that this crude light sensitivity was the foundation stone of all physical sight. But this beginning awareness of the direction from which light came is a far cry from the visual acuity that we now have.”

This is Darwin’s incrementalism spread over the vast geological record of 250 million plus years, time enough even for radical change.

Now I wonder about this construct called *mind* being like an inner eye. Has the mind evolved to give input to the brain in even greater depth than the eye was *engineered* to do? The eye views the physical world and we have used the philosophical understanding of *sight* to obtain a view into the world of *meaning*. The *mind* seems to have evolved to interpret this world, and have we also used it to develop the ability to peer ever more deeply across ours, and into the margins of the world of this *Essence* that we discern so imperfectly?

But I seemed to have digressed again, but what a digression!

As is obvious I do not agree with many of the ways that David Berlinski attempts to disprove a positive through the use of a negative. But within many of the things that he has cited in his essay, I see the glimmer of hope for a positive proof of Intelligent Design, in the context of how I understand this term. I would hope that he might be encouraged to sift through that verbiage for those hidden “gems” to flesh out that positive support.

I hope that it is additionally obvious that I am also heartily in disagreement with the egocentric postulations of those atheistic scientists, some of whom he has cited here. I have a question for them. If everything has happened by the purest of *chance*, is it also by that same vehicle that you have made your *discoveries*, and drawn your own conclusions? And why should we allow those who appear to be as *blind* as we, or even profoundly more so, to lead us where we would hesitate to venture ourselves?

Berlinski concludes with a quote from Richard Feynman, “Today we cannot see whether Schrodinger’s equation contains frogs, musical composers, or morality.”

Then one of his own, “The remark [in Feynman’s lecture on turbulence] has been widely quoted. It is honest. The words that follow, however, are rarely quoted. ‘We cannot say whether something beyond it like God is needed, or not. And so we can all hold strong opinions either way.’”

Berlinski seems to sum up with, “We are where human beings have always been, unable to place our confidence completely in anything, unable to place our doubt completely in everything, unsure of the conveyance—and yet conveyed.”

To which I would add an understanding gained from a Feynman essay on fractal geometry concerning fluid turbulence. Within the seeming chaos of random movement, there is an almost undetectable underlying order discoverable only through far closer observation than has been available to us, until now.

The best of science’s newest instruments of measure are just now beginning to open the door to that which seems at the very foundation of everything that is knowable. Experimental science has been the twentieth century’s engine of discovery. But science hasn’t done it alone. It has built itself upon the anciently broad shoulders of all the previous systems of belief (the acceptance of a proposition with proof insufficient for positive knowledge).

An hypothesis is a scientific statement of belief. It is accepted, but only conditionally, depending on future testings, discoveries, or proofs that either verify or falsify this *educated guess*.

Verification builds upon itself, finally producing a *theory* with many convincing proofs providing a stable platform of understanding, but it is still vulnerable to an occasional exception. Its work, it would seem, is never totally done.

Science shorn from its foundation of belief is an impossibility. It's like a head without a body, an intellect without a purpose, a strategy without a goal. It's like a dog smelling its own dung for an answer to why it's there.

Belief without an attempt at verification is like a person on a springboard who refuses or hasn't bothered to check on whether the pool contains water, or how deep it might be.

The totality has always been greater than the sum of its parts. Until all possible knowledge has been revealed, there will always be plenty of room for belief.

The enormity of that gap is impressive indeed!

Let science prove we are, and then
What matters science unto men
No longer half-akin to brute,
For all we thought and loved and did
And hoped, and suffer'd is but seed,
Of what in them is flower and fruit
Whereof the man, that with me trod,
This planet, was a noble type
Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine who lives in God
—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memorium*

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Chapter 24

Is Evolution Compatible with Religious Belief?

Must it be One or the Other?

A short while ago, I had subscribed to a new magazine for reasons other than as a potential reference resource. *National Review* was its name. Imagine my surprise in viewing the cover of the first copy, at the very top of which was this headline: “Jim Manzi on the Abuse of Evolution.”

I immediately turned to it on page 42, and discovered the title of the article, “The Origin of Species, and Everything Else.” At the bottom of the page Jim Manzi was identified as the CEO of an applied-intelligence software company.

Was he pro or con on the subject of science's compatibility with religious belief? I wondered. I became wary as I read into the first two paragraphs of the article. And then this stood out in bold relief: “Scientific atheists who condescendingly argue that anyone who *really* understands evolution realizes that it implies atheism. Probably the most famous of these is Oxford's Richard Dawkins, Professor of the Public Understanding of Science, who has expounded this idea over more than 30 years.”

Yes, I thought. I remember this guy. He was one of two that had debated Frances Collins, scientist, biologist, and head of the government's Genome Project in another article that I had read. The debate was whether scientific knowledge was compatible with religious belief. I had thought that this "Oxford" man, Dawkins, became rather shrill in his rhetoric when he realized that he couldn't seem to shake his opponent's argument that it was compatible, and now here he was being quoted as a most authoritative source.

"Scientific Atheists put forward two propositions as logically deducible from science that evolution eliminates the need for a Creator, and that evolution has no ultimate goal or purpose."

This is not the science that I know, I thought. Science to me has always been a means to an end. It's the study and verification of a process. It does not and cannot, as far as I know, present evidence of what came before Creation (the physical world as we know it), or its ultimate end as we might guess it, because each observable *end* seems to leave a remnant which inevitably moves toward another end, seemingly *ad infinitum* (as in chapter 19, *Does History Repeat Itself?*). Science seems destined to be limited by the lack of sufficient sharpness of its instruments, with each *end* indicating only the limit of those instruments' ability to measure what might be beyond. Scientists may hypothesize what came before, or what lies beyond, but they would have to rely upon metaphysical extrapolation, which by its very nature takes one beyond testable theory.

And everything about evolution implies a progression of events, no matter how unruly, that seems to move from simplicity toward complexity. But then, as I read on further: Manzi avers, "That known science implies either conclusion is a myth, both in the sense of being objectively false, and also in the sense of being a story that a community of believers tells itself in order to provide meaning and coherence to the lives of its members."

At first I missed the point that the author was making in this second quoted line and I wondered, *Is the author using this opinion as an expert source or as a foil for his own purposes?*

(I must have been thrown off by the reference to a "community of believers." I immediately pictured a religious group, but a science community? Yes atheists, even the scientific variety, are believers in something also, even though their "pitch" is diametrically opposed to religion and its belief system.)

Then as he got into his background in Artificial Intelligence and the computer modeling program known, as I style it, "Factory Efficiency" and how some of it mimics the mechanics of physical evolution, I began to feel that the latter understanding was probably the better.

He continued with how his background had led him to conclude the following.

"First it is obvious from the factory analogy that evolution does not eliminate the problem of ultimate origins—of what, in explicitly religious terms, is called Creation. Dawkins himself, in *The Blind Watchmaker*, is clear about the fact that evolution requires pre-existing building blocks. He writes: 'The physicist's problem is the problem of ultimate origins and ultimate natural laws.'"

Once again I asked this question of myself. Where did those *natural laws* come from, that scientists would search them out as if for a kind of *Holy Grail*, without being willing to look beyond them to their origin?

Then Dawkins, seemingly heedless of what he has just conceded, reaches out for support from an associate, as the author continues, “Dawkins...cites *The Creation*, a book by Oxford Professor Peter Atkins that...claims ‘the original units of creation do not demand anything as grand as a Creator.’”

But then, Jim Manzi, the author of the article counters with, “[But] Atkins has come to have second thoughts. In a speech in Edinburg earlier this year, Atkins had this to say: ‘I must admit that we simply do not know how the universe can come into being without intervention.’”

Now to my delightful enlightenment the author lays out his own understanding of why this appears to be so.

“A scientific theory is a falsifiable rule that relates cause to effect. If you push Dawkins and company far enough, you find yourself more or less where Aristotle was more than 2,000 years ago in stating his view that any chain of cause-and-effect must ultimately begin with an Uncaused Cause. No matter how far science advances, an explanation of ultimate origins must always—by the very definition of the scientific method—remain a non-scientific question.”

It sounds like the old conundrum “Which came first the chicken or the egg?” Without the chicken the egg was never laid, but without the egg the chicken can never be, except for *First Things*.

Aristotle’s cause-and-effect will inevitably lead to another cause. And “cause” being the first named in this duet must be considered to have been the first of the two entities. So, what must have brought the first cause into being?

If not an “effect” then what else is there but an occurrence that seems to be unprovoked by anything that we can testify to except through the agency of belief. And we already know that the definition of belief is an assertion that lacks sufficient proof to provide positive knowledge.

This sounds like the “axiom” of mathematics, “a proposition which is assumed without proof for the sake of studying the consequences that flow from it.” An example of this proposition that was offered to me at an early time in a geometry class, was “that the Earth exists” and this before we had external space-based evidence of it. Before then, it was an unprovable construct whose obvious reality was corroborated by all of our senses.

Well what about this proposition? “That God exists.” What’s the difference? For objective proof of this, short of that final rendezvous, we would have to be able to *stand* out beyond *Creation*.

And will we ever discover a *platform* which would provide that external proof? This, needless to say, is not likely. Is not to worry! If God is your Axiom, then all else may be proven through this one well-chosen assumption. All science is built upon the proposition that there was “in the beginning” something before that first *Cause*.

But I digress—or do I?

Manzi continues, “Scientists appropriately proceed *as if* the goal of evolution were incalculable, while from a philosophical perspective it remains calculable in principle, using only the information embedded in the initial conditions.”

Science reaches ever more closely toward those initial conditions, while religion witnesses to us through the institution of *belief* what our *primary assumption* must be.

Manzi again, “And here it’s especially important that we be clear about our terms. The scientific atheists sweep a lot of philosophical baggage into the term *random*.”

Well, I thought, random, chance, chaos; all terms indicating lack of predictability, the opposite of *order* and regularity, “that which can be defined or measured.” Is it possible that what appears to us as random is only because we lack the fineness of measuring ability to *see* the regularity embedded within these *chance* occurrences? Fractal geometry seems to give us a glimpse of an underlying order while we at the “macro level” see only a chaotic condition.

Manzi says, “Randomness is reducible entirely [down] to the impracticality of building a model...As a practical matter, we lack the capability to compute either the goal or the path of evolution, but that is a comment about our limitations as observers, not about the process itself. Accepting evolution, therefore, requires neither the denial of a Creator nor the loss of the idea of ultimate purposes. It resolves neither issue for us one way or the other.”

Life on earth seems at first glance, to be an agglomeration, rising in and through an ultimately complex biological system with order not easily discernable within it, a regular *chaos* of life.

Religion gives the credit for this to a supernatural power, implying within this system a magnitude of order impossible for us to understand within our present level of perception.

Science, through its best guess called evolution, attempts to *see* that emergent order; *religion* believes that what we see is evidence of a Creator as He went about His business of Creation.

Back to Manzi, “One of the advantages of institutional religion is that it conserves insight. Ironically, dealing with evolution places us back in the company of Augustine and Aquinas, who were both forced to figure out how to reconcile powerful proto-scientific ideas with Christianity. They described God as acting through laws or processes. [Laws?] In about the year AD 400, Augustine described a view of Creation in which ‘seeds of potentiality’ were established by God, which then unfolded through time in an incomprehensibly complicated set of processes. [Hmmm, evolution?] In the thirteenth century, Aquinas—working with the thought of Aristotle and Augustine—identified God with ultimate causes, while accepting naturalistic interpretations of secondary causes”. [Like theories?]

“Neither Augustine nor Aquinas was a proto-Darwinist...What is striking about both of them, however, is their insistence on understanding and incorporating the best available non-theological thinking into our religious views.” (Today, how about scientific thinking?)

What a marvelous discovery! That others earlier and more famous than I have spoken out on this in a way similar to that which I have felt *commissioned* to do. How marvelous also that a scientist of the caliber of this author has been able to deflate the conceit of an atheist who only coincidentally happens to be schooled in the scientific arena of ideas, but as I suspect, is just a different kind of believer. One, with only a negative kind of faith to keep him company as he blindly marches ever so determinedly toward an eternity whose existence he so vociferously denies.

Religion and science, it seems to me, are like two trains trying to use what is perceived as a single track. “I came first says religion, so I have the right of way. There is

no room for another.” And science replies, “I have the most important load, so you should be removed to a permanent siding.” All the while they argue, each one’s narrow perception makes it impossible to see the double track already laid out by the *Railroad Manager*.

Another view of them is like the wheels on a bicycle. Each one without the other, as with a unicycle, finds balance a much more complicated endeavor, but together they can maintain an easier equilibrium. Because it came first, religion would be best suited as the front wheel, the one that gives guidance and direction. Science on the other hand because of the drive of its many discoveries would provide the power to overcome any incline. Without it the *first* sits idle going nowhere. Without the first the second is directionless, wobbling first one way then another, toward a direction that it is ill prepared to perceive.

In the end they ought to try to see themselves as the yin and yang of a perfectly balanced system as they together look into this thing called *Creation*. Are they compatible? Are picture prints and negatives compatible? If one was extremely nearsighted, it might be hard to tell, but as one with nearly normal vision, I give a resounding **yes**, how about you?

*There is one thing worse than a fool,
And that is a man who is conceited.*

—Proverbs 26:12, TLB

*It is a badge of honor
To accept valid criticism*

—Proverbs, 25:12, TLB

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Chapter 25

Beyond Nature’s Evolution?

God’s Plan and Science’s Theories

While waiting in the doctor’s office recently, I was thumbing listlessly through the available reading material, when my eye caught sight of a skull on the cover of *Newsweek* (Mar.19, 2007 edition; it was already months out of date), and above it in big bold letters, “The Evolution Revolution.” The article by Sharon Begley on page 53 was titled “Beyond Stones and Bones.” The author indicated that, in a step further than the traditional ways of *reading* the *Rise of Man* through the study of physical artifacts, science was just now learning to apply the newer technologies available on the cutting edge of research.

“Whoever would have thought that science could learn anything from a louse? Yet DNA analysis of body lice seems to indicate that it diverged from head lice about 114,000 yrs. ago.”

An interesting thought that Sharon Begley shares with us. (However, if you’ll pardon me while I scratch a sudden itch. Come to think of it, which should I do first my head or my body?)

This, it was averred, is the very first indication, the appearance of clothing adapted body lice, of when Man lost his own body hair. And the science of climatology seems to offer confirmation with a concurrent change toward much more rapidly colder conditions.

This newest of *Man's tools* along with a new application in the form of the science of paleoneurology (the measurement of impressions that brains leave on the inside of skulls) "is documenting when structures that power the human mind arose, shedding light on how our ancestors lived and thought," she continued.

"DNA analysis can now be used to much more closely estimate when humans (as with the louse) had split off from the common ancestor of Man and our Simian cousins."

The most recent *guestimate* of 5 to 6 million years ago is the new and improved number, as I had already gleaned from a larger context.

"Last summer scientists discovered a gene called HAR1 (for human accelerated region)," she added.

A simpler version is found in animals as varied as chickens and chimps, but the version residing in humans is found to have accelerated at about the same 5 million-year demarcation.

In the 310 million years since the *chicken's* saurian ancestor gave birth, and then way to the mammalian ancestor that led, inexorably it would seem, to the *chimp's*, only two chemical *letters* had changed. (Again I tried for brevity by summarizing from a much larger context.)

"But 18 letters changed in the (relative) blink of an eye since the human lineage had split from chimps," Katherine Pollard of the University of California, Davis and colleagues reported, according to Begley's article.

This word *acceleration* began to subtly draw my attention to other *markers* offered in the remainder of the article.

There was PDYN, a "gene that began accumulating changes 7 million years ago, soon after our first ancestor appeared. This gene regulated production of prodynorphin, which is like the brain's soup stock.

"Depending on what other ingredients are added, it can change into neuro-chemicals that underlie perception, behavior or memory...says Rob Desalle, co-curator of the American Museum's new hall."

Again Begley led me into another report.

"Scientists led by neurogeneticist Daniel Geschwind of UCLA are examining which combinations of genes are active in the cortex, the seat of higher thinking, of chimps and people.

"Among the genes turned to 'high' in people...are those that influence how fast that electrical signals jump from neuron to neuron and therefore how fast the brain can process information...This pattern of gene activity, it appears, began emerging when the *Australopithicus* species did."

From there I was led into the following synopsis, because of Robert Sussman and his article, part of which is quoted below. Because of hominid's small size and the "tooth and talon" marked fossils, this indicated that Man's Precursor had been more preyed upon than predator for the majority of his existence and that his increasingly enhanced rapid-thinking and social skills had come well before Man's appearance.

"That, more than aggression and warfare, is our evolutionary legacy," offered Robert Sussman of Washington University, coauthor of the 2005 book *Man the Hunted*.

Then onto the next item in the growing list of recent discoveries.

“Oxytocin, best known for inducing labor and lactation in women, also operates in the brain (of both sexes). There it promotes trust during interactions with other people, and thus the cooperative behavior that lets groups of people live together for the common good...The research is still underway, but one possibility is that the changes occurred around the time our ancestors settled into a system based on enduring bonds between men and women, about 1.7 million years ago.”

At about this juncture I began to discern a *punctuated progression*. (As in Stephen J. Gould’s theory that was meant to amend the earlier evolutionary understanding of even and gradual progression. His was called Punctuated Equilibrium. This was his effort to recognize and account for the many disruptions in the geological record.)

Here I think that I perceive a progression punctuated by sharp advances toward the *making* of modern man, many in seeming response to rapid changes in habitat as well as natural disasters. Man has made these many wrenching adjustments with capacities that he never realized that he had acquired, and that had never been expressed in quite this way before, nor exaggerated to this degree until Man.

I also began to see a timeline of *progression*. (Although many are those who *hear* any hints of a progressionary theory as a wholly “theological” concept, still it appears to be there in the *real* world also.) Within the many species and variations leading to Man there have been those who were granted, in some manner and without their awareness, each of these *progressive* evolutionary gifts and survived, while those who *stood* evolutionarily still were sidelined to the “stones and bones” of archaeological history.

The first gift of *change* was HAR1, which seems to have appeared consistent with the upheaval called the mammalian revolution about 310 million years ago. There is no knowledge of what that original small contribution did for its original recipients, and nothing much seems to have changed until 5 million years ago when the human ancestor diverged from the line ancestral to our chimp *cousins*.

