

# THE TORAH CODE

THE SYMBOLS OF YAHWEH

Volume 1: Foundations

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## The Parables of God

**“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of Yahweh, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.” (Psalm 78:1-4)**

**“With many such parables [Yahshua] spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to His own disciples he explained everything.” (Mark 4:33-34)**

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Yahweh declared that He speaks to us in parables, symbols, and metaphors, but the extent to which He does this may surprise us. Although what He tells us in His Word is literally true, the *significance* of His written message often runs deeper than the overt historical record might indicate to the casual reader. There’s more to this iceberg than what we can see on the surface.

Some of these symbols are obvious. That is, it should be clear to anyone with his eyes open that their meaning isn’t intrinsic, but metaphorical. You’d have to be comatose to miss, for example, the concept that such God-instituted rites as circumcision, baptism, and the removal of yeast from one’s home for one week every spring are pictures of some greater truth Yahweh wanted His people to learn. If these things aren’t symbolic—if they don’t have life beyond their own literal rites—then our God truly has a twisted sense of humor.

But if these things are so obviously metaphorical, then what about the hundreds of things that aren’t so obvious? Why are lambs specified for one type of sacrifice, goats for another, and bulls for another? Why was sacrificial grain always to be mixed with olive oil? Why was wine to be poured out on the ground? Why was God so obsessively specific about the design of the Wilderness Tabernacle? For that matter, why did He allow the Temple to be destroyed, while arranging to preserve the instructions concerning its layout and furnishings? There’s more going on here than meets the eye.

Upon reflection, I have come to the conclusion that virtually *everything* in our universal human experience is there, by God’s design, to point us toward a larger

reality—an *eternal* reality. Birth, death, and everything in between; love, marriage, sex, and procreation; the physical world in which we live: plants, animals, minerals, weather, and our place in the cosmos—all of these things and more were created by Yahweh as teaching tools so that we might come to know Him, and know Him well.

Please join me on what promises to be a fascinating voyage of discovery—a voyage through the very mind of God.

*Ken Power*

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or the *New King James Version* (NKJV).

## Religion, Reason, and Reality

The Torah—the “Law of Moses”—is apparently a most puzzling document. Hardly anybody—even the rare individual who claims to live by it—seems to have a handle on what it really means. Though it is the foundation of two of the world’s longest-lived religious traditions, Judaism and Christianity, its primary effect on both of them seems to be consternation and evasion: nobody actually does what the Torah says to do, though both groups readily admit that it’s God’s word. Why is that?

The Jews (those few who try) substitute what the Torah plainly says for a caricature of its precepts—a convoluted and largely contrived system of 613 “Mitzvot” that bear only passing resemblance to the Torah’s actual requirements. Extra-biblical Jewish writings based on a hypothetical “Oral Law” that supposedly accompanied the written Instructions (but aren’t referred to anywhere in the Tanach), are given weight equal to or greater than Scripture itself. But the Mishnah and Gemara (together known as the Talmud) and the Midrashim (a series of stories expanding and expounding upon Biblical incidents) are the products of centuries of rabbinical scholarship and opinion—which pretty much guarantees that they’re self-contradictory, if not incomprehensible. The prevailing Jewish position seems to be that if their greatest rabbis can’t agree on what G-d (they mean God, heaven forbid you should use His actual *name*) said to do, it must be impossible, so the Supreme Being is going to have to settle for our best effort—hence all the shrugging, sighing, and feelings of unresolved guilt endemic in the Jewish mindset.

Christians, on the other hand, usually try to dodge the Torah’s requirements by assuming that since Yahshua (or Yahushua, commonly known as Jesus) paid for their sins, the Law has nothing more to offer them: it has served its purpose and may be safely ignored as a quaint anachronism that no longer applies. But Yahshua plainly said, **“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matthew 5:17-19) So the Law of Moses, He says, stands intact. It is to be both kept and taught. But then, as if this weren’t confusing enough already, God confirmed that gentile (non-Israelite) believers did not have to physically perform the Law of Moses in order to be saved. The test case was circumcision (see Acts 15), a symbolic rite which was *still* required of Jews. Was God instituting a double standard, one method of redemption and reconciliation for the Jews, and another (easier) road for the gentiles? No. But to

understand why, we need to comprehend what Yahshua meant when He said He had come to *fulfill* the Law but not to *destroy* it. If keeping the Torah to perfection was the price of peace with God, then exempting a segment of the world's population from compliance would indeed have destroyed the Law—abrogated it, done away with it. And that, He said, was not His purpose.

The key, therefore, is to understand what it means to “fulfill” the Law. The word in Greek is *pleroo*, meaning to make full, to fill up, hence to make something complete or perfect, to accomplish, to carry out an undertaking, to bring it to realization or fruition. If the Torah is just a collection of rules we must obey to please God, this makes no sense. How does one “fill up” a regulation? How does one complete a law or bring it to fruition? If I were to obey all the traffic laws while driving my car (yeah, picture *that*), I may have *kept* the law, but I still wouldn't have *fulfilled* it: nothing about the law would have been fundamentally concluded or accomplished when I reached my destination. The use of the word “fulfill” implies something beyond mere performance. It speaks of realizing a potential, of completing an unfinished act, of keeping a promise. Yahshua was therefore announcing that the Torah was a pledge or vow God intended to keep—through Him. That is, the things God instructed Israel to do comprised a demonstration, a dress rehearsal, of what He Himself had pledged in His heart to do on behalf of all mankind—Jews and gentiles alike.

Israel's job, then, was to reenact the image of God's intentions before all of humanity throughout their generations. By keeping the Torah, they would be, in effect, telling the world, *Our God has a wonderful plan to redeem fallen man, to restore anyone who seeks Him to fellowship and blessing. And the things we do symbolize and reflect—in detail—the various components of that plan.* Well, that's how it was supposed to work. As it is, since they *don't* keep the Torah as God delivered it, all we have to go by is the instructions themselves. It's as if the Jews were supposed to be the actors in a Broadway play, but they missed their cues, blew their lines, and lynched the Leading Man—so not surprisingly, the production closed on the first night. Now, all we have left is the script.

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On the face of it, the Torah seems to be a collection of statutes, guidelines, and religious rituals addressed to a single bronze-age family, one on the cusp of becoming a nation in its own right. This code of law was delivered amid a recounting of the history of mankind as it pertains to this family—the family of Abraham, through his sons Isaac and Jacob, later known as Israel. The text itself identifies the Author of these “rules”—the One True God, mentioned *by name*

1,787 times in the five books of Moses: Yahweh (more accurately pronounced with the “w” as a vowel—*Yahuweh*). The fact that God’s self-revealed name was replaced every single time in most of our English Bible translations with an anemic title (“the LORD”) should give us some appreciation for how badly our adversary wants to obscure God’s identity. Calling Yahweh “the Lord” is like calling the Pacific Ocean “moist.” Though it’s true enough, it’s a totally inadequate description. Yahweh is a name that means “I am,” or “I exist.” But names are to be transmitted, not translated, and certainly not replaced.

Yahweh’s prophet and amanuensis was Moses (or Moshe). Time and time again we see the phrase, “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel...’” Yahweh’s blunt command “You shall...” peppers the Pentateuch like stars in a clear summer sky. His signature line, “I am Yahweh,” punctuates scores of these passages, as if to say, *My name alone is reason enough to make you serious about keeping my commandments*. His instructions to Israel are specific, detailed, authoritative, and unbending.

The Torah’s straightforward compendium of rules and instructions is unique among the religious writings of man, as is its setting in a matrix of contemporary historical reality. Most religions are actually *philosophies* that have been promoted over time to the status of cultic systems through the sheer weight of their societal influence. Therefore, they usually offer only abstract theories on how to achieve what their prophets or priests presume man wants: peace, prosperity, power, enlightenment, oneness with the universe, personal gratification, or a foolproof means to appease god.

Outside of the Judeo-Christian experience, only one major religion, Islam, claims to speak for the one true deity. But unfortunately (for the Muslim) the only scriptures attributed to this deity offer little or nothing in the way of practical instruction. The Qur’an offers almost nothing from which to derive Islamic Sharia law. Islam’s “five pillars” and the vaunted seventy virgins in paradise that Muhammad promised to Muslim martyrs are conspicuously absent from Allah’s supposed revelation: these doctrines must be gleaned instead from the Hadith (the “sayings of the prophet”) and the Sunnah (the biographies, or “example” of Muhammad). That makes the Torah the *only* body of law or instruction in the world that is—or even purports to be—handed down directly from the One True God. In other words, when it comes to rules for living, the Muslim—along with the Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Orthodox Jew, Pagan Christian, and every other practitioner of religion in the world (including *political* religions like communism, fascism, progressivism, and atheistic secular humanism)—is forced to make do with the opinions of men instead of the oracles of Almighty God. If you don’t believe He exists, of course, this is not viewed as a problem. But for the

overwhelming majority of mankind—who *do* claim one way or another to worship or follow one or more deities—it’s a real predicament.

For convenience, I’ve been speaking of the Torah as if it’s scripture that can be legitimately compared on some level to the writings of the world’s most popular religions. In reality, it’s nothing of the sort. Religion is man’s systematic endeavor to reach out to “god,” however that god is defined. In contrast, the Torah, and indeed the entire Bible, is the record of *God reaching out to man*. It is thus the very antithesis of religion, no matter how much following its precepts might look like one. To understand why this is so, we need to grasp the fact that when God says “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not,” He’s not defining what we must do to please or appease Him. Rather, He’s either asking us to trust Him to know what’s best for us, and to reenact—to rehearse—what He was doing to reconcile us to Himself.

The whole thing can be confusing, however, because there are points of similarity between God’s Word and “competing” scriptures. The fact is, not all religions are automatically mistaken about everything. There’s a reason even a nearsighted squirrel finds an acorn now and then: he’s *looking* for it. As flawed as man’s wisdom is, it isn’t *always* wrong, for man was created in the image of God. As Paul points out, **“When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.”** (Romans 2:14-15) So we should not be surprised to occasionally find some of the same basic truths presented in a plethora of scriptural traditions. Take for example the “Golden Rule.” Its core premise (or something quite similar) shows up *everywhere*. I’ve listed these sources in the chronological order of their appearance:

Torah: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke (that is, reprove or correct) your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.” *Leviticus 19:17-18*

Jainism: “One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated.” *Mahavira, Sutrakritamga*

Brahmanism: “This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.” *Mahabharata, 5:1515*

Buddhism: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” *Udana-Varga 5:18*

Confucianism: “Is there one maxim which ought to be acted upon throughout one’s whole life? Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.” *Analects 15:23*



Taoism: “Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.” *T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien*

Zoroastrianism: “That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.” *Dadistan-i-dinik, 94:5*

Rabbinic Judaism: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.” *Talmud, Shabbat 31a*

Christianity (New Testament): “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” *Matthew 7:12 (cf. Luke 6:31)*

Islam: “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.” *Sunnah*.

(Note, however, that if you accept the claim that the Qur’an was revealed directly from Allah to Muhammad, you’re forced to conclude that the Muslims’ “god” had a very different take on it: “Kill them wherever you find and catch them. Drive them out from where they have turned you out; for disbelief is worse than slaughter.” *Qur’an 2:191*. “The punishment for those who wage war against Allah and his Prophet and make mischief in the land is to murder them, crucify them, or cut off a hand and foot on opposite sides.” *Qur’an 5:33*. “Fight and kill the disbelievers wherever you find them, take them captive, torture them, and lie in wait and ambush them using every stratagem of war.” *Qur’an 9:5*. “I will terrorize the unbelievers. Therefore smite them on their necks and every joint and incapacitate them. Strike off their heads and cut off each of their fingers and toes.” *Qur’an 8:12*. Need I go on? So much for the Golden Rule in Islamic thought. On the other hand, it does explain why Muslims who really *believe* their “holiest” scriptures tend to be murderous and/or suicidal.)

You don’t have to be God, then, to offer good advice. But only God can do it with authority. What are mere platitudes and maxims on the lips of men become binding commandments when Yahweh says them—or at least they do if we call Yahweh our God. Although His invitation to a loving relationship is extended to all people, the choice to accept it—and Him—is ours to make, not His. Love requires free will; it implies the freedom *not* to reciprocate. Our choices, however, have repercussions. If we choose to receive and respond to Yahweh’s love, we are acknowledging His sovereignty, His right to instruct us. It is illogical in the extreme to tell God, “I want all the good things You’ve reserved for your children, but I’m not willing to even *try* to do what You ask.” Those very instructions are a big part of the “good things” He has given his children to enjoy.

If, on the other hand, we choose *not* to avail ourselves of the relationship Yahweh is offering—if we reject His authority and His love—then we are not obligated to heed His Law. After all, a citizen in one country is not bound by the laws of another, nor is a child required to obey a total stranger. We keep our *own*

laws; we honor our *own* parents. The latent anarchist in us may rejoice at this apparent “liberty,” but the “benefit” of being free from God’s Law is an illusion. It’s like being set free from the law of gravity: there’s a downside. Imagine yourself in a town with ordinary traffic laws but no police or courts to enforce them. Inevitably, somebody will choose to ignore all the speed limits, traffic signals, and road signs, declaring himself “free.” But is he? Even though no one will arrest him, his choices still have consequences. Eventually, this guy will find himself either lost, maimed, or dead—and he will have adversely affected the lives of people who were trying to observe the traffic laws, as well. No policeman or judge is necessary to “punish” a man for driving 86 miles per hour on a curvy mountain road, intoxicated, in a blinding snowstorm. The “accident” he’ll have will have been no *accident* at all, but rather the natural result of rejecting the authority of the law. His “punishment” will be self-inflicted.

In the same way, Yahweh doesn’t go out of His way to punish people for failing to share a relationship with Him. What we choose to do is our own prerogative. But if we don’t recognize His authority, we must bear the responsibility—and the consequences—of having followed our own. We can’t logically blame Yahweh for our own poor choices. We can only “blame” Him for having given us the right and ability to make those choices in the first place. That’s *real* freedom. It’s Yahweh’s primary gift to mankind. In the same way, if we don’t invite Him to bear our guilt, we have no alternative but to it carry ourselves. If we don’t ask to be given eternal life with God, we will possess only whatever life we are able to provide for ourselves. It bears repeating: our choices have natural consequences. Since Yahweh alone is God, the greatest of man’s “wisdom” is derivative at best, and a deadly fraud at worst. Therefore, the only possible alternative to Yahweh’s instruction runs a distant second in both wisdom and potential benefit.

The bottom line: if we wish to avail ourselves of the benefits of God’s recorded instructions to mankind, we have no choice but to consult the Torah. It is the *only* code of Law or Instruction in existence that claims divine authorship—and those claims are vindicated ever more convincingly the closer one looks. Deny them if you want to—it’s your choice—but know for certain that there is no logical alternative: every other code of Law in human experience, without exception, is the product of man’s imagination—or worse.

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We have observed that Yahshua came to “fulfill” the Torah, and that to do so, He needed to do more than flawlessly observe its statutes: He had to *become* the

fulfillment of its promise, the completion of its contract, the accomplishment of its covenant. Isaiah explains what was happening: **“I, Yahweh, have called You [i.e., Yahshua the Messiah, identified previously as ‘My servant whom I uphold...My elect one, in whom My soul delights’] in righteousness, and will hold Your hand. I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house....”** The “Elect One” was “given” by Yahweh to two groups of people, for two different but related purposes. First, He is God’s “covenant,” that is, His promise, contract, or pledge. To whom? Since the contrasted group is “the gentiles,” or “the nations” (*goyim*), “the people” apparently refers to Israel. Isaiah has revealed that the Messiah is to be the personification of God’s covenant promises of redemption and reconciliation, as symbolized in the rites of the Torah—the very thing Yahshua claimed of Himself when He said, “I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.” Second, the Messiah is given by God to be “a light to the gentiles.” These are not distinct concepts, but two sides of the same coin. That which brings spiritual enlightenment, opens the eyes of the blind, and brings Satan’s prisoners out of the gloom of bondage to sin, is the same person who fulfills the covenant of Yahweh to Israel: Yahshua, God’s Anointed One.

Isaiah continues the prophecy: **“I am Yahweh, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare. Before they spring forth I tell you of them.”** (Isaiah 42:6-9) We haven’t changed subjects. Yahweh is declaring through His prophet that He had *already* revealed the nature of this covenant and defined the source of this enlightenment—and that He was still in the process of revealing new facets of His plan. The revelation had begun in the Torah, and it was continuing apace in Isaiah’s day. That last sentence, **“Before they spring forth I tell you of them,”** separates the *real* God from the wannabes. Yahweh has identified a fundamental benchmark of the true and living God, as opposed to false gods and “carved images”—predictive prophecy. The reason is evident: the *real* God is not confined by the dimension of time. You’ll search in vain for a “god” other than Yahweh whose prophets could speak of specific future events with unerring accuracy. Only one comes to mind who even tried: Muhammad called himself a prophet who spoke for his god, Allah. Although he uttered very few predictive prophecies, even those few he did failed to materialize. (He prophesied, for example, that women would someday outnumber men a hundred to one; and that the end of the world—judgment day—would happen half an Islamic “day,” or 500 years, from the coronation of its last prophet, i.e., himself. That works out to 1110 A.D., but we’re still here, waiting.)

Yahweh’s prophets, on the other hand, are incessantly heard delivering predictions of future events or conditions. But even here we have a “problem” or two. The overt prophecies are often somewhat obscure—making them sound like

something Nostradamus might have come up with. They're specific enough, but their meaning, their significance, often seems a little esoteric—until the prophecy comes to pass, that is, at which point anybody who's looking for it can recognize the obvious fulfillment. These correlations between prophecy and fulfillment would tend to go right over the heads of people who *weren't* looking, however. For example, Yahweh never just comes out and tells us plainly that He will manifest *Himself* as the “Anointed One” or Messiah—and that He will be born into the world as a human child in the town of Bethlehem. No, first he tells Isaiah to write, **“For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will perform this.”** (Isaiah 9:6-7) Then He tells another prophet to say, **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”** (Micah 5:2) You often have to use more than one interlocking “puzzle piece” like this to see the truth. Once you're prepared to embrace Yahshua as the anointed human manifestation of the Living God, it all makes sense. But if you're not, it all seems pretty vague.

Why does God do this? Why does He make the truth obvious only to those who are willing to accept it? It's because of something I mentioned earlier: love requires choice—the liberty to either accept or reject its object, however one chooses. Without this freedom, love degenerates into something less: loyalty, gratitude, obedience, or even good manners. If Yahweh were to *prove* to you in obvious and undeniable terms that your salvation depended on reciprocating His love, you'd have to be completely insane—in a state of denial—in order to reject Him. (It's like the guy who thought he was dead, but his friend, after convincing him with undisputable scientific evidence that dead men don't bleed, stuck him with a pin—producing a gusher of blood. Seeing it, the man merely replied, “Well, what d'ya know? Dead men *do* bleed.”) God *could* prove His love, but not without abridging our ability and right to choose whether to love Him back. The evidence is there in abundance if we want to see it, but Yahweh refuses to cram incontrovertible proof down our throats.

So God is seldom blatantly direct in His prophetic pronouncements. His information concerning the future is often delivered to us in poetic language that leaves as much “wobble room” for the skeptic as it does vindication for the faith of the believer. For example, the prophet says, “The virgin shall bear a son.” The follower of Yahshua looks at the historical record of Matthew and Luke and praises Yahweh for His mind-bendingly literal fulfillment. The rabbi, meanwhile, looking for a way to undermine Yahshua's credentials, notes (quite rightly) that

the word for “virgin” *can*, under certain circumstances, simply mean “young woman.” God has not *forced* him to accept what to the Christian believer is obvious and wonderful. He has, however, left the rabbi with a problem: he must explain why such a mundane prophecy is included in Scripture. As signs go, it isn’t much. It’s like saying, “The sun will rise in the east tomorrow morning.” Face it: virtually *all* “sons” are born to “young women.” It was considered a miracle, in fact, when Abraham’s son Isaac was born to an *old* woman. So if the rabbinical take on it is correct, this is hardly an earth-shaking revelation. What, then, was God’s point? *A sign from God: tomorrow, the sky will be blue!*

Besides using poetically obscure prophecies, Yahweh often resorts to symbols, metaphors, and parables to communicate His story. In fact, Yahshua taught *primarily* with parables: **“And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.”** (Mark 4:33-34) This wasn’t an innovation on the part of the Messiah. Yahweh had been using the technique since the very beginning, if only we’d open our eyes to what He was showing us. As He revealed His Instructions through Moses, practically everything He told His people to do, or use, or give, or avoid had parabolic significance. So Asaph writes of Yahweh’s preferred method of communication, **“Give ear, O my people, to my law. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.”** (Psalm 78:1-3) Through every precept of the Torah, God was telling Israel in symbolic terms something about Himself or the relationship He wished to enjoy with them—and with us. If we don’t sort out the parables—if we don’t comprehend the symbols—we won’t really understand what Yahweh was telling us.

These symbols are the subject of this book. Together they form a sweeping panorama of information about God’s nature and intentions. They aren’t meant to be understood by everyone, however. As with fulfilled prophecy, they’re only intended for people who are honestly seeking His truth, His companionship, His love—they’re for His children, His adopted family. They’re not expected to be comprehensible or appreciated by outsiders, by those who don’t really wish to share a relationship with Yahweh, no matter how badly they’d like to reap the rewards of religious conformity. When God says, “Do this” or “Don’t do this,” it is of no lasting benefit to the hearer to do what He says without reference (or deference) to Who He is. That’s why He repeated the phrase “I am Yahweh” over seventy times in the Pentateuch—always to punctuate His authority by stressing His identity. If He’s our Father, we need to listen to Him.

The symbols are a Code of sorts. Once established, they always signify the same thing, within the Torah and throughout the entire Bible. The meaning of the

symbol is often revealed, or at least hinted at, in its very first usage in scripture. Usually, the intrinsic nature of the code element is a clue to understanding the mind of God. As in the parables of Christ, some common component of the human experience is recruited to teach a lesson of greater significance than the original image might suggest. These mundane attributes are pressed into service in Scripture to demonstrate extraordinary spiritual principles. Taken together, these common metaphors—scores of them—form a Code that reveals the very nature of God to those who are looking for Him. For example, lambs are vulnerable, harmless, and innocent; gold is immutable, thus a metal whose value is enhanced by removing its impurities through a violent, fiery process; yeast permeates and changes the character of bread dough, and so forth. Note, however, that every code has a key, something that controls or secures the objective, the system that grants access and understanding to what would be otherwise random and unintelligible. In The Torah Code, that key is Yahshua the Messiah: without reference to His life and mission, the Code is gibberish. (So although lambs are fuzzy, and gold is heavy and yellow, these facts are not germane to God's cryptic purpose.)

I'm not suggesting that there are hidden messages in this Code (an idea the Kabbalists dote on) that supersede or challenge the plain reading of the text. I'm not advocating or promoting gematria (i.e., biblical numerology), equidistant letter sequences, or any other veiled and mysterious technique for ferreting out of scripture concepts that are neither introduced nor supported by the plain text. (I'm not necessarily declaring gematria or ELS to be fraudulent, either, but they're not what I'm talking about.) I am, rather, trying to point out something I've noticed time after time in my study of the Torah: things mentioned over and over again seem to *mean* something: they invariably stand in for, and point toward, a larger and more significant concept. I've found that if you pay attention to the Code, *all* of scripture forms a cohesive, comprehensible whole, one that points unequivocally to Yahshua as God's chosen means for reconciling us to Himself. Nothing in the Code contradicts the plain meaning of the Word, but its elements work on an entirely different level—they cast light of a different wave length, so to speak. The Torah Code can (and for me, does) illuminate and consolidate the parts of scripture that seem, to some people, to be disjointed or incongruous.

The Torah is part of both the Jewish Tanach and the Christian Bible, and yet these two groups invariably have radically different views of what the Law of Moses means and requires. Orthodox Jews (who don't avail themselves of the Key) neither comprehend it nor find the Torah remotely possible to observe in any meaningful sense, even with the strictest discipline. So they retreat into a man-made maze of substitute or derivative rules (that for any number of reasons can't be kept flawlessly either). Christians, on the other hand, tend to see the Torah as irrelevant, obsolete, and of no further use, choosing to ignore Yahshua's

clear statement to the effect that He hadn't come to abolish the Law of Moses. They've got the Key, but overlook the keyhole. The Code reveals where both traditional Christian and Judaic doctrines have gone astray, for it ties all of the rites, rituals, customs, sacrifices, architecture, props, and raw materials referred to in the Torah directly to the person and work of Yahshua of Nazareth. Simply stated, there are no contradictions between the Torah and the Gospels, between the Tanach and the epistles of Paul—there are only failures on our part to discern how Yahweh has explained the latter through the symbols of the former.

