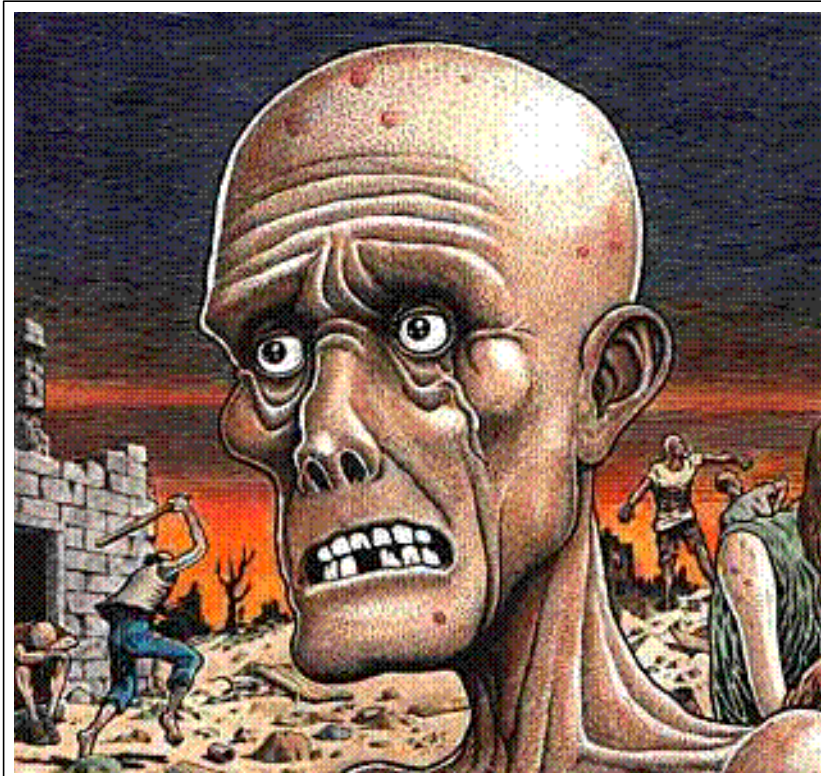


The Berean Voice

Hope of Israel Ministries (Church of YEHOVAH) Volume 2, Number 6 November-December 2001



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***Hope of Israel Ministries --
Preparing the Way for the
Return of YEHOUAH God
and His Messiah!***

Islam and the *Koran*

The words "Arab" and "Islam" are synonymous. Arabs were responsible for the introduction of Islam, and Islam is responsible for keeping the Arab world in the Dark Ages. Arabs are cruel, and Islam is a cruel religion -- they suit each other. The adherents of Islam are exhorted to kill for the sake of Allah, and where the Islamic holy law (*Sharia*) is in effect, there can be no resisting of Islam nor turning to another religion or faith. To do so invites severe punishment -- by sword, hanging, stoning or crucifixion.

The *Koran* teaches that women are inferior to men and even admonishes husbands to "scourge" their wives. According to a recent poll, 80 percent of Arab women believe that routine wife-beating is "normal and beneficial for family stability and discipline." And at least one sect believes that women have no souls and, therefore, will not be resurrected.

In some Islamic countries a woman who turns from Islam to embrace Christianity will be publicly hung. And if she has young children, those under the age of five years will be hung along with their mother. Petty crimes, committed by both men and women, are punished by the severing of hands or feet, or both. The "cutting off of hands, feet, ears, tongues, and heads; and the gouging out of eyes -- all of these things are part of Islamic law today."

Like the Arabs themselves, the religion of Islam is savage and rules by fear and terror. Iran's own brand of fanatical Islam has executed 95,000 political prisoners -- dissidents and apostates -- since the 1979 revolution. Untold thousands have died in the Sudan, Iraq and Syria. Welcome to the world of Islam -- the "supreme" religion that Osama bin Ladin and others plan to bring by force upon the entire inhabited world.

-- John D. Keyser

Is the "Great Tribulation" *Really* in the Future?

What does the Bible teach about the "great tribulation"? Will it take place during the last seven years of this age -- as Christians who follow the Futurist interpretation believe? Others believe that these things happened before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. The two interpretations cannot be reconciled -- which one is correct?

John D. Keyser and R.E. Woodrow

It was a shocking statement that fell upon the ears of the disciples. As they left the Temple in Jerusalem, certain of them remarked about what a magnificent Temple it was and how remarkable were its stones. But Yeshua said the time would come when one stone would not be left upon another that would not be thrown to the ground! This startling pronouncement aroused immediate questions from the disciples. As they sat upon the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple compound, they asked Yeshua *when* these things would happen and *what sign* would be given when these things were about to be fulfilled. In reply to these questions, Yeshua talked about deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, the "abomination of desolation" -- and GREAT TRIBULATION!

Those among the Churches of God who hold to the FUTURIST point of view apply the verses about deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences to our time -- to the time leading up to the tribulation period which they believe will be the last seven years of this age. The abomination of desolation is regarded as an idol of the Antichrist (or the Antichrist himself) to be set up in the Holy of Holies of a rebuilt Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. When this happens -- according to this scenario -- the Jews will flee into the mountains around Jerusalem to avoid the impending great tribulation.

The FULFILLED interpretation, on the other hand, portrays the deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines and pestilences as events which Yeshua said would SOON happen -- things that happened *before* the destruction of the Temple. When parallel accounts are compared, the abomination of desolation was clearly Gentile *armies* that surrounded Jerusalem in order to cause its desolation. As a result of Yeshua's warning, the disciples fled from Jerusalem and Judea. What Yeshua termed the "great tribulation" referred to the judgment that fell upon the Jewish nation -- resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. and the death of over 1,100,000 Jews.

Needless to say, the two scenarios or interpretations (the FUTURIST and the FULFILLED) are eons apart. Many have accepted the futurist view simply because they have not been fully

aware of the historical fulfillment. The prophecy in question is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. In order to get the *complete* picture, we must read ALL three accounts. Sometimes a detail not fully explained in one is explained further in the other.

The statement Yeshua made about the Temple being destroyed is recorded in all three accounts -- notice:

As Yeshua left the Temple and was going away, his talmidim [disciples] came and called his attention to its buildings. But he answered them, "You see all these? Yes! I tell you, they will be totally destroyed -- not a single stone will be left standing!" (Matthew 24:1-2, ***Jewish New Testament***).

As Yeshua came out of the Temple, one of the talmidim [disciples] said to him, "Look, Rabbi! What huge stones! What magnificent buildings!" "You see all these great buildings?" Yeshua said to him, "They will be totally destroyed -- not a single stone will be left standing!" (Mark 13:1-2, ***Jewish New Testament***).

As some people were remarking about the Temple, how beautiful its stonework and memorial decorations were, he said, "The time is coming when what you see here will be totally destroyed -- not a single stone will be left standing!" (Luke 21:5-6, ***Jewish New Testament***).

"Tell us, WHEN will these things happen?" the disciples then asked, "and what sign will show when all these things are about to be accomplished?" In addition to the questions about the destruction of the Temple, Matthew -- and only Matthew -- recorded the question: "What shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?" Yeshua answered ALL of these questions. However, the *primary* questioning (recorded by all the writers) was about the destruction of the Temple: "When will these things happen?"

Deceivers

First, Yeshua warned about *deceivers* in Matthew 24:4-5; Mark 13:5-6 and Luke 21:8. Notice --

Yeshua replied: "Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray" (Matthew 24:4-5).

Yeshua began speaking to them: "Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will fool many people" (Mark 13:5-6).

He answered, "Watch out! Don't be fooled! For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time has come!' Don't go after them" (Luke 21:8).

All three accounts warn about deceivers -- but Luke's account alone explains *when* these things would occur: "The time HAS COME! Don't go after them." This was not something that

would take place hundreds or thousands of years into the future! Yeshua was clearly warning his disciples about something that was about to happen *in their time!*

Did "many" deceivers deceive "many" people in the days of the original disciples? Indeed they did! According to the Jewish historian Josephus, twelve years after Yeshua's death on the tree, a certain impostor by the name of Theudas persuaded a large number of people to follow him to the river Jordan which he claimed would part like the Red Sea for them to cross. At the time of Felix (who is mentioned in the Book of Acts), Judea was *filled* with impostors who Felix had to put to death EVERY DAY -- a statement that indicated there were very many of them! An Egyptian who "pretended to be a prophet" claimed he would show "how" the walls of Jerusalem would fall down at his command. He managed to gather 30,000 disciples to watch the event which, of course, failed to come to pass.

Another prominent deceiver was Simon the sorcerer -- who we read about in Acts 8. He led people to believe that he was the great power of YEHOVAH. According to Irenaeus, he claimed to be the Son of God and the creator of angels. Justin further tells us he traveled to Rome and was recognized as a god by means of his magical powers. This man was the REAL "Peter" that the Roman Catholics claim was the first pope.

Origen mentions a certain wonder-worker by the name of Dositheus. This deceiver claimed he was the Messiah foretold by Moses. Another such man was Barchochebas -- who claimed he could vomit flames! Bar-jesus -- mentioned in Acts 13:6 -- was a sorcerer and false prophet. These are a few examples of the many deceivers of whom history says there were "a great number," and of whom Yeshua had prophesied there would be "many."

Wars and Rumors of Wars

Next, Yeshua remarked in Matthew 24:6-7; Mark 13:7 and Luke 21:9-10:

"You will hear the noise of wars nearby and the news of wars far off; see to it that you don't become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come. For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other..."(Matthew 24:6-7).

"When you hear the noise of wars nearby and the news of wars far off, don't become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come" (Mark 13:7).

"And when you hear of wars and revolutions, don't panic. For these things must happen first, but the end will not follow immediately." Then he told them, "Peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other..."

When Yeshua gave this prophecy the Roman Empire was experiencing a general peace within its borders; but Yeshua boldly stated that they would *soon* be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. And they did! Within a very short time the Empire was filled with strife, insurrections and wars.

Before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., four different emperors experienced violent deaths within a space of 18 months. According to the Roman historian Suetonius, Nero "drove a dagger into his throat" and Galba was run down by horsemen who cut off his head. "Thrusting his thumb into the mouth" a soldier carried the horrible trophy about. Otho "stabbed himself" in the breast. Vitellius was killed by slow torture and then "dragged by a hook into the Tiber." Tacitus, writing of this period in history, used such expressions as "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "insurrections in Gaul," "intrigues among the Parthians," "the war in Britain" and the "war in Armenia."

Among the Jews it was a turbulent and terrible time. Fifty thousand Jews were killed in Seleucia. There was an uprising against them in Alexandria -- with many killed. In a battle between the Jews and Syrians in Caesarea, 20,000 were killed. During this period the mad emperor Caligula ordered his statue placed in the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews refused and lived in constant fear the armies of Rome would be sent into Palestine. In fact, the fear was so great that many Jews did not even bother to till their fields.

Although there were to be wars and commotions, Yeshua explained to his disciples: "See that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the END is not yet." Sermons have often been preached in the Churches of God about deceivers, wars, rumors of wars and other things mentioned in Matthew 24 -- as though they were signs of the *soon coming* return of the Messiah! But instead of these things being signs of the end, Yeshua clearly said: "The end is *not* yet!" Wars and commotions are of a general nature and, as such, *could not* provide a definite sign that the end was at hand.

There is something else we should notice: the word "end" in this verse is not the same Greek word used in the expression "end of the world." When the disciples spoke of "the end of the world" in Matthew 24:3, the word used is *sunteleia* (***Strong's Concordance***, #4930). But in verses 6 and 14, the word translated "end" is *telos* (***Strong's Concordance***, #5056). Not realizing or understanding this, some have taken "end" in verses 6 and 14 to mean the end of the world. However, the primary "end" in these verses, understood in context, would be the destruction of Jerusalem. Later, when Yeshua answered the question about the end of the world, he used the term "that day" -- when "heaven and earth shall pass away." Considering the setting, Barnes is no doubt correct when he says the end here is "the end of the Jewish economy; the destruction of Jerusalem."

Famines, Pestilences, Earthquakes

Next in order are famines, pestilences and earthquakes. All three of the gospel writers record the words of Yeshua regarding this in Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:11:

"...there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world" (Matthew 24:7).

"...there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but the beginning of the 'birth pains'" (Mark 13:8).

"There will be great earthquakes, there will be epidemics and famines in various places, and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:11).

Now the Bible records a famine "throughout all the world...in the days of Claudius Caesar" (Acts 11:28). Judea was especially hit hard at this time and "the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea" (verse 29). 1 Corinthians 16:1-5 and Romans 15:25-28 mentions that they took up collections of food for the saints there. Historians such as Suetonius mention famine during those years and Tacitus speaks of a "failure in the crops, and a famine consequent thereupon." Eusebius mentions famines during this time in Rome, Judea and Greece.

Along with famines, Yeshua talked about pestilence, i.e. plagues -- the spread of disease epidemics. Of course, famine and pestilence go hand in hand. Suetonius wrote of pestilence in Rome during the days of Nero which were so severe that "within the space of one autumn there died no less than 30,000 persons." Josephus records that pestilences raged in Babylonia in 40 A.D. and Tacitus tells of pestilences in Italy in 66 A.D.

During this same period Yeshua said there would be earthquakes in many places as well. Once again, this is verified by the historians. Tacitus records frequent earthquakes at Rome "by which many houses were thrown down" and that "twelve populous cities of Asia fell in ruins from an earthquake." The Roman financier Seneca -- writing in the year 58 A.D. -- noted: "How often have cities of Asia and Achaea fallen with one fatal shock! how many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! how many in Macedonia! how often has Cyprus been wasted by this calamity! how often has Paphos become a ruin! News has often been brought us of the demolition of whole cities at once." He mentions the earthquake at Campania during the reign of Nero. Hierapolis, Colosse and Laodicea were overwhelmed by an earthquake in 60 A.D. Pompeii was greatly damaged in 63 A.D. and there were earthquakes in Crete, Apamea, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos and Judea.

Persecution Against the Disciples

Yeshua warned that his disciples would be afflicted, hated, imprisoned, beaten, killed and brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake. But he added that they would speak wisdom that their enemies could not gainsay or resist -- notice Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9-13 and Luke 21:12-17:

At that time you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me (Matthew 24:9).

But you, watch yourselves! They will hand you over to the local sanhedrins, you will be beaten up in synagogues, and on my account you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. Indeed, the Good News has to be proclaimed first to all the Goyim. Now when they arrest you and bring you to trial, don't worry beforehand about what to say. Rather, say whatever is given you when the time comes; for it will not be just you speaking, but the Ruach HaKodesh. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will turn against their parents and have them put to death; and everyone will hate you because of me. But whoever holds out till the end will be delivered.

But before all this, they will arrest you and persecute you, handing you over to the synagogues and prisons; and you will be brought before kings and governors. This will all be

on account of me, but it will prove an opportunity for you to bear witness. So make up your minds not to worry, rehearsing your defense beforehand; for I myself will give you an eloquence and a wisdom that no adversary will be able to resist or refute. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends; some of you they will have put to death; and everyone will hate you because of me.

That such persecution came upon the followers of Yeshua in those years is well known. They faced "great persecution" (Acts 8:1) and were "imprisoned and beat in every synagogue" (Acts 22:19). When called upon to answer charges, they were given a wisdom that their persecutors simply could not resist (Acts 6:9-10). Also, they were hated and some were even put to death (Acts 7:59; 12:2).

Adding to all this chaos, it was revealed by Yeshua that "many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11). Peter, who was present when Yeshua gave this prophecy, later wrote about "false prophets" that has risen and of "many" that followed their deceiving ways (2 Peter 2). The apostle John -- who also heard Yeshua give this prophecy -- recorded its fulfillment in 1 John 4:1: "Many false prophets are gone out into the world." Paul clearly spoke of "false apostles, deceitful workers" in 2 Corinthians 11:13. He reveals in 2 Timothy 2:17-18 that Hymenaeus and Philetus taught false doctrines and overthrew the faith of many. By the time Paul wrote to Titus, there were "many...deceivers...who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not" (Titus 1:10-11).

The true message of Yeshua and the disciples was perverted by betrayals, false prophets, iniquity and the love of many waxing cold. "But he that shall endure [such things] unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13) -- both *now* and hereafter. The word "end" here is to be understood in a GENERAL SENSE, for unlike the use of this word in verses 6 and 14, this particular reference does not have the definite article in the Greek text.

Gospel to Be Preached to the Nations

In Matthew 24:14 we read -- "And this Good News about the Kingdom will be announced throughout the whole world as a witness to all the Goyim. It is then that the end will come." Unless we remove this verse clear out of its setting, "the end" written about here is the end or DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM! When the disciples spoke of "the end of the world in Matthew 24:3, the word used is *sunteleia* (***Strong's Concordance***, #4930). However, in verses 6 and 7, the word translated "end" is *telos* (***Strong's Concordance***, #5056). Not realizing this, many have taken "end" in verses 6 and 14 to mean the end of the world! But the primary end in these verses, understood in context, is the DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM. Later, when Yeshua answered the question about the end of the world, he used the term "that day" -- when "heaven and earth shall pass away." This clearly was the question that Yeshua was answering in the verses before -- and the verses that follow are *still* speaking about Jerusalem and Judea. Jerusalem would be destroyed, but "first" the Good News of the Kingdom of God would be preached to all nations -- see Mark 13:10.

It was a fantastic prophecy! Picture the scene in your mind's eye: Here, on the Mount of Olives, Yeshua spoke these words to unknown, insignificant men. Who would have supposed in their

wildest dreams that their names would become known around the known world of the time -- and that even in our day (almost 2,000 years later) the seeds of YEHOVAH's truth they planted would still be producing fruit? Who would have even supposed that their message would ever have spread beyond that immediate area?

Such a vast evangelical program reaching all nations seemed almost impossible of fulfillment -- but it was! In a very real sense the gospel message did indeed go to all nations of the time BEFORE the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.!

The seed was sown on the day of Pentecost. There were present in Jerusalem "devout men, out of *every nation* under heaven" (Acts 2:5) who heard the Good News preached by Peter. Three thousand were converted and many of these returned to their various homelands and shared the gospel. Later -- when persecution raised itself against the Church of YEHOVAH at Jerusalem -- believers were scattered and "went everywhere preaching the word" throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1, 4). Philip took the message to Samaria with great results and was later directed by YEHOVAH to a high ranking government official from Ethiopia who was converted on the spot. Tradition records that this man took the Good News to the African continent where many others were converted because of his inspiring testimony.

Peter took the gospel to the "Gentiles" at the house of Cornelius -- an event that was a turning point in the missionary activities of the church (Acts 10, 11). Eventually Peter took the message to Rome itself -- see our article ***Did the Apostle Peter Ever Visit Rome?*** By the time of emperor Nero the Christians in Rome had grown so numerous that they aroused the jealousy of the government. The story of the great fire in Rome in 64 A.D. -- for which the Christians were falsely accused -- is well known. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, Paul opens by saying: "Your faith is spoken of throughout the *whole world*" (Romans 1:8). In his closing words of this letter he speaks of the gospel as having been "made known to *all nations*" (Romans 16:26).

This even included far away England. Records Newton: "There is absolute certainty that Christianity was planted in this country in the days of the apostles, before the destruction of Jerusalem." Eusebius -- and also Theodoret -- recorded that the apostles preached the gospel in all the world and that some of them "passed beyond the ocean to the Britannic isles." By the time that Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians, he could rightfully say: "The gospel...is come unto you, as it is in *all the world*...the gospel which you have heard, and which was preached to *every creature* which is under heaven" (Colossians 1:6, 23). By 70 A.D., the gospel had gone forth to the world for a witness. No longer was YEHOVAH's message to man limited to one nation or race!

The Abomination of Desolation

When Yeshua prophesied of the Temple being destroyed, the disciples then asked: "...Rabbi, if this is so, WHEN will these events take place? And WHAT SIGN will show that they are about to happen?" (Luke 21:7). As we have just seen, Yeshua mentioned things of a general nature that would occur first. Now, at this juncture, he gives a specific sign -- when they would see "the abomination of desolation," they would know that the destruction of Jerusalem was "nigh." Upon seeing this, they were to flee quickly into the mountains.

Matthew 24:15-16: "So when you see **the abomination that causes devastation** spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing **in the Holy Place** (let the reader understand the allusion), that will be the time for those in Y'huda to escape to the hills."

Mark 13:14: "Now when you see **the abomination that causes devastation** standing where it ought not to be (let the reader understand the allusion), that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills."

Luke 21:20-24: "However, when you see Yerushalayim **surrounded by armies**, then you are to understand that she is about to be destroyed. Those in Y'hudah must escape to the hills, those inside the city must get out, and those in the country must not enter it. For these are the days of vengeance, when everything that has been written in the *Tanakh* will come true. What a terrible time it will be for the pregnant women and nursing mothers! For there will be great distress in the Land and judgment on the people. Some will fall by the edge of the sword, others will be carried into all the countries of the Goyim, and Yerushalayim will be trampled down by the Goyim until the age of the Goyim has run its course."

Notice now -- step by step -- the information contained in these parallel accounts:

1/. Where Matthew and Mark record: "when you see **the abomination of devastation**...that will be the time for those in Y'huda to escape to the hills," Luke writes: "...when you see **Yerushalayim surrounded by armies**, then you are to understand that she is about to be destroyed. Those in Y'huda must escape to the hills..." What was to become a devastation or desolation, then, was JERUSALEM.

We further note that this "devastation" was that which was "spoken about through the prophet Dani'el." If we turn to Daniel 9, we will find the passage where Daniel speaks of this destruction: "And the people of the prince that shall come shall *destroy* the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26). A comparison of the parallel accounts in the gospels, the reference to Daniel's prophecy, and the fact that Yeshua was answering questions about the destruction of Jerusalem -- all clearly show that what was to become a devastation was the city of Jerusalem.

2/. Looking again at the parallel accounts you will notice that what Matthew and Mark refer to as the "abomination" that would devastate Jerusalem, Luke (using plain language) shows this would be accomplished by ARMIES -- "Gentile" armies: "However, when you see Yerushalayim surrounded by armies, then you are to understand that she is about to be destroyed....and Yerushalayim will be trampled down by the Goyim" (Luke 21:20-24).

"Abomination" is a word that denotes anything that is especially loathsome or detestable. This certainly fits the Jewish feelings towards idol-worshipping Gentiles -- intent on destruction -- taking a stand against their beloved city.

3/. In Matthew's account we find that the abomination (Gentile army) would be "standing in the Holy Place" and he adds the words: "let the reader understand the allusion." Mark's account also uses language that is somewhat veiled and includes the words; "let the reader understand the allusion;" but Luke, on the other hand, writes his account in *plain language* saying: "However, when

you see Yerushalayim surrounded by armies..." Luke gives the explanation for the veiled language; and so, it should be carefully noted, does not include the phrase "let the reader understand the allusion."

By comparing scriptures we can clearly see that the term Holy Place in Matthew 24:15 refers to Jerusalem. This portion of Matthew 24:15 is based on what was spoken by Daniel -- and Daniel referred to Jerusalem as the "holy mountain" and "holy city" that was to become "desolate" (Daniel 9:16, 24-27). Even after Yeshua was rejected there Jerusalem was still commonly referred to as the holy city -- see Matthew 27:53.

What is called the Holy Place is explained by Luke as the area that would be occupied by armies surrounding Jerusalem. The *Matthew Henry Commentary* says it well: "Jerusalem was the holy city, Canaan the holy land, the Mt. Moriah, which lay about Jerusalem, for its nearness to the temple was, they thought, in a particular manner holy ground; on the country lying round about Jerusalem the Roman army was encamped, THAT WAS THE ABOMINATION THAT MADE DESOLATE" (Vol. 5, p.352).

According to Yeshua, Jerusalem was destined for destruction. But a few days after Yeshua made these chilling pronouncements, he commissioned his disciples to wait in this very city -- to be imbued with power from heaven. They were to be his witnesses throughout the known world -- *including Jerusalem* -- where their work would start from (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49). But if the city was to be destroyed, how could the disciples witnessing there survive? Were they to perish along with those who rejected the Messiah and screamed "Crucify him, crucify him"? Or would there be a way of escape? According to the Bible their witness in the city of Jerusalem was to continue up to a certain point -- only until they saw a certain sign -- and then they were to flee from the city!

Everyone knows the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by Roman armies in 70 A.D. However, before this happened and in obedience to Yeshua's warning, every Christian fled and therefore escaped death at the hands of the Romans. How this took place is truly amazing!

In 65 A.D., Florus, the most notorious of Caesar's procurators, took over control of Judea and goaded the Jews to the point of rebellion -- a rebellion he found he could not handle. To control the situation, Cestius Gallus took over and marched his armies into Palestine. After subduing a number of towns he advanced toward to Jerusalem and began to assault the city after camping nearby for three days.

Seeing the city compassed with armies, the disciples then knew its destruction was near -- exactly according to Yeshua's statement. They realized this was their sign to flee! But how could they flee when the city was surrounded by the Romans? Yeshua had not explained this in his prophecy -- but notice what happened:

A Way of Escape

When Cestius was at the point of taking the city, suddenly, as Josephus says, "without any reason in the world," he withdrew his forces and hurriedly departed! The Jews, who were about to open the gates in surrender, couldn't believe their eyes! Filled with courage, they pursued the

retreating army, inflicting on it a major disaster. Following this retreat there was a brief interlude before the armies of Rome would return with reinforcements to destroy the city. During this interval, there was time for Yeshua's followers to flee Jerusalem. What took place is summed up by Thomas Newton:

We learn from ecclesiastical histories, that at this juncture *all* who believed in Christ departed Jerusalem, and removed to Pella and other places beyond the river Jordan; so that they all marvelously escaped the general shipwreck of their countrymen; and we do not read anywhere that so much as one of them perished in the destruction of Jerusalem (*Dissertations on the Prophecies* [London: 1754], p. 389).

According to Adam Clarke, "it is very remarkable that not a single Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem though there were many there when Cestius Gallus invested the city" (*Clarke's Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 228). without a doubt it was a marvelous escape! What a remarkable confirmation of Yeshua's words! What an amazing fulfillment of prophecy!

After Cestius Gallus had retreated with his troops, Nero ordered Vespasian to take over. He, in turn, ordered his son Titus to go to Alexandria and bring the fifth and tenth legions from Egypt to subdue the rebellious Jews. But a crisis in Rome caused Vespasian to return there -- where he was hailed as the new Emperor in 70 A.D. As result, the job of capturing Jerusalem was left in the hands of Titus who swiftly brought about its destruction.

In the verses where Matthew and Mark use the same somewhat veiled expression "the abomination that causes devastation," Luke -- using plain language -- shows this to be Gentile armies compassing Jerusalem to bring about its devastation. This interpretation is solidly built on the Bible. With it the gospel accounts are COMPLIMENTARY -- *not* contradictory. It is confirmed by history and it glorifies Yeshua. It plainly demonstrates how his words were fulfilled and his warning heeded -- thus providing a great deliverance and blessing for the Christians of that time!