Then the Human Accelerator Region (HAR1) accelerated leaving that ancestor of ours as well as our simian cousins in a similar *dustbin of time* to that which so many others had preceded it to, as archaeology has also uncovered. It would appear that something within that *biology* of Man added that small change for reasons of added survivability, and much later sent it into overdrive for a purpose not yet the certain subject of discovery.

Then there was the PDYN gene gift *bandwagon* that got started as long as “7 million years ago.” This “brain soup stock” seemed to lead to an increase in decision-making ability, and when combined with other neurochemicals became the underlayment for perception, behavior, and memory enhancement. As it too began to accelerate, it might be seen to be the *tie* that seemed to *bind* us and the chimps as genetically close as we are. Then again something happened. As earlier indicated HAR1, the “human accelerator region,” kicked in around that 5 million year demarcation.

Then there were the genes that seemed to increase the speed of electrical signaling between neurons. “This pattern of activity, it appears, began emerging when the Australopithecus species did” approximately 2.5 million years ago.

Also at about that time, Homo habilis appeared on the scene concurrent with the Australopithecus Africanus’ “area 10” gift, where its probable progression in Homo habilis seemed to “promote the earliest signs of primitive tool making.”

The “area 10” gift? It “played a key roll in decision making, requiring initiative and advanced planning.”

The Oxytocin gift arrived approximately 1.7 million years ago. It promoted the “trust” reaction about “the time that our ancestors settled into a system based on enduring bonds between men and women.” It promoted and improved social and cooperative behavior. While it appeared in its beginning form “and was present in both chimps and human ancestors, its one-sided rapid acceleration in our hominid precursors was probably accomplished by the simple expedient of volume increase.”

And then there was *Homo erectus* who appeared approximately 1.8 million years ago, the first hominid to have the same striding posture as modern man and who inherited *Homo habilis*’ tool-making ability without having appeared to have improved on it very much. However, he was the first of the hominid species to produce an “asymmetrically modern brain which is the sign of increasingly complex cognitive ability.” This probably allowed him to range out of his “cradle” of Africa into a much larger world.

“By 600,000 years ago, everyone had a big brain, and by 200,000 years ago people in Africa looked like modern humans,” says archaeologist Richard Klein of Stanford. “But there was no representational art, no figurines, no jewelry, until 50,000 years ago.”

Representational art implies creating from memory a recognizable two-dimensional image probably of predators or quarry meant to help tell a story of an experience worth repeating or avoiding. It might also imply the inability of a rather crude, beginning language development, by itself, to describe an important event.

Figurines might then imply the inability of two-dimensional representations alone, to adequately portray important aspects of animals that engaged Man’s attention. It might also imply modeling an animal as an artificial container of the spirit that Man sought to turn to his favor, as indicated in a past chapter.

As the figurines began to develop toward human form, the implication could be that Man had become minimally aware of an unseen *Presence*, a *Spirit*, beyond animal, to which he must apply his attention to receive an advantage of some kind. All climatological gods had human-looking representations (storm god, etc.).

Jewelry demonstrates ability beyond utility. Also enough leisure to create decoration. It probably first appeared to denote status or ownership of some kind.

“Combing the genome for genes that emerged just when language, art, culture and other products of higher intelligence did, researchers have found three with the right timing...The first, called FOXP2, plays a role in human speech and language...colleagues at the Max Plank Institute estimate that the human version...appeared less than 200,000 years ago...and maybe as recently as 50,000 [years ago]...Another gene with interesting timing is microcephalin, which affects brain size. It carries a time stamp of 37,000 years ago, again when symbolic thinking was taking hold in our most recent ancestors. The third, called ASPM and also involved in brain size, clocks in at 5,800 years [ago]... It therefore suggests that we are still evolving.”

These are the genetic “gifts” that have been discovered up to the present. Will there be more? Will there be additional genetic “insights” that will lead to other areas of acceleration? Or is this all that there is? What about *environmental dislocations* that are suspected to have been a spur in past ages? (In an earlier chapter there was mention of a

catastrophic environmental disturbance (flood) which seems to have taken place, 5,700+ years ago, approximately consistent with the ASPM “gift.”)

Or, is it just possible that *physical* evolution has exhausted the possibilities of change to the human form? Brain volume increase seems to have hit a physical barrier in the pelvic area of the female body.

It is theorized that any further biological adjustment to accommodate increased prenatal brain size will so compromise female mobility as to make it a survival threat in the face of a societal emergency or breakdown.

One may argue that we as a species have not waited for biology, or genetics to *rescue* us, that Cesarean section has engineered a detour around the present pelvic stricture. But this procedure is totally dependent on an ongoing stable societal environment. Any environmental disturbance that disrupted this stability would erase in a generation any incremental size advantage so gained.

Some in the research community theorize that the next advance will be in the “reorganization of the structure within the present brain volume.” But considering the massive interconnectedness that has already been discovered and theorized that governs our *many splended* neural facets, I don’t see much improvement without some kind of volume increase.

So, rather than waiting for size or internal reorganization to *save* us, we just might have to think more creatively within the confines of a radically altered and exotic paradigm. What might that be?

Most of the structuring of the “way the brain works” seems to have been genetically initiated, so unless a new hidden *recombination* or *expression in the making* can be encouraged to reveal itself, physical evolution seems to have already offered all that it has within its *bag of tricks*.

Are we then, the “end point” of evolution? Or are we just blind to an almost invisible idea that has been around and in practice in another venue for hundreds or even thousands of years?

Will the “Arrogant Young Rebel” called “Science” be compelled by ugly circumstance to inquire of the “Ancient Patriarch” if the “Wisdom of the Ages” has something else to say to us before it’s too late?

Fifty-eight hundred years ago for that last incremental change would imply that, as the article said, “we are still evolving.” But how, and how fast? Has that last incremental change fully expressed itself or is there something more, lying undiscovered, that can be converted in some way to a new kind of utility?

Approximately at the time of the last incremental change was when civilization is thought to have begun, and look where we have ridden this change agent to, but biology by itself most likely will not be a fast enough accelerator to *carry* us to where we desire to go, if we even know where that might be.

Man did it once through a small incremental *gift* that *suddenly* multiplied. The last change seems to have created a base platform called *culture* and the subsequent changes due largely to that have come very swiftly. Can nature stand much more than what we’ve heaped upon it already?

So, if genetics and possibly culture have truly *exhausted* their *bag of tricks*, what might we turn to that would be as different from them as the ocean is from the land that *life* crawled up on so many ages ago?

Theology, the wisdom of the ages in the form of *religion*, might have within it a way to *see through* to an understanding that would imply a process that has been under way as an anciently long work-in-progress. (If only we have the *eyes* with which to *see* it.)

Science itself implies that these genetic *gifts* so recently discovered had been bestowed long before we as a species had an awareness that they were there to use, or already in use in some small way. In the past, it appears to have taken an environmental disturbance or catastrophe to bring forth their expression or increase in activity.

The first seems to have taken hundreds of millions of years before initiation in its present form. The second and third in the millions. The fourth in the hundreds of thousands, and the fifth just 37,000 years ago. The sixth, and seemingly last just 5800 years ago, seems to have led to *culture* as an unanticipated by-product of the ability to gather much closer together than had been “natural” in all the previous eons of time.

A culturally based gift (theology) seems to have been around for millennia (thousands of years) and might be seen as the latest attempt to develop a platform upon which to build a new capacity.

Science’s sixth “gift” that genetically began some kind of expression 5,800 years ago, “just before people established the first cities in the near east” could be the “physical foundation” that a theological platform might be constructed upon. The many attempts at construction of a lasting platform seems to be the history of all the religions that have come and gone, as Man has tried to “civilize” himself. The *wisdom of the ages* seems to be the only lasting by-product of those many attempts that are still a work-in-progress today.

As far back as scientific (archaeological, anthropological) discovery has been able to discern, “self-conscious” Man has prepared his dead in a way anticipating, or at least implying hope of some kind of existence beyond physical life.

I’ve observed, in many of the previous chapters, that “Man was aware of *Something* that seemed to ‘lurk’ just beyond his ability to sense directly” and also at times “he was, through some experience, made acutely aware of that Presence.”

Some claim to have been able to *look through* to an existence beyond this one in near-death experiences, but whether it is *real* as we understand reality, is open to question. Those who have made that claim generally have had low credibility because of other factors in their life experience, such as delusionary tendencies on other occasions, and/or susceptibility to hypnotic suggestion, that dampens their *witness*. But have we understood that witness correctly?

Many, some long ago, claim to have seen *visions* of things past or future, a kind of *dream* or *spirit* time traveler, as it were, but their descriptions had seemed so fantastic as to have strained the credibility of their listeners. Only those of following generations have been able to bear witness as to the correctness of what the earlier visionaries had been *shown*. And the record hasn’t been perfect, but have we understood these phenomena as fully as we might?

How had they *seen* and what was it that they had *observed*? And where did they think they had been when they’d become aware of this *It*? The vast majority of descriptions of the realm of so-called superior spirit *Beings* was only warily received and usually responded to with an upward motion of the arms or the eyes.

This realm, such as it was, for those who chose to *believe* was eventually given a name that has been translated from ancient times into our pre-literary oral history references of “the heavens” and then, more recently, into heaven.

No one in those ancient times could have known that traveling toward this upward realm would take one to an environment that physical bodies could not exist in. Even now, we have to take special gear into this near-earth space that would be the equivalent to that of a fish wrapping itself in an envelope of water in order to visit dry land.

This *Spirit* rendering of that which could only be guessed at, first spoken in some ancient forgotten tongue, was meant to represent that which was more than real but somehow other than physical.

This unseen *Something* that seemed to give the animals their *powers*, and whose departure could only be vaguely implied in viewing a dying animal’s eyes as it passed from living to dead, from seeing to dull-eyed unseeing, haunted Man’s perceptions of an *existence* superior to his *natural* world.

Then when extrapolating this vague “other world” into the *Godliness* of climatology, it became the largely unseen power that drove weather disturbances. And then there were the solar and heavenly bodies that finally put Man into contact with the incorporeality of a realm so near to emptiness, yet with a kind of fullness that surrounded our earthly “cradle” with a hope beyond mere earthly life.

All through time immemorial, imaginative “guessers” have tried to surround the vagueness of visionary clues with a kind of “playhouse embroidery.” This was meant to give a kind of form to aid Man’s limited three-dimensional perspective. A way to fill in that *Something*, which was incapable of definition by even the sharpest of Man’s now well honed measuring tools.

Science has measured its *vision* of the many facets of “Creation” and found its measurement wanting. They have detected the microworld and found it to be a kind of copy of the macro world, or vice versa. They have measured the quantities of the visible universe and found it incomplete to explain the power that appears to drive it.

Because of this they have extrapolated a kind of “dark” energy and/or matter. Is it possible that it only appears dark because we lack the kind of vision to discern it in its true perspective?

Science has measured the microworld with its quantum mathematical tools and found that nothing will hold measurably still. Particles can switch to a waveform while the scientist is not looking, as it were.

These particles keep being able to be divided into ever-smaller sub-units which ability appears to approach infinity. And vast regions of dark matter/energy, as science has most recently extrapolated, appear to surround all the visible cosmos.

The speed of light seems to be a poor measure of a world that has been calculated to be 90 percent something else. Where will it all end? In a “worst possible” scenario Man seems destined, or even ordained to eventually know almost enough about all of the nothing that surrounds him in any direction that he chooses to look to be impressed that this is all there is, but still he searches. And if “seeing is believing,” he has a long way to go before certainty is even hinted at.

Is this then, a kind of intellectual “Tower of Babel” meant to remind Man that he can climb or build only so high in his own strength and wisdom? And what more does theology have to enlighten our way?

Science has *pictured*, as I've indicated in a previous chapter, the very beginning of life as one-celled *things* existing in a *soup* of finite hydrocarbon complexes from which they extracted their *being*. As the earthly prenatal overcast gave way to sunshine, it penetrated into this *soup* to a certain depth. Some of these one-celled *things* eventually became aware of this added *good*. Inevitably it would seem, "some developed the ability to discern the direction from which it came, and they reaped an abundant advantage." Science has extrapolated "that this crude light sensitivity" was the foundation stone of all physical sight. But this beginning awareness of the direction from which light came is a far cry from the visual acuity that we have now.

Science is today only vaguely aware of the existence of *something* that they have labeled *dark matter/energy*. Their visual acuity is so poorly attuned to this *Presence* that they cannot even point out with any certainty a direction where it may be found. This awareness is not sight and this *Presence* appears for all intents and purposes to be formless and vague in character to them.

If only they could develop a measuring tool fine enough to bring into our three-dimensional world some indication of this *Presence*, they might be able to extrapolate a source that they could attune their understanding toward. It would benefit Mankind's quest immeasurably, they aver, if their efforts were to produce a direction from which this "unknown quantity" emanates. This scientific "light," as it were. And it is a most important *quantity* for, they excitedly exclaim, it might be the "Grand Unifier" that would be able to bring together into a composite whole all of the separate forces that Man's science has *discovered*. The ultimate "Holy Grail" from which the "cup" of Man's knowledge would surely "runneth over." But I digress.

Theology has endlessly searched to identify that which seems to be at the center of all that Man does in his physical existence. But, like a blind man, is startled by vague shadows that suddenly seem to insinuate themselves across his almost sightless field of awareness.

These shadows, occasionally so solid seeming, have led Man's quest astray many times. The great variety of his religious expressions, over all time, stands as a stark witness to this *digression*.

The width of Man's *shuffling gait* and outstretched arms, as he vainly seeks out his *true* destination, testifies to the uncertainty he feels in his search for that unseen *thing* that seems designed to trip him or divert him from that path toward a truth that would grant him a vision that he does not naturally possess, and rarely understands the nature of.

Man's ages-long quest for even a hint of this understanding is strewn with the corpses of myriad visionary experiences that themselves have become subjects of awe, veneration, then outright worship, as if they, in the "fertile mind of Man," were the source instead of the message.

As these experiences turned into ever more static belief systems, *standard* interpretations became unchallengeable *dogma* vociferously defended by those most likely to reap benefit from "things as they are." Newer *enlightened* interpretations tended to be resisted as apostate corruptions of *original* belief, and additional "visions" tended to be treated in a "capital" way.

As Man radiated out into an ever-larger world these *apostate* versions of *true* belief tended to seek new horizons for the sake of clarity as well as security.

To this author, this *Spirit*, this *Presence*, this *God of All* has been everlastingly persistent in attempting to bring an ever-clearer, insightful view to Man, of the nature of His *supernatural* being. Each effort down through the long march of Man's religions was meant to bring an incrementally small but clearer view of this supernatural state of things.

The myriad of "imaginative embroiderings" added during the infinity of oral history's "twice-told tales" of communication was surpassed only by the *wisdom of man* superimposed to *clarify* a message infinitely difficult to understand. This muddying of the waters of the original visionary gift with Man's added graffiti has also projected the confusion of ignorance over a clarity too magnificent for ordinary man's understanding.

But there have been some things that theology has gotten right!

A belief in the reality of this unverifiable Presence has been universally insisted upon down through all the ages of Man's long quest for assurance that he is not alone in his existence.

That there is something superior to his present existence that Man is able to sense without being able to measure is a surmise that he is not willing to remove from his attention.

That he was meant to be elevated, in some manner, to join with this Presence has been his hope eternal.

That there is a *way* to be searched out, a latent *talent* that might be brought to expression, a *puzzle* beyond the capacity of Man's intellect alone to solve, which can provide for this grandiloquent transposition, has forever consumed the consciousness of his very uncertain and limited existence.

That is the bedrock upon which this sacred edifice has been agelessly constructed.

Mankind wanders through each individual's life experience like a mole, with senses sufficient only to his limited burrowing existence, and only vaguely aware that there might be something above him, or beyond him. On the rare occasions that he might come into direct contact with it, this blinding visionary experience leaves him unprepared to describe it in any way but the vernacular of his *tunneling techniques*.

When compared with similar *sightings* all would be remarkable in their variability, but each viewer would believe that only his was the most accurate. The passion of his experience might so awe others that he could gather a dedicated following who would avidly repeat his shared experience with the differences that time and tongue would add or subtract.

From such as this is the "haystack of Man's conceit" constructed. But blind as we are, might we not somehow train ourselves to sift through this *man-made* dross to discover those sharp needles of visionary experience meant to illuminate our way through to that most treasured, if illusive of yearnings?

The best of science *alone* cannot guide us along this path to that "other world," for their vision is limited to this existence, and the "darkness" that they currently stare into without understanding its dimensions or nature blinds them as surely as above-ground light does to a mole.

Theology might have correctly identified the next or final elevation, but has never been unified in their understanding of how it might be surmounted.

But might an amalgam of these two combatants' efforts and talents multiply their strengths, while overcoming the weaknesses of each?

Theology has always promoted the benefits of moral behavior, stressing service to others over serving one's self as more beneficial in the long run, in that it fosters living closer together than the self-serving spirit of competition would permit. It also allows the efficiency of specialization of work skills, encouraging the trusting relationships that are necessary for the teamwork that multiplies resources.

Science feels that it has discovered the genetic expression that encourages that behavior, called the Oxytocin gift as described earlier. Whether just trial and error over extremely long expanses of time selecting for that behavior changed the expression of that gene sequence, or a more purposeful alteration was performed cannot be known with any certainty at this reading.

All science can indicate is, at an anthropological time certain, 1.7 million years ago this genetic expression multiplied suddenly in an ancestor of modern man. *Homo erectus* appeared about 1.8 million years ago. Was he the one that it appeared in? He was the first that walked upright with a gait like ours. Did he also have a beginning awareness of that *Presence*?

We have no evidence either way, but the earliest theological thinking stressed that the principle of serving others was somehow superior to selfish individual acquisition. And Neanderthal man, 800,000 years ago, appears to have buried his dead in a particular way that implied a purposeful component suggesting hope for some kind of continuation. That hope had to have developed over some indeterminate period of time previous to its verified expression.

Insect brains, it is averred by the science of biology, appear to be hardwired. Their existence is ruled by reactions to their environment in what appears to fit a predetermined pattern. Like computer software, if the reaction is not "written in," no notice can be taken of any new or novel threat.

In the vertebrate portion of the animal world, a different approach seems to have been taken. In the simplest of life-forms, a very small portion of brain capacity has apparently been left open to learned reactions. The higher that one travels up the scale of complexity, the more openness there appears to be.

Man seems to have little in the way of truly instinctive behavior, and in him there appears to be the greatest number and strongest version of the altered genetic expressions that science has discovered. Has this openness of the brain network fostered the learning, and its repetition over countless generations, of behaviors with survival value? Has this then been partially written back in by genetic expression, either original or altered?