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You may be asking, “Okay, I can see where there might be a Code, a system of symbols, employed in the Word of God that go largely unnoticed by both Christians and Jews. But what makes *this guy* think he's qualified to sort them out?” It's a fair question. The answer may explain why I began to see the pattern in the first place, when so many other students of scripture—good and faithful men and women—have missed so much of it. You see, I wasn't always a writer. (You may protest that I'm *still* not, but that's another subject.) I was trained as an artist. For thirty years, I made my living as a graphic designer. I have designed scores of logos, trademarks, signatures, symbols, and icons to be used in corporate or commercial environments, and I have implemented hundreds more in my work. I know how they're supposed to work, what they're expected to achieve, what their limitations are, and what factors contribute to their success or failure.

I've always seen graphic design as a tool for visual communication, as important and significant in its own way as printed text or the spoken word. Its function is far more significant than merely “making something pretty” or “making a style statement.” I spent much of my professional career as a packaging designer, which meant that my primary “canvas” was usually limited to the front panel of a container displayed for sale on a store shelf. Within a few square inches of printed space, I had to “do battle” in the marketplace and in the mind. In that limited area, I had to (1) Attract the consumer's eye, (2) identify what the product was, (3) communicate its features and benefits, (4) intimate that its manufacturer could be trusted, (5) promote confidence (or at least desire) in the mind of the consumer, (6) compete with other products in the same class, and (7) negotiate a maze of Federal regulations designed to protect the consumer from fraud, warn him of any possibility of danger, and level the playing field.

Needless to say, these goals could work against each other. I could make a package scream “Look at me!” from forty feet away, but it would be so butt-ugly at arm's length it would repulse any intelligent shopper. I could explain every

nuance of the product's appeal and functionality on the front panel, only to lose the impact of its benefits in a sea of fine print. I could tell the honest truth about the product while running afoul of the FTC's packaging guidelines. I could sacrifice the message of the product to the prestige of the brand, or vice versa. I could make the thing so pretty it failed to communicate anything of substance. And there was no such thing as working in a vacuum. As if it weren't complicated enough already, I had to consider extraneous factors, like: could I count on advertising to support and extend the package's effectiveness? What was the competition doing? Was the manufacturer or brand well known, or obscure? Was the product a pioneer, or a Johnny-come-lately? How big a learning curve would the customer encounter in order to appreciate the product? What was the budget? Did the product stand alone, or was it part of a series? What needed to be shouted, and what needed to be whispered? One of the hardest things I had to do was make my clients understand that only *one thing* could be "first read," the most prominent feature, and it had to be chosen with care.

Upon reflection, it occurred to me that Yahweh faced a lot of the same kinds of hurdles in presenting His "product" to His target audience—the human race. That "product," in a manner of speaking, is *Himself*. The marketing problem, specifically, is how to persuade us to "buy" the concept of redemption, of salvation, of reconciliation with Him. (As I've noted, He could have *forced* us to buy into the idea, but not without violating His own standards and character. Remember: love requires choice.) So God, like any manufacturer, finds Himself faced with communication challenges to overcome between Himself and His intended audience. In His case, His product is unique (which is essentially the meaning of holiness—being set apart from the crowd)—there is nothing else like it in existence. This alone makes the learning curve steep indeed. That's not to say there aren't competing products out there. There are a myriad of cheap knock-offs, look-alikes, and counterfeits. None of them actually work, you understand, but many of them are brilliantly packaged, promising something, with glowing words and images, that *can* look to unsuspecting "shoppers" like viable alternatives to God's plan—if only because we've been subjected to a relentless but misleading advertising campaign telling us so. In reality, Yahweh has no rivals worthy of the name, but that doesn't stop the adversary from hawking his cheesy wares, distracting and defrauding us if he can. *Caveat emptor*.

Why is Satan able to grab so much "market share?" Because people naturally *want* the product. There is within us—by Yahweh's design—something called a *neshamah* (first encountered in Genesis 2:7)—roughly that which Pascal described as a "God-shaped vacuum" within our souls. It's why we intuitively know right from wrong, and it's why we invent religions in an attempt to deal with the aching chasm within us. Nothing but Yahweh Himself can fill the *neshamah* perfectly, breathing into us, as He did with Adam, the "breath of life."



Satan however, who envies Yahweh with every fiber of his being, keeps pushing his phony bootleg knock offs—in such a dizzying variety we humans sometimes get the idea that Yahweh’s grace is merely one of scores of worthy competitors. But like a hundred dollar bill, there are only two kinds: the real thing and something else.

So Yahweh, whose infinite love precludes Him from forcing the issue, has gone to the trouble of “marketing” His plan of redemption to us. As with any major product launch we might do, He relied not on a single means of communication, but used many. He began with individual, One-on-one communication with the likes of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses—word-of-mouth advertising, so to speak. Then He made mass media personal appearances, like the exodus miracles or the sound and fury of the Sinai experience, the point of which were to verify the credibility of the “Brand” in the eyes of the target audience. He appeared in dreams and visions to a long succession of prophets—subliminal advertising, so to speak. And He employed a “focus group,” Israel, not to fine tune His product (which was perfect from its inception) but to function as the foundation of a “viral marketing” strategy: the world was supposed to see Israel’s relationship with Yahweh, comprehend the benefits of such a relationship, and want it for themselves.

Then He used the written word, stating (whether plainly or not) what the nature of the “product” was—a personal, familial relationship between Almighty God and mortal man. Of course, the vast chasm between the natures of God and man made the job of verbal communication tougher than we can possibly imagine. Complicating matters, human language is a moving target, imprecise and elusive. So everything essential to our understanding was stated many different ways, with many different turns of phrase, through many different messengers. Because it had to “work” in every language and culture known to man, the message was delivered not by one succinct, catchy advertising slogan, but built up line by line, precept by precept, over the course of several thousand years. Remember “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz. Oh, what a relief it is?” What was arguably the most successful advertising slogan of the twentieth century will be meaningless gibberish in a hundred years, incomprehensible or at the very least incapable of communicating anything remotely related to its original meaning. Yahweh’s message of love and redemption, on the other hand, is still crystal clear and awesomely powerful six thousand years after it was first presented—even though we who study it can’t pretend to understand it fully.

Finally, Yahweh employed symbols—a system of shorthand devices designed to focus our understanding, jog our memory, teach us basic principles, and function as keys to a puzzle—the Torah Code. As a designer, I used graphic metaphors all the time. The most significant symbol on a product or package is

invariably the one that identifies the brand. This “trademark” is called the *logo* (or “signature,” if it’s achieved solely with text). The logo’s job is to wordlessly identify the manufacturer or brand, and hopefully bring to mind the consumer’s entire positive experience with that company. As I said, it’s shorthand. The bigger the brand or corporate entity, the less pictorially specific the logo has to be to be effective. When we see these marks, we are expected to, through thousands of repetitions, mentally connect the products with the company that made them. This necessitates that the logo be used consistently, for change is unsettling and potentially confusing. Updating a corporate logo must be done with glacial deliberation—so slowly you can’t really see it move—if a company doesn’t wish to undermine public confidence in their soundness. (Of course, if the company has been poorly run, offers a crappy product, and has thus earned its reputation as a loser, a total revamp of the image is usually considered job one. It’s a pity such companies don’t put their efforts into real self-improvement instead of mere image enhancement.)

Let’s consider a few logos from the automotive world. (It’s a guy thing, I guess.) Through sheer weight of ubiquity, most car brands are instantly recognizable via their logos, at least to anyone who spends a fair amount of time on the road. They’re *always* displayed prominently on the back end of the car (which helps, because so many of them—like the religions of man—have a lot in common these days). The older brands’ logos may not have anything going for them except history, but that’s enough to get the job done: Chevrolet, Buick, Cadillac, Mercedes Benz, and many others *can’t* change their logos very much because they’re indelibly etched in the public’s mind. Whatever that squashed plus sign Chevrolet uses once signified (if anything) is lost to posterity; now it just says, “Chevy!” Ford did something brilliant a few decades back. After wallowing for a while in graphic-update limbo, they decided their history was, after all, one of their most appealing features, so they went back to the old turn-of-the-century *Ford* script they’d been trying so hard to make everyone forget. They framed it in a blue oval and began displaying it prominently again, as if to say, “We’ve been around *forever*, so you can trust us to build good cars.”

The best logos, to my mind, blend both meaningful pictorial and verbal elements. Some of the newer automotive brands work beautifully. The center of Mazda’s M forms a bird in flight—a euphemism for freedom. Acura’s A is a stylized compass, a classic drafting instrument that’s probably never actually been used to design an Acura, but which nevertheless conjures up echoes of old-school craftsmanship and precision. I love Infiniti’s “infinitely receding highway” symbol. (Nissan’s latest logo is an inadvertent disaster: it bears a strong resemblance to the standardized American road sign for “Do Not Enter.” *Oops.*) My own design firm logo, which I used for twenty years, was a light bulb, the universal symbol for the bright idea, in which the name of the company, Power

Graphics, was spelled out as the bulb's filament. (Get it? Ken *Power*... electricity... illumination... the bright idea?) Sadly, the advent of the compact fluorescent light bulb has made my old logo an anachronism. Good thing I'm retired from all that.

Corporate logos aren't the only graphic symbols in our everyday lives. You see a red octagon on a pole, and even if you can't read the word on it, you know you're supposed to stop. Moreover, there's an implied warning: if you *don't* stop, something bad could happen to you. You see a small icon light up on the dashboard of your car, and you know without reading a word that something requires your attention: fasten your seatbelt; stop for gas soon; the passenger door is ajar. Symbols tell us where the subway is, which restroom to enter, where you can and cannot park your car, how much battery life you have left—all with an absolute minimum of verbal interaction. Symbols don't have to be visual, either. They can be audible, like the Intel "chime" in computer commercials, the fanfare that accompanies a movie studio credit, a train's whistle, or a bugle call. Every culture on earth has a characteristic hand gesture that symbolically indicates one's displeasure or scorn for another person.

Symbols, then, are designed to communicate relatively complex messages through comparatively simple non-verbal means. They therefore tend to be intrinsically universal in nature, for they don't depend on words (though words themselves are a type of symbol—a sound or written mark representing a concept or idea). Knowing the limitations of language and the pitfalls of translating His word from one to another, Yahweh found symbols to be the perfect complement to the written Word. What one mode of communication lacks, the other has in abundance. Words can shift in meaning through time and cultural upheaval; symbols are (or at least *can* be) quite stable. Words often can't be translated perfectly; symbols don't depend on language at all, but rather on universal human experience. Symbols, however, can be esoteric and obscure, subject to either misinterpretation or (more often) our failure to recognize them at all as anything more significant than what they appear to be on the surface: *Oh, that's just an octagonal piece of red metal mounted on a pole.* Words, on the other hand, require direct comprehension: they *mean* something, whether we concur or not: *The sign says to stop. Now I must decide whether or not to obey its instruction.* Of course, if you spoke only Finnish, you might not know that the sign actually meant *pysähdys*, but the red octagon street sign is pretty much universally recognized to mean only one thing: alto, zastavení, postój, stöðva, zatrzymać się, fermata, halten... stop!

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If you drive down the street in any town in America, you'll eventually encounter a symbol. It looks like a lower case sans serif "t." It's called a "cross," and people the world over recognize that this symbol stands for Christianity: there's either a church nearby, or someone is making a statement about the Christian religion. Cemeteries are full of crosses. People wear them as jewelry, like a charm or amulet. They're usually plain, but Roman Catholics often depict this symbol with a man being tortured—*crucified*—upon it, for that was the function of the prototypical Roman cross, the very implement of execution upon which Yahshua died. It would appear to many, then, that the cross is Yahweh's trademark, His logo, His symbol of corporate identity.

But it's not. The Greek word invariably translated "cross" in our Bibles is *stauros*, which actually denotes an upright stake or pole, not a "T"-shaped device. The word is derived from the verb *histemi*, meaning: to cause or make something to stand; to place, put, or set into position; to make firm; to cause someone to keep his place, to keep intact (referring to a family or kingdom, etc.); to escape in safety; or to uphold or sustain the authority or force of something. So the *stauros* (as well as the verb from which it's derived) holds immense symbolic significance for the Christian believer. But is it the same thing as a cross? Not really. The cross as a religious symbol predates the death of Yahshua by several millennia. It was a central feature of Babylonian sun-god worship (built around Tammuz—the initial of whose name the "T" commemorates), dating back to only a few generations after Noah.

I'll get into the gory details of what the ancient cross symbol *really* meant (and how Yahweh feels about it) in a later chapter. For now, I merely want to make a point: Satan, like Yahweh, knows how to use symbols to promote his agenda. Just because we dumb humans ascribe universal religious significance to a symbol, it does not necessarily follow that this symbol is part of Yahweh's chosen vocabulary. We need to keep this fact firmly in mind: there is nothing Yahweh can create that our adversary cannot try to corrupt, counterfeit, confuse, or claim for himself. We need to be constantly on guard, for Satan (as Paul reminded us) walks around like a roaring lion looking for something to devour: you and me. I would add that before the lion roars, he lies in wait, crouching stealthily in the tall grass where none of us suspects danger. When it comes to the wiles of the devil, a little paranoia on our part can be a very healthy thing. In fact, if the whole world buys into something, that's a pretty good indication that there's something wrong with it. The broad highway and the wide portal leads to destruction—few choose to travel the difficult road or seek the narrow gate that leads to life. We've been warned.

If the cross—the ubiquitous and universally understood “logo” for the Christian religion—is a symbol that was neither instituted by Yahweh nor one He promotes, then perhaps the most basic question before us is, “Is there such a thing?” Do our scriptures single out one thing, above all others, that represents Yahweh before mankind in terms we can comprehend, in a form to which we can relate? Is there one symbol God introduced with which He intended to communicate His love and His plan to us? After all, He told us through the prophet Isaiah, “**My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,**’ says Yahweh. **‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’**” (Isaiah 55:8-9) What symbol would the Almighty Creator of the universe ultimately choose to represent Himself to the collective object of His undying love, the human race? What image would serve as His logo, His signature, His trademark?

John addresses this most fundamental of issues. He muses, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**” The *Word*? The Greek word translated “Word,” fittingly enough, is *logos*: a statement or declaration uttered by a living voice, embodying and communicating a thought or idea. John informs us that this Word, this *Logos*, existed in the beginning, which, if you think about it, makes It (or Him) equal to or identical with Yahweh Himself. But Yahweh described Himself as “One”—that’s the Hebrew word *echad*: “united, alike, alone, one, only, or together.” Yahweh alone is self-existent, and yet the *Logos* was both *with* God and *was* God. It sounds confusing, so John repeats himself: “**He** [note that John is now describing the Word with a personal pronoun] **was in the beginning with God.**” (John 1:1-2) No, God wasn’t “beside Himself.” Nor had God spawned another of the same kind—a second god, like Zeus giving rise to Athena in Greek mythology. We’re being told the nature of the living Symbol—the *Logos*—that Yahweh introduced into the earth in order to communicate Himself to mankind.

The key to the identity of this Symbol is recorded a few verses later: “**And the Word 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) A careful reading of this sentence reveals that Yahweh’s *Logos* or Symbol was *at least* three different things—all of which represented Almighty God and communicated Him to mortal men. (As we shall discover shortly, there are actually *six* such manifestations of the One God, Yahweh—all of Whom are incorporated in this title, *Logos*.) The first and most obvious is Yahshua of Nazareth: “**the Word [who] became flesh and dwelt among us.**” Yahshua was identified as Immanuel (“God with us”) from the womb. But the concept of *becoming* flesh (along with John’s earlier statement that the Word was “in the beginning with God”) makes it clear that the *Logos* existed *before* Yahshua was born into the human race in Bethlehem of Judea. So

the Symbol includes any and all pre-Yahshua manifestations of Yahweh among men.

But a third permutation of the *Logos* is also implied here. John speaks of “His glory.” Not to be picky, but Yahshua in His humanity had no intrinsic glory. As Isaiah had prophesied, **“He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”** (Isaiah 53:2-3) So to what “glory” is John referring? First, there was Yahshua’s transfiguration (Matthew 17:2), to which John was a witness. But infinitely more significant in the long run was John’s eyewitness testimony of the risen, *glorified* Messiah (see Luke 24:26). This too is the *Logos*, the Symbol Yahweh employed to represent Himself to mankind—to communicate His love to us.

Just because the *Logos* is a Symbol, don’t think of it as somehow less significant or less real than what it represents. As John reminds us, **“The Word WAS God.”** The fact is, we will *never* experience direct and unfiltered contact with Yahweh as long as we inhabit these frail, mortal bodies, for the encounter would kill us. All we’ll *ever* see of Him in this life are these Symbols He’s provided. As I said before, symbols are “designed to communicate relatively complex messages through comparatively simple non-verbal means.” There is nothing more “complex” than Yahweh—certainly no subject where there is a greater dichotomy between reality and our perception of it. And there is no area of human endeavor where it matters more. In short, we cannot appreciate God, much less His unfathomable love for us, unless He alters—diminishes—the scale or intensity of His presence. We can comprehend a glass of water, but we can’t really get our heads around the entire ocean, can we? We might pretend to be able to understand our sun, but there’s no way the human mind can really grasp the enormity of our galaxy. And God? We don’t even have enough *dimensions* to comprehend Him. If He didn’t employ symbols—radically condensed, compartmentalized sketches of different facets of His nature and character—we’d have no way of knowing Who He is or What He’s doing. The “God-shaped vacuum” within us would remain forever empty and devoid of life.

If Yahweh is incomprehensible to mortal man except through the measures He Himself has taken to inform us of His presence and purpose, we may logically ask, “Why does He bother?” I am continually impressed by both the immensity of the universe and the relative insignificance of our own world. And the dichotomy between Yahweh and mankind is infinitely greater. The universe is trivial compared to its Creator, just as we are but inconsequential specks sprinkled about here and there on the surface of this planet. And yet we *do* know of God’s existence and are aware of His love and provision—and we have been ever since

He first breathed spiritual life into our race. So again, we must ask ourselves, “Why would God bother Himself with mankind? What could He possibly hope to get out of such a ridiculously mismatched relationship?”

The question begs us to consider the very nature of humanity. If man, as scientists and philosophers have been insisting for the past century or two, is merely an intelligent animal, one of hundreds who have spontaneously evolved on this planet and one of millions of similar creatures who must surely inhabit other planets in galaxies across the universe, then God—if He exists at all—has no particular reason to interact with us. The scilosophers conclude, based upon their questionable assumptions, that all the evidence man sees of God’s existence and care is merely delusion, wishful thinking—a pathetic attempt to impose order upon chaos or to find reason in an unreasonable and undirected existence. But it’s an untenable position: if Darwin’s disciples are right, there’s no reason Christians and pagans alike shouldn’t mug them and steal their wallets. They don’t seem to realize that the very prospect of an interested God (however unlikely that may seem to them) is the only thing keeping civilization civil. If there is no God, then anything not calculated to enhance one’s short range prospects for self-gratification is pointless. Taken to its logical end, evolutionary philosophy inexorably leads either to cruel authoritarian control in the hands of a few strong individuals, or total anarchy—the complete breakdown of society.

But there’s another theory concerning the nature of man—one that explains why we do what we do in the real world, why we sense the presence and personal interest of God in our lives, why we so often find ourselves treating each other with kindness and respect even when there’s no temporal advantage to be gained by doing so. This theory (held by me and at least twelve other people on this planet) states that as far as God is concerned, man is the *whole point* of creation.

Ask yourself: why did God create *anything* in the physical realm? Even if He *is* an eternally existing spiritual entity powerful enough to create all the matter, energy, space, and time in the universe with a snap of His celestial fingers, so to speak, what possible reason could He have had for doing so? Does He need the physical universe? No—as far as He’s told us, He existed quite nicely *forever* without it, and He intends to undo it someday. So He created it because it’s a necessary requirement for something He *wanted*—something He didn’t have within Himself. What’s lacking in the God who has (and is) everything—the God who is *echad*: One, alone, unity? There’s only one thing: companionship.

The spirit messengers He had created, commonly known as angels, lacked the one important component necessary for true companionship: free will. Angels were designed to do whatever Yahweh told them to do, so He gave them immense power, awesome intellect, and immortality: once created, they cannot die. But although God imbued angels with the ability to operate independently (they aren’t

robots), they are not granted freedom of choice. It's like the classic conundrum of grammar school English: angels *can* rebel against Yahweh (i.e., they have the capability), but they *may* not (they don't have permission). An angel who has rebelled against Yahweh (and apparently, a third of them have) can look forward to an eternity of punishment for his crimes, for he hasn't been given permission to ignore or disobey God.

So if Yahweh wanted companionship, if He desired the friendship of someone who could actually love Him (as opposed to merely obeying Him, being loyal, or worshipping Him), He would have to do something dangerous, something counterintuitive: He would have to create a being with free will, a species who not only had the ability to share fellowship with his Creator, but also had permission to choose *not to* if he wanted. Yahweh wisely decided that this new being should have an entirely different type of life than the angels did, for the prospect of living forever in a state of rebellion was a curse He didn't want anybody to have to endure. So this new creature—man—would have a mortal body—one that would be born, grow, mature, and die, and during his limited lifetime would have ample time to decide what kind of relationship he wanted to have (if any) with his Creator.

To make the whole mortality thing easier for the man to comprehend (and of course, I'm including his female counterpart in that), Yahweh made all sorts of animals, most of whom had shorter natural lifespans than humans did. But Yahweh also gave the man a *neshamah*, something the animals didn't have, that would function as his conscience, give him the sense of God's presence, and ultimately allow Yahweh's very Spirit (the *Ruach*) to dwell within his soul (the *nephesh*—that component of his being that made him, like any animal, biologically “alive”). The plan was that since God's Spirit would never die, man's soul, if indwelt with the Spirit of Yahweh, would never have to die either. But if he chose not to share a loving relationship with God—if Yahweh's eternal Spirit was never invited to live within his soul—then his soul, like any animal's, would perish at the end of his body's mortal life. It would simply cease to be. No harm, no foul. I should point out, however, that there is a downside to having a *neshamah* in a universe populated with renegade eternal spirits—fallen angels, demons: if asked (but *only* if asked), they too can inhabit a person's *neshamah*. If Satan's spirit has been invited to take up residence in a human soul, that soul will never die. But spending eternity with Satan instead of Yahweh isn't what you'd call living—it's a living *death*, commonly known as hell.

But I digress. In order to make the man as a mortal being (not pure spirit), God had to start from scratch, building the celestial infrastructure that would in time yield the elements from which He could form us and the world we live in. This invites us to make another comparison between Yahweh's scale and ours. If



my theory is right, then Yahweh was willing to invest a humongous amount of resources to obtain what seems to us like an infinitesimal return. He expended something in the neighborhood of fourteen billion years building the infrastructure that would be needed by His new companions, even though their earthly walk with Him wouldn't usually last more than seven decades or so. And He was willing to squander most of the universe—100 trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion tons of matter, according to one source (another pegs it at  $3 \times 10^{42}$  kilograms)—on them, even though their bodies would only weigh a couple of hundred pounds apiece (if that). There have been perhaps ten or twelve billion humans on planet earth since time began. Even if every single one of us chose to appreciate and accept Yahweh's grace, that's a degree of extravagance on His part for which there is no counterpart in human experience—not even remotely. But as far as I can tell, Yahweh was willing to sacrifice all of this time and effort for just *two* people—you and me.

So once again, I ask: “Why did God bother with us?” We might assume that someone willing to spend so much to get so little was either crazy or stupid, but I can assure you, Yahweh is neither. And it can't be because He wanted someone to order around or bow down to Him in worship. He already had that with the myriad spirit messengers He'd created—beings who are far more magnificent than anything in our sphere of personal awareness. There can be only one logical answer, an answer that can't be quantified, classified, or even comprehended by the scilosophers running our world: Love. Yahweh wanted to express His own intrinsic nature: He wanted to love and be loved in return.