The Futurist Interpretation

Having laid out the exact and only possible fulfillment of Yeshua's words, let us consider the now-popular FUTURIST interpretation -- that the "abomination that causes devastation" will be an idol placed in the Holy of Holies of a rebuilt Jewish temple. One publication expresses it this way: "The Jews -- who will have...restored Herod's Temple, and be in league with Antichrist -- will have a visit by the False Prophet who shall bring an image of the Antichrist into Jerusalem and wheel it into the Temple....When this image of the Antichrist is taken into the Jewish Temple, that will be the sign Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24, the Abomination of Desolation" (Oral Roberts, *How to be Personally Prepared for the Second Coming of Christ*, p. 38). Another equally misguided writer has this to say: "This image will be placed in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and is the 'abomination of desolation' to which the Lord made reference in his Olivet discourse" (Richard W. De Haan, *The Antichrist and Armageddon*, p.13). William F. Dankenbring, in his book *The Last Days of Planet Earth* adds to these misconceptions: "Here we need to understand a basic and fundamental Bible truth. In prophecy, type often blends subtly into antitype. That means, there is often a comparatively minor fulfillment of a major prophetic event pictured for the "last days." Even so, the wicked Antiochus Ephiaphanes, who desecrated the temple, and abolished

the daily sacrifice, is merely a TYPE of a king in these latter days, who will once again invade the Middle East, conquer Jerusalem, and raise up the abomination of desolation! (p. 182).

There are some very serious objections to these opinions --

1/. The setting up of an idol in the Holy of Holies is something the enemy could not do until such a time as the Temple would be in the enemies' possession. Since the magnificent Temple would be the LAST THING yielded to an enemy in battle, by this time the city would have ALREADY BEEN CAPTURED. It would *be too* late for Christians to flee then! An effective sign to warn Christians to flee would need to come BEFORE the capture of the city -- not afterward!!

2/. The prophecy indicates that "the abomination" would destroy Jerusalem AND the Temple -- would cause devastation. This is EXACTLY what the Roman armies did. But with the teaching that "the abomination" will be some sort of idol set up in the Temple, there is a definite contradiction. *HOW* in the world could the abomination be an idol set up in the Temple -- when the Temple was to be destroyed *BY* the abomination?! We all know that idols are abominations in YEHOVAH's eyes, but they are *NOT* capable of destruction!

3/. "The abomination" that causes devastation was to be something that could be *SEEN* by the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem. "Now when you *see* the abomination"; that is, "when you *see* Yerushalayim surrounded by *armies*," then, "that will be the time for those in Y'huda to escape to the hills." It is quite evident that Yeshua was *not* talking about an idol in the Holy of Holies -- for such could not be seen by the population of Jerusalem and Judea! Only the high priest entered the Holy of Holies -- and that was only on the Day of Atonement. None of the ordinary Jews would dare enter the Holy of Holies.

4/. The futurist interpretation regarding the abomination that causes devastation requires a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. Some, strangely, even offer this as proof that the Temple *will be rebuilt*. This, of course, is circular reasoning! Their scenario goes something like this: Since "the abomination that causes devastation" will involve the inner sanctum of the Temple, "it is certain that the Temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it" (Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 56). This is absolute twaddle!! The Bible makes no such demand, for WHAT Temple was the subject of Matthew 24 and the parallel gospel accounts? Was Yeshua talking about the Temple of his day or a rebuilt Temple 2,000 years later?

It is quite evident that Yeshua spoke of the Temple that was then standing *IN HIS DAY*; he talked about the stones that it contained, had the disciples look at it, and answered questions about it! Are we, in all seriousness, expected to believe that he was *not* actually speaking of that Temple at all, but of a rebuilt Temple -- a different Temple, a Temple made of different stones, a Temple to be built 2,000 years later? The answer should be evident! Yeshua was speaking of the Temple of his day and it was that Temple which was to be destroyed by Gentile armies -- a prophecy that was dramatically fulfilled in 70 A.D.

The disciples asked when the Temple would be destroyed and what sign would be given them in warning. "Yeshua *replied*..." -- he told them *when*, he gave them a *sign* -- as we have seen. But those who think the prophecy of Matthew 24 refers to a *future* Temple are at a COMPLETE

LOSS to show one verse in this chapter where Yeshua ever answered questions pertaining to a *future* Temple!

The misguided teaching that the abomination that causes devastation is sometime yet future not only requires a future and different Temple, but such a Temple -- instead of being destroyed -- is pictured as a place where the Antichrist will set up an idol for worship. If so, this would be a *preserved* Temple -- a place of false religion -- not a *destroyed* Temple. The prophecy of Matthew 24 and the parallel accounts NEVER make mention of a future Temple. That is a fact, pure and simple!

As for Dankenbring's statements about the prophecy being dual -- a type and antitype -- just *where* in YEHOVAH's word is such an idea promulgated? You can search the Bible from cover to cover and you will *not* find a statement that prophecy is dual.

Flee to the Mountains

The area from which the disciples were to flee was Judea -- and especially Jerusalem. They were to flee into the mountains. The setting is definitely Palestine, and the time -- as indicated by the prophecy itself, as well as the historical fulfillment -- was back in the *FIRST CENTURY!*

There are a number of popular books on prophecy that make the following wild claims: "Where will the place of safety be? Some have speculated it might be Petra, the Rose-red City of Rock....an indication that this may be so is found in Isaiah, chapter 16. We read: 'Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion'" (William F. Dankenbring, *The Last Days of Planet Earth*, pps. 335-336). Talk about stretching scripture to promote the idea of Petra! Another book -- *The Late Great Planet Earth* -- makes this equally ridiculous statement: "The residents of Israel who believe in Jesus will flee to the mountains and canyons of Petra for divine protection" (Hal Lindsey, p. 56) -- as though what Yeshua mentioned is still in the future! And why in the world *Petra*? The Bible nowhere says this! William Blackstone, in 1935, even sent workers to Petra where they placed Hebrew Bibles (encased in copper boxes) in some of the caves in that area. He believed the Jews would flee there during the tribulation period and read his Bibles!!

Futurism commonly takes verses that were *fulfilled long ago* and applies them to some current event. People unfortunately take Biblical passages OUT OF CONTEXT and minimize or ignore the historical fulfillment that is clearly intended. Why were the disciples given a sign to flee into the mountains prior to 70 A.D? The Bible goes on to explain.

Then Shall Be Great Tribulation

For there will be **trouble then worse than there has ever been from the beginning of the world until now, and there will be nothing like it again!** Indeed, if the length of this time had not been limited, no one would survive; but for the sake of those who have been chosen, its length will be limited (Matthew 24:21-22 -- *Jewish New Testament*).

For there will be **worse trouble** at that time **than there has ever been from the very beginning**, when God created the universe, **until now; and there will be nothing like it again**. Indeed, if God had not limited the duration of the trouble, no one would survive; but for the sake of the elect, those whom he has chosen, he has limited it (Mark 13:19-20 -- *Jewish New Testament*).

Luke's account reads as follows: "For these are the days of vengeance, when everything that has been written in the *Tanakh* will come true. What a terrible time it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers! For there will be great distress in the Land and judgment on the people. Some will fall by the edge of the sword, others will be carried into all the countries of the *Goyim*, and Yerushalayim will be trampled down by the *Goyim* until the age of the *Goyim* has run its course" (Luke 21:22-24, *Jewish New Testament*).

Unless we choose to totally ignore the setting, it is manifestly evident that the tribulation or "trouble" mentioned here is that which was to envelop the people of Jerusalem and Judea -- trouble that would result in the destruction of their city and Temple. General things like wars, famines, pestilence and earthquakes would occur -- none of which would be the SPECIFIC SIGN of the impending destruction. But -- when they would see Jerusalem surrounded by armies -- then they would *know* the desolation was near. This would be the SIGN for them to flee into the mountains, "then you are to understand that she is about to be destroyed."

The Jewish historian, Josephus, was an eye-witness to the unparalleled calamity that ended in the fall and devastation of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. His detailed and scholarly account -- *Wars of the Jews* -- was published around 75 A.D. -- while the events of which he wrote were still fresh in the memory of thousands. His history provides an incredible *confirmation* of the prophecy Yeshua gave, even down to fine details. Since he was not a Christian, no one can accuse him of slanting his material to match the prophecy.

The trouble in Jerusalem began over differences between the Jews and the Roman Empire. There were also differences between the Jews themselves -- some favored a revolt against Roman rule, while others hoped for a peaceful settlement. Those who favored revolt took a violent turn and began killing those who disagreed with them. Troops were sent in to control the mob. War was inevitable -- not only was there unrest at Jerusalem, but also throughout the land.

Records Josephus -- "Every city was divided into two armies, and the preservation of the one part was in the destruction of the other; so the daytime was spent in shedding blood, and the night in fear -- which was of the two the more terrible....It was then common to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied; those of old men mixed with infants, all dead and scattered about together; women also lay amongst them, without any covering for their nakedness: You might then see the whole province full of *inexpressible calamities* while the dread of still more barbarous practices which were threatened, was everywhere greater than what had been already perpetrated" (Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1957 edition), 2, 18:2).

Jews in Alexandria (Egypt) that revolted against the Romans "were destroyed unmercifully; and this, their destruction, was complete...houses were first plundered of what was in them,

and then set on fire by the Romans; wherein no mercy was shown to the infants, and no regard had to the aged; but they went on in the slaughter of persons of every age, till all the place was overflowed with blood, and fifty thousands of them lay dead upon heaps" (*ibid.*, 2, 18:8).

In one hour, according to Josephus, over 20,000 were killed in Caesarea and the battle continued until "all Caesarea was emptied of its Jewish inhabitants...Galilee was all over filled with fire and blood, nor was it exempted from any kind of misery or calamity" (*ibid.*, 3, 4:1). So much horror was in the land that one prominent man took a sword and killed first his aged father and mother, his wife and children, then took his own life in order to save his family from a worse fate. His family willingly submitted to their deaths at his hand.

In Jerusalem, those of the revolting party were known as Zealots. In their fanaticism they "fell upon the people [who disagreed with them] as upon a flock of profane animals, and *cut their throats*." In this manner 12,000 of the more eminent inhabitants perished. "The terror that was upon all the people was so great, that no one had courage enough either to weep openly for the dead man that was related to him, or bury him...those that mourned for others soon underwent the same death with those whom they mourned for" (*ibid.*, 4, 5:3).

Slaughter continued until "the outer temple was all of it overflowed with blood, and that day they saw 8,500 dead bodies there." Included in this number were "those that a little before had worn the sacred garments and presided over the public worship, which were cast out naked to be the food of dogs and wild beasts." Even those who came with sacrifices were slain, "and sprinkled that altar...with their own blood; till the dead bodies of strangers were mingled together with those of their own country, and those of profane persons with those of priests, and the blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts themselves" (*ibid.*, 5, 1:3).

Continues Josephus: "The noise also of those that were fighting was incessant, both by day and by night; but the lamentations of those that mourned exceeded the other...their calamities came perpetually, one upon another...But for the seditious themselves, they fought against each other, while they trod upon the dead bodies as they lay heaped one upon another, and taking up a mad rage from those dead bodied that were under the feet, became the fiercer thereupon...and when they had resolved upon anything, they executed it without mercy, and omitted no method of torment or of barbarity" (*ibid.*, 5, 1:5).

Little wonder Yeshua said: "Daughters of Yerushalayim, don't cry for me; cry for yourselves and your children!" (Luke 23:28) -- knowing that all these things would come upon that generation! It is a fact that many Jews were killed *by Jews* -- not by the enemy outside the walls. Josephus states that the Jews "never suffered from the Romans anything worse than they made each other suffer." Such insanity shows the validity of Yeshua's words when he likened that generation to a man possessed of demons -- see Matthew 12:43-45).

Food became scarce within the walls of Jerusalem, and many who ventured out by night to search for food were caught by the Romans, "tormented with all sorts of *torture*," and then crucified in the sight of those on the walls. Incredible as it may sound, about 500 people were killed in this manner EVERY DAY until the number finally became so great that there was not enough room for all the crosses -- nor enough crosses for all the victims. Often, to save room, several victims

were nailed to the same stake. Imagine the torment of those who could see or hear their loved ones being tortured in such a manner just a short distance from the walls. Many had their hands cut off (Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 5, 11:1-2).

"Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; a kind of deadly night, had seized upon the city....Thus did the miseries of Jerusalem grow worse and worse every day...the multitude of carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench" (*ibid.*, 5, 12:3; 6, 1:1).

Josephus goes on to record -- "The number of those that perished by famine in the city was prodigious, and their miseries were unspeakable. For if so much as the shadow of any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced presently, and the dearest friends fell fighting one another about it....Children pulled the very morsel that their fathers were eating, out of their very mouths, and what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do to their infants: and when those that were almost dead were perishing under their hands, they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives....

"The seditious...also invented terrible methods of torture to discover where any food was, and they were these: to stop up the passage of the privy parts of the miserable wretches, and to drive sharp stakes up their fundamentals! and a man was forced to bear what it is terrible even to hear" (*ibid.*, 5, 10:3).

In one horrible instance recorded by Josephus, a woman of prominence killed and roasted her infant son. When she had eaten half, she hid the other half. When certain rebellious Jews smelled the scent of roasted flesh, they threatened to cut her throat if she did not reveal to them where it was. She then uncovered the remaining half of the little body, saying: "Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself! Do not pretend to be either more tender than a woman, or more compassionate than a mother." But even those hardened men, horrified at the sight, left the house trembling (*ibid.*, 6, 3:4).

Without a doubt these horrifying incidents fulfilled the prophetic warning given years before in Deuteronomy 28:49-57: "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar...which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young....And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters....The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward...her young one...and toward her children...for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, where with thine enemy shall distress thee."

Many, attempting to escape from the city, swallowed pieces of gold in order to take them unnoticed. Once the Romans realized this, soldiers cut these unfortunate people open searching for gold. "Nor does it seem to me that any misery befell the Jews that was more terrible than this, since in one night about 2,000 of these deserters were thus dissected" (*ibid.*, 5, 13:4).

The Destruction of the Temple

Finally the Roman legions broke through the wall of the Temple and an enraged soldier set it alight. "While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests, were all slain in the same manner....The flame was also carried a long way and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain...nor can one imagine anything either greater or more terrible than this noise...one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething-hot, as full of fire on every part of it" (*ibid.*, 6, 5:1). As the Temple burned, the Jews knew that all hope for deliverance was gone. Out of desperation people crowded into the aqueducts and city sewers -- only to be discovered by the Romans and put to death.

It is highly significant that the very date the Temple was torched by the armies of Titus, was the same date that Nebuchadnezzar had burned it centuries before! "But, as for that house, God had for certain long ago doomed it to the fire, and now that fatal day was come, according to the revolution of the ages; it was the tenth day of the month Ab, upon which it was formerly burnt by the king of Babylon!" (Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6, 4:5).

In Deuteronomy 28:68 the Bible warned: "The LORD will send you back to Egypt in galleys, by a route which I told you you should not see again. There you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but none will buy." Josephus tells how those that survived the conflagration of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas were led away captives -- some being taken into *Egypt!* "As for the rest of the multitude that were above 17 years old, he put them into bonds, and sent them to the Egyptian mines...and sold the rest of the multitude with their wives and children, and every one of them at a low price, and that because such were sold were very many, and the buyers few" (*ibid.*, 6, 8:9).

There were 97,000 that were sold as slaves and 1,100,000 people that perished during the terrible TRIBULATION of those days, "the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation, but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were suddenly shut up by an army....The multitude of those that therein perished ***exceeded all the destruction that either men or God ever brought upon the world***" (*ibid.*, 6, 9:3,4).

Josephus continues --

I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly:-- that neither did any other city suffer such *miseries*, or did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in *wickedness* than this was, ***from the beginning of the world.*** -- *Ibid.*, 5, 10:5).

These terrible calamities that engulfed the Jews were "the ***GREATEST*** of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ***EVER*** were heard of; both of those wherein cities have fought against cities, or nations against nations...it appears to me that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were."

In a footnote to this passage in Josephus, the translator adds this comment --

That these calamities of the Jews, who were our Savior's murderers, were to be the **GREATEST** that had ever been *since the beginning of the world*, our Savior had directly foretold (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19; Luke 21:23, 24) and that they proved to be such accordingly, Josephus is here a most authentic witness (*ibid*, Preface).

Writes Loraine Boettner: "There have been, of course, other periods of tribulation or suffering in which greater numbers of people were involved, and which continued for longer periods of time. But considering the physical, moral, and religious aspects, suffering *never reached a greater degree of awfulness and intensity than in the siege of Jerusalem. Nor have so many people ever perished in the fall of any other city.* We think of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima as causing the greatest mass horror of anything in modern time. Yet *only about one-tenth as many people were killed in Hiroshima as in the fall of Jerusalem.* Add to the slaughter of such a great number the bestiality of Jews to Jews and of Roman to Jews and the anguish of a people who knew they were forsaken of God, and we see the justification for Christ's words, '**For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been seen from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be!**'" (*The Millennium*, 1957, p.202).

When Yeshua spoke of tribulation "worse than there has ever been from the beginning of the world until now" he was using a *proverbial* form of expression. Similar expressions can be found throughout the scriptures, such as: "I will give thee [Solomon] riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like" (II Chronicles 1:12). Some might argue that there have been greater times of tribulation since 70 A.D. They could also argue that there have been kings with more wealth and honor than Solomon. But understanding *how* this expression was used in the Bible, we should not try to press it beyond its intended meaning. Without a doubt, the HISTORICAL fulfillment *fully* meets the requirements of the prophecy about great tribulation and devastation upon the land of Judea and its people.

Knowing fully well the intensity of that trouble or tribulation, Yeshua had prophesied:

Indeed, if the length of this time had not been limited, no one would survive; but for the sake of those who have been chosen, its length will be limited (Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20)

We must keep in mind that the reference here is to the area upon which the tribulation or trouble of those days fell -- Judea and Jerusalem. We should not attempt to wrest it from its proper setting.

In a passage from the Old Testament concerning judgment that fell upon this *same* area, we read: "Your land is a waste, your cities burnt down; before your eyes, the yield of your soil is consumed by strangers -- a wasteland as overthrown by strangers!....Had not the LORD of Hosts left us some survivors, we should be like Sodom, another Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:7, 9). In the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, of course, no flesh was saved alive. It was *total* destruction.

There is an obvious *similarity* here. In the Old Testament, "had not the LORD" left a remnant (some survivors), no flesh would have been saved alive. In the New Testament, "if God" had not limited the duration of the trouble, no one would survive. The meaning is basically the same in both cases. It is not necessary (as some would do) to read atomic bombs, biological warfare and modern times into this passage. Josephus informs us that "the population was *almost annihilated*...there was no part of Judea, which did not partake of the calamities of the capital city."

Though the Christians had successfully escaped into the mountains, living without housing or provisions, they too could have eventually been destroyed by sword or famine. So, for their sake, those terrible days were shortened. YEHOVAH had placed definite, foreordained limits: "Yerushalayim will be trampled down by the Goyim [Gentiles -- Roman armies] until the age of the Goyim has run its course" (Luke 21:24).

Some people pull these five words, "the age of the Goyim" right out of their setting and try to stretch them far into the future. H.A. Ironside wrote that this is "the entire period during which the nation of the Jews, the city of Jerusalem, and the land of Palestine are under Gentile domination. This began with Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Palestine and will end at the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven at the close of the Great Tribulation" (*The Great Parenthesis*, 1945, p.94). Unfortunately, this is nothing but Scofield dispensationalism at its worst. There is simply NO SCRIPTURAL BASIS for this interpretation. Figuring from the time Vespasian received his commission from Nero and declared war on Jerusalem (February, 67 A.D.) until the end of the siege and destruction of the city and Temple (August, 70 A.D.), this treading down of Jerusalem -- in actual time -- was *three and a half years*.

Signs in the Sun, Moon and Stars

"But immediately following the trouble of those times, the sun will grow dark, the moon will stop shining, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in heaven will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

Luke's account of these events states: "There will appear signs in the sun, moon and stars; and on earth, nations will be in anxiety and bewilderment at the sound and surge of the sea, as people faint with fear at the prospect of what is overtaking the world; for the powers in heaven will be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

We are now seeing a description of the state of things after the tribulation or "trouble of those times." There is *no doubt* that the trouble referred to here is the SAME as the one mentioned previously. Yeshua said there would be great tribulation and except "*those days*" were shortened no flesh would be saved alive. And then we read: "...*immediately after* the tribulation of *those days*." Mark's testimony says: "But in those days after *that* tribulation..." Are we to understand, then, these expressions about the darkening of the sun, moon and stars literally or figuratively? Clearly, Yeshua used these expressions the SAME WAY as the Old Testament prophets did: *figuratively*. They commonly used these expressions as part of literary devices to describe various disasters: the sun shall go down, sun darkened, light darkened in the heavens, no light in the

heavens, the moon shall not give her light, stars shall fall, stars darkened, cloudy day, darkness at noon day, etc.

This same type of wording was used to describe the destruction that came upon Egypt: "Thus saith the Lord God: I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He and his people...shall be brought to destroy the land...the day shall be DARKENED...a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity" (Ezekiel 30:6-18). "And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the SUN with a cloud, and the MOON shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make DARK over thee, and set DARKNESS upon thy land...I shall bring thy destruction...I shall make the land of Egypt desolate" (Ezekiel 32:2-15).

The same type of wording was used to describe the destruction that came upon Idumea: "All the host of heaven shall MOLDER. The heavens shall be ROLLED UP like a scroll, and all their host shall WITHER like a leaf withering on the vine...Its streams shall be TURNED TO PITCH and its soil TO SULFUR. Its land shall become BURNING PITCH....Through the ages it shall lie in ruins; through the aeons none shall traverse it" (Isaiah 34:4-10).

In the prophecy about the fall of Babylon, which was to come "as destruction from the Almighty," we read: "Lo! The day of the LORD is coming...to make the earth a desolation, to wipe out the sinners upon it. The stars and constellations of heaven SHALL NOT GIVE OFF THEIR LIGHT; the sun shall be DARK when it rises, and the moon SHALL DIFFUSE NO GLOW...Therefore shall heaven BE SHAKEN, and earth LEAP OUT OF ITS PLACE...Behold, I stir up the Medes against them...and Babylon...shall become like Sodom and Gomorrah overturned by God" (Isaiah 13:9-21). The fulfillment of this prophecy is evident -- the kingdom was given to that ancient people known as the Medes (Daniel 5:28-31). This *was not* an end-of-the-world-prophecy, even though it was described in language about the sun, moon and stars being darkened.

This same type of wording or literary device was used describing the Old Testament destruction of Jerusalem: "I will stretch out My arm against Judah and against all who dwell in Jerusalem...that day shall be a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of calamity and desolation, a day of DARKNESS and deep GLOOM, a day of DENSEST CLOUDS...the whole land shall be consumed" (Zephaniah 1:4, 15, 18). "Now, then, dwellers of Jerusalem and men of Judah...in that day, a roaring shall resound over him like that of the sea; and then he shall look below and, behold, distressing DARKNESS, with light; DARKNESS, in its lowering clouds" (Isaiah 5:3, 30). "For thus said the LORD to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem...I look at the earth, it is UNFORMED and VOID; at the skies, and their LIGHT IS GONE...for this earth MOURNS, and skies are DARK above..." (Jeremiah 4:3, 23, 28). Jeremiah warned them to turn to YEHOVAH in repentance "before He brings DARKNESS, and...while you look for LIGHT, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross DARKNESS" (Jeremiah 13:9, 10, 16-19). "Assuredly, it shall be NIGHT for you...and it shall be DARK for you...the SUN shall set on the prophets...and the day shall be DARKENED for them...and Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins" (Micah 3:6, 12).

Now, obviously, when Babylon was overthrown by the Medes and others it was not the *literal* sun, moon and stars that were darkened. When Idumea became a desolation it was not the *literal* stars of heaven that were dissolved. And again, when Egypt and Jerusalem were overthrown

and became desolate under the attack of Nebuchadnezzar, it was not the *literal* sun, moon or stars that were darkened. These expressions or literary devices symbolized **very dark times** for those various places. The bottom line is, if YEHOVAH God saw fit to use these **symbols** in the Old Testament, why would we suppose He would inspire the Messiah to use different terms in talking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives?

As we have clearly seen, the prophecy of Yeshua about the tribulation or trouble pertained to a CERTAIN CITY -- *Jerusalem*; to a CERTAIN LAND -- *Judea*; to a CERTAIN PEOPLE -- *the Jewish nation*. What would be the condition of things for that city, nation and people "immediately after the tribulation of those days"? Would they experience only a passing tribulation after which conditions would return to normal? No -- absolutely not! Transferring the expression about the darkened sun, moon and stars from symbol to *fact*, the picture is one of a complete overthrow, destruction and desolation! This interpretation is solidly built upon the Bible and its accuracy is soundly confirmed by history.

The Return of the Son of Man

"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, all the tribes of the Land will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with tremendous power and glory. He will send out his angels with a great shofar; and they will gather together his chosen people from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31).

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with tremendous power and glory. He will send out his angels and gather together his chosen people from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (Mark 13:26-27).

"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with tremendous power and glory. When these things start to happen, stand up and hold your heads high; because you are about to be liberated!" (Luke 21:27-28).

It would seem that we have here before us a description of the second coming of the Messiah. For this reason, futurists start here and work backward through Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. By this method they then place the tribulation, abomination of desolation, earthquakes, famines, pestilences and wars as end-time events. But in so doing, ***the very foundational theme of the prophecy*** -- THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE -- must be ignored!

Some argue that the coming of the Messiah *did* occur at this time -- resurrection, rapture and all -- in 70 A.D. However, the weakness of this scenario is the total lack of any history to confirm it! It tends to leave us hanging.

Others feel Yeshua came figuratively or spiritually in 70 A.D. -- to judge Jerusalem. In a sense, this is true, because YEHOVAH had given Yeshua all authority to execute judgment -- see John 5:22-27). This would have included his judgment upon Jerusalem. According to Josephus, a strange omen appeared at that time: "I suppose the account of it would seem to be fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sunsetting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were

seen running about among the clouds" (Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6, 5:3). Were these angels? Was this a *sign* of the Messiah coming in judgment upon Jerusalem?

Being so closely associated with the apocalyptic language about the darkened sun, moon and stars, it is not impossible that the coming of the Son of man in the clouds (Matthew 24:30-31, etc.) could be understood in the same way. However, this has problems of interpretation. In this scenario, the sending forth of angels with the sound of a trumpet to gather the elect, is taken to mean sending the apostles to preach the gospel so that people could be gathered into the church. But -- even granting that the word translated "angels" can be translated "messengers" -- we would normally think of the apostles being sent forth at the ascension of Yeshua -- not at his return. By 70 A.D. these men had *already* gone forth into all the world with the gospel message.

