

The Theocratic Kingdom

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Table of Contents:

I. In the Beginning

II. Two Trees – Two Wisdoms

III. Principalities and Powers

IV. The First Mention of Nations

V. Babylon – Chief of the Nations

VI. Abraham – God’s answer to the Nations

VII. Messiah

VIII. Caesar or Christ?

IX. Herod or Christ?

X. The Davidic Kingdom

XI. Theocracy only Established when Jesus Rules From Zion

XII. Eternal Rule and Reign with Christ

Introduction

One of the first questions that is asked when I start to consider taking my notes and making it into a book is “why?” For what reason should I decide to write this out as a book instead of a handful of notes? In this case, the answer is simple. I’ll tell a story as an analogy.

I am one who enjoys physics. I specifically enjoy cosmology – the study of the universe. A few hundred years ago, there was a man by the name of Galileo. One of the reasons that Galileo is so famous is because of the advancements that he made in science. One of those advancements is his discovery in gravity. He discovered that all objects fall at the same rate. The reason that we don’t say the same speed is because they accelerate – continue to pick up speed. Galileo was able to quite accurately measure this rate.

Then Newton came along. When Galileo was accepted as giving one of the most accurate measurements of gravity, Newton expanded upon it. He said that not all objects fall at the same rate. The reason that we find a cannon ball and an apple falling at the same rate is because of the extremely large mass of the Earth. He made the formula that we all have to learn in high school: $F=ma$. By this formula, Newton was able to figure the orbit of the planets around the sun, the speed of those planets’ motion around the sun, the orbits of moons, and the mass of galaxies.

For a long time Newton was the name in physics. If you wanted to study the world around us, and study beyond our world and into the universe, you would use Newtonian Mechanics. In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, there was a problem discovered. Mercury’s orbit around the sun wobbled. Why did it wobble? They didn’t have an answer. So some scientists started speculating that there must be “dark matter.”

Dark matter is basically matter that we cannot see. We do not know if it exists, but we see the effects of it. It was assumed that this dark matter between Mercury and the Sun was the reason behind the wobbling orbit. However, Einstein disproved that. In his General Theory of Relativity, Einstein explained a deeper understanding of how gravity works. Because of this deeper understanding, the need for dark matter vanished. I assume that the same is true today. Modern scientists who discuss dark matter probably are simply misunderstanding the science involved. A new physics is required.

I set my heart to learning about the Kingdom of God. This search and study lead me on a path that called into question almost everything that I had previously held to about the Kingdom of God. With that being said, I in no way want to bash the presence of God in our lives here and now, tangibly. I in no way want to eliminate the understanding of the Kingdom of God within. I in no way want to abolish or discriminate or mock any belief that holds to the Kingdom of God *now*.

Just as Galileo did not have the full understanding of how gravity worked, I believe that many today do not fully grasp the Kingdom of God. We need an update. These things mentioned previously are not necessarily wrong. They have their place. Since many of us do not understand the Kingdom of God, we place translations upon these verses and teachings that are indeed false. The phrase itself is not wrong. The Kingdom of God *is* now. It *is* within. We *can* experience it tangibly.

What I take fault with is the assumptions and translations that then stem out of that. We then take the assumption that because the Kingdom of God is within that we take the Kingdom of God with us. We assume that we take the presence of God wherever we go. We teach that Jesus returns to judge the world, but neglect that He will establish a Kingdom upon this world. The Kingdom of God is indeed now, but a fuller expression is to come *later*.

While digging through the Scriptures, I have come to vastly different conclusions than what I had originally thought. I hope that they will alter your perception. I hope that they bring you into closer relationship with Jesus Christ. But most of all, I hope that they work in you a spirit that would rightly cry out, "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

Words which do not give the light of Christ increase the darkness.

-Mother Teresa

If you don't do your part, don't blame God.

-Billy Sunday

If the Lord's people will humble themselves by admitting that deception is possible to them, they will be the less deceived.

-Watchman Nee

"Oh, to realize that souls, precious, never dying souls, are perishing all around us, going out into the blackness of darkness and despair, eternally lost, and yet to feel no anguish, shed no tears, know no travail! How little we know of the compassion of Jesus!"

-Oswald J. Smith

I. In the Beginning

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it was* good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

At the very beginning we find darkness. We find chaos. We find void – or emptiness. We find shapelessness. These are all descriptions of emotions and feelings that every human being on the planet has felt at one time or another. We’ve all felt as though there is no form to life. We’ve all felt as though we’re empty and purposeless. We know what it is to feel in a state of chaos. In fact, I would submit that the most chaotic that we feel is not when we’re busiest, but when darkness is upon the face of the deep. In the moments when life slows down and seems surreal because of heartbreak or suffering – in that we find the most chaos.

We spend the rest of the chapter seeing how God created order and light. When the universe was empty, God filled it. When the world was formless, He shaped it. God brought order into the creation, and day after day He brings more order out of the chaos. But we don’t see God eliminating the darkness. Why is that?

Before I get into that point, I want to search a little deeper in what God does do. We find in Revelation 21-22 that there is no darkness. God was not unknowing when He made this world. If it is in God’s plan and intention now (or at least in Revelation 21) to have no darkness, then I must believe that it was God’s original plan. What we find that God does do in response to the darkness is that He set up rulers over the darkness.

On day four, it is written that God “made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also.” Why this wording of rule? Do the sun and moon rule over the darkness? Genesis 1 seems to indicate yes. They were made for the intention of giving light to the world, and to hold back the darkness. This does not tell us why God allowed the darkness to stay, but it does show us that God had intention of withholding it.

I don’t know, and this is merely speculation, but it also seems to indicate in the Psalms that the angels of God were created to rule over God’s creation. Psalm 82 is a great example of this – the whole Psalm is dedicated to speaking to these “rulers” that are greater than men, but will be judged as men. Is it possible that God created the angels to guard over the darkness? Did God possibly make the angels to co-rule with Him over the earth and to bring forth righteousness and justice in the land?

This of course brings us to the pivotal point of the plot. Where did Satan come from? Did God create Satan – and thus create evil? When we examine the Kingdom of God, we are describing something that is quite different than anything we see around us. We are surrounded by darkness, violence, and terror. How do you perceive something that is quite contrary to that which you see all around you?

Clothed in Darkness

In Genesis 1:2, we find a bit of Hebrew poetry. The Spirit of God is being cross-compared with the darkness. Because the word for “deep” and the word for “waters” are being likened to one another, the word for darkness and the word for Spirit are being likened to one another. That is not to say that they are synonymous. The author is saying something about God. His Spirit has some sort of a positive relation to darkness.

This quick hint that is very subtle gives us a bit of a tip off. Why did God not completely purge heaven and earth of the darkness? We find various Scriptures that might help us to understand. In Exodus 20, Moses draw’s near to the “thick darkness” where God was. This is reiterated in Deuteronomy 4 and 5. 2 Samuel 22:12 states that God made thick darkness, dark waters, and thick clouds His pavilion. The Lord speaks to Solomon in 1 Kings 8:12 and says that He will dwell in the thick darkness.

God seems to be found in the thick darkness – specifically when the name YHWH is used. So why would God keep the darkness at the beginning? Is it possible that God created humanity pure, but even that purity and innocence could not protect Adam from the glory and the light that God is? At the end of the Bible, we find that the people of the city of God are in the midst of the light of God, but there are a people outside of that city that are being ruled over (check the last part of Revelation 22:5).

Is it possible that even with purity we cannot see God and live? Does it take something more substantial than purity? What I’m getting at is that maybe it was a mercy of God to allow the darkness to continue for a season. Adam needed to take of the fruit of the tree of life before he could see God and live. In the next chapter we’ll explore what that tree of life symbolizes. For now, we’ll leave the idea with whatever that tree bore, the life that it offered was the only thing that could cause Adam to see God face-to-face.

If this were true, then God would need to clothe Himself in darkness. He would need to cover Himself as mercy so He could walk with Adam in the Garden. There would come a day when God could dwell with mankind and not need to disguise himself or cover His majesty. The Scripture shows this to be heaven.

If we desire to know why God would not just make us so that we could behold Him, then we lack understanding of His essential character. It is and always has been the pattern of God (even from Genesis 1) to bring forth from a lesser glory into the greater glory. This is why resurrection is so crucial to the Christian faith. It is not about the first state of something that we should pay attention to. We ought to pay attention to the details of how God chooses. He chooses the weak and foolish to confound the wise. He takes the thing in darkness and chaos and starts bringing light and order into it. This is the pattern set up from the beginning – who are we to challenge God?

Adam was made from the dust of the earth. He was made pure – undefiled. Corruption was brought into Him from deception. The very darkness that was intended for Adam’s good was thus used as a power to destroy the relationship between God and man. This point is pivotal. Adam was created undefiled, but that purity and innocence was not enough to see God. Adam needed something else – something greater than innocence and human righteousness – to see God as He is.

The reason I belabor this point is because Adam was not intended from the beginning to remain in that condition. God made Adam pure. That is true. But God intended that Adam would be more than pure. God intended Adam to experience the fullness of His self. We can know that because we can read the end of the Bible to see humanity and God coexisting together. We can see the ultimate intention that there would be no darkness. It isn't necessary any longer. People can behold the Lord as He is.

So when we look at Adam, we should not see him as something that we should go back to being. Rather, we ought to view him as corruptible. He was corrupted. But there is a glory that God is bringing into humanity that would make them incorruptible. Where darkness at one point had opportunity to defile mankind and bring sin, there is coming the time where darkness has no power and sin is nonexistent. We have not attained to that glory, but just because we have not attained to it *now* does not mean it was not intended by God *at the beginning*.

But if I understand anything from Scripture it is that God intends to work with humanity. It is very possible that God had intentions to work with His creation in driving back and expelling the darkness. The ultimate intention was for all of His creation to work together – led by humanity as co-rulers with God – to expel the creation of darkness. But still, there needed to be something to happen to that humanity. It is not that Adam was fallen. It is that no created thing can behold God and survive. The whole of creation would need to be made into something more glorious. And that doesn't happen because God simply remakes it. That only comes about by a certain kind of cleansing.

The whole of Scripture (and especially eschatology) seems to speak of this climax where a final tribulation breaks forth and darkness is given full reign to rule. In this time of calamity, the saints are purged like never before. Even with the darkness having full sway, God somehow is able to use that darkness to bring about purity and righteousness in the creation that would cause all things to be new. It is after the 1000-year reign of Christ, the war of Gog and Magog, and the judgment seat that we find the new heaven and new earth. These are not things that seem to be somewhere else.

The new heaven and new earth seem to indicate more of a cleansing of this heaven and earth. Darkness has passed away. Because it has passed away, the whole of creation is not the same as it was before. That in its self is a total change. All of creation wars against the darkness in the final tribulation. Revelation seems to indicate this. The sun scorches people, the moon turns red, the stars collaborate together to strike the earth, there are earthquakes and hailstones the size of cars, at one point it seems like a super volcano erupts, and even the people are crying out to the rocks to protect them.

The end of the age is concluded by a massive onslaught of creation and the righteous – working hand-in-hand together – to expel the darkness and cleanse the world from evil. If this is how it ends, then it was God's intention from the beginning. The violence and wickedness might or might not have been what God intended. That isn't the point of discussion. However darkness would choose to react is outside the question. We cannot know such things.

From whence evil?

This is an age-old question. Many skeptics have used it as reason to doubt. Many theologians have used it to believe. The question of evil and suffering are very difficult subjects to navigate through. We need to be very precise in our wording and very cautious to not say something that is heretical or blasphemous. God did not create evil. He did not create the devil. From that which is absolutely pure, no evil can come.

But this, of course, sparks the long asked question? From where *did* evil come? Who *did* create the devil? I would like to attempt to clarify a little bit. God created Lucifer. The name itself means light bearer. He created the angel. This is made clear in both Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. But God looked at His creation on day 6 and said it was very good. Just when did Lucifer fall? We see in the book of Job that the angels rejoiced at the laying of the foundations of the earth. That took place on the third day. So before the third day, God must have created the angels.

God rested on the seventh day. There is no way that we can say that Lucifer fell on the seventh day. If that were true, then God wouldn't have rested. Genesis chapter 2 is a reiteration of the sixth day. So when we reach chapter 3, we are now reading of some time not announced. It is possible that Adam lived in the Garden for 100 years before taking of that fruit. He was 130 when he bore Seth. We don't know how old Cain was when Seth was born, and we don't know how old Cain and Abel were when Abel died.

I say this to make the point that we really can't give conclusive answers to when Satan tempted the woman. The best we know is that it was probably within that window of after day 7 and before Adam was 100. I have a theory on how it happened. It doesn't necessarily tell us when. God created out of darkness, but did not eliminate the darkness. When there was void (emptiness), He filled; when there was chaos, He created order. But darkness continued. I've already ventured into this thought a little bit.

God set up lights to govern the darkness. The sun was to govern the day, and the moon was to govern the night. We see in Isaiah 24 that they are ashamed and confounded at the end of the age. They allowed the darkness to continue to creep in and overtake God's creation. I speak of light and darkness as though they have personality. I don't believe this is mere personification. I think that words escape us on this description. We are left groping for proper language.

I don't think that the physical light and physical darkness is what is being expressed here. When I read the writings of John, I am captivated by the usage of these words. I don't think they simply mean physical light and physical darkness. John's gospel gives to both light and darkness personality. Darkness has a power to blind and to cause people to stumble. Light has power to set free and to release from the blindness and stupor that the darkness has brought.

Jesus is called the light of the world. John refers to Jesus at the very beginning of his gospel as the light; "the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of men. This life that is the light of men shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. Do you see what I mean by John personifying light and dark? It is almost as if these are actually two different powers of two different kingdoms.

And here is where I think the answer lies. I can't help but wonder if maybe Lucifer saw the darkness and was captivated by it. Something about the darkness might

have enticed him, and he allowed it to overtake him. The power of darkness that was being governed over and held at bay now became the force by which Lucifer tried to establish himself as the Most High.

In this we have much that needs to be discerned. Is there a difference between sin and darkness? Sin has a power. It is more than an action. There is something about sin that actually binds and blinds humanity. We cannot get free from its grip. To stop performing actions that God calls abominable is not enough to make it to heaven. Our righteousness is not enough. There is still something within mankind that is not up to par. I think this is especially true after the fall. In Adam we all die.

The power of Satan is the darkness itself. It is by this darkness that he blinds us. What it is about darkness that causes humanity to be in a stupor, I don't exactly know. Sin is only a side effect of this. I don't mean to make it less than what it is. As abhorrent as sin is, the real fight is against darkness itself. To fight against that darkness is to fight against everything that is opposed to God. God originally used darkness as a cloak. It was originally permitted for a season.

What is it about the darkness that God was willing to allow to remain? I think that before it was harnessed for evil to go against God, the darkness was a symbol of mystery. It was something of the unknown. God allowed the darkness to remain because darkness hides. It cloaks. There are certain things that have not been revealed yet. The apostle Paul speaks of mysteries that were not before known until revealed in his time. Two of these would be the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Church.

The mystery of Christ is stated as thus: the savior of the world had to come as priest and king, and had to come as sacrifice and ruler. Atonement had to be made. This is what many of the Jews miss. This is what many Christians even miss. It says in Daniel 7 that Messiah comes in the clouds. It says in Zechariah 9 that Messiah comes on a donkey. Which is it? Does He come in the clouds or on a donkey? The answer is both. Hosea 6:3 says that the Messiah would come like the former and latter rains – like the spring and fall harvests.

His coming would be twice. In between would be an entity associated with Israel but outside Israel called the Church. Paul mentions a mystery yet to be revealed called the man of sin. This is known in Revelation as the beast or the Antichrist. The darkness originally had a sense of mystery and cloaking, but that does not mean that there was evil contained within it. What Satan did was took that mystery and cloaking and held it over the man and woman. He proclaimed as one who has secret knowledge that the woman knew nothing of.

When the serpent went to the woman, he did not tell her to eat the fruit. Not one time did the serpent tell her that she should take and eat of the fruit. He was much more crafty than that. The serpent started by asking a question that denies God's innate goodness. Is God really after our best interest? Does He truly want our success in the highest sense of the word? Does God, as a Father, so love us that if He withholds information from us it is for our good, and never for our downfall? This is what the serpent attacks.

He came along and started to speak words that challenged whether God really does desire our benefit. Because God has hidden this knowledge from you, how can you

be sure that He isn't holding more from you? How can you be sure that He isn't withholding something that is essential to you?

This is the way the serpent twists and mocks. He took the darkness – the mystery and the unknown – and he used it to then confuse and deceive the woman. Thus, the darkness, though it was originally intended for good, was forced to perform something wicked. The darkness was for our benefit. That mystery and the hidden knowledge was for our good. If it was essential that mankind would determine for self what is good and what is evil, then the fruit of this tree would not have been forbidden. However, our morality and our knowledge of right and wrong do not come from our own perception. It comes from something deeper than what *we* think.

Our morality as Christians is to come from God and God alone. The Father instructs, the Son reveals, and the Spirit enforces. It is contained within all three parts of God that we find morality. No one is greater than the other, and we cannot say that morality comes from one part alone. It is neither in Christ alone, nor by the Spirit alone. I make this point only to display how far we are from this. Even in our Christianity we have taken of the knowledge of good and evil.

We'll dive further into this topic in the next chapter. For now we end with a reasonable conclusion. God had created all things good. God had kept the darkness at bay by having the two great lights to govern it. Satan then took that darkness and yielded it for evil. Something in the darkness must have enticed him and consumed him with pride and envy. So, by manipulating the very creation that God had made, the devil brought in evil. Mankind's fall was not contained only in humanity. It was a cosmic fall because it brought darkness into all aspects of creation. That which was at the first made to dwell in light has been now cast into darkness.

If the whole Church goes off into deception, that will in no way excuse us for not following Christ.

-Leonard Ravenhill

To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men

-A.W. Tozer

Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“We don’t need a new definition of Christianity, we need a new demonstration of Christianity.”

-Leonard Ravenhill

“How shall I feel at the judgment, if multitudes of missed opportunities pass before me in full review, and all my excuses prove to be disguises of my cowardice and pride?”

-Unknown

II. Two Trees – Two Wisdoms

“And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” Genesis 2:9, 16-17.

When I look at this text, I see that God created two trees in the midst of the Garden. When the serpent comes to tempt Eve, he only speaks of one tree in the midst of the Garden. Eve in return only addresses one of the two trees in the midst of the Garden. The word “midst” would mean the middle. The image in my mind is of a small clearing with these two trees next to one another. Both of them represent something in and of themselves, but each of them represents the other tree just as much.

What is it about the tree of life that it would be blessed? What is it about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that it would be cursed? Both are symbols of something larger than what is initially being spoken. What captures my attention is that to only one tree was commanded that it should not be eaten of. We find out later in Genesis 3 that the result of eating of the tree of life is that man would never die. I’m not sure that mankind would have died regardless, at least physically. I think that this symbol of life is something deeper than physic.

In the last chapter I talked about how God might have used the darkness to cloak Himself. He still does today. I talked about how Adam might not have been able to see God in full glory and live. The tree of life is what is necessary to see God. In the New Testament, this is typically called very specifically “eternal life.” Why would Adam not take of that? I’m not sure how long Adam was in the Garden. It is possible that he was there for close to 100 years. Why would the one tree be rejected, and the other be the means of temptation?

In the last analysis, the tree of life is the only tree remaining. When we look at Genesis 1 and 2, we find both trees. But at the end of Revelation, we only find the tree of life. I’ll discuss later why this is. For now, I want to establish the point that if God has set it up this way *now*, then His original intention was that very same thing. God’s original intention was that darkness would be overcome and that mankind could live with God and in His presence unadulterated. This means two things: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil cannot last forever, and darkness must also be exterminated.

Why exactly God chose to do things the way He has chosen is His prerogative. This is the defining characteristic of God. He is the one that chooses. His choices establish His sovereignty in a greater degree than any amount of foreknowledge and sovereignty in the Calvinistic sense ever could. This is not an argument for Arminianism either. Arminians fall short of this perception too. This kind of view takes God’s sovereignty as absolute. Our prayers and our moods cannot determine whether God chooses this or that. His choice speaks of His character. This is the scandal of specificity. Arminians are afraid to get too specific. God’s specific choosing is interpreted as predestination. But we cannot lack in our Bible verses to say one over the other.

While discussing the two trees, let's ask the question of what they mean. Why would knowledge of good and evil be what God does not desire for us to take? In our free will, the one thing that God never gave us was "what we think best." Free will does not mean that we are allowed to determine for self what is best and to pursue that. God alone gives revelation of good and evil, right and wrong. I don't think that God would have hidden this from Adam. The question isn't whether God intended us to make our own choices. The question is from where do we determine if that choice is good?

Our morality and sense of good and evil must only come from God. Anything outside of Him is taking up that same fruit that caused curse. This, then, begs the question of how to determine from where our morality is coming from at all. And this is why we must understand what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes. In short, I find these symbols to be most correct: self-preservation, self-promotion, and self-pleasure. The tree itself denotes self. The things that are self-promoting, self-preserving, and self-gratifying are the things that our flesh longs for.

It is from the basis of self that we determine right and wrong, good and evil. If I wouldn't want someone to do this to me, then I shouldn't do it to others. If I want someone to do it to me, then I should do it to others. However, if there is a time where we must stand up for truth and we know that we'll be placing self in danger, we then quietly find another alternative. We might gossip or we might anonymously write a note, but to stand up and get in the face of unreality and deception is far from us.

I don't need to look far to find an example. I caught a coworker stealing. Truth demands that I would report it. However, in sympathy I didn't simply report it. I offered myself. I went to the boss and I offered to pay for it. I was self-sacrificial as much as possible. The other person lost their job, and almost the entire staff – other than the boss and a handful of others – despised what I did. Before this incident I was well liked. After that incident many of the people no longer desired to associate with me.

While being asked why I chose to do this, a manager asked me how I thought this would help the man. I wasn't trying to help him. Truth demands that I would stand up for it. When something happens that goes against God, you must stand up against it. These are the moments that are the hardest. It is easy to go with the flow and be well liked. It is extremely difficult to stand up for God. It is even more difficult when it means that you are jeopardizing your reputation, friendships, stature, job, family, or all the other areas of self.

Two Value Systems

It seems to me as that these are two polar value systems. The one tree promotes self. The other tree – the tree of life – promotes selflessness. Jesus told us that if we lose our life we shall obtain it. If we take up our crosses and follow Him, then we shall be His disciples. Those that want to save their lives shall lose them. But those that lose their life for Jesus' sake shall save it. The tree of life is about resurrection. It is about a denial of self-life to take up eternal life.

At the root of all disputes in modern Christianity we have these two trees. Everything forms from such a view. There are many questions that our society faces. Not one of those questions is left unanswered when we face down our darkest deeps and ask the question of where it comes from. Does our understanding come from the tree of life, or does it come from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Our theology can actually misrepresent Christ and turn people to a misappropriation of God. That should seem obvious. What isn't so obvious is the root.

Jesus said in John 7:17 that anyone who chooses to do the will of God will know whether Christ's words are true. There is an actual exchange between holiness and understanding. It is by obedience that we obtain knowledge. The reason this is so is because of the definition of wisdom. If our definition of wisdom is simply an application of knowledge, then we have misappropriated that word. It says in Proverbs that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (1:7). It is said later in Proverbs (9:10) that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If this is true, then what shall we say of the atheists?

Do atheists have knowledge or wisdom? We know that they do. But then, is the Bible incorrect? We are not finding any kind of contradiction. The struggle is the same ancient struggle. From where do you gain your knowledge and wisdom? God has given us a brain to be able to reason and probe and learn. We can, in our own humanity, learn and become knowledgeable. But if we're going to understand the concepts of knowledge and wisdom from the biblical perspective, then we need to dig deeper than what the Oxford dictionary tells us.

It takes a desire to wrestle in order to understand such words. How do you understand the word glory? How do you understand the word holy? These are not simply taught. They are only understood on the basis of openness to God's Spirit, and revelation from His Son. There is no other way to come into a deeper knowledge. Indeed, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. Without it, we cannot even understand what such words entail.

And so when we read this verse in John 7 about only those who do the will of God will know whether Jesus' words are truth, I think it is safe to say that it is the case for all of Scripture. Why are there debates on Calvinism and Arminianism? Why are there debates on evolution and creation? Does the Bible not clearly teach these things? Are there grey areas in Scripture where human interpolation is needed? I whole-heartedly say no, there are no grey areas in the Scripture. Many times what we find is that we are unwilling to dive into the text without a pre-conceived notion that it has to be one way or another. To say that both Calvinism and Arminianism are true sounds paradoxical.

There is a deeper knowledge than our modern great debates. There is a bigger picture that does not diminish any Scriptures, but instead promotes all Scriptures. I find that when I am trying to push a certain idea, it usually means that my base is off center. Because I have not grasped the deeper picture, I have held to a specific point or view. By my holding to that specific point or view – even if that view is truth – I promote that view until it is no longer truth. It no longer holds as reality. A good example of this would be the modern hyper-grace movement. Of course there is some marvelous truth that we are no longer condemned if we are in Christ. But the rest of that verse says it is only true for

those that walk according to the Spirit. A carnal and immoral man that is in Christ is a liar. You cannot be of the light and walk in darkness.

And all of this is obtained through the grounds of resurrection. Our understanding of the faith and our knowledge of God can only be obtained by the tree of life. If we humanly try to understand, we will warp Scripture and cause it to say something that it was never intended to say. Scripture cannot be known on the basis of intellect. That is why God has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise. The wisdom of this world is at a complete loss when used to try and understand the Bible.

Only obedience to God will give us our understanding. Nothing less than devotion and holiness can grant us deeper insight. I hope that the point does not need to be made that we should study the Bible. Holiness and devotion cannot be obtained only through prayer – devotion itself requires a study of Scripture to know what God has said. And it is this point that is critical. I often see things in opposites. The world and its value system are at a polar opposite with God and His value system. Then the atheists have the audacity to claim that God is immoral because of the genocide recorded in the Bible.

In the next chapter we'll look into the principalities and powers. When we examine the demonic presences that influence humanity, I will continue to drive this point. So for now I want to make the base in order to springboard into that discussion. What is at the root of the two value systems? It is the tree of life or the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The former states that God alone is good – the latter states that humanity is sufficient.

The tree of life is a cross. When we take the fruits of that tree, we die to self. It is a selfless tree. Anyone who attempts to take of that fruit in selfish motive finds that they are all the more practicing the values of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In order to obtain life we must lose our lives. This seems absolutely absurd. Everything in the natural tells us that in order to gain life you must work to sustain and maintain life. Everything in the natural tells us in order to have life we must work hard to get enough money to go out and enjoy life. The tree of life gives it freely to anyone who abhors their own life and seeks to take up a greater life than their own.

This is the basis of the faith itself. Anyone who says they are of God and still live from selfish passions are liars. They have never met God. To take of the fruit of life is to meet God. To meet God is to die to self and live from Him. To live from Him is to live like Him. That alone is the ground and pillar of truth. We as the Church are called to be a representation of that ground and pillar (1 Timothy 3:15). Knowledge and wisdom are expressions of the Spirit of God.

How did Jesus answer those that came to Him with ridiculous questions? I think that every believer needs to wrestle with this. If we were put on the spot with the same kinds of questions asked Jesus, most of us would end up with our faces sticking out and embarrassed. Where did He get His wisdom to confront the scoffers? It came from the Spirit. And Jesus then put His finger into our chests and told us not to worry about when we're taken before courts and rulers because that same Spirit will reveal to us what to say. And how many of us have mouth-stopping answers?

Our view of wisdom and knowledge is only the biblical perception of wisdom and knowledge when all other previous experience and understanding that has led us up to

this moment cannot account for the answer that we give. Nothing in our lives can attest to why we would respond the way that we respond. It is as though God Himself has spoken or acted through flesh and blood. That kind of obedience to Christ is not born in a day. It is not learned simply because we have read a book or spent a little bit of time in the morning with God. This is only born by deep crying unto deep.

At the center of the faith, and at the center of all of mankind's beliefs, is the question of where our wisdom and understanding come from. The answer to that question is actually not found in searching out our hearts. The answer to that question is found in our openness, willingness, and obedience to every word of God. There is not one word in the Bible that is not important. We are called to follow the Law in every aspect. This takes both study to know what the Law says, and it takes Jesus revealing to us the full purpose and intention of that Law.

Everything that we are about comes from the question of whether we have been raised from the dead. The full purpose and intention of the Law (both Old Testament and New Testament Law) is that we would be full expressions in a corporate body of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to have an absolutely pure and holy and blameless walk before God apart from the resurrection. It is not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit. The whole crux of the faith hinges upon resurrection and how we perceive it. If it is simply a doctrine that we hold to, but it is not an outworking reality in our lives, then resurrection has no meaning and/or power.

The value system that we hold to is not achievable on the basis of our own human ability. God calls each and every person to hold to a morality that is beyond our capacity. But the kicker is that God doesn't merely call us as individuals to this kind of lifestyle. The whole point of Israel having their Laws was to display God to the nations (Deuteronomy 4:6). God is calling whole nations and systems and governments to obedience. If it weren't already impossible enough for individuals to live in the light, God then furthers the onus by demanding us to call our nations to obedience before God.

This is why I see there are two value systems and that they are opposite. If we are content to live out of our own ability, these challenges will be worded away. It takes resurrection to even agree with the basis of resurrection. If you hold to the one value system, then you cannot entertain the other. You cannot be halfway. Nor can you hold to one value system without fighting against the other. Our very presence is a spiritual warfare. Our walk before God is fighting against the principalities and powers of darkness. Our authority is not given on the basis of devotion. It is given solely on the basis of resurrection. If the Spirit is at work within, then we have the authority over the enemy. But if the Spirit is lacking, then the demons will reply, "Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are you?"

This kind of perception makes demands upon our walk that would not have otherwise been made. It isn't enough to be moral people. Morality only takes someone so far. Ethics only take us so far. Our denomination and categories only take us so far. This is beyond all morale, ethic, and category. This view that bases everything upon the resurrection cannot be defined. All terms seem to fall short. It is a Hebraic view of the faith. This view of resurrection has its inception at the beginning with the two trees in the Garden, and various characters emerge throughout the Old Testament to display the same

Hebraic faith (see Hebrews 11) all the way until we reach the end of the Bible and the Spirit and the Bride say “Come.”

Hebraic Roots of the Faith

God’s people are strictly Hebrew. There are zero other options. God has chosen Israel, and it is into Israel’s root that we are grafted (Romans 11:11-24). But even of Israel Paul remarks that not all Israel is Israel. There is a remnant. This remnant that God identifies with and calls His people are Hebrew. All other perspectives, whether Greek, Messianic, or Jewish, are not of God’s wisdom. The Hebraic faith is not Jewish in nature. It is more than Jewish. It is not Messianic. The Messianic movement seems to be a Zionist movement back to Judaism and away from Greek-minded Christianity. It still falls short for one simple reason.

God’s view is solely based upon resurrection. I cannot stress this enough. The Messianic movement, though there are some good aspects to it, is not a valid alternative. In many ways it is still trying to be identified as another type of Judaism. God isn’t interested in us being identified as another type of Judaism. Judaism, as is Greek-minded Christianity, is idolatry. Messianic Judaism is also idolatry.

Idolatry is any religious practice that gives mankind a measure of religious and emotional satisfaction, and that alleviates their conscience and requires nothing from them. The view of resurrection says that nothing in man is good. There is no one good except God. Jesus alludes to mankind being evil (see Matthew 7:11). Any religious practice that does not have that same view is an idolatrous view. Why? Because, it brings a false ideology of God.

If we continue to teach and preach that we only need to do these things in order for God to accept us, then we have brought a false view. No one will truly argue this point. Yet, I still see that the vast majority of ministers do not put forth resurrection as a reality, but only a doctrinal statement that Jesus rose from the dead – and some might even go as far as holding the doctrine that we too are raised according to Romans 6. The doctrine of resurrection really interrupts all of our categories. Many ministries are guilty of taking this most holy thing of God – even in well-meaning intention – and transfiguring it as to rob resurrection of its cogency and power.

The reason that this Hebraic view is so important is that it takes into account all aspects of Scripture. Something in my heart aches when I see New Testaments with the Proverbs and Psalms. We are being robbed. Concepts of covenant, atonement, abomination, the end times, and the whole basis for the New Testament and New Covenant are stolen from us when we only read and study from our New Testaments solely.

One man has said, and I agree, that it seems like modern Christianity has given the Bible a hierarchy. John and Romans are at the top, followed by maybe Galatians, the other Gospels, and Revelation, but at the very bottom is the entirety of the Old Testament minus the Proverbs and Psalms. The Old Testament seems to only be good for flannel

graph children's stories. At the absolute bottom would be books like Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

We have no idea what we are missing. I've actually heard pastors that would tell people to ignore the Old Testament because it has nothing to say. Where, then, do we get the notion that all of Scripture is infallible? Did you know that Paul and Jesus only read the Old Testament? There wasn't a New Testament to read. All of the insight that we read from Jesus and the apostles came from the Old Testament.

So to conclude this chapter, I want to put my emphasis back on where I began. The two trees in the Garden of Eden were two symbols of something bigger than what is initially expressed. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a full representation of "man knows best." The other tree is the opposite: God knows best. Because God knows best, we humble self to take up His view and His purposes. This is the way that it has always been. From the beginning of Scripture through to the end, the only way to triumph over the serpent is by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony; loving not our lives even unto death.

What is our testimony except that we loved not our lives? And what good is a testimony if it does not continue? It is by the blood of the Lamb – we lay down our lives and take up His – that we overcome the world. God has established this from the beginning. Every generation since then has observed this truth. Even the prophets spoke of heart circumcision, rebirth, the Spirit being within us, and new creation. As we dive in further to the two opposing views by looking at the principalities and powers, lets not forget the whole point: God has made a way for mankind to dwell in His presence.