Yahweh, then was willing to expend energy and resources we can't even imagine in the pursuit of our friendship. But that's the problem: we *can't* imagine the lengths He's gone to on our behalf. It's like a kind king (the ruler of an imaginary kingdom called Parabolis), who wanted to give every poor homeless vagabond in the kingdom a trillion shekels, deposited for them in a big bank somewhere in the capital city. We homeless vagabonds, however, can't even *comprehend* a trillion shekels. Most of us have never seen a bank. And we have no idea where the capital city is. So the king has sent us a representative, an ambassador, a living symbol of his good will—a *Logos*, if you will. This representative of the king (who looks, talks, and dresses pretty much like we do) comes out to where we homeless vagabonds live, and he presents a scaled-down version of the king's kind gesture. One by one, he introduces himself and offers to take us out to Macdonald's and buy us lunch. *That* we can understand.

The point I want to make is that the hypothetical trillion shekel gift is no less real than the Big Mac and the chocolate shake, even though we can comprehend one thing but not the other. Like the king in the parable, Yahweh has provided something we can see and understand—the life of Yahshua the Messiah—in order

that we might somehow come to comprehend something far greater: the love of an infinite Creator. We can, in our finite experience, sort of come to grips with the Messiah's sacrifice—we can understand how a benevolent God might love us enough to pay the penalty for the sins *we know* we've committed (since our *neshamah* bears uncomfortable but undeniable witness to the fallen state of our *nephesh*). But in truth, as awesome as Yahshua's atoning sacrifice is, it's "only" a burger and fries to hungry, homeless vagabonds like you and me. It is but a symbol, a pale image, of the *real* legacy God has in store for us, the "trillion shekel bank account" that's been set up for us in the *real* capital city of the King—Heaven. As stunning as the sacrifice of Christ is, it is *only* (I blush to use that word) a faint and ephemeral hint of the depth of Yahweh's actual love for us. That love is something we cannot begin to comprehend. Not yet, anyway.

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In the same way, our own mortal lives, as real as they seem to us, are only symbols for the *true* life Yahweh has made available to us, if only we'll accept the gift. Yahweh, in reality, is as close and accessible to us as His Representative, His living Symbol, His Anointed One: Yahshua—the *Logos*. If we don't recognize Yahshua for who He is, we won't know Yahweh, either, for the *Logos* is not only *with* God, He *is* God.

It is critically important to Yahweh that we understand this. That is why He provided in His Word an extensive matrix of symbols pointing toward the Symbol that points toward Himself. This matrix—the Torah Code—is like a series of road signs that read, "Road Sign Ahead." If we want to know where we are in God's plan, we need to pay attention to the signs, for the signs all point toward Christ.

And Christ points all of us toward Yahweh.

## The Nature of God

Anybody who's been raised in a traditional Christian church (a term I use in the broadest sense) has been confronted with the idea that God is a Trinity—a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit. Most of us swallow the doctrine whole, never giving it a second thought, happy to remain blissfully unaware of the raging controversy that's been fought over the issue between competing schools of thought over the past seventeen hundred years. While some of us realize that the word "Trinity" (or anything like it) does not appear in Scripture, we're content (if we think about it at all) to let the theologians and preachers have the last word on the subject. But considering how often religious professionals have led us down the primrose path—not to mention how often they disagree with each other—I think maybe we should not surrender our intellectual prerogatives quite so lightly.

Neither the prophets nor apostles spoke of a Trinity—One triune God, defined as having three persons but one substance, essence, or being. Our first problem is that this definition makes no sense, at least not in any way we can relate to in the real world. It's theological mumbo jumbo, like saying black and white are really the same color—hypergray. To make matters worse (or at least more interesting) the idea of a trinity of gods predates Christianity by thousands of years. The prototypical instance is apparently the Babylonian triad of Nimrod, Semiramis, and Tammuz. The imagery is always the same: an authoritarian creator-father figure; his female counterpart, the Madonna or "Queen of Heaven" fertility goddess; and the Son, usually marketed as a Sun god. These three show up in various guises throughout the history of man. They're Horus, Isis, and Osiris in ancient Egypt; the Greek pantheon had Zeus, Athena, and Apollo; Rome venerated them as Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury; then Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva were worshiped among the Hindus. Not to be outdone, today's atheistic secular humanists worship Power, Sex, and Money. The fact that all of these trinities (even the last one) predate the first-century advent of Yahshua the Messiah ought to be a clue that something might be amiss with either the doctrine of a trinity or the religion that promotes it—or both.

The most definitive statement concerning the numerical component of God's nature is found in the Torah: "**Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One.**" (Deuteronomy 6:4) The Hebrew word for "one" is *'echad*, which according to the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* means: "1. one, a, an, i.e., a cardinal number in contrast to more than one; 2. first, i.e., an ordinal number, as the first in a series involving time, space, or set; 3. one time, once, i.e.,

a single occurrence, possibly in some contexts to the exclusion of all other occurrences; 4. one, i.e., that which is united as one in contrast to separate parts; 5. each, every, i.e., one as a part of a totality; 6. certain one, i.e., a reference to a person which is not explicit, but only one reference; 7. only, i.e., one of a unique class or kind, and so distinctive; 8. unit: אֶחָד לְאֶחָד (*'echad le- 'echad*) one by one, i.e., a sequence of single units; 9. unit: אֶחָד שְׂכָמָא (*sh<sup>e</sup>kem 'echad*) in unity, formally, one shoulder, i.e., pertaining to serving in a unified or unanimous manner.” It’s clear then that even if God is properly described as a “Trinity,” He is not three Gods, or even “God in three persons.” While all of these *DBLSD* definitions are true of Yahweh to some degree, the keys to understanding His “numerical” nature are definitions #4 and #5. Why this is so will become apparent as we continue to study the matter.

On the other hand, the three “persons” of the Christian Trinity are juxtaposed often enough in Scripture to make the doctrine seem plausible, if not proven. Maybe all these bogus trinities are just another case of satanic counterfeiting—the devil trying to confuse us by putting forty “packages” on the shelves that look to the unwary shopper just like the real thing. There’s only one way to find out for sure: let’s look at the Scriptures and engage our brains.

After His resurrection, Yahshua issued the “great commission,” recorded at the end of the book of Matthew like this: **“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”** (Matthew 28:18-20) All three of the Trinity’s supposed “persons” are listed here, but their “name” (Greek: *onoma*) is singular, not plural—there’s only *one* name in view here, and that name is Yahweh. Note also the extraneous instances of “of.” This literally reads: “...immersing them in the name: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Also, the definite article “the” (Greek *ho*) implies an exegetical or explanatory function: it would not be improper to translate this, “...the Father, that is to say, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” So what looked at first glance like an airtight proof text for “Trinity” is actually shaping up to be an argument for Unity.

Let’s try another one. **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”** (II Corinthians 13:14) See? See? There are three divine persons listed. That’s a Trinity, right? Well, yes and no. What’s really being differentiated here is function. First, *grace*—unmerited favor, kindness, good will, a gift—is bestowed upon us by Yahshua the Messiah. (Note, by the way, that of the three, only Yahshua is called “the Lord,” the reason for which was clearly stated in our previous scripture, when He declared, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”** Being “the Lord”—master,

ruler, and owner—is the *function* of the Messiah, even though that authority is derivative: it’s “given” to Him by Yahweh, the One to Whom it naturally belongs. The *exercise* of authority among men is the essential function of neither Father Yahweh nor His Spirit nor any manifestation of God in our experience other than Yahshua, the risen Messiah. We really need to learn to be more careful in our application of the term.)

Second, *love* is provided by God, i.e., Yahweh, “the Father.” Yahweh’s love is the source of everything—our existence, our free will, the gracious provision for our reconciliation with Himself, and even Yahshua’s authority. Love is the defining characteristic of the Living God. As John reminds us, **“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”** (I John 4:8) At first, it seemed strange to me that Paul listed God’s love second in the list, but upon reflection, it makes perfect sense: we cannot experience Yahweh’s love if we have not first embraced the grace afforded by Yahshua’s life and sacrifice.

Third and finally, *communion*—fellowship, intimacy, and community (both with God and among our brothers and sisters)—is what the indwelling set-apart Spirit of Yahweh brings to the party. Again, the order is significant, for communion cannot be maintained among those who are not unified by God’s love, which in turn is delivered to us through grace. Light can have no communion with darkness, nor can one be in intimate fellowship with both the world’s values and Yahweh’s at the same time.

Paul has thus concluded his second letter to the believers at Corinth by simply asking Yahweh to be Himself, the *form* of His revelation being ultimately determined by the *function* of the character trait He wished to bestow upon us, whether grace, love, or communion. (I guess Louis Sullivan’s architectural credo, “Form follows function,” has theological ramifications.) Further, I believe Paul’s conclusion in a previous letter still applies: **“The greatest of these is love.”** (I Corinthians 13:13)

The concept of Unity (as opposed to Trinity) appeals to this difference in function to define the nature of God not as three distinct divine persons, but rather as One Entity, Yahweh, who manifests Himself to the object of His love, mankind, in whatever way the situation demands. And as we will soon learn, there are some things Yahweh wished to achieve in our world for which neither the “Son of Man,” Yahshua, nor His indwelling Spirit were appropriate. For these functions Yahweh manifested Himself in other forms. Unless I’ve missed something, there are *six* of these *Logos* manifestations of Yahweh spoken of in Scripture, not just two—another instance of the Bible’s ubiquitous pattern of sevens, always expressed as six plus one. This epiphany renders the doctrine of the Trinity not so much wrong as it is *insufficient*—inadequate for the task of

accurately describing the revealed nature of God in our corporate human experience. God is not a trinity. He is, to coin a word, a SeptiUnity.

I hasten to add that though I'm using the term Unity, I'm not advocating the heresy of Unitarianism (which is sometimes referred to as "Unity"), which states that God is One, but Jesus (they would never call Him by His *real* name, you understand) was merely a man, a great moral teacher. That's one of the dumbest ideas I've ever heard, for Isaiah had prophesied concerning Him, **"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** (Isaiah 9:6) Yahshua Himself had confirmed this, saying, **"I and My Father are One...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me...I am in the Father and the Father in Me."** (John 10:30;14:6, 11) If He's *not* God incarnate, then these statements would prove that He's not a "great moral teacher" either, but is rather a cruel, lying sadist out to deceive anyone who's trusting Him for their salvation. No, what I'm saying is the same thing that Moses declared: **"Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One."**

Let's review another scene in which it is said all three divine "persons" are present—at Yahshua's baptism by John. **"When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"** (Matthew 3:16-17) Again, function, not identity, is what's being distinguished. Yahshua was preparing for ministry—the ministry of providing God's grace to mankind. The Spirit is seen (in the form of a dove) descending from "the heavens" as if from God. So as before, the Spirit's role or function is communion—facilitating an intimate relationship between a loving God and a lost and needy human race.

Yahweh here is adhering to a principle He had laid down in the Torah, that **"By the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established."** (Deuteronomy 19:15) John had already testified, **"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I said, After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me. I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water...."** God required at least two witnesses (preferably three) that Yahshua was His Anointed One. John the Baptist announced it publicly. That's one.

The Spirit's manifestation as a dove alighting upon Yahshua was the next witness. The dove as a symbol has a rich symbolic persona of its own, a discussion I'd like to defer to a later chapter. It's worth noting, however, that nobody seriously thinks the Holy Spirit is a bird. This, rather, was taken (by those who were willing to see it) as a symbol of a greater reality: the dove *visibly represented* the Holy Spirit of Yahweh, in whom the followers of Yahshua would

find themselves immersed. “And John bore witness, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.’” (John 1:29-34) The Spirit of God, in a rare visible symbolic manifestation, arrived to confirm the remarkable revelation that John had made. That’s two.

Finally, a Voice came from heaven. It spoke Yahweh’s message, confirming publicly what John the Baptist had been told by God in private. The voice was not Yahshua’s, nor was it the dove’s. It was a separate divine manifestation stating—confirming—that Yahshua *was* the Son of God. (Note that the voice was *not* that of Yahweh Himself in His undiminished glory either, but rather another *manifestation*, a theophany. The evidence for my contention is that the witnesses survived the encounter.) Here at the outset of the Messiah’s public ministry, Yahweh was concerned with establishing Yahshua’s credentials. You might be able to brush off the testimony of one eccentric locust-munching prophet baptizing people in the wilderness, and you could chalk up the dove thing to “bizarre animal behavior,” but the audible Voice From Heaven—especially in light of the other witnesses—should at least have given the doubters pause. God had spoken. That’s three.

We could go on, but the pattern with these scriptural examples is well enough established: God reveals Himself to man in different ways, and sometimes He invites more than one of His symbolic manifestations to share the stage at the same time. But that in itself does not establish a Trinity in the traditional Christian sense, for several reasons:

(1) Every manifestation of God seen among men is diminished, reduced, or restricted—“dialed down” in some way from what we can perceive of Yahweh’s glory. They all bear evidence of being derivatives, shadows, or as I put it previously, *symbols* of God’s infinite presence. (I’m using the term “infinite” because I can’t really comprehend the scope of Yahweh’s being. If you can conceive of a limitation in Yahweh’s character or existence that isn’t self-imposed, then feel free to select another adjective.) These *Logos* forms of God are not created beings, however: they share Yahweh’s character, nature, identity, and eternal existence, though not His magnitude. They *are* God; they’re just not *all there is* of Him. More to the point, they’re all of God that He allows us to experience, at least for the moment.

(2) Yahweh is *never* seen or heard in His undiminished glory in any of these encounters. To do so would be fatal to the very object of His love—mankind. “Voices from heaven,” whether audible speech or ominous “thunderings,” always stop far short of the kind of awesome power of which the Creator, who *spoke* the

very universe into existence, was capable. (I believe the heavenly Voice heard at Christ's baptism was the same divine manifestation of Yahweh that delivered the Torah to Moses on Mount Horeb.)

(3) The Holy Spirit is never spoken of as being a *person* distinct from Yahweh, but rather as the form of Yahweh that He has set apart from Himself for our benefit—in order to indwell, cleanse, and empower His children.

(4) As I mentioned before, God has historically revealed Himself among men in a variety of diminished forms whose description fits neither that of Yahshua the Messiah nor the Holy Spirit. There are four of these, besides the two obvious manifestations that are universally identified as being part of the “Trinity.” One God, Yahweh, manifests Himself to mankind six different ways. This six-plus-one pattern is ubiquitous in scripture—and every time it's used, it's function is to reveal Yahweh's character or His plan to us, whether in soteriological, chronological, or personal terms. Yahweh and His six chosen manifestations are the subject of this chapter, for they define the nature of deity as He has revealed Himself to man.

I hope it's clear that my objective here is not to shake your faith in God—only your confidence in traditional religious dogma. I don't want to challenge your belief in the scriptures—only to encourage you to look at them more closely, and with fresh eyes. Even honest theologians sometimes get it wrong—and theologians aren't always honest. Yahweh, on the other hand, never makes stupid mistakes. If we believe a doctrine that doesn't really hold up under the light of scriptural scrutiny, the problem isn't with God's Word, but with our own inadequate understanding. And if the scriptures themselves seem to be contradictory, it should tell us that we need to delve deeper. Errant translations can lead us astray, as can our traditions. Clerics, customs, and culture can conspire to rob us of insight. And apathy and inertia can quench our confidence and joy. Still, the truth is there, if only we'll seek it. If it's hidden at all, it's hidden in plain sight: all we have to do is cut down the weeds that have grown up around it.



## YAHWEH

### ❧ 1.2.1 ❧

#### *God as Father*

It may seem strange to say it, but Yahweh waited until man had been around (at least in the state we find ourselves today—fallen creatures in a cursed world) for over four thousand years before He sat us down and explained His most fundamental nature. Oh, we knew a lot *about* Him before this time—revealed in glimpses of glory and glimmers of insight throughout the Old Covenant scriptures. But I believe Yahweh wanted to wait until He had shown us all the cards in His hand before He revealed Who was dealing. In other words, He apparently wished to let us see every *Logos* manifestation—every Symbol revealing His nature—before He chose to elucidate the heart of the matter.

In his first epistle, John returned again and again to a handful of fundamental themes: God’s intrinsic nature as light, life, and especially love, our proper response to that nature (to live in purity, set apart from the world), and the rather surprising concept that we can *know* what our relationship with God is—information that’s guaranteed to suck the profit margin out of any manmade religion. He says, **“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”**

Wait a minute. Although he wrote this (most likely) while serving a predominantly gentile congregation in Asia Minor—in and around Ephesus—John was Jewish. He was steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, the Tanach. Thus He *knew* Yahweh’s name, for it is written seven thousand times in these Scriptures, even though rabbinical pressure had been trying for some time to suppress it. John used the generic Greek word for deity here—*Theos* (although he didn’t actually write *that* word out either; it’s rendered with a placeholder abbreviation called a “nominum sacrum” in the few pre-Constantinian manuscripts we have). We aren’t told why he indicated “*Theos*,” but I suspect it’s because John simply didn’t countenance *any* pagan “god” as a rival to Yahweh. In his mind, “God” was *obviously* the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, not some Greek or Roman myth. And if you’ll analyze New Covenant quotations of Old Covenant scriptures, the vast majority of the time, the name YHWH is transmitted as *Theos*. Anyway, if you’ll indulge me, I’d like to quote this passage using the Name that I *know* John knew as God’s self-revealed identifier—Yahweh. I’ve warned you up front about my “textual tampering,” which is more than I can say for the Scribes, Pharisees, and Masoretes.

So, to begin again, **“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of Yahweh; and everyone who loves is born of Yahweh and knows Yahweh.”** Cutting right to the heart of

the matter (just like Yahshua always did) John begins by linking Yahweh with love, observing that since love is God's primary defining characteristic, then we who know Him and are His children will naturally and inevitably display the same trait: we too will love. Note that love is characterized as something you *do* because of something you *are*; it's not something you *feel*. It's not a byproduct of hormones or cultural impetus or emotional response, but of having been born from above. The converse is also true: **"He who does not love does not know Yahweh, for Yahweh is love...."** Lack of love betrays one's ignorance of, and one's lack of relationship with, Yahweh. Note that John here (and not for the last time) *equates* God with love, as if to say Yahweh is love personified.

But Yahweh, as I noted, does not pour Himself "full strength" into human affairs, for we'd never survive the encounter (and our continued life with Him is the whole point, as far as I can tell). So John now discusses "manifestations" Yahweh has employed, through whom He has communicated His love to us. The first One mentioned is the most obvious: Yahshua. **"In this the love of Yahweh was manifested toward us, that Yahweh has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him...."** We recognize the phrase "only begotten Son" as one with which Yahshua described Himself to Nicodemus in John's Gospel, chapter 3. This introduces a recurring metaphor, that of the relationship between a father and his son, into the discussion. We'll get into precisely what these familial symbols mean later in this volume. For now, just suffice it to say that these *are* symbols: Yahshua is *not* a second-generation deity.

I've been using the words "manifest" or "manifestation" with alacrity, assuming everybody knows what I'm talking about, but now that John's used it, this might be a good time to analyze the word from the Greek. It's *phaneroo*, a verb that means to make visible, known, or conspicuous something that was previously hidden or unknown. Applied to people, the word denotes being made to appear, to be recognized, shown openly, or understood. So John is telling us that something about Yahweh, something that was previously obscure, was brought to light in the person and ministry of Yahshua. Something we didn't formerly understand was made perfectly clear, if only we'll look at it. What was that something? Yahweh's Love. What was the mechanism for revealing this Love? Yahshua's life and sacrifice. And what was the point of doing this? That we, through Yahshua's coming, might have eternal life.

John now defines the practical aspect of Yahweh's love: **"In this is love, not that we loved Yahweh, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins...."** That's a big, scary word, "propitiation." I guess we'd better look it up. Propitiation is sort of like expiation. (*Oh, thanks, that's a big help.*) The Greek noun *hilasmos* denotes the means or mechanism of forgiveness, an atoning (that is, covering) sacrifice, the remedy for defilement. Whereas "expiation" would

focus on the *means* of forgiveness, “propitiation” would stress God’s positive assessment of the remedy’s efficacy (both of which concepts are implied in the word *hilasmos*). Therefore, Yahshua’s mission was designed to be the sacrifice Yahweh would accept so that we could be forgiven, cleansed, and reunited with Him. Furthermore, Yahweh’s love, not ours, instigated this process of propitiation. He loved us, in point of fact, before we even existed.

How, then, are we to respond to this unilateral display of love on God’s part? **“Beloved, if [i.e., *because*] Yahweh so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** (I John 4:7-11) Yahshua had affirmed that the first and greatest commandment of the Torah was **“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one! You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”** (Deuteronomy 6:4) In light of His love toward us, reciprocation would seem perfectly appropriate—even obvious (which is not to say everybody actually does it). The Old Covenant scriptures agree with the New—no surprise there. But the second most significant instruction, according to Yahshua, wasn’t quite so intuitive: **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 19:18) The surprise comes when we analyze the precept: we are to love one another *because* we are loved by God. Why is that? I believe it’s because Yahweh wants us to be *like Him* insofar as our core nature is concerned. Like God, we are to be loving, not hateful; creative, not destructive; forgiving of personal affront, but not tolerant of dangerous falsehood; liberating, not domineering; fair minded, not unjust; merciful, not cruel; fruitful, not barren. But again I must ask: *why*? Why does Yahweh want us to be like Him? Why did He create us (as we’re told in Genesis 1:26) in *His* image, in *His* likeness? He created a lot of living things, from angels to amoebas. But we’re the only “species” we know of that was built specifically for the purpose of communing with God, having fellowship with Yahweh, sharing His love. Face it: we’re special. Why don’t we act like it?

John wasn’t nearly done. He still had to explain why “God sent His Son,” His *Logos*, to be the propitiation for our sins. So he reminds us, **“No one has seen Yahweh at any time.”** If we had “seen” Him, we wouldn’t have lived to tell the tale. All we’ve seen of Yahweh are diminished manifestations: we’ve felt the leading of the Spirit, we’ve experienced dreams and visions, we’ve stood in awe as God wreathed Mount Sinai in smoke and filled the Temple with His glory, and we’ve walked with the One who was sent to put the “Man” in manifestation: Yahshua of Nazareth. So although what Yahshua said to Philip (in John 14:9) was true—that he who had seen Him *had* seen the Father—the fact remains, no mortal man has actually experienced the full and undiminished glory of Yahweh.

That being said, **“If we love one another, Yahweh abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”** How does God do this? **“By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”** (I John 4:12-13) Here the Spirit of God is

identified as the specific manifestation of Yahweh who “abides in us.” Abides in *whom*? In all mankind? In every living thing? No. The Spirit abides in people who love each other, people in whom the love of God has been “perfected”—accomplished, completed, brought to fruition, or fulfilled (Greek: *telieoo*). John here has given us a litmus test whereby we can *know* we are Yahweh’s children: we are “in Him” if His love characterizes our lives. Do we love the people we encounter? Are we willing to meet their needs as we do our own, physically if we can and taking them before God in prayer if we can’t? Conversely, are we *unwilling* to stand idly by and watch them perish in ignorance and apostasy if it is in our power to awaken them?

I’m not saying you’re a hell-bound heathen if you don’t accost people in the street, waving Gospel tracts in their faces, accusing them of being heinous sinners, and demanding that they repent. We’re *not* called to force people to toe the line in their behavior, or even their doctrine. But where is your heart? Ezekiel once saw a vision where Yahweh’s criteria for life or death was determined by whether “men...sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done.” (Ezekiel 9:4) In the same way, “meeting needs” involves perceiving and embracing Yahweh’s plan, not tolerating destructive alternatives and worthless counterfeits that lead lost people away from Him. It’s not a loving act to facilitate a heroin user’s addiction, no matter how badly he “needs” another fix.

John continues, offering eyewitness testimony of how Yahweh has manifested Himself among us. **“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.”** You don’t have to have seen the Messiah with your waking eyes, however, to bear witness of the truth: **“Whoever confesses that Jesus [Yahshua] is the Son of Yahweh, Yahweh abides in him, and he in Yahweh.”** A “son” in this symbolic context is one who reflects the character and advances the agenda of his father, not merely someone who is genetically related. **“And we have known and believed the love that Yahweh has for us. Yahweh is love, and he who abides in love abides in Yahweh, and Yahweh in him....”** As love is personified in Yahweh, so “the love that Yahweh has for us” is personified as Yahshua. Therefore, if we love one another, it is evidence of Yahweh’s *Logos* living within us, empowering us and conforming us to His likeness: love.