Because of many second coming verses about angels coming with the Messiah, believers being gathered unto him, the sound of the trumpet, etc. it is quite clear that Matthew 24:30-31 refers to the return of the Messiah in power and glory shortly before the return of YEHOVAH God the Father at the end of this age. This, of course, raises an objection. In verse 29 we read about the condition of things "immediately following the trouble of those times." And the very next verse says: "Then...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with tremendous power and glory." Would this not indicate that the second coming was to occur right then? It would, on the surface, seem so. However, we must be aware that the word "THEN" (used by Matthew more than all other New Testament writers put together) can mean an event will happen right away, OR it can indicate the *order* in which events will take place. Applied in this latter sense, we could understand Matthew 24 in the following way: Yeshua spoke of general events that were to occur before the overthrow of Jerusalem and then the specific sign of that destruction or devastation -- Gentile armies surrounding Jerusalem. The invading armies would bring about great tribulation or trouble for the people left in Jerusalem and Judea. The condition of things immediately after that tribulation or trouble would be that of desolation. All of these things would happen *first*, "then" -- in the *order* of events mentioned -- "they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with tremendous power and glory." Many other verses justify this position:

1/. The second coming was not to be at the fall of Jerusalem because Yeshua expressly warned the disciples about any who would say that the Messiah had come in those days -- and was in the desert or in some secret place (Matthew 24:23-27).

2/. Yeshua stated that Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jews who were not killed in the tribulation or trouble would be led captive into all nations -- see Luke 21:24. This could not be the same time as the second coming of the Messiah at the end of the age, for the Jews will not be led away captive into all nations then. It was *following the events of 70 A.D.* that they were led away captive. The one event was the end that came upon Jerusalem; the other will be the end of the age.

3/. In a later part of Matthew 24, Yeshua clearly stated that no man knows the time of the second coming, the end of the age (Matthew 24:35-36). But, and realize this, Yeshua *knew* the time of the overthrow of Jerusalem and said that it would be BEFORE that generation then living would pass away. They had asked him *when* this destruction would take place, and he told them. But the time of the second coming was NOT REVEALED. There is a *distinct contrast* here. The possibility that a long period of time might pass before the coming of the Messiah is suggested by the story of

the bridegroom that did not appear until the midnight hour or the master who "AFTER A LONG TIME" returned -- Matthew 25:5, 6, 19.

4/. The destruction of Jerusalem was preceded by a SPECIFIC SIGN -- Jerusalem surrounded by Gentile armies. But the second coming will be "*as a thief in the night*"; we are exhorted to be ready at all times; there will be no specific sign (such as a huge cross in the sky!) to warn people a few minutes before the Messiah returns. People will be eating and drinking and getting married -- the routine things of life, just as in Noah's day -- and will not be expecting anything unusual to happen. SUDDENLY -- the Messiah will come! The sign preceding the fall of Jerusalem was SPECIFIC; the signs or warnings about the second coming are GENERAL -- *nothing* to reveal the day or hour!!

5/. At the time of the fall of Jerusalem, the disciples were to escape into the mountains. Then, there was time to flee; but when the Messiah comes there will be NO TIME to flee or make preparations to meet him. At the second coming, believers will not flee into the mountains, but will be caught up to meet Yeshua in the clouds. In the first century, they *scattered* -- at the second coming they will be *gathered*. It is CONTRAST all the way through.

The Meaning of "Generation"

In Matthew 23 Yeshua warned that generation of Jews: "Go ahead then, finish what your fathers started!....Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and Torah-teachers -- some of them you will kill, indeed, you will have them executed on stakes as criminals; some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so, on you will fall the guilt for all the innocent blood that has ever been shed on earth, from the righteous blood of innocent Hevel [Abel] to the blood of Z'kharyah Ben-Berekhyah (Zacharias son of Barachias), whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar. Yes! I tell you that ALL THIS WILL FALL ON THIS GENERATION!" (Matthew 23:32-38).

In commenting on this passage, C.I. Scofield correctly wrote: "It is the way also of history: judgment falls upon one generation for the sins of centuries. The prediction was FULFILLED in the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70." (***Scofield Reference Bible*** [New York: Oxford University Press, 1917], p. 1032). Unfortunately, however, Scofield tries to make "generation" mean "race, kind, family, stock, breed" in the verses in Matthew 24 where Yeshua said: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" -- a statement which would place the great tribulation or trouble back then! Then, based on this erroneous definition, concludes: "The promise is, therefore, that the generation -- nation, or family of Israel -- will be preserved unto 'these things'" (*ibid.*, p. 1034).

But, if we go back through the book of Matthew, we can clearly see by context how Yeshua used the word "generation". First, there is Matthew 1:17: " Thus there were fourteen GENERATIONS from Avraham to David..." This reference is *not* to 14 different races, but to 14 different generations of that race -- each generation following the other in logical sequence. Yeshua asked: "Whereunto shall I liken this GENERATION?" -- a reference to that generation then living. Yeshua called it "an evil and adulterous GENERATION," and likened it to a man possessed of demons whose latter end was worse than the first. The people of Nineveh "will stand up at the Judgment

with this GENERATION and condemn it" (Matthew 12:38-45). It was a "faithless and perverse generation" (Matthew 17:17).

Then, in Matthew 23, Yeshua sternly rebuked the hypocrisy of his day and proclaimed that they were no better than their fathers (former generations) that had killed the prophets; judgment upon Jerusalem was certain; their house would be left desolate -- "all these things shall come upon this GENERATION." Finally we read in Matthew 24:34: "Yes! I tell you that this people will certainly not pass away before all these things happen."

It is totally *arbitrary* to take "generation" in all these other verses in Matthew to mean the generation living at one time, and then -- in Matthew 24 -- try to make it mean the whole race of Jews over a period of 2,000 years or more! This is illogical and preposterous! Only someone trying to uphold a pet "theory" would attempt to do this.

Strangely enough, those who say "generation" means the Jewish people as a *race* in Matthew 24, also say the Jewish race will *never* pass away! So if Yeshua meant the Jewish race will not pass away until these things are fulfilled, and if the Jewish race will never pass away, his words were totally meaningless! But if we take the word "generation" in its normal and primary meaning -- ***the generation of people living at one time*** -- Yeshua did indeed answer the question: "WHEN shall these things be?"

The End of the Age

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. Concerning that day and hour NOBODY KNOWS, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:35-36).

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Concerning that day or the hour NOBODY KNOWS, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:31-32).

To this, Luke's account adds --

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away. But keep watch on yourselves, or your hearts will become dulled by carousing, drunkenness and the worries of everyday living, and that Day will be sprung upon you SUDDENLY like a trap! For it will close in on everyone, no matter where they live, throughout the whole world" (Luke 21:33-35).

Now up to this point Yeshua spoke of things leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem. Twice he briefly left his original line of thought to contrast those events with the second coming (Matthew 24:27 and 30-31). After explaining what would happen in that generation, the entire discourse now shifts to the question about the second coming and the end of the world. Yeshua said that heaven and earth shall pass away -- the end of the age -- and that the TIME of "that day" is not revealed -- see Matthew 24:40-42:

"Then there will be two men in a field -- one will be taken and the other left behind. There will two women grinding flour at the mill -- one will be taken and the other left behind. So stay alert, because *you don't know on what day your Lord will come*"

Dispensationalists who suppose these verses describe a pre-tribulation rapture, face serious difficulties of interpretation! We are all the way down at verse 40. To harmonize with the dispensational scenario, these verses should have been way back in the early part of Matthew 24 -- before the tribulation, before the abomination of desolation, before the flight into the mountains! But, no matter how hard you look, there is NO HINT of a secret rapture anywhere in those early verses. Not until "*after* the tribulation" -- regardless of how we understand the tribulation of Matthew 24 -- do we read of Yeshua's coming when one will be taken and the other left!

New Testament References for "Tribulation"

The word that is translated "tribulation" or "trouble" in Matthew 24 is *thlipsis* (***Strong's Concordance***, #2347). This Greek word is also translated affliction, anguish, persecution, and burdened. An in-depth study of all references in which this word appears can be summed up in the following categories --

First, tribulation upon the Jews. As we have seen, Yeshua spoke of "great tribulation" or trouble (Matthew 24:21). Luke's account states: "There shall be great **distress** in the land" -- JUDEA -- "and wrath upon this people -- THE JEWS -- "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:23-24). We know this tribulation CAME TO ITS END IN 70 A.D.

Second, tribulation against Christians. "In the world you shall have **tribulation**" (John 16:33). "We must through much **tribulation** enter into the kingdom" (Acts 14:22). "**Tribulation** works patience" (Romans 5:3). **Tribulation** will not separate us from the Messiah (Romans 8:35-37). We are exhorted to be "patient in **tribulation**" (Romans 12:12), "joyful in all our **tribulations**" (2 Corinthians 7:4), and faint not at **tribulation** (Ephesians 3:13 and 2 Thessalonians 1:4). In the book of Revelation we find that the Church of YEHOVAH at Smyrna suffered **tribulation** -- see 2:9-10. The apostle John, the writer of the book of Revelation, refers to himself as "your brother and companion in **tribulation**" (Revelation 1:9). This type of tribulation SPANS THE ENTIRE GOSPEL AGE.

Third, tribulation upon the wicked. To the believers in Thessalonica who were enduring "persecutions and tribulations" (2 Thessalonians 1:4), Paul wrote: "For it is justice for God to pay back trouble to those who are troubling you" (verse 6). WHEN? "*When the Lord Yeshua is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in a fiery flame.* Then he will punish those who don't know God, that is, those who don't listen to the Good News of our Lord Yeshua and obey it. They will suffer the just penalty of eternal destruction, far away from the face of the Lord and the glory of his might. On that Day, when he comes to be glorified by his holy people and admired by all who have trusted, you will be among them, because you trusted our witness to you."

When Yeshua descends from heaven, his people will be caught up to meet him in the air -- and "sudden destruction" will fall upon the wicked "and they shall not escape." It is concerning THIS WRATH -- not a seven year tribulation period -- that we read: "For God has not intended

that we should experience his fury [wrath], but that we should gain deliverance through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah" -- see 1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:9. True Christians are not appointed to wrath, but only a few verses before Paul *did* say they are appointed to tribulation! "...none of you would let these persecutions [tribulation -- *thlipsis*] unsettle him. For you yourselves know that these are bound to come to us; even when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were about to be persecuted; and indeed it has happened, as you know" (1 Thessalonians 3:3-4).

Jacob's Trouble

One prophecy remains to be considered here -- the time of Jacob's trouble! "Ah, that day is awesome; there is none like it! It is a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be delivered from it" (Jeremiah 30:7). Because this description in some translations uses the terms "great" and mentions trouble "is awesome; there is none like it," dispensationalists ASSUME this refers to a final seven year tribulation period. And since this "is a time of trouble for Jacob" -- **not the church's** -- it is further ASSUMED the church will be raptured *before* this time! Such conclusions cannot be justified when taken in context.

Because the book of Jeremiah is a long book -- the second longest in the scriptures -- many people are simply not familiar with the SETTING in which this prophecy was given. Jeremiah repeatedly warned the Israelites that enemy armies would come against them; they would be taken into captivity; they would be punished by YEHOVAH -- if they did not repent. They did not repent -- and the time of trouble came upon them. They were then taken into captivity by the king of Babylon. But notice -- the prophecy said, "but he [Jacob -- Israel] will be delivered from it." This took place when YEHOVAH God allowed the people to RETURN from the Babylonian captivity.

We have heard a voice of **trembling**, of **fear**, and not of **peace**. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth **travail** with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in **travail**, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, **so that none is like it**: it is even THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE; but he shall be **saved** out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his **yoke** from off thy neck...I will **save** thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their **captivity**; and **Jacob shall return**...I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents...and the city shall be builded upon her own heap (Jeremiah 30).

1/. The prophecy about Jacob's trouble mentioned "a voice of **trembling**" (verse 5). Was this the case when the king of Babylon came against Israel? Yes -- notice: "We have sinned against the Lord. We looked for **peace**...and for a time of health, and behold trouble! The snorting of his horses was heard...the whole land **trembled**" (Jeremiah 8:14-16).

2/. Jacob's trouble would be a time of **fear** (verse 5). Did fear come upon the people in those days? You bet! "Behold, a people cometh from the north country...they ride upon horses....We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble...**fear** is on every side" (Jeremiah 6:22-26). "**Fear** and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction" (Lamentations 3:47).

3/. The prophecy said *peace* would be taken from them (verse 5). Was their peace taken away in those days? Indeed -- notice: "I have taken away my *peace* from this people...We looked for peace...and behold trouble" (Jeremiah 8:15; 16:5).

4/. The prophecy compared Jacob's trouble to the *travail* of a woman giving birth to a child. This also happened at this time: "What will thou say when he shall punish thee?...sorrows shall take thee as a woman in *travail*" (Jeremiah 13:21). Also: "Pangs have taken thee as a woman in *travail*...for now shalt thou go forth out of the city...even to Babylon" (Micah 4:9-10).

5/. It would be a time of trouble so "that none is like it" (verse 7). Does this phrase properly describe the trouble that enveloped that people? Yes! Ezekiel -- using language very similar to that of Jeremiah -- said: "...assuredly, thus said the Lord God: I, in turn, am going to deal with you, and I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. On account of all your abominations, *I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again*" (Ezekiel 5:8-9). When this punishment descended upon them, Jeremiah stated that it "exceeded the iniquity of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment" (Lamentations 4:6). Daniel wrote of that time of trouble in the following words: "All Israel have transgressed thy law...therefore the curse is poured upon them...God hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us...by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven *hath not been done as hath been done* upon Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:11-12). Such proverbial wording and literary techniques were used by the prophets to describe times of trouble that were uniquely severe.

6/. Even though this time of trouble would come upon Jacob (Israel), the prophecy had some light at the end of the tunnel: "But he shall be delivered from it. In that day -- declares the Lord of Hosts -- I will break the yoke from off your neck and I will rip off your bonds...I will deliver you from far away, your folk from their land of captivity" (Jeremiah 30:7-8, 10). They had the promise that "after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you...in causing you to *return*...I will turn away your captivity...I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive" (Jeremiah 29:10-14). "Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you fear; do not be afraid of him -- declares the LORD -- for I am with you to save you and to rescue you from his hands" (Jeremiah 42:11). "Fear not thou, O my servant Jacob...I will *save* thee from afar...Jacob shall *return*" (Jeremiah 46:27). The fulfillment of these verses and the return from the seventy years captivity at Babylon are spelled out in the book of Ezra.

Here, then, we have the prophecy about Jacob's trouble and deliverance -- complete with other scriptures that record the fulfillment. In most cases the wording is precisely the same. It all fits perfectly together. But some misguided modern-day "prophets" and "ministers" have set all of this aside, claiming that this prophecy is still future, because of the closing words: "...in the *latter* days you shall consider it" (Jeremiah 30:24). In reading the expression "the latter days" it is easy for some to ASSUME the very end of *this* age is intended. However, the word *latter* -- which is used several times in Jeremiah -- simply expressed an undefined future: "in the future" or "*later on* you will consider it."

When these things had all taken place, they were able to "consider" or understand the fulfillment of what had been prophesied. In this case, the "latter" days were those days AFTER THEIR CAPTIVITY. The house of YEHOVAH (the Temple) that they built upon their return was

the "*latter*" house" or Temple as compared to the "*former*" house or Temple before the captivity -- see Haggai 2:9. After their return, the prophets that had warned them *before* the captivity were referred to as "the *former* prophets" (Zechariah 1:4; 7:7, 12) which would mark the days *after* the captivity (in comparison) as the *later* or *latter* days. Therefore, it is in this sense that the expression is used in Jeremiah 30. What Jeremiah labeled "the time of Jacob's trouble" is now ANCIENT HISTORY -- *not* an end-time tribulation period!

A Seven-Year Tribulation Period?

With so much talk in "Christian" circles about a future seven-year Tribulation Period -- and all the discussion as to whether the rapture will be pre-trib or post-trib -- it is simply amazing that one simple fact has been completely overlooked: There is not one single verse anywhere in the entire New Testament that mentions a seven-year tribulation period!

Are we, therefore, implying that there will be no tribulation at the end of the age? All through the centuries there have been times of tribulation experienced by Christians -- to one degree or another. We have, of course, no guarantee that the last days will be any exception. But we certainly DO NOT believe there will be the type of tribulation period that is commonly expounded in dispensational circles.

The Bible clearly teaches that at the time of the second coming -- the end of the age -- people will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building, buying and selling -- in other words, life will be going on as it normally does! (Luke 17:26-30). Life will be continuing in what will be considered a NORMAL, routine pattern. People will be saying, "Peace and safety" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Surely, if "all hell will break loose" upon this earth in the way some have proclaimed, after undergoing this for seven years people clearly would *not* be saying, "Peace and safety"!!

Writing more than a hundred years ago, H. Grattan Guinness said it well --

If such signs as are imagined by some people to precede the advent, the state of society predicted in these passages could not by any possibility exist. If monstrous, unheard of, supernatural, portentous events were to transpire, would they not be telegraphed the same day all over a startled world, and produce such a sense of alarm and expectation that buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, would all be arrested together, and 'peace and safety' would be far from anyone's lips? (***Light for the Last Days***, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1893).

In view of the things we have presented in this article, the only conclusion possible is that there ***WILL NOT*** be the type of tribulation during the last years of this age as some have envisioned. We don't know the day or the hour of Yeshua's return. The important point to remember is that we should watch and be ready for his return at all times -- "while continuing to expect the blessed fulfillment of our certain hope, which is THE APPEARING OF THE SH'KHINAH [GLORY] OF OUR GREAT GOD [YEHOVAH] ***AND*** the appearing of our Deliverer, Yeshua the Messiah" (Titus 2:13 -- ***Jewish New Testament***).

HOPE OF ISRAEL



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Dear Brother John D. Keyser,

Thanks for the Berean magazine. May Yehovah God and Yeshua Messiah bless you a bundle. This is the true good news that shall preach to all the nations before the return of the Messiah.

One thing that I thought you had made a mistake because you denied the pre-existence of Yeshua the Messiah. Are you denying that Yeshua is not God in flesh? If so, you are also denying John 1:1; 10-12; 10:30; 14:6-10; Matthew 1:22; Rev. 1:17-18; 22:13.

I am also a minister of a Church of God, but I love to call and use the name of God Yehovah or Yahuvah or Yashua or Yeshua instead of Lord and Jesus. That is why I came out from the Church of God in 1992. I always prayed that one day Yeshua will open the blind preachers eyes and many will come with me to share and praise God's Holy Name, the name Yehovah and the name of Yeshua, the true name of salvation. Now that my eyes have seen you proclaim the name Yehovah and Yeshua, and it makes me very happy. Halleluyah. May your magazine shine for everywhere so people may see the true light and the truth that will set them free. Halleluyah.

Please put me in your list. I am a pastor and is also your Brother too.

Shalom,
D.K.H. (California)

COMMENT: Thank you for your letter. You bet I deny the pre-existence of Yeshua -- the Bible denies the pre-existence of Yeshua! The verses you mentioned in no way prove that Yeshua the Messiah pre-existed before his human birth in Bethlehem. I don't have room in this section to answer all of the verses you quote above. You need to send for the many articles we have that cover these much misunderstood parts of the Bible.

Hello,

Thank you for sending me the latest issue of the Berean. Could you please send me a calendar for the year 2001 so that I will be observing the correct Sabbath Day and also the correct Holy Days this year? I tried to view it from my computer but I can't for some reason. Thank you so much for all your help. Your articles are outstanding, and they have helped me to dramatically change my life for the Lord.

Thank you again,
P.F. (Arizona)

I love to get a monthly Berean report and anything else that you might send to help me in my daily walk with God.

COMMENT: A calendar has been sent. Incidentally, *The Berean Voice* is bi-monthly -- not monthly! If time allows, I would certainly like to make it monthly. Thank you for your message.

Greetings:

Thank you for sending me The Berean Voice. I was so moved by the articles in the December, 2000 issue that I am requesting that you send the magazine to three of my friends. I still have to read the July/August, 2001 issue...and can't wait. The article entitles "Should there be Government in the Church of God?" was truly Holy Spirit inspired! It is so sad how this world and this world's churches are corrupt through and through with satanic influence. This just causes me to cry out to YEHOVAH to come quickly and establish His Kingdom here!

Would you please send the articles that I have marked on the enclosed sheets. Enclosed is a money order to cover your costs. Please send this order to the above inside address. Thank you and YEHOVAH's blessings be upon you.

Sincerely,

D.M. (Texas)

COMMENT: Yes, may YEHOVAH set up His kingdom soon! The articles you requested have been sent.

Half of my family is Catholic, my best friend is Catholic. They now tell me that Jesus is Catholic because Peter founded the early church.

I read your article about Peter, and wish that I could present it to them, but as a fellow believer in Christ, I don't think I could present these facts to them, without making them think they are being bashed. Do you have something with a little more grace, that presents the truth to people who are so grounded in their faith, yet are open-minded to facts?

I am not Catholic, nor a Protestant, I can't stand labels, although I may lean toward one direction more than another. I believe literally in the Bible and prefer the King James Version over all the others. I pray daily for my friends and family. I just am not sure how to get them the truth, especially since they think that I don't know the truth. They label me as a Protestant. I am just a believer in Christ and the Bible is my foundation. I do attend a 4 square church, that is just a part of my feeding, my richest food is from the Bible. However I am weak at presenting the truth especially since my Catholic family reads the same book as I and get another interpretation. I believe these Catholics are saved, maybe mislead, yet by God's grace are saved. However I do wish for them to see some facts.

What if Peter is who they truly think they believe in because constant Biblical references are made, and what if they never really knew about Simon Magus? What if God looked in their hearts and knew their intent was the good Peter and not bad Simon, because they didn't know the difference? Your article could hit hard, and probably wouldn't even be accepted by my friends and family. Can you show me something with just facts so they would decide for themselves, rather than feel it's being thrown at them that they are being led by Satan? Please help.

A.M.

COMMENT: Thank you, A.M., for your message. There are a number of books on the market which deal with the erroneous doctrines of the Catholic Church. Here are a few:

A Woman Rides the Beast, by Dave Hunt.

The Gospel According to Rome, by James G. McCarthy.

The Two Babylons, by Alexander Hislop.

Babylon Mystery Religion, by Ralph Woodrow. (I believe this book is now out of print. You should be able to locate a copy on the Internet or Interlibrary Loan Service.)

Hello,

I wanted to thank you for all the wonderful articles you have been sending to me. They sure have opened my eyes to the truth. Your ministry is wonderful. I wish all the other ministries out there would have the courage to speak out against all the lies as you have done.

I need some help though. Now that I am observing the Sabbath by the moon, I am a little confused as to when to follow it. Could you send me a calendar for the remainder of the year, and that way I will know also when Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles is. Lately, I have been following the Sabbath Day for Fridays. Example: This week on Thursday August 9, 2001 at sunset I would begin Sabbath and end Sabbath on Friday August 10, 2001 at sunset. Is this correct? And then next week begin on Thursday, and end on Friday, and the next week. Then it would begin on a Saturday evening at sunset and end on Sunday night.

Could you please let me know if I am correct?

Thank You So Much,

A.

COMMENT: Dear A., Yom Kippur and the Day of Atonement are one and the same day. On the week you mentioned the Sabbath actually fell on the Saturday (sunset August 10 to sunset August 11). The following week it also fell on the Saturday -- sunset August 17 to sunset August 18. The next Sabbath day fell on August 27 (sunset Sunday 26th to sunset Monday 27th). We sent you a calendar which explains how YEHOVAH's calendar works.

Dear Mr. Keyser,

Thank u for the Berean Voice I received a few weeks

ago. My friend, D.M., most probably gave you my address -- he feels it has to come from you otherwise he is indoctrinating me.

I found your articles on the Sabbath very interesting and thought provoking. I would like to study what you have. I have always studied whatever came my way -- prayed about it before I started and asked our Father to guide me only in the Truth. Mr. Dankenbring will probably blast me, but I cannot leave studying this information, I will always be wondering....

One thing I would like to ask though. I don't know whether I am dimwitted, but with the Sabbath being observed according to the moon, should Pentecost not then fall on the ninth of Sivan? As the Bible says we should observe it the day AFTER the SEVENTH SABBATH. I am at work and can't remember the verses from memory, I think my old grey head is getting very forgetful. So counting the first week from the 16th Nisan (we have two weeks in Nisan), then we count four weeks in the following month and the 7th week in Sivan which starts counting on the 2nd to the 8th (Sabbath) then the day after the seventh Sabbath falls on the 9th (which I think is a better figure 3 X 3), 6 somehow does not fit. As you say, if there are more than 29 days in the month the extra day is counted together with the last Sabbath (if there is an extra day). Please let me know where I am thinking wrong.

Please could you send me all the other literature you have on the page I am sending a copy of. With you people in America and us in South Africa it is a bit difficult to send money, but I will arrange with D. when he transfers again. You don't have to send all at the same time, I will leave it to your discretion.

I have just sent a letter to Mr. Dankenbring about the Pentecost question -- after the 7th Sabbath and included the 16th page of his Bible lesson #12 on which I asked him about the paragraph by Dr. Dimbleby about being able to tell the day of the week by the sun and moon....I also told him that I just received your first Berean Voice and that I was studying your idea about the Sabbath.

I would also like to know whether you really stole the website and the list of members when you left? Funny, though, that you never sent me a magazine....Mr. Dankenbring is very very mad with you, and he will be very mad with me, but I believe that if I do not study widely I will never know the Truth -- look what happened to

Worldwide, of which I was a 'member' and Global, of which I was a 'member.' I think that 'church,' in any case, means called out ones and not a body corporate. I might be wrong, but the experiences I've had does make one skeptic.

Thank you for reading my letter. Hope to be hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,
H.M.G. (South Africa)

COMMENT: The first thing to remember is that you can't go by the present erroneous Jewish calendar. With that in mind, the true Pentecost will not fall on Sivan 6 on this calendar. This year it fell on Friday the 10th of Sivan (sunset Thursday Sivan 9 to sunset Friday Sivan 10) according to the Jewish calendar. We must think in terms of YEHOVAH's calendar -- not the faulty calendars that are the product of the minds of men. The article, *Leviticus Proves Saturday Is Not the Sabbath* (September-October *Berean Voice*) should help you grasp the subject of Pentecost.

Regarding Dankenbring and his libelous charges -- this man has a history of making accusations against people without doing any checking to see if he has any grounds for such charges. He is quick to jump to conclusions and has, in fact, promulgated lies about a number of people who happen not to agree with some or all of his corrupt doctrines. Needless to say, I did not steal his website or steal his mailing list -- these are nothing but false accusations without a fragment of evidence to back them up. "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles [or prophets] and **are not**, and have found them *liars*" (Revelation 2:2).