Man, it seems, has always been at war with his twin natures. The older *selfish* and personal, almost animal-like nature that demands the right to take of whatever resources are available around him to ensure his survival; and his newer, culturally learned, more cooperative nature that suggests the value of serving others in order to better serve one's self. As biology seems to have found, this culturally based behavior has begun to be "wired in" through several forms of genetic expression, but it appears to be no "done deal."

Theology has been preaching this same lesson among other *good, moral* behaviors for so long that it has become known as a part of the wisdom of the ages. Why? Is it because it is still a "work-in-progress," that we're not quite "all there" yet? And how much further must we go before we can learn how to *express* this developing ability consistently?

This is probably a gross oversimplification, a “parable” as it were, of a very complex process. But, is “species differences” as simple as a behavioral change among a portion of a larger population, that causes it to be separated out, with this physical separation creating a sexual separation that in turn creates physical appearance differences? And when environmental change creates a survival opportunity for one over the other, that one thrives and the other disappears?

Theology claims that Man is in the middle of choosing between two options, to go with the “good” or stay with the “selfish,” that can become “bad,” and eventually turns into “evil.” Theology also claims that God has given all Mankind the power of choice.

Will this choosing drive a wedge separating us into two different species? One in whom this power of choice has matured, wherein doing “His will” becomes so second nature as to allow a transition into the very different world that theology avers is possible, while the other stays within the confines of the physical world until some climatic event overwhelms his ability to survive? Is this then, a kind of final “rapture and tribulation”?

In a previous chapter I have asked the question, “Was this then the great tribulation, or just another?” There also seems to have been extrapolated from “words” in the Bible an understanding of a “rapture” of some from among the many, as popularized by the “Left Behind” series.

Once again, I ask the question, “Is this then the ‘end of days,’ the final one, where physical time comes to an end for humankind, where a remnant is seemingly removed, raptured while all others are accosted by a series of catastrophes with extinction as its final note?”

Theology appears to have discerned the destination, but in my opinion, in its quest for stability it has become sclerotic in its ability to digest new answers to age-old questions of just how we’re meant to get there.

Science for its part should come down from its intellectual Tower of Babble in recognizing that we all will eventually answer to the same “Master Planner.”

There are probably many other indications where the *wisdom of the ages* complements modern discoveries, but suffice it to say that together they, science and religion, would exert a far stronger influence on the concerns of Man than they do today, separated as they are, into selfishly disposed, unforgiving competitors.

So, is there anything beyond physical evolution that should be of concern to mankind? There have been many “ends” in geology’s long evolutionary trail. But for each “end of the many” there has been a beginning for a remnant. Are we being made ready for another end, and beginning? Is Man about to shed his old existence, like the fish who “rose up” to extract life from another realm? Is science right that we *must* evolve?

Will religion have the last laugh in having pointed out where at least some of us might be going? Can we just try to get along as we stumble toward a conclusion of our journey?

In Man’s long climb out of the natural world, there have been many steps taken up the ladder of physical evolution. Is there one more, a very different kind of step, a cultural platform, being constructed, or already finished but not in knowledgeable use, that some unanticipated circumstance might make us *acutely* aware of?

Half the battle, I’m told, is knowing the right question to ask, but that would mean that we are only half the way there. I wonder what we shall find as we begin our traverse of that other half?

“Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts” (Proverbs 24:3, 4, TLB).

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Chapter 26

More Than One Reality?

In reading the latest issue of my Discover magazine, (Sept.-09) An article on page #54 caught my eye. “Interview with Roger Penrose” that was subtitled,

“One of the greatest thinkers in physics seeks the core of consciousness and rails against the fundamental failings of quantum theory.”

As I read through the piece, some things caught my eye in the conversation between him and the interviewer “Susan Kruglinski.” (Her comments are bolded)

Here are some excerpts that began a thought process about consciousness and the different kinds or more nearly, shades of “reality.”

This process began with a suspicion which had been growing within me that Physicists today, (and more generally Scientists) give the appearance of being led along the largely unexplored frontiers of their domain where their almost-sightless awareness of what they try to envision is drawing them toward a conclusion that many are reluctant to accept and only a brave few dare to tentatively posit.

Man, as was said in a previous chapter, became aware “that there is more to this world than the eye or mind alone can perceive.” And in another place,

“Science is today only vaguely aware of the existence of something that they have labeled ‘Dark matter/energy.’ Their visual acuity is so poorly attuned to this ‘Presence’ that they cannot even point out with any certainty a direction where it may be found. This awareness is not sight and this “Presence” appears for all intents and purposes to be formless and vague in character to them.”

These excerpts that follow, seem to me to give evidence of a kind of support for the earlier quotes as well as the suspicion already stated.

(Each quote contains a thought that has impressed me and I have kept them separate for the clarity it will bring to the later reference of them.)

“He (Roger Penrose) even moonlighted as a brain researcher, coming up with a provocative theory that consciousness arises from quantum-mechanical processes.”

“Physicists will never come to grips with the grand theories of the universe, Penrose holds, until they see past the blinding distractions of today’s half-baked theories to the deepest layer of reality in which we live.”

“Is it true that you were bad at math as a kid?”

“I was unbelievably slow.” But within an understanding environment, that eventually changed, he went on to explain.

“In quantum mechanics an object can exist in many states at once, which sounds crazy. The quantum description of the world seems completely contrary to the world as we experience it.”

“That equation tells you this: If you know what the state of the system is now, you can calculate what it will be doing ten minutes from now. ---The equation should

describe the world in a completely deterministic way, but it doesn't. --- So there must be some other factor involved.”

“When he (Paul Dirac) was asked, What’s the answer to the measurement problem?” his response was, ‘Quantum mechanics is a provisional theory.’”

“Doesn’t the concept (Schrodinger’s Theory) drive many of today’s ideas about theoretical physics?”

“That’s right, people don’t want to change the Schrodinger equation, leading them to what’s called the ‘many worlds’ interpretation of quantum mechanics. --- It says --- you must become a superposition [two states existing at the same time] --- Of course , we don’t seem to experience that, so the Physicists have to say, ‘well, somehow your consciousness takes one route or the other route without your knowing it.’ --- You’re led into this ‘many worlds’ stuff which has no relationship to what we actually perceive.”

“The idea of parallel universes – many worlds – is a very human centered idea, as if everything has to be understood from the perspective of what we can detect with our five senses.”

“The trouble with it is, what can you do with it? Nothing. You want a physical theory that describes the world that we see around us. That’s what physics has always been. --- My view is that quantum mechanics is not exactly right--- and in a certain sense I blame quantum mechanics, because people say, ‘Well, (it) is so nonintuitive: if you believe that, you can believe anything that is nonintuitive’”

“Big fish, those things are. (String theory and Inflationary cosmology) It’s almost sacrilegious to attack them. And the other one is quantum mechanics at all levels—so that’s the faith. People somehow got the view that you really can’t question it.”

“In my view the conscious brain does not act according to classical physics. It doesn’t even act according to conventional quantum mechanics. It acts according to a theory we don’t yet have.”

“So I’m still hoping to find something like that (a tie between two known conditions)-some structure that preserves coherence, because I believe it ought to be there.”

In Physical Science today there seems (to this writer) to be a fissure developing. On the one side there are the traditionalists who want to believe that there is only one “world.” This seems to be the “natural” world that physics was developed to measure and our five senses seem to corroborate. But recent “Physics” seems to be developing into a double-edged weapon of discovery.

On the other side of this fissure, newer “pioneers” insist on leading out upon a road whose direction and end cannot be easily discerned, but where “educated guesses” seem to inform that there is more than this single existence. A recent permutation of the larger body of “Physics” called quantum mechanics seems to insist that there is a certain dualism in at least the sub-atomic-particle portion of our “world.” An extension of that “theory” or belief, “string-theory” if you will, into the macro-side posits that there may be even many worlds possible. Is this history repeating itself?

In an older version, Man as far back as archaeology can discover, seems to have intuited that there was more to his world than “eyes and ears” alone could confirm. Was there a “traditionalist” view in that ancient time that insisted on adherence to a one-world view of life called “Nature,” wherein unseen animal Essences somehow directed the flow of all life?

The scant “clues” that we have inherited don’t allow us the pleasure of positive confirmation, but all of history succeeding that time seems to positively affirm that the “traditionalists” went on to eventual extinction, or at least their ideas did, as Man’s next best guess expanded toward the more powerful forces seen within climatic disturbances.

However, a kind of “Resurrection” has been a recurrent theme during all of these ages of time, as ever-larger forces seemed to superimpose themselves over Man’s older understandings. His view of the origin of those unseen Essences expanded into ever-larger domains as he dogmatically followed the faint clues that seemed to lead him onward. Do we now seem to be having another?

Out of the serial “duality” of Man’s ancient belief systems, as they ascended the “ladder of time” into what is generally termed religion in more recent times, there again arose a new order. As it became practiced in a myriad of near-miraculous discoveries, some began to insist that this ever-so-much larger existence, the all that their many instruments measured, was most certainly this time, all there must be. Alas their very instruments increasingly seem to be undermining this certitude. Will the multi-existence pioneers have their way again?

Quantum mechanics insists that sub-atomic particles have two natures, one that an observer sees and one that he “misses.”

Religion insists that Man has two natures, one that is here, and one that is “there.” Only through “belief” can there be any assurance of the existence of the latter of the duo.

The quantum mechanical macro elevation posits that there are many Universes within its understanding.

The Christian religion’s Jesus declares that “In my father’s house, there are many mansions.”

As symbols go, is there a significant difference? Each assumes a belief that the other is there, and a faith that can act upon the premise.

In the part of “science” called Psychology there is the duality of the physical body (the Id) and then the mental processes called the Ego. Neurology also studies the way the brain answers the “calling” of this body, and how it also supports a theory of the “consciousness” of self and others as part of this mental process. The one can be seen, the other can only be understood or inferred by the results observed.

In Religion as well as neurology, there are the desires of the body called “Self”

Then there are the needs of others, collectively termed community, where conscience needs to be “heard.”

In the end there is the “Natural world” of Science and Physics, and the Supernatural realm of belief which requires a theory of “super-position” to see through to.

In the article, a well-known “man-of-science” witnesses to the imperfections of quantum mechanics, one of science’s main-stay theories.

“---The equation should describe the world in a completely deterministic way, but it doesn’t.”

“Quantum mechanics is a provisional theory.”

“It says --- you must become a superposition [two states existing at the same time] --- Of course, we don’t seem to experience that.”

“--- My view is that quantum mechanics is not exactly right---.”

But they persist in using their imperfect tool, because:

“You see, quantum mechanics has a lot of experimental support, so you’ve got to go along with a lot of it.”

In the end there is the desire expressed:

“So I’m still hoping to find something like that (a tie between two known conditions)-some structure that preserves coherence, because I believe it ought to be there.”

And a consciousness of things to come:

“In my view the conscious brain does not act according to classical physics. It doesn’t even act according to conventional quantum mechanics. It acts according to a theory we don’t yet have.”

“Physicists will never come to grips with the grand theories of the universe,” Penrose holds, “until they see past the blinding distractions of today’s half-baked theories to the deepest layer of reality in which we live.”

Hmmm, a scientist intuits a “structure that preserves coherence” which requires a “superposition” to understand, concerning a “theory we don’t yet have?” Science also seems to assume that there are “laws” that have always been there, and all they need do is discover what they are. Their “Axiom,” that these laws exist is unprovable, but accepted on its face. Discoveries seem to offer evidence of their presence. How could these “laws” have come into existence?

Might I make a suggestion as to where that “deepest layer of reality” may be discovered?

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Chapter 27

Angels?

Impressions vs. Interpretation vs. “Reality” An Attempt to See Through, from the Platform of Evolutionary Theory

In rereading an article carrying this “Angels” title in the April 2006 edition of the *Reader’s Digest* (p. 143) in the spring of 2007, I got that feeling again. This time it was not the déjà vu of a previously mentioned tract concerning Elie Wiesel’s “Cain and Abel” story, but that there was something that I had not had the mental discernment to appreciate the first time. But what was it? Angels are mentioned, kind of in passing, in the Bible, but what place should they occupy in my understanding of this book as a parable?

Again, the simplest understanding of that “evolutionary platform” would be that living things have moved (inexorably?) from less complex forms to the more developed representations that inhabit the world of today.

The earliest references to angels from my experience of the Bible’s contents appear in the Old Testament. They are presented as being *messengers* of God.

There have been many attempts at describing them from out of, most likely, the visions that they appear to have arisen from, according to the recipient of those *heavenly* messages. Early efforts at visualization gave them an only vaguely human form. Wings

were probably an effort to justify why these *messengers* seemed to be able to defy the law of gravity, to appear to hang suspended halfway between earth and the heavens.

Earlier still in the backdrop of prehistory there seem to have been animal attributes representing powers that Man recognized that he lacked, but had yearned for, over the eons of his rise from out of that natural order that had incubated him. The majestically maned head of the lion, with its powerful jaws, the cruelly sharp beak and talons of the eagle, the monstrously strong body of huge herbivores that gave protection from all but the most aggressive of the predators, seemed to represent as well as could be imagined, the all but invisible powers of that which lay just beyond Man's ability to sense directly.

These early representations appear to me to have emerged gradually from out of those same eons of prehistoric thinking, that had always tried to imagine what the *vessels* that contained these more than human powers must look like.

The metamorphosis toward a clearly human form within which most angels are pictured today—where they have only the power to do good, then disappear which makes them stand out from all the rest of us—has progressed in keeping with our ability to recognize the increasing subtlety of those differences

In the ancient past of recorded history, both oral and written, they appeared as agents of the believer's God (or gods) that Man had extrapolated from the merest of conjectural experience.

They *spoke* as with the thunder that loudly rolled over the hills, they *saw* with the sharpness of the lightning that occasionally claimed an apparently random victim. Their visage, as with other heavenly bodies, was too bright to more than glance at with any safety.

Their message also seems to have evolved from that *crack of doom* that came to Man as he stood perched on that anciently "sharp edge of extinction;" to the more morally oriented message of *correct* behavior that came concurrent with Man's increased civility that allowed his civilizations to emerge and advance; to the words of encouragement for those who couldn't understand the injustice of the ever more complicated rulership of our latter-day past. Our understanding has advanced.

From the "Be not afraid" message meant to assuage the *wondering* terror that still haunted Man from out of the vulnerability of his precariously uncertain past as he encountered these seemingly otherworldly experiences, to the modern versions of angels, meant only to help an individual overcome the "stumbling stones" of life; these have also evolved over that great expanse, from prehistoric through prebiblical and biblical times, to the present-day elucidations.

So, if many of these representations have come to us from out of that ancient prebiblical past, the context out of which the Old Testament was most likely fashioned, from where have we received the more modern versions?

Persian Zoroastrianism seems to have brought us "persons of light" that sometimes "stars" were the embodiment of.

"Under the general name of Amesha Spentas (Immortal Holy Ones) are grouped the six archangels who personify fundamental virtues and abstract ideas...In addition are a number of angels and lesser divinities, called Worshipful Ones who are more eminent than the rest, and include divine personifications of the planets...[and] Mithra, a divinity that incarnates light and truth...These too are almost parallel ideas as to the world's

regeneration, the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and everlasting life” (Encyclopedia Americana, 1959 ed. vol. 29 p. 733–734).

From out of that background Gnosticism also appears to have emerged during the Roman Syncretist movement (referred to in chapter 19 “Does History Repeat Itself?”) this was a drawing together of the “Mystery” cults during that transitional age that straddled the BC, AD chronology change just prior to the time the “Followers of the Way” emerged upon the scene.

Gnosticism, a study by those “Seekers after Knowledge” whose imaginations seem to have run rather wild on occasion, appear to have *borrowed* from the varied sources that they studied, searching for *enlightenment*. They seemed to have appeared upon the scene as a separate belief system sometime just before 30 BC. They incorporated into their system “stars” that represented the “spark of divinity” within *chosen* individuals that represented some level of *Godhood*. Then there were *divine* beings that covered many levels of relative “Gnosis” (mystical, as opposed to material knowledge).

They enthusiastically borrowed also from the first teachings in the early days of the emerging Christian belief system seeking to incorporate Jesus as one of their *divine* beings, and the Christian God in one of their levels below their topmost *Divinity*.

At first they attempted to absorb the “Followers of the Way” into their larger and more organized *Mystery Cult*. Failing that, some of their teachers joined the early Christian church, bringing with them the “pollution” of their earlier understandings.

Almost too late the apostles recognized the danger that this Gnostic version of the Christian teachings presented. It may have been the Apostle Peter or an early successor within a “Counsel of Many” who banned these intrusions, charging those teachers of that Gnostic brand of Christianity with heresy, and the battle of the ages was joined.

That battle, as detailed in a previous chapter, appears to have left a mixed legacy. The contest for the hearts and minds of all of the populations that flowed into the Christian belief system like a mighty river during those first three hundred years surged and ebbed for and against the apostolic version of the Word.

Gnosticism had at least a seventy-year time advantage over the infant Christianity with what appears to be the first evidence of it as a freestanding cult being found in Samaria sometime before 30 BC. It had borrowed its way into existence theologically mainly from the three major belief systems of the Middle Eastern megalopolis. (Does this sound familiar? Think Mohammed.)

From the Babylonian Astral religion. (Pertaining to or proceeding from the stars. Also pertaining to a supersensible substance supposed to pervade all space, and form the substance of a second body belonging to each individual. (Amer. Col. Dictionary). (Dark matter/energy, this early?)

To Persia’s Zoroastrianism, and Egyptian Isis worship, they *borrowed* the main tenets which were a kind of “Dualism” between the spirit and material world, with lesser elements “on loan from” possibly Hebrew mysticism (Kabala), and Phrygian as well as Buddhistic sources.

It held its own and even advanced against the other Mysteries Cults for some time, but it must have eventually recognized the superiority of the “Jesus Message” and began to *borrow*, and then burrow its way into Christian belief.

Gnosticism the *Mother* slowly gave of its substance to its offspring Christian Gnosticism. This took a considerable length of time, but finally the process was

completed and this *Mother* largely disappeared from view around the fifth century (AD), except for the Manichaeism of Manes, a Gnostic teacher whose opinion prevailed in western Asia and Eastern Europe during the fourth and fifth centuries of our era. But did it really disappear?