Now John stresses the practical aspect of *knowing* we are Yahweh’s children. **“Love has been perfected [i.e., completed or accomplished] among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world....”** The picture here is that of choosing sides. “Judgment” isn’t necessarily condemnation (though it’s how we tend to think of the word—probably because we’re so acutely aware of our guilt), but rather *krisis*—separation, sundering, a judicial decision dividing right from wrong, the guilty from the innocent. It’s the dividing of the sheep from the goats, the separation of the wheat from the tares,

the setting apart of the saved from the lost. In the “day of *krisis*,” there is no middle ground, no shades-of-gray situational moral code, no compromise between light and darkness. The division is absolute: one is either Yahweh’s or he is not. This is the very definition of “holiness,” which (as I’ve said) has nothing to do with good behavior, and everything to do with being set apart to God (something that admittedly *produces* good behavior in our lives). John says we can have “boldness in the day of separation” because (and *only* because) Yahweh’s love, dwelling within us, has placed us on *His* side of the “line He has drawn in the sand.”

This boldness, this confidence we have because the love of Yahweh resides within us, enables us to live our lives in perfect peace. **“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”** (I John 4:14-18) It’s another litmus test. Are you afraid of what the world might do to you? If so, why? God plus *anyone* is a majority. Is not Yahweh able to take care of His own? *Of course* He is. And yet, bad things happen to the saved and lost alike, which ought to tell us something: magically improving our circumstances in this life isn’t how God operates. He wants us to see challenges as occasions for growth, as opportunities to exercise our reliance on Him. We’ve been bluntly warned that tribulation will be our lot in this world—we (and I’m talking especially to my fellow American believers here) shouldn’t consider it strange when trials come, or presume that God has abandoned us, just because we always had a relatively easy time of it until now. “To live is Christ and to die is gain” is not just a platitude—it’s reality; or at least, it can be.

We need to pay attention to the actual words of scripture here: it doesn’t say “Being strong casts out fear,” or “Being vigilant and well prepared...” or even “Being ignorant of current events...” We are approaching times when we believers will have very good reasons to “fear,” for as the end approaches, the world will lash out against us, seeking to place the blame for their self-imposed problems on someone else—*anybody* else. As the signs of the end increase in frequency and intensity—wars, famine, pestilence, false messiahs, natural disasters, runaway political correctness, betrayal, hatred, and lawlessness—the world will look for a scapegoat, and we’re it. As Yahshua warned us, **“You will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.”** (Matthew 24:9) *Expect* it. It’s coming.

So why isn’t terror a natural part of a believer’s life? Because perfect love—Yahweh’s Spirit dwelling within us—casts out fear. It’s not that we masochistically learn to like the pain the world dishes out; it’s merely that we know that Yahweh’s love makes any trial we might be asked to endure trivial in comparison. What, then, is our proper response to the world’s ever accelerating demise? It’s “sighing and crying over the abominations that are done,” for one thing. “Praying for the peace of Jerusalem” is another. “Feeding Yahshua’s

sheep” is another. “Looking forward to His glorious appearing” is another. “Studying to show ourselves to be approved workmen” is another. Need I go on? The things we are to be doing in these last days are the *same things* we were supposed to be doing during the whole age of Ekklesia: we are to “love one another,” “hold fast to what we have,” “be watchful,” and “occupy ’til He comes.” Remember, **“He who endures to the end will be saved.”** (Matthew 24:13) That’s cause for celebration, not fear.

Something I previously “read between the lines” is now stated outright: **“We love Him because He first loved us.”** (I John 4:19) The opinion of cultural anthropologists notwithstanding, we did not invent God: He invented us. We did not set out to find Him: He sought us. We cannot purchase His favor with alms, penance, or good works: rather, He purchased *our* freedom with the most precious substance known to man—the blood of His Messiah. Thus it is impossible for us to initiate a loving relationship with Yahweh—in truth, all we can do is choose to reciprocate the love He has already shown us. But since Yahweh is careful not to force us to respond to His presence and persona (since love requires free will), showing our love *for Him* is a bit problematical: how, exactly, does one demonstrate one’s love for an infinite God?

Yahweh told us precisely how to do this: the proper way to reciprocate Yahweh’s love toward us is to extend it to other people. A few verses back, John had reminded us, **“No one has seen Yahweh at any time.”** Now, he ties the two principles together: **“If someone says, “I love Yahweh,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love Yahweh whom he has not seen?”** (I John 4:20) His point is well taken. It’s easy for someone to *say* he loves God. But since Yahweh is not physically, bodily, here among us, there’s really nothing he can do *directly* to prove it (or disprove it, for that matter)—even (or should I say, especially) to himself. The only evidence of our love for God that means anything is *circumstantial*: it’s what we do for other people.

I’ll give you an example that just occurred in my own life to demonstrate how this works. I could fancy myself a “servant of God” cloistered up here in my study, showing my love for Him by writing lofty tomes (that nobody reads, but ought to). And I could reason (in my pride) that any interruption to my oh-so-important train of thought would thus be intolerable. But my wife, who’s spent the morning out in her garden trying to grow some food for our family, just called up here and asked me to fix a problem for her—design an “environment” for her cantaloupes to grow in that will let them climb and flourish as they are wont to do, and yet be safe from the roving deer who think her garden is an all-you-can-eat salad buffet. So I dropped what I was doing, went downstairs, and figured out what would work. (She’s got a green thumb, but she’s no engineer.) I was loving God by serving her. Funny thing, though: while I was out there building frames

and draping deer netting, *you* didn't miss me at all, did you? Yahweh doesn't ask us to be in more than one place at a time. And note one more thing: even though I took time out to help my wife simply because I love her (and not because of something I might get out of the deal), a couple of months from now I could well find myself eating some of the sweetest melons this side of heaven—all because of a simple service I took the time to do, an act of love for my wife reflecting the love Yahweh had placed in my heart.

There are several principles we might derive from this. (1) Loving someone entails doing something for them that they couldn't do for themselves—but something for which God had equipped *you* before the need even came up. (2) The “loved one” need only be in your sphere of influence. In my illustration, it was my wife, but the connection needn't be remotely that close. In 1978, we adopted an orphaned child from a country half a world away—the first of nine such kids, it would transpire—simply because God had loved us, called us, and equipped us for the task. (3) The act of loving endeavors to solve a problem for the recipient—even if that “problem” is merely the need for encouragement, advice, or solace. (Put another way, love is *not* meddling in other people's affairs in an effort to “improve” their lives whether they want help or not.) (4) Loving costs us something: perhaps time, perhaps resources, perhaps emotional investment. Remember the ridiculous lengths to which Yahweh was willing to go in the process of redemption (not to mention creation) just to have someone with whom He could share a loving relationship. (5) Yahweh doesn't ask or expect us to solve all of the world's problems: our love should be focused upon whomever He has placed in our path. There were lepers and demoniacs in Judea at the time of Christ who *didn't* get healed. (6) “Doing God's work” entails meeting the needs of others, not trying to earn brownie points for ourselves. And (7) Although it may not be readily apparent, loving others always has an upside, a benefit for the lover, if only lowering our blood pressure a point or two.

Point Number Two above begs the next question on everybody's mind. If we're supposed to “love our brother,” precisely who is included in that? (And more to the point, who's not?) Let's face it: some folks are just naturally unlovable. I'm as guilty as the next guy of being “selective” in choosing whom to love and whom to ignore—it's human nature, which is not necessarily a good thing. That being said, we must balance the affirmative advice of scripture against its admonitions. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37 (where the Samaritan showed selfless and timely love toward one who would have normally considered him a cultural pariah—had he not been beaten bloody and left for dead by the side of the road, ignored and shunned by his own countrymen) told us in practical terms how to “love our neighbors as we do ourselves.” But Paul warned Timothy to have *nothing to do* with some people: **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters,**

proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. **And from such people turn away!**" (II Timothy 3:1-5) The word translated "turn away" is from the Greek verb *apotrepo*, meaning to avoid, shun, or turn away from—precisely the opposite of the Good Samaritan's taking a personal interest in a victim of the world's evil. For all practical purposes, these nineteen traits describe the bad guys who had mugged the victim in the parable—as well as the "priest" and the "Levite" who subsequently refused to help him!

I can only conclude that we are to be discerning, to be selective, to *discriminate* between people when showing our love. I realize that'll sound like heresy to some, but it's not. Toleration of evil is evil; support for the enemies of Yahweh is treason. However, I'm *not* saying we should love only our fellow believers, to the exclusion of lost souls. We should—we *must*—reach out in love to the world's victims, the sleepers, the prisoners, the misguided, the ignorant, and the apathetic. Those who have not overtly chosen Satan's path can still benefit from our expressions of Yahweh's love. It is not too late. But it soon will be.

The place to start, however, is within the ekklesia: we are *commanded* to love our brothers and sisters in Christ—without fail, without reservation. **"And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves Yahweh must love his brother also."** (I John 4:21) Those who don't acknowledge Yahshua as Master aren't expected to obey His commandments, but we who do, are. This is an all-volunteer army; there is no draft—nobody is forced to join. But if we sign on, we're then duty bound to follow our Commander's lead: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments."** (John 14:15) This isn't rocket science: even *I* can understand it. Just before His passion, Yahshua had instructed His disciples: **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."** (John 13:34-35) Loving each other "as Yahshua has loved us" is a tall order. But if we're part of this brotherhood, this fellowship, we will find it impossible to suppress the love of Yahweh that resides within us. Nor would we want to.

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We've been discussing the primary trait that defines and identifies Yahweh in our world—Love. John also speaks of two other attributes, light, and life. I'd like to defer the discussion of light to a later chapter, because it is spoken of as something God created: **"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."** (Genesis 1:3) There's more to it, of course. Light is merely one form of energy—



one that can be seen with the human eye, making it ideal as a symbol. Energy itself *is* a fundamental component of God's nature, but it's something that He hasn't pressed into service as a personal metaphor, probably because the human race wouldn't really come to terms with what energy was until physicists like Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, and Planck came along (and even then, who really understands it?). As a symbol, light communicates the same basic idea to men of all ages; energy, as a concept, does not.

But even though Yahweh didn't specifically utilize the concept of "energy" to communicate His nature to us, we should take the opportunity to pause and reflect on something. Remember how I remarked upon the extravagance of Yahweh in building an entire universe just so the elements needed to make our bodies would be available—bodies that are in turn needed to temporarily house our souls and His Holy Spirit? I'm going to suggest a theory that, I'm the first to admit, may be way off base—but on the other hand, I may be right. At least hear me out.

First, consider this: when Yahweh "created the heavens and the earth," He started from *nothing*—the only "thing" that existed was Himself. Second, note that Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity has proven that there is an equivalence between matter and energy. It's expressed by the well-known formula  $E=MC^2$ —that is, energy is equal to mass times the square of the speed of light. We've all heard of the practical applications of this principle in atomic weapons and nuclear power generation, where a tiny amount of radioactive material can be transformed into immense amounts of energy. But the formula also works the other way. It is theoretically possible to "create" matter, although you'd have to expend a ridiculous amount of energy to do so.

The mass of the universe,  $3 \times 10^{42}$  kilograms according to one estimate, is greater than we can possibly imagine. But the scientific data that has emerged over the past few decades has demonstrated convincingly that there was a point in time—about fourteen billion years ago—before which none of it existed. They call it the "Big Bang." I call it the moment of creation, when Yahweh put everything in motion, exquisitely balanced, awesomely energetic, and fraught with purpose. Where did God get His "raw materials?" My theory is that Yahweh invested *Himself*—in terms of physics, He utilized the energy that comprised His own substance—in order to create the matter necessary for our mortal existence. Considering what a vast amount of energy it would take to make even one gram of mass, we can start to get an appreciation of the scope of Yahweh's commitment, not to mention the greatness of Yahweh Himself.

Well, no, we really can't. Our feeble brains can't begin to grasp how much Yahweh has invested in us. We tend to think of God's sacrifice on our behalf in terms of Yahshua's agony at Calvary as He bore our sins. And we should. When contemplating this drives us to our knees in awe at Yahweh's unfathomable

mercy, that's precisely the right and proper response. But *sacrifice*? Yahweh's *real* sacrifice for us goes back to creation itself, and its extent completely defies mortal comprehension. As scripture phrases it, Yahweh "spoke" the worlds into existence. And what exactly is speech? It is the expending of *energy* to express in audible, comprehensible terms an idea or concept—something that in Greek, you'd call the *Logos*. David expressed it like this: **"The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make Him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies. Yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world."** (Psalm 19:1-4 NLT) The question is, "Are we listening?"

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Energy, however, cannot by itself display love. To do that, Yahweh (by any logical criteria) would have needed *Life*, the third key to God's identity in John's epistle. This life is neither a created entity nor a derivative of some other system, but is part of the very fundamental nature of Yahweh. Simply *being* is not enough—to be *God* Yahweh must live. **"Yahweh is the true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King."** (Jeremiah 10:10) Here the prophet has *de facto* equated Yahweh (the true and living God) with Yahshua (the everlasting King, to whom all authority is given).

Note that *His own life* is the basis of Yahweh's favorite oath: **"For I raise My hand to heaven, and say, 'As I live forever, if [and the Hebrew also allows the translation "when" here] I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me.'"** (Deuteronomy 32:40-41) His prophets too are constantly heard affirming the truth of their words by adding the imprecation, "As Yahweh lives...." Try that phrase out on any other "god" and it's tantamount to saying, "Oh, by the way, I'm lying to you."

Life is something Yahweh transfers to us who are made in His image and likeness. Yahshua explained: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live...."** We mortals have "life" from the moment we're conceived, but this biological sort of life is temporary: a soul cannot ordinarily live without a body, and our bodies are not built to last forever. But Yahweh equipped Adam's race with a *neshamah* which allows His own eternal Spirit to dwell within us. (It's usually translated "breath of life" or something similar, but considering all that it does, the

*neshamah* can't really be boiled down to a simple English word or slogan.) A soul (*nephesh*) whose *neshamah* is indwelt with Yahweh's Spirit (*Ruach*) will not perish when the body dies. It has "passed from death into life"—*eternal* life.

In explaining why this is so, Yahshua pinpoints what makes Yahweh absolutely unique: **"For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man."** (John 5:24-27) Although we're used to thinking of Yahweh as being eternal and uncreated (which explains why His self-revealed name means "I Am"), this description—of Yahweh having "life in Himself"—is, if you think about it, one of the most stunning truths in all of scripture. *Every living thing* in creation got its life from something that came before—its parents or progenitors, depending upon the reproduction mode of the species. Since life is obviously *here*, it had to start somewhere—it had to have a "first cause." So as if it weren't apparent before, Yahshua identifies that "Cause" in the clearest possible terms: life can only have originated with the One who has life *in Himself*, which explains why we call Yahweh "the Father." And as Jeremiah pointed out above, the "Son" shares this essential life with the "Father," for they are, in fact, One: "He is the living God *and* the everlasting King."

Scientists (who can be the *dumbest* smart people on the planet) like to pontificate on how life might have "arisen" on this planet. But the fact is, they have never seen it come from non-life under any conditions—and believe me, they've looked. Discover Magazine admits, "In 1953, chemist Stanley Miller tried to duplicate the conditions present on the primordial earth in laboratory flasks.... Miller's classic experiment involved putting atmospheric components thought to reflect those of the early Earth (ammonia, hydrogen, methane, and water) in a closed system and stimulating that mixture with an electric current to mimic the effects of lightning storms. He generated a small number of biochemically significant compounds, including amino acids, hydroxy acids, and urea, showing that conditions of primitive earth can create the building blocks of life. These results generated considerable excitement, but later researchers argued that Miller was wrong about the composition of the young earth's atmosphere, and the experiment was written off as a novelty." The point, to my mind, is that even if all the correct chemicals and compounds come to coincidentally coexist under conditions conducive to life, life *does not* spontaneously appear—whether in the laboratory or in nature. "Biologically significant compounds" aren't remotely the same thing as living tissue. In fact, considering the existence of angels—spirit messengers created by Yahweh (which I'll acknowledge aren't admitted as evidence by scientists because they can't analyze them)—I'd go so far as to say that chemistry has *nothing to do* with life—the two things may be compatible, but they aren't interdependent.

Scientists can't even agree on what life is. Oh, they can describe it, observe it, and try to define it ("a characteristic that distinguishes objects that have self-sustaining biological processes from those which do not;" or "the condition that distinguishes organisms from inorganic objects and dead organisms..."). But without reference to the Life that is defined by the nature of Yahweh, such anemic attempts to come to grips with the concept are invariably inadequate and shortsighted. There's more to life than biology. In point of fact, biological life (something *created* by Yahweh) is itself "only" a symbol introduced by God to illustrate to us what *real* life is. It's the same reality-shadow comparison we saw above, when Yahshua said, "**As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.**" As the Father (Yahweh) is Life Personified, His essential life was symbolically manifested first as *biological* life in the advent of the Son, Yahshua the Messiah. That was the only way we'd ever have been able to experience His presence while confined to our mortal bodies. But Yahshua was also granted Yahweh's *essential* life, something He demonstrated by rising from the dead—in an entirely different kind of body—under His own power on the Feast of Firstfruits in the year 33.

Thus John begins his first epistle, "**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.**" (I John 1:1-2) That "Word of life" is a theological mouthful—it's *Logos ho zoe*: the statement or declaration uttered by God's living voice, embodying and communicating the concept of animate, genuine, vital, and vigorous life. He's not talking about *bios*, the kind of temporary life we share with puppy dogs and paramecia; *zoe* (in New Testament usage) is a code word for life beyond this life, life of a fundamentally different and higher order than that enjoyed by plants and animals and unregenerate men. It's Yahweh's kind of life—essential, eternal, and unquenchable.

Lest we lose sight of the forest for the trees, note that John was saying that Yahshua, the One about whom he was bearing eyewitness testimony, was the very manifestation of the Life of Yahweh among men. Later, he says, "**He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.**" (I John 5:12-13) All three times here, "life" is the Greek *zoe*, not *bios*. So He's not saying that everybody walking around on this planet "has the Son of God" simply because he hasn't died yet. Rather, John is declaring that when Yahweh dwells within a person—something achieved by His Spirit through our belief in the name of the Anointed Son—this is *in itself* the source and cause of the person's eternal life. Note that he cites the "*name* of the Son of God" as the key to knowing one's

eternal disposition. What is that name? It's Yahshua—which means “Yahweh is Salvation.” The lesson is: trusting reliance upon Yahweh's Salvation is what gives us *zoe*-life.

Yahshua told us this very thing: **“Jesus said to [Thomas], ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.’”** (John 14:6-7) He was telling him, in so many words, “This eternal life you seek—the life that proceeds from the Father, Yahweh—is available only through Me, for I Am Yahweh in human form. I'm telling you the truth: if you know Me, you know Yahweh; and if you trust Me, you're trusting Yahweh, for We are One.”

The key word there is “If.” The choice is ours. Why anyone would choose death over life is beyond me, but we're allowed to do so if we wish. Love, as I've said 'til I'm blue in the face, must be freely given, or it isn't love at all. Yahweh won't twist our arms, but He will—and does—make the ramifications of our choices crystal clear. Moses, having delivered the Torah and outlived an entire generation of rebellious Israelites, put his cards on the table as they prepared to enter the promised land. **“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.”** Yes, it's a “commandment,” but it's clear that there is a choice to be made: life or death, good or evil, walking in God's ways or living according to our own lusts. **“But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess....”** Why would somebody perish if he worshipped gods other than Yahweh? Because only Yahweh “has life within Himself.” If you don't want *that* life, you don't really want to live. It's the only game in town.

Moses concludes, **“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing.”** Don't blame me if you screw this up, he says. I've told you the truth, straight up. **“Therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love Yahweh your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him.”** Life, he says, is comprised of three things: (1) love for Yahweh, (2) obedience to His instructions, and (3) a close relationship with Him. But since Yahweh's Torah is designed to point toward the means He would provide for mankind to regain the loving relationship with God that was lost in the Garden (namely, the life and sacrifice of His Messiah) these three are tantamount to being the same thing. **“For He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”** (Deuteronomy 30:15-20) If we choose Yahweh's

life, we will live. If we don't, we won't. It's that simple. But the death we'll suffer as a result of choosing *not* to reciprocate Yahweh's love won't really be the result of His righteous vengeance, the well deserved punishment of our crimes. It will merely be the inevitable result of having chosen a destination devoid of life.

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Yahweh's recurring pattern of Self-revelation is groups of seven, invariably arranged as six plus one. We see this most prominently in the creation account, the work week plus Sabbath, the Sabbatical year cycle, the annual schedule of Yahweh's "Feasts" (more properly, *appointments*), and the seven phases of Yahshua's called-out assemblies (erroneously called "churches"). These are all structured as six-plus-one "sets." We should therefore be a little suspicious of a doctrine that describes our God as a trinity, "three in one," not the scripturally ubiquitous "six plus One."

I had to search for all of three minutes to identify the seven components of the divine nature: they're patently obvious, if you're not hogtied by religious tradition. The Trinitarians are right, of course, in identifying the Son and the Holy Spirit as part of this, along with the Father. It bothers me a little that they (a term that used to include *me*) don't generally recognize the Father's self-revealed name, Yahweh, nor the Son's *real* name, Yahshua or Yahoshua (it's not Jesus), nor the *real* meaning of the descriptive word "Holy" in Holy Spirit. But hey, it's a start. Call me naïve, but I'm willing to overlook the pagan history of the Trinitarian viewpoint and characterize the Christian version of it as an honest mistake, a half truth based on incomplete information. I sincerely *hope* that's the case.

The key to seeing the six-plus-One pattern in God's persona is to realize and embrace the fact that "**Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One**" (Deuteronomy 6:4) That is, He is the "One" in the six-plus-One pattern. The "six" are all *Logos* symbols, diminished manifestations of Himself used to reveal His character and reality to mankind, thus avoiding all the undesired side effects that would have accompanied any *direct* revelation of Yahweh in His undimmed glory—like turning the whole planet into a charcoal briquette, for instance. The six are, in order of their chronological predominance in human affairs, (1) the "Angel of Yahweh" (a.k.a. theophanies), (2) the *Shekinah*, (3) visionary or dream-state manifestations of God, (4) the "Son," (Yahshua of Nazareth), (5) the Holy Spirit, and (6) the risen and glorified Messiah-King. Trinitarians aren't stupid, of course. They've noticed that these things exist, and valiantly try to make them somehow fit their "God in three persons" scheme. But remember Sullivan's architectural maxim, "Form follows function." Every *Logos* manifestation that Yahweh

chooses for an encounter with man is perfectly suited for the job at hand. For that matter, it's not uncommon for two or more of these forms to be seen in the same context, when several functions need to be performed at the same time.

And lest we slip back into familiar but erroneous patterns of thought, please bear in mind that the Six are all "God." They're not junior gods, or second generation "devinirivatives" (to coin another word), or separate godly entities. They're all Yahweh. They all bear His name, character, eternal existence, essential life, and unfathomable love. To paraphrase Colossians 2:9, "In them, all the fullness of deity dwells, each in its own unique form." As I said, they're all Yahweh, but they aren't *all there is* of Yahweh.

Perhaps a parable would help to clarify this concept. Let's say for the sake of the metaphor that Yahweh is the water of the Pacific Ocean. One *Logos* manifestation of Him might be a cup of this water scooped out at the surface. Another might be a bit of ice, frozen solid from the same source. If you boiled some of the water, you'd have steam. Another manifestation would be the water vapor comprising the clouds overhead, evaporated from the ocean's surface. Another form might be that found under extreme pressure in the crushing depths of the Marianas Trench. And the stinging, wind-driven spray of a typhoon, or perhaps the breakers rolling in onto a Hawaiian beach could qualify as other "forms" of Pacific Ocean water. All of these different manifestations have the same chemical composition and the same source—the same "identity." But they differ in their appearance, form, physical state, temperature, and the effect on their surroundings. Yes, they're all "Pacific Ocean," but none of them is *all there is* of it. We should not presume that just because we've analyzed a beaker full of it, we know everything there is to know about this vast body of water.