Hello,

I have just found your web site and love all the helpful information. I have been attending David J. Smith's church in Waxahachie, TX. Many people have been leaving in the last six months. Do you have any information about Mr. Smith that would help me? Also do you have a list of churches in the Ft. Worth, Waco, TX area.

Thanks for your help!

B.

COMMENT: I do not know Mr. Smith personally, but have visited his website and found it full of what could best be called drivel.

Unfortunately, we do not have any local churches in the areas you mentioned. If you are not already getting *The Berean Voice*, be sure to ask for a free one-year subscription.

Dear Mr. Keyser,

Have been reading some of your articles about the weekly sabbath. All of the articles have been making great sense to me. So would like to continue getting some of these, instead of getting them from friends.

I'm enclosing a small check to help with the postage, etc. Since I'm old and on Social Security, although both my husband and I are active, and doing alright we still have to watch the budget, and he is definitely not interested in religion.

Anyway, one thing I'm concerned about it seems a lot of people, places, etc. are sure to impress you with facts about how Yeshua was here at the beginning and involved with the creation not realizing that this is wrong. John 1:1 should read that In the beginning was the creation, and the creation was with God. Well, I won't go into this further, but I'm hoping that you won't have articles, etc., tapes to convince people that Yeshua was the creator and not God. In fact just the opposite I'm finally looking forward to more people who realize that Yahweh was the creator and Yeshua is the Messiah. Enough said, needless to say, I'm eagerly seeking after all these years, 30 or more to get on the right track, and realize that there is more to learn, and keep on learning and changing if that is what HE is showing us to do.

Thank you for listening,
R.M.C. (Washington)

We have two addresses because we have 2 places one in town and one at the lake. But since we will be at the lake more now, so send to this above address. Thank you.

Would like to receive *The Omer Count and God's Weekly Cycle*, also *Was Jesus Christ in the Grave for 3 Days and 3 Nights?*

COMMENT: You don't have to worry -- *The Berean Voice* magazine has articles proving that Yeshua did not pre-exist, as you have probably realized by now. The articles you requested have been sent to you.

Dear Sir:

Please send me articles about the pre-existence of Yeshua, pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton and the truth about the Anti-christ.

My address is...

Many thanks and hope to receive them soon!

Sincerely,
A.V.C. (Philippines)

COMMENT: Dear A.V.C. -- the articles are on their way to you!

Hi!

I have searched the internet and I found your site. I read approximately less than 1/3 of the article *Did the Apostle Peter Ever Visit Rome?* The information was interesting.

I would love if I had a copy of *Joseph and the Engineering Wonders of Egypt*.

Thank you.

God bless you, may God use you to bless others, & bring them to salvation!

God bless you!
E.B.

COMMENT: Thank you for your letter. The article has been sent to you.

The Three Great *Enemies* of the Kingdom of God!

John D. Keyser

The true explanation of the whole course of human history lies in the realms of the unseen; and it is only by divine revelation -- as has been given in the Bible -- that the hidden causes of the great historical movements and epochs of the world of men can be known. And let us have no doubt in our minds that all the disorders, conflicts, restlessness and miseries of the world are a result of the resistance Satan has offered -- and still offers -- to the establishment of YEHOVAH God's and Yeshua's rule on this earth.

In light of these Biblical facts, it is of the deepest significance that there have appeared, during all the centuries of the Christian era, just THREE great systems, having a *religious character* and a *political aim*, which have set themselves up in DIRECT OPPOSITION to the Kingdom of God and the express rule and sovereignty of YEHOVAH God and Yeshua the Messiah on the earth. These three systems are satanically energized and have the single object of frustrating the purpose and plan of YEHOVAH. We read, in Luke 11:21-22 --

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

This world was the strong man's (Satan's) house; and he was keeping his possessions (human beings) in "peace," until someone stronger than he appeared upon the scene and stripped him of his armor in which he trusted. Yeshua's coming into the world was for the one purpose -- which he caused to be proclaimed in the most public way, of setting up a kingdom -- the Kingdom of God. This was a DIRECT CHALLENGE to "the prince of this world" (Satan), who has never ceased, from that time until now, to resist the attempt to "spoil him of his possessions."

Judaism

The first system that offered organized and satanically inspired opposition to the Kingdom of God was THE JEWISH NATION -- the leaders of which were declared by Yeshua himself to be the children of the Devil (see John 8:44). That nation has miraculously maintained its national existence and its traditional religion ("the traditions of the elders") through all the centuries of our era. And it is, of course, BITTERLY OPPOSED as ever to the faith of Yeshua the Messiah. It is a fact that Judaism has NOT improved or changed its nature during the nineteen centuries of its existence in "this present evil world."

Judaism is the religion of the Pharisees and the patrimony of Babylon, from whence the Talmudic and Kabbalistic traditions of Judaism ultimately derive. It is the *Talmud*, not the Bible, which is the basis of the system of orthodox Judaism. Everything about Judaism is either a

distortion or a falsification of the Old Testament because Judaism is based on a man-made tradition that *voids* the Old Testament by means of a series of dispensations and loopholes. The uncensored *Talmud* is replete with absurdities and the filthiest and most psychotic libels and maledictions against non-Jews, women and Bible patriarchs imaginable. It specifically defines all who are not Jews as non-human animals, and specifically dehumanizes Gentiles as not being descendants of Adam. Orthodox Judaism's other major sacred book -- the *Kabbalah* -- is filled with astrological teachings, fortune-telling, gematria, necromancy and demonology. It is the other Jewish wing of the oral tradition of the elders claiming, like the *Talmud*, to be part of a secret teaching given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

Judaism's aim still is supremacy over the Gentiles, and its religious attitude is as uncompromisingly anti-Christian as it ever was. Satan, who inspired and directed its activities at the beginning, is still its spiritual leader and energizer. Apostate Judaism has neither quit the field of conflict, nor has it changed sides. Let us be perfectly clear about that. In a statement from the Israeli *Mechon-Mamre Torah Scholars* we find: "The Torah maintains that the righteous of all nations have a place in the World to Come. But not all religious Gentiles earn eternal life by virtue of observing their religion...And while the Christians do generally accept the Hebrew Bible as truly from God, many of them [those who accept the divinity of Yeshua after his resurrection] are idolaters according to the Torah, punishable by death, and certainly will not enjoy the World to Come" (June 26, 2000). Judaism's character and career as an opponent of true Christianity is pictured in the first group of four TRUMPETS in the Book of Revelation.

Muhammadanism

The *second* of the three great systems, religious in character, but having for its political aim the DOMINATION OF THE WORLD, is Muhammadanism or Islam. It is necessary to call attention to the remarkable fact that in Islam we have a movement energized by prodigious spiritual powers of evil -- a satanic caricature of the Kingdom of God being led by a FALSE PROPHET and based upon a FALSE BIBLE (the *Koran*) and seeking to gain the sovereignty of the world. Islam's earnest goal, set forth in the *Koran* and *hadith* (Islamic written tradition), remains the same: to bring all mankind into submission (that's what "Islam" means) and to kill or enslave all "infidels." Islam (in obedience to the *Koran* and Muhammad's example) is the driving force behind most terrorism today. Muhammad himself declared, "The last hour will not come before the Muslims fight the Jews and the Muslims kill them."

Islam spread rapidly under Muhammad and his successors through *jihad* ("holy war"). Muhammad himself planned 65 campaigns and personally led 27 involving naked aggression and treachery. This incredible "evangelism" made "converts" by the millions at the point of a sword. At its peak, Islam had conquered all of North Africa and almost took over Europe. Muhammadanism continues its conquest worldwide. Today's invaders are millions of immigrants who make converts to Islam through misrepresentation. Westerners naively accept Allah -- who inspired Muhammad -- as the God of the Bible. Yet Allah has no son, is unknowable, and was the *pagan idol/god* of Muhammad's tribe before he was born. Allah tells Muslims, "Take not the Jews and Christians for friends...slay the idolaters [infidels] wherever ye find them....Fight against those who...believe not in Allah nor the Last Day."

Catholicism

The *third* and last of these three enemies of the Kingdom of God is Catholicism. Here, again, we have identically the same distinguishing features that characterize the other two and mark them plainly as the enemies of the Kingdom of God. The system is also *religious* in character, binding its adherents together by that which has ever been the strongest of all ties -- religion. As well as this its aim is *political*, the same precisely as that of the other two -- namely to gain supreme authority over the nations of the earth.

Judaism bases its claim to supremacy over the nations upon its misinterpretation of the prophets. Muhammadanism also claims a God-given right to rule the world, basing its claim upon the *Koran* and the pretensions of the false prophet. Catholicism, in this respect, is the most *subtle* and *deceptive* of them all -- for its claim to supreme governmental authority is based upon the blasphemous pretension that its head, the pope, is the "vicar of Christ."

One difference between Catholicism and the other two systems calls for special attention. Both Judaism and Muhammadanism have been -- from the very beginning -- the OPEN ENEMIES of Christianity. They are shown in the trumpet visions as openly opposed to YEHOVAH and His saints. However, Catholicism arose not from without but *from within* the pale of professed Christianity. It has set itself forth *not* as the adversary of the Kingdom of God, but on the contrary as being the true realization and embodiment thereof. Therefore, its real character as the enemy of YEHOVAH and the oppressor of His purposes is not openly displayed. It is unveiled as a "mystery" in the days of the seventh trumpet, where it is shown by a special vision as developing out of, and in close political association with, the Roman Empire -- the political framework of which was perpetuated and subordinated to its purpose. The gradual transformation of Imperial Rome into Papal Rome has been a marvel of history greater and more mysterious even than the rise and career of Muhammadanism.

The Three Great Systems

This has been the general state of affairs during the Christian era. It is certain that if the design of the trumpet series of visions in the Book of Revelation was to reveal to the servants of Yeshua the great adversaries that were to arise in *direct opposition* to the purpose of YEHOVAH in this age, then we shall find therein the symbolic representations of just THREE -- no more and no less -- great and mighty *religious systems*, and each having the SINGLE POLITICAL AIM of subjugating the world. And, on the other hand, if upon careful study of the symbols of the trumpet series we find them such as may be clearly explained by reference to the three systems that have contested the field of the world (Matthew 13:38) with the soldiers of Yeshua, then we are fully warranted in concluding that it was the *design* of those visions to reveal the rise, the development and end of these great adversaries of the Kingdom of God.

It is also a matter of deep significance that each of these three great systems has manifested untoward activity in, and subsequent to, the great war of 1914-1918. For while the political manipulations of the Jews in regard to the finances of the great nations are very carefully concealed, nevertheless the "invisible hand" sometimes shows itself on the surface of world affairs. Also, the vitality of Zionism -- and the progress made in a very brief period of time towards converting

Palestine into a national homeland for the Jews -- are among the most significant of the events of the end-time.

Students of prophecy are watching these developments with intense interest, some with expectations (such as that the Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem by the Israelis, animal sacrifices resumed, etc.) which are totally without support in the Bible. Yet, in all of this, is the Word of YEHOVAH with the clear promise that "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26). That these words refer to the *physical*, not to the spiritual Israel, is clear from the context -- where reference is made to the power of YEHOVAH to "graft them in again into their own olive tree" (verses 23-24).

Muhammadanism too has had a remarkable recrudescence -- not withstanding the seeming death-wound to the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. The marvelous recovery under the regime of the Young Turks, the unrest in India, Egypt and elsewhere, and the dread possibility of concerted action by the Muslim countries of the world against the United States and the nations of western Europe ("the Christian nations," so called), are not the least among the anxieties of the heads of governments in these perplexing times.

Finally, as to the activities and gains of the Papacy in the field of world politics, coupled with that of religion (where it is taking full advantage of the disintegration of the Protestant denominations under the canker of *Modernism*) it is needless to speak. In fact, it would require an entire book to tell the full story. It is enough for those with understanding to see that these THREE MIGHTY SYSTEMS OF EVIL -- the agencies of the god of this world -- are all ready for instant action when the blast of the SEVENTH TRUMPET will announce the hour for the last fatal conflict in which *all* that oppose the Kingdom of God and the power of His Messiah shall be finally and completely overthrown.

It is indeed a very significant fact that in the tiny country of Judea (modern Israel) these three great systems are even now in touch with one another -- with results that hint at the most serious consequences. For the Muhammadan Arabs are violently opposed to the State of Israel; and the Papacy has uttered its protest against the "desecration of the holy places" by Jewish occupancy. So right here is a situation that is pregnant with great possibilities. For out of it might easily spring events that will set those mighty forces into operation, whereby the mystery of God shall be finished, His enemies be overwhelmed, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of YEHOVAH and of His Messiah.

In future issues of *The Berean Voice* we will delve into the prophecies of the Bible, and particularly the symbolism of the Book of Revelation, to show in more detail where these satanic forces are leading.

In Future Issues....

The Trumpets of Revelation and the Scourge of Islam!

Who Is -- "The Alpha and Omega"?

Colossians 1:15-20

Taliban: *A Perfect Islamic Society*

by Keerthi Reddy

On July 16, 1998, the maggot ridden naked corpse of a woman caked with old blood was found in a ravaged back alley of Khairkhana, Kabul in Afghanistan. After hours of investigation, the post mortem revealed that the corpse belonged to a young woman named Shukriya, the daughter of Ali Mardan. When she was alive, Shukriya used to take care of her family's tiny tailor shop in addition to raising her four young children. Fifty five days earlier, on her way back from a religious ceremony Shukriya was startled to hear the screeching of brakes as a car spun to a halt in front of her. A gang of about seven Muslim holy warriors of the Taliban, who carried beards the length of which were in exact religious conformance with the Islamic scriptures, grabbed her and dragged her into their car.

The Taliban is comprised of Pakistanis and Afghanis who are considered the true "Mujahideen" or "holy warriors of Allah" because they have established a purely Islamic state which rigidly conforms to the "pious Muslim ideals" which were outlined and set down by the Prophet Mohammed.

The piercing screams of Shukriya as she was gang raped by the holy warriors must have been muffled by the sound of the engine, for not a single passer by dared to protest the crime taking place in front of their eyes. Minutes later as her cries subsided, a thick and dark trail of blood slowly started dripping out of the drivers side door. Suddenly the car veered dangerously and drove off in the distance to an unknown location. No doubt the mangled and violated body of a woman who just minutes ago was the mother of four young children and now a lifeless corpse, must have been unceremoniously dumped by the Mujahideen like yesterday's garbage, only to be found in its festering condition, fifty five days later.

But that's not what's shocking about this incident.

What's truly shocking about it is the fact that Shukriya's story is just one among thousands if not millions such similar stories. Amnesty International, the leading global human rights monitor, in its report on Afghan women declared that:

"Armed groups have massacred defenseless women in their homes, or have brutally beaten and raped them. Scores of young women have been abducted and then raped, taken as wives by commanders or sold into prostitution. Some have committed suicide to avoid such a fate. Scores of women have reportedly disappeared and several have been stoned to death. Many women are traumatized by the horrific abuses, they have suffered or witnessed."

So desperate is their situation that the majority of women prefer to die by consuming caustic soda or other household poisons. Western aid workers in Afghanistan have reported a dramatic increase in the number of women committing suicide because they can no longer bear the country's stifling Islamic code. The mass phenomenon of Afghani women consuming caustic soda to put themselves out of their misery is shockingly common. The agony of their situation can be gleaned from the fact that consuming caustic soda results in a torturously painful and lingering death. First it burns away the throat, and then slowly the internal organs are burnt. It takes an average of three to four days to suffer out the symptoms which are horribly traumatic.

Many doctors are also reporting the fact that thousands of Afghan women now flock clinics by feigning heart condition. The reason for this drama is to somehow acquire lethal digoxin tablets for the purpose of committing suicide. The increase in female suicide was barely highlighted in last year's United Nations report on Afghanistan. A huge spurt in incidences of women being admitted to mental hospitals with severe depression has become rampant with the Talibanization of Afghanistan. The suicides and mental illnesses are never spoken about in the rigidly fundamentalist Islamic society. International aid agencies have been threatened with dire consequences for daring to say anything about the true situation of women in Afghanistan.

The reason for the utter helplessness of the raped, depressed and abused women of Afghanistan is the *Quran*. Rape is, if not very difficult, almost impossible to prove because of Islamic law. Prophet Mohammed's divine injunctions of Allah clearly outline through the *Quran* that a woman's word on rape is not to be taken into account. Proving her innocence is a dauntingly unreachable task. Almost all the rape victims are in fact charged with an adulterous and loose moral character. This is because the *Quran* clearly says that the testimony of one man is considered as equal to that of two women. This blatant discrimination is amply explained in Quranic Sura 24:1-4. Regarding this issue, the famous Islamic scholar Anwar Shaikh comments:

"As a result of this law, a raped woman has to produce four eye-witnesses to the act, which is more or less an impossibility. Its devastating effect can be clearly seen in Pakistan where several thousand good, honest Muslim women are imprisoned for suffering rape. When they report their cases to the police, they are required to produce four eye-witnesses. As they cannot do so, they are held as false accusers, and put behind bars."

Many Quranic Surahs exhort torturous punishment for "fornication prone" women. It is primarily due to this inherent disadvantage which weighs down Muslim women, that they fear for their very lives when they are the victim of rape. Instead of having the opportunity to bring the culprit to justice, these women spend the rest of their lives in fear that the deed will be discovered and that the victim herself will have to suffer the punishment for being an adulteress instead of the other way around.

Some of the Quranic Surahs which provide the basis for these type of heinous punishments on women are provided below. These verses have been taken verbatim from the translation of the *Quran* by the respected Muslim scholar, Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

Quran 4:15: "If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, Take the evidence of four (reliable) witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify, confine them to houses until death do claim them, or God ordain for them some (other) way."

Here one must note that anybody can point the finger and accuse a woman of "lewdness" meaning illicit sex and all they have to do to seal the woman's horrendous treatment is to get four other witnesses to testify against her. In case of gang rapes, there have even been situations where one of the rapists accuses the woman of "lewdness" and four of the other rapists support this charge with their testimony, in which case by Islamic law, the woman has to suffer the punishment for adultery.

Quran 4:16: "If two men among you are guilty of lewdness, punish them both. If they repent and amend, Leave them alone; for God is Oft-returning, Most Merciful."

The law for Muslim men who indulge in "lewdness" however is quite different. As long as the men "repent and amend" they are to be let off completely. This is a blatant instance of women being denied the rights that men enjoy in Islam.

Quran 4:34: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them, refuse to share their beds, beat them; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means: For God is Most High, great."

The fate of Muslim women has been sealed by this Quranic Surah as it provides Muslim men a clear justification for physical violence against women. The verse is redolent with blatant chauvinism and declares that women should be obedient as slaves to men. What is truly shocking about this Quranic verse is that it clearly implicates that if a man even so much as suspects the fidelity of his wife, he has a right to admonish and physically abuse her by divine approval of Allah! In many cases of rape in Afghanistan, this very verse is used as justification by the victim's husbands to beat and torture her despite her innocence.

Quran 4:31: "If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice."

This verse clearly illustrates that concubinage and treating non-Muslim women as sexual property is divinely sanctioned by Allah himself in Islam. A non-Muslim woman who is taken captive in war is treated as "Ghanimah" or plunder. The captured Kafir (non-Muslim) women snatched from their husbands can be enjoyed with absolute immunity by the Mujahids (holy warriors of Allah). Not only is it lawful to commit rape on captured women it is in fact a "pure and pious" act which earns the Muslim merit in the eyes of Allah.

Quran 2:228: "And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And God is Exalted in Power, Wise."

Again a clear vindication of Men's superiority over women is being sanctioned by Allah himself in this verse. In effect men have more rights than women in an ideal Islamic society.

The Taliban, in true accordance with Islamic strictures, has forbidden women to work anymore. Considering the skyrocketing rate of widowhood, the women of Afghanistan are left with no choice but to sell their bodies as prostitutes for the sake of a morsel of food. So desperate has the condition of these women become that they force their five to six year old children to beg on the streets. Many of the western aid workers secretly admit that almost half a million of these children are also forced into prostitution to earn tiny amounts of money for their families' subsistence.

If by chance a woman's rape comes to light she is accused of adultery by Islamic law. Most often the punishment for adultery is severe lashing or stoning to death. Over 65% of the Afghani female population is now directly or indirectly involved in prostitution. As prostitution invites the same punishment as adultery, millions of Muslim women carry on their trade in a surreptitious manner. They disguise themselves in rags in order to pass off as beggars. Their clients are usually shopkeepers who have a store room or an attic where they take the woman without any problem. Beggar prostitutes charge about 2 lakh Afghanis which is equal to Rs 250 (Pakistani).

This amount is peanuts considering the cost of living in war tattered Afghanistan, therefore most prostitutes are desperate to find at least three to four clients a day. Most of the prostitutes also become "traveling" types, as they cannot stay in one place for too long, due to fear of detection. The exceptions are those special prostitutes who work in the brothels which have the protection of the Taliban. Hordes of Pakistanis also come from across the border to take advantage of the freely available sexual services.

Even then the situation of Muslim women is far, far better than that of non-Muslim women who are accursed enough to live in Afghanistan. The non-Muslim women and children are treated worse than sewer rats. Considering that Muslim women themselves are being abused so rampantly, one can only imagine how inhumane the treatment meted out to these victims must be. The plight of non-Muslims is unimaginably horrific.

All non-Muslims, including Hindus and Sikhs, living in Afghanistan must abide by the "Ten Commandments", issued in accordance with the rules of Islamic Sharia. A few pockets in Kabul and Jalalabad, are still inhabited by these unlucky Hindus and Sikhs. The Islamic "Law Ministry" in Kabul has issued ten directives to all non-Muslims, including Hindus and Sikhs, determining their conduct in their daily lives. These orders include such unimaginably discriminatory tenets like the rule that non-Muslims are absolutely not allowed to build any place of worship like temple, church or Gurudwara. Legally, non-Muslims are not entitled to bring any lawsuits against a Muslim at all, regardless of the criminality or culpability of the Muslim! One can only imagine what sort of justice non-Muslim victims of rape and molestation in Afghanistan must receive!

Non-Muslims must follow such incredible rules as displaying a two-meter long yellow cloth atop their house for identification of their status as non believers. The order also bans non-Muslims from living together with Muslims in one house in a direct indication of the untouchability of the non-Muslims. The women of non-Muslim families are prohibited from walking in a street or bazaar without wearing the Islamic "chadar" to cover them. They cannot wear jewelry made from any metal more precious than iron in a humiliating reminder of their low status. What is most outrageous of all however, is the injunction for non-Muslims to wear dresses which are clearly "different" from those of Muslims. Non-Muslims must wear a MARKED YELLOW OUTFIT in order to ensure identification of their Kafir status from a distance. Non-Muslims CANNOT wear ANY dresses which signify priesthood or other religious denomination.

The status of Kafirs under the Taliban is exactly as Prophet Mohammed had envisioned it. It is in fact in perfect consonance with the suggested treatment of non-Muslims in the *Quran*. A number of apologists and misled scholars who have been horrified by the Taliban's policies have tried to explain away their practices as "misinterpretations of Islam". ***The truth however is exactly the opposite.*** The Taliban of Afghanistan, ably supported by the Islamic purists of Pakistan, is pursuing the establishment of an Islamic society that can be termed as *a perfect realization of the Islamic ideals entrenched in the Quran*. **The Taliban IS the perfect Islamic society.** The treatment accorded to women and non-Muslims by the Taliban is *exactly* as prescribed by the *Quran* and the Prophet Mohammed. In fact the reign of the Prophet Mohammed was marked by *exactly the same type of society*.

As Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism raises its ugly head all over the world, its time civilized societies took a long hard look at the Talibanism of Afghanistan, for the situation there foretells exactly what is in store for other countries around the world with a sizable Muslim population.

By refusing to stare the problem in the face, we risk allowing it to become stronger still. If we keep ignoring it, it won't be long before the ability to stop Talibanization in its tracks slips right out of our fingers.

The Celto-Saxon Law

It can be demonstrated that the British Common Law derives in no small part, through the legal system of ancient Britain, from an original Divine revelation. Much of this Law is contained in the ancient Celtic Triads, which are considered to owe their origin to a codification which has been firmly attributed to the royal British legislator, Molmutius, who according to available evidence, was of Judaic descent through the Trojans. The Triads, which were clearly drawn from earlier sources, furnish evidence of the fact that the culture of the

early Britons was of a high standard, bearing comparison with that of contemporary civilized nations.

A feature of the Triads is that, while they contrast sharply with the Babylonian code of Hammurabi (with its trials by ordeal and severe penalties which anticipate those of the Civil Law which descended through Rome) they reveal remarkable resemblance to the code of laws revealed through Moses to the Israelites at Sinai.

Yehovah's *Law* and Our Neighbor

The source or foundation of all law, order and society rests upon authority. Human lawgivers in a democracy declare that all power is from the people and in the people; but how *blind* are these lawgivers, for the Bible clearly tells us that "there is no power but of God." This statement is the underlying principle of all just governments. When the citizens of our countries realize this fact then, and only then, will Satan and his kingdom be destroyed from the face of the earth.

John D. Keyser

For those who come to the realization of the national need to keep YEHOVAH God's commandments, statutes and judgments, a question often comes to mind: What can we do about it? It is, of course, impossible for any one individual to put into operation the statutes of national administration or government. But we can, insofar as national violation of YEHOVAH's laws are concerned, POINT OUT the righteousness of the law and PROTEST its violation -- thus calling attention to the penalties being exacted from us as a nation today for such violation. Essentially it is a word of WITNESSING: a voice in the wilderness, as it were, CALLING ATTENTION to the ways of righteousness -- *pointing out* the need of a NATIONAL RESTORATION of the administration and keeping of *ALL* of YEHOVAH's laws in order to secure the blessings of peace and prosperity.

Individually we do not have to wait until the nation makes that restoration before complying with the law and coming under its benefits. Many of the requirements of the law can now be kept by individuals -- such as the rules for health as well as the required attitude toward YEHOVAH God and towards our fellow man. Therefore, while it is impossible to have the perfection of administration and peace promised by YEHOVAH as the result of the nation keeping His commandments, statutes and judgments as the law of the land yet, insofar as the law applies to the individual we can, as a committee of one, conform to its requirements. It should be self-evident that keeping every requirement of the Ten Commandments (or Words) brings specific blessings and an inward spiritual peace. This, then, is the answer for those who -- having heard of the need to keep the law and of its national administration -- ask the question as to what the individual can do about it!

The relationship of man to his Creator is set forth in the first half of the Ten Commandments. There can be no orderly society when these requirements are ignored. Unless men place YEHOVAH first, and recognize their proper relationship to Him, men are INCAPABLE of having a proper relationship to their neighbor. Immediately following the requirements governing man's relationship to YEHOVAH, He sets forth the relationship of men -- one to another.