When you can praise God in the midst of adversity and suffering, you have the most powerful release from the powers of darkness. They cannot stand it, or bear to hear it, and they flee, because it is the overwhelming evidence of the reality of the invisible God. It contradicts their wisdom which says that when you are suffering, you are to be mourning, pouting, feeling sorry for yourself, blaming God, and accusing this man or that. But when you can praise God in the midst of your sufferings, you have ruined them. You have taken their last weapon, and they have nothing they can use anymore to threaten or to intimidate. You have broken through onto a heavenly ground. They are absolutely helpless to adversely affect you, and so they are required to flee.

-Art Katz

My main ambition in life is to be on the devil's most wanted list.

-Leonard Ravenhill

Of two evils, choose neither.

-C.H. Spurgeon

“We want to be raptured from responsibility.”

-Leonard Ravenhill

III. Principalities and Powers

I left off in the last chapter with the two value systems at war with one another. The first is based upon self. The other is based upon selflessness. After exploring a little deeper, we found that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a representation of human ability and ingenuity. The tree of life is a depiction of resurrection. Here I want to explore a little more deeply how these are not simply humanity versus God (and vice versa). They are full representations of two different kingdoms: the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God.

We cannot express the kingdom of God rightly without acknowledgement of the kingdom of darkness. This kingdom of darkness is ruled by what are called the principalities and powers. These unseen forces of darkness – demons – are the very foundation for true seeing. One of the paradoxes of following Jesus is that He calls us to a certain perception and way of life that is completely counter to everything that the natural sees, experiences, and thinks that it understands. This very thing makes our walks and coming to a biblical perception both strenuous and difficult.

Paul reminds us that we do not wrestle with flesh and blood in Ephesians 6. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Even in our most Charismatic circles, the Church has mostly ignored these spiritual forces. Because we have overlooked this major topic, our services and activities have been fated to a certain kind of futile and fruitless pursuit.

Notice what Paul says in the rest of Ephesians, though. The whole book is not addressed to individual believers in the Ephesus Church. The whole book is written in a manner that would suggest that Ephesians 6 must also be taken as being addressed to the whole Church. We do not wrestle individually. As individuals, we cannot affect the heavenly realms. The reason for this is because individualism is a promotion of the same wisdom that they push. It comes from selfishness.

The wisdom of God is that we would be one. Unless that is a reality, and not mere words recited as a cliché, our wrestling (whether individual or corporate) will be ignored. As an entire Body, we must display to those powers the wisdom of God. Otherwise, our witness and our authority are cheap and self-centered. It requires selflessness to be one with each other.

To define the word “heavens,” what we’re referring to is an unseen realm that is all around us. It is not necessarily above us. Nor is it necessarily where God dwells. There is an unseen realm – or maybe another dimension – where these powers of darkness brood and influence.

The whole reason that I have put this chapter in the book is because our understanding is insufficient. Many think that demonic activity is strictly the issue of personal deliverance. This is not even close to the big picture of the role that demons play in our world. The conflict between the Church and those demonic forces is the contention for the actual dominion or possession of creation and the nations. We will later address in this chapter how we combat them on this kind of level.

For this introductory statement, I want to also make known that our evangelical endeavors will be shallow attempts without the recognition of these powers. We must be able to wrestle against them and break their power over our communities, cities, states, and ultimately, our nation. If we are to have an effective evangelism, we must first engage those powers that manipulate and influence the society around us.

This is why I hold to the view that an evangelist is one that wrestles with the principalities and powers to free the souls from their bondage and blindness before he is one that “evangelizes,” or witness, to those souls. The questions are asked about Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8. Philip was called an evangelist, and the only reference seems to be about him winning that soul. But what is not mentioned directly is that the Spirit led Philip there. This is an indirect reference. God’s Spirit sent Philip southward, where he then met the Ethiopian eunuch. So the argument can at best then be made that an evangelist is one that follows the Spirit to the souls that God is gathering.

If the Church is only an institution where isolated individuals meet together once a week to hear a message and sing a few songs, then it is not equipped for this kind of struggle. This takes an engaging in those powers before it is evangelical. Any church that is not willing to take up that call is not the Church. Social issues like gay marriage and extreme grotesque sexuality in public are only answered when considering that the culture is influenced by these demonic powers. If we do not deal with *them*, then we cannot be a force to speak against the rampant immorality in our culture.

I spoke in the last chapter how everything in the faith is based upon resurrection. If that is true for the individual, it is true for the corporate Body. The whole Body must be resurrected and unified as one. The principalities and powers will do (and do) everything they can to keep us separated and isolated. Denominations are a spiritual issue – not doctrinal.

Demonic Power

Maybe the first thing to ask is by what power do demons operate? The angels of God are recorded as having massive power to destroy cities and armies. If the demonic powers had that same authority, we would possibly all be dead. There are a couple things to consider. First, there is a war in the heavenly places. Whether Satan could destroy cities and people needs to be weighed with that understanding. Also, God is sovereign. Ultimately, however, I don’t believe that they do have that kind of authority, because that kind of authority can only come from glory. When Lucifer left God’s presence, he left his glory behind. He has been stripped of all ability. Any possible power that Satan might have had has been stripped by the Christ Jesus through His death and resurrection.

We are also not concerned with coming home from our jobs to find a demon in our homes desecrating our living rooms. They don’t have that authority. God is sovereign. Because of their inactivity, people have been duped into believing that there is neither God nor Satan. But if the power of the devil is not found in outward manifestations as mentioned, then what exactly is his power? It is darkness: manipulation. He manipulates that which God has made.

The reason that we don't fear whether Satan can kill us in the sense of calling down fire from heaven (like in Sodom and Gomorrah) is because he can't create. He cannot create from himself, and therefore he cannot destroy in that sense. He has no authority to call upon the power of heaven. Satan can only manipulate that which heaven has already made. This is why when I speak of the principalities and powers, I will be speaking of Satan's influence over humanity. He manipulates and jerks people and institutional systems into performing his deeds.

It is true that he seeks to kill, steal, and destroy. But by what power does he do these things? He employs people on his behalf. Demonic possession is real and alive today. And it is true that demons can possess someone to throw them into the fire. Notice, though, that even this young boy was not killed, even after being thrown into fire often (Matthew 17:15). The man possessed by a legion of demons was not killed, even after cutting himself with sharp stones (Mark 5:5).

The most destruction that Satan performs is through manipulating people into being racist, elitist, full of hatred, and bitter toward their fellow man. Through the governmental system called Nazism, the devil was able to influence an entire nation to seek the destruction of an entire people. This is the first time in history that the Jewish people were persecuted simply because of their blood. It did not matter whether they converted or were friends of the state. This is what genocide means.

Ethnic cleansing is a form of demonic activity. You cannot understand most of world history without understanding this. Behind the scenes, where the history books don't report, is a demonic power that causes mankind to hate each other. School shootings, war, abortion, crime, and every form of violence are first and foremost caused by these powers. They are the culprits. As much as humanity is depraved, it is not the depravity of man that breeds enmity. Depravity must be understood on the basis of these principalities and powers that sway the hearts of men.

Two Value Systems

The only way that we can understand these two kingdoms as opposites and how to engage in that opposing system is to have a cosmic view. So I'll start there and work into the subject at hand. Ephesians 3:8-12 reads, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."

Notice what is written. Paul writes that from the beginning of the world God has hidden this mystery. The whole of creation is tied into this mystery. The cosmic setting is not rhetoric. I don't even know how to begin to define the terms. Cosmic would be more than universal. It represents all aspects – seen and unseen – physical and spiritual. Everything that has ever been created is interwoven into this mystery.

And what is that mystery that everything is interwoven into? What is the mystery that has been hidden since the world began? “That now to the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifest wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What kind of a statement is that? How many of us have read this passage time and again and missed what was being communicated?

Did God truly create the whole world to perform this mystery? Is the Church’s ultimate purpose really to display the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers? There isn’t any other reason for the Church to exist?

This goes against almost every teaching that I’ve ever heard given about evangelism. There are so many teachings and dogma that are held to that would say that God made the Church so that we would be the witness to the world. The Kingdom of God is within us, right? Why, then, does Paul seem to indicate that the sole purpose of the Church is to display God’s wisdom (or value system) to the kingdom of darkness?

I think that the implications are quite profound. This calling has little to nothing to do with us. It calls us to something greater than ourselves, and in that it also seems to elude that there is little or no benefit for us. That is the point. This view is cosmic. It is beyond humanity. It gives us something larger than life to pursue. Without this view, we are stuck at the same tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are stuck with our own ability and intentions and hopes. This kind of view pushes us toward something larger. It forces us to take our attention off of self and give self over to something that will have little or no benefit (and actually quite the opposite) in this life.

Think about this. The world thinks that it can continue to have its commerce, its culture, its great cities, and its international glories. The world thinks that it was created (or wasn’t created...) so that it could be sustained by itself. It is the means and the end. There is nothing more beneficial to humanity than to benefit the world. Much of the Church has fallen for this mentality. God says that the world was created for a different reason. The whole of creation was made so that there would be an entity called the Church, and that entity might display God’s wisdom to the principalities and powers of the air.

How does the Church attain to this? We find the answer in Ephesians 2. As we read through Ephesians 2, we start with Paul saying that we were once dead in transgression and under the power of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. I think that you might better understand now what is being said. We continue, and Paul starts to express in verse 11 or so that we are one in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ – neither black nor white – slave nor free – male nor female. We are all one in Christ.

To the degree that we are able to display that reality, we are fighting against the principalities and powers. When we are able to display more than getting along with one another, we have reached holy ground. To display the manifest wisdom of God is to display God’s value system. This requires being self-sacrificial to the rest of the body – whether Jew or Gentile, male or female – in the same way that Jesus was sacrificial to the Father and the Father was sacrificial to the Son.

It says in Romans 11 that we have been grafted into the root of Israel. If these are not measly words, but explain a reality, then we cannot speak as though we are separate

from Israel. God has brought together the two. We are one under the same Head. Even though they do not yet believe in Christ, they are still our brethren. To the degree that we both believe that and treat them as though we believe that, we are fulfilling our mandate.

Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. Are these words that we believe and practice, or are these just doctrinal words? We read in Romans 11 again that the Jews are the enemies of the Gospel *for our sakes*. Why is it for our benefit? It forces us to be more than pampered believers. It forces us to take on the love of God. We don't love Israel simply because they are God's people. If it is shallow sentiment, then we will find ourselves in the same place Martin Luther found himself – bitter and anti-Semitic. We love Israel because we have the Spirit of God in us.

When we run into contention, we display the heart of God. Sometimes that means we rebuke. Sometimes that means that we give sympathy. To say that we stand with Israel and then neglect the Israel in our own neighborhoods is a mock and a sham. You cannot truly love Israel and then ignore the Jew all around. Something inside compels us to engage with them. The first place that Paul went when entering a city was the synagogues and market places to debate with the devout.

This is more than a view on Israel and the Church. We display to the principalities and powers that we are truly saints by our treatment of Israel. If we are unambiguously real about our faith, then it will lead us to community with the saints and a true standing with Israel. A cheap sign in our yard does not cut it. The reason that the Jew is so important is that they are the ultimate display of humanity. The Stephen Spielberg and Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein are trademarks. Like many of the Jewish people, they are the movers and shapers of society and culture.

To go to *them* is to engage with the Pharaoh of this world. If we desire to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let God's people go, we will bring upon self all sorts of terrible torments. We will mark self as one to be despised. To stand with God means to stand against everything that the world believes in. If we stand against everything the world believes in, then you are standing against the very spiritual powers of darkness that blind and influence that world.

Understand that to negate self does not lead to life in this present evil age. To negate self leads to the cross. Jesus only did that which the Father purposed, and they crucified Him. We will not get any better treatment when we deny self and take up the eternal purposes of God. Understand that God allows this because it deepens the quality and character of that Church to take on the cosmic purposes. The opposition, if not persecution, from the powers of darkness is used as a catalyst into more devout and holy living. For some reason, the paradox of God is that the more comfortable we are, the less like Him we are.

All of our speaking about and “doing” spiritual warfare without the proper framework is nonsense. Our terminology only reflects our ignorance. We desire to “take cities for Christ” or “take cities through worship.” We claim that we “cast down” strongholds. We shout all the louder and more hysterical when we start to get “serious” and “angry” at the devil. We “command” in the “name of Jesus” that the demons must submit. And the whole thing reeks of flesh over 95% of the time.

The whole issue is life together. The proximity that we are from other believers determines everything. Did you know that you could be sitting two feet away from the believer next to you, and yet be miles apart in spirit? Our corporate character, integrity, and authenticity are what matter. What is the quality of our life together? When we take the communion cup, and we say that we are taking it “together,” how close and personal are we truly being to one another? Are there any among us that are in need? Do you have funds to help those in need that might be sitting less than 20 feet away? Do you know their needs? Do you know their struggles? Do you even know their names?

The fact is that we are not one. Though we might claim it and “practice” it, we are not truly at the place where we are submissive and sacrificial to one another. The demons know it. While the group in the back is praying for the service, the demonic forces are yawning. Where is the Church that has wrestled together to come to an authentic reality of being one with each other? Show me that congregation, and I will show you a Church that can turn the world upside-down.

The forces of darkness only respond when they see the reality of heaven and the wisdom of God as being the effectual foundation for God’s people. Heaven and earth are not two separate entities. The secular and the sacred are not two separate classifications. Time and eternity are not two different views. The person and Church that continues to separate the eternal from the *now* is the least earthly good. We don’t become irrelevant when we are heavenly minded. Unless we are eternally focused, we cannot be relevant.

Psalm 82

¹ God standeth in the congregation of the mighty;
he judgeth among the gods.

² How long will ye judge unjustly,
and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.

³ Defend the poor and fatherless:
do justice to the afflicted and needy.

⁴ Deliver the poor and needy:
rid *them* out of the hand of the wicked.

⁵ They know not, neither will they understand;
they walk on in darkness:
all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

⁶ I have said, Ye *are* gods;
and all of you *are* children of the most High.

⁷ But ye shall die like men,
and fall like one of the princes.

⁸ Arise, O God, judge the earth:
for thou shalt inherit all nations.

Who are these “gods” that are mentioned in verse one? Whatever they are, they are not gods. The verse is a mockery of their actual authority and title. I think that this

Psalm is written about the demonic forces at work throughout the earth. The reason that I don't believe these are the false gods of other nations is simple. You start to read verses 2-4, and it sounds like God is speaking to actual beings. Yet the prophets mock the other nation's gods. They claim that man makes these images, and they are nothing. They do not speak, they do not hear, and they do not answer.

So if these are not the false gods of the pagan nations, then couldn't God be addressing the rulers and judges of the earth? Maybe these are just the kings. Maybe these are simply those in authority over the people of the world. If we think this, then we have misunderstood this Psalm. God calls them more than men in verse six. God does not give that kind of title or honor to any mortal man.

As a punishment of these gods, they are to die as mortal men. Poetic statement is used to explain this. I still see that this is not a poetic statement about kings and rulers. It is a literal statement about the principalities and powers. Though they were made to never die and endure eternity, they will die like mortal men. Though they do not have the physical body that mankind has, God is speaking to them a judgment. They will corrode as though they had mortal flesh.

Somehow these powers are set up in a place of authority and influence over the earth, but they do not rule in righteousness. "Defend the poor, do justice to the afflicted." They do not understand the wisdom of God – cannot understand – for they walk in darkness and misalign the foundations of the earth. What does that even mean? Somehow their corrupt judgment actually affects the created world. But the fruits of righteous judgment in the heavenly places does the exact opposite. By our righteous judgment and holy lifestyle among brethren, we do bring about a difference in the creation around us.

This is why the Psalm ends with calling the nations God's inheritance. The focus is taken off of the principalities and powers and placed onto the nations. The principalities that have sway and influence over the nation are removed, and thus the nations are no longer deceived. This is why God judges them and casts them down (they fall): so that the nations will no longer be blinded by their deception. Daniel 10 has an interesting passage about the prince of Persia retaining the angelic forces that were trying to deliver a message to Daniel. Is the prince of Persia here a man, or is it the ruler of darkness over that nation? It makes all the more sense when we open our minds to accepting that these demonic forces are what are at work behind nations and politics.

When those demonic powers are cast down, and righteous rulers are put in their place, the result will be cosmic. It is not enough to have a view of how this affects humanity. The birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees are also affected. Righteousness is like light that pierces the darkness. That darkness all around us is pushed back and set at bay when we rule in righteousness and equity. When the remnant is full of members that don't have ability or willingness to rule, the result is a universe that plunges into deep darkness where there is no remedy. Thank God that He has established a righteous remnant, and that they will indeed rule. The question for each of us to ask is whether we are a part of that remnant, or whether we will find ourselves outside of that remnant.

Religion is nothing more than something that establishes a status quo, and keeps mankind from the knowledge of the truth. We need to be beyond religion. At its best, it is still an institution and system. There is no effectual power in religion to bring a person to God. The only power to bring someone to God is the power of the Spirit. This is all the more amplified when we explore such a topic as the principalities and powers. Our cosmic struggle for the world as a whole is based upon these two wisdoms.

The wisdom of God is to put our minds beyond the temporal. It focuses upon the eternal. The wisdom of Satan is to put our focus upon the temporal and immediate. He desires to shut our minds off to any view of eternity. The whole world has subscribed to this lie that we can only believe in what we see. It has even affected the Church. Satan rules over institutions and systems. The reason for this is that they are easily manipulated.

We have set up our churches as institutions. Businesses are institutions. Government is an institution. Everything of the world revolves around system. System is not easily defined, but to give a shot at it, I would say it is something that revolves around man's ability, and leaves no room for any outside possibilities. It is based upon formula and result. Anything that derives its worth and success by the result in which it obtains is a system. Some systems desire results of money, while others desire results in influence. Whatever the goal, a system cannot simply be content. It has to continue to press forward and increase. God, however, calls us to the place where we would be content with simply being – being loved by Him, being of a certain character, and being His witnesses. The world is not so.

The whole world is a system. This is why it is so easy to manipulate and control. Satan only needs to make man *think* that he has the absolute control. In this he is worthy of his title: the deceiver. He influences and manipulates the world as a whole to perform his values. What are his values? They consist of power, force, threat, manipulation, intimidation, ambition, and lust. Wherever men are seeking to promote self on the basis of greed, ambition, power, seduction, exploitation, and/or force, it is precisely in that place that the powers of the air have their influence. Institutions are not simply set up to tend to humanity's needs. They seem to have their own agenda. And when something attacks that agenda, or submits a threat to the institution's existence, shock waves of hostility are resounded back at the threat.

The principalities are the rulers of these institutions. They are the little "g" gods of this world. If you look through the religions of the world, you will find that all the pagan religions have gods that are amplified humanity. They are not deity. These gods serve as poor substitutes for purpose and life. Man tries to find something greater to submit to in order to keep from anarchy. But amplified humanity is not deity. And anything less than deity only leads to anarchy. The principalities and powers, though they are the rulers and the judges of the earth, are not fit for their jobs.

The last sign before a civilization falls is that the civilization becomes grotesquely sexually explicit. We find this not only in Biblical narrative, but also in history books. This is what happened to the Greeks and the Romans. In modern history, this is what happened to Germany. Hitler's army was predominately homosexual and sexually fanatic. It is as though the last thing to go before the civilization crumbles is the very

humanity of the people within that civilization. The people are so robbed of their humanity that they are left as gross carnal beasts, something less than human but more than an animal.

This is what the principalities and powers do. They strip mankind of their humanity – which is ultimately an attempt to strip us of any possibility for reclaiming our dominion over them – and leave us naked and ashamed. If you begin to touch the preconceived and unwritten codes behind the culture and institutions, you start to invade into the principalities and powers. Sometimes fads and crazes, or technology that is the “must have,” sweep a nation or culture. You dare not ask why. To simply ask the question of why this or that particular thing is pushed seems to stimulate aggression.

You can be guaranteed that spiritual forces are behind it. Things like music, sports, television shows, and entertainment can be added to that list. Even in the realm of sports I have seen Christians get heated and in their brother’s face about saying something derogatory against their favorite team. What else, other than demonic forces, could drive someone to be so addicted and so easily agitated?

Freedom from Bondage

Only those that are completely free from this kind of system can expose it. But how is such freedom obtained? It is solely upon the basis of resurrection. We, as a corporate Body, must wrestle together to obtain that resurrection. Only the power that raises us up from the dead will be able to free us from the shackles that continue to bind us to that death.

Atheists have adopted the idea that there is no purpose for life, the universe, or anything else. But they have the point of view that we can subjectively make and design purpose for our lives. This is illusory. Atheism is not wrong to say either of these points. If there is no God, then there is no ultimate purpose for anything. But then to turn around and say that we ought to live as though there is purpose so that we can feel achieved and happy is complete unreality. To continue in a state of unreality can only produce wickedness of the ultimate and most unavoidable sort.

The world as system will always result to violence in the end. The most peaceful man can only resort to violence if he is not set free from this manipulative power. And violence does not necessarily mean beatings or brutality. There is a violence that is used with words or handing over to authority that runs deeper than outward violence. On the other hand, the wisdom of God is sacrificial. Though the wisdom of the principalities and powers is to use force, threat, and violence, it is the wisdom of God to not be intimidated and willfully surrender their lives. As a Christian, I would rather suffer under that violence than to reserve self and play their game by reacting in violence.

The whole system itself is built to cause a struggle. It is a struggle to keep your head above water. By distracting and by causing disturbance emotionally and spiritually, the system diverts the attention of every person away from God and onto self. We can even suffer this as Christians. The church system is set up to cause this very emotional and spiritual disturbance/distraction. There is prestige and honor given to those that are

elders, deacons, pastors, or some other form of influence. You must work your way up through the church by being a member, and then serving, and then volunteering in various platforms. After you have paid your dues, then you might get promoted to something admirable like an usher or, even better, an elder.

The whole thing is based upon self. It is based upon self-promotion. *We* want honor, respect, reputation, and prestige. The man that is free from such desires is the man that can expose such frauds. These kinds of systems of promotion open wide the door for the principalities and powers to find lodging. The whole point made in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:8 is that God chooses the weak things and the foolish things to confound the strong and wise. It is God's choosing to take the lowly and abased and promote it by His Spirit to do some of the most miraculous things that have ever been recorded in history.

Who was Evan Roberts? This young man prayed for 13 years that God would send revival. No one knew his name other than the people in his youth group and a few in his church. Yet, God chose him to be the evangelist by which the Welsh revival came. The whole of Europe was set ablaze by the Spirit of God for a full year. Judges were handed white gloves because they went a year without any crime. It even came over the ocean to the United States. The revival that followed was Azusa Street.

God does not choose the prestigious. He chooses the weak and foolish. He chooses the Evan Roberts that no one has ever heard of. Paul said of himself that he was "unknown, but well known." He was unknown to the giants of the world, but well known to God and to the principalities and powers. This is where the freedom lies: determining to not be given over to such seductive power. By the power of the resurrection, we can be made free. But we have to desire such freedom. Many of us *want* to be famous. Many of us *want* honor and prestige. It was for this very reason that Jesus said of the Pharisees, "Woe to you, for you love the most important seats in the synagogues and at banquets."

In his book Ben Israel, Art Katz expresses his journey hitchhiking through Europe as an ex-Marxist atheistic Jew. One of the stories that he tells is while he was in the midst of a rainstorm. Car after car would pass him. Just as he was giving up on the goodness and brotherhood of humanity, a car pulls off to the side of the road. Art expected for the man to put his hand out the window and give a wave as if saying, "Hurry up; I'm doing you a favor."

Instead, the man got out of the car. He approached Art beaming from ear to ear. This kind of approaching leads one to question whether the man is a homosexual. However, the man took Art's bags and threw the rain soaked luggage into his back seat. At this, Art winced at the damage that it did to the new upholstery. Looking at the man to see his reaction or face to the damage, Art saw that he didn't even care. It was as if he didn't even notice. This is the thought that then ran through Art's mind – as an atheist – "What manner of a man is this?"

You will have to read the book to find the full story. My point in mentioning this much is to have it register deep within you. How many of us would have been the one to wince? How many of us would have been the one to wave instead of get out and greet the hitchhiker? How free are we from the wisdom of this age? I mean really... To what extent do we truly have freedom? If our cars, our homes, our expensive luxuries, and the

like are something that we're so attached to that we would wince in that moment, then we have not come to the true place of freedom.

Though we might be free from sin in the respect that we don't look at pornography, we don't smoke, we don't get drunk, we don't curse, etc, we have not truly been released from the power of sin until we have no care of our earthly possessions. As long as they are in our possession, we take care of them to the best of our ability. But we don't allow that to diminish what is truly important. Stewardship is only stewardship when we are using what God has given us as witnesses unto Him. If stewardship means that we merely take care of what God has given us, then we have already lost the battle.

This kind of freedom from worldly possessions is evident in more places than whether we would wince when our upholstery is tarnished. How often do we need to get out of the house? And for what reason? Are we content to remain and enjoy our family and community? The need to go out and see the merchandise at the mall is as much evidence of not being free from this spirit of the world as wincing when someone scratches the side of your car.

The people that need the latest technology, to see all the new movies, to go to the concerts when their favorite bands are in, and/or to obtain unnecessary luxuries have not yet stepped onto apostolic grounds. These things in themselves are not the issue. It is the motive behind why we would need these things that is the issue. I don't take issue when people have nice things. But what is the reason for those nice things? Is it simply to have them? Or is there actually something deeper in our hearts that is longing for what we don't have? That kind of longing is only fulfilled in Christ.

To the extent that we do not find absolute satisfaction in Christ and His work in us will we find ourselves needing these sorts of luxuries and attractions. God offers absolute freedom. Paul tells us it is Christ in us – the hope of glory. Do we have *that* hope? Do we believe that there is *that* glory inside?

Our Warfare

It says in Jude 9 that we are not to rail against the principalities and powers. Yet, I see many times that the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches do this very thing. They “cast him down,” and “command him out” and “take authority over the devil.” Use extreme caution. Jesus might have unarmed them and made a public display of them (Colossians 2:15), but they still have some authority. There awaits a final defeat.

Every true preaching of the cross is a reiteration of their defeat. Maybe this is why there is so little preaching of the cross. Men who are still bound and blinded by the principalities and powers' influence are standing in the pulpit. How can they possibly preach something that hinders their livelihood and their provision? Whenever there is obedience unto suffering, and a trust in God instead of self, there is a cross. Every time there is a reiteration of the cross, there is a defeat of the demonic realm. This is our warfare. It does not have much to do with prayer and fasting and worship. First we live, and then we pray. From our lives we give prayers. I would go as far as saying that my life is itself a prayer.

What kind of lifestyle do we need to live from? When we do something that has no benefit to self, and can only bring glory to God, we perform something that even the principalities cannot understand. That is the lifestyle we must pursue. When our every moment is lived out of a reality that this moment is precious and it will not be given again, and we take it to the degree that we sacrifice self to reiterate the cross, then we have defeated the powers. Our warfare is not carnal. It is spiritual. Spiritual warfare must first be derived from a lifestyle in the Spirit.

Many times I fear that we might have actually replaced obedience with prayer. This is not an absolute statement. Not in every form have we done such. The reason why many of our prayers are unanswered (such as our prayers for revival) comes down to the fact that we simply want selfish gain. Even our hopes of revival seem to stem from wanting a spiritual shot in the arm to have some glory in our services and gatherings. There are some that desire to see many come to Christ. Many of those people even want revival so that God will evangelize and they don't have to.

I know these things because they were true for myself. I, myself, desired revival for the sake of tangible glory during the services. I, myself, wanted God to evangelize so I didn't have to. This is deep in the heart of mankind, and it takes a certain kind of stripping to realize these kinds of faults. No one desires stripping that has a carnal mind. To be stripped is ultimately to suffer judgment. That is how God strips: He judges. But God never judges out of anger or hatred. God judges out of love. His judgments are redemptive. What we think is somehow being used to condemn, God's purpose and heart is to redeem. His judgments are His mercy.

The carnal minded man does not desire this. It takes a certain kind of spiritual maturity to welcome and rejoice when we find ourselves in obscurity and pain. When suffering a trials come, we are to rejoice. Why do the apostles tell us this? It is because they know something that we don't. For God to judge, which is to say, for us to suffer, is for us to obtain mercy. It is in our rejoicing and thanksgiving through suffering that we learn obedience. Even Jesus Himself had to learn obedience through suffering, and that suffering made Him perfect and the author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9).

If this is something that Jesus Himself had to endure, why do we expect that we shouldn't? Why are so many of us under the assumption that pain and trials are attacks of the enemy? We might actually be praying against the Lord. Rejoice in your suffering. His judgment is His mercy, and when we have been brought into a place where we accept the deep dealings of God, we have been brought onto holy ground.

The Wisdom of God

The third chapter of Ephesians ends with "to God be glory *in the Church*." The reason it says thus is because of God's end time strategy. It is the Church that is supposed to express the manifest wisdom of God to the principalities and powers. I have already hinted at what this means. Here I want to explore more deeply what God's end time scenario is. When the pieces come together, it will make all the sense in the world as to what we are called to and how we overcome the principalities and powers. I'll be

addressing this topic further while discussing Israel's ultimate role to the nations. With that being said, understand that this will not as of yet be exhaustive.

It is God's wisdom that He would die upon the cross. From the foundation of the world, the ruach (God's Spirit) hovered over the waters and dark chaos. It was from the midst of the darkness that God spoke order and light. As it was at the beginning, so it shall be at the end. Jesus upon the cross demonstrated the two wisdoms clashing. He displayed their character and to the same degree displayed the character of God. It is God's wisdom to be submissive unto death. Through submission and humility Christ was exalted. By force and power Satan desires to apprehend the throne of God.

The end time scenario exposes this truth again. We, as the Church, will be called upon to perform that same selflessness that Christ performed on Calvary. In Daniel 11:33-35, we read of the Antichrist persecuting the wise. He puts them to the sword, sets them on fire, and puts them in prison. The wise *must* be the faithful Christian remnant. There is no other way to interpret the passage. If we claim that these are Jews, then we misappropriate the Scripture. Israel is being persecuted, and there are a people that are somehow outside of the Jewish people, yet also defined as being a part of Israel, offering help.

If we take that thought and expand upon it, we can better see and understand what is taking place. Revelation 12 has two great signs that appear in heaven. The first is a woman. The description of the woman is reminiscent of Joseph's dream in Genesis 37. This woman is Israel. We know this because she gives birth to the Messiah that is caught up to heaven (called the man-child). Jesus came out of Israel, not the Church. The other sign that appears in the heavens is a red dragon. This is identified as "that ancient serpent the devil." He desires to devour the man-child.

When Jesus is caught up to heaven, the dragon turns and persecutes the woman. Once again, this cannot be the Church. The reason is to be found at the end of the chapter. After the woman is safe in her wilderness refuge, Satan goes after the woman's other offspring: those that obey the commandment of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. This entity that is called the woman's other offspring is the Church. What causes Satan to move from persecuting Israel to persecuting the Church?

We'll look into why Satan first persecutes Israel in a later chapter. This is irrelevant to our study currently. Satan turns his attention away from Israel and onto the Church for a very specific reason. It is said that the woman flies into the wilderness where God has made a refuge for her. In the Greek, which was translated correctly by the King James' Version, the wording is "and *they* take care of her for 1,260 days," Revelation 12:6. We are that they. God has a place in the wilderness for Israel to run in the last days when all nations gather against Jerusalem. During that final 3 ½ year time of Jacob's Trouble (read Jeremiah 30-31), God disperses Israel through the wilderness of all nations (Amos 9). It is the Church that takes her in.

The reason this is important is because our welcoming them will not be with joy. They won't receive this with gratitude. Many Jews will act with hostility and with reservation. After 2000 years of being persecuted by the name of Jesus, what motive do we have to take them in? Are we using this as a ploy to convert them? Is there something that we get out of this? Are we taking them in only to report them to the State? They have

every reason to question us. Jewish-Christian relations have been quite rocky, to say the least. But we take them in anyway.

By our spirit of submissiveness, we reveal to them a character that they do not possess. We don't get offended. When they search us out to learn our hidden agenda, we allow the mockery and scoffs. If they report us in order to survive a little longer, we willingly go to our deaths *for their sake*. If we see them being pulled out of their homes and shops by their beards and beaten in the streets, as happened in Nazi Germany, we don't pull the shade down to ignore it. Against all desire of the flesh, we run out to protect them. To our own peril and possibly to our own death we defend them. This is what separates the true Church from the apostate religious system.

Jesus cried out on the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Stephen made that same proclamation while being stoned to death. It comes upon our shoulders to cry that same edict while they are expiscating (and possibly being hostile to) us for simply trying to help them. And what do we gain as a reward for taking them in? We have nothing to gain, and everything to lose. This is what it takes to be a disciple. Only those that deny self, take up their crosses, and follow Christ can be His disciples. If we are unwilling to die for the least of these *His brethren*, then we are unwilling to die for Him.

God has put His eggs in one basket. It says in Romans 11:26 that all Israel shall be saved "as it is written." Isaiah spoke of the nation of Israel being born in a day. Zechariah also alludes to this in his twelfth chapter, verses 10-14. That national rebirth comes when Christ returns. There will be a few that come to Christ during that 3 ½ years. I don't deny that. But the whole nation will be physically and spiritually born in a day. This happens when the deliverer comes out of Zion (Romans 11:26). The deliverer is Christ, and Zion is a literal place in Jerusalem.

It is on that day that all of Israel will be saved. So why do we suffer on their behalf? What are the purposes of God to have us to die as witness to them if they don't receive that witness until Jesus' return? God's purpose is simple. There is a veil that blinds the nations. Israel is not outside of that. In Isaiah 25:7, we find that there is a veil that covers all nations. It is upon Israel's redemption that God destroys that veil over the nations. But the veil over Israel is destroyed by different means.

Any reiteration of the cross is a defeat of those powers. When the Church in corporate can display the wisdom of God – which is selflessness and sacrifice – to God's people Israel – who don't deserve it and we have every reason to renounce this calling – then those powers that influence and manipulate her are defeated. There is actually a power released in our dying. We overcome the principalities and powers through our death. There is no other way. The cross is the only answer.