## THE “ANGEL” OF YAHWEH: THEOPHANIES

### ❧ 1.2.2 ❧

#### *God as Messenger*

There were times between the creation of Adam and the birth of Yahshua of Nazareth when Yahweh wished to walk the earth in the form of a man in order to directly commune with the object of His love—us. Theologians call these appearances “theophanies,” a term that in the broadest sense might include phenomena like the Burning Bush of Exodus 3, although I will be restricting the technical meaning of the word to describe only anthropomorphic, or “human-like,” manifestations. (I’ll categorize the non-anthropomorphic but physically tangible appearances of God as “*Shekinah*” manifestations—something we’ll explore shortly.) The usual reason Yahweh used these theophanies seems to be that He wished to communicate with people without frightening them. The “awe factor” in these cases was purposely played down, I believe, because the recipient of the Godly visitation was *already* aware of Yahweh, even if he wasn’t particularly receptive to His will. The more examples we examine—and there are many—the more complete will be our understanding of this type of *Logos* manifestation of Yahweh.

We encounter our first theophany in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Chavvah (Eve) sinned, **“They heard the sound of Yahweh, God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh, God, among the trees of the garden. But Yahweh, God, called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’”** (Genesis 3:8-10) A spirit, by definition, doesn’t have this kind of physical presence, described as walking, talking audibly, and enjoying the same cool breezes in the garden that Adam and his wife did. It’s interesting that the word “cool” here is actually the same word usually translated “spirit,” that is, *ruach*. It’s not much of a stretch to read into this that the theophany (a diminished, personified manifestation of Yahweh) shared the same communion with Yahweh’s Spirit as Yahshua later would—whether “walking in the garden in the *ruach* of the day” or being driven by the Spirit into the wilderness in order to be tested. (The language also allows the idea that God manifested himself as a literal wind or breeze blowing through Adam’s environment. But it’s hard to hold a conversation with a gust of wind, nor would it make sense for Adam to try to hide his nakedness from the breeze.)

God’s frequent manifestations as theophanies made perfect sense in the days before the human race had scriptures for guidance—or better yet, had the historical fact of Yahshua’s life and work to bring them into focus. We should



therefore not be surprised to encounter most of these appearances early in the course of man's tenure upon the earth. So we see Yahweh personally (that is, in the form of a theophany) chatting with Cain (Genesis 4:6-15), after which Cain unilaterally severed this uncomfortable personal contact: **"Then Cain went away from the presence of Yahweh and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden."** (Genesis 4:16) It's significant that "Nod" means "wandering" or "exile." It's from a Hebrew verb (*nuwd*) meaning to shake, waver, wander, take flight, or lament. This is still our fate if we choose to separate ourselves from God's presence.

Next we see that Enoch (father of Methuselah and great grandfather of Noah) "walked with God," after which God apparently "raptured" him—**"He was not, for God took him."** (Genesis 5:24) It would later be noted that **"By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."** (Hebrews 11:5-6) Though the record is sketchy, it seems logical that when it is said that Enoch "walked with God," this means that he had a face to face relationship with Yahweh's theophany. It's hard to be dogmatic, however, for we are not given the record of any conversations that took place between them as they "walked" together through life.

We are more fortunate in this regard in the story of Noah, of whom it was also said that he "walked with God." In Genesis 6 and 7, Yahweh is recorded as audibly talking to Noah, giving him directions on how to build the ark, and telling him why he was going to need it. Although God presumably took human form in order to communicate with Noah and his family, it is clear that this theophany was not *actually* a man, for we are told in Genesis 7:16 that God sealed the door of the ark from the outside: **"And Yahweh shut him in."** Noah's conversations and communion with Yahweh's theophany continued for the rest of his life—another 350 years, during which His promises and covenant established (or at least predicted) the course of humanity from that point forward.

Fast forward to Abraham. It is at this point that Yahweh begins giving us a bit more detail concerning the nature of His manifestations. Beginning in Genesis 12, we see Yahweh interacting with Abraham in pretty much the same way as he had with Enoch and Noah, as far as we can tell. But then we read of an encounter with someone named Melchizedek. After rescuing his nephew Lot from the warlords who had kidnapped him, and Abram was on his way home, **"Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him a tenth of everything."** (Genesis 14:18-20) We'd be tempted to write off this enigmatic character as just one of many men Abram encountered in his travels,

but for the subsequent scriptures that elucidate his identity. Speaking of the Messiah, the Psalmist writes, “Yahweh has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’” (Psalm 110:4)

The writer of the book of Hebrews explains: **“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness [or “my king is righteousness”], and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.”** *Melek* is the Hebrew word for “king,” and *tsedek* means “righteousness,” “justice,” or “vindication.” *Salem*, of course, is related to *shalom*—peace. The place name apparently refers to Jerusalem—long before it *was* Jerusalem. **“He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever...”** This all compels me to think of Melchizedek as a theophany, not an ordinary man whose brief contact with Abram made him a handy illustration tool for writers of scripture.

**“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?”**

Remember, the Messiah had been prophesied to be a “priest of the Order of Melchizedek.” **“For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.”** (Hebrews 7:1-3, 11-16)

Yahshua the Messiah could not have been an Aaronic priest, for He was born (in human terms) into the wrong family for that—the royal line of the tribe of Judah. But because the Messiah—the Anointed King—was also (according to Psalm 110) a “priest forever of the Order of Melchizedek,” then Melchizedek’s status as a theophany devolves upon Yahshua as well, confirming His divinity.

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It always humbles me to observe that Yahweh uses our failures, not our successes, to teach us. Abram had originally been told to “leave your country *and your kindred*,” but instead, he’d dragged his nephew Lot to Canaan along with him. And as we’ve just seen, if Lot hadn’t needed rescuing, Abram might never have met Melchizedek—at least not under those circumstances. This wasn’t the

last time Abe's nephew would need to be rescued, nor was it the last time Lot's deliverance would put Abraham in the presence of one of Yahweh's theophanies.

But the next theophany to appear in scripture wasn't to Abram—it was to his wife's handmaid, Hagar. (Abe had indeed met with Yahweh again before this, but He had assumed a different form, one we'll be discussing shortly.) The Hagar passage (Genesis 16) is the first time in scripture that the word *malak*—simply meaning messenger or representative, but usually translated “angel,”—is used. The phrase “the Angel of Yahweh” makes it sound to our ears like God sent one of His many created spirit envoys to Hagar to deliver a message. But a close examination of the text reveals that this “messenger” is actually Yahweh Himself—a theophany. **“The angel of Yahweh said to her, ‘Return to your mistress and submit to her.’ The angel of Yahweh also said to her, ‘I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.’”** (Genesis 16:9-10) Although ordinary angels can convey instruction from God, they cannot “multiply offspring.” Only Yahweh can do that.

Hagar apparently understood this, for **“She called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, ‘You are a God of seeing,’ for she said, ‘Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me.’”** (Genesis 16:13) She didn't know God as “Yahweh,” a name later revealed to Moses (the historian recording this). But she did know that the “angel” talking with her was deity, not merely a spirit messenger, so she portrayed Him as “a God of seeing.” That's the Hebrew *El roi...ra'ah*. *El* (God) is described using a rather common Hebrew linguistic device of using a noun in conjunction with a related verb for emphasis. *Roi* is an appearance, sight, or spectacle; and *ra'ah* means “to see, look at, perceive, inspect, or consider.” In our parlance, Hagar was saying that the Messenger (of) God was “a sight to see,” or perhaps, “a spectacle worthy of consideration.” That's not a bad description of theophanies in general. Whether figuratively or literally, Yahweh always wants us to “see” Him—and the sight is always an eye-opener.

The next time we see a theophany in Abram's life is in Genesis 17, where God changed his name to Abraham and instituted the rite of circumcision as a sign of the covenant that existed between them. We aren't given much information about the theophany, only that He “appeared to Abram” (vs. 1) and left just as abruptly: **“When He had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.”** (Genesis 17:22)

We're given more specifics concerning their next meeting: **“And Yahweh appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men [Hebrew: *iys*h—males] were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, ‘O Lord [Hebrew: *'adown*—master, ruler], if I have found favor in Your sight, do not pass by your servant.”** (Genesis 18:1-3) One of these three “men” was Yahweh's theophany, and the other two were angels who

would go on to extricate Lot's sorry carcass from Sodom, leaving the theophany behind (vs. 22, where He is *identified* as Yahweh) to explain to Abe (and to us) that He would never destroy the righteous along with the wicked. (This, by the way, is compelling evidence for a pre-Tribulation rapture.) The theophany is again identified as Yahweh in the record of their parting: **"And Yahweh went His way, when He had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place."**

(Genesis 18:33) It is clear, then, that God has on occasion taken on the form of a man, and has given angelic beings the ability to do so as well. Abraham seems to have known intuitively, however, that these three who visited him were no ordinary men. We are not told *how* he knew. The question we need to ask ourselves is, would we recognize God if we met Him on the street? I think we would—*if* He could recognize us as His children.

Quite often in scripture, a theophany is "only" a voice from heaven. That is, God is heard speaking audibly, using human language, but He's not employing the whole anthropomorphic "package" to achieve this. This type of theophany was in evidence at the baptism of Yahshua, as we saw above (Matthew 3:17), where Yahweh's theophany referred to Yahshua as "My Son, in whom I am well pleased." Twice in the story of Isaac's almost-sacrifice in Genesis 22, God (identified here as "the Angel—or Messenger—of Yahweh") is described as "calling to Abraham from heaven." And we hear the theophany reassuring Hagar: **"And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.'"** (Genesis 21:17) We may find it confusing to hear Yahweh speaking of Himself in the third person, but He does it all the time. It can also be disconcerting when God refers to Himself as an "angel" (a *malak*, a messenger—the term "angel" carries too much errant baggage with it these days to be of much practical use). But when He's delivering a message as a theophany, it's perfectly appropriate: the diminished *Logos* manifestation is seen (or heard) bearing messages from Yahweh, whose undimmed glory is incomprehensible (not to mention lethal) to us mortals. Thank God He goes to all the trouble.

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The Tanach is peppered with instances where Yahweh "appears" or "speaks" or "calls" to one person or another. These theophanies vary in circumstance and detail, but they all portray Yahweh's willingness—even eagerness—to reach out to us and tell us what we need to know. Most of them follow the patterns we've already explored, but there are two cases we should examine more closely: Jacob's wrestling match, and Moses' remarkable interaction with God.

Jacob had heard of Yahweh and the covenant He'd made with both his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, and had received personal confirmation of that covenant in a dream (received at Bethel, recorded in Genesis 28). But years later, after Jacob had accumulated two wives, two concubines, eleven children, and more wealth than you could shake a stick at, he had a strange encounter with a theophany: **"And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that He did not prevail against Jacob, He touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with Him. Then He said, 'Let me go, for the day has broken.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let You go unless you bless me.'"** Jacob would get more than he bargained for: **"And He said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God [*Elohiym*] and with men, and have prevailed."** (Genesis 32:24-28) The "striven" and "prevailed" observations are a reflection of one of the two words comprising Jacob's new name, "Israel" (*Yisra'el*): *sarah* is a Hebrew verb meaning to contend with, to persist, to exert oneself, or to persevere. But *sarah* is derived from a verb that more directly reveals the nature of the covenant Yahweh wished to confirm with him: *yasar* means to be upright, just, lawful, level or straight. So the blessing bestowed by the divine Wrestler upon Jacob was that he would no longer be known as "the supplanter—the cheater," but would now be known as Yisra'el: the one who is "upright with God." Why? Because he'd insisted, **"I will not let You go unless You bless me."** When's the last time *we* refused to "let go" of God—for any reason?

No divine expression other than a theophany—a pre-Messianic anthropomorphic manifestation—would have been appropriate here. We need to come to grips with a very counterintuitive truth: God allows us—even *encourages* us—to "wrestle" with Him. We're so used to hearing Yahweh referred to as "Lord"—something He went *far* out of His way to avoid (even though He *is* the source of all authority)—we often get the erroneous notion that He's cold, distant, and autocratic—willing, even eager, to squash us like bugs if we have the temerity to "speak freely," tell Him what's on our minds, *wrestle* with Him. But that's precisely what He *does* want. It's called prayer. It's to be done with reverence and respect, of course, but God wants us to "level" with him (just as the name Yisra'el implies)—be straight with Him. He wants us to refuse to let go of Him. The last thing He wants to see from us is cringing trepidation or obsequious obeisance: we're His *children*, after all.

A later prophet points out that the God who had visited Jacob in his dream at Bethel, confirming the covenant (Genesis 28), was the same God who wrestled all night with him at Peniel. That God's name is Yahweh. **"He [Jacob] took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel [*malak*—messenger: in this case, theophany] and prevailed; he wept, and**

sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us—that is, Yahweh, God of hosts. Yahweh is His memorial name.” (Hosea 12:3-5)

One more telling detail about Jacob’s little adventure should be explored. **“Then Jacob asked him, ‘Please tell me Your name.’ But he said, ‘Why is it that you ask My name?’ And there He blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel [“Facing God”], saying, ‘For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.’”** (Genesis 32:29-30) The same question was asked of another theophany, the “Angel of Yahweh,” (described in Judges 13 as “a Man of God” who had a “countenance like the countenance of the Angel of Yahweh, very awesome”) who delivered the prophecy of Samson’s miraculous birth to his parents. The same evasive answer was given each time: “Why do you ask?” In the time honored tradition of wrestling with Yahweh until He blesses us, let *us* ask the question, “Why do You *ask*, ‘Why do you ask?’” That is to say, why was the theophany reluctant to tell Jacob, and later Manoah, what His name was? I believe it was because God didn’t want to create the wrong impression. If He said His name was “Yahweh,” (which it *was*, in a way) then Jacob or Manoah might have jumped to the erroneous conclusion that God was restricted or confined to the form of a man. But God *would* later manifest Himself as a human being, so why didn’t He introduce Himself as Yahshua? Because the Messiah’s name foretells His mission: Yahweh is Salvation. The “Man” who wrestled with Jacob and delivered good news to Manoah and his wife wasn’t there in the role of Savior. That would come later. So Yahweh declined to confuse us by telling us something that wasn’t immediately relevant. All they really needed to know was that they had **“seen God face to face”** and had lived to tell the tale.

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When it comes to face-to-face contact with Yahweh’s manifestations, Moses is in a class by himself. His introduction to the God of his fathers was something that hasn’t been seen by anybody else, before or since. **“And the angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, ‘I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.’ When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ And He said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”** (Exodus 3:2-6) What Moses *saw* was a non-human manifestation of God—something we’ll be calling the “*Shekinah*” in our continuing exploration of the *Logos* expressions of Yahweh in our world. But what he *heard* was a

theophany—that is, the audible voice of God speaking in a human language, and indeed, holding a lengthy and somewhat confrontational conversation with this man He was trying to recruit. It’s kind of an eye-opener to read the transcript of this chat: even after Moses is convinced that this is Almighty God talking with him, he continues dodging, making excuses, and begging God to choose somebody else for the job He has in mind. There isn’t even a hint of the obsequious boot licking so endemic in our “prayer” today. And I get the feeling that Yahweh, for all His frustration, actually enjoyed this conversation with Moses more than He does with the self-centered and one-sided lectures to heaven that religious people call prayer. At least Moses was being honest with Him! Jacob had wrestled with God; Moses *sparred* with Him.

This theophanic “voice of Yahweh” would be Moses’ constant companion for the next forty years. Hundreds of times in the Torah we read, “And Yahweh said to Moses...” or “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying...” He also communicated with Aaron and others the same way. Moses didn’t just listen, either: he also spoke to God, carried on a conversation with Him, enquired, complained, pleaded, interceded, and vented his frustrations. The vast majority of exchanges between God and Moses were of this type. But the exceptions—the other theophanies in Moses’ experience—tell us even more about how Yahweh is willing to reveal Himself to us when the circumstances call for it.

The first one I’d like to look at is the theophany that slew the firstborn Egyptians while passing over the Israelites. I’ve always been confused about this: did God Himself do the “deed,” or did an angel get assigned the task? After all, we read something like this in our typical English translations, **“For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.”** (Exodus 12:23) First (of course) they mistranslate God’s name: the text reads “Yahweh,” not “the LORD.” And then, who is “the destroyer?” Actually, this too is a mistranslation. What’s literally being said here is **“Yahweh will pass over the door and will not put [or give] destruction to come into your houses.”** It’s a little awkward in English, but the point is clear that Yahweh Himself would be the One doing both the “destroying” and the “passing over.” Actually, that fact is stated quite bluntly no fewer than eight times in Exodus 12.

In this case, of course, the usual anthropomorphic form of Yahweh’s theophanies seems to be an inadequate description: no “man,” no matter how strong or swift, could visit selective death upon the households of an entire nation in one night (any more that Santa Claus can deliver toys to all the good little boys and girls on Christmas eve). Nor did Yahweh say He would assume human form in order to achieve this. He only said He would *do it*. We’re left to ponder how. There are, however, several “human” functions that Yahweh (whether as a

theophany or the *Shekinah*) would perform: He would survey and observe which houses in Egypt had the required lamb's blood on the doorposts, and He would visit with death only those that did not. Then, He would slay only the firstborn of each household, leaving the others physically untouched. And finally, He would slay the firstborn farm animals belonging to the unmarked households. This wasn't generalized mayhem: it was a focused, directed demonstration of Yahweh's plan of redemption—including a picture of what would happen if the world ignored it. The point is stated in verse 12: **"On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am Yahweh."**

It was only after the exodus that Yahweh became Moses' constant companion. The whole Sinai experience—Moses' one-on-One interaction with God as He delivered the Instructions—would best be covered in our next section: the *Shekinah* manifestations of Yahweh. But there is one telling incident within this story that will help us to understand theophanies a bit better. **"Moses said to Yahweh, 'See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' Now therefore, if I have found favor in Your sight, please show me now Your ways, that I may know You in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people....'"** Moses began by noting that Yahweh didn't tell him *everything* up front, so he was going to have to rely on his relationship with Yahweh day by day as new challenges presented themselves. There's a lesson for us in there somewhere, I think. Moses then stated what should be obvious to us, but apparently isn't: if we're going to "find favor in God's sight," we're going to have to "know His ways." And the only way that's going to happen is for Him to "show us." As I pointed out before, the purpose of every religion on the planet is to enable man to reach out to God. But that's backward: the relationship God seeks to share with us results from *His* reaching out—from *Him* "showing us His ways." The Bible is the record of Yahweh having done that very thing. It's not His fault if we don't pay attention to what He said and did. Remember the "burning bush?" Yahweh placed the evidence of His presence in plain sight, but it was not until Moses turned aside to investigate that God called him.

So Yahweh offered Moses and the nation of Israel some badly needed reassurance. **"And He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'"** Moses' reply reminds me of Jacob's wrestling match with the theophany—refusing to let go of God. **And he said to Him, 'If Your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not in Your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and Your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?' And Yahweh said to Moses, 'This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in My sight, and I know you by name....'"** One of the most common mistakes believers make, at least in my experience, is to run out ahead of God's will, and then beg for His blessing on



whatever we've already decided to do—a process only slightly less harmful than sowing our wild oats and then praying for a crop failure. What we should be doing is what Moses did here: waiting for Yahweh to move, so we can move in concert with Him.

So having established a bond with His God, Moses desired to “take the relationship to the next level,” so to speak. **“Moses said, ‘Please show me Your glory.’”** Yahweh didn't want to say no, but He didn't want to turn His faithful witness into a crispy critter, either. So He did what He could to accommodate His servant: **And He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you My name “Yahweh.” And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy....”** Yahweh was obviously pleased that Moses craved a closer relationship with Him—contact more intimate than anything he had yet experienced. And it was perfectly natural for Him to promise to show grace and mercy to those who sought those blessings through just such a relationship. But what does it mean to “make all My goodness pass before you?” The word translated “goodness” is the Hebrew *tuwb*: good things, fairness, beauty, joy, prosperity—goodness. It's derived from the verb *towb*, meaning to be good, pleasing, joyful, beneficial, pleasant, favorable, happy, or right. So, if I may read between the lines, Yahweh is telling Moses, “I can't show you My full glory without harming you, but I'll show you what you so earnestly desire to see: the Goodness that comprises My nature.

He went on to explain (because, let's face it, that statement still left a bit to be desired in the clarity department): **“But, He said, ‘you cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.’ And Yahweh said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me where you shall stand on the rock, and while My glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.’”** (Exodus 33:12-22) I have no doubt that this describes what literally happened: Moses was allowed to see a fleeting glimpse of Yahweh's glorious presence (call it a mega-theophany, perhaps: something less diminished in glory than usual)—but not face to face, for Moses was still mortal, and could not have survived the encounter. But I believe we're being taught a more significant lesson here. Yahweh was telling us that the “goodness” and glory we would see of Him could only be perceived from the “Rock,” upon which we must stand and within which we must find shelter. I don't have to draw you a picture, do I? That “Rock” is Yahshua the Messiah. If you don't believe me, consult Matthew 7:24-27, I Corinthians 10:4, and I Peter 2:4-8.

My other observation is a bit less solid, but hear me out. Yahweh tells Moses, **“You shall see My back.”** That's a perfectly good literal translation, but there may be more to it. The word translated “back” (hindquarter, rear, behind) is *'achowr*. When rendered *l<sup>e</sup>-'achowr*, it means future, that is, an indefinite duration of time

in the forward direction. I'm reminded of a passage (Psalm 102) that speaks of the physical restoration of Israel as a national entity being a sign for something usually mistranslated "a generation yet to come." In Hebrew, however, the real meaning is crystal clear: the sign is for "the *last* generation." The word used for "last" is *'acharown*—an adjective related to our noun *'achowr*. (The *-own* or *-on* suffix is used in Hebrew to highlight the conceptual nature of a word as opposed to its literal surface meaning.) My point is simply this: Yahweh—*maybe*—is hinting to us through Moses that we will finally "see" Him (from our vantage point, sheltered in the cleft of the Rock, the life of Christ) during the "last" days. I don't know about you, but the very idea makes my heart race.

## THE SHEKINAH

### ❧ 1.2.3 ❧

#### *God as Natural Phenomenon*

The next category of *Logos* manifestations on our list is the *non-anthropomorphic* expressions of God’s presence in the human experience—instances where Yahweh has revealed Himself through visual or audible phenomena that are *not* based on human modes of expression in any way, whether in appearance or speech. These appearances are still physical and corporeal, however—they’re “real” in every sense of the word, that is, they happen in the real world, not in visions, dreams, or (as some would say) hallucinations. They are seen with man’s waking eyes; they are witnessed and attested to, often by thousands of people at one time. And they are, by design, impossible to ignore.

The word used to express this concept, *Shekinah*, is a Hebrew noun, but one not found anywhere in the Tanach. The word was used, rather, by later Targumists and rabbis to denote the radiance, presence, or glory of God as He dwells among His people. The concept of “dwelling,” in fact, is the basis of the word. The primitive root verb upon which *Shekinah* is based is *shakan*, which means to abide, dwell, settle down, or reside. Thus we see the concept of the *Shekinah* (though not the word) side by side with this root verb in the story of the wilderness wanderings: **“And whenever the cloud [as the *Shekinah* was manifested in this instance] lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down [*shakan*], there the people of Israel camped.”** (Numbers 9:17) The related noun *sheken* is one’s dwelling place or residence, as in Deuteronomy 12:5—**“But you shall seek the place that Yahweh your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation [*sheken*] there.”** In the rabbinical mind, then, the *Shekinah* is “the One [i.e., the one God] who dwells among us.” Of course, bereft of the information imparted in the New Covenant scriptures, the rabbis are clueless concerning the true nature of the *Ruach Qodesh*—the One God who dwells *within* us—and are horrified at the prospect of a Messiah who spent His time upon earth as “the One God who dwelled *with* us”—though He is called Immanuel (“God with us”) in both Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23. With only half the facts at hand, their confusion is understandable—even inevitable.

Though the word *Shekinah* isn’t used in scripture, the concept shows up often in the Old Covenant scriptures, and the reason is apparently always the same: the *Shekinah* appears when Yahweh wants to make an indelible impression on His people. Remember: “Form follows function.” The Holy Spirit allows Yahweh to empower, teach, and convict His children by dwelling within them—the “still,

small voice.” His theophanies’ role was to communicate specific messages to specific individuals in an intimate setting—without frightening them to death. But the *Shekinah* was sent to do something for which neither of these other manifestations was appropriate: invest God’s people with a sense of awe, a deep and profound respect for the power and majesty of Yahweh. God was still “holding back” His actual glory, of course. But the obvious point of every *Shekinah* manifestation was to get our undivided attention.