Modern Unitarianism might be seen as the godchild of Arianism, which was itself the godchild of ancient Unitarianism (the original), a belief in the *singularity* of the Christian Deity. This influence, in all probability, came from that old battle cry of the Jewish religion, "There is but one God and His name is Jehovah" (a Germanization of the Hebrew Yahweh).

"The earliest teachings of the Followers of the Way" (according to the Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 27 p. 294; L-Unitarianism) "made no mention of Jesus as God...Tertullian [a Christian theologian of North Africa, 200] who was the first to introduce the term Trinitas into Christian thinking, is responsible for the statement that in his day 'The common people think of Christ as a man.' It is that common belief which Arius is trying to save, at least in part, at Nicaea [325] in his conflict with Athanasius."

Even so, Arius was no strict Unitarian. Neither did he seem to be an enthusiastic Gnostic, as the three groupings at the Council of Nicaea seem to have implied, the Strict Arians, the Semi-Arians, and the Alexander Athanasians. But under the negative rephrasing of an old saw, "Any friend of my enemy is my enemy also," all three, the Unitarians, Arians, and Gnostics, an "Unholy" Trinity, were seen as associated.

The highest point of success of the Gnostic Christians and the Gnostic leaning Christians came when Arius was appointed Archbishop of Constantinople by Constantius II sometime before his death in AD 363. But Arius was not a strict Unitarian, his representations became a highly compromised version of the duality of Jesus nature, as he tried to walk a thin line between the Unitarians and the Athanasian champions of Trinitarianism.

The Gnostics had subscribed from the beginning to a similar position in having recognized Jesus as one of their "Divine Beings," but they resisted the placing of the Christian God at the top of their cosmological hierarchy. Their "God-most-high" was of a different sort.

So what does this have to do with angels? Perhaps nothing, perhaps everything. During those first three hundred years the Apostolic and Gnostic Christians vied with each other like Abraham's sons, the brothers of two different natures, Ishmael the firstborn and Isaac the chosen one. Or again, as with the "Twins" of Isaac, Esau technically the firstborn and Jacob the "insistent" one.

In all three cases the slightly elder one slowly gave way to the younger, but not without contest. The Apostolic church fought to maintain the purity of its message against its slightly older *twin* whose wildly imaginative nature made it the "hunter-gatherer" of the theological thinking of their day. Within that agglomerated wildly speculative synthesis there appear "Aeons" which apparently has its twin in the biblical angels. Once again the elder *twin* slowly gave way to the younger, with the younger seeming to have almost accidentally absorbed some of the attributes of the elder along the way.

Aeons: "From the Supreme Being...is descended a series of divine personages arranged in pairs of male and female [serial Adam and Eves?], which all form the *Pleroma* the mystic representation of this one God, who is remote and unknowable. In

some Gnostic systems, the members of the pleroma are called Aeons which emanate in pairs further and further from the center” (Amer. 1959 vol. 12, p. 736).

Angels: “an order of creation higher than man, frequently mentioned in the Bible. Angels are often represented as the messengers of God...There are thought to be several degrees of rank among them, perhaps three, four, seven, or nine, which the later conception of the “heavenly hierarchy” arranged in ascending order: Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim. There are also fallen angels...Great emphasis was laid on angels in the apocalyptic books, for example Enoch and Revelation” (Amer. 1959, vol. 1, p. 681; Angels).

Cherubim: “One of the order of heavenly beings which in the angelic hierarchy are next to the seraphim. Originally, in Mesopotamia, the word referred to a winged sphinx with human head and animal body, placed at the entrances of sanctuaries and palaces as divine intercessors and guardians” (Amer. 1959, vol. 6, p. 420; Cherub).

Seraphim: “A plural Hebrew noun which occurs only in one passage of the Bible, Isa. 6:2–6, where it denoted certain heavenly creatures of human form but having each six wings...Their station was above the throne of the Most High...The Seraphim are in the later Jewish theology and in Christian Angeology classed as the highest of the orders of angels” (Amer. 1959, vol. 24, p. 578–588).

One of the first mentions of angels in the Bible is in Genesis 16:7 (NKJV).

“Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, ‘Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?’”

This passage doesn’t describe anything about this angel except that it is “of the Lord” and can talk. It doesn’t indicate whether the communication was mental or the spoken word. It does not indicate what rank it carried (if that part of angeology had been interpreted into being by that time), or whether it had human form.

Hagar answered as if it had come from a familiar source. In her anxiously desperate condition she might have thought that she was hearing things, or that it had come to her as a welcome realization that she was not alone in her condition.

Either the question asked was rhetorical or indicated that this messenger did not emanate from the omniscient portion of the Godhead.

Many centuries later Ezekiel sees a vision. While not expressly labeling it angelic the descriptions bear a good resemblance to the previous cherubim representation. He was a captive either in Ur or Babylon (Chaldea) where the Israelite community was immersed within the captor’s theological iconography.

“Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month [June] on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar [Chebar Canal] that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoachin’s captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Bizi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

“Then I looked and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud of raging fire engulfing itself; and brilliance was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures.

“And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calf’s feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each went straight forward.

“As for the likeness, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the likeness of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on their left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle (at the back) Thus were their faces...As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright and out of the fire went lightening. And the living creatures ran back and forth in appearance like a flash of lightening...the likeness of the firmament above the head of the living creatures was the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads...This was the likeness of the appearance of the Glory of the Lord” (Ezek. 1:2–14, 22, 28, NKJV).

And shortly after that, biblically speaking, Daniel hears and feels an angelic presence while experiencing a vision (Dan. 10:4, 5, 10, 12, NKJV).

“Now on the twenty fourth day of the first month [April] as I was by the side of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like Beryl, his face like the appearance of lightening, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude...Suddenly, a hand touched me...‘Oh Daniel... understand the words that I speak to you...Do not fear...I have come because of your words.’”

This time the angelic presence is seen, if only as in a vision, in human form encased within a shining aura, a truly “heavenly” body.

Again additional centuries later, in Revelation 1:20, *“The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.”*

In this case John was having a scene explained by *“One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band—His eyes like a flame of fire, His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice like the sound of many waters. He had in his hand seven stars” (Rev. 1:12–16).*

During a somewhat earlier time frame, Matthew remembers Jesus saying: *“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their Angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10).*

This appears to be the first mention of a personal angel, a “guardian”?

Again in Matt. 25:41, *“Then He [the King] will say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”*

Another kind of angel, “fallen,” cursed to roam the earth, confined to it, like a bird with its wings clipped.

And again, Matt. 22:30, *“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor be given in marriage, but are like Angels of God in heaven.”*

Here Jesus is describing all resurrected people, male and female, being like angels, having the form of angels.

Now in Mark 8:38, “*For whosoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes into the glory of His Father with the holy Angels.*”

The largely human configuration by this time has been mostly confirmed. With the exception of the cherubim and to a lesser extent the seraphim whose form has been consistently described within the caveat of seeming lack of corporeality (physical existence). They are only spoken of by this time but never seen, the Ark of the Covenant having been long lost.

So, the Bible seems to contain only meager references to and descriptions of angels. But there is a rich folklore in the modern day about angels, who they are and what they can or are sent to do. Now, it seems obvious, we must look elsewhere for indications supporting their origin, but where?

The Books of the Apocrypha (non-canonical writings and/or teachings) mention angels often but have been considered of suspicious origin.

There are several books of Old Testament times that are so classified, by those who organized the Masoretic text having been allowed in only as an appendix to that work.

In the New Testament times there were others that, long before present times, had been charged with being outright Gnostic tracts or written under the influence of Gnostic or other teachings.

They appear in the Vulgate (Catholic scriptures) as an appendix but do not appear in most Protestant versions. Much of the substance of angeology, I suspect, arises from out of these non-canonical sources.

Because they have been allowed that entrance, much of what is modernly *known* having to do with *angelic* description and disposition, may have innocently infiltrated into the larger community of knowledge.

And, because the Gnostics were the great borrowers of the ideas of those whom they studied, their *books* would probably have to be considered secondary sources at best, and elaborations of false doctrine at worst. But, Gnostics were known to have been wildly imaginative in some of the extrapolations of what they had studied.

Also, during the first three hundred years of the Christian Era, this version competed rather seriously with the apostolic renderings, having been able to lead church teaching for a short interval before the Council of Nicaea overthrew their versions. (Unitarianism vs. Trinitarianism as regards Arius).

By the opening of the seventh century those of the majority view had harried this school of teaching to a point that these Gnostic thinkers committed the most heinous breach of faith imaginable. They seem to have given over to those Muslim desert raiders the parts of the old Roman Empire that they nominally controlled by virtue of residence.

Greater Syria and all of the old Hebrew homeland, within which the Jews were still vastly underrepresented, were practically an outright gift. The Metropolitan of Jerusalem declaring it an open city had to practically escort a Muslim army commander to the city walls to keep it from being bypassed. All of Egypt and much of North Africa were a slightly later addition to the list.

It is said that they treated the Muslim armies almost as liberators, with the Jews in residence grasping onto the Muslim promise to rebuild their Temple. What they got was the Golden Dome of the rock, which to this day has prevented them from even thinking seriously about any rebuilding project.

So where do we stand today? Is it true that Christian theology has been contaminated with the imaginings of those Gnostic thinkers, in the area of angeology at least? And if so, how early in the beginning of the apostolic age did it come in?

If their imaginings came from their studies of the Babylonian Astral belief, Zoroastrianism, or Mystic Hebrew thinking, could it have been around to influence the thinking of Jesus' day?

The axiom of Christian theology is that God is omnipotent as well as omniscient. This understanding forms the "solid rock" upon which all other things may be proven. This being so, Jesus, as "God incarnate," could not have been influenced by the knowledge of mere "man." Therefore anything that He taught would have to have influenced the thinking of his day not the other way around.

Two examples of his teachings as has already been quoted earlier should be sufficient to understand angelic purpose and nature.

"Take heed that you not despise one of these little ones for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10).

"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor be given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30).

In the first quote Jesus seems to be saying that all children have angelic intercessors, who may stand before God directly in representing or overseeing the interests of children personally and individually.

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray to God my soul to keep.

In the second quote Jesus is answering the question that assumes that marriage is a covenant that exists beyond the grave. In his answer to this "baited" question, Jesus provided instruction that took his questioners beyond the ability of their imaginations to extrapolate that far above the "natural" limitations of this world. The complexity of their rather tortured question reveals their guile as well as their limited understanding of what might come after physical death.

In his answer Jesus poses an interesting question. Within the subject of "*in the resurrection*" he seems to be saying that all people, male and female, will be "*like angels of God in heaven.*" Is there a significant difference between being "like angels" and being "their angels"?

If I die before I wake
I pray the lord my soul to take.

We've talked about the differing forms within which angels seem to have been described, from the animal/human composite of the cherubim, the seraphim's human form with some animal support (several wings) to the human form with just two wings, to the human form sans wings that Jesus seems to be describing, to the modern form, just like a person, who happens to disappear after a life-saving good deed.

Was Jesus, with his description, attempting to correct an ancient misinterpretation of a visionary experience, where the one who received it came from out of a background of animal representations of special powers and couldn't yet imagine a kind of human-like representation of *powers* that seemed to be far beyond even those descriptions already in vogue?

Has He given us another parable to ponder? A history, so to speak, of Man's long effort to try to visualize that which has always been just beyond his ability to sense directly, and has always been far more than he could ever imagine?

*Truth stands the test of time,
Lies are soon exposed
—Proverbs 12:19, TLB
Don't let the sparkle and smooth taste
Of strong wine deceive you.
—Proverbs 23:31, TLB*

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Chapter 28

Belief vs. Unbelief

In the world of Science, Religion and Other Information Gathering Systems

The *American Collegiate Dictionary* describes *belief* as: "Conviction of the truth or reality of a thing, based upon grounds insufficient to afford positive knowledge."

On the other hand, *unbelief* is simply stated as "lack of belief, disbelief, esp. in divine revelation or in the truth of the gospel."

Of course, by extrapolation, this can be applied to any religion or belief system wherein the lack of positive proof creates doubts in some who are not convinced that following the precepts of that tenet, dogma or system of behavior will produce the results claimed for it.

The problem with any system of belief is the partial nature of the proof of its utility. Many behaviors that are purported to lead to distressing consequences have a time lapse long enough to cause doubt as to the origin of the end results.

Those who are skeptical for any reason, or just generally not totally convinced, of the *truth* of the claims that these tenets make, become a dissident faction within a believing movement. The search for a different interpretation, or understanding of an alternate acceptable behavior pattern that will overcome their reservations, can take many forms but inevitably meets with opposition from those whose *authority* governs and preserves the traditional dogma, or understanding.

Among those who might, even ever so respectfully, challenge the current or traditional behavior norms may be individuals who are perceived to have suffered negative consequences from following precepts accepted by many as trustworthy guides to productive behavior.

These *factions*, depending upon the *popularity* of their competing interpretations, may gain adherents. As exceptions multiply within static, authoritarian systems (due possibly to conditions that have changed so subtly as to not have been recognized by those in authority), those who have responsibility for the maintenance of the integrity of the existing structure of belief become more resistant to change of any sort. If any kind of

advantage can be seen to accrue to those who have that responsibility, then an additional motive to support “things as they are” can be suspected.

As a faction grows, disagreements widen to the point of eventual separation into two or more competing and antagonistic parts, each contending that their view is superior to the others, or all others. *Systems of belief* by their nature don’t seem to have the ability of self-correction for reasons, some of which are listed above. This ability, while in theory might be seen to enhance their viability and survivability, for obvious reasons breeds authoritarian opposition.

Because the authority of those *in charge*, having been agreed upon by most, comes from an entity so far superior to any and all of its members as to vitiate easy argument challenging its correctness on any subject, any suggestion of change of any kind could be characterized as questioning that higher authority directly.

But interpretations are human attempts at understanding *experiences, messages, visions, dreams, etc.* put forth in a manner that might suggest differing understandings, and possible alternate routes to that ultimate authority. But as the generations pass, objection to change increases as the understanding of an *original interpretation* becomes confused with eternal unchanging *truth*.

Experience teaches that systems which become static tend to *die out* with time, being replaced by newer ones whose answers seem more complete, but again, only for a time. Then these in turn are replaced by others, all of whom may be seen to have marched down a similar road of stultifying changelessness. But change, no matter how dogmatically it is resisted, does come, and history, including prehistory, is strewn with the remains of belief systems that could not or would not accommodate themselves to an ever-changing understanding of that sought-after *Presence*.

For all, who have felt responsible for their version of truth, resist the humbling perception that all which has come to Man has come through the imperfect agency of Man’s intellect where misinterpretation can creep into even the primary experience.

Regarding the beginning of an understanding toward a perception of an “Ultimate Authority,” in a previous chapter it was stated: “Against all the understanding derived from his senses that should convince Man of his singularity, somehow he could never feel totally alone in the world. Even understanding his felt need to believe in something more able to control the raw forces of his environment, there were still times when he felt led by something more than his own experience. Religion provided a form in which to enclose that something.”

But the mistake, I feel, has come in the misunderstanding that all *necessary* knowledge has come in one concise package.

Science, even though it has at its core an axiomatic belief that everything else is built upon, is a different source of inquiry. Its propositions are frameworks that are meant to be filled out with new discoveries.

They don’t declare them to be *true*, only testable. It seeks to adjust to new information and therefore its propositions are changeable, but as indicated in a following set of paragraphs: “Still, because of the uncertainty within these testings, it [science] offers no firm ground to build a system of belief upon, to explain those verities that seem not to have changed over the ages, as well as the questions that still have no apparent answers.

“Religion is the platform upon which those things [have been, and] can be contemplated, where surmise can lead to a seemingly logical conclusion, the foundation of which lies far enough beyond current ability to verify as to seem without resolution.”

And within another few paragraphs: “Yet *religion*, systems of belief, exist primarily because Man has always felt that there was more to this world than the eye or mind alone can perceive.”

Religion always seems to have been best at answering those kinds of questions. But *religion*, at least the Christian version of it that I have experience with, has felt ever more crowded by its younger upstart cousin *science*.

This entity, in the last two centuries has provided what appear to be exquisitely, and seemingly complete answers based upon interpretation of physical discoveries in its many fields of expertise.

Many of these at first glance seemed at variance with centuries’ old surmises. These earlier *best guesses* should have never been *cast* in the stone of final answers, as many seem to have insisted upon who felt responsible for stable dogma.

At first, the answers of science could be fended off by the very authority of the established religions of the Western World, Catholicism, and its co-opter Protestantism. All answers they felt must, by the necessity of its faith expression, have come from its sacred book the Bible.

The question of the genesis of this tome has been under challenge for a very long time, but its beginning, it is generally agreed, was as a kind of written history that dates back to at least seven or eight hundred BC. Even with that date of origin it has been thought to be a compilation drawn from other earlier sources. And these sources, some aver, taint the *originality* claimed for it.

But, if the Bible can be seen as the parable this author claims, then most of the power of those challenges fall away. Its *earthly* genesis, as this study has been at pains to point out, should be seen as Man’s *best guess* at the time of each *encounter* with the *Presence* that eternally seems to have been there.

The Bible then might be seen as only the latest compilation of what all those encounters have tried to describe. And all compilations have always been limited by the linguistics available at each stage of those encounters.

It has always been seen, by those of us within the faith, as the *Word of God*. How this understanding is to be interpreted has been largely an open question, with no authoritative attempt to answer it until the early to mid-eighteen hundreds when a doctrine that declared it to be the *literal* Word of God was first promulgated.

As I had indicated in the Introduction at the beginning of this work, “This clarification, I’m sure, had been felt necessary by the increasing popularity of these new answers [from science]. And so, resort was made to a time-tested biblical method of corroboration by looking back into itself for earlier references that the word, as adherents declared it, had also been so declared by others from the past.” But has it in this case?

Even setting aside the argument of circularity, that any attempt to prove a statement by references to the statement itself were circular in nature and proved nothing without outside sources of corroboration, it is found that in the early history of the practitioners of Christianity there was the cautionary advice from St. Augustine (AD 354–430) to be “wary of a literalist interpretation of the Bible’s genesis.”

Why would he have felt the need to include this advisory within his writings? He was born a scant thirty years after the Council of Nicaea had canonized the works chosen from the many that purported to truthfully convey the Christian message. Among those that had been declared apocryphal (of doubtful authenticity or authorship), many still competed for the attention of the faithful and would for a long time. Even today a few keep being *resurrected*.