When we have come to that place where we so identify with Israel that we call her sin our sin, and we give our lives for her, we have stepped onto the grounds of God's wisdom. When our identification with our Hebrew roots go deeper than words, we have obtained unto resurrection reality. Our actions speak louder than words. This might be literally true, for Jesus went as a lamb that is silent. We too might be silent lambs before the slaughter.

The way that those powers are defeated and Israel's blindness is cast down can only be obtained through a sinless sacrifice. Christ is the ultimate sacrifice. He calls upon His Body to replay that sacrifice. This is a high calling that none of us are prepared to take on. Our Christianity has been flabby and diluted. We have spent much time in the world. The world has conditioned us to be all too self-oriented. This is a calling to break the power of Satan in our own lives.

God has granted us a way to overcome by the blood of the Lamb. We don't try to live up to God's call on the basis of "because we have to." We are living for something larger than self. Our call and purpose is bigger than our surroundings. This view alone can rid us of our selfish mentalities and scheduled Sunday services. Currently, each week we know exactly what to expect. There isn't a progression toward an ultimate goal. It is almost as though we don't believe that there is an ultimate goal. How can we face those demonic forces in the culture around us while we are busy playing games and entertaining each other? God's purpose for us is greater than we could ever imagine.

The Righteousness of God

Romans 1:16-17 states, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." Something that I don't think that people catch is that the Gospel is the righteousness of God. Why would the Gospel be what reveals the righteousness of God?

I would like to suggest that maybe verse 16 gives us a clue. It says to take the Gospel to the Jew first, and then to the Greek. Why is this important? It says later in Romans that they are the enemies of the Gospel for our sakes. To go to the Jew requires something. It is not easy. In fact, Jewish missions are the most barren missionary service in the world. Why is it so hard to witness to the Jew? It is because since they came out of Egypt they have rejected their God.

Rejection of God didn't start after Joshua died. It didn't start with the golden calf. Rejection of God started with God coming down upon Mount Sinai. When God came down and spoke to Israel directly, they were unwilling to hear it. Instead of being in relationship with God, they decided to send Moses up to the mount to speak with God. Their hearts said, "We will listen to Moses, but speaking to God directly is unacceptable." To say it bluntly, I detest when Jews wear their yamaka or spell God as: G-d. As intrigued as I am, and as much as I agree that we are to respect and honor God, I give no room for false respect.

These practices are not righteous practices – they stem from idolatry. This isn't born out of a heart that desires to be humble before God. As devout as they are, these are ultimately only symbols of that same act at Sinai. God actually desires to be with His people. Why would we then take God's word to Moses about not being able to see His face and live as we need to cover our heads so that God doesn't kill us? This is a false basis of knowing God. It is a false religion and a false righteousness.

And this is the danger of false religion. Any tradition or practice that tells us we are righteous is a false ground. We aren't made righteous by our deeds. Our deeds are but filthy rags before God. Human ability only goes so far. It takes the blood of Christ for the remission of sins. Jewish tradition and custom, as well meaning as it might be, is not the true basis of righteousness. It is self-righteousness.

God's righteousness is to go down into the Jordan and recognize with other's sin, even though we have not committed those sins, so that we might be priestly and offer a holy sacrifice for them. Only on the basis of God's righteousness can we display righteousness. Anything less than God's righteousness is self-righteousness, which is what the Pharisees had. Self-righteousness is still self-focused. That might sound obvious, but the implications are profound.

Jesus said that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, we couldn't enter the kingdom of heaven. That should strike fear into our hearts. The Pharisees were more devout, more pious, more righteous, obeyed the commandments of God more thoroughly, and knew the Scriptures better than the majority of the most holy and devout Christians that I know. And yet our righteousness is supposed to exceed that? This is why we need to understand the righteousness of God.

Do we really believe that we are sinners saved by grace? Do we truly believe that we are no better than the prostitutes and drug dealers? Our understanding of sin is not adequate. Our inadequacy in this causes us to be self-righteous and forces us into a plastic or synthetic relationship with Christ. Because we think that sin is disobedience, we have misappropriated the Gospel itself. Sin is only sin when we see it as a condition. It is the condition of every human being on this planet. Why is it a condition? There is no cure for sin. We cannot relieve self from this curse.

Sin is the condition that humanity is in. It has a power. The power is darkness itself. That darkness is what plagues mankind. It is what causes us to continue in sin. It is the blinding power. The deception is that we can continue in sin and be okay. How many of us will make up excuses as to why we transgress? How many of us will allow self off the hook because "we're only human?"

This is self-righteousness. It is deadly. The reason it is deadly is because this kind of righteousness is self-preserving. It will go to any length in order to continue to be on top. It will go to any length – even the murder of the righteous – in order to maintain self. These righteous Pharisees slew the prophets. How do I know that they are the same as the generation before them? They killed Jesus.

Religion is deadly. It poisons us. It causes us to think that we are better than others. It causes us to have a false understanding of self, and therefore a false understanding of God. The Lord's righteousness is to say "to the Jew first" even though they are the most undeserving. They are the very ones that rejected Him at Sinai. They are the very ones who rejected their own Messiah. They crucified Him. Of this kind of man – this kind of righteousness – all that they could say was, "Crucify!"

They killed the prophets. They stoned Stephen. They killed Peter. They fasted and swore on an oath that they would not eat again until Paul was dead. And yet God says that the Gospel is to go to the Jew first. It shows God's righteousness that forgiveness is first and foremost to those that are the most undeserving and the least willing to humble

self. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. These words are spoken in the utmost sincerity, or they are not spoken. How much do we really believe that when we're persecuted, it does not come from the hands of men, but from the hands of the demonic forces driving those men?

How much do we believe that the Jews did not crucify Jesus? How much do we agree with Jesus that no one takes His life and that He gave it freely? This question strikes at the heart of all anti-Semitism. For 2000 years the Church has persecuted the Jewish people because they are "Christ killers." The principalities and powers killed Christ. The sin of Israel is the same as it has always been. They have rejected God and were only too eager to listen to those demonic voices that would shout, "Crucify!"

What shall we say about our righteousness? Are we willing to allow the whole world to die and go to Hell before we're willing to be mature in Christ and wrestle with the principalities and powers? Does our righteousness go beyond self? To what extent have you taken up your cross and followed Him?

The Power of True Prayer

Matthew 17:21 says, "This kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting." It is interesting to me that the newer versions of the Bible don't have this verse in them. It ought to grab our attention. There is a spirit that the disciples could not cast out, and when asked about it, Jesus only spoke of a lack of faith and that this kind only comes out with prayer and fasting. Did the disciples not pray? Did they not have faith? We do read elsewhere that they were not in habit of fasting.

But what exactly is the implication of this verse? Are we supposed to fast all the time if we desire to affect the heavenly places? I think that a larger context is needed. We find in the start of this chapter that Jesus takes up on a mountain three of His disciples: Peter, James, and John. On this mount, Jesus is transfigured before them, and He meets with Elijah and Moses. It is upon coming down the mount that they find a boy who is demon possessed. The disciples couldn't cast it out.

The story begins on a mountaintop and ends in a valley. It begins with spiritual bliss, and ends with morbid confrontation with the powers of darkness. These times in the life of Jesus are for our instruction – especially for we who are in the last days. And isn't it interesting that it starts on a mountain? And who can ascend the holy hill of the Lord? Only He who has clean hands and pure heart (Psalm 24). Yet we are also called to climb that mount for our own transfigurations. As it is written in Hebrews 12:22: "Ye are come unto Mount Zion!"

I agree with the commentators when they say that it isn't so bizarre that Jesus would be transfigured. What makes this scene so spectacular is that Jesus would allow three men to see Him transfigured. It is the same for us. We need to also be found apart from everyone else where we might behold God as He is, in full radiance and glory. How is it that we can have this without dying? How did Peter, James, and John see Jesus without dying? Something is transacting here that needs our attention.

These three men were saved from death by the vision that they had seen solely on the basis of the blood of Jesus. Though it was not yet shed, God had allowed them this vision because they had already been transformed by the resurrection power. I know this because in the previous chapter, Peter claims that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus then tells Peter and all the disciples that this revelation only comes from heaven. You cannot gain that revelation by your own intellect. If that is true, then some sort of resurrection power must have already been at work within them to allow them that sort of understanding.

We find that these same men who were on the top of the mount and saw Jesus in His glory, heard the voice of the Father, and were themselves transfigured by that manifestation, could not then come down the mount and perform the necessary task to relieve this boy of his demonic possession. What happened? This is our situation also.

Even this little bit of Elijah and Moses needs to be searched out. How did they know that it was Elijah and Moses? Why not Enoch? Why not some other Old Testament saint? All I can say is that when you see the saints in their glory, you see them as they are. There is no question. This must be Elijah and Moses – not necessarily because they knew what Elijah and Moses looked like, nor because they overheard Jesus use their names, but because only they would have that kind of glory. Only they would have that kind of appearance. No other saint was fitted for that. Their appearance was their essence. You can recognize them because something in your spirit is able to recognize them.

We find the fatal mistake of Peter on this mount. He cannot simply receive, but must do. There is an itch to perform and do and be found in the midst of the action. Peter cannot simply sit back and receive what God is doing in that moment. He says, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here... Let us build three buildings for you guys.” Jesus is in His glory, and Peter calls Him *rabbi*? Elijah and Moses are in their resurrected bodies, and Peter wants to build them *buildings*? For what? It is because Peter is not able to rest in God and allow God to do.

The one word that I have underlined in that passage is the word *us*. It is good for *us* to be here; let *us* make... This kind of statement was answered only by the voice of God saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. *Listen to Him!*” God’s only answer to Peter’s self-centeredness is to say, “Listen to my Son.” Basically, “Shut up, Peter.” And when they looked up after falling upon their faces, all they saw was Jesus. They saw no man, but Jesus.

We now come to where we started. The disciples walk down the mount. Upon arrival at the foot, they find a boy who has suffered being deaf and mute from a spirit. His whole life this spirit has tormented him. And when Jesus heard that His disciples could not cast out this demon, He says (possibly) the most severe rebuke recorded in the life of Jesus. “You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I put up with you?” And when the boy was brought near Jesus, He rebuked the spirit and it came out. We find in other Gospels that the boy is shaken violently one last time before collapsing and looking as though he is dead.

It might be easy to pray for someone who has a sniffle, or if they have some sort of illness that can be treated by medicine, but how do you react when the boy is thrown to the ground convulsing? Too many times I’ve heard faithless prayers for people to be

healed by the hands of doctors. Oh you perverse and faithless generation... How long must I put up with you?

This is a believing of an ultimate kind. This kind of faith stands firm even though every appearance is screaming the contrary. It is one thing to believe when we're in comfort. It is something completely different to believe when it seems as though the enemy is riding high and calling all the shots. It is a completely different faith when we aren't holding to doctrines and creeds, but when the cards are stacked against us and we still believe those doctrines and creeds.

To believe then, when everything seems futile, is real believing. Unless that kind of faith is obtained upon the mountaintop, it is not obtained. This kind – this ultimate kind – is not your everyday demon. This isn't a fluke sickness or some sort of anger issue. This kind of demon plagues an entire nation and generation. Can you believe for *that* to be cast down? This is an expression of the powers of darkness in their severest and most powerful form. This kind that has sway over nations, and we're not talking about mere personal deliverance, does not come out by invoking the name of Jesus like a genie lamp. And this kind is all the more powerful when we're talking about Israel itself.

The blindness and stupor that is over the Jewish people is a calculated demonic fierceness that we cannot simply combat with our hopes. This kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting. This is an ultimate kind. The powers of darkness know that the restoration of that people means the coming of Jesus. They will try to obliterate them.

I want to direct your attention to Mark 9:25. It is the same story, but as recorded in Mark we find that Jesus rebukes the spirit. The words of Jesus are recorded, "I command you to come out of him and never enter him again." This kind of freedom is eternal freedom. "Never enter him again." When Jesus rebukes the spirit that has tormented this boy since childhood – much like the demonic realm has tormented Israel since her inception – it shall never again enter him. The same is true for all nations.

How many of our nations have had revivals and then war follows directly afterward? The bigger the revival, the worse the war. And how many of our countries have had some sort of moral change in heart only to in a few generations be worse off than before? History is plagued with the nations having some sort of revival or repentance before God, only to then forget entirely about their repentance in less than a century. When Jesus rebukes the spirit, it does not return.

We find in Mark 9 that the child was thrown down a final time and didn't get back up. It was such a display of demonic fury that the people surrounding said, "He is dead." This kind of spirit, that we as the Church are required to engage with over Israel, is one that does not come out peaceably. It shrieks, it moans, it kicks, and finally casts Israel to the ground dead before leaving. And the Lord allowed it. He didn't tell the spirit to come out immediately and not to kick and scream. He had the authority to. But instead God allows these satanic spirits to grab hold of the boy a final time and toss him around in their teeth like a mad dog with a rag doll.

I think that this should be dwelt on a little more. This boy was cast down as though dead. Maybe he really was dead. The nation Israel cannot be redeemed until it passes through death unto life. It is the same cross to take up that we as believers have taken up. We must be resurrected from our deaths. So, too, must Israel.

So what is this kind of prayer and fasting that is required for us to be able to cast out this ultimate kind of spirit? It will not happen until that demonic fury is poured out even upon the Church. Fasting is any kind of self-denial. The thing that makes fasting so powerful is the way that it contradicts and confounds the wisdom by which the world lives its life. We might feel like we're dying when we deny food to our lips. But what is actually transacting is spiritual, not physical. Any denial, whether of food, time, luxury, or anything else, is a fast.

People do not willingly deny gratification. We might be forced to fast because of this or that circumstance, but to willingly forfeit our nourishment is something entirely different. We can live a life of fasting by simply denying ourselves the luxury to indulge. We all have this option in our modern Western world. Obesity is a display of indulgence, and indulgence of a grotesque and antichrist kind. We deny even things that might be legitimate because we know that there is something going up and transacting in the heavens. Those principalities that live by a different wisdom rage against this.

And what shall we say of prayer? "This kind comes not out but by *prayer* and fasting." I pray, but I don't have the authority to confront *these* spirits... This is because our prayers are fixed only at the level of petition. There is a time and place for petition. Of course we ought to bring our needs before the Lord. He even requires it! James says we have not because we have not asked. But there is a deeper prayer still. There is a prayer life that actually affects the world around us without us even leaving the room.

This kind of prayer is communion. Communion is not a sacrament of taking bread and a cup. When I say communion, I mean that we commune with God. We simply reside in His presence because we actually want to be with Him. Whether we feel something or not, whether we hear His voice or not, whether there is anything outside of self that transacts, it does not matter. We ascend the mount to be with God.

Have you ever known a mountain that has an elevator? It does not naturally happen. To go up is strenuous. It defies the flesh. Nothing in us desires to make that sort of a climb. It is in opposition to what is easy and convenient. But something is transacted only when we go up. And what does that even mean? Can we find a good definition of how to ascend upward to God in prayer?

We can simply take the hard thing as a symbol. Whenever we are willing to pray when it is difficult, we are ascending that mount. To wake up early and open your Bible to ask what the Lord is desiring that we would seek to understand, and your body is groaning because it is five in the morning, and you haven't slept well, and my stomach is aching because I haven't eaten yet, and the fan is making me cold... It is in that moment that we are not actually in the room. We are in actuality in heaven on the top of the mount, before God in the Holiest place.

We might be physically in our bathroom or living room or closet, but where we are in actuality (which is to say: spiritually) is heaven. Any time that we are willing to push against our flesh and obtain the difficult thing we are truly praying. It might not be waking up early. Maybe it is praying while at work, and isn't that going to be embarrassing? Maybe we need to pray and lose sleep from our eyes in the night hours. Maybe we need to take 30 minutes away from our day that is crammed full and there is not 30 minutes to spare.

If we are willing to pray when it is not easy, then we are truly praying. And what does it mean to pray? If you think that I mean speaking out loud to God, then you are wrong. I spend my prayer reading and meditating upon God's word. Sometimes I'll just sit in the silence and allow my mind to think out what is upon my heart. There is no formula for prayer. The point is not *how* or *what*, but is instead *communion*. When we are willing to open up our deeps and be searched out, and to also honestly search out God's depths, then we are in the place of communion. Whatever that looks like for you, that is prayer. It might mean confession. It might mean petition. It might mean devotion and study of the Scripture. Whatever it looks like for you, that is prayer. As the Spirit gives guidance, we follow the still small voice.

I do not believe that tossing in our beds at night is from restlessness. Sometimes it is from a lack of prayer. If we would connect with God, then we would obtain rest and be able to sleep better. But sometimes it is a transaction in the heavens. Your soul has been agitated. Some issue is being transacted that you are not even conscious of. Do you know that the loss of sleep is another form of fasting? Even unconsciously our spirits will wrestle with those spirits when we have stepped beyond self and into the realm of engaging those powers.

Kill the Jews; free your souls.

-A popular Church slogan around the 11th and 12th century

We can be in our day what the heroes of faith were in their day – but remember at the time... they didn't know they were heroes.

-A.W. Tozer

The best theology would need no advocates; it would prove itself.

-Karl Barth

A Church that does not anticipate the consummation of the age has lost its identity as the Church.

-Art Katz

IV. The First Mention of Nations

As we continue through Genesis, we happen across Genesis 10 and 11. Genesis 10 is considered the Table of Nations. Genesis 11 is the tower of Babel. These two chapters are not to be taken individually. They are both together. The first chapter tells us of the nations represented in the next chapter. It is like when you read a newspaper headline “22 killed by bus accident.” When you start reading the story, it gives details of the bus’ travel and the people on the bus. But I thought that the bus wrecked. How is it now traveling? This is the very thing that I have heard people accuse of what is happening in Genesis 10 and 11. The first chapter gives the headline. Chapter 11 then gives the details. We need to wrestle with those details.

“And the whole earth was of one language, and of 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. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

In this first mention of the nations, we find that they are in disobedience to God. He told them to fill the earth and be fruitful and multiply. Instead they have come together as an international one-world antichrist government. As it was at the beginning, so it shall be at the end. This tower of Babel represents the world coming together to rival the heavens. They have banded together to ensure humanity will be god-like. We are able to reasonably consider that the U.N. and other international systems are the first fruits of this last day’s antichrist government.

Maybe one of the most important details is that instead of using stone they made bricks and baked them thoroughly. It says they had brick for stone. Why is that important? Stones are what God has made. You will never find a reference to the altar of God and bricks together. The altar is made out of stone. Those stones were not even allowed to be chiseled or cut. The way that God has allowed those stones to be shaped (by erosion or other means) is the way they are to remain.

The nations made bricks. They baked them thoroughly. They didn’t even let them sit outside to dry out. Bricks symbolize human ingenuity and ability. By their own strength, power, and wisdom the nations built this tower. They relied on nothing of God. And why would they bake them instead of allowing them to dry? This speaks of imminence. The nations could not allow an extra moment to pass. Their exultation and promotion had to be immediate.

This is how the nations are described at the very beginning. From their very inception they are in opposition to God in all things. So why would God choose to confuse their language instead of destroy the nations totally? The nations are God’s inheritance. We read that as the last verse of Psalm 82 in the previous chapter. God has intention and purpose for those nations. Their disobedience to His plans and purposes does not diminish or contradict their existence.

The Nations in Relation to God

We are all familiar with the Scripture, “Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.” The 82nd Psalm ends with these words. Though we’ve all read it, we continue to allow the nations to indulge in their own pride and arrogance apart from God. Because of our unbelief in this particular verse and verses like it, we have only allowed too many times the nations to continue in their hostility against God. Every culture is hostile to God – even the ones that seem gracious.

As much as national culture might be dear to us, I am convinced that it does not come from above, but instead comes from below. Many nations throughout the world are hostile to God in that Christianity is being persecuted with more and more ferocity. However, in these Western countries that are not yet hostile to Christianity, we find the more subtle (and therefore all the more dangerous) persecution. We are allowed our Sunday culture – a few hours to spend together at church – but are forbidden to allow such a culture to come into the secular affairs of men.

Probably the two biggest examples of this would be the homosexual agenda and the creation-evolution debate. Scientists are absolutely appalled and angered that anyone would take the Bible as literal and base their science off of it. Though it has never been proven wrong, and though models have been made based off of the Biblical account that are more accurate in explaining the world around us, scientists insist that the Bible is a taboo source because anything supernatural is not scientific. Our mere insistence on taking the Bible literal seems to cause for chafing and argument.

It is just as much a sin for the nations (and cultures) to continue in their ignorance and rejection of God as it is for individuals. The Gospel is just as much to the nations as it is to individuals. But who of us believes that? The nations are the Lord’s inheritance. Israel was even commanded in Deuteronomy 4:6 to observe the commandments of God as a display to the nations. God has always had a prerogative to them. It is a Hebraic understanding that would grasp this. But we are all too Greek or Messianic. And if we as the Church – the sole instrument of God that knows the truth – do not take reality and truth and this heavenly perspective to the nations, then how will they hear it?

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. ²³ For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. ²⁴ God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵ neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶ and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸ for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. ²⁹ Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and

man's device.³⁰ And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:³¹ because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. Acts 17:22-31.

This is the message that Paul gave to secular men on Mars Hill. Although the Greeks emphasized and applauded man in all that he is, Paul brings an entirely different view. The Greeks built monuments and massive architecture to their gods and goddesses. Mankind has always done such. It goes back to the wisdom of the principalities and powers. They need something massive. They need something monumental. If it isn't large, then it isn't great. This is the thinking that categorizes mankind. Unless we achieve greatness, then we aren't successful. And of course greatness has been defined as wealth, fame, stature, etc.

In order to continue in that view, humanity as well as the nations *must* say that God has not made them. The maker is the owner. Unless that maker then sells or gives away his authority over that which he made, the clay has no authority over the potter. It is this way with Jesus and His Church. It is this way with God and Israel. He has made them and formed them, and He decides their ultimate purpose. Paul interjects, though, that God made *the nations* and has established their boundaries. Therefore, God is the owner and authority of those nations. They might serve their own purposes – which are actually the purposes of Satan – but that does not relinquish them from God's cosmic purpose for them. Any nation that does not seek God to understand its purpose must reject the notion of God and therefore be driven atheistically – even if being run by Christians.

The issue of boundaries shouldn't be quickly disregarded, though. If God has set up the boundaries of the nations, then why do the nations war against each other for more territory? We do not want to be bound, because a boundary means a limitation. Any God that would enforce boundaries and limitation is opposed by all men.

I would say that between this verse and the many verses in the Old Testament where God shows jealousy for His name among the nations, I have come to believe that God does not only desire that the individual seek Him, but also the nations. There is an individual call to each person. But there is a much larger call to even the nations. God has established them, and even all the way through to Revelation 22 when we're seeing heaven, the nations still exist. God is jealous for the nations in the same way that He is jealous for individuals.

In the void of seeking God and His purposes, a nation is driven to its ultimate end – wickedness and destruction. God tells Abraham in Genesis 15 that Abraham's descendants will be lead into a country where they will suffer slavery and persecution. Why can't God just give Abraham the land then and there? Why must there have been 400 years between that moment and the leaving of Egypt? The answer is given in verse 16: "...the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

God was going to destroy the Amorites for their wickedness. But it had not yet reached the brim. Therefore, God allowed slavery and persecution of His own people so that there would come a later time when Israel would bring justice to the Land. We can look at modern history to find this as well. Hitler established Nazism, and where is the

glory that was Germany? But the wall being broken down in 1989 is not a victory. This was a sign that just as much communism was on the other side of that wall to allow peace. The Berlin Wall coming down was a prophetic warning to the world of another Neo-Nazi movement. Germany's cup has not reached full wickedness. And if you trace their history back, you will find that the name Germany comes from the settlers of that region of Rome. Where did they come from? They were Assyrians.

So this is not Germany against Israel – or Judaism. This is Assyria against Israel. This is the same ancient enmity. Assyria's wickedness will come to full measure at the end of the age when the Day of the Lord utterly destroys wickedness from the face of the planet. It has been almost 75 years since the death of Hitler, and yet Germany is starting to be known again for their Neo-Nazism. This spirit is rising again to the same degree of national pride and ambition apart from God.

I mentioned in passing that the nations are displayed in Revelation 22. The Bride rules and reigns with Christ. But in heaven, what is there to rule and reign over? Haven't all things been brought under the authority of Jesus Christ? Haven't all people been made clean so that sin and death are no more? I'll get into this point more at the end of the book. For now, I want to make the statement that Paul also seems to mention: that the nations are to be judged at the end of the age (verse 31). The nations were not established incidentally. It was not accident either.

God has plans and purpose for those nations. If they, as nations, decide to rebel against God's purposes, then they will be judged accordingly in righteousness. But if those nations *have* sought God to seek out His plans and purposes, then they shall receive reward as nations. And we as believers know what these rewards are. When we surrendered our lives and purposes and ambitions over to God's plans, we were the beneficiaries of peace and joy. For the nations to surrender to the plan of God is for that nation to receive life itself. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people," Proverbs 14:34.

For many years I thought that the "they" mentioned in Acts 17:27 was about the people. "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us..." The problem is that this comes as a continuation of the sentence speaking of nations and their boundaries. If Paul is continuing the statement about nations, then the "they" mentioned here must be national. In the rejection of the nations to seek God to understand their purposes we have the ultimate display of sin. Maybe what Paul is trying to get at is that the judgment of the world is not to be over individuals only, but even judgments of the nations.

"I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land," Joel 3:2. This verse in Joel is speaking of a judgment of the nations. In the context around it, this is after Jesus has returned. How do I know that? I know that because Israel has been restored to her Land (verse 1), and that happens at the return of Christ (Zechariah 12:10 and context).

The nations are in requirement to seek the Lord to see what His purpose is for them. How much more does God expect the Church to seek Him and find *its* purpose? While we are remaining in the nations, we have a very specific role to play to those

nations. How often have you heard *that* spoken? Have you ever heard someone pray for that (or prayed it yourself)? Because the Church has not been seeking God continually, we have no message for our own nations. How true is it that most of our activity has been of our own initiating, even if it is for God's sake? We cannot blame the nations for not seeking God when most of us haven't sought Him ourselves

What might be even worse than not seeking God to know our purpose is that the Church doesn't even recognize the contention between God and the nations. We are the ones that are required to speak on God's behalf to these nations. How else will they know that they are at war and opposed to God? How else will they hear the word of God? How else will they know to seek Him?

To seek God for His purposes is to seek God directly. Any other seeking of God is a false seeking. Any other seeking of God might result in us finding something other than God – even something that gives relief, supposed benefit, and freedom. God is only found when we find His purposes. His purposes are only found when you find Him. The two are interwoven. To find God is to understand His purposes. By this we know whether we have truly found Him. We understand His heart, because He has both given us a new heart and exposed to us His heart.

This can be equated to asking the why question. There are the “five double-u.” Who, what, when, where, and why? Many of us when searching out the end times, and when studying the Scripture in any area, we will ask the first four questions. We want to know who is writing, and to whom he is writing. We want to know what the context of his writing is (because that is equally as important as the subject matter itself). We want to know when it was written, because culture can give us a hint as to why the author says what he says. For the same reason, we press the where question. But we don't often ask why. If we do, it typically is to ask why he is writing, and not to ask why he says what he says. These are two very distinct questions.

If God is the true author of all Scripture, then why is it that God would say this? Why would God have this plan? Why would God have this opinion? Do you see how this is searching out the heart of God? We need to understand God's heart in order to understand His purposes. The study of any Biblical topic must start and end here. Without God's purpose, we are left with shallow understanding. We might have the whole Bible memorized, and yet we couldn't tell you one iota about what the Bible is really saying.

This gets at the heart of the matter. One of the many flaws in the people of God is that we simply don't know God as we ought. This has caused many doctrines to come that are absolutely ignorant. I have a friend with a shirt that says, “I've survived every wave of doctrine.” Everything matters. Our understanding and our perception of the things of God really do matter. This is one reason why I find myself speaking extremely harshly to those that would say, “I just like things to be simple. I don't talk doctrine.”

I'm all for simplicity, especially since God can speak to anyone in their own terms. This is what was recorded in Acts 2: everyone heard them praising God in *their own tongue*. It isn't just a language; it is recognition of personality and character traits. I don't care how deeply you think. One thing that matters is doctrine. If we don't esteem it, then we will ultimately give a skewed vision of the Gospel and God Himself.

Kingdom versus Patriotism

To see the nations as at war with God gives us a better view for dealing with them. We aren't speaking of some sort of government set up by people to have order. The nations represent and typify a system behind the system. The powers of the air have great sway over nations. They lead and corrupt the hearts of entire national culture. While we as mere men think that we're having some sort of control over government and national/international affairs, the powers of darkness are having a field day on such an open and willing playground.

Until we can recognize that, we will have no effectual power to come against such a system. Christianity is cross-national. That doesn't mean international, as though God plays according to national culture and opinion. It is cross-national. Nation and kindred do not tie down the kingdom of God. There are no borders set up to divide God's kingdom from the kingdoms of the world. This is in stark contrast to every other religion. Every other religion allows many gods. Not the least of these gods is national pride – the state. Is the highest calling for man to defend their nation?

This brings an interesting question. If Christianity is cross-national, then what does that mean with regards to the nations that we live in? Can we be both patriotic and still live in a cross-national reality (Theocratic Kingdom)? I think the dividing line is when our nation decides that their purposes are supreme. We cannot support our nations when they would teach, as Japan and Germany taught in World War 2, that they are supreme and all other nationalities are less than. We cannot support our nations when they push for a culture or agenda that is contrary to the eternal purposes of God.

The question of whether we can both be kingdom minded and at the same time be patriotic is difficult. You cannot come to conclusions alone. A community of believers that understand the implications of both aspects must wrestle this with. The reason for this is simple. Every nation is different. The amount that is required to be patriotic is quite different. If we're told to bow down and worship the emperor, then patriotism is unacceptable. If we're told that in order to support our country we must support our team, support our wars, or we must support anything else that is specifically on the nation's agenda and opposed to God, then patriotism is unacceptable.

I enjoy what America stands for. I agree that freedom and equity are important and vital things. But since when have freedom and equity become something to worship? When has freedom and equity been possible through a nation, instead of through God? These are important things to note and answer. You cannot come to a complete answer on your own. It takes a corporate searching of our hearts and motives to make sure that we are not merely antipatriotic. To be antipatriotic is still below the glory of God.

Our goal is to be kingdom minded. Is there a conflict between devoting ourselves wholly to God's kingdom and also showing devotion and loyalty to our nation? There is if our nation is something we worship. There is if we find ourselves in a place that we will never speak ill of our nation. There is a conflict if we will not bring a necessary message of judgment to our nation if or when God calls.

The current Messianic movement among Christians searches to get back to our Hebrew roots. The problem is that they then put Israel on a pedestal. I have never heard a word spoken by Messianic believers against Israel. All of the immorality and pride and godlessness that Israel is about are frightening. And there isn't a peep from the Church to call them out in their sin. Why? Israel might be God's people, but that does not make them more godly and blameless and "untouchable." They are still mere men that have sin and struggles like everyone else.

One of our first and primary calls as the Church is to express the attitude of God to our nations. America has taken the Native Americans out of their land, uprooted them and moved them to "undesirable" land, and then claimed their land as our own. One of the figures that I've heard was that six million Jews were killed in the Nazi Holocaust. But in our own country, when we moved the Indians, we exterminated any that were unwilling to be moved. This resulted in 150 million Native Americans' deaths.

Where was the Church to speak up against such an act? Where is the Church now to speak up and call to the attention of our nation the immorality that we've swept under the rug? When a nation will not deal with their history and repent honestly, it will deepen the sin worse in the following generations. We push one more click further into apostasy and grotesque immorality. This is all done for the sake of national pride. Nations do not want to be exposed, and thus they will silence any voice that sheds light in the darkness.

When Sherman, during the Civil War, went from the north all the way through the southern States into Georgia, he did not relent to only killing the opposing army. He burned fields, he ruined cities, and he destroyed century old vineyards and orchards. What was it that he did? On what grounds does he have the authority to rob people of their livelihood and food? What reason is there that is great enough to say that what Sherman did was heroic? To say that slavery or defeat in the war are those sufficient grounds undermines the question. What God has established is challenged in these kinds of war tactics. In our national zeal and pride we go to far.

If we are somehow tied up with our nation in a way that causes us to overlook these details and not call them to attention, then we have forfeited the ground of truth. Our witness is hindered. We are no longer steady eyed and unwavering. God allows the nations to perform such thoes as these in order to bring them to the ends of self. It is after we have exhausted our resources and our ability to uphold peace is still challenged that we will then degrade to other wicked and detestable means. When a nation reaches those grounds, it has come to the place of overturning.

For us as the Church to recognize this and act appropriately will make us an object of opposition. What is the appropriate reaction? The appropriate reaction is to understand the issues behind the issues and to speak to them in love and sobriety. We don't debate the surface issues. Homosexuality is a surface issue. There is a deeper issue still at play. Homosexuality is a preliminary judgment of God to the nation to call it to repentance before the ultimate judgment of hellfire comes upon them.

Biblical Christianity opposes all other religions. It stands on truth and truth alone. There is no other objective means to knowing God. In a world where the nations are increasingly striving for pluralism and religious freedom, this is the thorn in their sides. And how many of our denominations have fallen into the trap of interfaith relations? Do

we honestly believe that our religion alone is the true and valid religion? The current events would suggest that we not only see other religions as valid, but we even applaud Moslem fervor and Judaism's devout customs and religions. By even having a term as "the three great religions" or monotheisms, we have sacrificed our voices.

There are consequences for allowing these false religions to continue unchallenged. This kind of tolerance is of the devil. By allowing nations to be established on the basis of false religion only paves the way for militarism and aggression and death. So it is not for us to give these other religions a respect, but for us to contend against them. This isn't done in hostility. It is done in supreme love because we know the consequences and we know the demonic deception behind their religions.

But this view of Christianity being the sole way to God, and all other religions are lies, is being called Christo-fascism. It is using Christ as a means to fascism. The question, "Where do you come off with the arrogance to say that *your* religion is *the* religion, and all these other religions are false?" They have ancient and valuable traditions with their holy books and their rituals. What kind of superiority complex do you suffer from to think that their prayers are unanswered, but your prayers are heard?