I may be splitting hairs, but it seems that the *Shekinah* often appears with—in the same context as—a theophany. For example, the spectacular pyrotechnics of the burning bush fit the profile of the *Shekinah*, but the “Angel of Yahweh”—that is, a theophany who wanted to have a One-on-one conversation with Moses—was said to be “in” the flame. And the thunderous theatrics that wreathed Mount Horeb (Sinai) in smoke and flame were clearly the *Shekinah*—manifested to give all of Israel some palpable idea of Yahweh’s awesome power. But the God who met Moses on that same mountain to deliver His Instructions to him was a theophany: **“And He gave to Moses, when He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.”** (Exodus 31:18) Not to be picky, but the *Shekinah* doesn’t exactly have “fingers.”

A word that might have been better chosen to represent the *Shekinah* concept is *kabowd*, usually translated “glory” (and occasionally “honor” or “splendor”). It’s derived from a root verb (*kabad*) that means to be heavy or weighty—hence to honor or glorify. (This is the same word used in the Fifth Commandment: “Honor your father and your mother.”) Forty-five out of the two hundred instances of *kabowd* in the Tanach refer to the “Glory of God”—a physical manifestation of Yahweh’s magnificence in the sight of man and for his benefit. In the previous section, we read that Moses asked God to “show him His glory,” that is, *kabowd*. And Yahweh, while taking steps to protect His prophet, was willing to comply: **“While My glory [*kabowd*] passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by.”** What this “glory” was, however, is not made clear, though Moses knew it when he saw it.

Although it is not called *kabowd*, I believe Moses received his first glimpse of God’s glory at the “burning bush.” Fire was the only terrestrial source of light with which he was familiar, and he described the encounter accordingly: **“The Angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.”** (Exodus 3:2) A very subtle *Shekinah* had been used to get Moses’ attention so he and God’s theophany could have a little chat. What drew Moses’ notice was light—a light source strong enough to be clearly visible at high noon in the middle of the desert, but not so powerful that it would blind or kill him. There’s something in play here that’s so ubiquitous we tend to take it for granted, but we shouldn’t. Yahweh has balanced

with exquisite perfection a myriad of factors that if shifted in one direction or the other even a little bit would spell disaster for the human race, and indeed, all of creation. Here in the case of the *Shekinah*, this balancing act is particularly tricky, because the whole purpose for Yahweh using these manifestations is to get our attention and engender our awe—which demands a display that’s intrinsically somewhat dangerous, a little “over the top.” Achieving the “Goldilocks syndrome”—getting it *just right*—can’t be easy, but Yahweh loves us so much, He does it time after time.

The next time we encounter the *Shekinah*, it’s leading the Children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. **“Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.”** (Exodus 13:21-22) Notice that Yahweh Himself is said to have been “in” the pillar of cloud and fire, just as He had been “in” the flame in the midst of the “burning bush.” A bit later, at the Red Sea, this same *Shekinah* manifestation is called the “angel (i.e., messenger or envoy: *malak*) of God. **“Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.”** (Exodus 14:19-20) The *Shekinah* didn’t just stand around looking awesome: it assumed the role of the Protector of Israel, separating them from the pursuing Egyptian armies. I find it fascinating that the same *Shekinah* that was seen as darkness to the Egyptians (read: those in the world) was *light* to Israel (read: those who are “upright with God”)—at the same time! The lesson: what we perceive in life will inevitably be determined by where we stand in relation to Yahweh.

We shouldn’t let the shifting terms throw us: whether described as “Yahweh,” (not “the Lord,” as our standard English versions render it), the “Angel of God,” or the pillar of cloud and fire, the *Shekinah* being seen here is, in the end, one thing: Yahweh Himself—that is, one of the six diminished manifestations of Almighty God through which He reveals Himself to mankind. It is an expression of the Word—the *Logos*—that would one day become flesh in the person of Yahshua. Remember John’s declaration: **“The Word was with Yahweh, and the Word was Yahweh.”**

A word used here to describe the *Shekinah*’s visible form deserves closer study: it was said to be a *pillar* of cloud, and a *pillar* of fire. An *amud* is a pillar, column, or supporting post. The noun is based on the Hebrew verb *amad*, which is one of the most fundamental (and most often overlooked) concepts in the entire Bible: it means to stand, remain, endure, take a stand, be upright, arise, or cause someone to stand (i.e., to appoint, ordain, or establish him). In Greek, the

equivalent word is *histemi*, which is the root of the word usually (and errantly) translated “cross.” My point is simply this: Yahweh is constantly portraying Himself as a God who stands for us and with us, enabling us to stand upright in His presence. This concept “stands” in sharp contrast to the posture of man-made religions—groveling before both God and the people who have placed themselves in the position of gatekeepers and intermediaries. Like any father, Yahweh desires our respect, but not obsequious obeisance. He doesn’t want His children cringing in fear and bowing down in terror before Him, but rather standing upright (in every possible sense of the word), confident and secure in His presence. It’s hard to hug someone while you’re kissing his foot.

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Perhaps the most “spectacular” expression of the *Shekinah* was the phenomena that accompanied the giving of the “Law” upon Mount Sinai. **“Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever....’”** Yahweh began by telling Moses why He would appear this way: He wanted to ensure that the people of Israel knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that God, not Moses, was calling the shots and giving the Instructions. But at the same time, He wanted the people to respect Moses as the one He Himself had chosen to lead the nation. So after a few days of preparation and consecration, Yahweh’s *Shekinah* was revealed. **“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because Yahweh had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”** (Exodus 19:9, 16-20)

The evidence of God’s immediate presence was visual, audible, and terrifying: thunder, lightning, a thick cloud of smoke enveloping the entire mountain, the blast of a trumpet, trembling earth, and the very voice of God. Though the Israelites weren’t familiar with volcanoes (having lived in the alluvial plain of Goshen for the previous four hundred years) Yahweh made certain that no one could logically mistake the Sinai experience for a mere volcanic eruption. That’s why He sounded the trumpet and provided thunder and lightning, and it’s why He audibly instructed Moses to ascend to the top of the mountain to receive the Torah. I have seen photographs of this mountain (which is located in northwestern

Saudi Arabia, not the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula). To this day, the entire top portion of the mountain is blackened and burned—it's nothing like volcanoes usually look; rather, it appears as if Someone has taken a gigantic blowtorch to it. The forensic evidence supports the scriptural description: Yahweh “had descended on it in fire.”

The people's reaction was predictable: **“Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the reverence of Him may be before you, that you may not sin.’ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.”** (Exodus 20:18-21) This reaction was precisely as God had engineered it, and for a very good reason. He wanted Moses to serve as a “type” of Christ here—an intercessor or intermediary delivering the Word of God to man while insulating him from His terrifying glory.

The most often mentioned *Shekinah* manifestation in the life of theocratic Israel was the “cloud” that rested upon the Tabernacle, dwelled within the Most Holy Place, guided Israel's steps, and set their pace. At the end of the book of Exodus, we read that after Moses and Aaron had completed all the Tabernacle preparations as instructed by Yahweh, **“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle.”** The word translated “cloud” means just that: it's *anan*, a cloud, either of water vapor or smoke (as in the cloud of burning incense mentioned in Leviticus 16:13), or a mist—dense enough to block light. **“Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of Yahweh was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.”** (Exodus 40:34-38) More detail is given in Numbers 9:15-23, where it is explained that whether the cloud moved every day or remained in place for months at a time, the Children of Israel relied upon it for guidance in their wilderness wanderings, moving only when the *Shekinah* moved. In principle, we should all be doing that very thing—moving only at God's leading.

Yahweh—as the *Shekinah*—had promised to speak with Israel from between the two cherubim that flanked the mercy seat—the covering of the ark of the covenant: **“Make one cherub on the one end [of the mercy seat], and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim**

be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.” (Exodus 25:19-22) The only words that men could use to describe the *Shekinah* were mere descriptive suggestions. They saw it as a “cloud,” or as “glory.” But it didn’t follow the normal laws of physics; it didn’t dissipate, disperse, or diminish. This “cloud” didn’t obey the rules: it *wrote* the rules. It was simply the way Yahweh wished to present Himself in this place, at this time. Thus we read passages like this: “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon [or abide between] the cherubim, shine forth.” (Psalm 80:1)

The same *Shekinah* manifestation of Yahweh’s presence inhabited the temple of Solomon. “When the priests came out of the Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves...), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to Yahweh, ‘For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever,’ the house, the house of Yahweh, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of God.” (II Chronicles 5:11-14) Whereas everybody in the vicinity saw the Glory of God enter the Temple, only one man saw it leave—and then only in a vision. Some four hundred years after the Temple was built, Ezekiel saw the *Shekinah* depart, in stages. It was as if It was reluctant to go, saddened beyond words at the way Israel had brought judgment upon itself. The story is recorded in Ezekiel 10.

This is precisely how the Glory of the God in Whom we *used to* trust seems to be leaving my beloved America—step by painful step, looking back over His shoulder as if to ask, “Are you *sure* you want Me to go away?” But this is a democracy: the majority has spoken. We (as a nation) no longer honor the God of our fathers. “We the people” haven’t listened to His voice in years, and we swear we won’t miss Him when He’s gone. But there are a few of us (relatively speaking) who cry out in anguish at the abominations we see around us, and sigh in frustration at our inability to turn the tide of apostasy. In the end, before Yahweh sadly leaves our world to its fate, He will turn around one last time, and say to us, “Come with Me, My children. The wrath I’m about to visit upon the earth is not for you.” I don’t know about you, but I’m ready to go *now*.

But I digress. Neither the Tabernacle nor Solomon’s Temple has existed for over twenty-five hundred years, and we have no record of the *Shekinah* ever taking up residence in the Second Temple. But in one of the hundreds of passages describing the eventual spiritual restoration of Israel under their King and Messiah, Isaiah reports that we haven’t seen the last of the *Shekinah*. “In that day the branch of Yahweh [a euphemism for Yahshua the Messiah] shall be beautiful and



**glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.**” Unfortunately, Zechariah reveals that only one third of them will make it to this blessed stage. **“And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when Yahweh shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning....”** And as in the original Tabernacle, the witnesses must be consecrated before Yahweh will dwell in their midst.

The glorified Messiah will reign at last on the throne of Israel, but He won’t be the only *Logos* manifestation of Yahweh present. The *Shekinah* will return as well: **“Then Yahweh will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.”** (Isaiah 4:2-6) And that’s not the end of it. As we shall see in the next section, the prophet Joel (in 2:28-32) reports that Yahweh will also “pour out His Spirit upon all flesh in those days,” causing the redeemed to dream dreams and witness visions of Yahweh’s glory. By my count, that *four separate ways* Yahweh will be manifested among men during the Millennial reign of Christ.

Mortal man will still walk the earth during this time. But the offspring of the initial redeemed population—repentant Israel and the gentile “sheep” of Matthew 25:31-46—will have no plausible excuse for failing to perceive God in their midst. Without repealing free will altogether, Yahweh will have gone as far as logically possible to *prove* His love for mankind. It will be as obvious and as undeniable as the *Shekinah*—the towering pillar of cloud and flame hovering over the Messiah’s temple in spectacular glory. Only a fool would deny His presence.

But then again, that has always been true.

## VISIONARY MANIFESTATIONS

### ❧ 1.2.4 ❧

#### *God as Apparition*

Occasionally, there are situations that no physical manifestation of Yahweh can adequately address. At these times, He resorts to dreams, visions, and ecstatic encounters. I like to think of these as God's "special effects" department. These visions have no objective reality, existing only in an individual's subconscious, but they nevertheless play an important role in communicating Yahweh's will, plan, and nature to their recipients. Unlike the Holy Spirit, these are not a permanent, indwelling spiritual presence, but are rather specific, sporadic, and temporary glimpses into Yahweh's unique psyche or personality. Unlike theophanies, they have no corporeal existence, but are expressed, as needed, in forms that range from anthropomorphisms to hallucinogenic apparitions that defy description. And unlike the *Shekinah*, these are private, One-on-one expressions, shown to only one person in his subconscious mind, and then only for a very important reason—to enable him to viscerally experience something that really isn't really "possible" in his waking life.

Not every dream or vision is from God, of course, nor is every vision that's *from* Yahweh of Him. For example, Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a statue (see Daniel 2) was sent by Yahweh to reveal prophetic truth concerning the future of gentile world domination, but it wasn't a vision *describing* Him. Daniel himself saw visions that revealed (among other things) both Yahweh and His Messiah in anthropomorphic terms. **"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter."** (Daniel 7:1) He's apparently using the words "dream" and "vision" interchangeably, so it might be instructive to examine the source of these concepts. The Hebrew noun *chelem* is the ordinary word for a "dream." It's from the primitive root verb *chalam*, meaning to dream, whether the ordinary "theater of the mind" kind of experience or God-sent prophetic encounters. But the word also means to be healthy or strong; to restore to health. In order to dream, one must have entered into a state of deep, restorative sleep—something called REM (random eye movement) sleep. I don't know if the Hebrews knew this or it's just a coincidence. A "vision," in contrast, is the noun *chezev*, from the verb *chazah*, meaning to see, behold, witness, or perceive. So the difference is that a "vision" speaks of content—that which one sees—and a "dream" describes *how* he sees it: i.e., subconsciously.

This is what Daniel saw: **"As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His**

throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before Him; a thousand thousands served Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.” (Daniel 7:9-10) The “Ancient of Days,” obviously a euphemism for Yahweh, was “seen” in somewhat “human” terms: though more awesome in glory than anything Daniel had ever seen, He had a head and hair, wore clothing, and sat on a throne.

But almost immediately, we’re given the record of another vision: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14) Just as obviously, this second visionary personage is the risen Messiah: Yahshua, who confirmed (in Matthew 28:18) that it was He alone who would exercise the dominion—the authority—of Yahweh. Whereas the Ancient of Days is invested with human attributes in the vision, this One is described *as* human, a “son of man”—or at least “like” us in some way. The clincher as to the Messiah’s identity is His grand entrance: “with the clouds of heaven,” precisely as Yahshua prophesied His own return at the end of the age (see Mark 13:26).

We’re being given the opportunity here to understand one reason why Yahweh sometimes resorts to dreams and visions. It’s the only way (at least the only way *I* can envision) that we could compare or contrast the roles of Yahweh with His Messiah, since they both share the same identity, though not the same form. Daniel could never have been shown Yahweh’s true glory with his waking eyes, nor could he have comprehended how this glory could have devolved upon His Anointed One. This kind of thing could only happen in a vision.

As we have seen, Yahweh frequently met with Abraham in the form of theophanies. But there were times when the things He wanted to show the man of faith couldn’t really be described without resorting to “special effects.” We see just such an instance in a pivotal moment in Abram’s life, when He was earnestly trying to comprehend God’s promises of national blessing, promises he believed but didn’t quite understand—*before* he had any children. “The word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision: ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great...’” The noun translated “vision” here is *machazeh*, based on the same verb (*chazah*: to see, perceive, or look) as the one describing the Daniel 7 vision. The “vision” of someone in an ecstatic state is implied. Also of interest is the word translated “word,” *dabar*, which basically means a speech, word, saying, or utterance. It’s based on a verb meaning to speak, declare, converse, command, promise, warn, threaten, or even sing. The “Ten Commandments” are actually the “Ten

Words”—*dabar*. I can't help but see more than a passing resemblance to the Greek concept of *Logos*.

What's remarkable here is that Abram is not just an observer, but an active participant in his own visionary experience, and Yahweh is seen “counting as righteousness” the trust and belief Abram felt in his heart, even though he was not consciously forming his thoughts on the matter, since this all happened within his vision. **“But Abram said, ‘O Lord Yahweh, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Behold, You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ And behold, the word of Yahweh came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ And He brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed Yahweh, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”** (Genesis 15:1-6) It's a somewhat stunning epiphany, at least to me: Yahweh knows the thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs we hold to be true in the deepest recesses of our hearts—even if we're not quite aware of these things ourselves, even if we haven't studied, reasoned, researched, prayed, and settled upon an unshakable “doctrinal position” concerning every nuance of scriptural teaching. Knowledge is wonderful, but we don't have to know *everything* to know Yahweh. The kind of trust a small child has for his father is all He needs to work with. He *knows* what makes us tick, even if we haven't quite found the words to express it ourselves.

Within the vision, Abram and Yahweh were to enact a covenant of blood, in which a sacrifice was to be split in two, and both parties were to walk between the pieces, as if to say, “If I break my vow, may I be split in two like this.” But Yahweh put Abram—who was *already* in an ecstatic state in his vision—into a “deep sleep,” causing a “horror and great darkness” to fall upon him. Yahweh's point in doing so was that the conditions of the covenant (namely, that Abram would have many descendants who would inhabit the Promised Land) would be met by Him alone: nothing was required of Abe except the trust in Yahweh he had *already* shown. **“When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram.”** (Genesis 15:17-18)

Again, the truth Yahweh wanted to present is something that Abram could not really have comprehended with his waking eyes. The “fire pot” here is a *tannuwr*, a small beehive-shaped portable oven or furnace, often used as a metaphor for God's wrath: **“Your hand will find out all your enemies; Your right hand will find out those who hate you. You will make them as a blazing oven [*tannuwr*] when you appear. Yahweh will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them.”** (Psalm 21:8-9). And the connotation of the “flaming torch” is the flip side of that coin: the brilliance of Yahweh's deliverance. *'Esh* is fire, and *lappid* is a torch, lamp, or even

lightning—the word is used to describe the “lightning flashes” that scorched the summit of Mount Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments. Note Yahweh’s imagery through Isaiah’s pen: **“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch [lappid].”** (Isaiah 62:1) So the images Yahweh presented to Abram in the covenant vision were symbolic of Himself: the blinding light of His righteousness, imputed to us and making possible our salvation, is bolstered by His willingness to back up His covenant promises with wrath upon His enemies—including, according to the terms of the covenant, the enemies of His friend, Abram, and his progeny. If we understand what the symbols mean, they’ll tell us as much as the actual words Yahweh used to express His covenant.

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Though dreams and visions were used throughout scripture to communicate facts to people regardless of their spiritual affiliations (note the cases of Joseph’s Pharaoh, Balaam, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar) Yahweh, to my knowledge, never revealed *Himself* in a vision to anyone who did not already have a personal relationship with Him. Perhaps the most remarkable such vision, in terms of imagery and symbolism, was that seen by a young priest in the early days of the Babylonian conquest: Ezekiel.

The reason for the vision was explained immediately after he received it: **“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.’ And as He spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard Him speaking to me. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord [or, “the Foundation”] Yahweh....”**” If Ezekiel was going to speak in Yahweh’s name to this pack of impertinent rebels, he was going to have to be utterly convinced that it was really God who had sent him, and not some figment of his own imagination. And the vision of Yahweh’s glory he had just seen, which we’ll review in a moment, had been so utterly unlike what *anybody* might have expected, Ezekiel had no choice but to believe that it had been sent by God Himself. The vision had been designed to engender boldness and unshakable conviction in Yahweh’s young prophet.

That’s *not* to say this newfound confidence was designed to make Zeke popular or successful. Yahweh’s admonition continues: **“And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words,**

though briars and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions.” Oh, *that* sounds like fun. **“Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. And you shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.”** (Ezekiel 2:1-7) *Swell*. Yahweh was practically *guaranteeing* that His prophet would be ridiculed and ignored—just as his predecessor Jeremiah (perhaps twenty years Ezekiel’s senior) had been for decades before the conquest. But “results” were not what Yahweh was after, exactly. He only wanted to make sure that Israel’s free will—their right and ability to repent and follow their God if they chose to—was not abridged, even here in captivity. He wished to provide a witness, even now, when it was too late to avoid temporal judgment, for there is more to life than what we see with our mortal eyes. No, the Israelites would *know* that there had been a prophet among them. Whether they liked it or not.

The vision itself was not for the faint of heart. Ezekiel begins by telling us precisely when he saw the visions, where he was, and what conditions prevailed. **“In the [i.e., ‘my’] thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal [the royal canal Nebuchadnezzar had built connecting the Euphrates and Tigris rivers], the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), the word of Yahweh came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of Yahweh was upon him there.”** (Ezekiel 1:1-3) A priest’s duties in the Temple officially began when he was thirty years of age, so having been exiled before his service could commence must have been frustrating for the devout young priest. (The Temple still stood when this was written—about 592 B.C.—but it wouldn’t for much longer.) It was as if Yahweh was saying, “There’s more than one way a dedicated priest can serve.”

**“As I looked, behold, a stormy wind [Hebrew: *ruach*—the same word translated spirit] came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal.”** From the very beginning, we get the feeling that Ezekiel doesn’t quite have words to adequately describe what he’s seeing, but he does his best to report the scene objectively. Clouds, brightness, and flashing fire are all reminiscent of Yahweh’s Shekinah manifestations, but *this* was all happening in his cerebral cortex—in “visions of God.” **“And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures.”** “Creatures” is a truly unfortunate word choice. The word is *chayah*, a verb meaning to live or to have life, or the related noun that means “life” or “living being,” such as an animal. **“And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings....”** We’ll get to the “faces” and “wings” in a moment. The primary impression these four Living Ones left upon Ezekiel was their fundamental humanity—their affiliation or connection with mankind.

**“Their legs were straight [*yashar*: upright—i.e., the legs appeared to be human], and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf’s foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze....”** This is undoubtedly what Zeke *saw*; the trick is figuring out what it *means*. Legs and feet are the implements of one’s walk through life; calves (clean animals suitable for burnt offerings) are indicative of service; bronze is a metaphor for judgment. (These are symbols we’ll cover later in this book. For now, just trust me.) The picture, then—human legs with calves’ feet, gleaming like polished brass—seems to be one of a very special human being, one whose walk is characterized by service and sacrifice, but whose service includes the function of judgment—which in Biblical terms isn’t so much condemnation *per se* as it is separation, judicial decision, a setting apart of the guilty from the innocent.

Each of the four Living Ones, you’ll recall, had four faces and four wings. **“Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went.”** Wings, like legs and feet, speak of locomotion through life, but this time the path is in the heavens. These Living Ones are as comfortable in the realm of God as they are on earth. **“As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces....”** The imagery here is identical to a vision John would experience on the Isle of Patmos, recorded in the Book of Revelation, though the manifestations change a bit. The four faces represent four different attributes of the *Logos* of Yahweh. Each of these “faces” is emphasized in one of the four “Gospels,” the historical accounts that begin the New Covenant canon. The human face represents Christ’s humanity, the facet of His character stressed in the Book of Luke. The lion indicates the King’s authority (backed by royal power): The Messiah as King is the theme of Matthew’s Gospel. The ox (like the calf’s feet) speak of service—the undercurrent of the Book of Mark. And the eagle is Master of the Heavens: the deity of Yahshua is emphasized in John’s Gospel. If it wasn’t clear before, it should be now: the four Living Ones in Ezekiel’s vision are together a prophetic preview of Yahshua the Messiah.

And what was the function of the wings? **“Their wings were spread out above. Each [being] had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went....”** If I’m picturing this correctly, the four Living Ones acted and moved in concert: the two wings used for flying were extended, touching the wingtips of the two neighboring Living Ones—making them, for all practical purposes, one composite entity—I guess you’d call it *echad* in Hebrew. They “flew” as a unit, the direction being determined by the “Spirit” (*Ruach*). Since each Living One had four faces (that is, four separate character attributes),

the direction in which they moved as a unit stressed one attribute (at a time) over the others. Following the career of the Messiah, we can guess that the Living Ones began by moving in the direction of humanity, shifting first to the left—to service—then making an abrupt “about face” (at the resurrection) to move in the direction of the Lion’s countenance—the face of the King. Finally, it turned ninety degrees right, moving in the direction of deity. Ezekiel was being told that these were all the same entity—the same Person—but they wouldn’t always present themselves to mankind in the same way. The Baby in the manger didn’t look much like “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” and the bloodied corpse of Yahshua doesn’t remotely resemble the reigning King of Glory—returning soon to a world near you. But God was showing Ezekiel that no matter what direction He was moving, His plan was steadily progressing, just as He had ordained.