All these books had human authors. Many of those chosen were written by or in the name of the apostles. Claiming God as the direct author even if only through the avenue of inspiration would have put the councilors of Nicaea on the slippery slope of claiming to know which ones of the many in circulation were really God's direct creation.

Then there was the Old Testament, an heirloom from the Hebrew Torah, the "rock" upon which the Christian message stood for historical veracity. No Levite priestly class or Midrashic Rabbi ever felt the need to claim those writings as anything more than a history of the Jewish people. Nothing but human authors has ever been claimed by them.

In a recent article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Mar./April 2007) titled "Losing Faith" by Herschel Shanks, an interview with four biblical scholars, one of whom, a practicing Jew made the remark, "Inerrancy assumes a kind of literalism never adopted in Jewish tradition."

St. Augustine understood the kind of debate that this claim of "literalism" must surely evoke and advised against requiring the *faithful* to defend it. "That it was the *Word of God* he was sure, but in what manner this was so, he felt no need to speculate."

But in the early eighteenth century the *Church* felt the need to make that claim and the *can of worms* that St. Augustine warned against has come crawling out, to the detriment of the clarity of the Christian message, the embarrassment of many of the faithful, and to the delight of those in the *world* who would *scoff* at such a claim.

Because the *Church* has not had the *wisdom* to give the new answers of *science* a respectful review, because it has pushed back instead of going forward, a schism has opened, where none should have been allowed, that grows wider every day.

Because *science*, suffering through the wounded pride of the non-acceptance of its well-intended discoveries, has built *battlements of intellect* with which to nullify the answers of old, and with which some of its participants attempt to seek to discharge their senior partner with the cry of obsolescence, we have a fratricide, reminiscent of the biblical Cain and Abel, that could lead to the unintended demise of one or both.

Many scientists, but not all by any means, have become confused by the amazing multiplicity and versatility of their answers. They feel that what they *know* has now superseded all older *knowing* and have given up their belief in anything but their *knowledge* (Gnosis). (Chapter 23 provides background for this statement.)

On the other hand, some of the best of the scholars of theology, having at first set out to verify and sanctify their faith through the studious investigation and correlation of the *answers of old*, have stumbled over an exception that they believe has nullified the basis of the faith that they once had.

This is the problem that William Dever, one of the scholars in the interview mentioned earlier, has confessed to. He said that he came from a "fire-breathing fundamentalist" background. "I was ordained a minister at 17, put myself through undergraduate school and divinity school, through Harvard, then a congregation. I have

13 years experience as a parish minister and two theological degrees. For me it was this typical Protestant conundrum: It's all true or none of it is true. [Literalism?]

"My sainted mother once said to me, 'If I can't believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, I can't believe any of it'...I [Dever] discovered the works of George Ernest Wright—and his little book *God Who Acts...* 'In biblical faith,' Earnest said, 'everything depends on whether the original events actually happened' and I thought they had, so I went to Harvard to study Old Testament theology with Earnest.

"I got disabused of that in the first semester, so I shifted to archaeology...My long experience in Israel and my growing uncertainty about the historicity of the Bible meant that it was the end for me."

In each case the acceleration of *knowledge* has turned belief into unbelief. And who has been hurt the most? Certainly the scientist and theologian have hurt themselves with their well-intended search for more knowledge. The one deceived into believing that his knowledge is sufficient in and of itself, and the other convinced that what he *knew* (was taught) was not reliable. But who "observes" them as they engage their "destiny" in this manner?

Within the vast audience of the common man there are those who witness the arrogance of the scientist, in his studied self-sufficiency, and become anti-scientific. In the almost-as-vast audience of the laity there are those who watch the highly respected scholar stumble over knowledge that was more than he could handle.

They wonder whether it's smart to know that much, or whether it might be better to *skate along* in semi-ignorance, taking the chance of drifting into a form of agnosticism rather than daring to learn where the real *truth* may lie. Many others have tried to rely on faith alone to be able to ignore what appear to be more complete answers. Largely because of the aforementioned occurrences, there are many questions that appear to swirl among those of the multitude who harbor *secret doubts* that make them feel like hypocrites.

As for me, I have had my "Eureka" moment. I have found it. This is the *lodestone* of my new assurance. The Bible is a parable of God's Word! With this touchstone of theological understanding I am now assured that all scientific knowledge is allowed. Whether it is used for good or evil is Man's choice, except as he places himself under God's tutelage.

And the Bible? As a parable it doesn't have to be perfectly worded to project the perfect Word of God, which is not offended by Man's inability to *get it right* the first time. My new understanding, that this parable that is the Bible, is God's gift to me, given in the fervent hope that I can learn to raise the sights of my understanding high enough to come within view of the *real thing* without succumbing to the *shock and awe* inherent in coming under the influence of such a vision of perfection.

I believe that I can make it, and I believe that I can take it, all the way to my encounter with eternity.

*The Man within, who searches long
Finding naught, he gropes along.
Finding aught, he casts about
For support, he cannot doubt.
What he finds, he cannot see
For what he grasps, just cannot be.*

*For what he clasps, seems a very thin line
Secured by what, may be only his mind
But, No! This must not be true!
For the inner man, has always sought You
—Al Gilding*

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Chapter 29

Good vs. Evil

Toward an understanding of Values

An ancient creature (hominid?) on the road to becoming Man had probably looked at the accidentally occurring sharp edges of naturally broken stone for ages of time, before he could discern an advantage that he might acquire from them. Was it the desperation of an embattled individual searching for anything that might postpone the violent end that had suddenly confronted him? An end that he had always had an elemental fear of turning into reality with every nightmare that had rehearsed the probability, since his kind had emerged into an awareness of the consciousness of self?

Or, had he serendipitously been made aware of the uncertain utility of a broken branch that offered a sometime protection, before he had learned of the utility of a stone to crack tough shells? Had he, in his industry to feed himself, used his hammer-stone too diligently, accidentally flaking off an edge that revealed the sharpness that he had been warned away from, among the many choices of stones to be found lying in certain places close to where water was to be found? Had he become aware of the danger to himself in the continued use of that broken stone when the flesh of his finger came into contact with that sharp edge? Had he now thrown it in the forlorn hope that this suddenly sharp edge would somehow slash into this enemy of his existence?

It's hard to tell whether any of these probable discoveries, among many other possibilities, had the greatest effect in the rise of Man. Many of his sharp stones have been left behind as a witness to the genesis of his rudimentary technology.

The urgency to communicate the details of an advantage, once discovered, possibly initiated a simple grunt communication that allowed him to convey to those around him the specifics of these discoveries. One or more of these possible scenarios was certainly the elevator that raised Man up from out of the natural world to become extraordinary. Or did brute learning by example precede even the most simple of oral symbolism?

“So the Lord God formed from the soil every kind of animal and bird, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever he called them that was their name” (Gen. 3:19–20, TLB).

In its beginning form, language was probably limited to the identification of the things of Man's immediate, personal world. If one wanted to share an experience with others, a reenactment would have been required, adding the appropriate emotions that it had engendered, or maybe replacing some of the paralyzing fear with a display of a kind of bravery that had not been a part of the original.

All hearers of his story, with him, lived close enough to the world of wildness to quickly understand that the sound that eventually became lion, or other large predator, was probably something similar to the call of alarm that was still used on occasions of sudden panic: That the sound for cave also was connected somehow to the smile of satisfaction, or the relief of being in secure surroundings. Only much later would the *quality* of an experience become represented linguistically, as the speed of communication became more urgent.

Other sounds that much later accompanied these proto-words have become known as *relative* terms, in that they have meaning only as they attach a value to that which is being described. A large lion vs. a small giraffe; the *sweetness* of ripe fruit vs. the sourness of spoilage, all the way to the bitterness of poisonous plants. There are those that describe opposites such as up and down, in and out, over and under, etc. And then there are those that describe something that confers a benefit such as food, shelter, safety, even survival vs. those that carry an indication of harm such as pain, or a threat to survival such as the presence of a predator. These also imply opposites such as *nice* behavior vs. *bad* experiences, or the much, much later moral equivalent *good* vs. *evil*.

These may seem like different words for the same opposites but *bad* is a more generalized term that implies misfortune that has come seemingly without purpose, or personality; whereas *evil* implies a repetition of harm that is purposeful, as if aimed at a specific target.

My *American College Dictionary* defines the following words:

“**Nice**: Pleasing, agreeable, delightful, amiable, pleasant, kind, precision, skill, or delicacy, showing tact or care.”

“**Good** [whether capitalized or not]: Morally excellent; righteous; pious. (virtuous)...satisfactory in quality, quantity, or degree; excellent...Right, proper, qualified, fit...Well behaved...Kind, beneficent, friendly...Honorable, or worthy...Reliable; safe...Genuine, sound, or valid...Agreeable, pleasant, genial...Favorable, auspicious, propitious, fortunate, profitable, useful.”

“**Bad**: Not good...Not valid or sound...Having an injurious or unfavorable tendency or effect...Depraved, corrupt, base, sinful, criminal, Bad is the broadest and simplest term” (implying anything that stands in opposition to that which is good).

“**Evil**: Violating or inconsistent with the moral law...Due to (actual or imputed) bad character or conduct.”

“**Moral**: Pertaining to or concerned with...the distinction between right and wrong...concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct...Resting upon convincing grounds of probability.”

Because these are “relative” terms, each of them appears to have a somewhat different connotation when applied to different situations. What appears to be *good* as viewed through the eyes of an individual may turn out to be seen as *bad* in the eyes of a mate, a family, or a community.

Man has been described as a social animal concerning his physical existence. As far back as archaeological evidence can discern he has been a member of a group of one size or another. That there is safety in numbers was a lesson learned before language, even before proto-man. But this arrangement places a strain on an individual’s ability to satisfy the desires of self. In the oldest parts of his brain, Man is a competitor with all others of

his kind, for the acquisition of those resources that ensure the continuance of life and well-being.

Yet, there are many things that can overwhelm an individual's ability to survive in the solitary world that fits his singular nature. It is also obvious that only those who have learned to inhibit the desires of self to a degree that allows others a closer proximity than is natural have survived to pass on to the present generation the inheritance that is Man's world of today. Only through hard experience has Mankind learned the extent of the compromises necessary to have accomplished this gargantuan effort at *civilizing* his natural inclinations.

The *wisdom of the ancients* that in an heroic length of time became the *moral law* gives evidence of the terms of the covenant that he has entered into that has brought this noble task to its present fruition. History is strewn with the detritus of those primitive societies that had attempted a reversion to a lesser compromise or one that was meant to serve the welfare of a lesser group than the whole. But each generation has had to learn anew the relevance of each and every term of that covenant, the benefits of which during periods of stability might not be as obvious as in times of stress. The parts of this covenant that societies have honored they have reaped the benefits of, the parts that they have ignored or considered irrelevant they have had to learn anew the reason for their original inclusion in the whole. Could Man through the *eye of chance* alone have accomplished such a monumental task?

It seems to have only been when an appeal was made to the *Presence* that has always seemed to lurk just beyond the *natural* senses of mankind for the guidance that was beyond Man's ability to give himself, that he has been successful in devising and maintaining this "Book of Wisdom."

So, how does this apply to the opposites as indicated in the title? Satisfying the near term desire that would be termed *good* by the individual seeking it can be seen as having a *bad* effect if repeated too often and can be discerned as selfish or even *evil* by others at whose expense the repetitions are allowed or insisted upon. The bodily senses unmindfully direct the individual toward the immediate pleasure-seeking goals that foster the sensation of *feeling good*.

The beginning of all cultural organization probably began at the level of family. From the earliest of times, as far as the science of anthropology has been able to discern, the father/patriarch has been the guarantor of the welfare and safety of the family, then clan, etc. in the ever-expanding buildup of cultural hierarchy. This has probably been so since before Man was separated from the rest of the natural world, as science describes that process. Even the animal world offers examples of complex hierarchical structure, as some species appear to have *learned* the benefits of cooperative enterprise, which concurrently brought elevated levels of individual safety. It is also probably safe to say that there has been a more complex social structure than the family since before Man emerged as a separate species, but the family has always been the root of all human cultural edifices for the most obvious of all reasons.

The most complex hierarchical development in animal societies seems to have been an alpha male surrounded by a coterie of slightly lesser males arranged in some kind of *pecking order*. The stability of this kind of structure seldom outlasted the natural or unnatural demise of its leader. Even weakness or sickness of the *alpha male* could trigger

a challenge to the *established order*. Or, an exceptionally well-developed interloper might wrest the prize in the temporary disorder attendant with this *changing of the guard*.

The unnatural servility required by this *enforced* cooperative arrangement bred an ever-present tension among its participants who needed to stay ever ready to react to the change that might enhance their opportunities within this cooperating group.

Man seems to have evolved beyond this *natural* limitation. His wondering intellect, within some indeterminate length of time, intuited an unnatural *Presence* apparently just beyond the bounds of his physical existence.

At some point in Man's early development an appeal was thought to have been made to this *Presence* (there have been many representations for this entity who we now call God), to arbitrate between equally demanding claims to leadership in order to avert the chaos inherent within a physically contested resolution. The stability conferred by an agreement to *view* this *Magnificent* arbitrator as a final *Referee* in leadership contests inexorably spread to contests concerning other kinds of behavioral disputes. The inevitable expansion and codification of these *first* decisions defining allowable behavior between individuals, families, groups, tribes, etc., I suspect, became the basis for what we have throughout most of historical time called the *wisdom of the ages* or the *moral code*.

In the early expansion of mankind over the face of the globe, many groups carrying this tradition went their separate ways settling into societies that remained isolated from each other over considerable lengths of time. Each inevitably made additions or deletions to their versions of this code as was deemed desirable and/or necessary to fit the unique-appearing conditions that they faced. Eventually as territorial expansion brought these groups (that later became societies) into collision, the name or names of their *separate* gods sounded strange to all but themselves. It was even difficult to picture these *strangers* as *real* people. That all might have come from a common source seemed to be an idea, the simplicity of which was beyond the capacity of Man's intellect. Their cultural mores, while familiar in some ways also sounded strange in others and the determination of whose were superior was a contest with no apparent possibility of agreement short of violence.

Disputes over whose name for God (or the gods) were the most relevant was to be an unavoidable source of misunderstanding and conflict that still rages today with no end in sight. *The small still voices* pleading for all to remember the *brotherhood of man* have been, over the ages, and still are, relegated to a position of an almost-silent observer as wars and rumors of wars smother all but the participant's own sounds of violence.

Can we again come to the place where our ancient ancestors were, when they all placed their faith and trust in a single *Magnificent Arbitrator*?

Every belief system present in the world of today avers that only they have a lock on the identity of that source, which appears to be waiting for mankind to make its plea once again. Were the most aggressive proponents of this new system called *science* to prevail over its predecessors, would Mankind insist on going its own way one more time, even with historical and theological evidence that these deviations, so many times in the past, have led to destruction?

The *moral code* agelessly arbitrates between the personal *selfish* desires of the individual, and the exacting but *selfless* needs of the cooperative community. Man's intuitive intelligence grasps the superiority of the long-term good of cooperative effort, over the short-term gain in the gratification of individual desire, but the immediate power

of that desire has always, and will always tempt the individual to *fudge* on his commitment to abstain from those activities that this covenant denies him.

Good is the one who voluntarily abstains from thoughts or actions that tempt toward any breach of that covenant.

Good also are the influences that draw the individual toward the observances that serve fellow participants.

Selfish is the individual who cannot or will not voluntarily comply with the needs of the many.

Even more selfish is the individual who purposefully seeks personal gain at the expense and pain of those others who have trusted in his or her adherence.

Evil is any influence that draws the individual away from serving the urgent needs of *community*.

More evil still is any attitude that inflicts pain without remorse on all who may be seen as “fair game.”

Most evil of all is the denial of the belief that undergirds the philosophy that provides the benefits of adherence to that covenant, and denies the *Author and Finisher* of that greatest of all agreements.

*Once to every man and nation, comes a moment to decide,
In the strife with truth and falsehood, for the good or evil side.*

Some great cause, some great decision,

Offering each the bloom or blight,

And the choice goes by forever,

'Twixt that darkness and that light

Seek ye then the path

That will lead you to the right

Away from the dark and dreary

from what must be covered by night

Seek ye then your choice

For choice is all we're given

In every way all through your day

Make it worth someone else's living

—Al Gilding

(untitled hymn, excerpted from the Mar. 2009 Smithsonian, end of article titled “Bingham’s List.”)

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Chapter 30

Parables

What are They, and Why are They

As to what they are, chapter 1, “Toward a Middle Ground,” gives the dictionary descriptions:

“A short allegorical story, designed to convey some truth or moral lesson.”

“A comparison: specifically, a short narrative making a moral or religious point by comparison with natural or homely things.”

(“Homely: Ordinary, domestic, plain, unpretentious, not having elegance, refinement, or cultivation.”)

I would have the reader understand my usage as the following:

“A parable is a word picture comparable to the physical structure of the Ark [of the Covenant, referenced earlier]. As such it is another kind of “type,” (a prefiguring symbol—a simplified representation of a substantially more complex subject) very similar in its nature.

“I am convinced that the Bible is also a kind of “type,” a complex word picture containing many other word pictures, a parable of parables, the most original of all simplified examples, the foundation from which all others derive their form. It is the quintessential narrative story told to convey a complicated message by using familiar things to illustrate a communication many times too complicated for the limited understanding of Man!”

(Within the Bible, see the Book of Job, a complicated dialogue of many parts symbolically representative of Man’s long quest for answers to ill-formed understandings of questions concerning “beliefs.”)

As to why they are (parables that is), Jesus, when he taught about the things of earth and the behaviors of Man was straightforwardly a teacher, why else the appellation “Rabbi, Teacher”? But when he taught about the things of “His Father,” he used parables extensively. It was as if he had difficulty translating such a magnificently complex concept and idea into any human language. And so he used very simplified, “homely” analogies set into a background understandable to his listeners. Even then he had to play connect-the-dots for his disciples.

In my case, the parable was already there, unknowingly constructed by its human authors (or intentionally instructed), over the ages that span most of pre, and recorded history. What I was given was straightforward and crystal clear. Fortunately, no translation of the message into a parable (as Jesus had done) was needed. What was necessary and critical was learning how to interpret the parable, the Bible, back toward the larger meaning that it had come from that became my personal odyssey.

As I said at the beginning, I could scarcely believe how the understandings fell into place one after another of all that I had read and wondered about, had read to me and heard discussed in my presence, of that great work, among innumerable other literary sources, over many years.