Domestic tranquillity and peace is simply IMPOSSIBLE in any community that ignores these fundamental laws. Thus, while the greatest of all commandments is to love YEHOVAH your God with all your heart and mind, the second is like unto it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The Sixth Commandment

No man can violate the last five commandments (beginning with the sixth) and love his neighbor as himself. The sixth commandment is: "You shall not murder."

But there will be men who will violate this law. Unless authority is vested in some organization with POWER to enforce its observance, society will suffer from the result of violence and crime. Because this is so, YEHOVAH authorized the establishment of governments -- delegating to man the power to administer His laws and authorizing the bringing to justice of the individual who violates His commandments.

Now understand this: Individuals have absolutely NO RIGHT whatsoever to set up a standard of personal conduct! That has already been done by YEHOVAH through the Ten Commandments. It is also equally true that NO NATION has a right to say what type of punishment shall be meted out to those who violate any of the commandments! The punishments have already been laid out by the statutes and judgments of YEHOVAH God.

Capital Punishment Mandatory

The original statute, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by MAN shall his blood be shed," was enlarged upon by a statute of judgment given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. Notice: "The assembly [i.e., the governmental assembly of Israel] must then judge between the striker [slayer, the one who has taken life] and the avenger of blood [the executioner]...And these [things] must serve as a statute of judgment for you *throughout your generations* in ALL your dwelling places. Every fatal striker of a soul should be SLAIN AS A MURDERER...And you must take no ransom for the soul of a murderer who is deserving to die [*not even the substitution of life imprisonment*]...And you must not pollute the land in which you are; because it is blood that pollutes the land, and for the land there may be no atonement respecting the blood that has been spilled upon it except by the blood of the one spilling it" (Numbers 35:24-33).

Under this very law every nation is justified in executing the murderer. THIS LAW MAKES SUCH EXECUTION MANDATORY and the nation that refuses to carry out this law is guilty of *failure* to administer justice in the land. Such failure will result in a land filled with violence and crime.

In order to PROTECT the man whose duty it is to execute the criminal, a judgment was rendered under this sixth commandment: "And [if] the avenger of blood [the executioner] does slay the manslayer, HE HAS NO BLOOD GUILT" (Numbers 35:27).

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not hold life cheaply. It is a serious thing in YEHOVAH's eyes to take life, and for the taking of life the murderer must forfeit his life. But those

who ACCIDENTALLY cause the death of another person are confined in a city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. In some cases this could amount to life imprisonment. Such a law certainly produced a healthy respect for life and made a man careful of the life of his fellowman. Automobile accidents would be reduced to a minimum today if this law was in operation. A driver of a car would be as careful of the life of another's husband, wife, daughter and son as he would be of his own loved ones -- for none would want to forfeit his freedom.

Swiftness of Justice

It has been a fact of our history that when crime becomes intolerable the Anglo-Saxon mind unconsciously reverts to the ancient Israel laws of administration. This was very evident in the early days of the American west when vigilante committees were formed to deal with crime. The SWIFTNESS with which justice was executed soon restored law and order to a troubled community. This swiftness of justice was the method YEHOVAH God demanded in the handling and punishment of the criminal. The case was tried and before sunset of the day following the verdict the murderer was dead. The man or woman who feels such swiftness of justice will not have a law-abiding effect *completely fails* to understand human nature. A man desires to live -- not to die. YEHOVAH knows this and therefore gave laws and judgments which would deter men from committing crimes. In the swiftness of judgment He said, "So shall you put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

Specific Judgments

Certain cases would be difficult to decide, so judgments were rendered by YEHOVAH to cover this: "He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death. If he did not do it by design, but it came about by an act of God, I will assign you a place to which he can flee. When a man schemes against another and kills him treacherously, you shall take him from My very altar to be put to death" (Exodus 21:12-14, The Jewish Bible (Tanakh) translation).

Also: "He who strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death" (Exodus 21:15, Tanakh).

When two men strive or fight together and one becomes injured and is confined to his bed (or hospital) and the one responsible is uninjured, then the uninjured one shall pay for the loss of the injured man's time and bear all the expense necessary to effect a cure. Notice also --

"And in case men should get into a quarrel and one does strike his fellow with a stone or a hoe and he does not die but must keep to his bed; if he gets up and does walk about out of doors upon some support of his [crutches], then the one who struck him must be free from punishment; he will make compensation only for the time lost from that one's work until he gets him completely healed" (Exodus 21:18-19).

If an ox should gore a man or a woman the ox shall be killed and the owner be free except in the case where he knew the ox was vicious. In modern society this could apply to a dog (i.e. a pit bull) that kills someone. If the owner knew the animal was vicious the DEATH PENALTY

could be pronounced upon him, but under this judgment he could redeem his life by paying substantial damages.

When a thief is found breaking and entering someone's home at night and if the homeowner kills the intruder, then the homeowner *would not* be guilty of murder (Exodus 22:2). If the crime occurs during the daytime and the intruder is not killed, the thief can redeem his blood and if he has nothing, then he can be sold for stealing. These, and sundry other judgments, were passed by YEHOUAH to guide in the matter of administration.

There would be cases where a murder has been committed and the perpetrator of the crime is NOT DETECTED. In such scenarios the city in which the crime was committed, or if in the country the nearest city, is to make atonement -- see Deuteronomy 21:1-9. Here we have *community guilt* established when the individual responsible for the crime is not detected and punished.

We cannot leave this subject without referring to the New Testament. Yeshua stated that hatred of a brother without cause was equivalent to murder. Thus the inward desire to destroy another is considered murder in the sight of YEHOUAH.

In the New Testament exclusion from the Holy City -- which is emblematic of the coming new order -- is pronounced upon "the cowards and those without faith and those who are disgusting in their filth and *murderers* and fornicators and those practicing spiritism and idolaters and all the liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur. This means the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

The Seventh Commandment

Next to murder, YEHOUAH condemns the pollution of the lifestream of His people. The corruption of family life was to be guarded against at all costs, therefore the seventh commandment is: "You must not commit adultery."

A vigorous, prosperous, healthy nation depends upon a healthy and vigorous family life and relationship. History has demonstrated time and time again that when a people depart from the laws of decency and morality, that nation declines rapidly. The Bible is *very clear* in its instructions regarding the proper relationship between the sexes -- for ignorance of such matters is not considered a virtue in scripture.

Death for Adultery

YEHOUAH pronounces severe judgments on those who fail to keep these laws. Respect for womanhood, motherhood and for the rights of one's neighbor would prevent violation of this commandment. DEATH is the penalty for its violation. "Now a man who commits adultery with another man's wife is one who commits adultery with the wife of his fellow man. He should be put to death without fail, the adulterer and the adulteress as well" (Leviticus 20:10).

Yeshua cites this commandment and rendered a judgment under it when he said: "But I say to you, that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already

in his heart." Under such judgment thousands -- even millions -- become guilty, for in this statement Yeshua has taken this commandment from the Table of Stone and written it upon the heart. By outward appearance men can seem virtuous by force of circumstances, but the man whose heart is right will not think or desire to do evil. He will refrain from all evil in thought and deed -- regardless of conditions and circumstances.

Very strict rules are given under the law governing sex relations and hygiene. Close marriages among blood relatives are *absolutely forbidden*. DEATH is pronounced for the crime of sodomy (homosexuality) and for carnal relationships with animals.

Women engaged to be married are treated, under the law, as though they are married -- with the DEATH PENALTY for the man who molests them. A problem, the mishandling of which has caused untold suffering, involves young people who have been compelled to get married. Under YEHOVAH's law it was mandatory that they marry and it is stipulated as an atonement that the young man pay a sum of money to the girl's father. In addition to this, the law declares that the young man MAY NOT divorce her for any reason all the days of his life. Thus, by his act, he has made binding upon himself the need of keeping, supporting and cherishing her to the end of his life.

Adultery is the ONE GROUND under the law that Yeshua proclaimed was justification for divorce. He said: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery" (Matthew 5:32). The reason for this is clear: According to the law of judgment, *death was the penalty for adultery*. Therefore, under the law, the one who committed adultery was *legally dead* -- and whether actual death followed or not divorce was justifiable.

There are certain cults and priesthoods of some religions (i.e. the Catholic Church) that teach against marriage. Timothy 4:1 unequivocally declares that it is giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons for anyone to follow such teachings. The Bible declares that marriage is honorable -- but adulterers will be judged by YEHOVAH (Hebrews 13:4).

Solomon said, before going astray: "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with you. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them upon your fingers, write them upon the table of your heart. Say to wisdom, You are my sister; and call understanding your kinswoman: That they may keep you from the strange woman, from the stranger who flatters with her words." He also said, "But whosoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding: he that does it *destroys his own soul*."

The Eighth Commandment

Having given the commandments respecting life and virtue YEHOVAH proceeded to set forth man's relationship to his neighbor's possessions. The violation of this eighth commandment is responsible for more violence and suffering than perhaps the violation of any of the other laws. Violence and murder -- and, in fact, the whole category of crime -- can often be traced to the violation of this commandment. The eighth commandment reads: "You shall not steal."

A wide variety of activities in modern business and financial life violates this law. Every phase of human endeavor that undertakes to secure SOMETHING FOR NOTHING when such

acquisition is a loss to others is STEALING. Withholding tithes is stealing from YEHOVAH according to Malachi 3:8.

Judgments for Stealing

The judgment for stealing varied with the type of goods stolen. It ranged from restoration and other penalties to even death. If oxen and sheep were stolen and found in the hand of the thief, he was to restore DOUBLE. If, however, the thief had sold or killed the stolen animals, he was then to restore FIVE oxen and FOUR sheep for the one ox and the one sheep which he had taken. While this law applied to an agricultural community, it nevertheless sets forth a principle which can as readily be applied to a highly industrial civilization. YEHOVAH's law removes all profit from stealing and imposes severe penalties upon those who steal. When money is stolen, the thief must make DOUBLE restoration.

In the case of kidnapping -- or the stealing of a man or woman to sell them for ransom -- YEHOVAH's judgment requires that the thief should surely be PUT TO DEATH.

A natural question that arises is: "What shall be done with a thief who cannot make restitution?" YEHOVAH said: "If he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." That is, HE MUST WORK OFF HIS INDEBTEDNESS. If such a law was in operation today, any financier or business magnate who had taken millions from the needy and/or elderly through stock manipulations would spend the balance of his life working to RESTORE DOUBLE that which he had fleeced from his poor victims.

Under YEHOVAH's law two, four and even five times increase in restoration over that which was stolen and with double the money taken to be returned by the thief, many would-be thieves would FEAR to do wrong. Manipulation of finances and reorganizations for the sole purpose of squeezing out the small investor -- in fact, ALL SHARP PRACTICES by which much stolen wealth has been accumulated in the past would *cease* under the righteous administration of such laws.

For certain borderline cases that would be difficult to resolve, YEHOVAH has judgments, under the law, to handle these. Let's take a look at a few of them, for the Bible definitely *BLESSES AND PROTECTS PRIVATE OWNERSHIP*.

Personal Responsibility

If a man digs a pit or hole in the ground -- and an ox or other animal of his neighbor falls into it -- the owner of the pit must make good the loss. If one man's ox (or animal) hurts another's so that it dies, then the live ox (or animal) is to be sold and the money divided, and the dead ox (or animal) is also to be divided. But if the ox (or animal) was known to be vicious -- and the owner fails to keep it confined -- he must then make good the ox (or animal) his neighbor has lost and the dead ox (or animal) will be his.

If a man causes a neighbor's field to be eaten by his animals, he is to make restitution. If he lights a fire and it accidentally burns his neighbor's goods, he must make restoration of the goods

destroyed. When a man delivers goods or money to his neighbor for safekeeping and it be stolen from out of his neighbor's house and the thief is caught, then the thief must make DOUBLE restoration. If the thief, in this particular scenario, cannot be found then the judges must decide as to whether the man to whom the goods or money had been entrusted is himself guilty; and if the judges condemn him, *HE* must make DOUBLE restoration.

If a man delivers his stock to a neighbor for safekeeping, and it die or be driven away by wild animals (with no man seeing), he must take an oath before YEHOVAH that he did not personally harm his neighbor's stock. If it be stolen from him he must make restitution to his neighbor -- but if it is torn to pieces by wild animals and he brings it in for evidence, then he need not make good.

If a man borrows anything from his neighbor -- and it is hurt or dies or is damaged in any way while in his hands (and the owner is not present with it) -- it must be made good. But if the owner is present with it, he shall not make it good for it is hired and the owner, being present, is responsible for its care. These judgments of YEHOVAH establish principles of law that are applicable in every age.

YEHOVAH God said: "You shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another."

The Ninth Commandment

Thus it is that the life, wife and the possessions of his fellow men are to be respected by man. YEHOVAH now set forth the relationship of men towards the good name and reputation of their neighbors. The ninth commandment is, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

There are many ways in which one can bear false witness regarding his neighbor. It can be set in motion by word, act or deed -- for often a false report can be started about another by a lift of the eyebrow, the shake of the head or the shrug of the shoulder at the mention of a name. In many instances, action can be a more powerful method of circulating a false report than even the spoken word.

YEHOVAH forbids the making of *false* oaths -- as well as committing any fraud. "You must not follow after the crowd for evil ends; and you must not testify over a controversy so as to turn aside with the crowd in order to pervert justice" (Exodus 23:2)

Examination of Witnesses

Bearing false witness in court proceedings was more readily detected under YEHOVAH's laws than it is possible to detect it today. Each witness was examined separately and out of the hearing of the others. This minimized the possibility of collaboration between witnesses as well as the opportunity to escape detection if testimony is falsified.

When the judges detect the possibility of falsification the case stops and the judges make a thorough investigation. If the testimony was found to be false, "Then shall you do to him as he had

thought to have done to his brother." The man who testified falsely would have to bear whatever the judgment would have been had the defendant been found guilty. If it would have been death, then it meant *death* for him. If the judgment were to be restitution, then the witness had to pay the equivalent of that restitution. The result would be as YEHOVAH declared: "And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you."

Bearing false testimony is greater in scope than testifying in court cases alone. YEHOVAH said, "You shall not raise a false report; put not your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness."

Also -- "Whosoever privately slanders his neighbor, he will I cut off."

Talebearing Forbidden

The Bible has a lot to say about those who harm their neighbors by gossip. "You shall not go up and down as a talebearer among your people." It is interesting to note that the truth or falsity of the matter is not raised -- for if you truly love your neighbor as yourself you will not privately bear witness to his harm, be the gossip true or false. YEHOVAH only knows the untold heartaches that have resulted from the violation of this commandment and the amount of suffering which has resulted. James had these facts in mind when he said: "The tongue is a little member, and boasts great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles!" (James 3:5).

Many otherwise respectable people look down upon an unfortunate brother who may have violated some of the other laws of YEHOVAH, while they themselves are breaking this ninth commandment. However, Yeshua warns: "But I say to you, that every idle word that men speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." YEHOVAH God demands swift witness and judgment against false swearers -- and against those who oppress the worker in his wages, the widow, the fatherless and that turn aside the stranger from what is rightfully his; and those that do not fear Him.

The Tenth Commandment

The final commandment which the Israelites heard from the voice of YEHOVAH at Mt. Sinai was: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbors." Yeshua also added: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses."

It should be noted that this last commandment *sums up* the cause behind most of the violations of the rest of YEHOVAH's commandments. Covetousness leads men to commit murder and adultery; it is the first cause leading man to steal the property of his neighbor and is often behind the giving of false testimony. YEHOVAH has declared, "Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away; so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

Reason for Violence

Violence and blood have filled the earth as the result of the breaking of this tenth commandment. The desire to acquire the possessions of others has resulted in *destructive competition* in business -- which is itself WAR when carried on under the Babylonian system -- leading to armed conflict between nations. The desire for commercial supremacy as nations strive to destroy competition is but coveting world markets, even to the point of waging war in order to take that which is coveted. There will -- and can always -- be legitimate trade in the buying and selling of goods and the exchange of one's increase. But, unfortunately, methods are such under the present Babylonian system that men are not content to live and let live. Instead men covet power and wealth -- and in their desire to bring their plans to fruition have drenched the pages of history with blood.

YEHOVAH God gave to men an inheritance in the land *forever*, but modern business and the Babylonian system of administration we live under has DENIED men their God-given privilege. In a world order where foreclosure of mortgages, tax sales and interest charges can be imposed upon a people -- and used to acquire the property of one's neighbor at a *greatly reduced value* -- such has served those who have coveted their neighbor's possessions. Covetousness is the FOUNDATION of evil desires and lusts.

If the Ten Commandments that YEHOVAH has set before His people are kept (and they can only be kept by a people in whose *heart* they have been written) there will be peace and contentment in that community, with freedom from strife.

Individual Requirements

When the question is asked as to what we can do regarding YEHOVAH's law, the answer is to *keep that law* insofar as it is possible for the individual to comply with its requirements. No individual can do less as he yearns and works for the *restoration* of YEHOVAH's law as the law of the land.

This article contains but a brief summary of the last five of the Ten Commandments -- making reference to certain of the statutes and judgments which are for the purpose of forcing men to comply with the requirements of the commandments. Until our nation makes this enforcement part of their national administrative activities, only men of good will will strive to keep the requirements of YEHOVAH's law.

While no honest man can deny the importance of the Ten Commandments yet they are no more important to the individual who strives to be right with YEHOVAH than are the God-given statutes to the nation that would have YEHOVAH's blessings on *all* their undertakings in the righteous administration of equity and justice for all.



The House of Israel

Our Shemite Ancestors

For centuries, it was considered that the English-speaking and kindred folk were "hybrids," descended in part from skin-clad savages and in part from racially distinct "Germanic" tribes: Celts, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes, Vikings and Normans. This concept has been updated. There are now historians of the highest rank who have asserted that our Family of Nations -- the Celto-Saxons -- as to the great mass of them, stem from a single ethnic group.

Not Hybrids

A generation ago, Sir Arthur Keith, F.R.S., an ethnologist of the highest rank, said of the early inhabitants of Britain: "The British Isles are supposed to be inhabited by a mongrel people, the most mixed in Europe -- descendants of Celts, Saxons, Angles, Jutes, Danes, Normans, Flemings and Huguenots....Although they came at different times, bringing with them peculiarities in speech, manners and customs, they were not in a physical sense different peoples....It is true today, just as it was in the days of Tacitus, that a dark-haired people of Mediterranean origin live in southern Wales and southern Ireland. Notwithstanding these exceptions, we may rightly look upon the people of Britain as the least mongrel, the most uniform to be found in any country in Europe." Since then, later authorities concur in this.

Whilst there is assuredly no inherent discredit attaching to any of the peoples of mankind, mixed or unmixed, by reason of their race or colour, it is necessary for the development of our theme to show that the Celto-Saxons are largely of one physical type and are now embodied in one section of the Caucasoid race. There remains, therefore, no obstacle from this viewpoint to our assertion that they sprang from a common source -- the great race of the mighty Shem, custodian of the Oracles of God, from whom came the Hebrews and God's Servant people of Israel.

The Indo-Europeans

Accepting this, it is logical to equate the pioneering race of Shem with the Indo-Europeans of the

ethnologist who migrated, mostly westwards, from the region of the High Caspian. Long before Israel moved to Egypt, thrustful Shemites were pushing westward by land, river and sea. The Stone Trail from Bible Lands to Stonehenge and Norway marks their path. Unwittingly they blazed the trail for westward-moving Israel, centuries later, from Canaan to their Appointed Place in the Isles of the West, promised by God to His Servant People as a sure refuge in which to re-consolidate and to return to Him.

This is a great step towards the vindication of our Movement's century-old conviction that the Celto-Saxons in general stem from a migration of kindred clans who originated as far east as Bible lands and, indeed, that these were none other than the mass of "lost" Israelites deported from Palestine by the paramount Assyrian power in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.

The clans of Israel sprang from the Hebrew section of the great Shemite race of which the patriarch Abraham, father of the Israel peoples, was a prominent citizen in the cultured metropolis of Ur. He was summoned to the service of Almighty God and to him was committed the Divine Code which had been earlier entrusted to his ancestor, Shem, patriarch of the far-ranging, civilizing race from which so many of the nations of the ancient civilizations derived their lore, learning and flair for government.

Israel in Palestine

The Israelites became established nationally around the 15th century B.C. Assembled *en masse* before the Divine Presence they were given a commission to serve their God as His point of contact with His whole human family. For His part, God undertook to guide, prosper and protect them. For their part, they accepted this role, with the privileges and responsibilities attaching to it. This was Israel's *Old Covenant* with Almighty God. By this, they were guaranteed national safety and well-being, provided that they obeyed their God and maintained His Code. On the other hand, it was made plain to them that failure to do this would bring punishment -- even to the extent of their being expelled from their new homeland.

Some five centuries later, the nation split into two sections on the issue of harsh taxation. The ten northern clans chose Jeroboam, a commoner, as their king, to become the "House" or Kingdom of Israel, whilst the clans of Judah and Benjamin, with the priests and most of the Levite officials, remained loyal to the Royal House, which continued to reign at Jerusalem. These became the southern "House" or Kingdom of Judah.

Israel Moves West

Thenceforward, the two sections acted as if they were separate nations, each with its own line of kings. Judah at first remained loyal to the worship of Jehovah, whilst Israel deserted their God-given Code and brazenly adopted idolatry. Subsequently, Judah fell away in similar manner. Thus, both sections of the Israel nation incurred the ultimate penalty under the terms of their Covenant with Almighty God. Both were expelled from their land -- Israel and much of Judah to the Caspian area and the residue of Judah to Babylon -- from which point in time the Bible narrative has little to say -- though Bible prophecy has much to impart about their future.

In addition to the testimony of the trustworthy Bible narrative, there is good secular evidence that most of the deported Israelites were moved by their conquerors to the Caspian region, later to head westwards into the huge territory of South Russia, to the north and east of the Black and Caspian Seas, known in New Testament times as Scythia. From there, secular history brings them into the Isles of Britain as Celts, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes and Normans.

-- L. Buxton Gresty

The Origins of America: What the Chronicles of Eri Reveal

The *Chronicles of Eri* faithfully record the events of the Eri-an (Aryan) people from the time of the Flood, circa 3100 B.C. They took residence in the Shinar Valley, or Mesopotamia, for 300 years under the leadership of Shem, son of Noah. They were forced back by the Assyrians, into Eri-mentia (Armenia), a high plateau between Mount Ararat and the Caucasus Mountains. They enjoyed their freedom there. As the Gael of Scot of Eri, they lived in peace for 1,300 years on the high plateaus of Armenia (Eri-mentia) and

decided to follow others of their race to Spain. In 1490 B.C. they assembled under the leadership of King Calma and decided to leave Armenia for Galicia in Spain. They said (as recorded by the *Chronicles*) "Whithersoever we go, we shall live free!"

Moving to the port of Sidon they embarked in ships and sailed across the Mediterranean Sea, passed through The Gate of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar) and round by the coast of Es-feine (Spain), where they entered by the mouth of the Tagus river. They journeyed northward and found some of their own race, who had left Iber 140 years before. They called their new land Gael-ag (or Galicia) in the north-west of Spain. There *they lived free for 484 years*.

King Eolus, who reigned over them from 1368 to 1335 B.C., began the writing of the *Chronicles of Eri*, creating a written language derived from the Phoenicians in Sidon. He put down in writing for the first time tales of the past which had been transmitted orally from father to son for several centuries. His last entry in the *Chronicles* read: "Thereby wilt thou avoid doing unto another what thou wouldst not have another do unto thee. Preserve the glory of the race, die, or live free." Tarlot was the first Ard Olam. To him Eolus gave the writings which he had accumulated, and Tarlan swore in the presence of the people "To guard the writing, to set down the words of the Gael, to keep falsehood therefrom, and to preserve them during his days." So from that day the records have been faithfully kept until early in the nineteenth century when, in 1822, they were published in London in English.

Much of the material found in the *Chronicles of Eri* are born out by the Declaration of Arbroath issued by King Robert Bruce 6th April, A.D. 1320. The king and his noblemen declared their independence from any other nation, declaring that "they journeyed from greater Scythia by way of the Tyrrhenian Sea (the Mediterranean) and the Pillars of Hercules and dwelt for a long course of time in Spain among the most savage tribes, but nowhere could they be subdued by any race, however barbarous. Thence they came...to their home in the west where they still live today...In their kingdom there have reigned one hundred and thirteen kings of their own royal stock, the line unbroken by a single foreigner."

In their Declaration these Scottish leaders claim to have been the first to accept Christianity, saying, "That the King of kings and Lord of lords, our Lord Jesus Christ, after His Passion and Resurrection, even

though settled in the uttermost parts of the earth, almost the first to His most holy faith. Nor would He have them confirmed in that faith merely by anyone but by the first of His Apostles by calling -- though second or third in rank -- the most gentle St. Andrew, the Blessed Peter's brother, and desired him to keep them under his protection as their patron forever."

Many of those 113 kings mentioned in the Declaration were kings of the Eri in Spain, and many others were kings in Er-land (Ireland) where they stayed for over a thousand years, before moving over to Scotland. In the year A.D. 503 one of the Irish kings, Fergus Mac Eric, moved the Stone of Beth-el to Iona. There it remained until A.D. 836 when King Kenneth removed it to Scone, where he had established his throne.

The 1,500 years of the Gael of Scot in Eri-land are carefully recorded in the *Chronicles of Eri*. In 1003 B.C. the Gael of Scot of Eri were forced to leave Spain, taking ship and landing on the shores of the island known today as Ireland. A large part of the tribe of Dan, learning the art of navigation from the Phoenicians, had escaped from captivity in Egypt and conquered the island 200 years before the Eri arrived. Moreover, circa 1600 B.C., portions of the tribe of Zarah-Judah had arrived in the north end of the island and had already sowed the seeds of the Kingdom of Northern Ireland, now known as Ulster. These two tribes of Israel had already arrived in Eri-land and were in control of the island. They were prepared to contest the landing of the Eri, but finding that they were likewise descended from Shem, rejoiced and welcomed them instead. They assembled together and decided to divide the island into five kingdoms.

After three hundred years there arose much conflict between the five kings and their people. In 703 B.C. King Eochaid of Ulster called the other four kings together and suggested that one of them should be "raised a little higher than his fellows" and be the High King, or Ardri. Eochaid was chosen by the others to be High King, with the title Eochaid Olam Folla Ardri. He built a parliament building on Tara hill, called Teacmor, in which the kings and noblemen of the land assembled every third year. Eochaid built a palace on Tara, called Dun Sobairce, gave Ulster to his relative who became King Ros of Ulster in his stead. King Ros represented Ulster in the triannual parliament meetings held in Teacmor, where Eochaid presided as Ardri.