**“As for the likeness of the living [beings], their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living [beings] darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning.”** (Ezekiel 1:4-14) All we’ve really seen in history so far is the Living Ones’ humanity and service. But Ezekiel got to see the reality of the whole spectacular scenario, not that he had the words to express the splendor of what he was witnessing. I get the feeling that “burning coals,” “torches,” bright “fire,” and “lightning” darting about are but a pale approximation of what he actually saw in his vision. Not that I could have done any better. There are some situations in which words simply fail us. This was one of them. Where are the Hollywood special effects wizards when you need them?

If you thought the vision was strange up to this point, hold onto your hat. **“Now as I looked at the living [beings], I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living [beings], one for each of the four of them. As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl.”** This gem, probably yellow jasper (Hebrew: *tarshiysh*), was also listed first in the fourth row of the High Priest’s Ephod (see Exodus 28:20) and seventh in the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-21)—there called “Chrysolite,” from the Greek *chrysos* (gold) and *lithos* (stone). **“And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. And when the living [beings] went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living [beings] rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living [beings] was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living [beings] was in the wheels.”** (Ezekiel 1:15-21) My motto is, “When you’re speechless, retreat to the shelter of quotes from



scholars.” Okay, I’m kidding. But *The Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament* notes: “Both Ezekiel (1:10) and Daniel (7:9) had visions of God’s throne set on a platform with wheels. The celebrated wheels within wheels of Ezekiel 1 had axles set at ninety degree angles somewhat like a gyroscope, so that the platform could go at once in any of the four directions, without a steering mechanism. The whole picture symbolized the omnipresence of the Lord, and the rapidity with which he executes judgment in his rule of the earth.” Well, maybe. I would point out that since **“the spirit of the living [beings] was in the wheels,”** and **“the rims of all four were full of eyes all around,”** we’re being shown that the direction and pace of the Messiah’s mission was controlled by the infinite perception of the Holy Spirit. What Yahshua did, when He did it, and what “face” He showed the world at any given time, was directed and ordained by the Spirit of God.

None of this happened in a vacuum. Next Ezekiel reveals the environment in which the Living Ones—the *Logos*—operated. **“Over the heads of the living [beings] there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads.”** In other words, everything the Living Ones did was done in reference to the heavens—the abode of God—not according to earthly goals. **“And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each [being] had two wings covering its body. And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings.”** The Living Ones weren’t always in motion. When they *did* move, the impact upon their surroundings was awe-inspiring, earth-shaking, and impossible to ignore (if you weren’t spiritually comatose). But there were to be times when the Living Ones (who, don’t forget, are a collective metaphor for Yahshua, the *Logos*) stood still—moving in no direction at all (and therefore, displaying each of its four defining attributes in equal measure). If you think about it, that has been the state of affairs under which we have been living ever since the ascension of the Messiah from the Mount of Olives—almost two thousand years now. When the Living Ones let down their wings—when They are not in motion—They are considerably harder to see and hear. Today, we have historical accounts of His humanity and service, and prophecies of his royal majesty and gloriously visible deity, but because God isn’t “in motion” right now (as far as His Messianic Plan is concerned) it is up to us to seek Him through the evidence He’s left behind—to pay attention to the Spirit’s “still, small voice” speaking within us, and to listen for the echoes of the Living Ones’ past movements in our world. Don’t get used to the relative quiet, by the way. I have it on good authority that the Living Ones will soon be on the move once again.

Ezekiel continues: **“And there came [Hebrew: *hayah*—to be, the root verb upon which Yahweh’s personal name is based] a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings.”** Who dwells “above the

expanse?” Why, Yahweh, of course. Remember, even though the Living Ones *are* God, the purpose of the vision was to teach us, through Ezekiel, about how the relationship that exists between Yahweh and His *Logos* functions—how one is a diminished manifestation of the other, the same identity, though different in form. There is apparently a causal connection between what was said by the voice and the subsequent stillness of the Living Ones. In other words, the timeline of the Messianic program is Yahweh’s prerogative alone (see Mark 13:32).

We are now told of the source of the voice. **“And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh.”** (Ezekiel 1:22-28) Again, we have the distinct feeling that words are failing our faithful prophet. *Ten times* in this one paragraph he admonishes us that whatever he was seeing in his vision only “*looked like*” or “*had the appearance of*” something with which he was familiar in his human experience—implying that it wasn’t really that at all, but something far more spectacular.

The descriptive words Zeke uses, however, are telling. The expanse itself looked to him like “crystal,” the same word used for frost or ice. The throne looked to him like sapphire (Hebrew: *sappiyr*)—not the sapphire we know today, but rather the rich blue lapis lazuli, the second foundation stone of the New Jerusalem and the second stone of the second row of the High Priest’s ephod. (Could Yahweh be telling us that as far as He’s concerned, His heavenly throne, His seat of authority, is of secondary importance to Him—that love trumps lordship every time?) The “Ancient of Days” (as Daniel would characterize Him) was presented in anthropomorphic terms, but from the “waist” up looked to Ezekiel like a “shining substance” or “glowing brass,” (Hebrew *chashmal*, a word used only by Ezekiel, and then only to describe what we’re seeing here). From the waist down, He looked even more striking—like pure fire: *esh* is a word that also means lightning. The “brightness” that surrounded Him was *ngah*—“light, i.e., that which is known that can be responded to (hence: knowledge); brightness or radiance, i.e., the quality or state of having a relatively strong light; or splendor, majesty, i.e., that which has a beautiful appearance.” (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*) Finally, this “brightness” was compared to a rainbow—the symbol of God’s covenant of peace with Noah.

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Most visions recorded in Scripture are intended to convey some prophetic truth to God's people through the seer. Relatively few, in fact, are those recorded visions in which Yahweh presents *Himself*, but these few are remarkably consistent. We've looked at several of them already. Some of the imagery presented in the extensive vision of Ezekiel 1 was reprised a bit later: **"Then I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man. Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist was something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal.... And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley."** (Ezekiel 8:2, 4) But perhaps the most interesting comparison can be drawn between the visions seen by Ezekiel and Daniel with those recorded by John in the Book of Revelation, six centuries later.

**"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.' Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me."** We aren't told precisely what being "in the Spirit" meant. Considering what John saw and reported, however, I'm going to assume that this was a visionary encounter, a dream or ecstatic experience that he was able to recall and write down, in all its esoteric detail. **"And on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest."** None of us will ever see God unless we turn toward Him. For confirmation of the Messianic significance of the seven lampstands, compare Zechariah 4 to Isaiah 11:2. **"The hairs of His head were white like wool, as white as snow."** Exactly as Daniel had pictured the "Ancient of Days" in 7:9. **"His eyes were like a flame of fire, His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace [Remember the "calves feet" of Ezekiel 1:7? We're talking about judgment], and His voice was like the roar of many waters [see Ezekiel 1:24]. In His right hand he held seven stars, from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and His face was like the sun shining in full strength."** (Revelation 1:10-16) John had been a witness to both the transfiguration of Yahshua before His crucifixion and His glorified manifestation after the resurrection. But he had never seen Yahshua looking like this. In fact, no one had since the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel. But I have a feeling that these glimpses of glory are actually closer to objective reality than the flesh and blood Messiah who plied the streets of Judea in the First Century. Yes, God has humbled Himself for our benefit, because He loves us more than we can possibly comprehend. But let us never forget that His diminished appearance is a *disguise*, so to speak—He's not really like that. Think of the *Logos* as a "hazmat suit" Yahweh dons in order to protect us from His glory as He works in our world.

Practically the entire book of Revelation is visionary, though John saw only brief vignettes of Yahweh's persona. The description is continued in the fourth chapter: **"After this [the dictation of the seven letters to the seven churches] I looked,**

and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’ At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with One seated on the throne. And He who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald....” We should by now be quite familiar with some of the imagery John is being shown here. The voice “like a trumpet” may be a reference to the rapture. The throne of God and the rainbow that encircled it should ring loud bells: they’re things we’ve encountered in previous visions that revealed the nature of Yahweh. But let’s look at some of the “new” elements presented here. The One sitting on the throne (obviously deity) looked like Jasper. That’s the Greek *iaspis*, the first stone listed in the wall of the New Jerusalem, and the last (*yashpheh* in Hebrew) named in the High Priest’s ephod—the first and the last, the alpha and omega, precisely as Yahshua had introduced Himself at the beginning of the vision (see Revelation 1:11, 2:8). Carnelian (alternately translated sardius, ruby, or garnet) is a red form of chalcedony, representing the blood of Yahshua, shed for our sins. Its hexagonal crystalline structure speaks of His humanity, telling us that the blood of sacrificial animals was not sufficient to atone for our transgressions. This stone was sixth (the number of man) in the city’s foundation, and first in the top row of the ephod, as if to say: *this* Man is First, preeminent in all things. Finally, the rainbow about the throne looked like an emerald (Greek: *smaragdinus*—an adjective meaning “emerald-like,” based on *smaragdos*). The fact that an emerald must be oiled to retain its luster leads me to conclude that this may symbolize our need for the Holy Spirit—God’s presence living within us. We, too, must apply the “oil” of the Spirit to our lives if we wish to gleam for God’s glory. Just a guess.

**“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.”** We’ll address the “white garments” and “golden crowns” at a later date. **“From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God [again, see Zechariah 4 and Isaiah 11:2], and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal....”** If you’ll recall, the expanse that separated the “Living Ones” from the throne of God in Ezekiel 1 was described as “crystal,” a word that could describe either ice and frost or a crystalline mineral. Here in Greek, the word (*krystallos*) has the very same etymology—and if we consider where the vision is taking place (in heaven), the “sea of glass” before the throne is identical to the “expanse” seen by Ezekiel: it’s positioned above the earth, and beneath God’s heavenly throne.

And the similarities don’t stop there. **“And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature [again, these aren’t “created,” so let’s call them “beings”] like a lion, the second living [being] like an ox, the third living [being] with the face of a man, and the fourth living**

[being] like an eagle in flight. And the four living [beings], each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy [that is, set-apart, unique, distinct], is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'" (Revelation 4:1-8) We saw these same symbolic attributes in Ezekiel's vision: the authority and power of the lion, the service and sacrifice of the ox, the empathy, vulnerability, and volition of the man, and the metaphorical deity of the flying eagle—lord of the heavens. They once again paint a picture of the *Logos*, Yahshua the Messiah. Twice here we are told of the multiplicity of eyes (seen in Zeke's vision as being on the "wheels") reminding us that Yahweh's *Logos* perceives and comprehends *everything*.

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There seems to be a progression of modes in which Yahweh has manifested Himself throughout our history, beginning with His theophanies, then the *Shekinah*, then through dreams and visions. The advent of His "Son" as a human being living among men was next, followed by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who will in turn be eclipsed in our experience by the glorified reigning Messiah. These modes, though generally consecutive, aren't strictly exclusive: as we have seen, several of Yahweh's manifestations often share the spotlight at the same time. Between Moses' time and Yahshua's, dreams and visions were the order of the day. As Yahweh (speaking, ironically enough, *as* a theophany *through* the *Shekinah*) stated to Aaron and Miriam, "**If there is a prophet among you, I, Yahweh, make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.**" (Numbers 12:6)

An intriguing contrast is drawn by Solomon: "**Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.**" (Proverbs 29:18) The Torah, he implies, is guarded and kept alive in the hearts of the people through the ongoing ministry of Yahweh's prophets. Their messages—received through dreams and visions—reinforce their audience's reliance upon God's instructions, which in turn makes them blessed. It's a scathing commentary upon Israel's spiritual apostasy that Yahweh saw fit to withhold all "prophetic vision" for four hundred years preceding Yahshua's advent—and what little has been bestowed upon us in the years since the resurrection has largely been ignored for the last two millennia by Jew and Christian alike. What part of "Blessed is he who keeps the Torah" didn't we understand?

It's not too late to heed the visions of God's prophets, though we're clearly running out of time. The message hasn't changed. Consider this: "**And Yahweh answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems**

slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.” (Habakkuk: 2:2-3) God reminds us that He’s on a schedule; the visions of the prophets will be fulfilled, each in its “appointed time.” What did this vision warn against? **“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.... Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own.... Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high.... Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity.... Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness [read: exposure, lack of resources, vulnerability to oppression]!”** (Habakkuk 2:4, 9, 12, 15) The pride and lack of love for one’s fellow man predicted here are characteristic of our age as never before. It’s been a long time coming—2,600 years, from Habakkuk’s point of view. He wrote the vision down so that you and I could know that we should *run away* when we saw these things happening—so we could “flee from Babylon” when we saw it growing strong.

Though such visions have been rare of late, that too is about to change. **“And it shall come to pass afterward [in context, “after” the restoration of Israel—a process that’s already begun but is by no means complete; or this could be interpreted “at the end of the age,” i.e., “in the last days.” It’s from a root verb meaning to tarry, delay, or defer.], that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of Yahweh comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on [*qara*’: to proclaim] the name of Yahweh shall be saved.”** (Joel 2:28-32) Not to be picky, but how can you proclaim the *name* of Yahweh if you only know Him as “the Lord?” There’s an implied warning to the world here, written between the lines. Follow the logic: if these dreams and visions will be seen by *all* flesh, and if these visions are the result of Yahweh’s Spirit having been poured out upon them, and if all these people have been saved because they “call upon the name of Yahweh,” then, if I’ve got the math right, *nobody* will be left on earth who *doesn’t* know Yahweh when everybody starts seeing dreams and visions. The kind of personalized “crash course” in God’s glory that had heretofore been seen only by the likes of Ezekiel, Daniel, and John will be a universal phenomenon among surviving mortals at the commencement of the Millennial age. Evidence: **“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Yahweh: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares Yahweh. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”** (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

## THE SON: YAHSHUA OF NAZARETH

### ❧ 1.2.5 ❧

#### *God as Sacrifice*

Undoubtedly the most tangible of *Logos* manifestations was the advent of Yahshua of Nazareth: God as man. I'd also have to say this was the most unlikely, illogical, counterintuitive, and *dangerous* thing Yahweh could have done—Yahshua was the *Logos* expression most likely to be misunderstood, misconstrued, despised and rejected. But He was also the most necessary manifestation of the six if loving, restoring, and redeeming us was God's purpose.

Think about it: if all Yahweh wanted to do was inform us, then an endless string of theophanies would have done the trick. If all He wanted to do was impress us—compelling us to humble ourselves before Him in awe and reverence—then the *Shekinah* would have been pressed into service every time we turned around. If Yahweh only wanted to inspire individual believers, to encourage us to heed His word despite temporal obstacles and satanic opposition, He could have made do with a liberal use of dreams and visions revealing His unmistakable glory. If all He wanted to do was comfort, console, guide, and admonish His people with an indwelling influence—a still, small voice within us—then sending His Holy Spirit would have been quite sufficient for the task. And if Yahweh only wanted to rule the human race with a scepter of iron, exercising perfect justice and unerring wisdom as He reigned over the whole earth, He could have skipped the rest and presented Himself as the glorious Messiah-King at the very outset.

But as it turned out, though Yahweh wanted to do all of those things, the picture remains incomplete. There is still something missing. In all of these manifestations, the data all flows in one direction—from God to us. That would be expected if God were Allah or Ba'al, but not if He's Yahweh. That is, if God's agenda were merely top-down control, submission, conquest, and the unquestioning obedience of mankind, then it wouldn't really matter if He didn't provide some means through which we could choose our own destiny. But as I've said until my cheeks hurt, *Yahweh's primary gift to man is free will!* It is therefore a logical necessity that He would, somewhere along the line, manifest Himself in a manner that presented a choice, an opportunity for us to either accept or reject Him, a door through which we could opt to walk—or not. Let's face it: it would be awfully hard to “choose not to accept” Yahweh's lighting up the top of Mount Horeb like a highway flare if you happened to be there when He did it. You can't say, “No, I don't allow that,” to a vision of God's glory you receive in your sleep. There is no record of anyone ever doubting the veracity of a theophanic

appearance. And although it will be theoretically possible for someone to “just say no” to King Yahshua during His Millennial reign, there will be no way to pretend He isn’t *there*, large and in charge.

Therefore, there logically had to be, somewhere in God’s plan, a manifestation of Yahweh’s *Logos* that not only spoke, but also listened—that not only taught God’s precepts, but also fulfilled them. Somewhere, Yahweh had to physically, tangibly, become the expression of the choice of which Moses had spoken: **“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God that I command you today, by loving Yahweh your God, by walking in His ways, and by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.”** The choice, he says, is between good and evil, between life and death, between walking in God’s ways by heeding His commandments (literally, “words”) or serving “other gods,” whether Ba’al or yourself. **“But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving Yahweh your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days.”** (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

Please note a very subtle distinction here, something that’s invariably overlooked or misunderstood. Yahweh says that He is the source of the life and goodness that are ours if we’ll obey His words. But He doesn’t state the converse, that He will personally go out of His way to harm us if we refuse. He merely warns us that we “shall surely perish.” His is not a “carrot or stick” approach; rather, it’s a “carrot or no carrot” way of thinking. The “stick” is self-inflicted: it’s merely the inevitable result of our refusing to accept the carrot He’s offering; it’s something from which He would spare us. Yahweh is the source of life (the consequence of obedience); it doesn’t follow that He’s also the source of death (the consequence of disobedience). It’s simple logic: one cannot blame X for the consequences of my having chosen Y. One thing has nothing to do with the other. I can’t fault General Motors if the Ford I bought breaks down.

As I’ve pointed out, everything in the Torah, one way or another, was a symbol—a road sign, if you will—that pointed toward Christ, who in turn pointed toward Yahweh. Just before His ascension, Yahshua told His disciples, **“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”** Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, **“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are**



**witnesses of these things.’”** (Luke 24:44-48) So the choice Moses had put before the Children of Israel (and through them, us) was in reality the choice of whether or not to accept Yahweh’s plan for their reconciliation with Him—a plan brought to fruition through the life and mission of Yahshua of Nazareth. Yahshua was the mechanism by which we could exercise the free will Yahweh had bestowed upon us. He was the *fulfillment* of the Levitical sacrifices, the tabernacle symbols, the Instructions concerning reverence, purification, civilization, consecration, relationships, and even diet. He was (or will be) the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies recorded in the Psalms and Prophets. If we choose not to embrace His mission, if we opt not to accept His sacrifice, then we have, in effect, rejected everything the Scriptures were designed to reveal—the very plan of God. Conversely, if we proclaim the Messiah as our Savior, we have *by definition* kept the Law.

Consider this. The Second Commandment seems to many to be the least “practical” of the ten. **“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”** (Exodus 20:4-6) I mean, if you place Yahweh first in your affections (Commandment #1), and you don’t accept or advance anything that is false, deceptive, or destructive in His name (Commandment #3), then what possible difference could it make if you made yourself a statue or a picture of what you think Yahweh might look like, to help you keep Him at the forefront of your awareness? Wouldn’t that be a good thing?

No, for two reasons (at least). First, as Yahshua said to the woman at the well, **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.”** (John 4:24) So whatever image you might come up with on your own is, by definition, *wrong*. Second, and more to the point, Yahweh planned to provide *His own* image, so we could all see what He was really like, in terms we could relate to, understand, and appreciate. This “image,” of course, is Yahshua the Messiah—the *Logos*: **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:14) If we want to know what Yahweh “looks” like, we have only to look at Yahshua—not in physical form, of course, but in character, purpose, nature, and identity. That’s why He told Philip, **“Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.”** (John 14:9)

Now we know why Yahweh was so adamant about our not bowing down to “carved images” we had made. If we really want to “worship God in spirit and in truth,” we’re going to have to refer to the “carved image” of Himself that *He* made: Yahshua. This explains why He described Himself as a “jealous God” in

this context. Any “image” of Him that isn’t Yahshua is actually a rival for our affections—to put it bluntly, a false god. Of course, when looking at Yahshua (in order to perceive Yahweh) we have to be looking at the *real* Messiah—not a caricature of Him drawn by imaginative but mistaken purveyors of religious dogma. He is *Immanuel*: God with us, the Word made flesh—not the founder of a great religion, not an innovative moral teacher, and not some pacifist who failed to bring down Rome through a policy of passive resistance, getting Himself executed for His trouble. He’s neither a baby in a manger nor a condemned man hanging on a cross. Because He is the very image of Yahweh, He has life within Himself—life that couldn’t be held forever in a mortal human vessel.

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Scripture continually uses one metaphor that trips us up: we just don’t understand it these days. This passage is typical: **“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.”** (John 14:28-31) Yahshua is constantly heard talking as if He (the “Son”) and the “Father” are two different people. Or at least that’s how it sounds to modern ears. In our world, fathers and sons see themselves as separate, different, and as often as not, at odds with each other. But this was not always so.

All through my teenage years and for the first quarter-century of my adult life, I had the distinct impression that my dad didn’t really “get” me, appreciate what I was doing with my life, or understand what made me tick. And the feeling was mutual, I think. It wasn’t that we fought, or anything like that; there was nothing adversarial about our relationship. But we lived completely separate lives: distant (not geographically, but socially), disconnected, detached. It wasn’t until my mother passed away that my father (who had worked as an accountant all his life) bothered to look into what I did with my days (running a modestly successful graphic design agency). It was only then that he realized that my life wasn’t so very different from his. I wasn’t the unrealistic “*artiste*” he’d pictured; I ran a profitable small business, solved real-world problems, kept my clients satisfied, and fed my family. Only then, during our last few years until he died, did we grow close: we finally saw things eye to eye.

Father-son relationships in scripture aren’t pictured like that at all. Sons—especially firstborn sons—are seen as extensions of their fathers’ interests. They

usually followed their fathers into the same trades, had the same agenda, and lived on the same land. Businesses were family affairs, with knowledge and assets passed down from one generation to the next. Whereas in our world, we “start over from scratch” with every new generation, the ideal—the norm—in Biblical times was continuity: the father serving as leader, master craftsman, and mentor in the family enterprise, until the son had matured and seasoned to the point where he was ready to assume those roles himself. The Psalmist puts it this way: **“Behold, children are a heritage from Yahweh; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.”** (Psalm 127:3-5) A man’s children, in other words, project and extend their father’s agenda in the community—an agenda that always has the best interests of the entire family in view.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see how this “father-son” picture comes to fruition in the “relationship” between Yahweh and Yahshua. Lay the biology aside and consider only the connection, the affiliation, that exists between the Heavenly Father and the Son of God: Yahshua is the first “arrow” in Yahweh’s quiver. It is He whom the Father sends to “speak with their enemies in the gate.” (Note that the Father’s “enemies” are the Son’s as well.) The metaphor is telling us that Yahshua is the “front man” for Yahweh’s interests in the physical world. And what are those “interests?” What is the family business? It’s *salvation*: the redemption and reconciliation of mankind to our Creator.

So don’t think of Yahshua as a second-generation deity—the *Son* of God, who is therefore somehow junior to Yahweh. And *certainly* don’t think of Him as a messenger boy, a prophet, or the founder of a new religion. Think, rather of Yahshua of Nazareth as a reflection of Yahweh in the mirror of our lives: reduced in dimensions and voluntarily bereft of God’s power, and yet the very image of Yahweh presented in a form we can perceive. What Yahweh does, His reflection does. He who has seen Yahshua *has* seen the Father.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### ❧ 1.2.6 ❧

#### *God as Mother*

We don't have to read very far in scripture to encounter the next *Logos* manifestation: it's found in the second verse of the Bible: **"The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."** (Genesis 1:2) Verse one tells us, **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,"** (that is, God created space-time and matter-energy), unorganized at first, formless, empty, and lightless—just raw materials. "God" is the Hebrew word for deity: *'Elohiym*—a "job description," not a name. (He wouldn't assume the name "Yahweh" until man's advent was in view, in Genesis 2.) God would go on to speak light into being, organize the universe, create plant and animal life on earth, and finally introduce man. But why was God's Spirit first seen "hovering over the face of the waters?" Something's "face" (in Hebrew, *paniym*) is its countenance, its disposition, its "mood," if you will. Ask any astrobiologist (yes, there are people who get *paid* for searching for life that God *didn't* create) what's the primary requirement for biological life? He'll tell you it's *water*. H<sub>2</sub>O, as it turns out, is the third most common molecule in the entire universe (after molecular hydrogen and carbon monoxide). So under the mothering and nurturing of the Spirit of God (see Deuteronomy 32:11-12 for a parallel example of what "hovering" is all about), the waters were being encouraged and prepared to bring forth and sustain *life*—one of Yahweh's fundamental attributes.