The *gift* that earlier I had so hesitatingly understood the need to accept the reality of was a kind of insight gained I thought, at an early age, of simply learning about how to stay out of trouble.

This skill and the understandings flowered gradually, beautifully, magnificently in the thought processes that raced through my head, erasing the uncertainties, the doubts, the suspicions that had afflicted my questing mind over a lifetime. I also had been aware for a long time that I was not unique in my particular kind of myopia, that these thoughts might be the kind of new beginning for others that they have been for me.

But the thoughts seemed to have been the easy part compared to the question that eventually came. What was the use of all the thoughts if no one knew that I’d had them? But oral witnessing had never been a strength of mine, and how would anyone else be

able to make the kind of sense out of such a rambling train of thoughts, that seemed so delightful to me, as they came, seemingly unbidden so many times, and in so many ways? But any attempt at purposeful recitation on my part never seemed as good or complete, or organized. Categorizing the thoughts had never seemed essential until the necessity of relating them to others.

That was why a literary witness had to be made. It **must** be, **would** be, and now **has** been made in as good a manner as I have been able to bring to such an all-encompassing enterprise.

At first I thought my goal was to harmonize two different ways of seeing the world and how it got to be the way that it is. There was the way of belief, “a logical surmise about things that seemed to work to Man’s advantage long before any understanding of why could even be contemplated.” Through this system a platform of understanding that I have called the *wisdom of the ancients (or the ages)* was constructed to denote those things that seemed not to have changed over time.

Then there was the most recent wisdom of the human intellect that I have identified as experimental science. This was built upon the earlier platform of philosophy, and theology. In answering the question, why, philosophy posited that everything worked because of universal laws that had always been there, all Man had to do was to discover what they were. Science worked on their discovery without granting theology the need of identifying a source.

Experimental science began as the systematic study, through observation and testing, to discover those laws. Hypothesis is a best guess at describing the language of a proposed law based upon the reaction of material things. If they supported the hypothesis, this would lead to a theory, as corroboration through experimental testing added support to that “best guess.” This, in turn, would lead to a designation of law, only when over time no exceptions to testing results could be discerned in practice.

For eons of time through the seemingly upward march of Man, *religion* (a systematic exposition of belief) was the only reliable source of answers of how Man got to be where he is, as well as how he has come to be in such a commanding position.

In more recent history many of the “best guesses” of belief seemed not to have held up very well, before the challenge of science’s verifiable postulations. Because it is never easy for leadership to admit error (or inexactitude) conflict has ensued, dividing those whom should have remained as one because of the commonality of their quest. Error on the one side has bred error on the other as even the reality of the “Axiom of Existence,” God that is, has been challenged. Those in science who unwisely made this point of contest now find themselves on the uncertain ground of attempting to falsify that which cannot be proven or disproven.

This new way of viewing the Bible as a parable has allowed me to see what is the good in each, while being able to overlook the errors of both. These words that I have written have instructed me in turn, adding meaning that I hadn’t been aware of as the characters first appeared in textual form. It has made me wonder at the patience of that which seems to have guided my hand as I have journeyed down this path of discovery.

If the Bible is a parable, what is it a smaller, simpler example of? It seems to cover a huge expanse of time and territory. The Bible is almost universally *seen* as God’s word by most who support it and all who proclaim it. If so, then in what way is it God’s word?

I have proclaimed that it is a parable, a smaller example! But of what? It begins with Genesis, which describes in a manner, the beginning of everything, all creation.

As I have endeavored to elevate its contents into a larger context that science has attempted to describe everything in, it would seem to contain all that has ever happened in the cosmos as well as everything here on our earth. Is God's perfect Word then a record of everything that has ever happened, everything that is happening, as well as everything that ever can happen? That's some big word! But why not? If God is omniscient, all knowing, then He knows all there is to know about all that has happened, all there is or ever will be. I know, I just repeated myself, but maybe it bears repeating, and repeating and repeating as Mankind has been doing so imperfectly over the ages.

Every instance that I have been able to discover as candidates for sub-parable within the larger example have elevated themselves rather well into the real-world contexts of history and scientific discovery, and there are probably many more, but I have to confine myself to what has already been exemplified, as my share of what there is to witness to.

Have I digressed one more time? Who cares? Maybe it needed to be said, right out, plain and simple! Maybe it doesn't matter anyway, any more than all the names that Man has tried to attach to this *Presence*, an indefinite term that I have tried to use to keep from inventing one more, but that probably won't stop the process from what I've already seen.

Throughout all of the serial namings that Man has applied to his understanding of Deity, from the animal representations, to the climatological, then solar, celestial, and finally more personal appellations, there has been the unwarranted certitude that each name has been the singularly correct one. Many needless, as well as bloody contests have been waged over such prideful arrogance.

Now the question needs to be asked again. Has there, after all, been only the One, patiently waiting for Mankind to finally overcome the many figments of imagination and guess right about the entity that underlies all existence? This incomprehensibility that has "lurked just beyond Man's ability to sense directly" has been called these many names, as Man has attempted to elevate his sensibility of this *Presence*. From the long-forgotten names of old to the Christian name of God, they appear to have been countless as well as imaginative.

Visions have been claimed by many who might have become "more acutely aware" of this *Presence*. May *insight* have been granted to those who were seen to be *intuitively wise* over the millenniums of Man's saga?

And what of the scholar's quest for enlightenment as he tried to pierce Man's curse of that linear veil of imperfect discernment? And is science only the latest attempt at that scholarship?

All seem to have been granted, within a variety of degrees, an elevated sense of this *Presence*, this God. Imagine the arrogance it must take to feel that one could make a material representation of such an entity! And yet so many have tried, and still do!

And so many of us construct and worship idols which reside outside of our everyday awareness that they are what they are.

And so many others have denied that existence, and still do.

And so many more deny the power of that most ancient of paradigms even as they reluctantly accept the reality of this Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Magnificent Obsession!

So I wait for Man to understand the need to “sift” through the chaff of his “imaginings” until he finds, once again, those bright jewels of visions given, insight granted, and enlightenment bestowed. Only then will he be able to piece together a relevant mental image of “I Am!”

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Epilogue

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and (a) void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (dark vapors).

“Then God said ‘Let there be light.’ And light appeared. And God was pleased with it, and divided the light from the darkness. So he let it shine for a while and then there was darkness again” (Gen. 1:1-5, KJV & The Living Bible, paraphrased).

If you were given the privilege of having witnessed such an event, in the safety of a distance that afforded an appreciation of the colossal scale upon which it took place, how would you describe what you had seen? What if you had also been made aware of the “Source” that had initiated such an epic occurrence?

However witnessed, this eons’ old story told in a very ancient original or possibly even a proto-language seems to be as old as civilization itself, or more likely even older. How was it that it was transported, translated, and transferred from that ancient time to become today’s oldest of all stories?

The Old Testament portion of the Bible, as I’ve said and implied in other parts of this book, appears by most estimates to have come into its written form sometime between the sixth and the tenth century BC with the bias leaning toward the older end of the time frame as ever newer discoveries seem to confirm.

It appears that Genesis, its first *book*, largely came from older literary or oral history sources that appear to predate the Hebrew understanding by centuries, if not *ages*. Were some of its stories *borrowed* from belief systems ancient even to these scholars of old? Why would this “pagan pollution” of their *truth* have been *allowed*?

Could it be that the many *gods* supported within these myriad versions of “belief” were merely misinterpretations and therefore misrepresentations of the One who has eternally and patiently instructed Mankind about the nature of His *Being*? Might these *borrowings* have been meant to come to them as a kind of parable of earlier times, telling of things far beyond the normal ability to remember?

In today’s world, if you were a scientist or inventor you might have tried to describe that huge event in this way, for the benefit of a lay public.

“It’s as if a person performing an experiment for the first time had pumped all the air out of a glass vessel down to the point of a vacuum, then after sealing it, he sat in a darkened room and contemplated the void within the vessel for a while, in an attempt to determine whether there was any detectable substance still within it that his instruments had failed to register.

“From somewhere it was as if a switch had been thrown. A searing white light suddenly burst forth in the midst of the voided vessel. It was blinding in the sudden

brilliance of its ignition. Almost as quickly it was gone, leaving only a darkness where the nothing of the void had been before.”

Of course, the very smallness of that description leaves out so much of what would have actually been *seen* as to misinform a *listener* as to the real dimensions of the occurrence.

A long time ago, probably somewhere around 1,700 BC or before, had a learned scribe tried to put into words that which had been spoken to him by one who had seen a vision? The words, in whatever language it was first enunciated and then, whenever it was written, probably could have been translated into something akin to the opening quotation.

Or, had he transcribed those words from a text so ancient that it had been lost beyond the memory of those who had misplaced it, and then found by a near miraculous accidental discovery, hovering, as it were, on the verge of disintegration when it was rescued?

Or, had this been an ongoing project, to render into written literature the oral history recitations, whose beginnings had been lost in the mists of a time so immemorial as to dwarf all of the time ascribed to written history? How far back might a time traveler have to journey to discover the beginnings of a culture’s *Genesis* story?

In the *Overview*, the beginning page of this book, I said: “Man has always felt that there was more to this world than the eye or the mind alone can perceive.” As far back as anthropologists have unearthed the fossilized remains of Man, there have been indications of the ability to think abstractly.

“Many discoveries seem to have been purposeful burials, with remains seeming to be positioned by some unknown thought process. In others ‘grave goods’ have been added as if to imply some usefulness after the fact of physical existence. Then there were the drawings, rendering life into representational art for a purpose seemingly beyond just physical utility.”

Again, in a following paragraph: “Against all the understanding derived from his senses that should convince Man of his singularity, somehow, he could never feel totally alone in the world. Even understanding his felt need to believe in something more able to control the raw forces of his environment, there were still times when he felt led by something more than his own experience.” Under what circumstances might he have first become aware of that *something*?

In chapter 5, under the sub-heading The Rise of the Mammalian Order, (according to science) it was stated, “The latter of these two branches (hominid) made its appearance less than ten million years ago, with modern man, *Homo sapiens*, having been around less than one hundred thousand of those years. Somewhere in the time between the... two events a bipedal hominid began its slow punctuated rise toward the life-form that became us.”

And in chapter 9, “From out of the dim unmarked past, comes an animal, quite unlike any other, elevated by some unseen fate to come to a place of primacy unmatched in all of earthly creation. For many eons (ages) of time he remained in the incubator of the natural world, slowly gathering the limited resources that were attuned to his ever-changing ability to manipulate. Perched always on the knife-edge of extinction, he sharpened his tools of survival throughout that crisis-laden epoch” (the Pleistocene).

Chapter 5, “So when did mere hominid become Man? The so-called Homo erectus seems to have been a simple, tool-making ‘animal,’ which assumes an ability to retain in memory certain procedures of manufacture, along with an occasional fortuitous accidental improvement that could then have been purposefully replicated...At what point can we say that (this) proto-man became Man?”

And later in that same chapter, “From psychology we get the principle that Man is self-conscious. He is aware of himself as a separate individual within a group. From early childhood he recognizes his image as a representation of himself...Awareness of self could have been the beginning of future abstract thought...Somewhere within that miasma of inherited change...(from a fortuitous notice of a naturally sharp edge to purposeful manufacture) Man continued the sharpening of his tools of survival.”

In the animal world, an early awareness of the presence of danger has survival value. Sight, smell and sound are the primary early warning systems that alert herbivores to the presence of danger in their area of activity. This has led many times to the incongruous scene of herbivores slowly grazing across a meadow totally unaware of a predator lying quietly in wait, unseen in tall grass, downwind of his intended victims. Only the alarm call of a bird or small climbing animal, from an elevation that overlooked this scene, could save one of that herd from becoming dinner. That seems to be the acme of an herbivore’s learning ability, to accustom itself, by very slowly acquired experience, to use something other than its own senses to secure its safety and survival. Or is it just the *natural selection* process that weeds out the unwary?

The creature that became man must have witnessed this scene, ages of times, before the ability to extrapolate this position of oversight into his imagination while on the ground became heritable.

Those few in the beginning who were able to become aware of the possibility of a presence beyond their ability to sense it directly many times survived to propagate another generation.

This *tool of survival* was sharpened persistently over those ages before the possibility of a use of the power of this *imagining* could be extrapolated into a wider utility.

At first the entity so indirectly sensed was, of a most dire necessity, a fearfully malevolent predator, and the desire to somehow be in some way like it must have been overpowering. The ever-finer sharpening of Man’s sharp stones, the substitute fangs that he had been so woefully deficient in, must have been used to open dead carcasses for a long, long time before the realization that it could be used on live flesh also dawned on some lucky individual.

Imagine the first time that some variation of his sharp stones was successful in bringing down that dreadful predator. The celebration must have been intense. They could now imagine that they had in some way become as powerful as the entity that had so many times lurked just beyond their physical ability to sense, but now not beyond their new ability to visualize in its supposed absence.

That predator who had now also most fortuitously become a part of their larder had somehow lost the essence that made it live. Might they somehow reclaim a portion of that essence through making its muscle their muscle, its skin their skin, its likeness their likeness?

An appeal to that part that still seemed to lurk just beyond their senses somehow, even without a body, could there be a way found to show a proper kind of respect for the

power that this body had once possessed, that might make possible a way to come into possession of a portion of that lost essence? There might even be a way imagined to grant them some of its success as they went in hunt of the prey that used to be that predator's exclusive prerogative.

Other animals, some many times larger than the wielder of these new *fangs*, had also long ago earned the respect of this *new* hunter. After each success might a ritual of respect be performed beseeching the departed *essence*, the spirit of the quarry, to grant the successful hunter a portion of itself? Did it eventually begin to be *understood* that the successful hunter had only caused the essence of each individual so hunted to be returned to its *source* and a properly orchestrated request for some small token might be granted proportional to the greatness of the respect shown toward this *source*?

As the ages marched inexorably onward, many others of nature's bounty would be added to *spirit totems* as an ever more confusingly complex pantheon gradually grew into being. Slowly a *vision* of the merging of the *essence* of all *natural* beings into a *family*, and then into a *Mother of All* could be conceived.

Slowly also, the *good* that came from the hunt began to interpose itself between the *evil* source of terror of the hunted and that *other*, which had always seemed to lie just beyond Man's physical senses. Ever so slowly also, an idea of a balance of the *good* and *evil* that might reside within an *essence* superior to all others, that might be swayed by the behavior of Man came into his repertoire.

Throughout all these eras of remembered experience, larger, less predictable forces that were able to alter Man's environment left questions to which there seemed to be no answers. The power so overwhelmingly present in each display seemed to diminish that of even the most powerful animal Essence, whose individual representations ran in fear before this larger show of force.

In chapter 9, I observed, "Slowly, his awareness increased of those observed elements that were still far beyond his understanding, let alone his control. Powers both fickle, as well as fearsome displayed themselves, often with disastrous results for mere Man."

Some of these *powers* seemed to be even greater than their *Mother of All*, but how could that be? Even the largest display still seemed to be in the world of her *nature*.

Was there something more? Could there be other *beings* behind these forces that the best of Man's experience could not sense?

Could there be *essences* that made the thunder, the lightning, the storm clouds, the floods, the earthquakes, and the fires that poured from broken mountains?

If there were, could they be mollified in some way, similar to the *respect* that Man had learned to show to the animal essences?

How? What kind of ritual or practice must he learn to come to the notice of these greater *essences*?

Maybe by offering something that Man holds even nearer and more dear?

"All we have is the sustenance gained from the hunt. Should we have been offering these to more than the personal *essences* that the animals of the hunt represented?"

And surely It wouldn't, It couldn't demand the treasures of our very own life, or that of our progeny? But sometimes, weren't they senselessly swept away as if an angry force took what we were too ignorant to offer? That a much larger malevolent something lurked in every one of these disturbances seemed an idea whose time had finally come!

Might this have been how an even more dizzying extrapolation was finally arrived at, through the myriad thoughts and wisdom of the many, and something more? Was this how Man, always searching beyond his current grasp, reached toward an amorphous kind of veil that had hidden something so far beyond his worldly senses that it had gone totally undetected, until now?

At first only a very few would have been insightful enough to have grasped this most outstanding of all discoveries. But such an important finding would have spread rapidly after its first revelation, especially if a serendipitously pacifying result appeared to be occasioned in the company of the first few efforts.

Again in chapter 9, "Out of this fear grew a philosophy that posited, only the sharing of Man's increasing bounty could decrease the likelihood of victimization at the whim of these entities that seemed so much larger than the life of Man's understanding. Also from out of these beginnings, gods, related to every element of the world and nature, sprang forth, named for the powers that they seemed to influence."

There had to be names! Everything had to have a name to enhance its identity! An *essence*, a *spirit*, a *god* of the named force would have to carry the name of the force, until a better arrangement could be found. A god of lightning, a god of thunder, a storm god, etc. had now come into Man's vernacular.

Again in chapter 9, "Man's gods, that had thus been brought forth, evolved in step with his own growing abilities to manage other forms of life to his benefit... Then, those forces of nature whose powers were at a level unmatched by any displayed by mere animals, gained ascendancy in the fertile mind of Man. But, they (also) grew to be many. And their propitiation began to absorb much of the time necessary for his own survival. Over the ages, there (again) began a consolidation of the various powers, that seemed to have some similarity, into ever fewer Godheads, that continues to this day."

As *early man* spread over the face of the earth, many separate ways were chosen that created the isolation of that separation.

Old gods slowly took on other names as languages diverged. Different names were given to newly discovered gods, whose natures, while similar, seemed strange to all but those who had named them.

Favorites began to be *found*. A family saved remembered whom they had prayed to. A clan rescued from disaster, a tribe rejuvenated, a village spared, a city resurrected, a *people* honored in battle.

As prime living space in fertile valleys filled, competition for the best sites grew in seriousness. Winners honored their favorite *God* by imposing him on the newly subjugated. Early recorded history is replete with accounts of such happenings.

When fortune shifted from one to another, back again, and then to a new contestant, as it did in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, it was discovered that subject peoples remained more pacific if their favorite was not removed from them completely. Pantheons emerged according to the fickleness of fate, as no winners seemed to remain strong forever.

Moving through the complicated world of animals, then through the uncertain world of climate variables, Man cautiously began to look up into the heavens. A *sun god* early on became a favorite. The regularity of its lofty comings and goings decreed a sense of order to the smallness of life below. But still, many of the earlier representations lingered on in the fringes of man's awareness.