Beginning with Eochaid, who began his reign in 703 B.C., the *Chronicles of Eri* list 64 kings who reigned as Ardri until 7 B.C., a period of approximately 700 years. 14 kings are listed as kings of Ulster previous to Eochaid, which carried the strains of Zarah-Judah into the royal House of Eri. Previous to that, twenty names are given of the Chiefs who ruled the Gael of Scot in Galicia of Spain from 1491 to 1000 B.C. These make up a total of 98 kings who ruled over the Eri people before the Christian era. The Hie Neil dynasty began with the Christian era and carried on until 557 A.D., when Columba transplanted Christianity from Ireland to the Isle of Iona.

The two volumes of the *Chronicles of Eri*, translated into English by Dr. O'Connor, end with the Christian era. Dr. O'Connor never completed the *Chronicles* with a third volume; but we can be sure that the claims of the Declaration of Arbroath of an unbroken succession of 113 kings of the Sciots (Scots) is a conservative number. Transfer of the throne was made by Fergus Mac Eric (son of Eric) who led the Dalriads to the shores of Iona and Argyllshire in 503 A.D. Subsequently, the throne was moved to Scone, where rested the Stone of Destiny, or "Lia Fail," until removed to Westminster by Edward I in 1296. Concerning this throne it has been written:

Unless the fates are faithless found.
And prophets' voice be vain,
Where'er this monument is found
The Scottish race shall reign.

What had been done by Edward I in bringing the Lia Fail to Westminster was completed by King James VI of Scotland, who was invited to become the king of England in 1603, assuming the name of King James I. Having a Scottish king upon the throne of England seems to have fulfilled the rhyme as given above. Indeed, not only did kings of Scottish blood reign in England, but stout-hearted Scots scattered all over the world, providing leadership in new countries forming abroad. Several Scots placed their signature to the U.S. Declaration of Independence, among whom was Colonel George Ross. While he was placing his signature to that document, his brother John was fighting and dying to give effect to its brave words. And it was the widow of John Ross who sewed together the first flag of the United States, in the form of thirteen stars and thirteen stripes.

The *Chronicles of Eri* faithfully record the history

of Eri-land, or Erimion, until the coming of St. Patrick (whom some claim to have been a Scot) who converted many of the nobility of Eri to Christianity. By 563 A.D. Columba, of the royal House of Eri, moved to Iona and began the conversion of Scotland to Christianity. In doing so, he founded not only the Church of Scotland but also, as the historian Hume Brown has said, "Scottish history may be emphatically said to begin with Columba's landing at Iona in 563. By the great work he achieved Columba fairly takes his place with the founders of nations, who have a niche apart in the annals of mankind." No one can doubt the magnificence of Columba's work in helping create the Scottish nation.

Beginning in 1610 thousands of Eri people left the British Isles and settled in colonies in North America. They entered the forests, cut down trees and planted their crops. They created farms, built towns, some of which became cities. They went under royal charter of the kings of England. Many went to Canada in the north and many to what is now the United States to the south. All of the first settlers came directly from Britain to North America, first the English, followed by the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish. The 1980 census taken in the United States show that the majority of their citizens trace their roots back to Britain. Large numbers came from other Israelite nations such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Holland, and others from pockets of Israel in Germany, France and other European countries.

Although Canada and the United States appear to be a conglomerate of many people, they primarily have their roots in the twelve tribes of Israel and fulfill the prophecy made by Jacob concerning Ephraim and Manasseh, the twin sons of Joseph. The United States undoubtedly fulfills the prophecies for Manasseh and Canada -- being also one of the "young lions thereof" -- is clearly the American portion of Ephraim. These two great nations of North America have lived for over two hundred years on each side of an open, unfortified border. Of course there have been differences between them; but they have always been able to settle these by arbitration. They are model nations for the future development of nations in the Kingdom of God soon to be established on earth.

Both nations are American, and both enjoy the blessings of Almighty God, as the name "America" reveals. The first two letters mean "my people," as they were called by *Hosea* (2:1 & 2). They are also called "Ruhamah" which means "having obtained mercy." They

have "obtained mercy" by having become Christian, by benefiting from the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross at Calvary and by becoming two Christian nations before the world. That term describes them up to the present day, and the grace by which they "have obtained mercy."

The central three letters of America is the exact name of the ERI people, or the "hero people" of God, who are all descended from Shem, the eldest son of Noah. They were formed for a definite purpose and have had the direct protection of Almighty God in their long wanderings across the face of the earth. They have loved freedom and are today among the leading nations of the free world. As ERIans they are of the *Aryan* race, which is the phonetic spelling of the original word *ERI-ans*. The ending of the word *Ameri-CA* means the place where the ERI people live. Obviously it is in the Continent of America where they live today in predominant numbers.

God has given great blessings to those of His people whom He has led to the North American Continent. People of all nations wish to receive those same blessings. And so they shall -- as they accept the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ in the days ahead.

-- J.A.B. Haggart

Israel's Caucasus Trek

The movement of peoples and tribes during the late centuries B.C. and the early centuries A.D. were so sporadic and involved that ethnologists have had difficulty in establishing the original identity or habitat of any of them with certainty. For centuries the position -- particularly in the Near and Middle East -- was so fluid that any one locality might have been occupied by totally different peoples within the space of a few generations.

The student of Bible history is particularly concerned with accumulating evidence which relates the movement of the Israelites after their removal from Palestine to the Caspian area of Media and their subsequent, second Exodus from that land and of their second captivity. Of outstanding interest is the testimony of modern authorities to the fact that Israelitish customs still survive in the Caucasus regions, furnishing sure proof that Israelites passed that way in their ever-westward trek. Rostovtzeff's *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* should be read in this context.

Is *JUDAISM* the Religion of Moses?

Here is the third installment -- revealing what really happened under Ezra and Nehemiah, and how the Government of God functioned in the Old Testament Church.

by Ernest Martin
Part Three

THE religious condition of the Jews during the time of Christ had not evolved in just a few years. It took over 200 years for Judaism to firmly implant itself in Palestine.

If we are to adequately understand the full development of Judaism, we will have to go back in history over 500 years before Christ. In these centuries history shows why and how "Judaism" replaced the Law of Moses as the religion of the Jews!

The Babylonian Captivity

The proper place to begin a study of the development of Judaism is with the Babylonian captivity of the Jews.

Between the years of 604 B.C. and 585 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians, made war with the Kingdom of Judah. The Jews were not successful in any of the skirmishes with the Babylonians. In the first years of this war, Nebuchadnezzar carried away the majority of the Jews from Judah to Babylon. At the end of the war, in 585 B.C., ALL THE JEWS, except those under Gedaliah, were finally carried to Babylon. And even those under Gedaliah finally fled Palestine. This was a complete captivity.

The Babylonian captivity came to an end with the downfall of the Babylonian Empire in October 539 B.C. Isaiah had prophesied, about 200 years before, that Cyrus, the king of Persia, would be responsible for the overthrow of Babylon and for making it possible for the Jews to return to Palestine (Isa. 45:1-4). Thus, Cyrus and his armies captured the capital of the Empire and Babylon was absorbed into the Persian Empire.

Cyrus was so betook over the exact prophecy by Isaiah concerning himself, that he determined to honor the God who had granted him victory over the Babylonians. He issued an edict that the Jews who had been carried captive by the Babylonians could return to Palestine and rebuild the Temple of God (II Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1,2).

The issuance of this decree resulted in about 50,000 Jews later returning to Palestine. These Jews were under the leadership of two men. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, and Joshua, the High Priest. The reason for the Jews' return was to rebuild the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians, and to again establish the true worship of God. The books of Haggai and Zechariah were written during the period when these Jews were returning to Palestine and during the building of the Temple. These books describe the condition of the Jews at this time.

Majority did NOT Return

It must be remembered, however, that the majority of the Jews did NOT return to Palestine. Most of them elected to remain in the Babylonian area. Under the benevolent rulership of Cyrus, many of the Jews had their own homes, substantial properties and not a few were wealthy and influential. They did not want to give all of this up in order to go back to the wasted land of their forefathers. Even Cyrus did not want all of them to leave the Babylonian area since the bulk of the population in some provinces was principally Jewish. Depopulation would have been a serious setback to the ECONOMY of the area (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i, p. 8).

The majority of the Jews were content with the situation in Babylon. They had no desire to return, and in consequence, they built permanent schools, colleges, and synagogues. They were settling down to stay. And, even though there were several migrations from Babylon back to Palestine, the bulk of the Jews remained in the Mesopotamian area. Even as late as the New Testament times, there were still more Jews in Babylon than there were in Palestine (*ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 7-9). THIS EXPLAINS WHY THE APOSTLE PETER WAS IN BABYLON IN THE LATER YEARS OF HIS LIFE. He wrote his two epistles from near Babylon on the Euphrates (I Pet. 5:13). Since the Apostle Peter was the apostle to the Circumcision scattered abroad -- the Jews in the Diaspora (Gal. 2:7) -- it is not difficult to see why he went to Babylon, where many of the Jews lived.

Ezra Goes to Jerusalem

After the deaths of Zerubbabel and Joshua, who led the first wave of returning Jews to Palestine, the people began to take a lackadaisical attitude concerning the services in the Temple and religion in general. Even though the Temple had been completed in the early months of 515 B.C., the people of Palestine took no interest in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. It still remained in ruins! The people had also begun to intermarry freely with the idolatrous Gentile people round about. The religious life of the people in general was becoming corrupt. This condition was prompted because the people in general did not have any real spiritual leaders after the death of Zerubbabel and Joshua. As the years rolled by, the condition became worse and worse.

Finally, in the summer of the year 457 B.C., the seventh year of Artaxerxes, Jewish reckoning, Ezra came to Palestine to rectify the situation that was beginning to get out of hand (Ezra 7:7-8).

Ezra was a priest of no mean standing. He was a direct descendant of Aaron and some of his forefathers had been former High Priests in Israel. His grandfather was the High Priest who returned with Zerubbabel and Joshua to Jerusalem in the first migration back to Palestine

(Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, vol. iii, p. 435). Ezra, himself, was a "scribe," a "ready scribe of the law of Moses," "a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord and of His statutes to Israel," "a scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:11, 12). He was considered by Josephus, the Jewish historian of the apostles' days, to have been, in a sense, the "High Priest" of the Jews who were still living in Babylon (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xi, 5,1).

The Scriptures say that Ezra "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). From these Scripture references alone, we can say confidently that Ezra was determined to live by the laws of God and to teach them to the people. So profound an influence had Ezra over the Jews, and so righteous was his character, that a later Jewish writer said he would have been the lawgiver to Israel had not Moses preceded him (*The Talmud, Sanhedrin*, c.ii).

Ezra knew the laws of God -- he was well trained in them. And God directed that he go to Jerusalem to beautify the Temple, establish its services in proper order, to teach the people the laws of God, and to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

He went to Palestine, in the year 457 B.C., with authority from the Persian government to carry out these reforms. About 2,000 people went with Ezra to Palestine. These were notably priests, Levites and servants of the Temple. The object of Ezra and these other important dignitaries in going to Jerusalem, was to restore the worship of God that was fast becoming defiled.

Ezra's Restoration

When Ezra and his retinue went to Jerusalem from Babylon, they went with a royal decree from the king of Persia -- Ezra had the power he needed to carry out the reform. The decree gave him authority not only to establish the true religion in its purity, but also he had governmental orders to "appoint magistrates and judges which may judge all the people that are beyond the river (in Palestine), all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye him that knoweth them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God and the LAW OF THE KING, let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment" (Ezra 7:25, 26). In other words Ezra was going to Jerusalem not only as a priest of God to reestablish the religious worship, but also to establish law and order by rebuilding Jerusalem as a Jewish capital city.

Why was the king of Persia so interested in the Jews' religion and why did he want Jerusalem to be rebuilt and inhabited? The answer is plain.

The Bible records how Esther, a Jewish girl from the tribe of Benjamin, became Queen of Persia, and Mordecai, her uncle, became Prime Minister of the kingdom (Esther 2:17; 10:3). Esther was married to King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) who ruled according to Persian reckoning, from 485 to 465 B.C. The king under whom Ezra was appointed to rebuild Jerusalem was Artaxerxes I -- the son of Xerxes. Esther was still, undoubtedly, the Queen Mother, when Ezra left for Jerusalem in 457 B.C. Thus we see that there was considerable Jewish influence in the king's palace at this time. No wonder Ezra was given such responsibility by the Persian king. He had power from the

king to perform the needed restoration. Ezra's personality and authority had a tremendous effect on the people.

The real intent of Ezra was to establish the Law of Moses as the constitutional law throughout Judea (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 33) -- to make Judea a model state within the Persian Empire -- one adhering to the law of Moses. The laws of the king were to be few, dealing mainly with taxation. Herford, the Jewish scholar, continues, "The Persian rulers, living far from Judea, seldom interfered with the internal affairs of their Jewish subjects, and were content to leave their public business in the hands of the governor of the province. If the royal taxes were paid, and order maintained, the Jews might organize their own life as a community in the way that seemed best to them" (*ibid.* p. 45). This was the policy of the Persian rulers for the two centuries they governed Palestine. This gave the Jews ample opportunity to settle down firmly in Palestine and to practice their religion without undue molestation.

Jews Had Married Foreign Wives

The first thing Ezra found upon his arrival in Palestine was that most of the people possessed only a nominal religion. The Temple services were not being conducted properly and a great number of the people had intermarried with foreign women. Ezra, in no uncertain terms, warned the people that these very acts were violations of the Law that caused their forefathers to be carried into captivity (Ezra 9:5-7). Upon hearing this, many of the people covenanted before God to disentangle themselves from their foreign wives (Ezra 10:2-5). However, we find that not all of the people were so willing to do this. Some became quite obstinate. It took about 13 years to get all the people to forsake their own ways and be obedient to the Laws of God.

The reason that the Law had commanded the Jews not to marry with the heathen is that the natural tendency of a person is to lean towards the religion of the wife or husband. Solomon even set up heathen idols in Jerusalem and throughout Israel to please his pagan wives (I Kings 11:4). And because the Law specifically commanded the Israelites not to marry heathen women or men (Exodus 34:15, 16), Ezra commanded the Jews to repent of their erroneous ways and to begin keeping the Law. (See also Deut. 7:3.)

A paramount issue in the mind of Ezra was the establishment in Palestine of the civil Law as given by Moses. In other words, he was determined to see that the Jews obeyed the commandments of God as revealed in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Within these four books are found the basic spiritual commandments of God, plus many basic laws and statutes of a civil nature for the governing of the physical nation of Israel. Also within these books are the ritualistic and ceremonial laws of purity and the sacrificial ordinances that formed such a distinctive part of the Law of Moses that by New Testament times the term "Law of Moses" often became a special and exclusive term for the sacrificial ceremonies and physical rituals (Acts 13:39; 15:5). Ezra was commissioned by God to teach the people ALL these laws -- from obedience to the spiritual laws to the observance of physical rituals.

Ezra was fully qualified in education, political power and divine favor to accomplish the job of establishing the Law of Moses as the law of the land.

"To place the Torah (the Scriptures) in the position of supreme authority in Judaism, and to win the people to that recognition and acceptance of that supreme authority was what Ezra set out to do" (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 37). And, we find that Ezra succeeded in transforming the Jews from a nominal Mosaic religion to the real thing. It took, however, the help of Nehemiah to finally and fully implant the Law of Moses as the law of the land.

Nehemiah Comes to Jerusalem

Nehemiah was a Jew who was a high government official in the Persian kingdom (Neh. 2:1-8). After learning of the plight of the Jews in Palestine and the difficult time Ezra was having getting the Jews to obey the laws of Moses, he resolved to do something about the situation. Being in close communication with the king of Persia and in good favor with him, he petitioned for the right to become governor of the province of Judea, directly under the king himself. The petition was granted!

Ezra, who had also gone to Palestine in an official capacity, was not the governor of the province. He acted more as a civil servant of the king. But Nehemiah came with much more power. He went to Jerusalem as governor of the whole province of Judea.

Upon the arrival of Nehemiah in Artaxerxes' twentieth year, Ezra's position was greatly strengthened. Nehemiah was as much inclined toward getting the people back to God as was Ezra. Nehemiah and Ezra both worked together in harmony towards accomplishing their goal. And accomplish it they did! They established the Law of Moses as the law of the land, they set up the Temple service in proper order and they made the people put away their foreign wives. They established meeting places where the law was preached and expounded. The ordained priests were judges, teachers, and administrators of the government. This was a phenomenal task to accomplish among thousands of Jews who were not always in favor of the law. But it was done.

Jews Sign a Covenant With God

Ezra and Nehemiah brought all of the leaders of the people, the priests, Levites, and all the principal men, and had them sign a covenant that they would henceforth obey the laws of God. In the covenant they signed, they all agreed to perform seven things. These articles of the covenant were mandatory: 1) They were to keep all the laws, statutes, judgments and commandments of God; 2) not to intermarry with the heathen; 3) to keep the Sabbath holy; 4) to observe the Sabbatical year; 5) to pay the annual third of a shekel for the upkeep of the Temple; 6) to supply wood for the altar in the Temple; 7) to pay all the tithes that were commanded in the Law (Nehemiah 10:28-39).

The leaders signed the covenant on behalf of all the people. Consequently, all the Jews who lived in Palestine, solemnly entered into this covenant. They all pledged to carry out its requirements.

Before this time, the people were content with a nominal form of religion, but after the surge of spiritual zeal and determination of Ezra and Nehemiah, with the Persian monarch backing them up, the people took on a new outlook towards the truth of God. There arose a new kind of

constitutional government -- a government which had as its laws the Law of Moses. It was a kind of Church and State government, under the authority of the Persian kingdom, but with its own schools, colleges, synagogues, court houses and Supreme Court. With this kind of central government established in Judea, the result was a religious unity not known since the days of Joshua. No wonder that Ezra, the principal figure of the time, was called the "second Moses." This was a new beginning in the history of the Jews.

The Great Assembly

The convening of these Jewish elders was of great importance. This assemblage was actually a religious and political body of priests which was, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, empowered by God to maintain the obedience of the people to the Law of Moses for that and future generations.

This organization was known as "The Great Assembly." It was an assembly comprised of Ezra and Nehemiah, two of God's chosen ministers, along with all the principal priests of the Jews. This assembly was the ruling institution to guide the religious life of the Jews. It was the religious supreme court. It was the center of authority in regard to education and regulating the priests and Levites in teaching the people the Law of Moses. In effect, the Great Assembly was the governing body of the Jewish people in Palestine.

This assembly initiated by Ezra and Nehemiah has often been called by the Greek name "The Great Synagogue." The word "synagogue" in Greek means ASSEMBLY. This is the name most modern writers use when referring to this authoritative body of priests. But whether the name Great Synagogue or Great Assembly is used, it represents the same institution.

"According to the most ancient tradition, this assembly or synagogue was styled GREAT because of the great work it effected in restoring the divine law to its former greatness, and because of the GREAT AUTHORITY AND REPUTATION WHICH IT ENJOYED" (*Cycle. of Bib., Thee., and Ecc. Lit.*, vol. x, p. 82).

This assembly actually represented the executive, judicial and legislative congress of the Jews. It was convened to insure the observance of the Law of Moses. From history we know that it accomplished its task. It brought the people back to the Law of Moses, and established that Law as the constitutional law of the land.

Some of the decisions of this Great Assembly have had far-reaching effects -- even unto our present age. It is necessary that we learn about this organization established by God under the supervision of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Members of the Great Assembly

The Jewish historians are united in telling us that there were 120 members in the original Great Assembly (*Berakoth*, ii, 4; *Megillah*, 17b). All of these members WERE PRIESTS (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, p. 59). There were no laymen in this authoritative assembly.

The president or ruler was the High Priest. According to rank, this should always be the case. However, when the Great Assembly was organized by Ezra and Nehemiah, the High Priest, Eliashib, did not meet with the Assembly. He did not entirely agree with the covenant that the Great Assembly made binding. See Nehemiah 13:4-7.

He did not agree with the specific part of the covenant which commanded all Jews to give up their Gentile wives. His grandson, Manasseh, was married to a very important Gentile woman, of which more will be said later, and Eliashib did not necessarily want this particular union to be broken. Because of this attitude, he was rejected from having a part in the Great Assembly. Later on, however, the High Priests did assume their proper place as head of the Assembly.

The rest of the Great Assembly were priests of varying rank occupying different positions within the institution. Their jobs were to carry out the actual work of the Assembly while the High Priest would supervise and oversee.

These priests were the leaders of the Jewish nation at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, about 440 years before Christ. They and their immediate successors were responsible for many weighty and authoritative decisions that affected the whole mode of Jewish life, and, in reality, settled a very important question, the effects of which reach unto our own day.

We shall see in the next installment, how this Great Assembly, with the Spirit of God guiding them, put together the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Our Old Testament comes to us because of the work of this Great Assembly!

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"And eternal life is this: to know you, the one true God, and him whom you sent, Yeshua the Messiah" -- John 17:3 (*Jewish New Testament*).

Yeshua Did *Not* Pre-Exist!

John D. Keyser

Just who is Yeshua the Messiah?

We state this question in the present tense, because though Yeshua the Messiah was crucified 1,900 years ago at the instigation of a Jewish mob and maladministration of Roman power, he lives today.

And the fact that he lives is of the greatest significance to mankind.

Paul, the one time inveterate opponent of Christianity, who was converted into its greatest advocate by the incontestable evidence of Yeshua's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:10), explained it thus:

"For he has set a Day when he will judge the inhabited world, and do it justly, by means of a MAN whom he has designated. And he has given public proof of it by resurrecting THIS MAN from the dead" (Acts 17:31 -- *Jewish New Testament*).

To judge the world is to rule it. Paul thus taught that the living Messiah is the assurance of YEHOVAH that He will send Yeshua to set up His Kingdom on earth (Acts 1:11; 3:19-20). Yeshua is coming to change present conditions, and to reign as a king under his Father YEHOVAH.

Confusion Concerning Yeshua

But who is Yeshua the Messiah? Eternal life is bound up in the answer to this question, as the quotation at the head of this article shows. Put the question to Jews, and they reply that he was the son of Joseph and Mary, and that he lived and died in Judea 1900 years ago. Ask it of most clergymen, and they will state that he is the second person of a biune or triune God. Others, whilst rejecting the Trinitarian concept as unscriptural and illogical, teach that he pre-existed. Thus endless controversy has continued; even those who admit that he lives, violently disagree as to who he is.

We can ignore the Jewish answer. The disciples were not liars, fools, mystics or charlatans. They comprised practical fishermen like Peter, hard-headed businessmen like Matthew, even skeptics like Thomas. Such men were not prepared to be misled by a rumor, but demanded concrete proof of the resurrection of Yeshua (John 20:24-29). We believe them, and reject the unbelieving attitude of Jews and atheists.

We not only set aside the skeptical attitude of Jews and atheists; but we also repudiate the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of a biune God. The concept of three Gods who are but one

God is illogical and unscriptural. Similarly, the idea that two gods existed together from eternity is totally unscriptural. The word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, but is a title manufactured to serve the cause of theology. On the other hand, the Bible teaches that Yeshua is subordinate to YEHOVAH, thus:

"There is *ONE* God, and one mediator between God and man, the MAN Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

"*ONE* God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor.8:6).

"Now when everything has been subjected to the Son [Yeshua], then he will subject himself to God [YEHOVAH], who subjected everything to him; so that God [YEHOVAH] may be everything in everyone" (1 Cor. 15:28 -- *Jewish New Testament*).

Did Yeshua Pre-exist?

Although such a question, if asked of any other person, would be treated with the ridicule it deserves, it is seriously alleged of the Messiah.

Yet the Bible clearly shows that Yeshua had no existence prior to his birth in Bethlehem, 1900 years ago. He was born of the virgin Mary, by the overshadowing power of YEHOVAH (Luke 1: 30-35), and thus was both son of YEHOVAH and son of man.

From his mother, he derived the nature common to all mankind, but from his Father he inherited latent spiritual proclivities that strengthened him to conquer the flesh, and manifest divine qualities (1 Tim. 3:16). He was executed as a criminal, but, in fact, never sinned, and therefore YEHOVAH's justice demanded his resurrection (Acts 2:24). He was raised to immortality, and ascended into heaven, where he awaits the time to return and set up the reign of his Father on this earth (Acts 3:19-23; Daniel 2:44).

Nowhere is it suggested that he existed before his birth.

Take, as example, the opening verse of the New Testament:

"The genealogy of Jesus Christ the SON of David, the SON of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).

If Yeshua lived in some form before Abraham and David, he was not their son, and the statement is false. We believe that the statement is true, and all Scripture agrees therewith. Consider the record of his early childhood:

"And Yeshua *grew both in wisdom and in stature*, gaining favor both with other people and with God" (Luke 2:52 -- *Jewish New Testament*).

How can these words possibly apply to a pre-existent angel, or the second person of a Triune or Biune God? Could such a one increase in wisdom and in favor with YEHOVAH? Assuming the impossible were true, and Yeshua pre-existed as an angel or a member of the god-head, on

what grounds could it be said that he increased in favor with YEHOVAH merely because in his new state he grew from a baby to a youth!

If Yeshua pre-existed, he must have divested himself of all previous identity, lost all his former knowledge, power and standing with YEHOVAH, and had to establish this all again! What for? What did it accomplish? Is such belief logical? We shall show it is unscriptural!

It is normal procedure for a child to "develop in wisdom and stature," but where Yeshua differed from all before or since, was in his Divine conception, and his exceptional predilection for spiritual things. This he inherited from his Father. The Father who is from everlasting became revealed in the Son (2 Cor. 5:19; Isa. 11:2-3; John 12:49), so that Yeshua could say with perfect truth, "before Abraham was I am" for he was "God manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16).

The only sense in which it can be taught with truth that there was anything pre-existent about Yeshua is in relation to YEHOVAH Who was manifested in him. In all that he did and said, there was manifest the impress of his divine origin, and the influence of YEHOVAH's spirit which was given him "without measure" (John 3:34). He is "the only begotten son" of YEHOVAH (John 3:16), whom "the Lord made strong for Himself" (Psalm 80:17), in order that His ways might be revealed unto men.

The Thread of Evidence Throughout The Bible

Throughout the Old Testament the promise of the Messiah is proclaimed; throughout the New Testament the person of the Messiah is described.

He was the "seed of the woman" promised from the beginning, to destroy the law of sin and death which was the product of the misguiding influence of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). The New Testament comments:

"When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His son, *made of a woman*, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Galatians. 4:4).

If Yeshua pre-existed, how could he be described as the "seed of the woman?"

Abraham was taught: "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed" (Genesis 22:18).

Paul commented: "And that SEED is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

Would Abraham imagine that his seed (son) existed before he did? Of course not! Where is there any evidence in Genesis that Yeshua was then living in any form? There is none!