We are now being brought into a place where we must either be apostolic or apostate. The apostolic view condemns all other religions. I don't think that assailing them is the proper form or word to use. The apostate view is tolerable of all religions, and we really don't have right to judge them. The reason that this is important is because national pride is itself a religion. As foreign an idea as this might be, there is only a small jump between national ego and pride in our support of militarism and national sports and worship of the state or dictator.

As long as we as the Church are willing to entertain and allow such other religions and such freedom of opinion to renounce the Bible, we have lost all grounds of witness. Issues like homosexual marriage, health care, abortion, and interfaith relations are only scratching the surface. We must come to terms with the Bible being literally true or not true at all. It says in 1 John not to love the world or anything of the world. Yet our television sets and our movies continue to speak into the hearts of Christians that sexual promiscuity, cursing, hatred, and lying are okay. We bring the values of the world into our own homes when watching – and therefore endorsing – such things. Sports are not an issue of entertainment. There is more behind the scenes. What is the nature of competition itself but a manifestation of ego and pride? My state, my team, my college, my nation, etc is better than *yours*.

If we will allow and entertain that kind of mindset, then we have invalidated our entire call and purpose. We are to stand opposed to the principalities and powers. Yet we have only endorsed them on a national level. If we oppose them in such depths as I've mentioned here, then we are marked. The world will call us dogmatic, as if that is supposed to offend me. Of course I'm dogmatic. Tell me one person that is not. Yet, this word is used as an insult. It is like telling someone they are too religious, or too heavenly minded. Thank you. I was hoping for that, actually.

The opposite of dogmatism is, of course, liberalism. To be liberal or tolerant of certain things is actually to bring damage and harm. Some things require dogmatism. Why don't we endorse rape? Am I being dogmatic when I say that pedophilia is wrong?

If we go by the same logic and reasoning given for homosexual agendas, pedophilia should also be legitimate. They were born that way. They can't help it if they are only attracted to little girls or little boys. God made them that way.

Do you see the problem? The step is not far. To be tolerant and liberal only results in further sin. We ought to be dogmatic. We ought to know where to stand and draw the line. And we ought to draw the line. To allow men and nations the opportunity to continue down a path of ignorance is to ultimately allow them to be cast into the lake of fire. We not only allow this, but we are the door greeters and ushers to push them in.

But how do we bring truth and draw the lines without offending? We will step on toes. We will offend. But is that okay? Does God allow us to offend? After all, one of the fruits of the Spirit is kindness. Never forget the words of Paul when he says in Galatians that the cross is an offense. The Gospel is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. Why would we expect that they rejoice and bless us when we speak?

Karl Barth has said that the very existence of a synagogue alongside of a church is an affront to God. In that we have permitted their ignorance and surrendered God's view, we have actually caused an offense to God. Do you recognize how this is inevitable? When we won't take a stand with God and what He has decreed, then we, as the sole representation of Him, have thus bowed the knee to allow men their wicked intentions and continue in their sins. Not only have we allowed this, but also we have even endorsed it by our silence. When we don't speak, when we don't correct, we actually tell the nations that they are off the hook and even righteous in their actions. This, of course, does not imply that we are to somehow attack or belittle. It certainly does not mean that we should become violent somehow. There are ways of expression that ring true. It takes the Spirit of God to speak instead of using our own words.

Ironically, it is our absoluteness about God and His opinion that with either save the nation or send the nation into absolute corruption. If we are unwavering in our faith, it is a testimony to absolute truth. When men see this incorrigible resolution, they are struck to the quick. No one can be so sure unless they are insane or telling the truth. No one surrenders their lives and their reputations for a lie. We lie to preserve self, or maybe to preserve the life of someone else. No one stakes his or her lives on a lie without benefit.

There is supposed to be a divine rule where the nations are in proper relationship to one another and God is Head over all. This is much like we are to be one with each other as the Church, and Jesus is our Head. The nations cannot be what they are supposed to be to each other without God being the Head. And God will not be the Head if they do not have His Spirit at work within them. God's purpose for the nations is that they would be a representation in themselves of the salvation of every believer.

How many of us have a hard enough time believing for the salvation of another person? Here we have something that is even beyond that faith. Can you believe that by your witness to your nation, that you might actually cause the salvation of your nation? National salvation is quite different than personal salvation. God speaks of this about His people Israel. As far as I can see, national repentance is rare in Scripture – let alone outside of it. Jonah is the only story that I can think of apart from the handful of times that Israel repented.

I can't tell you what it might be that God has set up for the 1000-year reign of Christ. How the nations will interact, and what the divine rule will look like, is completely contrary to what we see today. I'm excited to see what it might come to be in the Millennial Kingdom. This is what God is progressing toward. We need to seek God to understand what our role is here and now in the midst of those nations that will one day stand before God.

Stereotypes

Every time that I am driving down the road and a car pulls up with loud rap music, I turn and I look. This kind of thing draws attention. The times that I look over to see a black man with a pack of black and mild cigars on his dash, one in his mouth, a do-rag on his head, an a-shirt (sometimes called wife beater) on, baggy pants, slouched way back in his seat, and one hand on the wheel, something within me breaks. Why do people seem to live according to stereotypes?

Culture is predicated upon stereotypes. It would seem as though without them we wouldn't know how to function. I can't help but wonder if God had separated the nations according to language intentionally. Maybe His plan was that people would be distinct from one another. Maybe culture and diversity was in His plan. While not refraining the differences that we all have, God has required us to come together and be one.

Even in marriage, we have the symbol of the Church. Man and woman are opposites, and yet when they come together they fully represent humanity. It is not good for man to be alone. This wasn't some sort of lack in Adam. There also needed to be something more than community. Adam needed a helper. He needed someone who would complete him. The Hebrew phrase "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" is an idiom for "where I am weak, she is strong, and where I am strong, she is weak." It has the idea of completing one another.

If this were so at the very beginning of time with Adam and Eve, how much more true might it be for the nations? Even in the diversity and mishmash of culture that is represented, we ought to be of a different breed. The Church is supposed to be a representation of the Kingdom of God. Does God's Kingdom not have any kind of culture or representation that should be seen within every believer? The place where we gain our culture and our customs should be from the Spirit. Just like man and woman complete each other, so we see that Jesus is the husband of the Church. Spirit and flesh complete each other. There is something about divinity and humanity coming together that is a fuller representation of both God and man.

Our culture and customs as the Church should be birthed in heaven. That does not diminish our national culture and customs. Paradoxically, it brings them all the more fullness. It is in the midst of our diversity and cross-nationality that we find a more full representation of the nations themselves. Until the nations are subservient to one another instead of prideful and at war with one another, they cannot be the fullness of what they were intended.

I think that this might be why stereotypes both exist and why they are so prominent. Because something deep within every human being recognizes the culture that they come from, but lacks the deep interweaving and completion that comes from God and cross-nationality, our reaction is to overcompensate. We express our culture and our “stereotype” all the more. God is not done with the nations. He has eternal plans. They don’t stop existing in heaven. It says in Revelation 22 that there is a river that flows from the throne of God, and on either side of the river is a tree of life. That tree of life gives different leaves and fruits for the healing of the nations.

The healing of the nations comes from being one with all other nations. We can feel free to express our differences and our culture and our diversity. But we never allow that to subvert the ultimate purpose: glorifying God together. It says in Acts 13:2 that certain men from much diversity came together and “ministered unto the Lord.” This kind of ministering (or worshiping) does not come independent from diversity.

At the Church in Antioch, there came together prophets and teachers. These two callings in themselves display the contrast. A prophet is one occupied by the big picture. The teacher is occupied by the details and how it all fits together. The two can clash if the Spirit does not bring peace. Not only are these callings showing how diverse they were, but even the names are suggestive. Barnabus and Saul were both Jews. Niger is a name classically given to a man of African descent (probably Ethiopian – Acts 8:26-40). Lucius was of Cyrene (a Greek). Manaen had been brought up by Herod (probably a Roman).

These five men gathered together to minister to the Lord. There can be no ministry unless they were indeed “together.” Even in the midst of national difference and opposition – not the least of these to be Jew versus Gentile – they were able to be one. The biggest evidence that they were one is that when the Holy Spirit spoke, it demanded that the Jews be separated. There is not a hint of jealousy. Why do the Jews get chosen while the Gentiles stay behind? Do you see how this could have caused for division?

When we as the Church are able to both remain in our boundaries and yet not be jealous or prideful toward one another, we have reached the place of divine intention. The nations await this kind of display. We can’t even get along with other denominations – much less the people of other cultures and internationalities. When we are truly walking of the Spirit, this kind of freedom from insecurity can be maintained. We can be comfortable to live in our own skin, but at the same time not feel the need to pomp or rival other cultures and nationalities.

This kind of a display brings freedom to the nations that would have otherwise thought they had no other alternative. What entity is there in the world to display an alternative to rivalry and competition? I did not even know that rivalry and competition were results of sin until this kind of freedom was brought into my life. The power of racism cannot be broken on any other grounds. There is no other alternative. Racism and patriotism and cultural pride all stem from the same root: division. When nations, cultures, peoples, tribes, and kindred are all one together – each displaying their own nationality and difference, yet somehow humble in that distinction – we will find an entity on the earth that cannot be called a “nation.” Just as man and woman come together to make humanity, and Jew and Gentile come together to make one new man, so too do the nations come together to make something new and different.

This is the cure for much of our sins. Ego is destroyed when we come together. Pride runs deep, yes. However, love runs deeper. National pride, cultural pride, and the like are all rooted out when we come together in unity. This takes a striving toward. It was when I got married that I realized this glory. Somehow I am able to be distinct from my wife, and I am able to have my own personality, and I am able to live from the core of who I am, but at the same time you cannot understand me without knowing my wife. You cannot see where the one begins and the other ends.

If this is glorious between us in marriage, how much more in the midst of community when you have prophets and teachers together? For such things as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to all come together as one – and truly be together as one – we have stepped into realms beyond expression. To be unified in those conditions is to truly be unified. To love another brother that is completely opposite in many respects is to truly love.

I'll use the example of the Jew and the Gentile. Can we love Israel? Can we love the Jew who is not Christian? To delight and love the Jew, whether they are or are not believers in Jesus, is to truly love. By this you know that you have overcome racism. By this you know that you have broken the power of pride. By this you know that you are free from the bondage and deception of the principalities and powers. To lie down your life for your brethren, even when they are not “technically” your brethren, is to show that you no longer have that dividing wall of separation – fueled by enmity.

Christ has indeed broken down the ancient wall of division. Hostility and bitterness to those that are outside of the faith displays the truth. Hostility to those that are in opposition to our country shows the truth. We might have zeal, and we might employ the Scriptures as justification, but that does not give credence for our lack of love. We can only display love when we truly have it. When we truly have it, we don't need to explain. All will know when we have it, because all will know that we love them. For the nations and cultures themselves to be able to display this kind of love to one another will mean freedom like they have never known. America that prides herself on being the “land of the free” does not experience freedom outside of this reality. This reality, of course, can only be obtained in God.

Anti-Christ is not only that which is opposed to Christ, but that which is seeking to be something like Him, yet not Him.

-Art Katz

Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced thus to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly.

-Albert Einstein

The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience.

-Oswald Chambers

“While physical churches may be demolished one day, the service and prayers that believers have set up in their own homes shall remain forever.”

-John Sung

V. Babylon – Chief of Nations

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has a night vision. This dream is of a statue. The statue is mighty and great. Then, a stone is cut without any hands from a mountain. This stone (other versions call it a pebble) strikes the statue on the feet. The statue then crumbles. The statue was made of five parts. The head of gold represented Babylon. The arms and chest were of silver, and represented Medo-Persia. The abdomen and loins were of brass and represented Greece. The legs were made of iron and represented Rome. The feet were made of iron and clay, and this is the Antichrist's kingdom.

The fact that the head is Babylon is not a fluke. This isn't comprised of nations strongest to weakest. This isn't a statue to describe the first empire down to the last great empire. What is being expressed in this statue is the continuum of Satan's nation. What I mean by Satan's nation is that he has placed his name upon it. Whether it is called Babylon or whether it is called Greece, it is a full embodiment of the kingdom of Satan. These four kingdoms (and fifth coming soon) are mentioned both in order of history as well as from precious to common – most glorious to inferior.

Note as well that gold is the softest of all these metals while iron is the strongest. This also displays that they get more and more militant and aggressive. Gold is malleable. Iron is less malleable. Iron and clay is not malleable. What this represents is the degree of intervention that God is able to perform. That does not mean that God is no longer sovereign, but that the hardness of the hearts increases until the Antichrist sounds a lot like Satan in the flesh.

I said that this statue displays that the same satanic antichrist spirit rules these kingdoms. We come to Daniel 7, and we read of four beasts that come out of the water. The first best is a lion – king of the jungle – that represents Babylon. The second beast was a bear, which represents Medo-Persia. The third beast was a leopard, which represents Greece. The last beast is not identified. It sounds like some sort of dragon. It represents the Rome, but ultimately the Antichrist Kingdom.

When we turn our attention to Revelation 13, we see a beast that comes out of the sea. Reference this with the four beasts that came out of the sea in Daniel 7. This beast has ten horns and seven heads – which is the description given to Satan in Revelation 12. This is one reason why some think that the Antichrist is Satan in the flesh. The beast resembles a leopard, but has feel like a bear, and a mouth like a lion. Does this sound familiar?

We reach Revelation 17, and we find a woman that rides a scarlet beast. The scarlet beast is Satan's nation. We know because the same information about the ten horns and seven heads is mentioned. We can reference this detail with those ten toes on the statue in Daniel 2. The horns represent 10 kings. We find this elsewhere in the book of Daniel as well. But the woman riding the scarlet beast is called Babylon in Revelation 17. How is it that Babylon is the final kingdom when Daniel 2 says that it should look more like Rome? How is it that after Babylon has been gone for millennia that somehow it appears at the end of the age as the Antichrist Kingdom?

The answer is simple. I've already given you the information you need to connect the dots. Babylon is the head of the statue. The rest of the statue, it doesn't matter what kingdom it is, is Satan's nation. To that extent it wouldn't matter if this nation were called Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, or the kingdom of the beast. But the name Babylon is given to it for a very specific reason. Babylon in the prophetic Scriptures has a certain characteristic to it. It is the nation that is used to bring judgment upon Israel. It is a symbol of the immanent kingdom of the north that brings judgment upon Israel, but ultimately will be destroyed by the coming of the Messiah on the Day of the Lord.

It is true that Satan is the one influencing all of the nations. This nation, however, is not merely influenced by Satan. This is Satan's kingdom. This is the literal and physical locality of Satan's reign. I don't personally believe that the Antichrist is Satan in the flesh, but I do see the parallel that others are drawing. To an extent, the question does arise as to how Satan is able to have his own kingdom on this earth. To another extent, it seems obvious. This is a mystery, and it is one that we need to search out.

If Babylon is only a nation mentioned in the Old Testament as the rod of God's chastisement, then why do we find her again at the end of the age? Babylon continues in spirit. That Babylonian spirit is carried throughout the empires of the world until it finally rests upon the Antichrist's kingdom. Babylon is actually first mentioned in Genesis 10. Shinar is the Hebrew metaphor for Babylon. Babal is the Hebrew word for confuse, and it is the word from which Babylon comes. It is directly related to Babel.

The spirit of Babylon runs through the world today. It is that antichrist spirit mentioned in 1 John, and as John had expressed: there are many antichrists. As the quote by Art Katz at the beginning of this chapter says, antichrist doesn't necessarily mean, "opposed to Christ." The deeper understanding of that word is that antichrist is what purports to be Christ, and is not. Anything that rises up and calls itself the messianic hope, but is not the messianic hope, is antichrist. That doesn't have to mean a person. America, in the mind of many, is a place of freedom and hope. But freedom and hope come from God or not at all. America is a Babylon of sorts.

This kind of understanding helps us in the prophetic texts. When we read Revelation 17-18, we find Babylon. That doesn't necessarily mean the literal Babylon from ancient times. Literal interpretation might be what is expressed. Metaphor and symbol are not always wrong, though. Satan has placed his name upon this nation. That nation, though it was called Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome at other times, is the very nation that the devil rules. I'm not willing to make any speculation of what nation it might be that will be the Antichrist's kingdom. We know there are 10 nations involved, and ultimately the whole world follows the beast, but it is too soon to authoritatively decipher what nations and where the Antichrist will rule.

Rome

The Roman world had at its root a governmental system that denied God. The whole nation was built up by a Senate, or proconsul, that had one purpose: the perpetuation of Rome. On that basis, Roman civilization was considered the greatest civilization of all. They conquered other nations out of pride. This national pride ran

deep. Laws were put in place to uphold peace, but when morality and law is subjective, and pride and conquest are the root of your nation, peace is impossible.

Anarchy broke out and made common life difficult. Even in the most pristine of society, in the classiest areas, violence plagued the streets. The reason is straightforward. When God is rejected by a nation, and in His place they put man-made gods (whether of Diana, Mars, Aphrodite, or the State itself), the result is amorality. Morals cease to exist. Our world is coming ever closer to the same.

The government decided it needed to do something different. They established a one-world dictator: Augustus. Under the rule of the Caesars, Rome was brought again into "peace." It wasn't long before the Caesar was considered to be a god. All dictators move from being considered human to being considered a god. It is the end result of glorifying your government and worshiping the State. In the same way that the Caesars were considered gods, the Antichrist will be considered god. A human god is no god, though. Therefore, Rome fell.

When someone became a Christian in Rome, they not only opposed the established religions, but also opposed the entire culture and State founded upon those religions. To become a Christian was to say there is only one God, and His name is Jesus Christ. No longer would you bow to worship the Emperor. No longer would you uphold or condone the worship of the gods in the temples. This brings an interesting question: how did Judaism survive?

The words of the Pharisees ring out true to this day: "We have no king but Caesar," John 19:15. Christians of the early Church met in the synagogues. Where else would they meet? It wasn't long before their (the Christians') emphatic demand that you worship the one true God and Him only became problematic. The Jews had been able to keep from being obliterated by subjecting themselves to the rules of the State. When the Christians started proclaiming that this is sin, it brought all eyes upon those Jewish people. So the Jews ran them out of the synagogues. Now the Jewish people were secure and the Christians were left without any kind of protection.

For many, becoming a Christian meant your death. You cannot both oppose the State and be allowed to live in that State. Christians were deemed unfit to live. With that kind of struggle, the early Church flourished. Only a couple centuries later, Constantine made Christianity the religion of Rome. However, the religion that Constantine set up was not the religion held to by Christians. Christians said that you should serve the Lord God only. Constantine continued in worshiping the gods of this world and all that they could offer him.

For this reason, Rome eventually faded into the history books as a great world empire, but no longer is remembered in its details. Christianity, however, has never failed. What is the difference? When you are founded upon worship of the State, man-made gods, and the perpetuation of those gods, you have a poor foundation for society. Society cannot live on the grounds of false gods. They will only destroy each other. It takes a bigger God with a better wisdom to lead a society. Ultimately, the society was not worshipping man-made gods, but the kingdom of darkness. Behind every "god" is a demonic power. Worship of those demonic powers leads to living from their wisdom. Living from their wisdom does not promote existence, but destroys it.

Antichrist

The day is coming when the Antichrist will be established and a one-world government will be strived for (if not obtained). This kingdom is all four of the previous world empires combined. It is a hybrid. The antichrist kingdom needs to be understood as Satan's "theocratic" kingdom. It isn't enough to seek to understand it as a one-world government in opposition to God. This kingdom is satanic in every aspect. The whole of its existence, from beginning to end, is to perpetrate Satan's desires.

We read in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,² that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.³ Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;⁴ who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.⁵ Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?⁶ And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.⁷ For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.⁸ And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:⁹ even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,¹⁰ and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.¹¹ And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:¹² that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Paul speaks about a mystery here. There is a mysterious man of sin that must be revealed. By his revelation, the mystery of iniquity is fully understood. Someone is restraining this man of sin (the Antichrist). He cannot come until that restrainer is taken out of the way. Some have reasoned that this restrainer is the Holy Spirit, and so we must be raptured out in order for the end to come.

This can't be true. We've already looked at Revelation 13:2, where the beast that comes out of the water looks like it might be Satan. However, I am not one who believes that Satan can be incarnate. I think there is something else going on here. Ezekiel 28:2, 6-9, and 12-19 says:

² Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD;

Because thine heart is lifted up,
and thou hast said, I am a God,
I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas;
yet thou art a man, and not God,
though thou set thine heart as the heart of God:

⁶ therefore thus saith the Lord GOD;

Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God;

⁷ behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations:
and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom,
and they shall defile thy brightness.

⁸ They shall bring thee down to the pit,
and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas.

⁹ Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God?
but thou shalt be a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee.

¹² Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith
the Lord GOD;

Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.

¹³ Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God;
every precious stone was thy covering,
the sardius, topaz, and the diamond,
the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper,
the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold:
the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes
was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

¹⁴ Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so:
thou wast upon the holy mountain of God;
thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

¹⁵ Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created,
till iniquity was found in thee.

¹⁶ By the multitude of thy merchandise
they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned:
therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God:
and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub,
from the midst of the stones of fire.

¹⁷ Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty,
thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness:
I will cast thee to the ground,
I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.

¹⁸ Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities,
by the iniquity of thy traffick;
therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee,
it shall devour thee,
and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth
in the sight of all them that behold thee.

¹⁹ All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee:
thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.

Notice that the beginning of this says that the prince of Tyre (or Tyrus) is being addressed. The second verse explains it quite well. We're talking about the actual ruler of Tyre, for God says, "yet you are a man, and not God." But then we reach verses six through nine and it seems like God is speaking to Satan. There is a mystery that is taking place here. Satan is being addressed, but the message is to the king of Tyre. They are one

and the same. There is a literal and physical king, but that literal and physical king is also Satan. Notice what Isaiah 14:4, 12-20 says:

⁴ that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say,

How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!

¹² How art thou fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
how art thou cut down to the ground,
which didst weaken the nations!

¹³ For thou hast said in thine heart,
I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:
I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation,
in the sides of the north:

¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will be like the most High.

¹⁵ Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell,
to the sides of the pit.

¹⁶ They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee,
and consider thee, saying,
Is this the man that made the earth to tremble,
that did shake kingdoms;

¹⁷ that made the world as a wilderness,
and destroyed the cities thereof;
that opened not the house of his prisoners?

¹⁸ All the kings of the nations,
even all of them, lie in glory,
every one in his own house.

¹⁹ But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch,
and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword,
that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet.

²⁰ Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial,
because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people:
the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned.

Once again, note how the message is to the king of Babylon. This is speaking to Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, God starts speaking about Satan in that he desired to exalt himself above the most high. There is a parallel happening. God is addressing the king of Babylon, but then starts addressing Satan. Is Satan going to rule incarnate?

When we read Revelation 12, we come to verse eight where it says that Satan is no longer allowed in heaven. The woe then goes forth to the inhabitants of the earth because he is no longer allowed in heaven. He is contained to the earth. How is it that God can be addressing the Antichrist and Satan at the same time? Because, Satan is now confined to ruling over that one kingdom. He is no longer able to roam to and fro throughout the earth. The mystery is that Satan is somehow the ruler behind the scenes

giving all of the commands to the Antichrist, and all the while the man on stage is a real human being.

It is almost like a puppet act. The Antichrist has no more will of his own. The things that he desires and performs are the things that Satan drives him to perform. It might be possession for all I know. Whatever it is, the mystery is that both Satan and man are working together hand-in-hand. No, it is not Satan incarnate. This is even more sinister. This is even more diabolical. God has allowed Satan to literally rule over the world in this one-world government. At the same time, He has allowed for mankind to choose whether they will also serve Satan or if they will serve God. There is no in between.

To get back to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, we look at verses six and seven: And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way. Who is the restrainer? Who is the one that holds back the man of sin? It is God.

The Holy Spirit doesn't need to be taken out of this world. God is keeping this from happening until sin has been made full. I'm quoting Genesis 15. God gives promise to Abraham that his descendants will inhabit the land that he is currently looking at. But they must first go into captivity in Egypt. Why can't God give them the land then and there? Because the sin of the Amorites had not yet reached its full measure. When the sin of the Amorites reaches its full measure, then God will bring Israel back to that land to uproot them and perform judgment upon them.

I believe that God is waiting for the sin of the world to reach its brim. When the mystery of iniquity has been revealed, the Antichrist will take his seat upon the throne of God. God is restraining this until sin has reached its full measure. When God takes away His hand and allows this to take place, Satan will actually literally rule and reign. There will be an end time ferocity poured out upon the people of God to try and eliminate them from the face of the earth. If Satan can destroy God's people, then he can thwart the plans of God. Jesus can only return when very specific prophecies have been fulfilled. If the devil is able to keep those prophecies from happening, then he has greater chance of ruling forever.

What is this mystery of iniquity that Paul speaks of? It is the mystery that we have explored already: Satan manipulating humanity. We looked at this in the third chapter – the principalities and powers. The mystery that needs to be revealed is just how much of an influence those powers truly have to rule over and manipulate humanity. We have such a small idea of this mystery currently. How will it be displayed?

I'll search history to help. Hitler had even the most assimilated Jews hunted down. Those that were the most identified with Germany, and supported Germany, were still counted as Jews. Those who identified themselves as Christians were still called Jews. Only one thing mattered: your blood. It did not matter what you identified as, you were Jewish if you had Jewish blood. In previous centuries, there were forced conversions, and the possibility that you could identify yourself as German instead of Jewish. Not this time. There are two reasons. The first is the most difficult: God was sending judgment. Beware, your sin will find you out. That is extremely difficult to swallow. We don't want to consider that God would do that.

But there is a second mystery at work. The principalities and powers had one thing in mind: the destruction of the Jewish race. Where the balance of God's judgment and demonic fury comes together is explained in the Scriptures. God uses Babylon as His rod of chastisement, but ultimately says He will judge Babylon for their excitement and over step. They do not do that which they were told to. They go too far.

In relation to Hitler, the question ought to be asked: how did the Nazis know who were Jews? They knew because the demonic furor pursued and haunted that woman. They were not content with killing the religious Jews. They knew that if they wanted to destroy the purposes of God, they needed to kill all Jews. So will it be in the last days. This ought to cause us pause. That Scripture, "Be sure, your sin will find you out," might be a lot more specific than we thought. That is quite frightening.

The Antichrist kingdom is the full embodiment of Satan's wisdom. That wisdom needs to be expressed in such a way that when Christ returns and casts him in the pit, everyone knows. There is no secret anymore. The cat has been let out of the bag. We know exactly how far we are depraved and how far we are manipulated. When Satan is then released and sent out through the nations at the end of the 1000-year reign of Christ, those nations and peoples that decide to be subject under that manipulated again show their loyalty. At that time, it has been revealed. No one who charges Jerusalem the second time is worthy of the New Heaven and New Earth.

It is directly after the fire comes down from heaven to consume the armies of Gog and Magog as mentioned in Revelation 20 that we read of the Great White Throne. Judgment has come. Every person has made their choice. Nothing further can be given to humanity as a choice. The Millennial Kingdom (1000-year reign of Christ) is a literal heaven on earth. For someone to reject that is to reject heaven itself. In God's view, people are not only individuals. We are in an unbroken continuum. All generations before us, and every generation after us, are all tied together. The generation that rejects God after seeing heaven is the same generation that saw Jesus Christ in the flesh and rejected God to His face.

The same people that saw the glory of God bringing Israel out of Egypt and into the Land is the same generation that will see heaven on earth. They are tied together in an unbroken continuum. God casts all that reject His glory into the lake of fire. To reject Him in this manner is to reject everything that God essentially is. I am not the prophet to be able to discern which peoples fit into which "generations," but I know that God will sift all nations (generations/peoples) and separate them like a Shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32). It is at the Great White Throne, after the nations have been judged, that Babylon, called Magog here, is finally destroyed utterly.

You know what our problem is? We are too darn Democratic. We're supposed to be a Theocratic people. How come we are not panting for His Kingdom?

-Art Katz

There are no crown wearers in heaven who were not cross bearers here below.

-C.H. Spurgeon

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, and absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, and grace without Jesus Christ.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“We are a long time in learning that all our strength and salvation is in God.”

-David Brainerd

VI. Abraham – God’s Answer to the Nations

There is a continuum into Genesis 12 from Genesis 11. It is set up almost to say Abraham is God’s answer to the tower of Babel incident. Through this one man God gives the blessing, “in you shall all the families (nations) of the earth be blessed.” God’s answer to the nations and their rejection of Him is not to destroy nations. It is instead to bless them. Abraham was called out to become a nation unto God. Just as Satan has his nation, so too God shall have a nation with His name upon it.

God tells Abraham to leave father, kindred, and nation and go to the land that He will show him. I don’t think that we can be the Abraham people of God until we too have heard that call. We too must come out from our own nations to join God’s nation. If we desire to be God’s people, we must come out from all that is in the world, and all that the world promotes and celebrates, and go into the land that God will show us. This is the promise. We aren’t even told as to where, when, or how we are going. There are no details given. Yet the call is made to leave.

How many of us are willing to receive such a call as this? Are we willing to entertain the thought of being wanderers without a place to lay our heads? Are we willing to *be* nomads and pilgrims? To walk with God is to be just that. We are no longer of this world. We are now a peculiar people, somehow searching for a city that is not made by human hands. God is leading us to a place, and we’re not sure where, but we will know it when we get there.

There are few that have the stomach for this. There are even fewer who have the willingness. We enjoy security. We enjoy rationality. We enjoy planning. We enjoy knowing. Yet God calls us to forfeit all these things and trust Him. Can you fulfill that call? This requires of us an ultimate trust. To kick and squirm against this will not suffice. This is all or nothing. This is the real deal. Here is where the rubber meets the road.

Yet it is precisely here that I rejoice in what the word of God says. We find at the end of Genesis 11 that Terah (Abram’s father) goes with Abram. When the call came to leave thy father’s house, Abram took his father with him. It might be said that the word father here is not necessarily to be taken as biological father. Maybe it means ancestors. Maybe because the call is mentioned in Genesis 12, that it really isn’t disobedience. Either way, to see that Abram does not leave alone, but takes his father and Lot with him, causes me to rejoice.

What did God see in Abram? It can’t be that God saw a perfect man. God didn’t see something that is mighty. He didn’t see something magnificent. God saw something weak. He saw something foolish. But God also saw Abram was willing. Even with this first mention in Genesis 11 about leaving with his father, we see that the call of God is greater than can be answered. But God didn’t allow that to offend Him. He wasn’t crushed by it. With grace He allowed this from Abram. It is something that we can take heart in. God might require from us something extreme. If we are willing to obey, God is gracious to allow us this kind of minor set back. He continues to beckon and continues to usher us forth into greater degrees of obedience to that first word. And He doesn’t rail on us, nor does He smite us, but instead patiently waits for our full obedience.

Israel – God’s nation

We need to understand that Israel is not simply another ethnic people or nation. It is God’s nation among the nations. Just like Babylon is Satan’s nation, God too has chosen a people to put His name upon. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 say, “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided all mankind, He set up the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob His allotted inheritance.” Can you imagine the humility it would take for a nation to come under that? Can you really imagine a nation that would acknowledge their boundaries being established by the hand of God *according to the sons of Israel*?

In other words, Israel is central to the nations. This is why “the law must go out of Zion, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem.” It is the appointed center. The law and the word don’t go out into the midst of Israel. They go out worldwide so that the nations study war no more. This verse in Deuteronomy 32 is never preached on. I’ve never heard anyone mention it, save one man. Why is that? God has chosen Israel to be the epicenter of the world, and yet we think that God has chosen the Church to be the central point.

Ezekiel 5:5 says, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her.” That wording “in the midst” is the Hebrew phrase for “in the center” or “in the middle.” Israel is not simply at such and such a place on the globe, and all nations around her. Even in this it implies that God has His focus upon that place on the globe. But God takes it one step further. She is *the* center. Scientists have found that our world might be at the center of the universe. They didn’t want to believe that (it might mean we’re special), so they said there is no center. Just imagine, though. God put this world at the center of the universe, and Israel is the center of the nations on this planet.

Would God get that specific? Would He be *that* explicit, so to call Israel the center of the nations? Does God really think that the land of Israel is that important? And what for? If we think that Israel is simply a location or a spiritual metaphor for something else, then we have missed it. God’s emphasis on Israel is everything. It is through them that the promise of Abraham continues. *That* people will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. *That* nation will be a blessing – even though they are currently bringing strife and chafing.

They are God’s nation in the midst of the nations. This is more than saying that they are important or blessed or authoritative. This is *God’s* nation. You cannot truly acknowledge that people without acknowledging the God of that people. The two are interwoven together. You cannot understand God’s prerogative for that nation before you understand the severity of God over that nation. They have been chosen to be the ones to defeat Satan’s nation. Satan has chosen his chess pieces, and God has chosen His.

Israel is the nation of God in the midst of nations, and that has a couple of implications. First, they are to be the Kingdom and Priesthood to the nations. They are to be the Kingdom in that God’s government will only issue forth from Jerusalem. There is no other designated place on the planet that God will rule. Second, they are to be the priesthood to the nations. How can God bless all nations of the earth through them without this detail? To be a priest is to offer sacrifices on behalf of.

Priesthood is more than an Old Testament word. It is rich in meaning and significance. The priests are to teach the people the difference between the sacred and the profane, the holy and the common. Because of this, it is marked through the Old Testament: like priest, like people. If the priest is wicked, the people too will be wicked. If the priest is holy, the people will be holy. It all comes down to this one thing.

And so if Israel is not holy, not teaching the difference between the sacred and profane, if they are indulgent in all the things of the world, and if they have promoted all the same mentalities and attitudes the rest of the nations promote and hold to, then *all* the nations will be vile. If Israel is wicked, all nations are wicked. The calling to display the Kingdom and priesthood is not something to take lightly. This is serious business. Because Israel is lax and not devout to God, we find the nations are nefarious to God.

This is not God just wanting real estate. The issue of Israel is the issue of nations. The issue of nations is the issue of God being known among those nations. The issue of God being known is the issue of His choosing. He is revealed in what He chooses. If the nations rebel against that choice, then it is only because they see entirely too well the God who made that choice. God is wrapped up in His choices.