The moon, that ruled the night, modifying the surrounding blackness with a kind of regularity that many times allowed the outlines of those close by to be recognized, led inevitably to a certain coziness, a certain intimacy of private closeness. When did it become a symbol of playfully frivolous sensuality? When did this delightful ritual detach itself from the “Mother Goddess of Nature” to become the pleasure Goddess called *Sin*?

Then there were the *gods* who took on the idealized form of Man, whose attributes were seen to be only a little larger than life itself. Heroes, whose selfless deeds caused them to be remembered as with a god-like mien, proliferated within the Pantheon of the “Hellenes.” All were exemplars of the voluptuous curves of female youth and the male strength of practiced athletes. Many were the epics and sagas recited at great length about these mythological gods and goddesses and their many heroic quests as if they were a cut above the best of once-live heroes.

Then there were those who aspired to such a lofty perch sans the lofty deeds, such as this were some of the Caesars of Rome.

Throughout it all, the idea of a complex but singular kind of *God*, superior to all that had ever been, maybe the only one that had ever been out there, wallowed around the edges of Man’s theologies, rising occasionally to a temporary prominence, only to be resubmersed as the strangeness of the novelty grew too much to bear.

The science of archaeology presents us with evidence of an ancient *God-most-High*, named EL who arose somewhere within the beginning civilization of early Ur, of Mesopotamia, having risen to the top of his pantheon, only to be overthrown after a long dominance. He had become *Old-in-the-land* of a land that once trembled before the mighty deeds of His earthly hosts.

Escaping to Canaan in the company of Abraham, He then virtually disappeared as Abraham’s heirs went into the snare of Egyptian hospitality that slowly sank into virtual or actual captivity.

Then there was the short-lived prominence of the Egyptian god Aten a latter-day echo of the much earlier sun god Re whose ultimate fate was to merge into the god Amun-Re.

And then there was another, Yahweh, the Hebrew God whose Tetragrammaton (four-letter word) substituted for the name that the Exodus Hebrews feared to give voice to on the imagined pain of death. The God EL, incognito, whose alias disguises him, even to this day. Again, there was a much later Hebrew-look-alike god, Allah of Islam.

But wait, we seem to have overlooked the Christian Deity simply called God. Yes, He was a kind of *successor* to the Hebrew God also, but the difference is that “He was a triune god, the Great Three in One.” Is this merely a new version of the earlier experience with plurality, only now, just a resubmersion into a lessor pantheon? Or, is it a tacit admission that Man has difficulty digesting this *God* in a single gulp? What about the more ancient others? Complexity does seem to breed plurality, but plurality seems also to breed confusion, and that fosters a lack of concentration.

The following might well be seen as a gross oversimplification of what really happened, but bear with me for a while as I get a little practice in my parabolic thinking.

As I understand it, early scientists in the experimental vein, when addressing the complexities of the natural world, discovered that it might be made more fully understandable if the apparently many parts of it were separated for the benefit of individual study. As each specialty went its own way, a vague element of despair grew

within the whole field as to whether a way would ever be found to fit the parts together again.

A synthesis of sorts began to emerge as the specialties began to spread toward a condition of overlap. The way back together, while a long confusing journey, is bringing a greater understanding of the natural world than could ever have been imagined if the whole had remained undivided.

Religion, it seems, has had a little more trouble in getting it all back together. The great many names that Man has given to that which made him feel “that he was not alone in this world” was an understandable response, naming that which he imagined that he knew something of, to separate it from that which he was aware that he did not. The many names only indicate the many times that Man has tried to understand that, which he, on occasion, felt acutely aware of.

It also indicates the many times that a *germ* of crystalline inspiration seems to have been virtually smothered in Man’s attempt toward a simplification thought necessary to introduce it into his lesser capacity, a kind of “dumbing down,” rather than a “rising up.” And then masking this lesser interpretation within a cloak of unchangeable truth has made that “reunification” virtually impossible, and has bred many violent encounters in the debate on who has gotten it most *right*.

Again, from a first sensing of a possible predator’s presence; to the receptacle of respect for the rewards of the hunt; to responsibility for the vagaries of climate oscillations; to the sensate presence imagined within the heavenly bodies; to the nearness of the family favorite, then the clan, the tribe, the village, the city, and finally the favorite of a nation, Man has always sensed something. It, this *Presence*, has been delicately intertwined throughout all of these *imaginings*.

Today, It is seen by many, to be a God-over-all that transcends the world, the cosmos, everything. The naming was neither right nor wrong, it was only an attempt to make familiar, that which has always seemed strange.

But the descriptions only revealed a gross ignorance of the communication that has been given in so many ways, and innumerable times. The embroideries stitched onto it by the myriad show-and-tells of human imagery have been more indicative of Man’s imagination than his clarity of hearing, his clarity of remembrance and understanding. But always, some small germ of the truth conveyed, lay well hidden within this “haystack of Man’s conceit.” But the Purveyor has, is, and always will be persistent as well as insistent that an ever more clearly perceived vision is placed within the questing grasp of Man.

There has never been an individual (with one possible exception) or institution of Man that has had a totally clear and complete understanding of the intelligence that has propelled Man’s progress. Today’s level of perception is exactly equal to today’s level of progress toward that perfect elucidation.

Because of this, tomorrow’s view of today’s perception may render our knowledge just as superstitiously ignorant as we see the best of those answers of yesteryear.

Our task then, as I see it, is to winnow the *haystack* for these *gems* of visionary and insightful experience that *We* were meant to inherit. As we painstakingly *fit* these *original* pieces together, a growing clarity of view should emerge, of the *whole* that was their origin. Might we be well into the beginning with a parabolic understanding of a book that I would recommend?

To think is to be human
To know is the province of Divinity

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Dialogue

In a kind of “dream of all mankind,” a scenario evolved concerning an understanding of that which was meant to be imparted regarding the “Creature” called Man and the Creator of all things.

Man speaks (in the beginning of his understanding that there was a presence beyond his ability to sense):

“I feel your presence, but I’m not able to perceive your form!”

I am, That I am! Before all creation, I am! In the Beginning, I Am! And throughout all the time thereafter, I Am!

Man: “By what name may I call you?”

Any that could be envisioned or uttered by Man would be incomplete! There is no language of Man that would be capable of such scope!

Man: “How then, might I address you?”

*All names by which Man has addressed Me have been rudimentary, but have been answered as if they were wholly sufficient! From the first ones that are now beyond your recollection, through all that are still within your memory, I have honored, except for those that have drawn Man away from **I Am!***

Man: “What of these would you prefer, that I may do You the highest of honors?”

The names are not of as great an import as is the desire of the user of them!

Man: “That, within our recollection which has the greatest antiquity, is the name **EL**. It seems to have been around since before the earliest settled human life. It has been used in other ways to call attention to something or someone of importance. It was used for ages as the name for the “God most high,” down into early Hebrew history, and is still used as part of names and words, and within hymns in their and other languages. But it is no longer used as a primary address by many because of some fear connected with its usage.”

It is as good as any other, in fact, better than most. It does introduce that unknowable quantity that I Am! And, is useful in keeping before the mind of Man the knowledge that I Am has no need of a name. A symbol meant to take the place of this Reality only diminishes Man’s capacity to discover a portal of attachment.

Man: “Why have things become as they are?”

You might as well have asked how? For I Am has given some an opportunity to acquire a Vision for the benefit of all! But most have been mistreated because of their zeal to share that which they have ‘seen’! And Man’s imaginings have been a poor substitute for the Reality that is all around him.

Man: “It has all been so confusing. The complexity, the magnitude, the variability, the uncertainty. It is difficult, nay, next to impossible, for two to agree on that which both have seen.”

Your imaginings, as with your tongue, run away with you, if not controlled by what is offered! It all has been made as simple as necessary for your understanding, if only you would summon the will to know!

Man: “There have been so many ways of believing. Are they all some part of you? Is there some way that we can know for sure?”

Only the smallest part of your imaginings has I Am presented to your attention. So much has been made out of so little, that the little has almost disappeared into the miasma of the great overflow of your detail. But, it is still there, for one who has a sufficiently fine sifter.

Man: “So many of the answers of old that we have held in such great respect for so long have come under the challenge of a new perception. Must we lay aside the comfort of the unchanging familiar in order to benefit from this informative, which seems to carry within it the seeds of its own uncertainty, and has not yet passed the test of time?”

That which you have received from I Am is true for all time. The great amount that your many babblings have conjectured, from that which I Am has given you, misinforms. Everything that Man has done, and does still, is imperfectly performed, without the wisdom of I Am.

You have studied my creation through your Ignorance and I have given you

Visions

*You have studied my creation through your Wisdom and I have
given you*

Insight

*You have studied my creation through your Intellect and I have
given you*

Theories

Throughout all this time, you have quested for Answers and I have given you

Parables

And still you understand imperfectly. That is your nature. But I Am is patient, a counterpoint to your lack of the same.

*In your parable of Job,
recited within his own imperfect understanding and language,
I Am asks,*

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements?...

When the morning stars sang together...

*When I made the clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band*

When I fixed my limit for it...

Have you commanded the morning since your days began,

And caused the dawn to know its place...

Where is the way to the dwelling of light?

And darkness, where is its place ...

By what way is light diffused...

Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water,

Or a path for the thunderbolt ...

*Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades,
Or loose the belt of Orion?
Does Job's own answer to I Am satisfy your quest for clarity?
Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble,
He comes forth like a flower and fades away:
He flees like a shadow and does not continue...
The number of his months is with You:
You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.
These answers of Old need not change before the findings of the New.*

They may have searched further in their quest, but the new discoveries have not altered the truth of the answers that have been given through I Am. For their walk is still through My creation. And Man cannot walk there alone!

Man: "We have often wondered, what is to become of us? We are granted the highest privilege of all beings in your creation, over the shortest period of all time. And yet, all of Man's understanding does not encompass even a portion of Your measure. Were we somehow meant to persist in a manner not granted to those *others* of your creation?"

*I Am was, before Creation!
I Am is, throughout all Creation!
I Am will be, beyond Creation!
From your privileged view within this Gift;
Can your instruments measure to its **Limits**?
With them, can you even theorize its **Scope**?
Can you accurately discern its **Variability**?
Can you imagine, even its probable **Destiny**?
Man was not meant to be the **knower** of all things!
Be still, and appreciate that **You Are**!
Be content with where you are **From**!
Be diligent in that which you **Do**!
Be concerned with where you are **Headed**!
Be **Assured** that **I Am** is with all who seek me! **Always!***

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Epiphany

There is but One God

And His Name Is...

After having completed the epilogue and the dialogue of this work, I happily congratulated myself on having completed that which I had at one time feared that I did not even know how to start. But just as it seemed that the time to celebrate was upon me, a disturbing thought began to gnaw at my peace of mind. Somehow I *knew* that I had left something out. Chapters 20 through 27 and 30 were added as a result of this feeling, but all throughout that additional writing the gnawing, while diminished, remained. The end result was the further addition of Epiphany, the After Word and the ending poem During that time I had cause to refer to the epilogue during each of these last additions.

Now I again review what has been written in it. At the first rereading it had seemed to be a relatively short recapitulation of all the previous chapters. Just what I had intended. But during the finishing of the additional chapters, I began to see something more than what I had thought in first forming the words.

It was like modern Man trying to look back toward his origins with the benefit of the sciences of archaeology and anthropology and all the linguistics tools now at his command. He peered carefully into both written history and then less clearly into oral history, and the rather confusing stories of mythology.

What he appeared to have unearthed was disturbing in the extreme. It was as if he must entertain for the first time that outrageous idea that he might just have come out of the *natural world*. This, after throughout all of his civilized history being convinced that he was a special creation. Every belief system that he rediscovered in his search has paid homage to that cardinal axiom. Now, what a dirty trick had been played on his ego. Modern Man could no longer maintain this obvious bias in the face of all the evidence, without ignoring much of it.

And his problem was this, his view of this *Presence*, this *God*, being similar to each within the many belief systems in declaring that only the one had the exclusive right to describe His Being and purpose, while seeing all others as false, was not immune from a similar question. All of history revealed that there have been many names, many attributes, many understandings, with the latter seeming to borrow some small part from the former. But his *scripture* said that God was the same since before the beginning, and throughout all eternity.

Could it be that somehow all these various belief systems had come from a single source? But what was true and what was false? How much of each of these systems was Man's elaborative imagination? How could it be that Man has made such an enormous mistake? Many wars have been fought over who had gotten it right! A single Presence over all this long, long time? Preposterous! But they couldn't all be right either! Is it possible that they are all wrong, at least in some part of what they believed?

The Epilogue pictures Man as trying to rediscover himself and having come, at the end, to a firm conclusion that he must sift through all present and past belief for those visionary kernels given through the ages to those who have become acutely aware of His presence.

Then again, he would have to attempt to fit these unlikely seeming pieces together to more accurately discern the gift that this *Presence* seems to have sought to convey unto mankind across the many ages of his imperfect awareness. The Christian religion among many says that God has given Man the power of choice in his life.

If this is an accurate assumption, how would this *Presence* seek to inform Mankind of Its Being?

If it were me, I would contact that rare individual who had shown some natural insight gained from worldly experience, and make him acutely, if only temporarily, aware of my presence.

After the wondering fear of this strangeness had abated, I would present a small portion of my personification for his edification, instilling in him an urgency to share, knowing that he would only be able to do so through the limitations of his very abbreviated, tunnel-like viewing repertoire.

As the imperfections of this kind of witness increased through serial repetition, I would try again with either him or others for the clarification needed. I would try as many times as necessary, until I saw that these “messengers” were either rejected or abused. Then, through the ages, as I saw some who received a small benefit from a previous effort become better prepared for acceptance, I would repeat the process, again, and again, and again as necessary, knowing all the while that envy would drive some to fake this experience. I would *lead* those who saw me most clearly to the “greener pastures” of acceptance when opportune, while seeking to curb the wildness of even their imaginations. All through this, I would enhance the limited abilities of those who chose to follow *Me*, while leaving simplified examples to challenge their mental acuity. Eventually, I might even find it reasonable to send a portion of myself incarnate to prepare them for the end that I would have in store for them.

So, with all of the names for Deity in this world, can we find one which might be seen as closest to an original, if there ever was one? How about the test of longevity?

In the greatness of the antiquity before the first recognized city-state in Mesopotamia called Ur, small communities along the Tigris and Euphrates river plain, among many others elsewhere, are thought to have coalesced around a favorite family or clan representation. As success expanded these communities’ boundaries, they came into immediate or eventual competitive contact with one another.

In the hurly-burly of those early times, the god EL is said to have worked his way to the top of a *fairly* wide-ranging pantheon of other suddenly *lesser gods*, to become known as God Most High. Ages later, when Ur was already an old city, he was overthrown around the time of Abraham about 2,000 to 1,700 BC.

He led his people south to a “*place I will show you.*” And the rest is the history of the Hebrew people through the Exodus and after when his name changed to Yahweh, which led directly to the Christian Deity simply known as God. That appears to be well over 4,500 years of existence. Therefore He is my candidate for the prize for longevity.

And what of all the others? A progression quite similar to that of ancient Mesopotamia occurred in the Nile River system, but its eventual demise as an organized system of belief possibly stumbled over the inability to *see* above the *sun-god* level of extrapolation. Today, hardly a mention of the names of these *gods* is seen or heard except through the aegis of archaeological discovery. Even the pharaonic earthly representation disappeared into Greco/Roman history.

And of the remainder? Many I suppose, will eventually be consigned to a similar *ash heap of history*, as has been the fate of so many already. Of course no one in the world of Mankind can know this for sure, and eternity I’m told will have no need for names as we know them. Already there are many that are long forgotten, and others only ill-remembered. But what about all those who still compete in the world of today?

If longevity isn’t to be the sole criterion, what else might be essential? All belief systems that have passed away seem to have had one thing in common. As they matured, they began to resist, for the sake of stability, the newness of further interpretation that might have allowed greater revelation, on the assumption that all that was needed to be known had already been revealed. Any new understanding that tended to destabilize the status quo ante and the prerogatives of established authority were resisted ever more persistently. If deemed necessary, sanctions meant to isolate supporters of each new understanding would be issued and implemented up to the point of severity.

Unfortunately, this stabilization inevitably led to stasis, which eventually turned toward the dullness of ritualization and finally to open rejection as the newness of some imaginatively constructed versions drew practitioners away.

But how else does one discern the *real* from the *false*? A *book* to use as a guide would be nice. “Ears to hear with” and “eyes to see with” would seem to be essential, a kind of super *common sense*, as it were.

Keen insight which might guide an open mind, that also refuses to *fall* for just any new or interesting idea, is all that I know that can be done. Staying with the basics of belief that don’t seem to change, while resisting the temptation to add to it, ideas meant to bring more *clarity* and that make basic tenets sound more interesting, or less exacting, would help.

A continuing *acute awareness* of that *Something* beyond physical reality would also be useful, it would seem; an *open channel*, so to speak, for receipt of additional *gifts* of otherworldly erudition. But within all of these resources it is still difficult to detect the *true* from the *false*. But maybe we have received most of what we need already and just can’t seem to be able to divide the *wheat* from the *chaff*, as it were.

Belief and faith in one central *Axiom of Existence* would help to build assurance. Because of the limits of our linear existence, repetition, for all of its tendency to stray from the *True* visionary message, cannot be dispensed with. And patience is the virtue that should be greatly sought after, from this most eternal of all sources.

Only time itself will tell if we are able to choose the best from among all the rest! But history repeats itself as a testimony of our imperfection. And trying is all that we have, to perceive if our way is the path that has been shown to us. So, maybe a name isn’t what is important, a knowledge of what it represents, may be.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.
—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memorium*

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Afterword

I had intended that *God* in the “dialogue” would have had the last word in this rather voluminous essay, or assay as the dictionary might better describe it, “To examine by trial.” But alas the very smallness of Man compared to his ego cannot resist having one more.

I had become aware, some time after I felt that I had finally completed my assignment, that there was something still missing. Had it been something still left unsaid? Some point of incompleteness? Something missed in translation from the most comprehensive of all sources down to the very best that Man can manage? Then an idea came to me and it wouldn’t let go. So an “Epiphany” followed the “Dialogue.” That still didn’t seem to relieve the pressure totally and so this “Afterword” now has to be engaged.

While I may feel more comfortable placing myself closer to the lesser end in the scale of human resourcefulness, I have tried to write about the frustration of those who have had a *vision*, where they have had to try to squeeze such grandiloquence into the

narrowness of Man's linguistics, only to discover for myself this feeling, up close and personal. So once again I will try to conclude that which probably cannot come to a conclusion within Man's range of understanding.