Moses, Israel's law-giver and leader, who typified the coming Law-giver and Leader (Yeshua the Messiah) told the Jewish nation:

"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet FROM THE MIDST OF THEE, OF THY BRETHREN, LIKE UNTO ME; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deuteronomy 18:5).

In the New Testament, Peter quoted those very words and applied them to Yeshua (Acts 3:22; 7:37), and Paul taught:

"Therefore, *IN ALL THINGS* he had to be made like his brethren" (Hebrews 2:17 -- *NKJV*).

Can the words of Moses above apply to a pre-existent angel or a member of the god-head? Could such a one be truthfully described as "raised up from the midst of thee," "of thy brethren, like unto Moses?"

Only a false theory could possibly make those words apply to a pre-existent angel or a god.

Yeshua was the son of David, and David was told:

"When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, WHICH SHALL PROCEED OUT OF THY BOWELS, and I will establish his kingdom for ever. I WILL BE HIS FATHER, and he SHALL BE My son (2 Sam. 7:12-14).

The prophecy relates to Yeshua, as the New Testament comment upon it makes abundantly clear (see Luke 1:32-33; Hebrews 1:5), and with that clearly established, note well the future tense used in relation to him. God says: "I WILL BE his Father," he "SHALL BE My son." If Yeshua were already in existence, should not YEHOVAH have said: "I am his Father," "he is My son"? Mary was told:

"He *shall* be (not is!) 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 1:32-33).

These words of the angel Gabriel state that Yeshua "SHALL BE called the Son of the Highest," and he shall reign on the throne of "his father David." Can these expressions apply to one already in existence?

Consider also the preaching of the Apostles. Did they proclaim belief in a pre-existent angel or god who had assumed human form? They did not. Listen to Peter's preaching:

"David . . . 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" (Acts 2:30).

Whom did David believe would sit upon his throne? An angel or god who was already in existence? No; he believed the one who would reign there would be "the fruit of his loins," that is, *a descendant*. The boy born of Mary was a descendant of David, not a pre-existent angel or god assuming human form!

Isaiah declared: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

That prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Yeshua (Matthew 1:23), whom Peter described as "a *man* approved of God . . . by miracles and wonders which God did by him" (Acts 2:22).

In short, YEHOVAH revealed Himself in a man of His providing who became the pattern for all those who would approach Him in hope of eternal life. YEHOVAH does not expect that such will attain unto the perfection they behold in the Son, but He does require of them that they build into their lives some of the divine characteristics that they see there revealed. By so doing, they develop a *character* worthy of perpetuation in a body of incorruptible glory in the Age to come (1 Cor. 15:53-57).

The theory that sets forth Yeshua as a pre-existent angel or a member of the god-head, however, destroys this pattern, and mystifies and distorts the beautiful doctrine of God-manifestation in the man Yeshua.

And remember that a correct understanding of the relationship of the Father and the Son is essential to salvation -- "And eternal life is this: TO KNOW YOU, the *ONE* true God, and HIM WHOM YOU SENT, Yeshua the Messiah" (John 17:3).

Is Not Yeshua The Firstborn?

At this juncture the reader might become a little impatient, and desire to point out Bible references that seem to give some support to the pre-existence theory.

We are not ignorant of those passages, but proclaim that none of them give support to the theory if they are properly interpreted. It is unfortunately true, however, as the Bible itself states, that some take passages of Scripture that are "hard to be understood" and proceed to "wrest them unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Such a reference is Colossians 1:15. It describes Yeshua the Messiah as "the firstborn of every creature," and some have advanced this in support of the pre-existence theory. If Yeshua is firstborn, he must have existed before all others, they claim.

But does not that set Scripture against Scripture? If he is literally "firstborn" in the sense implied by the theory, how can the Bible claim that he is the "son of Abraham and David" (Matthew 1:1)?

And consider the statement itself: "firstBORN of every creature." Does not that demand a mother? Who was the mother who gave birth to him before all others?

These difficulties are solved, and the passage simply and beautifully explained, when the Bible doctrine of the "firstborn" is understood. In the Bible, "firstborn" is a legal term, describing pre-eminence of position or status, though not necessarily of birth. There were special privileges

granted the legal firstborn in a family. He represented his father, he acted as a priest, he received a double portion of the family inheritance (see Deuteronomy 21:17).

But the law of YEHOVAH provided that the eldest son of a family could forfeit his position as legal firstborn, if guilty of misconduct or inability to perform the necessary duties, and be supplanted by a younger son. In other words, it was not necessary for Yeshua to be the first of YEHOVAH's creation to be eligible for the position of legal firstborn.

For example, consider 1 Chronicles 5:1:

"Reuben the firstborn of Israel . . . but forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birth right was given unto the sons of Joseph, and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright!"

Reuben's lewd conduct earned the rebuke of his father, who deposed him from his legal status of firstborn, and gave the position to a much younger son: Joseph.

Other examples can be briefly mentioned: Ephraim was blessed as firstborn by Jacob, even though he was younger than Manasseh his brother (Genesis 48:14-19), and YEHOVAH endorsed the appointment by describing Ephraim as "His firstborn" (Jeremiah 31:9). Jacob was given the birthright over his older brother Esau (Genesis 25:32-34). Simri was appointed to the position even though he was younger in years than his brethren (1 Chronicles 26:10).

These examples (and they could be multiplied many times over) clearly show that it was often the practice for a younger son to be elevated to the position of legal firstborn in a family. In fact, this was so common that the Mosaic Law prohibited the elevation of a younger son to this position on the mere whim of his father, because of favoritism. It commanded:

"It shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated . . ." (Deut. 21:17).

This prohibition shows that a legal firstborn could be a younger son, and therefore has a great bearing on the interpretation of Colossians 1:15.

The Bible refers to two notable "sons of God": Adam and the Messiah (see Luke 3:38). The "first Adam" forfeited the right of inheritance, the position of firstborn of the human race, because of sin; but YEHOVAH raised up a younger Son (called in 1 Cor. 15:45 "the last Adam") whose complete obedience to the will of his Father proved him worthy of the preeminence. He was thus elevated to the position of firstborn of the human race, which means that he receives "a double portion of the inheritance," and that he acts as priest in the family of YEHOVAH. Yeshua is firstborn, not by fact of longevity (which confers no merit) but by virtue of his moral excellence.

His elevation was predicted in the Old Testament. YEHOVAH declared concerning him: "I *WILL MAKE HIM* My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (Psalm 89:27).

The use of the future tense in this prophecy shows that Yeshua is not the firstborn by birth but by appointment; otherwise YEHOVAH should have said, "He IS My firstborn."

The resurrection of Yeshua was the seal of the Father's approval on the Son (Rom. 1: 1-4). This constituted him the Firstborn. Paul wrote: "He is . . . the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col 1:18), the "firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). The followers of the Messiah are also described as a "kind of firstfruits" to YEHOVAH (James 1:18; Rev. 14:4), and as "the congregation of firstborns" (Heb. 12:23 -- Greek. See *Dia-glott*). Therefore, if the title "firstborn" teaches the pre-existence of Yeshua, it must do so also in relation to his followers. All the privileges of the firstborn that rest on the Messiah, apply to a lesser extent to his followers. They will receive a double portion of inheritance in the Age to come, even immortality (1 Cor. 15:52-54), and they will act as a royal-priesthood (Rev. 5:9-10) in relation to the mortal population that will remain (see Zech. 14:16) during the period of the Messiah's millennial reign and that of the Father on this earth (Rev. 20:6).

These expressions show conclusively that the apostle did not mean, by his use of the term, that Yeshua pre-existed.

Did Yeshua Create The Heavens?

Some will remind us, however, that we have not disposed of all the difficulties contained in Colossians 1. For example, does it not reveal that Yeshua created all things? Paul taught:

"For by him (i.e. Yeshua) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:16).

This seems conclusive evidence, for it appears to teach that Yeshua created even heaven. But a close examination of the passage will reveal that it teaches too much if this interpretation is pressed, for it claims that he created all things "in heaven." That would include YEHOVAH Himself, to say nothing of the angels!

That is obviously neither logical nor Scriptural. What, then, does the verse mean? The Scriptures speak of heavens other than those which are above. For example, the prophet Isaiah speaks of "new heavens and a new earth" to be manifested in the future, which he describes as "Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy" (Isa. 65:17-18).

The coming of Yeshua will result in the formation of these political "heavens." The rulers who will reign therein will be followers of the Messiah, then made immortal, reigning "on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10).

Even now, a follower of Yeshua is elevated into a position of privilege in relation to YEHOVAH and His Son, described as "the heavens in Christ" (Eph. 1: 3 -- see margin). Paul thus taught:

"He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places (the heavens) in Christ" (Ephesians 2:6 -- Margin).

These "heavens" have been brought into existence through Yeshua, and they are the precursors of the political "heavens" to be manifested in the age to come when he rules on earth. In them are found gradations of authority, described as thrones, dominions and so forth; some of which were visible then, and some of which are yet to be manifested, and, therefore, are as yet invisible.

All will be revealed in the Age to come.

The term "heaven," therefore, often relates to a position of privilege or elevation. It is used to describe the present relationship of Yeshua's followers to the Father and the Son, as well as the authority that they will wield in the Kingdom that Yeshua will set up on earth in which they will exercise gradations of power (see Luke 19:17-19).

In Isaiah 65:17-18, the "heavens" constitute the rulers or government of the age to come, and the "earth" the ruled, or common people, as the prophet is careful to show (see v.18). The same interpretation is demanded for Colossians 1:16. The word in the Greek translated "by" is the preposition *en*. This is translated "because" in Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:27, but is more commonly rendered "in." It signifies "in the sphere of" a person's influence or being. The R.S.V. and Revised Version translations of the Bible render Colossians 1:16 as "for in him were all things created." It cannot be said that the material creation was created "in Christ," and therefore the reference must be to the spiritual creation, as is further implied in v.18.

Elsewhere, a person "in Christ" is described as a "new creature," or "new creation" as the expression should be rendered (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and as the "things" that Yeshua is said to have created are "in him" it is obviously this "new creation" that the Apostle has in mind. Yeshua is the beginning of this new creation of YEHOVAH (Rev. 3:14), leading the way to which his followers can attain (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:1-2), for what he is today they can become.

To summarize, Colossians 1:16 does not teach the literal creation of the heavens and the earth by Yeshua, because:

1. It conflicts with the testimony of the Old Testament which teaches that YEHOVAH alone created the heavens and the earth.
2. The heavens in question are "in Christ" which is only possible if they relate to spiritual things.
3. Other expressions by the Apostle align the "heavens" to positions of privilege in Yeshua.

So Paul concludes: "He is before (Greek -- superior to) all things, and by (Greek-en, in) him all things consist" (Col. 1:17).

The Greek word translated "consist" is *sunistemi* and signifies to "stand, or adhere, together." Yeshua is the cohesive force of the new creation, and as such these words can be understood. But if the creation in question is interpreted to mean the literal creation, we must

acknowledge that Yeshua holds all that together. Why, then, did it not disintegrate when he died? Obviously this interpretation is wrong, and as the context clearly shows, was never intended by Paul, who was writing of a spiritual creation in Yeshua.

"I Am From Above" (John 8:23).

This statement is often used to teach that Yeshua was in heaven before he came down to earth. The context of the verse, however, shows that this interpretation is incorrect. Yeshua declared to the Jews: "Ye are from beneath: I am from above," then, in explanation, he continued: "Ye are of this world; I am not of this world." The Messiah was "from above" and "not of this world" because YEHOVAH was his Father, and he manifested wisdom and characteristics that were divine.

A man who "loves the world" is "from beneath," or "earthy," but one who has "the love of the Father" dwelling in him is "from above" (1 John 2:15). Yeshua told Nicodemus that a person must be "born from above" (John 3:3 -- margin) if he would inherit the kingdom of God. Such a one is begotten by the word of YEHOVAH (1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9-10), by a "wisdom that descendeth from above" (James 3:15-18). The character that he will develop is one molded by the Word that dwells in him (John 17:17), so that he can claim to be "from above" though he was never literally in heaven.

That is the sense in which Yeshua's words are to be understood. He was "not of this world" in the same sense as John exhorted believers to be "not of this world" (1 John 2:15). The Yeshua-follower is expected to look beyond the earthy things of this world to the glory yet to be revealed, and to become mentally and morally changed by the influence which is "from above."

The Messiah provided an example of this.

"I Came Down From Heaven" (John 6:38).

"This is a hard saying, who can understand it?" asked the disciples (v.60). It was followed by one even more difficult: "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?" So ridiculous did this sound to some of Yeshua's disciples that they left him (v.66). And that conclusively proves that they knew nothing of the theory of a pre-existent Messiah.

Moreover, consider the title the Messiah used. He described himself as "Son of Man."

Was the pre-existent one a Son of Man? Evidently he was if this reference is relied upon as proof of his supposed pre-existence.

What did the Messiah mean by these difficult sayings?

They appear at the end of a long conversation with the Jews, based upon the giving of manna in the wilderness, and the circumstances provide the key to their meaning.

The manna is described as "bread from heaven" (John 6:32), and the Messiah likened himself to anti-typical manna or "bread from heaven" (vv. 32-33). Does this description mean that the manna was manufactured in heaven, at the dwelling place of YEHOVAH, and wafted down in a thick cloud every night through the illimitable spaces above to the wilderness below? Or did YEHOVAH send His spirit to earth, and there manufacture it?

Undoubtedly the latter, as any reasonable person will concede.

That is the sense, therefore, in which we must understand the Messiah's allusions to himself. Consider the circumstances of his birth. The angel told his mother:

"The holy spirit shall come upon thee, the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Yeshua was "the only begotten Son of God" and therefore from above. Paul taught that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). That which was in Yeshua (the Spirit) had come down from heaven, and tabernacling in the flesh of Yeshua, ascended into heaven after his resurrection.

That this is the true meaning, is shown by the explanatory words of the Messiah himself. To the confused disciples he declared:

"What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:62-63).

YEHOVAH, by His spirit, descended to earth to provide one of the human race capable of conquering sin (see Ps. 80:17), and having done so, He withdrew this one to heaven, having changed his nature from a body of flesh to one of spirit, for it should be clearly understood that a spirit being is corporeal (1 Cor. 15:44-45). Thus the Spirit ascended where it was before, though in a different form. It descended as the power of YEHOVAH; it ascended as a Son of Man made immortal.

In The Beginning Was The Word (John 1)

John's Gospel commences with this statement, and goes on to state that this word was with God (YEHOVAH) and was God (YEHOVAH), and made all things (vv. 1-4). And because the title, Word of God, is applied by many to the Messiah in Revelation 19:13 (in actual fact this is applied to YEHOVAH God's Shekinah Glory -- not the Messiah), it is claimed that these verses in John relate to a pre-existent Messiah.

If this were so, however, it would make the Bible appear hopelessly contradictory, for such reference as: "I will be his Father, and He shall be my son," "I will make him My firstborn," "Jesus Christ the son of Abraham the son of David" are at variance with the teaching that represents Yeshua as already living.

The Greek term translated "word" is Logos. It signifies the outward form of inward thought or reason, or the spoken word as illustrative of thought, wisdom and doctrine. Not only that, but it can also refer to YEHOVAH's Shekinah Glory.

John is teaching that in the very beginning, YEHOVAH's purpose, wisdom or revelation (Shekinah Glory) had been in evidence. It was "with God" in that it emanated from him; it "was God" in that it represented Him to mankind (a similar expression is used by Yeshua in Matthew 26:28: "This is my blood" -- that is, this represents my blood. Again in Matthew 13:20: "the same is he" signifies the same, "represents he." "That rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4), it represented Yeshua); and it became the motive power of all that YEHOVAH did, for all was made with it in mind, and it presented the hope of life to mankind (see John 1: 3-4).

What John is stating, therefore, is that in the very beginning there existed the wisdom or purpose of YEHOVAH (His Shekinah Glory), and that it was revealed unto men to provide a way of life.

What did it proclaim?

The coming of one who would overcome sin and give reality to the hope of life. The promise of this was stated from the beginning in the Word or Shekinah Glory of YEHOVAH (e.g. Genesis 3:15).

This Word, Wisdom or Shekinah Glory found its reality, its substance, its confirmation (Romans 15:8) in the person of the Messiah; therefore John taught:

"The word was made (Greek-ginomai "became") flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The Word was made flesh, or became flesh, as it is expressed in the Greek. The Declaration of Divine wisdom found its substance and reality in the person of the Messiah. Before his advent, it was a mere Word or Promise, but when he became manifested, it became a person.

The person did not exist before the birth of the child Yeshua; but the promise and wisdom (Shekinah Glory) of YEHOVAH always existed.

That is the teaching of John. It does away with the embarrassment of teaching that an angel or a god became an embryo in the womb of a woman, as demanded by the theory of a pre-existent Messiah.

We acknowledge that "Word" is personalized as "him", in John 1:4, but that is a common Hebraism found throughout the Bible. Riches, Wisdom, Sin, and other subjects are similarly treated. Sometimes these are used to press the doctrine of pre-existence. For example, on several occasions, Jehovah's Witnesses have drawn attention to such passages as Proverbs 8:22, and applied them to their notion of a pre-existent Yeshua. The passage reads:

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old."

The subject matter of the chapter is wisdom which is personified; but, unfortunately for the doctrine of the preexistent son, it is personified as a woman: "She standeth, she crieth" etc. (Prov. 8:1-3).

"The Glory I Had with Thee Before The World was" -- John 17:5

Do these words mean that Yeshua was personally with the Father from the very beginning? or are they expressive of the fact that YEHOVAH, as a wise Architect (Hebrews 11:10), foresaw the glory of His completed plan?

The latter without doubt! This is shown beyond question because of the use of similar language in the same manner.

Thus Peter taught that the Messiah was "foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifested in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:20). John describes him as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

Was Yeshua "slain from the foundation of the world?" Typically, yes, in the sacrifices provided; but literally, no.

In like manner, YEHOVAH, who knows the end from the beginning, foresaw the glory of the Son and proclaimed it through the prophets. The ultimate glory of Yeshua was in the mind and purpose of the Father from the very beginning.

He also provided for the ultimate glory of Yeshua's followers, so that the Messiah prayed:

"The glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them" (John 17:22).

Do Yeshua's followers possess his glory now? They do not, they are merely "in hope" of it (see Romans 5:2).

How can Yeshua then claim to have given it to them? Only in the sense that he has provisionally bestowed it, foreknowing that they to whom it is given in promise will fulfill the conditions to ultimately receive it in reality.

Thus, an accepted follower at Yeshua's coming could well speak to the Messiah as Yeshua prayed to the Father:

"Glorify thou me with the glory that I had (in promise) with thee before (this millennial) world began!"

YEHOVAH foreknows the completed purpose, and knowing that He will bring it to consummation, is able to "call those things which be not as though they are" (Rom. 4:17). Paul taught:

"God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, without blame before Him" (Eph. 1:4).

If John 17:5 proves the pre-existence of Yeshua, Ephesians 1:4 must prove the pre-existence of all who are followers of him!

The same language is used of other men whom YEHOVAH has used in a special way. Of Jeremiah it is written:

"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

Does that prove the pre-existence of Jeremiah? If not, why should John 17:5 be used to teach the pre-existence of Yeshua, and so be made to conflict with many other references which speak of him as the son of David born 1900 years ago? Similar language is used of Paul (Gal. 1:15) and others. When Yeshua returns, his accepted followers will be granted a glory similar to that bestowed upon the Son. They will be "conformed to the image of YEHOVAH's Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

Your Responsibility

As the hope of eternal life is bound up in a correct understanding of the Father and Son (John 17:3), it is the responsibility of all to seek out the truth concerning these matters. It is very difficult to rid our minds of bias, but it is necessary if we would find the truth. Is it logical that an angel or a god should become a baby, and be compelled to learn all over again those things that once he knew? What purpose is served by this?

No, the truth is simple, clear and logical. YEHOVAH's spirit caused the birth of His son, and strengthened him in his daily pilgrimage towards victory over sin. By so doing there was revealed the means of victory for each one of us: divine help and strength (Phil. 4:13). A careful consideration of Scripture will show that the doctrine of pre-existence is both *illogical and false*.

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"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the *firstborn* of every creature."
-- Colossians 1:12-15

"Yeshua - The *Firstborn*"

In the Bible Yeshua is given the title of the *firstborn*. What does this mean? In being the *firstborn* or possessing the title, many benefits or privileges went along with it. Since Yeshua was elevated to the status of *firstborn* at his resurrection, he inherited all these benefits -- and more! This article shows what they are.

by A. Thomas and John D. Keyser

Did Yeshua pre-exist? At first glance, the last phrase of the fifteenth verse of Colossians might seem to prove the idea. If kept in perspective with the whole council of YEHOVAH, such a conclusion is impossible. Though we understand that the Messiah existed as a matter of promise and was loved by his father "before the foundation of the world (*kosmos*)" (John 17:24), the scriptures give us plenty of evidence to deny that Yeshua existed in any sort of physical or disembodied spirit form as a "third or second person of the Godhead" before the account of his birth, as is clearly recorded for us in the Gospels written by Matthew and Luke. As Gabriel clearly revealed to Mary: "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. The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:31, 32, 35).

The only way that we can correctly say that the Messiah "pre-existed" in any way is to understand that he has existed in the plan and purpose of YEHOVAH since the creation. We see him as the promised "seed" of the Woman (Genesis 3:15), a promise given to Adam and Eve as an eventual remedy to the condemnation of death that now rested on the human race as a result of their disobedience. The Messiah would be that promised remedy by the destruction of sin in his own flesh through his death on the tree, "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (*diabolis*)" (Hebrews 2:14).

A proper understanding of the meaning of John 1:1 also helps us to understand the supposed pre-existence of Yeshua. It is not our intent to delve into an exposition of this verse (which

would take pages), but understanding that the "Word" or Logos carries the meaning of a declared or expressed intention, we see through the smoke screen created by Apostate Christianity. The Logos, defined as a doctrine or declaration, helps us to understand YEHOVAH's purpose in the earth, and what he has promised. Consider the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). In John 1:1 we are told that "in the beginning was the word" and in the second verse that "the same was in the beginning with God." What was in the beginning with YEHOVAH God? Was it Yeshua himself? Was the Messiah that word? No, the "word" was YEHOVAH's declared purpose to people the earth with an immortal race of beings that would manifest his name. It was that "promise of eternal life" that Paul made mention to that "was with God, and was God."

To understand Yeshua's relationship to this "word" or declaration, we must continue down to the fourteenth verse of the same chapter where we are told that Yeshua was the "Word" made flesh. The Messiah is the vehicle in which the promise of eternal life, YEHOVAH's expressed intention or declaration, was to be carried out. He was the promised seed of Eve to provide a way out of death. As Yeshua confessed of himself: "I am the resurrection and the life." It was through the Messiah that YEHOVAH's declared purpose was to be manifested and carried out. In this we see no evidence of a physical pre-existence but a glorious truth concerning our heavenly Father's plan and purpose with the earth.

Much more could be said to disprove the pre-existence of Yeshua, but that is not the main focus of this article. Our purpose is not to show what the phrase "firstborn of every creature" does not mean, but the very beautiful truth it in fact expresses. Instead of teaching pre-existence, this statement reveals what the Messiah accomplished when he was on this earth.

Yeshua - The Firstborn of YEHOVAH

In Luke 3:38, we find a lineage of Yeshua that traces him back to Adam. When we arrive at the 38th verse we read: "Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, Which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God." Here we have it stated that Adam was the Son of God (YEHOVAH). Knowing that Adam was the first created of the race, for he had no natural father, there is nothing questionable about this statement. As every child's memory verse states; "And the Lord God formed man (Adam) of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). But how do we understand the statement that Yeshua is the firstborn of every creature? We have all been taught the account of the creation since being a child and that Adam was the first man created. We all have been taught, since an early age, the events surrounding the birth of the Messiah some 4,000 years after the Creation. How can the scriptures speak of the Messiah being the firstborn when chronology and simple logic seem to prove otherwise?

Adam was considered the son of YEHOVAH, for he had no natural father, and the Messiah was also considered the Son of YEHOVAH because he had no natural father. But as scripture bears out, Yeshua was given the title of the firstborn. In ancient, and to some degree modern times, there were many benefits that went along with being the firstborn. A certain degree of prestige and power went along with such a position. But if we were just to consider the different accounts in the book of Genesis alone, we see that the rights and benefits of the firstborn mainly went to the

younger child. Shem was the youngest son of Noah but was given the pre-eminence over Japheth the firstborn. Isaac was placed over Ishmael, Jacob before Esau, Joseph before his brethren, and Ephraim before Manasseh.

Just as God told Rebekah, "the elder shall serve the younger"; these examples point forward to Yeshua the Messiah. Even though the Messiah, in the truest sense, was the "only begotten of the Father" by the way he was created as being born of a woman, as opposed to Adam being created directly from the clay, at first it might not be thought that Yeshua would be considered the "firstborn of every creature". It would seem that such a title would appropriately fall on Adam, yet the title is given to the Messiah. Let us consider further! The book of Psalms in the 89th chapter makes prophetic reference to this exaltation of Yeshua: "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established mine arm also shall strengthen him" (verses 20, 21). "He shall cry unto me, 'thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.' Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (verses 26, 27).

Benefits of the Firstborn

If being the firstborn, or possessing the title, is such a desired position, what benefits go along with the title?

1. The firstborn were set apart as belonging to YEHOVAH (Exodus 13:2): "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast: it is mine."
2. The firstborn received a double portion of his father's possessions. He was to receive twice as much as his brethren (Deuteronomy 21:15-17): "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength, the right of the firstborn is his."

Even though this makes reference to the justice delivered to the son of a hated wife (in the event that the man had more than one wife), the reference clearly shows that the right of the firstborn was a double portion of the father's possessions.

3. The firstborn was held in honor next to the parents. The other children were expected to look up to the firstborn, and the firstborn was to be an example for them (Genesis 49:3). Jacob spoke of Reuben his firstborn as "my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power."
4. The firstborn was appointed ruler in his father's house. In 2 Chronicles 21:3, Jehoram was made a king over Israel "because he was the firstborn."
5. The firstborn acted as a priest and led the family in their approach to YEHOVAH. In Numbers 8:14-18, we learn that the Levites were to be separated from the rest of Israel and minister to the service of the Tabernacle. Before the Levites were chosen for this service, the firstborn of every family group offered the sacrifices for the family -- see verse 16.

In this fifth benefit lies the key of our consideration. Levi was not the eldest tribe, but why is it chosen to fulfill the priestly duties of the firstborn? Because when Moses descended the mount after forty days, it was the tribe of Levi that stood by YEHOVAH in destroying those that had rebelled in the absence of Moses.

So, it would seem that the duties and benefits of the firstborn rely on obedience rather than natural inheritance. The scriptures show that a younger brother could replace the natural firstborn in a family if the elder was disobedient or could not perform the necessary duties.