Why did God choose Israel? What would prompt Him to choose Abraham? What would cause Him to desire a stiff-necked people? What would cause Him to choose Zion – just a foothill compared to other mountains? Why Jerusalem instead of Pompeii or New York City or Geneva or Hong Kong or some other massive internationally known city? Satan chose Babylon. Babylon is full embodiment of these cities and more. God's choice displays His character. Satan is loud and proud; God is meek and lowly.

Jacob is called God's inheritance. With the harvest of Jacob comes the harvest of the nations. As it says in Isaiah 14:1-2, "For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors."

God chooses that which is weak to overcome the strong. He uses that which is foolish to confound the wise. His wisdom is considered foolish to those that are wise. But to the righteous, the Gospel is salvation. In this God has shown that the proverbs are true. The beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7), and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). What shall we say of atheists? Their wisdom and knowledge are not true wisdom and knowledge. Otherwise they would hear truth and know that it is truth. Instead, they believe a lie and thus are shown as fools that are unknowing and unwilling to learn.

God has placed everything in this. To know what He chooses and why He chooses it is to know God Himself. This is revelation of God as God. In the scandal of specificity, we learn the character of God. Why would God be so specific to name these locations? Why would God be so specific to give every detail in how to build the ark and the tabernacle? Why would He be so specific in telling His servant David how to build the Temple? Why would God be so specific in calling out Cyrus by name – that he is the one to let Israel back into the Land? Why is God so specific to all the prophets?

It isn't just that God tells big sweeping statements. Sometimes He does. But sometimes He makes statements that are so specific and so terse that you wonder how the prophets even discerned that word. God told Daniel that there would be 70 sevens until the end of the world. These sevens are seven-year periods. When you do the math, you find that God gave perfect prediction on how long it would take for the Temple to be rebuilt and how long from that time until the death of Jesus. It happened exactly how God called it. He gives such details and makes such choices that you have to wonder whether there is any free will at all.

And yet God is absolutely sovereign because He is able to be that specific despite the free will of men. This is the scandal of specificity. We want God to make big statements with few details. We want to fill in the pieces. If we have possibility for our own agenda, then we have control. God doesn't allow it. He is specific down to the last detail of history. Nothing is hidden from Him, and all time and eternity has been written as what shall come to pass and when. Make your move, Satan, for God has already determined your fate.

Are We the New Israel?

This question is dear to my heart. I could not pass it up. There are some that claim we are the new Israel. We, as the Church, have taken their place. Some don't believe that, but desire that. They teach that God has put Israel away for a season, and so we've replaced them until we are raptured. This cannot be so at any level. We are not the New Israel. We were never intended (the thought never crossed the mind of God) that we would replace Israel to any degree. They are still the Kingdom and priesthood. Our lives and conduct matters very little to affect the nations.

God has chosen that people for a very specific purpose. Alongside of them is the Church with its own purpose. We are two distinct entities (the difference between the remnant and the common people), but we are both under the same Head. We are to be married together and become one People of God. We are distinguished from Israel, though we are one with Israel. Just as God has made male and female, and the two become one flesh, so God has made Israel and the Church, and the two shall be one.

We are not the primary beneficiaries of the Gospel, but the secondary. Peter even had to have a vision just to enter the house of a Gentile. How much more out of his mind must it have been to think that they might receive the same baptism of the Holy Spirit as he received! This is a proper view of the faith that keeps us from being conceited. Because I think that I am a secondary beneficiary of the Gospel instead of the primary, I will never boast against the natural branches (or root) lest I be cut off (Romans 11:18-20).

It is quite foreign to us as Gentiles, but we really do need to identify with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those are the names that He has associated Himself with. We have been grafted into that root. Romans 11:13-24 reads:

¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. ¹⁵ For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the

world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? ¹⁶ For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; ¹⁸ boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. ¹⁹ Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. ²⁰ Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: ²¹ for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. ²² Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

How many of us have read this passage and had no idea what was being spoken of? For years I didn't understand it. It wasn't until the context of Israel came that I could finally see what was being spoken of. God is not identified as any abstract being. He is specifically the God of Abraham. This is the first hurdle of the scandal of specificity that we must jump. Once we have wrestled with this, then we find depth and insight.

We may often find rich sermon illustrations in Israel's history. There are a lot of good stories for Sunday School. There are a lot of good moral teachings. Yet, that is not the primary purpose in God's giving of those Scriptures. The Old Testament is not something to toy with theologically so that we can glorify the Church. Israel's history is not something for us to take into account so that we don't backslide. We rob God of His literal meaning when we say and think these things. This is what many have blindly done.

True Christianity is the continuation and completion of Israel's faith. We are to drive them to jealousy (Deuteronomy 32:21, Romans 11:14). In light of Romans 11, Ephesians 2 makes more sense. ¹¹ Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹² that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³ but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; ¹⁵ having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; ¹⁶ and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: ¹⁷ and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. ¹⁸ for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. ¹⁹ Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

So are we the new Israel? Never. God has made us to be something altogether distinct, and yet at the same time grafted into Israel. Our purposes and our rewards are starkly different. We do not replace Israel; we complete Israel. Israel is not Israel without the Church, and the Church cannot be an entity apart from Israel. Old Testament

prophecies – such as Isaiah 56 – tell us that there would be people outside of Israel that are accepted by the Lord as a part of Israel.

The Cosmic Purposes of God to all Nations

Israel is God's nation. The nations recognize this well enough that they have tried to exterminate that people for as long as Israel has existed as a nation. When God is chastising Israel, He hands them over to their enemies. When Israel has been obedient (like with David), God defends them and takes down their oppressors. The reason that nations oppose Israel is because to oppose Israel is to oppose God. To annihilate Israel annihilates God's very relatedness to those nations. These things are true, even though they are completely invisible to the thoughts and understandings of the nations and the inhabitants of those nations. The principalities and powers manipulate such motives because the restoration of Israel is their end – the coming of the Lord.

The redemption of Israel will mean the redemption of the nations. "The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the nations. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God," Psalm 98:2-3. It is upon Israel's salvation that the nations are thus brought into the covenant made with Abraham. When God has redeemed Israel, and they return to that Land a final time never to be uprooted again, it is the sign to the nations of God's existence and His great love and righteousness. By this one thing God will make Israel to be a blessing to all nations.

It says in Luke 1:32-33 about Jesus, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end." If that God, and that King, can reign over that stiff-necked people, a people whose last national statement towards God was, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15), then what do you think will be the disposition of other nations? If God can possess Israel, a people who, in all their unbelief and opposition to Him, have blasphemed His name in the nations, then He will have all the nations.

This is the Kingdom and the priesthood together in full embodiment. It is the Kingdom because theocracy has been made to the ends of the earth. It is the priesthood because a nation of Pauls and Peters and Johns and James are going out to the world to evangelize those nations. Satan has been defeated over those nations. He is locked up in the pit for 1000 years. Can you imagine the Islamic and Moslem extremist nations that desire the death of Israel seeing this take place? Can you imagine what will happen when those nations hear the Jewish people admitting their failure before God – and that their judgment was due to their sin – and in love embracing their enemies and blessing them that cursed them?

It is this that brings healing to the nations. It is this that brings life from the dead. As Paul says in Romans 11, "If the casting away of them has brought salvation to the Gentiles, what shall their receiving be but life from the dead?"

Come Out From Her, My People

The Church continually follows the system of the world to such a degree they seem to believe in the world more than the world believes in its own system. I have continually noticed that the people of God are concerned with physical things more than spiritual things. Finances and getting a “good job” are at the top of the list of priorities. How are we supposed to engage any principalities and be a witness to the surrounding pagan nations when we ourselves live by the same precedence?

At the end of the Bible in Revelation 17, the call is made to Israel to “come out from her.” The “her” is Babylon. Babylon is the symbol for merchandise and prosperity. Everything that is about money and purchase and selling and fame from our wealth is Babylon. I look around and I can’t help but think that the Church needs to be delivered from Babylon just as much as Israel.

What categorized the early Church in the book of Acts was that they had all things common with one another. No one considered that they owned anything. God owned them, and therefore anything that they owned was God’s possession. This is a sublime contrast between the spirit of the Church today. We are all too wealth and luxury oriented in America. If the requirement was made to sell all our possessions and give to the poor – as it was made to the rich young ruler – then we too would walk away disheartened. We want Jesus without any challenge.

Jesus changes everything. Anyone who puts his or her hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom. How difficult it is for the rich to be saved! You cannot serve both God and money. So, choose ye this day whom ye shall serve. You will either love one and hate the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. We need to be taken out of the world. God called Abram out of nation, kindred, tribe, family, and all other forms of security. He was a pilgrim.

Jesus said that if Abraham were our father we would act like Abraham. Not only do we not act like Abraham, we don’t even follow his example of coming out of the system of the world to be taken into the Kingdom of God. When we are all too taken up with being a part of our own nations and families, God’s response is, “Get thee OUT!”

There is a remnant of a remnant of a remnant. And each one of them think that they are the “Elijah people.” Each one thinks that they are somehow “more holy” than the others. We all have that one thing that we are unwilling to commit to God. It is the Elijah people that have submitted even that one thing. I think that we would be amazed if we could stand back and see. If we were able to know the people that are dedicated and the people that have let the part stand for the whole, we would be utterly amazed.

The last days will be ruthless in their pursuit of destroying God’s people. We need to bring everything before God. This doesn’t necessarily mean absolute purity. It means absolute transparency. We need to be honest with one another. Can we confess our faults one to another? Are we willing to humble ourselves in such a way that we are willing to display our faults and our struggles to the community? We all have our faults. He who has sickness should go before the elders and be prayed for, *and God shall heal them.*

God calls us to confession before the saints. Community is necessary. It takes stamina and a relentless desire to be conformed to the image of Christ. That is what it means to come out from her. But come out and unto what? We come out of nation, people, kindred, father's home, etc, but where exactly are we going? Abraham was looking for that city whose builder and maker is God.

Zion

The place in which God desires that we go unto, after we have come out from our "nations" is Zion. Zion is as much literal as it is metaphor. We read in Hebrews 12:22-24, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

We have come. We are not going, but we have come. That is, of course, if you have indeed come. Those in Zion are those that have entered into His rest. His rest is Zion. That place of fellowship with the saints, where we dwell together in unity – *that* place is Zion. It is when we enter into that place that we find rest. We find God. It is where two or three are gathered in His name that He is in their midst. When we are unified together as a Body of believers, we have come unto Zion.

Zion is not simply a place of rest. It is a place of rule. It is the place where we are not longer governed by the things of this world. We have been brought past death, where the fear of death is the ultimate temptation (see Hebrews 2:15). Passing out from that death and into life, we as a community enter into the rest (Hebrews 4:10-11). The result of that rest is the Melchizedek priesthood. We are brought to a place of eternal priesthood – a people that offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save (Hebrews 5:7). It is through suffering in this priesthood that we learn obedience, and we ourselves are perfected unto the salvation of Israel – the author of that salvation being Christ, and being reiterated through His Body (Hebrews 5:8-9).

It is from that priesthood that we are brought into a place where we are kings of righteousness, and kings of shalom (peace), without father and mother, without decent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God (Hebrews 7:2-3). This new covenant brings us unto Zion. Everything about Zion is of the Melchizedek priesthood. It is of community. It is of entering God's rest. It is of being delivered from the fear of death.

We have come unto Zion, a place where God has set apart a solemn assembly designed for the things that are truly heavenly. We have been brought through to the new covenant, which is the Eternal Covenant. Christ Jesus – the Lamb slain before the foundations of the world – has established this eternal covenant that we should live full of the Spirit, purified by His blood. This is Zion – the only City that is in two places: both heaven and earth. This is the beauty of holiness.

Our call and our purpose is to attain unto *that* glory. Can we push forth into that reality, or are we condemning ourselves to endless repentance and bondage of the same sins? Who is willing to give the whole, and never the part? Who is willing to ascend that holy Hill? Who will ascend the Mount of the Lord? That Mount is Zion – the very Mount with God’s Temple upon it. To come into His remnant is to come unto Zion. The true Elijah people of God, those that are truly the people that will drive the Jew to jealousy.

This is all of our callings. God calls every single one of us. Not everyone listens. Few hear the call; even fewer obey it. The gate is narrow, and the path is difficult. My advice is to surrender whole-heartedly. Don’t hold back. Don’t allow yourself to stand before Jesus on the Day of Judgment with endless opportunity to have surrendered, but too much pride and cowardice to lay down your life.

I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ was no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.

-Napoleon

Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is Himself the way.

-Karl Barth

If Jesus had preached the same message ministers preach today, He would have never been crucified.

-Leonard Ravenhill

“One thing you knew about a man carrying a cross is that he is not coming back.”

-A.W. Tozer

VII. Messiah

God is the God who comes down. The Jewish people should have recognized this when Jesus came. The entire history of the Bible expresses that God is not contained in the heavens. Though we don't find Him walking around on earth here and now, and we don't say that God is everything like the pantheists, we must recognize that God has decided to make Himself known. It says in Genesis 3 that God walked in the Garden. It says about Abraham that God spoke to him, and that He visited him. It says that Jacob had a dream, and when he woke up he named the place "Bethel," because God was there. It says that God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Then later in the life of Moses God comes down upon Mount Sinai before the entire nation of Israel.

Throughout the whole of the Scripture we read about the God that comes down. Jesus was the full expression of God in human form. He was the Divine man. What is it about Jesus that we need to understand in relation to the kingdom of God? What we first need to understand is that God has set up His Kingdom as a theocracy. God rules over His kingdom. God is the one who reigns, and He shares His throne with no one. The idea of the Messiah is not simply a savior. The Messiah is to be the one who rules. He is supposed to be the King.

What we find in Jesus is the full embodiment of God. He has been given all authority because He forfeited all authority. It is by this that He has obtained His rightful place on the throne in the Kingdom of Heaven. After we've ventured this far into the Kingdom of God, I want to now go back to the beginning. We've looked at the battle between good and evil, light and dark, and now we need to understand why it is that we need a Messiah. God has made Himself known as the God that comes down, and therefore God will be the one to rule upon this earth.

Jesus is fully God, and fully man. He has the right to rule, not because He is God, but because He has been exalted by God the Father. This is why I use wording like, "He is the full embodiment of God." It isn't that a man has been exalted, but that God has somehow stuffed Himself into flesh and blood. Though Jesus is currently contained in the heavens (Acts 3:21), the Holy Spirit is not contained in the heavens. When Jesus went up, He did not leave us empty. He sent down His Spirit.

In every instance, we find that God makes Himself known by coming down. He came down to view the tower of Babel. He filled the prophets of old with the Holy Spirit – even before Pentecost. The Old Testament saints were not left without the Spirit of God. God has ever and always come down, and this needs to be recognized because we as human decide that we want to *go up*.

Too often we build our own towers and monuments to rival the heavens. We use worship, tongues, and other means to exalt, or work up the Spirit. Never on the basis of our worship, prayer, prophesying, incessant words, or endless babel (tongues) does the Spirit get worked up. The presence of God comes solely on the basis of Him coming *down*. We cannot work it up, for when we do this, we are very likely to be tapping into a realm of our soul – or even worse: to be stirring up demonic presence for the sake of "felling." Our service unto God is not on the basis of a feeling, but on the basis of "the glory of God *forever*."

We are often times too temporally minded. We don't think of the big picture view. Even less often than thinking of the big picture, we think of eternity. We quote the Scriptures that say we are seated with Christ in heavenly places, and we know all of the right phrases, but then the reality of our lives is lived as though *we must go up*. Jesus was exalted by going *down*. He went *down* into the Jordan, *down* into death, and was *raised up by the glory of the Father*. When we strive to go up, whether by prayer or by works, we are outside of the Spirit. It is the wisdom of Satan to exalt self – and that is precisely what we do when we strive to go up in our own ability. Those that truly desire to go up – even up to Mount Zion – must first be found going down.

This is one of the greatest paradoxes of the faith. It is upon our waiting, our silence, and our going down that we do more, speak more, and are exalted higher. Those that wait on the Lord are those that do greater works than even the biggest names in Christendom. Those that are silent until called upon are those that speak more – even with using fewer words. Those that go down into death are those that are raised up by the same glory of the Father into resurrection glory.

For the lack of even these basic truths, we need to reexamine the faith. We need to go back to even the most elementary aspects of Christianity and review afresh. What was the purpose of the Messiah, anyway? Why did Jesus even come? And why did He do what He did? What is the reason and heart behind all of this?

The Fall

There has been no greater tragedy than the fall. Our perception of sin and depravity fail us. We continuously think self-oriented. Sin and depravity are not contained to humanity. The fall stretches out to the fabric of the cosmos itself. All of creation moans and groans. Everything has been taken out of order and out of sync. It is the eternal purpose of God to bring it all back together again.

When we're describing the fall, we need to understand its character and nature. It goes beyond knowing right and wrong – good and evil. It goes beyond being bad people. It goes beyond being spiritually dead before God. It goes beyond being evil. The core nature of the fall is described in the very word. To fall from what? We have fallen from the Divine order. Since everything is out of sync, we are now in a realm of chaos. Chaos is not simply the lack of order. We best intuit chaos through things such as stress, trauma, and rigidity.

Sin is a condition. Death and sin are things that bind us moment by moment. Death cannot be defined as something that happens at the end of life. It is a moment-by-moment choice to choose life or choose death. Death is something that works in us to a deeper and deeper degree. It is another word that can't be defined. We can only intuit the affects. Why are there some people who live to be in his or her nineties and still get out and enjoy life? Others barely make it into his or her fifties before they need a walker, are diagnosed with a disease like cancer, or need some other form of medical aid. The affect of death is to strain out life. Eventually our breath will no longer continue. We all become cadavers at some point.

This is true for the whole of creation. The entire thing is winding down. Death is taking a toll on creation itself. Animals are becoming extinct, trees and plants are bearing less fruit, the weather is becoming more intense, and we have discovered that even the amount of usable energy in the universe is being consumed (a thing called entropy). We need a Messiah as humans. But the truth is, Jesus' death upon the cross has more power in it than to save us from hell.

Paul writes in Romans 5:13 that before the law was given, sin was in the world. Is that a statement of human depravity, or does he really mean that this whole world is infected? I know the obvious context is speaking of mankind. However, when we pair this with Ephesians 1, we find that Paul does have the thinking that all things are interconnected. In Ephesians 1:10, Paul makes the statement that it is not simply that humanity is to be brought under the one Head, Jesus Christ, but that the whole of creation is to be brought under that one Head.

The whole system and hierarchy that God had made and intended from the beginning has been upset. We aren't living in a world that looks anything like the Garden of Eden. Everything has changed. By one man's sin, the whole infrastructure collapsed. Now even the animals go according to their own way. When God had established it that everything be vegetarian, why do we now find carnivorous animals? There are even carnivorous plants. The whole thing has been capsized.

Understanding this view of everything being fallen helps us to understand the significance of humanity. It also helps us to understand the wickedness of sin. God is specific. He has a very specific order in the way that He made all things. We'll look in a later chapter at how theocracy is only fully established when Jesus rules from Zion. Why would God pick *that* place? Why be so specific? Everything in God is specific. The result from the fall is that the whole thing that God has made is leaning and about to fall. It is like the Jenga game when we start pulling out the blocks. This is the result of sin. God has established one specific place, the Garden, in which He will be in perfect fellowship with mankind. He must rule from that one place that He has chosen. At the beginning it was called the Garden of Eden, but since the Flood He has chosen Zion and Jerusalem. Whether Jerusalem is in the location of Eden before the flood, I cannot say. Whether it is or is not, it does not aid or eliminate the place that God has chosen.

The Cross

Jesus' death upon the cross is something bigger than humanity as well. Just as the fall was bigger, the salvation is bigger. Jesus did not simply come to save mankind. Though this statement is true that He does seek to save mankind, His goal was to restore *all things*. Peter has even said in Acts 3:21 that Jesus is contained in the heavens until the restoration of *all things* as spoken of in the prophets. Jesus' death upon the cross was a monumental moment. It is not, however, everything. There is still a restoration coming. There is still a moment when mourning and crying flee away. There is still a time coming when darkness is cast out and we remember our tears no more.

I don't in any way wish to make light or less of the cross. Quite the opposite is true. The cross is not a one-time event. It is the culmination of all of God's events. Every

moment is a cross. Whenever God works, He bears a cross. The cross of Christ was a powerful statement of the God who endures suffering. Any and every suffering that we would endure unto death *for God's sake* (which we might define as “in obedience”) is a cross. Bearing our crosses before men releases the power of the cross.

Though the cross of Jesus has disarmed the powers of darkness, it has not obliterated them. They still remain until their final defeat. It is upon that final defeat that God rains down fire from heaven, and the only thing to follow is the judgment seat (see Revelation 20). The end of this world is the destruction of everything by fire. Fire has always represented cleansing and purging. God refines, and the symbol is always by fire.

The final defeat of the principalities and powers, and the refining of this earth, is the display made by Satan leading an army against Jerusalem for one last and final time. The war against Gog and Magog concludes this age. The last moment is a clash of the two powers: the cross versus violence. I am back and forth on whether I believe that the end of the age will be with literal fire. I am uncertain of how literal this fire is and how metaphoric it is of an ultimate purging. Either way, what we see demonstrated in Revelation 20 is the rule of God from Jerusalem. It is from that witness – the wisdom of God – that this world ends.

Every moment of God is a cross. From the inception of the creation to the New Heaven and New Earth, everything must be understood in light of a God that endures suffering. The whole creation goes through a Calvary experience, which then results in a resurrected creation (Revelation 21-22). Jesus suffered before even the foundations of the Earth were laid (Revelation 13:8, 1 Peter 1:20). Humanity needed to go through a cross, and so does everything else. This is the nature and pattern of God.

The Crown of Thorns

I'm sure we've all read the passage in Galatians where Paul reiterates the verse in Deuteronomy about how anyone who dies upon the “tree” is considered cursed. Paul makes the statement that in Christ's death upon the cross, He became curse. He took up the curse, and therefore had victory over the curse through His resurrection. There is another statement made in Jesus taking up the curse. This is the statement of how He was crowned: with a crown of thorns.

When we read Genesis 3:17-19, we find that thorns are a part of the curse. Everything in the life of Christ seemed to be directed by the hand of the Father. If this is true, then why would thorns be the crown upon His head? Christ took the curse by even having a crown of thorn. Is there any crown more fitting for Him to have? Maybe something that we need to examine would be what the thorns represent.

In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus gives a parable of good and bad fruit. He says that good fruit does not bear thorns. Nor does good fruit bear thistles. In such a manner, we may know false teachers by their fruit. So if thorns are a sign of bad fruit, then what shall we equate as bad fruit? I had thought that thorns were fruitlessness, but this isn't so. Thorns represent bad fruit. Those that are dead do not produce fruit. So these are people that have been made alive by the calling of Christ, and yet are not bearing good fruit.

In the very next passage, Christ starts to explain how there will be many that say, “Lord, Lord.” The ones that Jesus turns away are the ones that bore bad fruit. So for Jesus to take up a crown of thorns, He isn’t taking something fruitless and making it fruitful. Jesus is taking the bad fruit and purifying it. He is making it holy. Think of the story of Jesus turning water into wine. The water from the Jordan was filthy. No one drank that. They had big jars to purify the water before anyone would even consider putting it to their lips. Yet Jesus didn’t send the water through the purification process. He simply said to put it in the jars and take some out. When it was taken out, it had changed to wine.

We have the same thing being reiterated within the crown of thorns. A faulty religion that is based on man’s ability is taken to death so that in resurrection it might be glorious. Though the pagan soldiers mocked Jesus by putting upon Him that scarlet robe and crown of thorns, the nations will one day bow the knee and worship Him. The religions of those nations that only bore bad fruit will be abolished and all nations will go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Isaiah 2:2, Zechariah 14:16).

But why would the nations have the sudden change in heart? God will work a wonder in their midst. The Jewish people that are sifted through all nations will one day be restored. Upon the return of their King, they will behold Him whom they have pierced. When they see that sight, they will weep in repentance. They will come to know their God. It is precisely in that moment that Israel will take up her priestly call to the nations. The crown of thorns is a symbol of Israel. They continually reject their own God so even the prophets have claimed that the generation sent into exile is the same that mumbled in the wilderness. Though they are currently that crown of thorns, that nation will one day be God’s crown of pure gold – a sign of divine glory.

In the crown of thorns, we find a symbol for all of our humanity that strives to know God and be godly on our own. It is explicitly said in Zechariah 4:6: not by might, nor by power, but by God’s Spirit. This is man apart from resurrection. Our own striving and ability is not enough. This is why Israel has constantly been in disobedience to God. It has very little to do with their rejection of Him. Their rejection of Him is an outworking of their desire to be independent. They don’t want to have the need of God. They would rather serve Him in their own strength. But that is not enough.

This is why when Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, He misquotes it. Deuteronomy 6:5 says to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and strength. Jesus said to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. It is not in our strength that we love God, but in *His* strength. But the Jews didn’t get it. So Jesus made an obvious misquotation purposefully to get their attention.

The crown of thorns upon Jesus’ head is deeply symbolic, and is also displayed in the cursed fig tree. In Matthew 21:19-20, Jesus cursed a fig tree and declared, “No one will ever eat from you again.” It withered instantly. The disciples were then astonished at how quickly it withered. What does this fig tree represent? Go back to Genesis 3. Adam and Eve learned that they were naked, and they sowed fig leaves together to make skirts. A fig leaf is curved in a way that it hides, or covers, fruit. For Adam and Eve to use the fig leaf is rich in meaning. The bad fruit that had been produced through the taking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is quickly hidden by man’s efforts in making him a skirt out of fig leaves.

Jesus cursed that tree. That barren fig tree that pretends to be good, but produces no good fruit is left for nothing but to be cut down and thrown into the fire. It is religion outside of God. An entire system had been made to bring people close to God – a system that made God’s Law into a formula instead of instruction. We can be guilty of this exact same thing in Christianity. We are not outside this possibility. Jesus cursed that fig tree and declared it shall never be eaten from again.

He took upon Himself a crown of thorns – something that should be humiliating and disgraceful. What was Jesus’ shame is our glory. What was His embarrassment is our delight. Because He went to death with that shame, we see that our shame too went to death *in Him*. We are going to be called upon to perform that same priestly work. We too must go to death shamefully and humiliated. We don’t bare our own shame – what shame is there to bear? Our shame has already been hung upon the cross. We bear the shame of Israel. We bear the shame of God’s people that are not God’s people.

We need to take up our own crown of thorns. We also will become curse. But there is something of encouragement here. Jesus cried out Eloi Eloi, lama sabachthani. Did God the Father turn His head away? Never. I think instead of understanding that God the Father turned away, we need to understand that there was no other moment in the life of Jesus that He obeyed more fully. This obedience would have actually drawn the Father’s face closer instead of further. His cry of, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is to be understood in the same context that Gethsemane was anguish.

Jesus was not apart from the Father. He isn’t a coward. Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane doesn’t show cowardice. These are deep subjects that need to be probed. Why did Jesus seem to be so “scared” before going to the cross? Maybe it wasn’t fear at all. It is possible we misunderstand entirely. Gethsemane is no more Jesus being afraid than the cross is the Father looking away. Both are heresy. But more than heresy, these teachings are actually damaging to we that expect to endure to the end. What transacted in the Garden of Gethsemane is the same thing that transacted on the cross.

That same anguish of soul came upon Jesus. The sweat of blood was the very blood of redemption. Gethsemane was a cross before the cross. Jesus’ anguish, and His cry upon the cross, are best understood when we experience them. Words do not explain. This deep kind of wrestling needs to be experienced if it is to be understood. The Father was right alongside of Jesus the whole time. His face was more intently looking upon Jesus on that cross than ever before. Jesus bore His suffering *through the eternal Spirit* (Hebrews 9:14). He was fully surrounded by the other two aspects of the Godhead.

What I want to encourage you with is that when we take up our own crosses for the sake of Israel, we too will feel this same anguish. Take heart, though. Jesus never was alone. He and the Father were one. If that is not true at the moment of Him becoming curse, then it wasn’t true at the moment He spoke it. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Isn’t Jesus really expressing the heart of David here? Isn’t this a reference back to Psalm 22? For Jesus to make that cry was for Him to blow the whistle on all of those that surrounded and mocked. This wasn’t about Jesus being forsaken. This was about Jesus prophesying even on the cross. He is still preaching. He is still proclaiming life to the dead and freedom to the captive. Our deaths are not moments at the end of our lives. They are platforms to express the very heart of God. When we will die in such a

way as to bring God's message and bless them that curse us, then we are truly offering freedom to the captive and sight for the blind.

What was Gethsemane from the disciples' eyes? They were asleep. When the time came that Jesus was taken, they all scattered. Not one of the disciples – except maybe John – saw Jesus upon the cross. What happened? Gethsemane is more than an anguish of soul because Jesus has to go to the cross. Something was transacting in the heavenly places that would cause Jesus anguish, but go completely unnoticed by the immature disciples. That same thing that caused Jesus to anguish was the very thing that when manifested caused the disciples to flee.

Gethsemane comes before the cross. If we liken the cross to our time of tribulation, then Gethsemane would be that time of anguish before it comes. Where I live, you can tell when a big storm is coming. You can smell it. The wind changes, the air becomes saturated with water, and the temperature drops. I believe that this same thing will take place before the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). Those who are mature will sense it. Those who are not yet mature will be able to sleep as though nothing is on the horizon. The very thing that caused Jesus agony was completely unnoticed by the disciples. I think we can learn a lot from this.

We are increasingly coming to a time when hell will break out. I have seen multiple people that desire to make timelines and charts. I don't feel as though this should be done. I was talking to my dad about these things, and he asked when I think they will come. The result was that he seemed to think, "Well, if I have a few more years, then I guess I'll continue to live in luxury for now." There are some people who are Hezekiah. They hear that destruction and devastation is coming, but then are happy because it won't be during their lifetime.

When we make tables, charts, graphs, timelines, etc to display to people what to expect and when, we run the risk of cheapening the very message of God. Those who are truly in tune with the Spirit will suffer Gethsemane. They will know when it is coming upon them. Corrie Ten Boom once spoke in Africa and told the saints there a story from her childhood. Her father asked her, "When I send you to go on the train, do I give you the ticket three weeks ahead of time?" No, he gave her the ticket when it was time for her to go. Likewise, God gives us the strength necessary to endure when the time comes. Gethsemane is not a time of anguish because we're afraid. It is a time of anguish because we are not afraid.

Christus Victor

When you study the early teachings of Christianity, you find that people did not teach that Jesus died for me. The teaching of the early Church fathers was that Jesus died to destroy the power of the devil. By His resurrection from the dead, He fulfilled that age-old prophecy in Genesis 3: a son of Eve would crush the head of the serpent. Christ was victorious over the power of the devil. And what is the devil's power? We've expressed it over and over again. It is darkness: "secrets" and hidden things.

Have you ever had an older sibling or a friend that held knowledge over you – “I know something you don’t know?” It is easy to be tricked. It is easy to be manipulated. The power of the devil lies solely in manipulation, force, intimidation, lies, etc. Jesus wasn’t intimidated. He wasn’t manipulated. He went down into death. No one took His life; He gave it willingly. And because Jesus gave His life willingly, it was His life to then take back up. The devil thought that he had victory. Satan assumed that he had overpowered the Son of God. In this we see the two wisdoms. The one results in death, the other results in life.

How is it that we can gain victory over the devil? It is by taking up that same cross that Jesus bore. We are more than over comers because we love not our lives unto death. A power is released when we stop following the lie of Satan. When we humble ourselves even unto death, and we take up our own crosses and follow Christ, resurrection power comes into our beings and we have authority as well as strength to overcome all that is in the world. And note that this doesn’t necessarily mean that we are free from persecution. We might be tortured. But that isn’t the point. Our freedom and our lives are not lived on this earth; they are first and foremost wrought in heavenly places. They are going to kill us, and that will be our crown.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

When Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him, what is it that He implies? When we look at the Garden, we see two trees. Man ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now mankind is bound to that tree. Every single one of us is born under that curse. We cannot be free from it on our own strength and power. Jesus, being born as a man, came under that same oppression and curse. He was bound to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

When we look at the end of the Bible, Revelation 22 (the last chapter) talks about only one tree: the tree of life. Where did the tree of the knowledge of good and evil go? It rests at Calvary. Jesus bore His life upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that humanity might follow Him in doing the same. On the other side of that cross is resurrection – the tree of life.

If we have died upon that tree of the knowledge of good and evil and been resurrected by the fruit of the tree of life, then why would we continue to live according to the knowledge of good and evil? Why do we continue to live bound by sin? Why do we continue to live as though there is no change? We might believe Jesus’ words about how much we’re loved and how forgiving the Father is, but why can’t we believe the words of Jesus on how we’re able to overcome sin? Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, “Go and sin no more.” Was He mocking her? Or does she actually have choice and power to not sin?

If we only view the tree of life as a symbol for the end of the age, then we will lack the resurrection reality here and now. We cannot fulfill our mandate as the Church without this. We cannot display the manifest wisdom of God to the principalities and powers, and we cannot drive the Jew to jealousy by anything less than resurrection. How

are we to do either of these things if we're playing the same game they are? Our need of a Messiah comes down to this: we are fallen and cannot get up.

God's requirement is that we would be a light to the world. We cannot let our light so shine before men if that light is either hidden or nonexistent. Jesus is the light of the world. Outside of Him, we have no light. He must dwell inside of us. Our need of a Messiah is more than an issue of king or redeemer in the sense of saving us from our enemies and oppression. There is a greater enemy than the Philistines. There is a greater oppression than Pharaoh. To miss this is to miss the faith.

The Kingdom of God can only consist of a people that are like God. Any moral defect or character flaw cannot stand in His light. Just imagine it. What will happen we see Him as He is? Anything in us that is racist will squeal. Anything in us that is manipulative cannot remain. We must go through an ultimate refinement. That ultimate refinement is nothing short of death itself. The wages of sin are death. No one goes into the next life without passing through those wages. We either die upon our own crosses, or we pass through death at the end of our lives. As Tozer has said, "One thing about a man carrying his cross is certain: he is not coming back."