Have there been any inferences not at least alluded to, or maybe too subtly drawn to have been perceived in the ordinariness of this author's mental repertoire? At the risk of repetition, I shall endeavor to list some that have come to mind during my own elucidation.

First, there is that *Presence* that seems to have always *hovered* in and over this *Creation*. What, if anything, preceded Man's attempt to envision some *Essence*, before a first "Animal Spirit" presence, is at this juncture, unassailably beyond common memory, and possibly discovery.

The spiral up through the higher levels of climatological iconography, then geological, astronomical, universal and beyond has seemed to have only added confusion to complexity at the expense of a clarity so diligently sought after.

Man's use of elaboration in his attempt to clarify what was almost impossible to translate into his human vernacular have many times so smothered any original *revelation* as to have *hidden* what was meant to have been opened. Within the *ages of generations* the popularity of these ever-less-meaningful elaborations have declined to the point of having dropped into a fog of forgetfulness, with only pitifully minute traces left to mark their passing. But this *Presence* has been persistently forgiving of the well-intentioned façades erected that only served to diminish the *light* of each of these kernels of brilliance.

The lack of permanence of these man-made edifices is only too well documented, and Man's *teleological* rubble appears to hide these many *pearls* of perception from our after-view. But all must not be seen as lost! What might be able to be resurrected?

Through the *gleanings* of the many ways that direct Man's inquisitive search for his roots, these gems of cognition might still be regained, to shine again as they once did with the eternal brilliance they were intended to reflect. But that *Presence* carries on, continuing to encourage the insight which would pierce that fog of man-made representations. It has already been a God-awfully long wait!

My second conclusion is that *belief* always arrives before *proof*, many times ages before. The belief that something works to one's advantage before the knowledge of why it does is the sharp-edged tool that has most certainly enhanced Man's long-term survival.

It has been what has made him *different* from all who have shared his *cradle of infancy*, the *Nature* from out of which he has apparently arisen.

But it has come at a cost. Many have been led astray by less than a well-founded belief that has seemed to work for a while, only to betray the trust placed in it, as over the long haul it failed to deliver what was touted for it. That seems to be why something more surely effective has always been sought as an adjunct to it.

Where Man has become practiced in the memory of an advantage that belief has many times bestowed, he has thrived in the *good* times and survived the *bad*. He has persisted throughout the *tribulations* that have driven others to extinction.

But any system of belief is only as good as its basis. That original basis seems to have been experience. As it was tried and found to be experientially true, the urge to pass it on to others became important. One's own family and progeny might depend on it; one's hunting group might be able to *bring home the bacon* because of it. One's own

community might learn to thrive because of it, even to survive because of it, and so on toward that, which this *arrow of progress* seems to have pointed, to *Civilization* and all its complex interweavings.

But experience is a sometimes brutal taskmaster also, and so, if only a way to learn before the doing could be found. Voila! Language! The lowest form of grunt communication that could pass on that which was most necessary seems to have, over a plethora of a great many generations of time, reached up to become the flowering of today's complicated linguistics.

The story of the tower of Babel is an excellent example, a kind of parable, of the progression of language from a single root to a great variety. The seeming similarity of linguistic structure implies a common root of the many languages. And an even more common root of these roots has been strongly suggested wherein names for the major body parts, arms, legs etc., as well as many basic food items, seem to have come from a common root of all roots.

How, one might ask, could the originator of this old, old story have come by this knowledge at the seemingly ancient time that this story came into being?

You have studied my creation through your

Ignorance

and I have given you

Visions

The third conclusion comes cloaked in a question. How did altruism arise, and from where did the understanding that bred cooperative attitudes come? The "Law of the Jungle" would seem to indicate that the most basic instinct is individual survival. And from this it may be posited that competition for food resources as well as mating opportunities is the basic *law* of simple survival. To the largest, most physically fit would go the greatest and most numerous opportunities. That seems to have worked in most cases, except in extreme environmental dislocations, where *large* has more recently been discovered, to have *lost* its advantage. Yet *large* seems to have been the end result of all successful animal adaptations.

But many of the *lesser fit* life-forms seem to have *learned* the lesson that cooperative behavior may also be linked to survival, giving those of a lower *personal fitness* a certain qualified advantage also. And when those environmental *tribulations* occurred, they somehow slipped through a door of survival too small for the physically larger specimens.

There are many examples in nature, of organized cooperative groups wherein certain competitive qualities have partially given way to afford this enhancement. This *compromise* has led to hierarchies of *allowed* behavior allotted to certain members that seems to have enhanced the security, as well as the opportunity to learn, for all. But, most if not all of the animal *societies* seem to have been balanced on the thin edge of competitive chaos, never far from an opportunistic challenge to existing authority where physical distress became the trigger for change. Many within nature's variety seem to have been consigned to this behavioral *groove* while a *lucky few* (us?) apparently have *learned* to rise above it where *good* behavior elicited an enhanced fitness for all, at puzzlingly, at least the partial, near-term expense of the individual.

Was this the *ground zero* basis of all morals? If so, how did *we* learn of this advantage, by experience alone? Or did belief somehow come to the aid of this stern taskmaster?

Selfless behavior in animal societies would seem to have had little obvious value to the individual life, but somehow, it has been enhanced enough at their level to aid in survival. Was this enhancement biological? Recent scientific discoveries in genetics seems to imply that this is probably so. If so, was it *experience* alone that guided this enhancement? Is that then why they only went so far?

In human societies, rewards such as increased status within the group that increased choices in food resources, enhanced sexual choices, and eventually, long-term remembrance would offer an understandable incentive to strive toward providing for the *common good*. However, the last mentioned reward, remembrance, would strongly imply the *gift* of language and a *belief* in more than the individual's present existence.

In prehistoric societies the probable vehicle for the transmission from one generation to another of the stories of selfless behavior of these *remembered heroes* would be the *oral history* recitations that have come down to us, through the imaginative renderings called mythology.

The preferred *good* within all moral codes of behavior has always been *the good of others*, the community. The selfish, the bad, the evil has always been seen as the insistence on individual advantage at whatever cost, with all the endlessly argued variations in between. Slowly, but surely, with frequent reference to the *wisdom* of those who have gone before, an ever more complicated body of *rules*, delineating the acceptable limits of individual industry, beyond which the needs of the *community* must take preference, was promulgated. All this seems to have been summed up in the personal *rule of thumb* called the *Golden Rule*. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Has this all been acquired only through the *accidental* acquisition of experience accumulated so slowly and painfully? Or has an organized system of belief somehow stimulated this enhancement?

You have studied my creation through your

Wisdom

and I have given you

Insight

The fourth conclusion concerns the evidence of the *evolution* of Man's learning capacity. The science of biology has posited that the single most important of Man's adaptations to his environment has been his oversized brain. The *episodic* evolution of this enhancement is evidenced within the science of geology's fossil record. It has been a most fortuitously sprinkled trail that only the most inquisitive of minds might have followed. But somehow intrepid volunteers came forth.

There always seems to have been those few who were *ready* to attempt to decipher the riddles of physical discovery as well as visionary experience. No matter how imperfectly they may have translated those *discoveries*, those *experiences*, it has always seemed wondrous to the many who would *listen*, and urgent among those, the *elect* who would *believe* in what had been *found*.

Then, through the ages of slowly acquired *wisdom*, a trail of *good* behavior has itself been laid out for heirs to follow. When they have, they seem to have prospered or at least persisted. When they haven't, that expensive teacher, experience, has intervened. Man's

ability to extrapolate the principles of already learned experience, using that to invade the mysteries of the new, the unknown, has paid the dividends of increased knowledge.

From the first *dance of discovery*, to the uncertain venue of *oral history recitations*, to the practical applications of the literary version of history, Man has compiled his understanding of the environment surrounding him. At first, *belief* was the only tool at his command, that “conviction of the truth or reality of a thing based upon grounds insufficient to afford positive knowledge.” That *surmise* that can “lead to a seemingly logical conclusion, the foundation of which lies far enough beyond current ability to verify as to seem without (other) resolution.”

Some beliefs “gained ascendancy in the mind of Man to the point of worship,” only to later slip into the “void of an unremembered past,” a victim of the ossification of stasis, a result of commanded commitment rather than the excitement of willing acceptance.

Slowly the fund of knowledge expanded as one system of belief built upon and then eclipsed its elder. Then there was the *logic* of numbers that evolved into the *empirical science of eternal truths* that were discoverable through inductive reasoning.

After a “classical” flowering, it too almost disappeared, resurrected by a later “Age of Enlightenment” that began to intrude into the fifteenth century, where a new “experimental” science gestated into a full-blown birth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The “Age of Deliberate Discovery” was upon us, whereupon an hypothesis, an insightful guess, was filled out with replicable experiments, leading to a “theory,” which seems to be an hypothesis with an increasing number of *proofs* pointing toward the *correctness* of its reading of *reality*.

This new knowledge of the intellect came into conflict with the *keepers* of the old, as a virtual inundation of *facts* has threatened to overwhelm them as well as the rest of us. But today the everyday itinerary of the world seems to rest upon the “broad backs” of the minions of these new ideas, but still the aged patriarch insists that his wisdom of the ages be given the respect that longevity deserves. So, was this *heir* meant to be a usurper also? Or has this heir been conceived to be a complement to its elder benefactor? Should *humility* teach gratitude as well as fortitude, standing as they both are on the shoulders of *all* that has gone before them?

You have studied my creation through your

Intellect,

and I have given you

Theories

My final conclusion is that there have always been more questions than answers. Has life on earth arisen by chance alone? Or does the genesis of such a complicated process demand the existence of a supernatural power? Do the *facts* of science conflict with the *stories* of the Bible? Is there another *existence* or is “Mother Earth” all we have?

These questions and many others like them have bedeviled Mankind throughout the modern age, as well as far earlier ones. Some have decided to rely on the tradition of belief alone as the anchor to their existence. Others have been equally convinced that the *new* answers of science are all that’s necessary to explain everything.

Some scientists believe that the Genesis of life was the product of chance, defined as, “the absence of any known reason why an event should turn out one way rather than another.” In their early study of the *natural order* of things, they were perplexed by their

inability to determine the origin of the processes that were the product of their investigations. Within all life they *saw* a great variability of forms, shapes, functions and natures. But within the many variations they perceived a kind of similarity, a likeness between certain of the forms, etc.

Out of the cataloguing of the many varieties of similarity came “families” of “kind.” From these there came the suspicion of the *commonality of origin* of the many groups of life-forms of both past and present experience.

Man’s ingenious surmise which turned into a theory of evolution that included the vehicle of “natural selection” seems to have answered, to “science’s” satisfaction, how all life-forms have arisen from a relatively common environment. But the question of how life first began is still a question without a satisfactory answer even within the scientific community itself.

From the study of the interactions of simple elements in solution, creating chemical reactions toward the forming of compounds, that is, the mixture of those elements together forming a larger chemical structure, to the combination of these compounds, somehow they became organized into molecular entities. From there, expanding into chains of these molecules, some, joining like to like and some matching up with others that had some kind of affinity or attractive power.

Science theorizes that the primordial oceans were probably full of a myriad combination of these molecular structures, some forming long chains of many different kinds. And further it is hypothesized that some kind of chance combination promoted a self-replicating sort of entity that, in a way not yet understood, led to the simple form of life that we find similar examples of abundantly supplied in the oceans and waters of our world today.

Is this thing that they call *chance*, in reality, another form of the “Axiom of Existence” that “science” must take on belief alone in order to investigate all that they wish to prove out. If so, what difference is there between *science* and *religion*? They both rest upon a foundation of belief, one in the total unpredictability of an unknowable, the other in their “God” whose existence is beyond proof. The one rests its case upon the unchangeability of their understanding of their *truths*, the other seems wired into the continuing changeability of circumstance.

We Christians believe that our God is the Creator of all things! Chance is an unpredictable unknown that *science* encounters in its investigation of nature as well as the universe.

Logic implies that if God is the Creator of all things and if there appear to be chance occurrences within this Creation, then God, the Lord of all, is also Lord over chance! By a simple intervention, God could make chance predictable; therefore chance would no longer be an immeasurable unknown. Therefore *chance* would be measurable and no longer a chance occurrence, but a known quantity. So the *God* that the atheistic portion of *science* worships would disappear.

But what if *chance* were already a known, that only seems to be unknowable because it eludes even the sharpest of our present measuring tools? From the little that I know of the study of fractal geometry, it is largely the observance of turbulence within fluid dynamics. The turbulence seems to be chaotic, randomly swirling one way then another. Understanding the forces that influence this turbulence could lead to design changes that

would discourage turbulence, and would greatly enhance the “efficiency of movement” of fluids and gasses.

Reaching beyond that narrow venue, mathematicians looked to other varieties of seemingly chaotic behavior within structures. One that I remembered and remarked upon in an earlier chapter concerned satellite pictures of shorelines between a body of water and the land that surrounds it or that it surrounds. Without enlargement, all seemed the epitome of randomness.

But as telescopic enlargement increased, certain smaller structures began to take on a kind similarity. Near the extreme of telescopic capacity ever-smaller structures within the larger showed evidence of a repeatable sequence of line orientations and lengths as well as angular variables.

Underneath seemingly chaotic structures appears to lay a basis of repeatability, order that is. Within greatly speeded-up pictures slowing the action of fluid flow lay similar repeatable swirl patterns, again order underlying seeming chaotic behavior.

What if all instances of *chance* behavior only seemed as such because our instruments were not sharp enough to detect the order at their base? What could possibly be at the base of all instances of order and regularity? An Intelligent component?

Throughout all this time you have quested for

Answers

and I have given you

Parables

Unbelievable

The intelligible forms of Poets, legion
Wove bright rhymes in the days of old
The fair humanities of old religion
Fairly reflected in the tales they told
They live no longer, in the faith of reason
But still the heart doth need a sign
Yearning earnestly for its own season
Still is Man's unfettered mind
Don't ask to what doctors
I need apply
Sworn to no master,
except one am I
For such there be,
but unbelief is blind
And searching for what is not,
Is wearing on the mind.

Incredible

From what dark illimitable void

that knows no bound
Wherein length and breadth and height
and time and place are tossed
See what this lowly Man of clay
has found
For which cannot be placed
A cost
But please,
Describe for him
The natural limits of his round
Before his eternal time and place
Are lost
—Al Gilding

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Acknowledgements

First, I wish to pay my respects to all of the myriad authors of all the things that I have read over the many years, from the Genesis of the Bible to the latest word in science. They have unknowingly contributed to an amazing synthesis that has given form and color to the endeavor that has produced what I feel is a miracle.

The uncountable many bits of information that have passed through the common sense of my intellect during all this time, and then stored as source material to aid in additional understandings, have been pried out of a portion of my memory that I had felt beyond recall until I began this work.

Through a process that seems to have guided my hand, the many bits and pieces have been fitted together in a manner meant to illustrate the principle contained in the title, “The Bible is a Parable.”

Next, but not necessarily of lesser import, I owe a debt of gratitude to the love of my life, my wife Theta, the closest long-term eye-witness to a metamorphosis that has surprised many and may have worried a few others within our collage of acquaintances. She has smilingly seen me through this process from where she knew me as a come-from-Missouri realist to this *enlargement* of my persona, without giving any indication that she felt that I was somehow slipping beyond the *pale* of my former reality.

Also, my thanks must go to my late friend Conal Lindsay. He, without any foreknowledge of my *secret* need, introduced me to a writer’s group who accepted me as an avid reader, and then presided over such a rapid change to the writer that I am today, as to militate against the common understanding of mere coincidence.

To my late brother Dave, who listened so sympathetically to the ruminations over the years as I sought to piece together the matrix of memory and newer understandings.

And to all those others in my life who have contributed to the forming of a character that has become such a Character, I give added plaudits.

And last but certainly not least, I thank God for the level of health, both mental as well as physical, that I have been preserved in, that has allowed me to participate in this latest rendition of the “Impossible Dream.”

Beyond that I would have to speculate as to what other *blessings* may have been bestowed, but I have been encouraged into a “Literary Witness” far beyond what I could have ever expected to see in myself until the wonderful occasion that has now come to fruition.

Now, this is where most authors thank all those who were instrumental in bringing his work to the point of publishing, with the editing, polishing the text, etc. Mine has been a unique and very different experience.

Within the group of authors wherein I learned the craft of writing beyond the limits of essays were two with very obvious differences, who became important to my initial success.

Fred Perry, aka “Dallas” from his very colorful background in intelligence, had an eye for detail. The background context that appeared in his works taught me something about seeing beyond the story line of my first effort.

Naida West kept insisting, “You have to make your character *think* and *feel* beyond just acting and doing. Her stories of the California Indian culture brought historically known persons as well as those who were unknown to life for me through that technique.

As I persevered in my new vocation, many stories were incidentally related during meetings about the impossibly chaotic condition that the publishing world appeared to be descending into from the late '90s and beyond. Unknown authors seemed to be increasingly locked out of any possibility of getting any kind of notice whatever.

The adventure that I was having buoyed me beyond the concerns of any kind of readership possibilities, as I worked through my first and then into this, my second effort. I never even tried any of the old ways or their alternatives (self-publishing, etc.). The stories told as others engaged themselves in these pursuits were enough to encourage me to look elsewhere. A certain disquietude began to disturb my peace of mind as the realization began to dawn that a literary witness would be useless if there was no opportunity to share what had been so avidly compiled. I looked into subsidy publishing at some point but found it to be much too expensive for my level of resources.

Over a period of time I became aware of an ad appearing periodically in my *Washington Times* subscription touting a different kind of publisher. I finally broke down and read it the next time that it appeared.

Elderberry Press seemed to be a relatively small but different kind of publisher. One who actually read manuscripts sent for evaluation. Of course he was a subsidy publisher, but the cost was half of my first inquiry. David St. John's operation was different. A print-on-demand breed who was into electronic publishing, the kind that I had heard the big publishing houses were trying to ramp up their operations to include as a hedge against complete failure. There would be none of the book inventory problems I had heard so much about during my adventure in prose.

Now with two books published and favorably reviewed, I seemed to have sidestepped all of the sad stories that I'd heard so much about, an exercise in serendipity far beyond any understanding I have of mere coincidence. A neophyte, potentially frustrated writer to a published author without falling into any of the potholes that I'd heard others wail about. How should one assess that circumstance? Just plain good fortune? This list of

acknowledgements would not be complete if I didn't offer the possibility of something beyond pure chance in this odyssey of creative expression.

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