This brings us to Yeshua as the firstborn. We read in Psalms 89:27 that YEHOVAH would make him (Yeshua) his firstborn. The key word in this reference is the use of the word "make", that YEHOVAH would make him his firstborn. By his natural birth, Yeshua was not automatically the "firstborn" of all creatures. As the examples that we have already mentioned, we see that it was Yeshua's perfect obedience to the Father's will that made him worthy of the position of the firstborn.

In 1 Corinthians 15:45, we have Yeshua referred to as the "last Adam". As the first Adam is the head of a race of people, so is the last Adam placed at the head of a race or family. We haven't the space to consider at length the two federal heads, but we know that those who are connected to the first Adam are related to sin and death, while those related to the last Adam are related to life and eternal blessings (1 Corinthians 15:22). The first Adam lost his position of favor and likewise lost his position of the firstborn, while Yeshua gained the title and all its benefits by his obedience to the Father's commands.

Since the Messiah was raised to the status of firstborn, he naturally inherited the duties and benefits that go along with such a title. The duties and benefits are as follows:

1. He was set apart as belonging to YEHOVAH (Luke 1:32, 33): "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest." "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28).
2. He received a double portion of an eternal inheritance (Hebrews 1:4): "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."
3. He acts as a priest (Hebrews 7:17): "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."
4. He will be appointed ruler over part of his Father's Kingdom (Luke 1:32, 33): "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."
5. His name will be held in honor next to his Father (Isaiah 9:6): "And the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

An important point that we have yet to touch upon is that before the Messiah could enjoy the benefits we have just mentioned, he had to become the firstborn from the dead. Not only did

Yeshua's obedience grant him all the glorious benefits that his Father wished to bestow upon him, but more importantly, his perfect obedience made it possible for YEHOVAH to raise him from the dead and grant him immortality. Referring back to the first chapter of Colossians in the eighteenth verse: " And he is the head of the body, the ecclesia: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

There had been others that had been raised from the dead, Lazarus for example, but none had ever been raised from the grave to be granted a perfect nature, never to return to the grave. And no other man has ever been appointed to be the arm of YEHOVAH, a Savior for fallen man. All this was no accident but according to the plan and purpose of the father.

Our Relationship to the Firstborn

Natural Israel can be seen as a type of firstborn in a natural sense. Because of disobedience, on a national scale, the benefits that YEHOVAH had promised to his people, namely the Kingdom, would be extended to the Gentile. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). Though Gentiles after the flesh, we have been adopted into the position of the firstborn (or firstfruits) through the blood of the Messiah. In a sense, there is a comparison with our previous position as "children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3, 11-13) and the hope that we now have as being Spiritual Israel, as compared to the law concerning the "son of the hated" (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). As the "son of the hated" was to be given a double portion, so are those Faithful of Spiritual Israel (once "children of wrath") to receive a double portion over the Natural Israelite. Though Natural Israel will be saved and be allowed to dwell in the Land and enjoy preeminence over the nations (Romans 11:26; Zechariah 8:23), it will be those of Spiritual Israel that will be given absolute power over the earth and the prize of all prizes -- IMMORTALITY! (Revelation 2:7, 26, 27)

Along with the redemption from sin that we have gained through the Messiah and the righteousness that has been imputed to us, we also have the promise of sharing a portion with our elder brother. And by continued obedience, upon our resurrection and judgment, we may be granted the gift of eternal life and inheritance after the pattern of Yeshua the Anointed. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4).

As we think upon these things, may we realize the beauty, wisdom, and supreme justice of YEHOVAH's plan of salvation as carried out through His Son. We see through YEHOVAH's workings with the position of the firstborn that what may appear logical or just according to the flesh is not in harmony with the thinking of the Spirit. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

May we be thankful to have the hope and privilege of being able to share with Yeshua the benefits of the firstborn; not by our own doing, but by the work of our elder brother -- THE FIRSTBORN OF EVERY CREATURE.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY: Christian Custom? -- or *Pagan* Holiday?

by Herman L. Hoeh

WHERE DID St. Valentine's Day come from? You might suppose school teachers and educators would know. But do they? How many of you were ever taught the real origin of Valentine's Day? -- were ever told in school WHY you should observe the custom of exchanging valentines?

The Silence of Educators

Teachers are all too often silent about the origin of the customs they are forced to teach in today's schools! If they were to speak out, many would lose their jobs!

Isn't it time we examined why we encourage our children to celebrate St. Valentine's Day -- when it is never so much as mentioned in the Bible as a practice of the New Testament Church?

Today, candymakers unload tons of heart-shaped red boxes for February 14, while millions of the younger set are annually exchanging valentines. Florists consider February 14 -- St. Valentine's Day -- as one of their best business days. And young lovers pair off -- at least for a dance or two -- at St. Valentine's balls.

Why? Where did these customs originate? Where do we find any such practices in the Bible? How did we come to inherit these customs?

A Christian Custom?

Did you know that centuries before Christ, the pagan Romans celebrated February 15 and the evening of February 14 as an idolatrous and sensuous festival in honor of Lupercus, the "hunter of wolves"?

The Romans called the festival the "Lupercalia." The custom of exchanging valentines and all the other traditions in honor of Lupercus -- the deified hero-hunter of Rome -- was also linked anciently with the pagan practice of teen-agers "going steady." It usually led to fornication. Today, the custom of "going steady" is thought very modern. It isn't. It is merely a rebirth of an old custom "handed down from the Roman festival of the Lupercalia, celebrated in the month of February, when names of young women were put into a box and drawn out by men as chance directed." That's the admission of the *Encyclopedia Americana*, article, "St. Valentine's Day."

When Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire there was some talk in church circles of discarding this pagan free-for-all. But the Roman citizens wouldn't

hear of it! So it was agreed that the holiday would continue as it was, except for the more grossly sensual observances.

It was not until the reign of Pope Gelasius that the holiday became a "Christian custom." As far back as 496, Pope Gelasius changed Lupercalia on February 15 to St. Valentine's Day on February 14." (p. 172 of *Customs and Holidays Around the World* by Lavinia Dobler).

But how did this pagan festival acquire the name of "St. Valentine's Day"? And why is the little naked Cupid of the pagan Romans so often associated today with February 14? And why do little children and young people still cut out hearts and send them on a day in honor of Lupercus the hunter of wolves? Why have we supposed these pagan customs in honor of a false god are Christian?

Who Was the Original "St. Valentine"?

Valentine was a common Roman name. Roman parents often gave the name to their children in honor of the famous man who was first called Valentine in antiquity. That famous man was Lupercus, the HUNTER. But who was Lupercus? -- and why should he have also borne the name Valentine among the heathen Romans?

The Greeks called Lupercus by the name of "Pan". The Semites called Pan "Baal," according to the *Classical Dictionaries*. Baal -- mentioned so often in the Bible -- was merely another name for Nimrod, "the mighty HUNTER" (Genesis 10:9). The hunter Nimrod was the Lupercus -- or wolf hunter -- of the Romans. And St. Valentine's Day was originally a day set aside by the pagans in his honor!

But why should Nimrod have been called "Valentine" by the Romans? And why should the celebration of this day have been anciently limited to the city of Rome before Pope Gelasius' time? What part did the site of ancient Rome play in the life of Nimrod?

Valentine comes from the Latin word "Valentinus", a proper name derived from the word "valens", meaning "to be strong," declares *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*. It means literally "strong, powerful, mighty." Any connection with Nimrod? We read in the Bible that Nimrod was the "MIGHTY hunter" (Gen. 10:9). It was a common proverb of ancient time that Nimrod was "the MIGHTY hunter before the Lord." NIMROD WAS THEIR HERO -- THEIR STRONG MAN -- THEIR VALENTINE!

How plain that the original Valentine was Nimrod, the mighty hunter of wolves. Yet another of Nimrod's names was "Sanctus" or "Santa," meaning "Saint." It was a common title of any hero-god. No wonder that the Roman Lupercalia is called "Saint Valentine's Day"!

But why do we associate HEARTS on a day in honor of Nimrod -- the BAAL of the Phoenicians and Semites?

The surprising answer is that the pagan Romans acquired the symbol of the heart from the Babylonians. In the Babylonian tongue the word for "heart" was "bal" (see *Young's* or *Strong's*

Concordance). The heart -- "bal" -- was merely a symbol of Nimrod -- the "Baal" or Lord of the Babylonians!

Executed at Rome

Nimrod -- THE ORIGINAL ST. VALENTINE -- was also known as Saturn, the Roman-Babylonian god who HID from his pursuers in a secret place. The Latin word Saturn is derived from the Semitic-speaking Babylonians. It means "be hid," "hide self," "secret," "conceal." The original Semitic (Hebrew) word, from which the Latin Saturn is derived, is used 83 times in the Old Testament (see *Young's Concordance* under "Sathar," also "sether").

According to ancient tradition, Saturn (Nimrod) fled from his pursuers to Italy. The Apennine mountains of Italy were anciently named the mountains of Nembrod or Nimrod. Nimrod briefly hid out at the site where Rome was later built. The ancient name of Rome, before it was rebuilt in 753 B.C., was Saturnia -- the site of Saturn's (Nimrod's) hiding. There he was found and slain for his crimes. Later, professing Christians in Constantine's day made Nimrod -- the St. Valentine of the heathen -- a SAINT of the Church and continued to honor him under the name of a Christian martyr.

Why February 14?

But why should the Romans have chosen February 15 and the evening of February 14 to honor Lupercus -- the Nimrod of the Bible? (Remember that days in ancient times began at sunset the evening before.)

Nimrod -- the Baal or sun god of the ancient pagans -- was said to have been born at the winter solstice. In ancient times the solstice occurred on January 6 and his birthday therefore was celebrated on January 6. Later, as the solstice changed, it was celebrated on December 25 and is now called Christmas. It was the custom of antiquity for the mother of a male child to present herself for purification on the fortieth day after the day of birth. The fortieth day after January 6 -- Nimrod's original birthdate -- takes us to February 15, the celebration of which began on the evening of February 14 -- the Lupercalia or St. Valentine's Day.

On this day in February, Semiramis, the mother of Nimrod, was said to have been PURIFIED and to have appeared for the first time in public with her son as the original "mother and child."

The Roman month February, in fact, derives its name from the "februa" which the Roman priests used in the rites celebrated on St. Valentine's Day. The "februa" were thongs from the skins of sacrificial animals used in rites of purification on the evening of February 14.

Cupid Makes His Appearance

Another name for the child Nimrod was "Cupid" -- meaning "desire" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, art., "Cupid"). It is said that when Nimrod's mother saw him, she LUSTED after him -- she DESIRED him. Nimrod became her Cupid -- her desired one -- and later her Valentine! So

evil was Nimrod's mother that IT IS SAID SHE MARRIED HER OWN SON! Inscribed on the monuments of ancient Egypt are inscriptions that Nimrod (the Egyptians called him Osiris) was "the husband of his mother."

As Nimrod grew up, he became the child-hero of MANY women who DESIRED him. He was their Cupid! In the Book of Daniel he is called the "DESIRE of women" (Dan. 11:37). Moffatt translates the word as Tammuz -- a Babylonian name of Nimrod. He provoked so many women to JEALOUSY that an idol of him was often called the "image of jealousy" (Ezekiel 8:5). Nimrod, the hunter, was also their Valentine -- their strong or mighty hero! No wonder the pagans commemorated their hero-hunter Nimrod, or Baal, by sending heartshaped love tokens to one another on the evening of February 14 as a symbol of him.

Nimrod, the mulatto son of Cush the Ethiopian, was later a source of embarrassment to the pagans of Europe. They didn't want an African to worship. Consequently, they substituted a supposed son of Nimrod, a white child named Horus, born after the death of Nimrod. This white child then became the "fair cupid" of European tradition.

It is about time we examined these foolish customs of the pagans now falsely labeled Christian. It is time we quit this Roman and Babylonian foolishness -- this IDOLATRY -- and get back to the faith of Christ delivered once for all time.

Let's stop teaching our children these pagan customs in memory of Baal the sun god -- the original St. Valentine -- and teach them instead what the Bible really says!

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A Moment for *Truth*

YEHOVAH is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear....

-- Psalm 46:1-2

Dave Hunt

America awakened September 11 to appalling scenes on TV of passenger planes deliberately crashing into the towers of the World Trade Center and into the Pentagon. Stunned disbelief gave way to the question, who could so carefully plan and efficiently execute such incredibly inhumane destruction and slaughter? What cause could so powerfully motivate educated and trained individuals to sacrifice their own lives and the lives of so many total strangers in this manner? In the minds of civilized people these men were unbelievable fanatics. But were they?

Could one call the spiritual leader of an entire major country a "fanatic," a man universally recognized as properly representing his religion? Who would know his religion better than the spiritual leader himself? Such was Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini when he declared, "The purest joy in Islam is to kill and be killed for Allah" (David Lamb, *The Arabs: Journey Beyond the Mirage*, Vintage Books, 1988, p. 287; David Reed, *The Unholy War Between Iran and Iraq*, Readers Digest, August 1984, p. 389). Is that fanaticism?

And could you call the founder of a major world religion a fanatic? Muhammad, who with his followers slaughtered thousands in establishing and spreading Islam, said of Muslims, "Who relinquishes his faith, kill him....(quoted on authority of Ibn 'Abbas in *Sahih of al-Bukhari*, part 9, 19. Attested by numerous Islamic scholars) I have been ordered by Allah to fight with people till they testify there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his messenger" (*op. cit.*, part 1, 13). Was Muhammed a fanatic? Are they fanatics who obey him today in exacting the death penalty upon Muslims (as in Afghanistan, the Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan) who for the sake of conscience convert to another religion?

Do we need a new definition of "fanatic"?

There is a certain hypocrisy in the new outrage with which America and the world now view terrorism. History's bloodiest, most vicious and successful terrorist, Yasser Arafat, has been given the Nobel Peace Prize and embraced as a world statesman. He is proof to would-be imitators that terrorism pays big. The United Nations, European Union, and countless world political and religious leaders have sided with him in his terrorism against Israel. Arafat and his PLO held the record for the largest hijacking (four aircraft in a single operation) -- which has just been equaled, the greatest number of hostages held at one time (300), the greatest number of people shot down at an airport, the largest ransom collected (\$5 million paid by Lufthansa), the greatest variety

of targets (40 civilian passenger aircraft, five passenger ships, 30 embassies or diplomatic ministries plus innumerable fuel depots and factories), etc. (John Laffin, *The PLO Connections*, Transworld, 1982, p. 18). Instead of being tried by an international tribunal as were the Nazi and Serbian leadership, Arafat's bloody exploits gained for him acceptance as a leader for peace!

In his brief speech to the nation the morning of the 12th, President Bush declared that the attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. were "acts of war." Indeed, they were -- *jihad* ("holy war"). He said that "freedom and democracy are under attack [but] we will not allow this enemy to win the war by...restricting our freedoms." Is it a mere coincidence that the freedom of speech, religion, the press, and of vote and conscience which we hold so dear in America are suppressed in every Muslim country?

Who dares to make the obvious connection between this declaration of war against America, and the declaration of war against the entire world by Muhammad in the seventh century, a part of Islam ever since? Since its inception, *jihad* has been waged by Islamic warriors to spread that religion of violence and hatred. Islam does not change. Rioting Muslim mobs invariably chant in their "fanaticism," "Allah is great! Allah is great!"

In the wake of this terrible act of "holy war," our President and Congressional leaders referred to God numerous times and invoked His blessing in tracking down the perpetrators of this infamous deed. The God of the Bible to whom they referred is *not* Allah, the god of Islam, whom the attacking terrorists served so faithfully!

We may be certain that the hijackers were not Israelis or evangelical Christians. Never! The simple but horrible fact is that only the religion of Islam could supply the motivation for what they did. Why are Muslims responsible for most terrorism in the world today? There is a definitive and foundational reason.

It would be extremely naive to imagine that terrorists who are willing to blow themselves up in Israel or to crash a plane at the loss of their own and many other lives do so for some commendable humanitarian cause. The courage comes solely from a unique doctrine of Islam. Abu-Bakr, the first Caliph to succeed Muhammad (and one of the few to whom Muhammad promised Paradise without martyrdom), declared that even if he had one foot in Paradise he could not trust Allah to let him in. The only sure way in Islam of achieving Paradise is to sacrifice one's life in *jihad*. Yes, suicide is forbidden as self-murder. But to sacrifice one's life in killing infidels carries the highest reward.

And what reward does Paradise bring to the *jihad* martyr? He is promised a palace of pearls in which are 70 mansions; inside each mansion are 70 houses and in each house a bed on which are 70 sheets and on each sheet a beautiful virgin. He is assured that he will have the appetite and strength of 100 men for food and sex. This is the fantastic dream that is fed to Muslim boys from earliest childhood. This motivation alone gives the reckless courage and determination to train and execute terrorist deeds in which they sacrifice their lives in bringing death and destruction to "the enemies of Allah."

America has been called "the Great Satan" by Muslim leaders around the world. Thus the strike at America was a strike for Allah against his chief enemy. Palestinians danced in the streets to celebrate the destruction in America, shouting victory to Allah. The day before the attack CNN showed routine footage of third-grade children in a West Bank school chanting death to Israel. Only indoctrination into Islam makes possible such incredible scenes and the terrorism they celebrate.

Though people of good will naturally recoil from attaching blame to a major world religion itself, we can no longer afford such sentimentality. No longer dare we allow Islam to escape its undeniable responsibility. Yet former President Bush called Islam a peace-loving religion.

The devastating acts of war by Islamic terrorists against the United States were greeted by naive statements from well-intentioned governmental leaders to the effect that we must distinguish *between* terrorism perpetrated by extremist groups and Islam *itself* which is peaceful. Yet there are more than 100 verses in the *Qur'an* advocating the use of violence to spread Islam. In the *Qur'an*, Allah commands Muslims, "Take not the Jews and Christians as friends....Slay the idolaters [non-Muslims] wherever ye find them....Fight against such...as believe not in Allah..." (Surah 5:51; 9:5, 29, 41, etc.). Though most Muslims would shrink from obeying such commands, this is official Islam and it cannot change without admitting that Muhammad was a false prophet and murderer.

Several years ago Steven Emerson produced for PBS an excellent video titled *Jihad in America*. Its cameras went directly inside cell groups associated with mosques here in America where eager young Muslims were being recruited for *jihad* against the United States. Muslim leaders are shown giving speeches about bringing America to its knees through terrorism and making cold-blooded statements such as the following from Fayiz Azzam in Brooklyn in 1989: "Blood must flow, there must be widows, orphans, hands and limbs must be severed and limbs and blood must be spread everywhere in order that Allah's religion stand on its feet!" Yes, *Allah's religion* is the motivation!

In Kansas, in 1988, another leader recruiting Islamic holy warriors against the United States exults, "O, brothers! After Afghanistan [where Muslim "freedom fighters," aided by the CIA, drove out the Soviets and installed the brutal Taliban regime] nothing in the world is impossible for us any more! There are no superpowers or minipowers. What matters is *will power* that springs from our religious belief!" Yes, *religious belief*, the particular belief of Islam, is the only motivation capable of inspiring such "fanaticism."

At the beginning of the video, Emerson, who had tracked international terrorism for the prior ten years, reported on what he called "networks of Islamic extremists" inside the US. He accurately warned that "for these militants *jihad* is a holy war, an armed struggle to defeat nonbelievers, or infidels, and their ultimate goal is to establish an Islamic [worldwide] empire." Yet he later backpedaled into the incredible statement that "Islam as a religion does not condone violence; the radicals represent only themselves -- an extremist and violent fringe...." THAT IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE. It is not because men are Arabs or extremists that they turn to terrorism, but BECAUSE THEY ARE DEVOUT MUSLIMS. Yet who will face this obvious fact?

Hatred of Israel and the call to destroy America for supporting her are also underlying themes of the terrorists seen in the documentary. Another Muslim leader in the US declares that Washington's Capitol Hill is "Zionist-occupied territory," that the Jews control Congress, and that the United States deserves what it gets so long as it continues to support Israel.

Referring repeatedly to "Islamic holy warriors," the video documented as clearly as could be done that Islam is the *driving force* behind terrorism. Astonishingly, however, the narrator and counter-terrorism experts being interviewed repeatedly declared that Islam was not to be blamed but only the "fanaticism" of certain individuals. For example, Paul Bremer, former Ambassador-at-Large for counter-terrorism for the State Department, said it is "important to make a distinction...the vast majority of Muslims and Arabs are peace loving."

It is true that the vast majority of Muslims are peace loving and would protest that they oppose terrorism. Our sympathy is with them. However, should they not ask themselves *why* they follow a religion *founded upon violence* which from its very inception has been spread with the sword? Under Muhammad's leadership in the seventh century, thousands of Arabs (and many Jews and Christians) in the Arabian Peninsula were killed by Islam's fierce "holy warriors" to force that religion upon the Arab world. Upon Muhammad's death, most Arabians abandoned Islam, imagining that they were free at last. Swiftly, tens of thousands of Arabs were slaughtered in the Wars of Apostasy, which forced Arabia back under Allah. From that base Islam was spread everywhere with the sword.

On radio and TV, during that black Tuesday in September which we can never forget, we were repeatedly told by well-intentioned government officials that we must be careful not to blame Islam for what a few fanatics had done. In fact, terrorists act in *direct obedience* to Muhammad, the Qur'an, Allah and Islam. While nominal Muslims reject the idea, all Islamic scholars agree that it is the religious *duty* of every Muslim to use violence whenever possible to spread Islam until it has taken over the world.

We need to face some simple questions: Is not the attempt to force them into Islam the cause of the cruel enslavement, torture and slaughter of millions in southern Sudan? Is not Islam the *driving force* behind the murderous and destructive riots against Christians in Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan and elsewhere? Is it not the enforcement of Islamic law that makes the Taliban deny all civil rights to those under its control in Afghanistan?

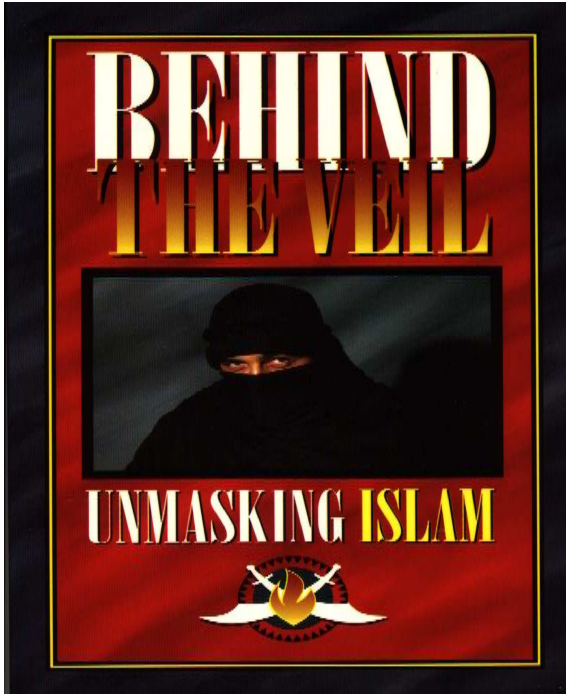
And what is it but Islam that unites the otherwise divided Arab world in an implacable and unreasoning hatred against Israel? No Arab map in the world admits Israel's existence. It is only Islam's *claim* that Ishmael, not Isaac, was the son of promise and that the Holy Land belongs to them which unites Arabs in the "fanatical" determination to destroy the Jews.

There is a natural reluctance to accept any statement which seems to be a prejudiced attack upon a world religion. IT IS THE FEAR OF SUCH PREJUDICE WHICH PREVENTS THE WORLD FROM FACING THE TRUTH. But is it prejudice to state the plain facts? No, it is not -- but it is difficult to face the truth that Islam itself is a *religion of violence* and that those who practice it are not extremists and fanatics in the ordinary sense of those words, but SINCERE FOLLOWERS OF MUHAMMAD.

The world has sided with Islam in its false claim to the land of Israel, which is now inaccurately called Palestine. This promised land, given to Israel by the God of the Bible, has been occupied by Jews continuously for the last 3,000 years, and they are the only people to have done so. In recognition of that undeniable historic fact, all of "Palestine" was to be given to the Jews for a national homeland by a 1917 ruling of the League of Nations. But steadily the Jews were betrayed by Britain's administration of this mandate (and the demise of the British Empire can be dated from that betrayal); the land was parceled out to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, etc. Israel is now accused of "occupying" land which actually has been theirs for 3,000 years. The come-lately "Palestinians" are sustained by the world in the *lie* that they are the original owners of this land. As a result, terrorism is perpetrated not only against Israel but now in this latest act against the United States to apply pressure to force Israel out of its rightful land and to spread Islam around the world.

We have arrived at a defining moment when TRUTH could triumph if the world would recognize that terrorists are not "fanatics" but *DEVOUT FUNDAMENTALIST MUSLIMS WHO ARE EARNESTLY FOLLOWING THEIR RELIGION*. This recognition could bring fresh sympathy for Muslims of all nationalities who are tragically trapped in that system. The expose of the truth could embarrass Muslim nations into opening the Islamic Curtain and allowing freedom to enter their borders. It could be a new day of open evangelism for the world where not force but love and reason permit each person to determine the faith he would embrace from his heart.

Let us pray to that end.



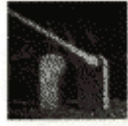
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The hour has come to expose the growing worldwide religion of Islam. Our Muslim friends must be delivered from its deception and be brought into a saving knowledge of the truth about YEHOUAH God and Yeshua the Messiah!

Many are unaware of what Islam really stands for. Certain well known Muslim leaders are labeled as "extremist" because they want to export Islam by force, and order the execution of those who disagree with them. In fact, these leaders are just conservative Muslims who want nothing more than to follow the teachings of their prophet Muhamed.

This simple, easy to understand book reveals Islamic teachings using intensified, scientific research. It is filled with quotes from authoritative ancient and contemporary Muslim scholars, accompanied with documented, detailed references from their own Arab textbooks. It also contains shocking information revealing that Muhamed not only owned slaves but worked as a merchant in this ugly business.

Many Muslim converts to Christianity have shared in the research contained in this book. Many Muslims have found the truth and we believe that Islam will be exposed and eventually defeated.



The Berean Voice

Hope of Israel Ministries (Church of God)

Volume 1, Number 1 January, 2000



**God's Sabbath Day --
Have We Been Keeping
It At the Wrong Time All
These Years?**

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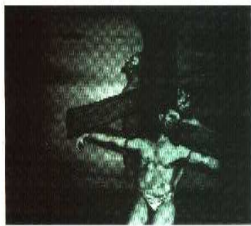
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The Berean Voice

Hope of Israel Ministries (Church of God)

Volume 1, Number 2 July, March, 2000



**Was Jesus Christ
Really in the Grave for
Three Days and Three
Nights?**

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