Christ's cross is the sweetest burden that ever I bore; it is such a burden as wings are to a bird, or sails are to a ship.

-Samuel Rutherford

Arbeit macht frei – work makes free

-Propaganda slogan found in Auschwitz concentration camp

Likewise today, some Christians are content to merely exist until they die. They don't want to risk anything, to believe God, to grow or mature. They refuse to believe his Word, and have become hardened in their unbelief. *Now they're living just to die.*

-David Wilkerson

"Isn't it staggering when you think that one sermon on the day of Pentecost produced 3000 people? And we had some cities yesterday where 3000 sermons were preached and nobody was saved... And it doesn't even faze us."

-Leonard Ravenhill

VII. Caesar or Christ

The Roman Empire came to be by brute force. Some stories are as follows: Germanicus slaughtered the population across the Rhine (Belgium, Netherlands, and Northern Germany). For 50 miles he wasted the countryside. Neither age nor sex inspired pity. Only the destruction of the race would end the war. Pompeii conquered the east. On an inscription in the Temple of Minerva (Roman god), Pompeii boasts about taking 12 million subjects at surrender in 1,500 towns.

Roman soldiers would enjoy some entertainment by nailing their prisoners in different postures to a cross. There didn't need to be a reason, other than Rome took over your country/people, and now you're subject to Rome. It's even said that there were (in some cities) so many crucified that there could not be found enough space for the crosses, nor crosses for the bodies. One historian recorded that when he looks out on a conquered city, he must think that they do this for the simple sake of terror.

In a city named Magdala, Cassius enslaved 30,000 people. By the way, Magdala was the city that Mary Magdalene came from (hence the "last name"). In the year 4 A.D., there was a revolt in the city Sepphoris. Sepphoris was about 3 miles away from Nazareth, and to the Jews of Nazareth was considered the city on the hill. So, around the time that Jesus was a teenager, there was a revolt in the city on a hill, and the city was burned to the ground 3.5 miles away from him. He would have been able to see the 2,000 crucified bodies from Nazareth. The same general that burned Sepphoris to the ground for their revolt also totally destroyed a town called Emmaus.

Now, Caesar Augustus was Julius' adopted son, and he came to power around the time that Jesus was born. He brought the whole world under his power. There was no longer a consul that he would stand with. Augustus was declared by the parliament to be god in the flesh; incarnate. Temples were built, and prayers and sacrifices were offered to the god on earth: Augustus. Wherever Augustus conquered a city, there would be an altar and monument built in his honor. Those cities were called ecclesia. Ecclesia is the Greek word used in our New Testaments for "Church."

A Roman poet had proclaimed in his poem that Augustus was the one who is to come, the divine being to bring salvation to humanity. Which, when John the Baptist is imprisoned, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come?" Interesting. The poet Virgil said that Augustus would bring universal peace, and would lead in the blessing of a renewed humanity. In Matthew 19, Jesus says that he will return at the "renewal of all things..." Interesting.

In the history books, you can find a "strange star" that appeared in the heavens before Jesus' birth. Augustus claimed it was his father. Witnesses came forth and proclaimed they saw the son of god ascending to the right hand of the father Zeus. So Augustus said, "If my dad is God, then I am the Son of God." So, in 17 B.C.E., Caesar claimed he to be god, and had a 12-day celebration that he called the 12 days of advent. The people celebrated because the hour had come that the climax of history was here. Caesar Augustus had united the whole world. No one else had done such a thing. And here, Augustus was to bring peace. Remember how he conquered the world, though. *He will bring peace?*

During the advent, the priests of Caesar sent incense to sprinkle upon you to find cleansing. So Caesar Augustus offered the forgiveness of your sins. (This is where the Roman Catholic practice of “sprinkling” comes from.) He was seen as the mediator between heaven and earth. He was the high priest of the Roman people. Coins were made with Augustus and his star on them, and an inscription that said, “Augustus, the son of God.” (Note that Jesus called Himself the Son of *Man* in contrast.) Money was a fast way to get propaganda out to the world. Everyone uses currency, so to make a coinage with engravings upon it would keep people up to date on news and current events. Jesus was later asked about these coins and said, “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.”

A popular slogan of the day was, “Salvation is to be found in none except Augustus.” In fact, when they would go to take over cities, if the city would say, “Caesar is Lord,” then they would turn your city into an epicenter of Caesar worship. If you didn’t pronounce Caesar to be Lord, then they would kill you. 30,000 people could be slaughtered at a time. Paul, when writing to the *Romans*, declared, “Anyone who confesses with their mouth *Jesus is Lord*, and believes in their heart that He has been raised from the dead shall be saved.”

For such a large army, you need to be able to pay that army. Taxes in the time of Jesus were somewhere around 80 or 90 percent of the Jew’s wages. After you add Temple tax and Herod’s tax and Caesar’s tax and the tax collector’s share, you were left with somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of your money... This brings about an interesting struggle. For the Jews, when you came into the Promised Land, your family was given a piece of land. Now the land is in your possession, and it is your responsibility to not lose the family land. It was God’s land, and He has given it to you. You are getting taxed more and more and more so that Augustus can rule more of the world. What eventually happens is that you get to the point where you can’t afford to keep your family land.

Imagine the guilt. Generation after generation has kept this land and farmed it. For centuries, your family has owned this land. Now it comes into your hands, and you are forced to sell it. If you can’t tend the family land, then you have to find some other skill and go wherever you can find money. You have to feed your family somehow.

Jesus’ father Joseph is a carpenter. In the Jesus story, Mary and Joseph need to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted in the census. Why is Joseph not living on his family land in Bethlehem? The whole Gospel story starts out of rough financial times because Caesar has brought “peace.” Caesar is going to make everything great. Because he is now in power, he will rule the world and bring it into a universal age of salvation and peace... Has Caesar’s rule brought salvation and peace to Joseph? No.

The story starts in Caesar’s Empire, and it is a political push against the powers of darkness that promote the men of this world and promise things that evil and darkness cannot give. The Gospel is a Gospel of light and freedom. Everything about the first century Church was designed to be a push against the system of the world and to display the true freedom from oppression. The principalities have promoted their “Caesar” to rule over the world. This man has claimed to bring peace and to be god-in-the-flesh, but this man is not a god. He has not brought peace. The first century message was one question: who is Lord? Caesar, or Christ?

Caesar or Christ?

In Romans 10, there is a fascinating verse that says, “Anyone who will confess with their mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in their heart that God has raised Him from the dead, then you shall be saved.” What is so interesting about this verse is that it is completely a ploy against Caesar. Who is Lord? Caesar or Christ? Who brings peace? Caesar or Christ? When the soldiers come and you need to worship Caesar, who do you really think is Lord? Caesar or Christ?

Caesar used to take bread and give it away in public as a symbol of his provision. This tradition was called “breaking bread.” So the first group of Christians would gather together and call it breaking bread. The disciples would essentially gather together and go around the room and ask the question of if anyone was lacking. No one considered their things to be theirs, but shared all their possessions with one another. If someone needed shoes, then they were given shoes. If someone needed a coat, then they were given a coat. If someone was in need of food, then they were given food. Everyone shared all things. Then, after everyone’s needs were taken care of, they would have a meal together. The question was then asked, “Who is really the provider? Jesus or Augustus? Who is really the Prince of Peace? Jesus or Augustus? Who is really Lord? Jesus or Augustus?”

The pivotal point of the Gospel in the first century was not man’s sin and our redemption through Jesus Christ. The main focal point of the Gospel was Caesar. He has claimed to be all these things, and has promised all of these things... but where is the evidence? Who is really bringing peace? Who is really Lord? This was the Gospel.

The good news is that there is a kingdom that has been established on the earth. This kingdom isn’t ruled by the unjust gods of this world. It isn’t established in bloodshed. This kingdom has been established in nonviolence. One of the famous words of Jesus to Peter was, “He who lives by the sword dies by the sword.” Caesar certainly knew the sword and was not afraid to use it.

You have these two kingdoms established in the earth: the Kingdom of God, and the kingdom of darkness. We can still see these two kingdoms at work today. The first is based upon peace and justice and hope and freedom and love. The second is based upon violence, greed, slander, manipulation, torment, and slavery. Who is Lord? This same question is to be asked both presently and future. There is an underlying premise that the world is ruled by, and heaven forbid that you go against that premise. We also know there will be a time coming when the Antichrist will also promote himself as god and seek to establish “world peace.” Who is Lord?

The Church today moves largely as the world; as if no practical input by God into their daily lives is expected by virtue of their believing.

-Art Katz

The more man reaches for material things on the outside, the more he points out spiritual bankruptcy on the inside.

-Leonard Ravenhill

Many have passed the rocks of gross sins... who have suffered shipwrecks upon the sands of self-righteousness

-William Secker, The Consistent Christian 1660

IX. Herod or Christ

The Kingdom of God is completely different and polar opposite of the Kingdom of darkness (which rules the kingdoms of the world). Lets look now at Jesus and the Herods: Jesus also was born in the reign of King Herod. If you are Caesar Augustus, and you rule an empire that spans from England to India, how do you rule an area thousands of miles away if it takes you a year just to get there? If you are Caesar Augustus, you put in place different kings and nobles who are under you, but over the people of that area.

In the area of Israel, they found a young warrior who was half Jewish and half Edomite (which, if you know your Bible, you know that has a whole lot of other complications in it). He besieged Jerusalem with 11 battalions of infantry and 6000 cavalry. Masses were butchered in the alleys. Herod's army (all Jews) was intent on letting no one survive. He claimed that he took power by the will of God, but left out the detail that he massacred countless Jews.

Herod had to ultimately pay alms to Caesar, so he built altars and statues everywhere he went. This half Jewish king was putting up statues and altars to a man in a land that the people believed God to say, "Make no graven image," and, "Worship no other gods beside me." Right away, you can see he wasn't well liked.

There is a legend that says that King David, while fleeing from Saul, hid out in the rock outcropping called Masada. So Herod said, "If your greatest king hid out on Masada, then I will live in luxury on Masada." He built a 3-story palace. He had marble custom cut and designed for it. He had hot and cold baths, as well as hot tubs on Masada. He had Italian marble imported from Rome for columns. On the roof, where it hadn't rained in 700 years, he had a pool put on. In order to get the water, Herod rebuilt the desert so that water would channel from Jerusalem (17 miles away) through the mountains and to his palace. In one rainfall, he could collect enough rainwater for 10,000 people for 10 years.

He discovered a way to preserve fruit. In the mid-60's, a group of archeologists discovered a storage room for Herod's dates and figs, and they undid the jars and ate them... and then visited the royal bathroom (the bathroom thing is a joke; didn't really happen). He knew how to preserve fruits for 2000 years.

Herod wanted to build a Greek-styled city on the coast. The problem was, where he wanted to build it, the soil was very swampy and couldn't be built upon. It is possible this is what Jesus was referencing when He said, "If you don't follow my teachings, it's like a man who builds his house on the sand." Herod rebuilt the coastline. By draining the coastlines and draining the marshes, he was able to reinforce it with cement, and then build the city known as Caesarea. The largest harbor in the world was 60 acres in Athens. So, Herod built his 520 acres. He built an underground sewage system that would drain with the tides. He also built an aqueduct in the mountains for freshwater. It was 19 miles long. For every meter, it would fall a centimeter. To this day (2000 years later) it is less than a centimeter off.

There is a legend that says that while Herod was sailing back to Caesarea, he saw the city and was displeased that it wasn't beautiful enough. So they covered the whole

thing in marble. To this day, if you go to the area that Caesarea used to be, you can find pieces of marble in the sand and on the tide. Everything Herod did was massive.

Herod wanted to build a stadium. It was claimed to be more massive than people could imagine. We've discovered one, and it wasn't that large, but then there was another stadium dug up. After discovering 350,000 seats, they are still digging. It's guessed that there are over 500,000 seats.

He had 11 wives and 43 children. He was suspicious of one of his wives, and had her executed. He had a suspicion against one of his sons. The son was drowned in the family pool. Two other sons were brought before him because they were "conniving against him." After interviewing them, he had them killed. You can actually read the interrogation. It is one of the most heart-wrenching scenes ever recorded.

King Herod had a dispute with the most influential Jews of his time, and so he had them all executed. He, at another time, took the most noble and wisest of the sages of his time, and locked them into a stadium in Jericho, and then said, "When I die, I want you to kill everyone in this stadium. That way there will be a guarantee of weeping and mourning at my death."

Some historians estimate that he was the richest person who has ever lived. Not just of his time: ever in history. It has been estimated that he had 500,000 people under his payroll. Only he, King Herod, was paying them. This wasn't a company or anything that spanned nationwide or internationally. King Herod himself had 500,000 employees working for him.

Herod added to the Temple to win some points with the Jews, who pretty much hated him. He had what are called Herodian stones cut out, and then brought them into Jerusalem, and he rebuilt the foundation of the Temple with these stones. The stones are 10 feet by 10 feet by 80 feet. Modern machinery can't move one of them. They go down into the ground 3 stories. Modern machinery can't move one of them. He had thousands brought in. Herod was way ahead of the curve.

King Herod built another palace on top of a mountain between Jerusalem and his home country Edom. He drew a line on a map and said, "That's where I'll build my palace." There was only one problem: there wasn't a mountain where he wanted his palace on a mountain. So, he had a mountain built and put a palace on top of it. You know... like most people do. His palace was called the Herodian. The Herodian had a pool that was 9 feet deep and a gazebo in the middle that you could only get to by boat. Everything Herod did was huge.

By the way, Jesus is on the Mount of Olives teaching in Jerusalem. He is teaching a bunch of high school kids that if you look out and see this mountain with a palace on it, and you look slightly past it, you could see the Dead Sea. And if you have faith, you can speak to that mountain, "Be cast into the Sea," it will be done for you. Basically, "The stuff Herod is doing... if you have faith... you can do bigger than that..."

He built an aqueduct in Laodecia. He funded the Olympics. He had built fountains and temples and monuments and all sorts of architecture in cities that weren't in Israel. Stick with me, because this gets really interesting really fast.

In Jerusalem there was no farmland. It was a city. Herod lived in Jerusalem in a palace surrounded by people who he had hired that also lived in Jerusalem. The poor didn't live in the city Jerusalem. Jerusalem was home of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Herod had control of the major religious establishment. He ruled the government system, the religious system, and the economic system.

One question would be, if there weren't any farmers in Jerusalem, then where did they get their food? It is believed that in the time of Jesus, 80 or 90 percent of the people of Israel were (or were at some point) some sort of farmer/fisherman/agricultural worker. Many of Jesus' parables deal with agriculture, because most of the people of His time would have understood this easiest.

Herod took 25 to 30 percent of all the grain, and he took 50 percent of all the fish. So if you were a peasant fisherman, and you've been out all night fishing, your nets are full. You come into the dock on the Sea of Galilee. Waiting for you on the dock was a telones. The word telones is the Greek word that has been translated into English as tax collector. The tax collector takes 50 percent for Herod. That's the law. But then, he is allowed to take as much as he wants for himself. That is the benefit of working for Herod. You don't like it? You get killed.

A list of some of the taxes would be that you had a Roman tribute tax, a tax because Caesar is god, taxes to Herod, transit trade tax, market exchanges, Temple tax, and then there were taxes on special offerings that you were demanded to perform at various times of the year. People are losing their family lands and are in debt. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

A Roman delegate went to Caesar because Herod had so overtaxed his people that they were in helpless poverty. What is Herod doing with this money? He is building hot tubs on Masada. He is building 500,000 person stadiums. And he is building statues and altars to Caesar. But you, as the common person of Herod's time, are starving.

This is the reign of Herod: 10 percent have all the wealth and all the power, and the masses are reduced to unbearable poverty. Notice Matthew 2: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who is born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.' When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, *and all Jerusalem with him.*"

Why is all Jerusalem disturbed with Herod? The richest of the rich live in Jerusalem. If there is a King of the Jews born, then that means Herod isn't the king. And if Herod isn't the king, then this new ruler might have it out for the people of Jerusalem. If you are Herod, what do you think your first reaction to this question would be? "... Who is this next person I'm going to kill?"

The birth of this baby means that an entire system is now going down. Just from Christ's birth, our Christmas story, there are huge governmental, religious, and economical implications. Herod and his oppressive rule are over. And those who are in Jerusalem are also finished with him. This is the way that the Bible introduces this pebble that shatters the feet of Daniel's statue (Daniel 2).

Christmas and the Kingdom

Remember Luke pulls from Caesar being Emperor. And then Matthew pulls from Herod being king of the Jews. In both cases, the question is “Who is the king? Who is Lord? Who do you follow?” The Magi came from the east and saw a star, and then Caesar claimed this same star to be the proof of his lordship and godhood.

Maybe another way to put it is this: Who is your Lord? Caesar or Christ? Power or peace? Who is your King? Herod or Jesus? Is power your king? Is authority your king? Is wealth your king? Who is the king? Who is Lord? Government? Statues? Stature? Hot tubs? Palaces? Who is the king? Who is Lord?

Now we have the Kingdom presented in such a way that we can understand it. You have polar opposites. Is your kingdom about the things of this world? Or is it about this Jesus and the way that He taught us to live? What does this have to say about religion? What about politics? What about obeying authority? Herod and Caesar were both vicious and oppressive. Jesus came meek and lowly. Spiritual authority is first and foremost a servant. If they aren't servant to you, then they aren't your authority. They have no authority.

Has Caesar been a good ruler? Has he brought you peace? Has Herod been all that you have hoped he would be? Have the rulers and the governments over you really brought you the peace that you were hoping for? Have they really supplied for your needs? Or are your needs deeper than stuff? Are your needs and your deepest longings for something bigger and greater than that which has been given you? Choose ye this day: Caesar or Christ? Herod or Jesus?

Have food stamps saved anyone? Has anyone been better off in life because they have health insurance? Does life get easier when we have these conveniences? Our tax money goes to pay for things like health insurance, food stamps, social security, Medicare, upkeep of unused buildings (that could be used to shelter the homeless if our Government really did care about us), great scientific studies like whether sick shrimp perform as well on a treadmill as healthy shrimp (this is a real study funded by the Government – it cost about 15 million dollars), army expenses, paying off the interest on our nation's debt, veteran's benefits, and government jobs such as postal workers or police officers. But I have to ask the question: as necessary as *some* of these things are, is it really benefiting the common person? Who is Lord? Does our Government satisfy our deepest needs, or do they only provide (sometimes) for our external luxuries?

It is striking to me that when you start talking in these terms, some people just don't follow you. You start to realize the question to ask isn't about needs anymore. If the answer to these questions about whether the system of the world has worked for you is yes, then most likely you are one of the people living in Jerusalem. If you can continue to go to church and not have some sort of longing in your heart for something bigger and more authentic, then you are probably in Jerusalem. If you don't feel the need to release the poor from their oppression, then you are in Jerusalem with King Herod. This Kingdom has never been, nor will ever be, intended for you. This is why Jesus said, “It is very difficult for the rich to make it into the Kingdom of God.”

There are some who are in the system and they love every minute of it. There are others who are in the system and they know something is wrong. You have examples in the Bible of such: Jesus ate with *tax collectors* and sinners. Obviously, not all of the tax collectors were hell-bent on wickedness. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and there is good evidence that more Pharisees followed Jesus secretly. And thus we are left with the question: what does the Kingdom of God look like? To be a part of *that* Kingdom, we need to understand more fully of what its character is.

We have searched out well enough the kingdom of this world – which is to say, the kingdom of Satan. Now we turn our attention to another Kingdom. Our first step in understanding is to see the Kingdom of King David. Everything that David was, and everything that David represents, is a depiction of Christ Jesus and His eternal Rule.

Jesus loves me this I know; for the Bible tells me so.

-Karl Barth when asked about to explain theology

The day you learn to be publicly specific in your prayer, that is the day you will discover power.

-David Wilkerson

There is something about the nature of suffering that has the greatest capacity to reveal truth.

-Art Katz

“By perseverance the snail reached the ark.”

-Charles Spurgeon

X. The Davidic Kingdom

The Kingdom of God is at its very core Davidic. To understand that word takes quite a bit of unpacking. It seems as though more thorough scholars than I am willing to be could write volumes on just that one word. We see the name David come up over and over again in relation to God's Kingdom and His throne. In the prophetic texts, when God says He will set His king over Israel, it is always David. The reason for this is because that which is Davidic is the spirit of Jesus, and vice versa. Just as Saul pursued David, so did the Pharisees desire the life of Jesus. The character of David is at its core the character of Jesus. David's Kingdom is a full representation of the Kingdom of God.

Saul is the human alternative for God as King. He was a head and shoulders taller than everyone else. By human standards, Saul has an appearance of kingliness. We see the parallel in the Pharisees. By all human standards, these were holy, righteous, and pious men. They were devout and extremely committed to their faith. Yet, the people that Jesus spoke most harshly to were these very Pharisees.

We can see the contrast between David and Saul in a couple of incidents in their lives. In 1 Samuel 15:1-35, Saul is told to kill the Amalekites. He is told to not leave woman, child, man, or beast. Kill everything that has breath in it. The conclusion of the story is that Saul could not bring himself to kill the enemies of God. A partial obedience is no obedience. This kind of disobedience – even to allow the king of the Amalekites to survive – caused for the prophet Samuel to weep all night. There is something here that needs to be dwelt upon and sought out.

The Amalekites, like all nations mentioned in the Bible, are both physical and spiritual. There is the physical Amalekite people from biblical time, but we still have the same age old enemies of God that we wrestle against today. Every nation has a personality. Every nation is ruled by a demonic power. There is something behind the scenes at play, that even when some nations seem to overlap and have very similar attributes, there is a distinction made between Assyria and Babylon. Babylon is the kingdom of darkness – not Assyria.

So when we're searching this out, we need to feel for who these Amekite people really are. What was it about this kind of disobedience that would cause the prophet Samuel to weep bitterly? The Amalekites are described in their first mention: Exodus 17:8-16. In this story, the Amalekites are the first peoples to attack Israel after coming out of Egypt. Egypt is bondage. Those who were fatigued and weak, and could not keep up with the rest of the congregation of Israel, were attacked from behind. This is the Amalekite: a wolf. Wolves do not go after the strong in the flock, but instead the weak and elderly. They bite the leg so that you cannot flee. Then they gather around in a pack.

This is the exact description given to the Amalekites. When we read of Jesus' words, "Beware of false prophets," he adds that they are wolves in sheep's clothing. That Amalekite spirit is alive and well. Though the people were destroyed by David in 1 Samuel 30, the spiritual Amalekites are continuing to attack the weak, young, elderly, and fatigued of God's people to this day. Amalek, from which the Amalekites came, was a descendant of Esau. Esau is Edom. God says in Daniel 11:41 that Edom, Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon will escape from the Antichrist. Why? Edom is Esau,

Jacob's brother. Moab and Ammon both came from Lot, who was Abraham's nephew – a righteous man. God preserves these nations because He is a redeemer. Though the nations themselves might behave wickedly, they are still descendants of Esau and Lot – of whom the Lord respects and will not destroy them utterly.

Saul being unwilling to utterly destroy that kind of enemy – wolves searching to destroy the weak and defenseless of Israel – is what caused Samuel the prophet to weep. Saul was not jealous over the flock of Israel, and yet he was supposed to be their king. He was unwilling to protect his own people, and is thus considered equally a bad shepherd as the wicked priests.

Only a couple chapters later, Saul destroys the whole community of Nob. He did not allow one living thing to survive. This was a community of priests. Why would King Saul have the drive to kill an entire community of priests, when he didn't have the drive to kill the Amalekites? The people at Nob helped David. Saul utterly destroyed them – to the extent required to kill the enemies of God, he killed the very priests of God.

That detail also should be dwelt upon. Saul did not have the fervor to perform the will of God against his own enemies. Yet, the foolishness that was David so jabbed at his heart that anyone to help this David – even a community of priests – were deemed unfit to live. It is the very pattern of God. Saul pursues David. The Philistines persecute him. There is no other logic. This is why Jesus warns us: "If they hated me, they will also hate you." Those same spirits are going to tug at the same people that epitomize Saul.

David is entirely different. What is it about David that is so heavenly? "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal," John 12:25. David, like Jesus, was willing to lay down his life in preserving Saul's life in 1 Samuel 24. In this story, David has the opportunity to relieve himself from the oppression of Saul. Saul walks into the cave that David and his men are hiding, and instead of killing Saul, David allows him to go free.

This is a deeper moment than we realize. David had opportunity to put to death that which was threatening and intimidating. Many of us are unwilling to allow the threat of survival to persist when even our ministry or calling or legacy are at stake. There is more to losing your life than death. Satan's kingdom is predicated upon self – God's upon sacrifice. David would not kill Saul. Even though he had every right, and even though the Lord had brought Saul into his hand (1 Samuel 24:4). But David was of a different caliber. He didn't pursue Saul. He allowed that threat to survive because he would not allow himself to kill God's anointed.

How many of us would at any opportunity like to hack into pieces the thing that calls itself "Church?" That is not the heart of David. Though it is apostate, and though it is an enemy of God, the heart of David is to allow the person to live. I will undergo suffering on their behalf because they are still the Lord's anointed. In the same way, I might speak harshly about the so-called-church, but I will not harm them. Those people are still people. Let it be God to judge them, and never I.

It says in 1 Samuel 24:12 that David was convicted because he touched the Lord's anointed. What manner of a man is this? Too many of us would have taken that opportunity to kill Saul and relieve self from oppression. David allowed Saul to live, and

therefore remained under oppression. But it doesn't stop there. David had such a heart after God that he was convicted for even "touching" the Lord's anointed.

How many of us have "touched" the Lord's anointed by raising objections to denominations, church leaders, etc? David's heart was grieved because he cut the edge of Saul's robe. This action of embarrassing Saul was unnecessary, and the very heart of David recognized it. David – and therefore God – lived by another wisdom. Jesus speaks of some ruling over ten cities, and some ruling over five. If we are to be rulers of this kind of Kingdom, then we need this same heart and attitude that David demonstrates.

The Heart of David

Saul towered heads and shoulders over everyone else; why did David intimidate him? When we study out the contradictions in Saul and David's characters, we come to conclusions that the very thing that brings the Sauls to a boil is the foolishness that the authentic is unselfconsciously in God. In our authenticity before God, we are unaware of our own characters. That very character is foolishness. It is so different and contrary to the world. And yet it is also the very thing that causes hostility.

Our absolute dependency upon God reveals all of the forgery in others. In this, we can see the plight of the Remnant Church in the last days. For those that are indeed authentic in God, even those who claim to be in Christ will persecute them. It says in Daniel 7:21, 25 and Revelation 13:7 that the Antichrist will overcome the saints. We have assumed that Revelation 12:11 means we suck it up and take death willingly. But what if our overcoming of the devil is actually found *in* the death?

Is our freedom constituted in that our death serves an ultimate purpose of God? Can we die in such a way as to express a mystery? Revelation 12:11 says that they loved not their lives even unto death. I heard the story of a Christian missionary community in Zimbabwe, Africa that was being tormented by the armed insurgents. These armed men delighted in intimidating and murdering white farmers. This community had no weapons and decided not to defend themselves. "Let God be our defense." One night death came with great suddenness. One by one they were taken into a shack – hands tied behind their backs by barbed wire – and hacked to pieces with an axe so that no shots could be heard. There was not a whimper, one scream, not a plea for their lives. Somehow they had sublime confidence in the sovereignty of God – even though it flies in the face of every natural and religious category. Was this a waste?

Could it be that God did not care so much about the ponds and chicken coops they built to help the village as He cared about a fulfillment of wisdom displayed through a willing Church that there is something more important than *this* life? What was expressed to that community was that these men were not simply there to help with the economy. They weren't only trying to establish schools and hospitals. Something was driving them that is deeper than life. The perpetuation of our breathing is not everything. There is actually something more important than the sanitation and provision of food.

I have heard another story of missionaries. I could not tell you where they were. This family was buried alive. The children asked their father, "What is happening? I'm scared..." The father replied with, "Let's sing songs." They sang hymns until they were under too much dirt to breathe. This man was able to hear the moment when his children and wife were no longer singing, and he was now all alone. Yet, he continued to sing hymns. Their persecutors overcame them. But that isn't the end of the story. One of those men that killed this family sought out a Christian missionary when he had opportunity. He expressed this story and explained that he has come to realize that what he is living is a lie. Whatever that family had, he needed it.

This is the Davidic heart. Read the Psalms. Even in the midst of adversity and persecution, David does not cry out against it. He submits himself to God. He blesses God. He rejoices in the God of his salvation. It is this kind of heart that really seems to stand out as being truly Davidic. This kind of heart defers.

Every king of Judah started their rule when their father died. That is, every king but one. Solomon was appointed king. David passed the torch. No other king of Judah did so. Until sickness or death disabled the king to continue their rule, they sat in their place of authority. David surrendered his authority. There is something about David that we all need to learn from. When it is time to pass on your ministry to the next generation, you need to pass it on. It is actually sinful for us to continue to expect that God will bless us.

True submission is unto the Holy Spirit. Any submission to authority is unto God, not to man. For the older generation to pass the torch is for them to submit to authority. For the next generation to take up that rule is to submit to authority. True spiritual authority is found when the eldest and wisest takes counsel in the youngest and most unlearned. When the elder can have his feet washed by the youngest, then we have reached a point of true authority. To *that* authority I submit. It is solely on the basis of God's anointing. If the anointing is lacking, then submission is unnecessary.

If Saul was God's anointed, then why didn't David submit to his authority? Why did David flee? If the Pharisees were the authority, then why did Jesus so oppose them? The answer to those questions is answered in understanding that our submission is first – and only – to God. The lack of God's wisdom and leading is all that is needed to be justified before God. You listen to God's voice. If that comes through another human being, then it doesn't matter how old or young they are, you submit to that authority.

The elders today have a lot of blood on their hands. Generation after generation has fought to continue their rule. They have fought to continue to stay in power. True authority and power is established when we defer authority and power. This is what it means to have the heart of David. This is what is required to rule and reign with Christ. Jesus will not return and somehow beat into submission all that do not follow Him. He will rule with an iron scepter, yes. That iron scepter is not used to bludgeon. He is meek and lowly. He is humble, and from that humility comes His authority.

The Heart of Davidic Worship

When we desire to understand the heart of David's worship, there is no better place to turn than to the Psalms. In Psalm 56 and 57 (to only examine two), we find them both starting with persecution. The one is persecution from the Philistines, and the other is persecution from Saul. In this we have symbols of persecution from the world and persecution from the backslidden Church. I find it interesting that even with both of these two very different oppressors, the first few verses in both the Psalms reference David being "trampled."

"Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me; fighting all day long he oppresses me (Psalm 56:1). He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me (Psalm 57:3)." This is the unfortunate fate of a "David." David symbolizes the man of faith – which is ironically the one that always gets trampled upon by men of the world, whether religious or otherwise. Though in both Psalms David is being trampled, his cry is to God and God alone. He does not raise his voice against the Philistines or against Saul.

In Psalm 56, we find that verses four and eleven repeat one another. In verse 11 we read: In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? In another translation it uses the word "flesh" instead of man. What is the "flesh" and who is the "me" being spoken of? We have already seen from verse one that David is being trampled upon. So obviously flesh is doing something to him. Not to mention, if David is taken, there is a lot of torture that man can do to another man. Yet David insists that man can do *nothing* to me.

The "me" must mean something more than the physical body that can indeed be harmed by men. However, what he is in God, the essential David, cannot be harmed. In this we have the basis for why we shall not fear. This is the basis for worship. Who we are in God cannot be taken from us. We are something very distinct and different from our bodies. Though we are contained within our physical bodies, the reality of who we are is not destroyed with our body. This is why in the midst of persecution we can find solace in God.

In all of the saints of old, whether Old Testament or New Testament, we read that the glory of God is revealed in both their lives and their deaths. Martyrdom is not merely in death, but a lifestyle. When we can live as though we have already died, then we are truly living. Our lives are not our own. God is somehow in control and is bigger than our lives. Everything we do is to the glory of God. Nothing is for self.

In this, our death is taken in a way to say, "There is something more important than self-preservation." In order to die at the hands of persecutors and make that kind of statement through your death does not come at the end of your life. You aren't going to somehow find the gusto to endure pain. This kind of manifestation is displayed through your life – your death is only the final enactment. Any persecution that is faced, whether to the death or we live through it, will display full well the wisdom by which we truly are governed.

King Zedekiah was promised his life if he surrendered to Babylon. There was a problem. He feared men more than God. Because he feared what the people of Israel would say, he was brutally tortured and ultimately killed. His death was not valiant. Isaiah, tradition says, was cut in half while hanging upside down. While they hacked him

asunder, he was still prophesying. Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego took “death” (fiery furnace) without wavering. They claimed, “Even if God does not deliver us, oh king, we still will not bow down to your stupid antichrist statue!”

When we view Acts 16, we see the story of Paul and Silas. These two men are beaten and thrown in prison unjustly. At midnight, they start singing songs of praise to God. In the midst of their worship, the prison doors swing wide open. What is it about the worship of Paul and Silas that would cause for such a phenomena? When you can give testimony of God like that to the world in the midst of adversity and trials, then you have given the ultimate witness of God that glorifies God and can be used as a witness to save the nations.

When our worship comes from a heart that knows God’s character and that He would not allow anything to befall us if it did not glorify Him, we have stepped out of the realm of music as worship and into the realm of Davidic worship. Even in the midst of prison and death, Paul and Silas rejoiced in the God who saved them. Death could not keep them from Him. Why fear? If we die, we go to see the Lord. If we are tortured, then we should count it privilege to be found as worthy vessels to take the same torment that Christ received. Isn’t this why Peter and John rejoiced after being beaten by the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:40-42?

Probably the greatest travesty of our age is the use of manipulation during worship to rile up the emotions and senses during the music time. True worship should be a spontaneous expression of a reality that has been obtained corporately, by a people who have been long enough and intensely enough together to obtain it. Choruses should be the expression of joy, not its substitute. Music can be a powerful thing, but when music becomes a means to *feeling*, we have forsaken the holy worship in Spirit and truth.

There is a wickedness beyond human capacity, which is of the principalities and powers of the air. If we do not recognize (and wrestle) them now, then we will not recognize them during the time of persecution. We will assume that mankind is purely corrupted, and in that we will possibly lose heart. But what do we lose heart in? It is ultimately that we lose faith in God, and we therefore lose our own humanity as well.

Our lifestyle must be born out of the real belief in a soon coming Tribulation and return of the Lord. With this, our view is properly centered to not fret with the things of this life, and to endure patiently until the end when we shall receive reward. My struggles in daily life are things to rejoice in. I know that the tougher the struggle the greater the work of sanctification it will bring. I rejoice that in pain there is comfort, in struggle there is ability to overcome, in persecution there is endurance, and in torture there is a crown.

Humility

David was humble. His character is at its center humble. Our understanding of humility is often times very shallow. Moses wrote about himself that he was the most humble man on the face of the earth. Was he arrogant, or was he right? If we say that the Scriptures are infallible, then we must say that he was right. But what kind of humility did Moses exude that would allow him to make that statement, and yet at the same time

he is telling the truth? When we have come to a place where we can make that kind of a statement about ourselves, and not have a hint of pride in the statement, then we have reached ultimate humility.

While on the topic of Moses, I'll also point out another interesting detail. When Moses came down from the mount, he found the Israelites dancing before the golden calf. Moses then broke the tablets of the law. He commanded that the calf be ground to powder and that the Israelites would drink it. Is there anything strange with this? Not one person seems to speak against it. There is not a hint of anyone who murmurs against Moses' demand. Apparently there was something about the demeanor of Moses that would cause for the Israelites to not even question that demand, but to obey and drink their shame. There is a conjunction between humility and authority.

This is something to dwell upon. The use of authority is very important. We do not use our authority to coerce or manipulate. It is on the basis of humility that we exercise our authority. We entreat. And that is the very statement of God's humility. When you view the statements of God to His people, He never seems to deride or mock them. His statements – even the harshest statements in Ezekiel – are always given in reference to what Israel used to be, or to the redemption that God has planned. God humbly speaks to Israel. He doesn't force. He entreats. And similarly, David also never exerted force or intimidation.

The interesting thing is that when God speaks, He is so precise in His words that He acts as though there is no other opinion. You find this also in the writings of the apostles. It is so exact. There is no other truth other than what is shared by the apostles. Any other opinion is a false Gospel. Only those that recognize the truth in the statements of Jesus and the apostles are welcome to come and speak. They will not bring a false reality. But this kind of dogmatism to claim anyone who says something counter to what you have said sounds so arrogant.

Here lies the whole of it. A false humility would never make these kinds of proclamations. False humility will come with an appearance of being humble, but it is only self-effacing. When we think of meek, we think of mild, deferring, quiet, lowly, placid, soft, and docile. How do we reconcile meekness with Jesus flipping tables?

Meekness is obedience. If it is simply being timid, then we have lost every reality of the faith. Why do I say so? There are times where Jesus was not timid. There are times where Jesus is flat out rude and/or violent. How do we reconcile kindness, gentleness, humility, patience, and self-control with the outbursts that characterize certain times in Jesus' ministry? Was Jesus out of the Spirit? It can only be reconciled if we come to the understanding that all of these things are first an obedience to God, no matter how much that might mean it is an affront to man.

We are first jealous for God and His glory. We desire to honor Him and guard His name and integrity. James has said that we are to be first pure, then peaceable. Humility is found in submission to God. When He calls upon us to perform His will, it might be entirely contrary to what this world thinks is peaceful or gentle or any of these other fruits of the Spirit. Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal. All of the prophets spoke against Jerusalem and the Temple – an act that was unlawful and almost resulted in Jeremiah's death. Our false humility and piety will lead us to taking the name of God in vein. We

will think that we are actually protecting God's name, but in actuality we are bringing an offense because we are out of sync with His character.

This kind of humility is unself-conscious. We don't even realize that we are performing this sort of characteristic. It is true for all of the fruits of the Spirit. When we are truly generous, we don't understand why people call us generous. When we are truly practicing kindness, we don't even perceive that we are being kind. It comes naturally or not at all. Does a tree strain to bear fruit? Does a plant have to wake up in the morning and remind itself that it needs to make seed? It is a natural process that the tree and plant were made to do. Likewise, those in the Spirit will bear the fruit of the Spirit.

We must come to the place where we are able to repeat the words of Paul, "Be imitators of me," 1 Corinthians 4:16. How is it that Paul could tell people to imitate him? Shouldn't we be imitating Christ? And yet, these words are found in our Bible. The lazy scholar (who often times are the liberal scholars) will read this and say that it is an error. Paul didn't really mean it. Or Paul was only speaking out of the flesh in that moment. Or Paul was speaking in the sense of being sexually pure. The problem with this is that we now must decipher which verses of the Bible are spoken from the Spirit and which verses did the author speak out of the flesh?

This verse, even though it is controversial, is a true statement. We are to actually imitate Paul. And that is not contradictory. We are to be imitators of Christ, but we are to be imitators of Paul. How? It is because when you examine the life of Paul and the words that he wrote to the Churches abroad, you find that his character is so Christ-like that we must conclude he and Christ were indeed one. We, too, must come to the place that we so mirror the image of Christ as revealed in us through His Spirit that we can say, "Be imitators of me." We too must be able to say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father; I and the Father are one."

It is actually a display of the Davidic character that drives Jews to jealousy. This is our great calling as the Church (Romans 11:11, Deuteronomy 32:21). The way that we display this great character is to be humble unto death *for their sakes*. Resurrection life means a life lived by the Spirit, which is to say, through the power of God. God's power is only truly working when His character is alive through us. Our death does not have to be literal, although I think in many cases it will be. Our deaths are like Paul's death: we die daily.

When we have attained to such a place that we are truly living in humility of this kind, the evidence will be seen through our children. Our children will testify to whether we are truly living this or not. The way that they react to our lives is our testimony – do they follow us as we follow Christ, or do they reject Christ? The book of Philemon addresses this very thing. It hit me once when I read it. This man Philemon was called a brother and Paul expresses the reasons that he knows this man to be true to the faith. He showed love to the brethren, and he had church in his house. Why did his slave run away? He ran to Paul. Why?

Is it possible that Onesimus heard the stories of Paul, heard messages of God's grace, mercy, and love, and heard his master speaking so highly of this Jesus, but didn't see the reality in his life? Is it possible that Philemon was a phenomenal example of what Christianity is supposed to be, but when it came to his slaves he somehow treated them

with contempt? Was Onesimus believing the words spoken, but having difficulty finding the reality of them?

What a shame it is for anyone that his or her families would run away from Church to find God. What a shame that by our lives we would draw many to Christ, but yet push the ones that are closest to us away. How many of us are guilty of this very thing? Humility is so utterly important. Servant hood is life and death. If we are not a servant to all, then we ought not to be authority over all. Our lives need to display true humility – the kind that says, “I am the most humble man on all the earth,” and I am not arrogant for saying so. Anything less than that is an affront to God. I do not write as one who has arrived, but instead as one that struggles with this myself.

It is mentioned in Revelation 20 that there is a first resurrection. Not everyone attains to that resurrection. The ones who do get in are the martyrs. Those that were slain by the beast get in. But Daniel was also promised that resurrection (Daniel 12:13). This first resurrection is only attained to by those found worthy to attain to it. What is the character necessary to attain? Humility. This is the heart and grit of the Kingdom of God. To be able to rule and reign in humility will guarantee us a place of governing with Christ at His return.

What does it look like to rule and reign in humility? I think that Paul typifies it for us. When we read his letters we find time after time that he teaches and gives understanding. He explains why this or that is necessary, and why these other things need to be forsaken. He doesn't exhort as one that has authority, but instead appeals on the basis of love. By deferring his authority and appealing on the basis of love, Paul shows us what it means to rule and reign in the Kingdom.

Ruling and reigning is about washing one another's feet. When your brother is found out, you restore him gently. When a burden is upon someone, we struggle together. We take up each other's burdens. We do not ever allow them to struggle alone. Sometimes in allowing them to struggle alone is to carry their burden. We lift them up in prayer, and it takes discernment to know when to comfort and when to allow the full working of death to overtake that fellow brother or sister. But we dare not slap them on the back and say, “I'll pray for you,” and then not pray.

To rule and reign in the coming Kingdom means to exhort in love. It means to lay down self for the betterment of others. It means to display the full understanding. Teachers are great for learning the little details of how everything fits together, but sometimes teachers need to give the bigger picture in order to admonish their sheep. Humility is the name of the game. When we can teach through our humility and deferring to another, then we have come to the place of ultimate humility, and from that state we are worthy to rule and reign with Christ.

Restoring the Tabernacle of David

And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness (Isaiah 16:5). In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the

breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old (Amos 9:11).

In these two verses, we see a phrase about restoring the “tabernacle of David.” What exactly is that tabernacle? The tabernacle is the house. To restore the house of David is to restore the King David. This is an establishment of the rule of David over the nation Israel. This happens at the coming of Jesus. I thought it necessary to put this in as the last section in order to get you thinking about what all that might entail. I do not have the capacity to understand such a phrase.

We know that at the coming of Jesus that representatives of every nation must go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16). What is so important about this? The feast of tabernacles is a representation of “God with us.” We celebrate that God has not left us alone, but has instead come to “tabernacle,” or dwell in our midst. Any nation that does not come to Jerusalem to celebrate that feast at the return of Jesus is cut off from the earth.

The restoration of the tabernacle of David is the coming of Jesus. His throne being established now redeems all the nations redeemed as well. It is at His coming that Israel finds redemption. Israel is sifted through all nations, but God is not only sifting Israel. He is sifting the hearts of those nations. Those nations will watch as Israel goes from being the persecuted and oppressed to being delivered by God and exalted unto priesthood. They will be the priestly nation to the nations (Exodus 19:6). To deny this is to deny God Himself. Nothing is left for that person or nation but hellfire.

We read in Revelation 20 that after Jesus rules for 1000 years there is a war against Jerusalem. Satan is loosed and riles up an army too large to count. How is it that these nations would endure 1000 years of heaven, and then be deceived into coming against God at Jerusalem? It is the rejection of God in this ultimate way that can only result in judgment. It is at this that the age concludes and the Great White Throne judgment commences. God has established who truly desires heaven and who does not. We cannot come up with excuses that we would like heaven, but God wants to send every sinner to hell. God gives every man on the planet heaven for 1000 years, and even in the midst of heaven they continue to despise God.

What is equally as appalling is that these who come against Jerusalem in this final time are peoples and nations that were not a part of the Antichrist’s army. Those that were somehow able to keep from following the Antichrist are now warring against God. We find in Daniel 7:12 that the Antichrist kingdom is destroyed, but the other “beasts from the sea” are left to remain for a time. I think that this might be what is happening. Those nations that are not technically saved are given the ultimatum. They do not realize how much of an ultimatum it is, however.

This topic will be picked up again at a later time. What needs to be looked into next is what it means for the Kingdom to have fully come. Theocracy (the Kingdom of God) is only fully established when Jesus rules from Zion.

Humility is the guardian of virtue

-St. Bernard

Our only hope lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

I will place no value on anything I have or may possess except in relation to the kingdom of Christ.

-David Livingstone

XI. Theocracy Fully Established when Jesus Rules from Zion

Almost everything that has been written up to this point (with exception of the last chapter) has been foundation work. It is here that we have now reached the place to start building what the Kingdom of God is. In the last chapter we asked what the character of the Kingdom is, but here we are to examine the Kingdom itself. When we examine such a subject, we need to have the understanding that it has a double aspect: physical and spiritual. We tend to look more at the spiritual aspect in our modern Christendom, and have therefore robbed ourselves of the full meaning and intention of God.

As much as I am an advocate of the spiritual Kingdom, I find myself needing to fill the vacuum. We need to better understand the physical before we can even discern the spiritual. It is at this point that we have a lot of questions that are asked: what about the current state of Israel? What exactly is Israel's purpose? What about the Church? What exactly is taking place in the world when Jesus returns? What takes place during the millennial reign of Christ?

All of these questions are lacking for the exact reason that we have not even thought to ask them. We have been content to claim, "The Kingdom is within you," and to that degree we have neglected the actual Kingdom of God. It isn't a metaphor. This is a literal Kingdom, with a literal rule, from a literal land, over a literal people. Maybe I'm too optimistic when I say that I believe we should all have a similar character and mindset. What kingdom is it that we subscribe to?

What kingdom is it that we subscribe to when we choose our homes? How much land is sufficient? How large of a house is conducive to claiming that we are Kingdom oriented? What is the proper mentality to hold for occupation and self-life? When guests come, what is the proper way to house them and feed them? What I find is that even across the United States of America the answer to these questions are vastly different depending on where you live. Why? Are we not all within the same Kingdom? Does that Kingdom not have it's own culture to teach us how to live?

What I would like to put forth is an introduction. I cannot begin to be exhaustive on such a subject as this. I'll answer the questions above, and then we'll go into some further subject matter about the Kingdom.

Nation state versus Redeemed Israel

There are various places that speak of world peace coming with the Messiah. In fact, this is one of the reasons that many Jewish people that know their Scriptures *don't* believe in Jesus. There are several details that happen when Israel is brought back to their land. It is promised in Amos 9 (as well as other places) that they will never again be uprooted. Is it a proper use of Amos 9 to apply it to modern day Israel, or are we looking for something else?

Israel's final redemption is upon the coming of Messiah. It says even back in Genesis 49:10 that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah," and of that ruler out of

Judah, “unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.” Isaiah 33:17 reads, “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty (we might call that “resurrected form”); they shall behold the land that is very far off.” Ezekiel 34:23-24 also reads, “And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them and he shall be their Shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant, David, a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken it.”

This last verse brings about a good point. Not only does the Messiah come at their final return, but they shall also know the Lord their God. They shall be His people, and He shall be their God. As it is said in Isaiah 10:20, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more lean upon him who smote them (the Antichrist), but shall lean upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.” This passage in Isaiah speaks of an escape. What are they escaping from? Many of the prophecies concerning Israel’s final return is mentioned either right after torment, or it gives the sense of no more torment. This is because their final return is at the end of the Tribulation – after the time of Jacob’s Trouble.

Jeremiah 31:1 reads, “At that time, says the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.” At what time is the Lord referring to? “That time” is almost always a reference to the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is the return of Christ. It is the Day of Judgment upon the nations. We read of it in our New Testaments as “the day of Christ.” The day of Christ and the day of the Lord are synonyms. The only two references in the New Testament to the day of the Lord are both quoting Jesus when He spoke of His return in the clouds.

Isaiah 35:10 says, “And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come unto Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” How is it that this can happen? It is only upon the basis of world peace. Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 both mention a time where the people will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. No nation will take up war any longer. When does this happen? It happens on “that day.”

“That day” is a literal day: the return of Jesus. It is on that day that the nation of Israel is reborn. As it says in Isaiah 66:8, and also mentioned by Zechariah in his 13th chapter that in a single day will Israel be born. Who has heard of such a thing? Can a nation be born in a day? And yet it has, and it will. The current state of Israel is indeed a fulfillment of prophecy, but not a fulfillment of promise. They were indeed born in a day, and they will be born again in a day.

The current state of Israel is the fulfillment of a prophecy given in Ezekiel 22:17-22: Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross; all they are bronze, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “Because you are all become dross, behold, therefore, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and bronze, and iron, and lead, and tin into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it, so will I gather you in my anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall you be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I, the Lord, have poured out my fury upon you.”

Along the same lines, we read from Isaiah 11:11, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again *the second time* to recover the remnant of His people; who shall be left, fro Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar (which is Babylon), and from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.” Why would God need to recover His remnant *a second time*? He recovers them a second time because the current state of Israel is the first time. The current state of Israel will not remain. They will be sifted again through all nations – the return from which will mean the redemption of those nations and the coming of Jesus on the clouds of heaven.

Israel’s purpose

When we’re talking about Israel’s purpose, we’re talking about an eternal purpose. It has been established from the beginning that there would be a people that will defeat the darkness so that the Kingdom of Light might be all to remain. These people that will overcome the darkness and cast it out of the cosmos are the people that bear the name of God. As Adam was a son of God (Luke 3:38), so too are the sons of Israel sons of God (Deuteronomy 14:1).

It takes a son to be able to defeat the darkness in this ultimate way. Christ Jesus has disarmed them, but He did not defeat them totally. That is still up to another son – Israel – to perform. Who is Israel? Israel is the people of God: any and every Jew or Gentile that has been grafted or re-grafted into that Hebraic root. We are people of the eternal purpose, and more fully, people of the eternal covenant. The eternal covenant is not something to toy with. It is the very blood of Jesus.

The eternal covenant stretches back to the beginning in that Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world. Anyone who comes into adoption of God the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ is now and eternally of that everlasting covenant. The covenant has its first expression in Genesis 3:15. It then gains more detail as we progress through Genesis. It is spoken of again and again: in Genesis 9:25-27, 12:2-3, 15:1-21, 22:18, 25:23, 26:4, 28:14, 35:11, and 48:19. God establishes this covenant directly with the children of Israel at Mount Sinai in Deuteronomy.

The eternal covenant is what we would refer to as “the new covenant.” This is the same covenant that has ever and always been, however it has been rejected and another was sought. The old covenant does not necessarily describe the Torah (5 books of Moses), but instead the agreement between Israel and God when they rejected to speak to Him directly at Mount Sinai. Now God has done away with such a covenant that would place a man between God and us, and has sent His Son as a man to be our mediator. No longer do we look for a man-mediator, but look to Jesus as our mediator.

When Israel, the currently unbelieving, will come into *that* covenant, then they will begin to fulfill their ultimate purpose. It is that ultimate purpose that we will begin to describe as we continue. They will be the center of all nations, as it is written in Ezekiel 5:5. They are promised in Deuteronomy 28:1 and 13 that they will be set on high above all nations of the earth, and they shall be the head and not the tail.

We've already examined that this people is God's nation among the nations. When they shall come into that calling, they shall be the priestly nation to the nations (Exodus 19:6). We read of this in Isaiah 51:4: "Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation; for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my justice to rest for a light of the peoples." It is that new covenant that proceeds from Him, and it is when Israel is restored as the priestly nation to the nations that all peoples will see its light.

Restoration

At the return of Christ, we know that He defeats the Antichrist. I'm not going to get into these details for the sake of not over exhausting the reader. Many times in the Old Testament, the return of Christ is called the "establishment of the branch." This "branch" sprouts from the root of Jesse, David's father (Isaiah 53:2). Moses called this branch a "prophet like unto me," Deuteronomy 18:15. Isaiah prophesied of this man (child) being born, and the government of God shall be upon His shoulders (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Zechariah 12:9-13:1 reads, "And it will come to pass, in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon, in the Valley of Megiddon (or, Armageddon). And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart. In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

When they shall see Him whom they have pierced, Jesus, then they shall all together weep for Him as one weeps for their only son. This is the redemption of Israel. It happens nothing short of the return of Jesus. One might ask why we even need to suffer on their behalf if it does not result in their conversion... The reason for our cross experience is because Isaiah 25:7 tells us there is a veil that blinds the nations. That veil is over Israel just as much as it is over all nations. Though the veil has been torn, they have not entered in. There still remains a veil that needs to be broken off by a people who *have* entered in.

It is when that veil is rent off from Israel nationally that they are then able to receive the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. They will no longer harden their hearts, but now weep in both sorrow and ecstasy for Him and His coming. They will weep in repentance, because they have killed Him and all the prophets with Him. This is their testimony as a people: rejection of God that eventually culminated into killing God. They have always been stiff-necked and heard of heart. But on that day, when that veil that deceives and blinds them is taken away, they shall see all things as they in fact are. This is why we

wrestle against the principalities and powers. They are the deceivers and the ones who have kept that veil there for so long.

Israel's full redemption comes when that veil is taken away, and they see Him whom they have pierced and weep for Him. That first act of repentance is enough to cause them to then go and tear down all of the false idols that they have set up. "By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged: and this is all the fruit to take away his sin, when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, so that the idols and images shall not stand up," Isaiah 27:9. When they will destroy their idols – especially that dragon statue set up at the Temple in Revelation 13:14 – then their redemption has fully come.

They are gathered from the nations to come back to Israel (Psalm 107:2-3). God shall set up a banner for the nations when He gathers them from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 11:12). According to Isaiah 49:22-23, even the kings and queens of the earth shall bring them back upon their shoulders! This re-gathering of Israel will be such a moment that all people in all countries in all lands shall behold it and shall know the Lord is God. This happens in a day.

It will be so glorious that there are even prophecies like Jeremiah 23:7-8 where it is said that they will no longer say, "The Lord who brought us up out of Egypt," but will instead say "The Lord lives, who brought up and who led the seed of the House of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries to which they have been driven, that they shall dwell in their own land." As our Lord Jesus said, and as it says in Psalm 37:11, "The meek shall inherit the earth."

1000-year reign

During that 1000 years that Jesus reigns, He has specifically chosen to reign from Jerusalem and Zion. Zechariah 14:16 says that any nation that does not come to Jerusalem to partake in the Feast of Tabernacles will be cut off from the face of the earth. Psalm 50:2 says that out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines. Zechariah 8:23 reflects the same kind of heart that Psalm 65:1-3 shares, that peoples of all the earth shall clutch the skirt of a Jew saying, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Psalm 102:21-22 also seems to reflect those passages in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 that out of Zion shall the Law go forth, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem.

God's government is to be upon the hill of Zion, and His rule out of Jerusalem. That hill shall be higher than any other mountain in the entire world, but it isn't that this hill will grow to be taller than Everest. Everest will bow down and be made low, while at the same time the mountain of the Lord is exalted. If God is this jealous over a piece of Land, it behooves us to ask why. It isn't enough to simply expect that God chose because that is His prerogative. He chooses that which be like Him.

Israel shall be the priestly nation to the nations. What does that mean and what does it look like? I believe that just as Jacob came back to see the face of Esau, and said, "I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God," (Genesis 33:10), so shall

the people Israel say to all those that currently persecute her. Can you imagine what it would mean for Israel to embrace their enemies and weep over them?

I had the vision in mind of feet washing. Israel will go out to the nations as priests so that they might minister sacrifices unto God. That sacrifice is the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit. He desires mercy more than sacrifice. When that people will go to those nations, they will offer the sacrifice of love to be servants and embrace with many tears the very people that were their persecutors. In this, Israel will not have an inheritance like the nations have an inheritance – for the Lord is their inheritance.

We find in Deuteronomy 17:8-13 that the priests are the judges. Israel was to have a court system where the priest is the one who judges, and never some sort of “official,” or ruler. The priest is the ruler, and not a man who thinks himself to be worthy. This is also symbolic of the coming age when they shall be priests. They shall rule over all nations as that priestly nation. The reason is simple: a priest is only concerned with the things of God. For a priest to rule is for God to rule.

As it says in Psalm 18:43, “thou hast made me the head of the nations...” This is David speaking, but remember that God’s Kingdom is Davidic. A corporate David will at this time also be able to utter this verse – all the while following the true David: Jesus. They will be made the head of all nations, and, as the verse ends, a people whom I have not known shall serve me. This is the ultimate fulfillment of Noah’s prophecy in Genesis 9:26-27. The nations are enlarged, but they must come into the tent of Shem. That Shem people will be called Israel. We all need to be grafted into it, because Shem is the Hebrew word for name. We must all come into the tent of “The Name.” The Name is Jesus Christ, the only true Semite.

“Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord, thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee,” Isaiah 55:5. “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising,” Isaiah 60:1-3.

“Moreover, I shall make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the nations shall know that I, the Lord, do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore,” Ezekiel 37:26-28. It is when the nations see this phenomenon that they shall be redeemed.

But what is happening with the Church at this time? They are spiritual rulers. As it says in Isaiah 32:1, “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and *princes* shall rule in justice.” Who are these princes? They are those who are counted worthy of the first resurrection. Those that are raised up from the dead to rule and reign with Christ during that 1000 years do so in the spiritual places. Satan is bound by chains and thrown into a pit (Revelation 20:1-2, Isaiah 24:21-22). In his place are other rulers established. Those that have been found worthy of such an honor are ruling and reigning with Christ in the heavenly places over the earth.

This is the fullness of the Gentiles. When the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, then all Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:25-26). That fullness is a number (according to the Greek word used). It goes back to the Hebrew phrase mentioned only one time in the Old Testament: Genesis 48:19 – Ephraim will be a multitude of nations (fullness of Gentiles). When the full number has come in, it is precisely at that point that the Lord returns. I believe that this fullness being expressed is a number to sit and rule and reign with Christ during the first resurrection (Millennial Kingdom). When a set amount has come to complete maturity, then it is decided that the end shall be upon us. Until that set amount reach maturity, we continue to drag out the time.

The Kingdom is Within You

In Luke 17:21, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is within you. What could He possibly mean here? If we are to believe that what we've been learning up until now is only taking place within us, then I think we have severely been misled. It is the common teaching of many Charismatic leaders that this is precisely what the verse means. We take heaven with us. We bring the Kingdom wherever we go. The focus is completely self-oriented.

But if Jesus was not saying that it is inside of us and that we need to take it everywhere, then what was Jesus saying? We need to remember to always look at the context of what is being said. Jesus is asked about when the kingdom of God would come. His reply is that it doesn't come by observance, nor do people say, "Here it is." The Kingdom of God is within you (in your midst).

The point being made here is that the Kingdom is *not* something that we bring. Jesus saying that the Kingdom is within you (or in our midst) is making the statement to the Pharisees that He is the Messiah, and the Kingdom of God is established when He sits upon the throne of David in Zion. That is the whole point of the verse. And yet we take it to mean that we're important.

To rule over Israel is to rule over the nations because Israel is the most obdurate of all nations. For God to rule over that same people that said, "We do not want this man to rule over us," then God can rule over any and all nations. They have rejected Jesus for 2000 years. Part of that is the fault of the Church. We have not provided for them a sufficient reason for them to believe that He is Messiah. Even worse, we have persecuted them for much of that 2000 years – all the way down to the Nazi soldiers singing Christmas hymns and having their own version of "In God we trust" across their uniforms.

We find in Isaiah 2 as well as Micah 4 that the Law will go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem. When we say, "Thy Kingdom come," this is what we are saying. So if the nations, which are being led by demonic deception, can destroy that people and that land, then they can thwart the plans of God. Everything is hinged upon this. That city and that hill outside of the city are the locus of His Kingdom.

By and large, the phrase "Kingdom of God" has been spiritualized, and therefore we have robbed ourselves of the very content necessary to progress toward the end time

purposes. The Church is flabby, and all of our theological strings are quite loose. Even our “unity” is a loose unity. We are not so woven together as we would like to believe we are. And all of this would be fixed, the strings tightened, if we had just one perception: a coming Kingdom.

To have this view that we are headed toward a consummation, and that consummation has to do with the rule of God over creation, affects every other aspect of the faith. Our lives together, our view of the gifts of the Spirit, the role and function of the Spirit, understanding the character of God, what the offices (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher) look like and what their functions and rule facilitate; all of these things are properly understood under the context of theocracy.

Both the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus were saturated with teachings of the Kingdom of God being at hand. There isn't anywhere a hint that the people questioned what that meant. There seems to be an understanding that was among the Jewish people of what it meant for God's kingdom to be here and now. And we read in the words of Jesus that because He casts out devils, we know that the Kingdom of God is indeed at hand (Luke 11:20). There is some sort of conjunction between the overcoming of the spiritual powers of darkness and the Kingdom of God being at hand.

In that time, Jesus was establishing that the Kingdom had indeed come. But it does not mean that the Kingdom had yet fully come. Jesus displayed that the Kingdom had come in demonstrations of power and mastery over the powers of darkness. But there is an ultimate fulfillment of when the Kingdom comes and they are abolished. The Kingdom fully comes when Jesus sits upon the throne of David as the King of Israel, and the theocratic kingdom of God has been established over all nations.

In Isaiah chapter 24, it speaks in the last few verses about a time when the kings and rulers of this world will be tied up and thrown into a pit for an extended period of time. This is reiterated in Revelation 20. We discover that these kings and rulers that are tied up are not natural or political kings and rulers, but instead is Satan himself. The whole demonic presence is abolished. In their place, a new government is established.

This is the understanding of the spiritual kingdom. It is physical, yes, but it also has a spiritual aspect. The Kingdom of God being established means the devastation of the kingdom of darkness. If we are currently brought into that Kingdom, then we too ought to have the authority necessary to heal the sick, cast out demons, and work the manifest will of God. That requires that we know the manifest will of God.

We must have such a perception and understanding of this mystery that we can discern when someone is sick and when they are demonically possessed. We need to have maturity enough to know the difference between the powers of darkness and human forces. We ultimately do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but where is the dividing line between a man who is doing something because of demonic influence and a man doing something because of demonic possession? Where is the dividing line between human depravity and demonic manipulation? Those that are of the Kingdom of God are coming to an increased understanding of where the divide lies. Those that are not Kingdom oriented, but instead are self-oriented, will not even think to ask such a question. Demonic influence means demonic possession to such people, and they will never see the overcoming of the powers of darkness so long as they remain in that state.

Angelic Pronouncement

We find even in the proclamations of the angels at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke a message of a new government to be established. “And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end,” Luke 1:30-33.

We find this is a reflection of what was proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this,” Isaiah 9:6-7.

Note that both times there is a mention of the throne of David. I’m not sure about you, but the mention of government causes me to want to recoil. To think that God wants to set up a government seems to cause queasiness. That word has been so perverted in our day. We think of men lining their pocket. We think of greed. Maybe this is why the Scriptures often speak of the government of God as being righteous and just. Maybe this is why many of the promises of the Messiah speak of justice and equality.

It is easy to see how men have taken government and corrupted it. But when God establishes government, there is no corruption. And why is it that when we think of God, we often are in error by thinking spiritually, lofty, and ethereally? It is cheap and easy to say that God is beyond understanding. But this cannot be so. He has done everything He knows how to do to cause Himself to be known. One day He won’t simply be some sort of “out of mind” and impossible to understand being. He will actually sit upon a throne and rule over the nations.

That rule and government is in keeping with God’s essential character. The Davidic character is Jesus’ character. So when we read about the throne of David, we’re reading about a certain kind of kingdom. This kingdom is not a kingdom that brings peace simply because God rules. It brings peace because God is peace. It brings joy because God is our joy. It brings justice because God is just. It brings righteousness because God is righteous.

Who God is in actuality is what the kingdom of God will be. There is a strange verse in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul asserts, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” We can couple this with 1 John 3:2, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” It is at the coming of Jesus that we shall be changed into our glorified bodies, and it is not at the rapture. From these texts, I actually assert there is no rapture in the sense of escaping.

And so what is it that is meant when we read 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then, face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known?” It has been taught that when we get to eternity we will know everything. This is not true. It is upon seeing Jesus and His character *as it is*, not as through a glass darkly, that we will be changed into His likeness – pure. Our knowledge and morality and character are based entirely upon the knowledge of God as He in fact is, and not as we think Him to be.

When we come to that perception of God as He in fact is, we will be transfigured and glorified as He is glorified. Our rule and reign with Him is solely based upon our own resurrection from the dead. To the extent that we experience that transfiguring of character *now* will we be given authority to rule *then*. We will know even as we are also known. What does that mean? Let us look at Matthew 17 briefly. We find the transfiguration of Jesus, and He speaks with Elijah and Moses. But there isn’t any mention of the disciples knowing it is Elijah and Moses because their names are used. How do the disciples know that it is Elijah and Moses, and not Enoch?

In all of the accounts (Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9), the only thing mentioned is that they “appeared.” Their appearance was of glory. I would like to submit that maybe the reason the disciples knew it was Moses and Elijah was not because Jesus used their names, but because of their appearance. The glory that they emitted was essentially Elijah, essentially Moses. No one else would have that kind of appearance. “When we are known” indicates to me that our appearance in glorified form will speak for us. Others will not ask who we are. They will know by our appearance, because we will be transparent. Our appearance in glory will be the core of who we are.

When we are known in that sort of way, we will be able to see Jesus as He in fact is. That knowledge of knowing Jesus at the very core – unadulterated – is the very knowledge that equips us to teach and rule and govern. When we are no longer confused about God’s character in certain issues, and we can therefore speak to different issues in the Church, then we have come to a place of being able to rule and reign. This perception requires that we know God in communion. We must know Him in our deepest depth, and be known of Him in our deepest depths. Deep cries unto deep, and if the core fabric of who we are is never exposed to allow God the place of dwelling, then we will be unfitted for that resurrection reality of ruling and reigning with Christ.

The Book of Acts

It says in Acts 1:3 that, “He shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Isn’t it remarkable that of all the subjects that could have been spoken of, only one is mentioned? Jesus spoke with His disciples about the Kingdom of God. Maybe this is because that one subject is the all-inclusive and central subject. It almost leads us to wonder how much can really be said on the Kingdom of God? Yet it is the only subject mentioned that Jesus spoke of for 40 days.

Little wonder, then, why it says in verse 6, “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom

to Israel?” After speaking with His disciples for 40 days on the Kingdom of God, they ask Him if this is when He will restore the Kingdom to Israel. Isn’t this the time that we would expect Jesus to shoot down that kind of Jewish nationalistic pride? Jesus’ answer actually doesn’t imply this. His answer seems to indicate that the question itself is legitimate. The only thing that needs to be considered and understood is its timing.

“And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” The question itself was totally valid. It was exactly what the Scriptures teach. After speaking about the Scriptures for 40 days, don’t you think the disciples would at least have understood that much?

And even in the answer, we read that Jesus is pinpointing Jerusalem. Jesus says that they will be witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem *first*, and then in Judea, and then in Samaria, and then to the uttermost part of the earth. Do you see the progression? It goes from Jerusalem being the central place, and slowly makes its way outward from there. Jesus actually validates the question, and that ought to cause for our consideration.

For the rest of the Book of Acts, we find that this same question is addressed. The Kingdom of God is preached as the Gospel. It is then validated by the powers of darkness being overpowered. There are healings, miracles, and demonic deliverances throughout the Book of Acts. The whole thing is rich with displaying the Kingdom of God in power. The only thing that is not there is Jesus bodily. There is not a literal rule over Israel through Jesus. The reason for this is simple. When He shall rule, He shall rule over all Israel. All Israel must be saved, and yet not all of Israel yet believed on Him.

Acts 2

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the

Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

These words of Peter are to be best understood in the context of the Kingdom of God. They are apocalyptic in their origin. Peter, and all who were at Jerusalem, knew the Scriptures. They knew that there would be a time of judgment upon Israel before the coming of the King. They knew that Zechariah declared only a third of all those in Jerusalem would survive the end time apocalypse. They knew that Isaiah spoke of 90% of Israel being empty. Out of the tenth of the people that remain in the Land, only a third of them would survive. The rest of the people Israel would be scattered through the wilderness places of the nations.

It is only upon that remnant that survives that will then return to the Land and be ruled over by the Messiah. How do you know who will survive? God preserves only those who are clean in heart. All of the wicked will perish. Over and over again the Scriptures indicate that God will cleanse Israel of her sins. He declares that He will completely abolish the wicked rulers and the wicked men that blaspheme and desecrate His name among the nations.

This is why the decree is made by Peter to come out from this wicked generation. That generation isn't simply to say those alive in that moment. There is an unbroken continuum of a generation that grumbled against God in the wilderness. This is why Paul states, "not all Israel are Israel." There is a remnant. And then there is a remnant *within* the remnant. Those who call upon Christ are no longer the same as those who are a part

of national Israel. They have been somehow taken out of Israel and made into something different, but all the while they are now the deeper representation of Israel.

Israel is first spiritual. Those that are spiritual Israel are Israel indeed. But there are Jews that are not in Christ, yet are within a remnant that shall be saved. Peter is calling to that remnant that is yet to surrender to the Messiah Jesus. He is warning that the time is now and at hand when destruction and devastation is coming. It is true that it has been almost 2000 years and we have not seen that calamity yet. The mystery had not yet been revealed that there should be an age of the Church to fulfill a specific role and function. It has been almost 2000 years and we are finding ourselves back in the same place that Peter proclaimed this message from.

The enemies of Israel that are to overpower them are surrounding the land. The fulfillment of these prophecies cannot have come with the Holocaust. They *must* have been ejected out of their land. That did not happen with the Holocaust. Ezekiel 22:19-22 seems to indicate that there would be a time near the end when Israel would be re-gathered, only so that God can pour out His wrath upon them. I think that this is what we are seeing today. God has gathered Israel back to the Land, and is continuing to gather them, until the decreed time to pour out His vengeance upon them. This collecting is not the final gathering of which they will never be uprooted again. The accumulation that we are seeing play out before our eyes is for Israel to be destroyed. The present, political state of Israel is indeed, in every way, the nation of (and national fulfillment of) prophecy, but not yet the nation of promise.

And isn't it interesting that Peter quotes Joel? We find that in Joel, it is at this moment that God pours out His Spirit that the judgment comes! Yet we don't stop there. If you are a student of the Word, you will also know that Paul has said that this Spirit that we received is only a *foretaste* of the true fulfillment of that verse. We have received a portion as a down payment, if you will, but there is a pouring out of that Spirit to come at the end of the age that will eclipse what we see and understand now. Many of our churches that practice the Spiritual gifts abuse them. They think that the Spirit is poured out so that we can have some sort of thrill or titillation. Heaven forbid that we even start to think that what we see practiced in our Charismatic churches even slightly resembles what we see in the Book of Acts.

Our Christianity today is absolutely anemic in comparison to the Book of Acts. And yet, it is from that very context that Paul speaks. At the first, which might actually be the fullest representation that the Church has ever known, is when we read Paul writing that the Spirit was given as a foretaste of things to come. What, then, must it be like at the end? The Tribulation time will be a time of great persecution and suffering. Many of us will go to our deaths. They will beat us, imprison us, kill us, and torture us, and that will be our crown. I dare not even think what might befall my family or myself lest I sin.

It is in that time of extreme adversity and suffering that the Spirit will be poured out. We have a difficult time even finding enough strength of the Spirit to overcome our lust and pornography addictions. How will we survive something as gruesome and terrible as the Tribulation without falling away? It is only by the empowering of the Spirit in a way that we have not yet experienced, nor began to fathom. When Israel falls, Jesus told us to look up, for our redemption draws near. Maybe the reason for our looking up is

not so much to see if Jesus is coming, but to receive that strength that has been promised to equip us through that time.

But this kind of pouring out of the Spirit will not be contained to the Church. It will continue on after we have been resurrected. During the Millennial Kingdom, Israel will have that benefit of the filling of the Spirit. They will enjoy the very blessing that we enjoy – the new covenant. It will be their joy and their honor. In order to fulfill their purpose as the priestly nation to the nations, they will need that Spirit. Men will clutch to the skirt of a Jew and say, “Take us with you, for you know God,” Zechariah 8:23.

We can continue through Peter’s statement about how David had prophesied about the coming Messiah. He spoke of one who should not die and see corruption, yet David’s tomb was known. But this Jesus’ tomb was also known. When Peter spoke of His resurrection, no one dared challenge it. No one went and got the body. The reason is because the body wasn’t there. Jesus really did rise from the dead.

We continue to find the statement about how Jesus now sits on the right hand of the Father. This is the same statement that Stephen made while he was being tried. When those who opposed him heard that statement, they stopped their ears and ran upon him. Gnashing their teeth like wild dogs, they stoned him. Interestingly, we read in verse 36 that it is actually because Jesus is at the right hand of power that we recognize Him as both Lord and Messiah. He went down, and therefore He was exalted. When it is the wisdom of Satan to egotistically and violently try to take by force the Kingdom, it is by God’s wisdom to humble self and die in order to be raised up and exalted.

The very word Messiah means anointed king. Jesus is both Lord and King because He has forfeited His life. It is after humility that we are then exalted. Ultimate humility brings us to a place of ultimate authority. This is why we needed to study so vast an array of subjects before we could even start to plunge into the texts dealing with Jesus and His Kingdom on this Earth. And what kind of indictment is it that those who are able to see do not recognize Jesus as a Son of David, and yet the blind man in the streets could not be shut up when continuously crying, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me?”

Psalm 22

Psalm 22 was quoted by Jesus when He hung upon the cross. It starts out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It goes through the whole of the crucifixion narrative. Yet, it ends with “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD’S: and he *is* the governor among the nations. All *they that be* fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done *this*.”

Isn’t it interesting that the conclusion of this Psalm would be that all nations would worship God? The whole of Israel’s history seems to indicate this. All the way back at the promise of Abraham we can read that God’s intention was to bless all the

nations of the earth (Genesis 12:3). We cannot understand blessing as something that is a high five or some sort of wealth or something that would cause the nations to now have peace and enjoy self. Blessing is only blessing when it brings us into relationship with Christ and an ultimate fulfillment of His intentions and purposes for us. Abraham's descendants are to bring the nations *that* kind of blessing.

We find this even in the prophets. Amos 9 has all of the judgment to fall upon Israel, and that they will be sifted through all nations. But the chapter concludes with the return to the land and the tabernacle of David being restored. Many Charismatic believers have then taken that and used it as a way to teach on Davidic worship. This passage is speaking of so much more than worship. It says that Edom will come up, and so will all the nations that know God, be possessed by the remnant of Israel. The tabernacle of David is the throne of David. Nothing short of the Messiah ruling the Kingdom of God fulfills that prophecy.

Psalm 149

¹ Praise ye the LORD.
Sing unto the LORD a new song,
and his praise in the congregation of saints.
² Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:
let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
³ Let them praise his name in the dance:
let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.
⁴ For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people:
he will beautify the meek with salvation.
⁵ Let the saints be joyful in glory:
let them sing aloud upon their beds.
⁶ Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,
and a twoedged sword in their hand;
⁷ to execute vengeance upon the heathen,
and punishments upon the people;
⁸ to bind their kings with chains,
and their nobles with fetters of iron;
⁹ to execute upon them the judgment written:
this honour have all his saints.
Praise ye the LORD.

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. This reference to a King in verse two is in direct relation to their Maker. This is not a king of Israel that we will find in Kings or Chronicles. This is Jesus the Messiah. The reason that they are rejoicing is not because of some random king upon the throne. *The* King is upon the throne. The greater than David has come. The Messiah rules and reigns, and because of *that*, the increase of His government shall have no end (as we read in Isaiah chapter 9).

Israel in her restored condition works out the rule of God to the nations as an earthly nation. But there is a glorified Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. We read in Revelation 20 about a first resurrection. The word *first* would seem to indicate that there will be a *second*. We are told in Revelation 20:4-6 that those who are beheaded by the beast are found worthy to rule with Christ for 1000 years. But those who are not found worthy continue to sleep through the 1000 years until the judgment seat.

In order to be found worthy of this first resurrection, we are not necessarily required to die at the hands of the Antichrist. Daniel was promised this resurrection (see the last verse of the book of Daniel). I had pointed out in the chapter on Babylon that there is an unbroken continuum between Babylon and the kingdom of the Antichrist. To oppose the kingdom of darkness in a way that you are not protecting your life, but allowing a sense of fragility, you are a candidate for that first resurrection. Who will and will not make it is God's decision and not mine.

Those who make it into this first resurrection will rule and reign with Christ. This is not the physical rule and reign as performed through Israel. We are ruling in the spiritual places through our now glorified (resurrected) bodies. We replace those false judges mentioned in chapter 3 of this writing (the section on Psalm 82), which are the principalities and powers. Now we rule in the heavenly places. We bring justice and righteousness, which the demonic forces never have brought.

This is totally lost to the modern day saints. If we understood the reward that could be ours, maybe we would strive with more diligence to achieve that reward. According to the character and maturity that we reach in this life we will be given authority and rule. That is why Jesus has said that some will rule over five cities and some will rule over ten. The eschatological framework and understanding of a *coming* kingdom gives us sufficient encouragement to put all of our chips in.

This is also why Abraham is mentioned in the New Testament as being a pilgrim and stranger in the land. In Hebrews 11 we read of His faith to look for a city whose foundations and builder is God (verse 8). He never received that land. His offspring have not yet received that land. That still awaits him in the Millennial Kingdom to possess as his inheritance. This is why the writer of Hebrews tells us to run the race with all diligence in Hebrews 12:1-2. Beholding *this great cloud of witnesses*, we press forward.

Many of us today could not dictate our way out of a paper bag, let alone rule. We have not even learned how to take charge and rule over our own households. Church discipline is most critical. If we cannot even settle matters as brothers, then how are we supposed to rule in that age? This is why Paul got so mad at the Church in Corinth. They were not even able to exercise church discipline. And *they* are supposed to judge the angels? They can't even judge among themselves!

The ability to rule in and through the Spirit of God is not something that comes naturally or automatically at the end of the age. We don't somehow pass through the fire and now we know everything and are able to understand everything. What we obtain to in God in this life will be our eternal blessing or our eternal shame. I'm not talking about sin. This is beyond a sin issue. This gets down deep into the fabric of our beings. Are we able to, from our deep communion with God, rule and govern in such a way that it displays the character of Christ?

In Psalm 149, we find in verse four that God crowns the humble. Jesus said that the meek are blessed because they will inherit the earth. But Proverbs tells us that it is a shameful thing for a servant to rule. There is a difference between when the Lord appoints the humble and when someone underneath comes up and appoints himself. The Lord searches the hearts. He knows what true humility is. If we think that we can fake this and appear to be humble, but we are really out for our own benefit and name's sake, then we will never inherit the Kingdom.

Isaiah 2

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² And it shall come to pass in the last days,
that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established
in the top of the mountains,
and shall be exalted above the hills;
and all nations shall flow unto it.

³ And many people shall go and say,
Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
and he will teach us of his ways,
and we will walk in his paths:
for out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ And he shall judge among the nations,
and shall rebuke many people:
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks:
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵ O house of Jacob, come ye,
and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Focus on these verses. We don't even get past the second verse before we have the words, "all nations shall flow unto it." The mountain of the Lord's temple – Zion – shall be lifted above all the other hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. It says in Zechariah 14:16 that any nation that does not come up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles will be cut off from the face of the earth. This is God's remedy. In order to solve the crisis of all the national pride and dispute that ushers from the nations' rebellion, God ordains that Israel will be the focal point, and Jerusalem will be the nucleus. If this is the establishment of God's peace, then it needs to be crucial for our consideration.

At the end of Ezekiel 37, we find that after the dry bones have been resurrected, Ezekiel is called upon to take two sticks and make them one in his hand. These two sticks represent Judah and Ephraim. They shall, in the last days, be joined together again, and one King shall rule over them both.

It is in the uniting together of Judah and Ephraim that a more full Israel is produced. In the same way, when the nations are united to Israel in the hierarchy of God, a more full Kingdom is produced. True peace is established when the hierarchy of God is established. When the nations and all people – including Israel – humble self to submit under the established order of God, then world peace has come upon us. It is heaven on earth. The millennial reign of Christ is nothing short of heaven manifest upon the earth.

Psalm 2

¹ Why do the heathen rage,
and the people imagine a vain thing?
² The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,
³ Let us break their bands asunder,
and cast away their cords from us.
⁴ He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:
the Lord shall have them in derision.
⁵ Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath,
and vex them in his sore displeasure.
⁶ Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.
⁷ I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me,
Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.
⁸ Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance,
and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.
⁹ Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron;
thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.
¹⁰ Be wise now therefore, O ye kings:
be instructed, ye judges of the earth.
¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry,
and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

In the first couple verses we see two things being addressed. The heathen and the people, the kings and the rulers, why the repetition? It is my belief that we're not dealing with kings and rulers in the sense that the king appoints others under him that also rule. I think that these are statements of both earthly and heavenly kings and rulers. One is physical; the other is spiritual. We see politicians striving to stay in political power as long as they can. There is something about ruling in a political way that gives a sense of power. It gives a false sense of prestige. It draws men to covetousness.

If this is true for earthly kings, then how much more for the principalities and powers? They don't want to forfeit their position. And so the nations rage and conspire a vain thing. Those very nations that rebel and strive with all of their might to continue in a

place of rule and government shall be overpowered and brought under the government of God. Those same nations that are rooted in pride and exultation shall be brought low and be submissive.

This was actually prophesied by Noah. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, Noah curses Canaan and blesses his other two sons. The reason that Noah does not curse Ham is because it is much more cruel to curse Ham's firstborn. Now it isn't just Ham that is cursed, but his seed and inheritance along with him. But in the blessings on Shem and Japheth, we find words of prophecy that I don't think I've ever heard or read commented on outside of one source. Every time that it is come to, it is quickly glossed over.

“And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant,” Genesis 9:26-27. What does it mean to dwell in the tents of Shem? It is from the lineage of Shem that Abraham comes. We read in Romans 11 that we as Gentiles are grafted into that root. To dwell in the tents of Shem is to dwell in the House of Israel. But we can't simply leave it at that.

Shem is a spiritual condition more than a person or patriarch. Jesus Himself is the sole human being to live Shem-like in character. The way that He achieved it was in going *down* into death to be raised *up* unto glory. In order for we who are Japheth to dwell in the tents of Shem requires resurrection. Even Israel is a Japheth people. Shem is not obtained because of your lineage. It is not your right to be a Shem people. This is a spiritual condition that is only awarded to those that humble self unto death.

It was upon that day that Jesus humbled Himself unto death that the decree went forth, “Thou art my Son; this day I have begotten thee.” As it happened with Jesus, so it shall happen with all of humanity. The day that we go to our deaths at the end of the age will be the day that we will be declared as sons of God, mature enough to co-rule and reign with Him. The day that Israel goes down to death will be the day that she is decreed as the daughter of Zion, and she will be the priestly nation to the nations. It is all about humility before exaltation.

This kind of lust for power that is exerted by the principalities and powers is the very thing that jerks and manipulates the nations. We are finding that the restraint that God holds out to those nations is being taken away. The corruption and the wickedness of the nations are ever increasing to a point of no return. It is upon that point of no return that God pulls back His hand and allows the Antichrist to be established.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth,

and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness,” 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

There are so many people that have questioned what it is that restrains the Antichrist from coming. Some have speculated that it is the Holy Spirit, and so there must be a rapture to occur before the Antichrist can come. I don't think so. I think that God is the restrainer. He is holding back the powers of darkness from sending the world into absolute darkness. He is allowing the sin of the world to continue to fill the cup of wrath before completely taking Himself out of the way.

When God releases His hand, Satan will actually have the ability and authority to rule over this world. There is a key timing that this happens. It happens precisely 3 ½ years into the Tribulation. We know this from a few sources. The book of Daniel tells us that it is when the abomination of desolation is set up (Daniel 9:27) that the Antichrist is established. Before this, we are told that the Antichrist is a little horn (or political ruler). It is upon taking over Israel that he is then promoted to being the world leader.

Another parallel is also in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 11, we are given more details. It is specifically verse 31 (which we just saw was half way through the Tribulation) that tells us the Antichrist is set up. Verses 31-39 are all simultaneous, or at least near simultaneous. It is when the Antichrist stops the sacrifice and desecrates the temple that he sets himself up as god. It is at that time that the decree is made to kill the Jews. It is from “the wise” taking them in (which we saw earlier is the Church) that he puts to death the wise.

We read in Daniel 12 that when Michael stands up the end is coming. The time of distress is the last 3 ½ years. There is another place in the Bible where Michael stands up. The only other place in the Bible that says this is Revelation 12. When Michael stands up, Satan is cast out of heaven. He is no longer allowed before God. So when Satan is confined to the earth below, then the Antichrist is established. God is restraining this for now. But the time is soon coming when He will take away His hand. The evidence is in the fact that the nations are already stirring into greater degrees of anti-Semitism and violence and wickedness. Even children are being corrupt.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Kingdom of God is officially and fully the Kingdom of God when Jesus the Messiah rules and reigns over the nations from Jerusalem. There is still the rest of Revelation 20-22 left to read, though. As much as it is true that Christ's 1000-year rule over the kingdoms of the earth is heaven, it is not the absolute full expression of Heaven. It is the full expression of the Kingdom, but there awaits us one more chapter in which we must search out what it will be like in Heaven.

Not everyone will experience this 1000-year reign of Christ. Some of the saints remain asleep until the judgment seat, in which they are then raised and must wait to see if their names are written in the Lamb's book of Life. In order to experience this Kingdom manifestation upon the earth, you must achieve that resurrection. The only way that I know how to fully expect to achieve that resurrection would be to live absolutely like Christ has taught us to live.

The issue of the Kingdom is the issue of wisdom. If we will live by a different wisdom and value system than the world, then we will inherit the Kingdom. However, if we are not able to forsake this world, then we will remain asleep. The issue of judgment does not come down to whether we have gifts of administration, or if we had a job that taught us good business skills. The issue of government rests solely upon humility. The meek will inherit the earth. This is the only test. Our meekness will define whether or not we are truly ready to rule and reign with Christ, or if we will need to wait until Heaven to experience life in unity with Him.

To enter heaven a man must take it with him.

-Henry Drummond

If the song in heaven is "holy, holy, holy," then the song in Hell must be: The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved.

-Leonard Ravenhill quoting Jeremiah 8:20

They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies.

-William Penn

"We shall have all eternity in which to celebrate our victories, but we have only one swift hour before the sunset in which to win them."

-Robert Moffatt

XII. Eternal Rule and Reign with Christ

When do the saints that remain asleep through the 1000-year reign of Christ become unified with those other saints that have already been resurrected? And what about Israel? Do they ever have a resurrection? These things happen after the judgment seat. Those that are found in the book of Life are resurrected unto glory, and those that don't have their names written there are cast into the lake of fire. The one is a resurrection unto life; the other is called the second death.

There is never a place in the Bible where it mentions a "second resurrection." As mentioned in the last chapter, the term "first resurrection" seems to imply that there is a second. Upon the gaining of our glorified bodies, we are able to endure the face of God. We are able to stand in His presence. There is no darkness, no stars, no moon, and no sun. God is the light of the world. In Genesis 2:24, we find the infamous Scripture that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

I think that this happens with Israel and the Church. The two cleave together and become "one." We find in Revelation 21 a description of the city of God. In verse 12, we find that there are twelve gates to the city. On the twelve gates are written the twelve tribes of Israel. We find in verse 14 that there are twelve foundations to the city. The foundations are the twelve apostles. The city itself is called the Bride of Christ (verse 9) and the Holy City Jerusalem (verse 10).

The Church and Israel are now together as one. Somehow it is neither called the Church nor Israel, but is something else entirely. It is called a Holy City. The two have become one, and therefore they are beyond what either ever could have been alone. They complete each other in a way that causes for glory beyond comprehension. The City itself radiates light. Though God is the light of it, it appears as though the City also has a light (verse 11). The light is the glory of God. This Bride is a perfect reflection of the Divine, in that she is no longer a depiction of separation or enmity, but of unity.

Spirit and Flesh

Paul made the statement that we are like seeds. We do not know what we will blossom into in the life to come. You cannot tell what a flower will look like by its seed. We cannot tell what we will be like when we have come into those new glorified bodies. We see in Revelation 21:2 this Holy City coming down out of heaven onto the earth. Spirit and flesh have been made one. Somehow they are no longer fighting each other, but as Job has said, "In my flesh, I shall see God."

Just like Israel and the Church becoming one somehow causes for a glory beyond comprehension, so too is it when Spirit and flesh are able to find unity together. In being united, they are able to display something fuller than either were able to display before. It is in the completion of Spirit and flesh becoming united – one together – that we can better understand the last verse in Ephesians 1: we are the fullness of Him who fills all things. We are a full representation of God, even in a body that has been resurrected.

The crazy thing about it is that in Revelation 21 and 22, we seem to find the Church as God's equal. Paul mentions in Ephesians 2:6 that we currently are seated with Christ in heavenly places. He mentions elsewhere that we are co-heirs with Christ. Somehow, when we are no longer individuals all separated, but are instead one, we are depicting something of glory. Further, when we are no longer Israel and the Church, but are now the New Jerusalem – the Holy City – the Bride of Christ – we are now displaying a further degree of God. When we reach Revelation 21 and 22, we are no longer flesh and spirit warring against one another, but are now a unified Body – corporately – that is neither ruled by flesh, nor by spirit. The result is something altogether other, and God so identifies with that corporate entity that He actually seems to indicate that *it* has Divinity.

Notice what I'm saying here. There is something about that Bride – not of us individually – that so represents God, that He has actually exalted it to a place of stature, and a name above other names, that He calls it part of Himself. Just as Jesus was resurrected and thus given a name above every name – including the name of the Father – we are resurrected and brought into unity in such a way with God and man, flesh and Spirit, Israel and Church, man and woman, black and white, cross-national, and any other distinction or separation that God then exalts us as He exalted Christ.

This is something that I believe we have not attained unto yet. I do not preach or teach that we are Divine – especially in an individual manner. There will be a time, after the end of the world, where we will somehow see a resurrection of the entire cosmos. During that time, God promotes His Body to a place of stature that we are now considered Divine. To the rest of the creation, there is no separation between God and we. To see us is to see God. God and we have become one – literally.

This ought to cause us to put aside vainglories. Anything that would hinder us from that kind of relationship and communion with God in this life should be cast aside. If there is coming a day where we will be so like Jesus that we are considered heirs with Him, then anything that would keep us from that reality here and now is to be violently opposed. If our churches are not united, then we need to repent and desperately seek the God who has torn down the dividing wall of hostility. If we are somehow racist or elitist, then we need to repent and cast ourselves upon the mercy of God.

If the ultimate reality and our eternal reward is to be one with God in a way that we are no longer “only human,” then this changes everything. Our character and conduct need to be governed from that reality, even though we have not yet attained unto it. How will we be fitted for such a seat if we are not willing to be changed in this life? God has given us everything we need in order to achieve this here and now. Jesus was tempted in every area that we were tempted. What does that mean? I have heard that some would say that Jesus didn't have sin nature. They argue that He might have possibly sinned if He had sin nature. But that is the marvelous thing: He *did* have sin nature, and didn't sin.

God's nature is pure. Jesus, from eternity past, has had fellowship with God the Father in purity, love, obedience, and righteousness. He is holy. When Jesus became man, He continued in that same nature. It was against His nature to do anything else. He had such communion with God the Father as to not be led away to the right or to the left over “sin nature.” He was perfect from eternity past, but was made perfect even in His flesh in that He learned obedience and overcame even sin nature.

We, who have not this nature from eternity past, have been given such hope. We have been offered that same freedom and perfection that Jesus knew as a man on this earth. Because He did it, and because He has given us that same Spirit that helped Him to obtain unto perfection, we also have the ability to know that perfection. Yet, it seems like not only do many of us lack the faith to believe that, we also lack the desire to be that. I can't help but wonder if there will somehow be those that are technically saved, and they technically are not cast into the lake of fire, but they also have not come into this reality.

Ruling and Reigning

Revelation 22 speaks of a river of life. It flows from the throne of God. On each side there is a tree of life, bearing twelve types of fruit – a different one each month. It says in verse 2 that the leaves on the tree are for the healing of the nations. Why are there nations in Heaven? Haven't all people now come under the Head? Aren't all people a part of this Holy City? Where do the nations come from?

Even in Heaven there are nations to rule over. We find in Revelation 22:4 that those who make up the New Jerusalem shall rule and reign with Christ forever. This is the eternal reward. We are given a place of government to rule alongside of Christ. The best that I can figure is that there are people that have escaped the flames of Hell, but have not come to a place of maturity in order to rule and reign with Christ in the same manner that the Bride is ruling.

So the nations that are represented must go up to the City of God to take of the leaves from the tree of life. Parallel this with Genesis 3. Adam and Eve sinned. They then took fig leaves and sowed them together to make coverings. But this wasn't sufficient. They made their own religion on how to cover themselves before God. At the end, the nations that are technically righteous enough to be in Heaven, but have not gained the character necessary to bear the light and face of God, must go up to the City in order to take of the leaves of the tree of life in order to find healing.

Those who have been found worthy and *do* have the character necessary to discern and judge and teach the ways of God go out to the world to subdue it and teach people of the ways of righteousness. This is very possibly the most controversial and profound teaching that has ever bubbled up into my consciousness. It is still a fresh idea in my mind, and so I'm not entirely sure how to present it. When we see in Genesis 2 that Adam was told to tend the Garden, we see quite clearly that the language is starkly different in Revelation 21 and 22. We aren't "tending the Earth." We aren't just making sure all is well. There is a government in place. There is somehow a rule and a subduing.

Everything that I have been classically taught about Heaven goes against this. I have always pictured Heaven as some sort of worship service in the clouds. But what I see Scripture indicating is some sort of government. The final defeat of the powers of darkness in Revelation 20 leads right into the judgment seat, which then leads right into the New Heaven and New Earth. There is no more curse. So we aren't talking about teaching people to not sin. What, then are we teaching?

I think that what we're teaching and what we're governing is something closer to God's character. We teach those nations and those people that have not attained to such glory to make it into the City how to live. The character necessary for *that* City is absolute perfection. We need to be completely purged of anything and everything that is not of God. This isn't about sin. It is about the wisdom of the age versus the wisdom of God. God's character and value system is what predicates to what proximity from the Throne that we will be.

Anyone who does not attain to that absolute emptying of self in order to take the absolute filling of the Spirit will not be able to handle the intensity of being within that City. The grace and character that we achieve in Christ *now* will actually affect who we are *then*. There is no going back. Who we are when we die is who we will be standing before Christ at the judgment seat. If we have allowed our souls to be somehow bitter or untrue, we will show that bitterness and untruth before Christ. When we stand before Him, we will be seen as we truly are. I don't think there will be some sort of a screen that we will watch all of the events of history. I think that the very essence of who we are will be before all. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit. So those who are technically saved will have good fruit to endure.

The question is whether those who are technically saved, but were still shaped by the world, are of the caliber to withstand the light and glory of God. Is there somehow some sort of "purging flame" that we all walk through? Maybe the truth is more that we will then know as we are known. If we are not able to know ourselves even now, because the pain is too much to bear, and the truth of our condition is too grievous to look at, then we will see ourselves at that time for what we really are. The truth of our condition will be laid bare before all others. They will see us as we are, and not as we want to be seen.

In that day, the Day of Judgment, God will ask for an answer. Why is it that we have not been willing to be cleansed more thoroughly? Why did we allow ourselves to be consumed with "blind spots" and things of the past that shaped us? This day won't only be to judge those that have not attained unto the first resurrection. Even those who *have* attained shall stand before God. They won't be judged, but they will give an account. Did I not see the truth of my brother's condition? Was I so pusillanimous that I would not confront? Was I so spineless that I cherished their feelings over their eternal condition?

Jesus said to the Pharisees that He would not judge them. Moses would judge them. Because they had so held to the words of Moses, Moses will in that day stand up and give an account against them. If we want to hold so highly the words of Paul, then Paul will judge us. Similarly, if we think that we are somehow accountable only to those that are pastors or of the same spiritual quality as we, then those who were babes in the faith will stand up and condemn us. Those who have spoken, but we wouldn't listen will stand up and tell Jesus, "Well, they did know, because I told them..."

There will be no excuse for why we do not make it into that Holy City. God has given us every need and resource to make it. The only reason we won't be a part of that City is because we have rejected God. If that is true for us, even if we are technically saved, then how true will it be for those that are not saved? Who will the Bride rule over? She will rule with her Husband, Jesus, over anyone and everyone that was unable to handle the light of God, and was therefore placed into outer darkness.

What does the rule of God look like? It is humble. It is meek. It is gentle. If the image in your mind is somehow an angry savior that will now exercise authority and judgment over you like the heathen exercise, then you only show your ignorance. If you have that kind of ignorance, then how great is your lack of the knowledge of God? We will rule in the character of God. Jesus set aside His deity. When He said, “The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve,” this was not a statement of His “first” advent. This was a statement of His character.

Jesus’ character doesn’t change. He still comes to serve. We aren’t going to rule over the nations with an iron rod in the sense that we will beat and punish all who are disobedient. We will exert the nature that we are. In our exerting God’s character through and through, we will teach and rule. Because of our humility and our character, we will have authority. There will be no question of that authority because our characters and our lives display the glory to which we have attained. That glory is what changes others. To paraphrase what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “beholding each other’s faces we are changed from glory to glory.”

So I don’t have all the answers. I interpret the Scriptures in part and prophesy in part. Down in the deeps of my gut I can sense that what it means to be a part of that City is complete translucence. What that even means I can only begin to unpack. The streets are of pure gold, so pure that they are like glass. How do we achieve such a state of character and being? It takes an absolute refinement from the Ultimate Refiner.

Are we willing to allow God to throw at us whatever necessary to purify us? He knows how to cause us to move from glory to glory. It is a difficult path to take, and by even saying, “Yes,” to that question, you mark yourself for every power of darkness to attack. We need to be purified from all false reality. After being torn down, we then must be built up. God must empty us of *everything* – even that which might be of God. It is upon being emptied that we can then be filled. On the other side of that emptying we might find ourselves picking up the things of God that we had set down. The difference is that it will never lead us to idolatry over some understanding that we *think* we know.

I was recently talking with my wife. We were returning home from out of state after looking at a property to possibly purchase. This wasn’t the correct property. We were devastated because we thought that God would provide, and here we are going home without enough money to pay rent, and yet spending it on gas to view properties we cannot afford. It was while we were coming back that God began to work in our hearts. He revealed to my wife that some of what happened during her childhood has led her to speak sharply, “guns a blazing,” when she feels insecure.

I admitted that from my childhood I was bullied. I did not have the capacity to trust that even my wife would tell me the truth in love. Any time that she would speak to me the truth straightforwardly, I assumed that she was bullying me. This happened subconsciously. Both her reaction and my reaction to one another would cause for an argument because we both immaturely understood the situation. The world and its wisdom goes deep into the very core of who we are. If we are not willing to take risks that will possibly result in such moments as that – to learn our shortcomings and repent of them – then what possibility is there for us attaining to that glorious City?

I'm reminded of a story that I heard C.S. Lewis had written. I've never read the book; I've only heard the story reiterated to me. The story is about a people that are in grey-town. Everything is grey. There is light, but it isn't much light. They can see off in the distance a light that is emitted, but they are not able to reach such a light. Every now and then, a train comes by. Everyone gets on the train. The train takes them to this city that is the source of light. People hate it. They can't stand the light. It is too bright, and they can't see, and it hurts them. After a while, they all get back on the train and go back to grey-town.

What if this story is actually a lot closer to truth? What if truth is stranger than fiction? Is it possible that heaven will have light for all to see, but not everyone can bear that light? Those who can bear it will remain in the city. Those who cannot bear the light will be in an "outer darkness," that might not be pitch black, but it is "grey." The nations need to come up to collect from the tree of life. They need to gather the leaves and the fruit for healing.

Maybe this is a lot closer to what heaven will be. I don't think that the story is 100% accurate. It seems like those that are in heaven will endure the pain of the light knowing that it brings health and closeness to God. Those same nations that do not fight against Jerusalem at the end of Revelation 20 are now in heaven. Any person who was in Christ, but has not attained holiness to live in the City is somehow outside of the City with the nations to come up and receive light, as they are able to grow to bear it.

I don't know if there would come a time that people would grow to bear the light and then be brought into the City permanently. I also don't know what the fate of those in the City is. I don't know if you can be exalted after being placed. I don't know if there is somehow a way to grow and mature. I only know what I have expressed. It is controversial, but it just seems to fit with the biblical narrative. Maybe this is why when Isaiah speaks of a New Heaven and New Earth at the end of his book that he speaks of life continuing as it has on this present earth. Maybe life does continue, though completely different and distinct, in a very similar fashion as to what we see now. The mundane is made holy, and the common is made precious.

This is an ultimate calling. We are called to absolute purity. May God give us the grace to comprehend His Kingdom reality, and in striving toward that, may God grant us the grace to be transfigured and remade into His likeness. In all sobriety of knowing what agony it will mean, we cry out with our deeps, "Even so, come Lord Jesus."