The word translated "Spirit" is *Ruach*, which basically means breath or wind. The problem is, no one really knows what a spirit (in the biblical sense) is. Scientists can't capture and study them, so they "naturally" assume spirits don't exist. Yahweh is clearly using the word as a metaphorical description: breath or wind is merely a hint, a symbol, of what Yahweh was trying to communicate to us. The *Random House Dictionary* lists thirty-one different definitions for "spirit." The salient definition for our purpose is #5: "A supernatural, incorporeal being, especially one inhabiting a place, object, etc., or having a particular character." (#10 lists "the third person of the Trinity." Not very helpful.) Complicating matters, two other Hebrew words, *nephesh* and *neshamah*, are presented in scripture with very similar imagery. The *nephesh*, or soul, is "a feminine noun meaning breath; the inner being with its thoughts and emotions." (*Baker and Carpenter*) And *neshamah*, the unique attribute differentiating man from the animals (see Genesis 2:7) also literally means breath or wind (it's derived from a verb meaning to pant or gasp), and is thus seen as a rough

synonym for the spirit and life. People tend to use these words more or less interchangeably (well, not *neshamah*—that one they just ignore), but they shouldn't: Yahweh is very precise in His word choices.

Yahshua told the woman at the well, **“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”** (John 4:24) Having been transmitted to us in Greek, the word used here for “spirit” is *pneuma*. (Actually, it's expressed with a code-like placeholder—a “nominum sacrum,” as they're called—in all of the extant pre-Constantine manuscripts.) But *pneuma* is a pretty good linguistic equivalent for the Hebrew *ruach*: it literally means breath or wind, but carries with it the same metaphorical associations *ruach* does. So although we haven't learned anything new about what a spirit is, at least God's use of metaphor has remained consistent from the Hebrew to the Greek. More to the point, whatever a spirit is, we now know that Yahweh's intrinsic nature is spiritual, not physical: in His undiminished state, Yahweh is incorporeal—He is not restricted by a material body, atomic structure, the laws of physics, or anything like that. The idea that He can (and has) manifested Himself in bodily form in the person of Yahshua of Nazareth is one of the primary stumbling blocks of Judaism, which observes that Yahweh (they'd never use His *name*, of course) is both “One” and incorporeal. They're right about what God is, but they're wrong in assuming limits to His power. Yahweh can and does manifest Himself however He pleases—even if it means “taking the form of a servant,” inhabiting a mortal body.

A spirit, then, is any incorporeal living being. The primeval Spirit, the First Cause of all others, is Yahweh, who, we have learned, “has life within Himself.” He has in turn created multitudes of immortal “spirit messengers,” commonly referred to as angels (a transliteration of the Greek *aggelos*) that share some, but not all, of His qualities. (Notably absent from their makeup is the privilege of choice, of free will: they are servants, soldiers, envoys. They are therefore not equipped to love, though they can show loyalty, obedience, and honor.) It is hinted in scripture (see Revelation 12:4) that a third of these angels rebelled against Yahweh in a satanic revolt, becoming demons. These are they for whom hell is prepared—an eternal fiery abyss designed specifically for the eternal incarceration of rebellious spirits (see Matthew 25:41)—a place that's necessary because once spirit messengers are created, they cannot be killed. Hell was not intended for men. God wasn't even *thinking* about people when he built the place (or state, or whatever it is). In order for a man's soul to end up there, it must be indwelled with—be made “alive” by—a satanic, fallen spirit. Human souls, in a very real sense, are just “along for the ride.” But as with being “born from above” in Yahweh's Spirit, the *only* way this can happen (i.e., being “born from below” in Satan's spirit) is for us to choose this tragedy. Man is endowed with free will; it is up to us to select our own eternal destiny by inviting one spirit or the other—or neither of them—to fill our *neshamah*.

I'm admittedly reading between the lines, but there are apparently other differences between Yahweh and His created spirit messengers. He is eternal: He not only exists from eternity past to eternity future, but He can maneuver in the dimension of time. This explains why he uses predictive prophecy as His primary means of vindicating His Word to us: that which is future to us is already a *fait accompli* to Yahweh. As one wag put it, "We shouldn't be surprised when Yahweh's predictions come to pass just as He said they would: God *cheats*." I know it sounds like science fiction, but He has "seen" us do things we have not yet done. But this is not predestination: Yahweh doesn't determine our destiny for us, even though He knows what path we'll choose, even before we do. False gods and demons have no such ability. All they can do is try to influence the world as they've found it. Angels, though they're immortal (they can't die once they're created), are not "fourth-dimensional." That is, they cannot go forward or back in time as Yahweh (who is *eternal*) does. (If Satan *could*, we'd all be in big trouble, I suppose.)

This brings up an interesting side issue: if Yahweh can maneuver in time, why doesn't He merely go back and start over—keep rewinding the tape, as it were, until He gets the result He wanted? As usual, it boils down to the free will He gave us. If our choices, whether for good or ill, weren't allowed to come to fruition, if they didn't have natural consequences, then they wouldn't really have been "choices" at all. In the end, we'd be nothing but ones and zeros in some grand cosmic video game. No, Yahweh is far too honest, far too *loving*, to prevent us from choosing our own destiny. But we need to get it right the first time, for God won't interfere with our choices.

Though they're incorporeal, created spirits (angels and demons) have the ability to affect the physical world. They are immensely powerful and extremely intelligent. But because they are not imbued with free will, they live on a short leash. That is, they can do only what Yahweh has allowed. If they could exercise unrestricted volition, the world would be a very different place. There is apparently angelic-demonic warfare going on that we seldom see (cf. Daniel 10:13), and I suspect that the coming Tribulation will be a time characterized by unrestrained and unmistakable spiritual conflict in the world (hinted at in II Thessalonians 2:7).

But the actions of angels and demons shouldn't concern us any more than those of other created things, from mad dogs to microbes. It's the nature of *spirit* that we're trying to get a handle on, for Yahweh is both a spiritual being Himself, and He is said to reveal Himself to us as His "Holy Spirit"—a diminished *Logos* manifestation of God, set apart from Him today in order to dwell within the *neshamah* of every believer, making our souls alive. The *Ruach/Pneuma* designation is clearly just a metaphor, for God's Spirit can't be literally described

as “air in motion.” The “wind or breeze” comparison is helpful, however, in that it tells us that the spirit moves, affects its environment, and leaves evidence of its presence, even though we can’t actually see it. And the concept of “breath” reminds us that our mortal life requires respiration—if we cease breathing, we die. Speech—the audible communication of thought (which, if you’ll recall, is what *Logos* means)—is achieved via breath expended with a purpose. So the words pressed into service to represent “spirit” do indeed tell us something about how God’s Spirit operates in this world.

*Ruach*, the Hebrew noun translated “Spirit” in the Old Covenant texts, is derived from primitive root verb *ruwach* (it’s spelled slightly differently in Hebrew but pronounced the same) that means “to smell an aroma or scent, to perceive an odor, to accept.” It should come as no surprise, then, that the noun translated “aroma” (*reyach*) is based on this same verb, and a study of *that* word can give us some valuable insight into what the Spirit is and how it’s implemented by God. I’ve always been a little puzzled by the dozens of references in the Torah to the “soothing aroma” of the Levitical sacrifices in which Yahweh took pleasure. These always struck me as being somehow primitive and anthropomorphic—I felt (in my ignorance) a little embarrassed for my God, that He would allow Himself to be characterized as if He were a god that man had invented in *his* likeness, enjoying the savory fragrance of steaks on the barbeque. Now I can (finally) see that Yahweh was really just trying to communicate the nature of His Spirit to us. The sweet aroma of a burnt offering on the altar told Him that His people were trusting in His instructions and were willing to let His Spirit lead them—even if they didn’t fully understand all of the Torah’s prophetic ramifications. Yahweh could *smell* their faith, and it was a beautiful thing.

A few non-Levitical usages of the word will serve to illuminate what I’m talking about. After the flood, **“Noah built an altar to Yahweh and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma (*reyach*), Yahweh said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.’”** (Genesis 8:20-22) Was Yahweh pleased with the smell of burning flesh after a year of smelling the rotting, bloated corpses of drowned animals? No. What pleased Him was the attitude and gratitude of Noah. The lesson: the Spirit of God ordered Noah’s steps, and Yahweh found that spirit agreeable.

Fast forward a few generations. Jacob, impersonating his brother Esau, went in to his half-blind father to receive the birthright Esau had so foolishly sold him. **“Then his father Isaac said to him, ‘Come near and kiss me, my son.’ So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell (*reyach*) of his garments and blessed him and**

said, 'See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that Yahweh has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!'" (Genesis 27:26-29) Jacob (though his name implies "cheater") had the *Spirit* of Yahweh (represented by the aroma that surrounded him) while Esau, who had despised his birthright, did not. The lesson: our reverence for Yahweh's covenant and faith in His promises is pleasing to God.

The Spirit of Yahweh was not compatible with the spirit of bondage in Egypt, so we read, "They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; and they said to them, 'Yahweh look on you and judge, because you have made us stink (*reyach*) in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.'" A few weeks later, these ungrateful slaves would be free and on their way to the promised land. But they didn't know that yet. For now, they were merely slaves who'd had the temerity to announce their affiliation with Yahweh to a boss whose affiliations lay elsewhere. We can *still* count on the world to be repulsed and offended by the odor of Yahweh's love about us—a smell that *He* finds delightful. The lesson: the Spirit of God *stinks* to a world that wants to enslave us.

The Song of Solomon is an allegory that describes the torrid love affair between King Yahshua and His called-out bride, the Ekklesia. Here the fragrance the King finds so pleasant is the aroma of the Holy Spirit that permeates the air about his beloved. "How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance (*reyach*) of your oils than any spice! Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance (*reyach*) of your garments is like the fragrance (*reyach*) of Lebanon." (Song of Solomon 4:10-11) The "oils" of which He speaks are a common metaphor for the Holy Spirit; and the fragrant garments are reminiscent of the "garments of light," the imputed righteousness of the saints, that clothe the Bride of Christ in Revelation 19:8. The lesson: the fragrance about us that the King (Yahshua) finds so intoxicating is the Spirit of Yahweh, permeating the lives of His people.

We can therefore begin to see the distinction between Yahweh (who *is* Spirit, the self-existent, living, unlimited, incorporeal First Cause), and the "Spirit of God," that is, the "Holy Spirit" (*Ruach Qodesh*) who dwells within us. Though both are "Spirit," the latter is a diminished *Logos* manifestation of the former, set apart from Him (as are all six of these *Logos* expressions) for our benefit. In a manner of speaking, the Holy Spirit is the fragrance of Yahweh that tells Him (not to mention the world) whose we are and where we've been. If we've been out in the pasture hugging the Lamb of God, we're going to *smell* like it.



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Just before He was betrayed, Yahshua told His disciples to expect the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would remain with them—and *in* them—after He had finished His mission. He began by saying, **“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”** The foundational commandment, as we have seen, was to love, for love is the fundamental attribute of Yahweh. He’s saying what we saw above: that love for Yahweh would naturally, inevitably, manifest itself in love for our fellow man. (But in case it still wasn’t clear, Yahshua spelled it out in John 15:12, where He commanded us to “Love one another as I have loved you.”) **“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper,”** that is, a divine expression other than Himself, a manifestation of Yahweh not confined, as Yahshua was, to a mortal body in space and time, **“to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you....”** This “Spirit of truth,” then, was to be a surrogate for Yahshua in the personal lives of the disciples. The Helper (I’ll address the personal pronouns “He” and “Him” in a moment—they can be misleading) had been dwelling *with* them (in the person of Yahshua). But the time would soon come when a different divine manifestation would be appropriate and necessary—this new Helper, the Spirit of Truth, would henceforth dwell *in* them.

**“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live.”** I can practically guarantee that this made no sense to the disciples when they first heard it. They didn’t understand that their Master was about to “leave” them—crucified, entombed, resurrected, and ascended back to Father Yahweh. The world had just had the only face-to-face encounter they would ever have with Yahweh in the flesh, and they’d *hated* what they’d seen. So from now on, only those who *chose to* would get to “see” Him and share in His essential life. The word “see” (Greek: *theoreo*) implies not only ordinary vision, but also means to perceive, understand, or experience something. **“In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you....”** This has to be one of the most confusing verses in the Bible for Trinitarians. Yahshua is speaking as if *He* were the Holy Spirit who would abide in the souls of the called out ones. But if we understand that Yahweh is One, then it all makes sense (in a mind-blowing sort of way): the *form* in which Yahweh is manifested to us may change depending on the function He wishes to fulfill, but His *identity* never varies. The amazing thing here is our part in the whole thing. If Yahweh—in whatever form He chooses—is “in us,” then the essential life that defines His nature has become our nature as well.

Not only can we *have* this life, we can also *know* we have it. The essence of religion—and the reason Yahweh despises it—is the fear, the uncertainty, the

apprehension it breeds. The sheeple are taught to live in dread of a grumpy and vengeful god who will punish them in righteous fury if they step out of line or make a mistake. The lie of religion is the concept that self-appointed gatekeepers—priests, rabbis, imams, gurus, and clerics—can intercede with this nasty god and keep him at bay, as long as we honor *them*, as long as we obey them, as long as we *pay* them. But the minute we *know* that Yahweh’s life is within us—and that it can’t be taken away, even if they kill the body—this terror becomes unsustainable. The cold grip of religion around our throats is replaced with the warm embrace of a loving, living relationship with God. Perfect love, after all, casts out fear.

So this should come as no surprise: the evidence of this Life residing within us is the *other* fundamental component of Yahweh’s nature: Love. Yahshua explains, **“Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me.”** Since His primary “commandment” was to love one another, this might be paraphrased, *Whoever loves his brother loves Me.* **“And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him....”** In other words, this love is reciprocal in nature. The Father (who *is* Love) sent His Son to demonstrate love to us, and when we receive this love, His Holy Spirit will in turn produce love within us. Now *that’s* what I call recycling.

The disciples, of course, still didn’t understand how this would all work. **“Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’** We’ll get to *how* Christ would manifest Himself to His disciples (but not to the world) in a moment. For now, Yahshua merely reiterated the principle of the unity of God, for that is the key to the whole thing. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would all share one divine identity in the life of every believer—the identity of Yahweh. **“Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. And the word that you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”** (John 14:15-26)

The word translated “Helper” here (“Comforter,” in some translations) is the Greek *parakletos*, which denotes someone who is summoned, called to one’s side, or called to one’s aid. *Strong’s* notes that it could be “one who pleads another’s cause before a judge, counsel for defense, legal assistant, an advocate or intercessor; in the widest sense, it means a helper, succourer, aider, or assistant.” Its root verb, *parakaleo*, means to aid, help, comfort, encourage, exhort, or invite. (*Para* means “to the side of” or “near,” and *kaleo* means “to call.”) From our vantage point, it isn’t hard to see that this *Parakletos*, this comforting, exhorting, Helper—the Holy Spirit of Yahweh—is ultimately the source of whatever love

we're able show our fellow man in this world. But there in the upper room, it all had to have been terribly confusing for the disciples.

Seven weeks later, however, all of it came to pass just as Yahshua had promised. **“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”** (Acts 2:1-4) Pentecost (the Hebrew *Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks, or “Sevens”) is the fourth of seven annual “appointments” or “convocations” Yahweh had instructed Israel to keep with Him throughout their generations. Each of these predicts and commemorates one of the seven most significant events in Yahweh’s plan of redemption. The first was the sacrifice of Yahweh’s “Lamb” at Passover, followed immediately by the removal of our sins on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and then the resurrection of the Messiah (proving that He had Yahweh’s “life within Himself”) on the Feast of Firstfruits. Our thankful acknowledgement of Yahweh’s provision naturally led (in God’s plan) to that about which we just read: the indwelling of His Spirit—the Pentecost experience. It’s the fulfillment of Yahshua’s promise that the Spirit of Truth would be *in* His disciples, just as He had been *with* them.

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I need to address the touchy subject of the gender designations of Yahweh and the *Logos* manifestations through whom He reveals Himself. We’re used to calling God “Him,” that is, envisioning “Him” as a male personality. And scripture seems to generally support this view. For example, Exodus 15:3 says, **“Yahweh is a man of war; Yahweh is His name.”** *Iysh milchamah* is a “warrior.” War (*milchamah*) is traditionally considered a masculine pursuit, of course, and the word for “man” here, *iysh*, is the normal word for a male. So the masculine pronouns “He” and “Him” used throughout scripture to refer to Yahweh are perfectly appropriate, though it is clear that Yahweh (being Spirit) is not a *man*, nor is “He” really a male. As usual, God is delivering truth in metaphorical terms. “He” was trying to teach us something about “Himself.”

Of course, Yahshua, being fully human, *was* a man, a male *homo sapiens*. As Isaiah had prophesied, **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal**

**of Yahweh of hosts will do this.**" (Isaiah 9:6-7) This manifestation allowed Yahshua to assume the persona of the "Son of God," the One who would legitimately present His Father's case before His human peers. It was the "Son" who would rightfully inherit the family business—in this case, the salvation of all mankind.

But with the Holy Spirit, gender designation is not so clear cut. Both masculine and feminine roles are evident. **"And the angel answered [Mary], "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."** (Luke 1:35) **"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit."** (Matthew 1:18) That's a masculine role, if I understand the biology of the thing. But many of the descriptions of the Spirit's function in our lives are gender-ambivalent in character, and indeed, the Greek noun *pneuma* is neutral in gender. In the passage we quoted above (when Yahshua spoke of **"the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you"**) the personal pronoun "Him" is not masculine, but neutral: *autos*—"it." That last sentence literally reads, **"You know It, because beside you It stays** [Greek *meno*: to remain, abide or sojourn], **and in you It will be."** I know it sounds awkward this way, but I think that's mostly because we're used to thinking of the Holy Spirit in personal terms—which in English is expressed as either "he" or "she," not "it." But the problem is with our perception (not to mention our linguistic tradition), not with God's nature.

Complicating matters is the fact that the word for Spirit in Hebrew, *Ruach*, is a feminine noun (as is *neshamah*, or "breath of life," the capacity for conscience and spiritual indwelling that distinguishes humans from animals). I firmly believe that when Yahweh tells us to **"Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you,"** (Exodus 20:12) He's speaking not only of our human parents, but also of our spiritual "father and mother," so to speak: His Messiah and His *Ruach Qodesh*, the Holy Spirit. Call me old-fashioned, but I see the "father figure" as the authority, the provider, the one who contends with the outside world to keep the family safe and secure. I see the "mother figure" as the comforter, consoler, intercessor, the parent who is intimately involved in our daily lives—and yes, the one who confronts and convicts us wayward children with the error of our ways. This is precisely the way the Holy Spirit functions in our lives. Anything else is dysfunctional.

I also believe that Yahweh ordained the generalized roles of our human parents to illustrate His own character and function. That would at least explain why Satan works so hard to break up families, and failing that, encourages us to abandon our traditional familial and gender roles. If men act like men, and women like women, then God's order is mirrored in our lives, and we will be in a position

to see what He meant to tell us about Himself when He made us male and female. Both of these parental roles are absolutely essential to our spiritual well-being.

I fully realize that linguistic nuances like this shouldn't be made to "walk on all fours." Though "She" is undoubtedly our Spiritual Mother, it's impossible to make a convincing case that the Holy Spirit should be characterized exclusively as *either* feminine or masculine. (Case in point: our old Greek friend *Parakletos* is a masculine noun.) But far too often in our world (and even in Yahweh's assembly) men have used the myth of God's "masculinity" as justification for dominating and oppressing women, imposing second-class status on them. It's a tragic comedy of compounded errors: if God is a male (*He's not*), and if Yahweh's primary attribute is being Lord (*it isn't*), then if I'm lucky enough to find myself equipped with a Y chromosome, I can feel free to abuse and subjugate any of the "lesser creatures" around me—beginning with women, who are by this twisted theory reduced to the status of chattel, or at best, second class citizens. In extreme cases they exist only for man's convenience, personal gratification, and procreation. Muslims are masters of this madness, but they're not alone.

If God's gender characteristics *aren't* exclusively masculine, however, then the whole arrogant hypothesis falls apart, and we're left to ponder, "What did He mean to teach us by portraying Himself as a male?" We don't have to look far for the answer: it's a recurring Biblical metaphor, actually two of them. Israel is pictured time and again as Yahweh's wife—unfaithful and now divorced, but destined to be restored. And the Ekklesia, the called out assembly of Yahshua, is characterized as the Bride of Christ, a pure and spotless virgin with whom our Messiah/King is passionately in love. We need to come to grips with the fact that when God allows "Himself" to be represented as one gender or another, it's not a biological observation, but rather a spiritual teaching tool. God isn't a "man" any more than He's literally a rock, a fortress, or a consuming fire.

## THE RISEN/GLORIFIED MESSIAH

### ❧ 1.2.7 ❧

#### *God as King*

To a dyed-in-the-wool Trinitarian, listing the risen and glorified King Yahshua separately from the mortal, human Yahshua of Nazareth might seem to be evidence of a dangerously unbalanced mind. Are they not one person?

Indeed they are! That's precisely my point: *all six* of these diminished *Logos* manifestations of Yahweh among us are, in fact, One Person, One identity, One God—a God whose name is Yahweh. The reason I feel this expression of God's presence must be listed separately is that “form follows function.” Neither the form nor the function of the glorified Messiah-King bears any resemblance to that of the mortal Lamb of God, the Son of Man, Yahshua of Nazareth. Their identities are the same, but their “personalities” are as different as ice is from steam. The two Messianic manifestations have separate purposes in God's plan, and as we shall see, their respective forms—the bodies that allow them to fulfill their divergent roles—are as different as night and day.

The human Yahshua came to offer us a choice: His sacrifice, in fulfillment of scores of transparent prophetic symbols in the Torah, divided us into two camps—those who willingly accept that He is Yahweh's Anointed One (and rely on all that implies), versus those who do not. (He freely said He'd come to bring not peace, but a sword. This was what He meant.) Yahweh will never abridge our privilege of free will in this life: He will—in fact, He *did*—defend to the death our right to choose our own eternal destinies—for good or ill. But once we have all made our choices, there will be no more reason for Him to conceal His deity in a cloak of humanity. So the *glorified* Yahshua will offer no such choice: His very presence will demolish any doubt someone might have about who He is. It will be impossible to stand before Him and still deny that He is God. This explains why only believers were given the privilege of seeing the risen Christ during the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension in the spring of 33 A.D. He was seen by over five hundred people during this time, but they had *already* made up their minds—they had *already* trusted Him with their souls.

This implies, even necessitates, that the world will at some point experience a spiritual paradigm shift. Yahweh has appointed a time—yet future—when our choices will be supplanted by their consequences, a time when we will no longer walk by faith, but by sight. The “deadline” for making our choices has always been literally that: our deaths. Granted, hardly anybody learns when that will be ahead of time, but between birth and death, we're expected to deal—as individuals—with the “God-sense” that's built into every one of us. We can

choose to accept it, ignore it, suppress it, deceive it, resist it, or attack it. We usually have a “lifetime” (whatever that is) to make up our minds. But there will be an entire generation for whom the decision process will be compressed.

Our generation has been playing “hide and seek” with God, and He’s “It.” One of these days, He’s going to shout, “Ready or not: here I come!” and the world will be instantly divided between those who are hiding from Him and those who are seeking Him. The Greek word used to describe this event (in I Thessalonians 4:17) is the verb *harpazo*: “caught up”—a singular incident known commonly as “the rapture.” How much time is left? Hardly anybody has heard Him counting: only those within earshot, those who are very, very close to Him know, even roughly, how long it will be before the game is afoot. For this generation—the *last* generation of our age—the choice we’ve already made will determine whether we will be kept out of the trial which will engulf the entire world (see Revelation 3:10), or be left behind to face it. As the five hundred post-resurrection witnesses discovered, awesome privileges await for those who embrace the fact that “*Now* is favorable time—*now* is the day of salvation.”

In a very real sense, making the right choice is *all* we’re asked to do in this life. Yahshua was once asked, “**What must we do to be doing the works of God?**” **Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God: that you believe in Him whom He has sent.’**” (John 6:28-29) Sacrifices, tithing, and alms are not really what we’re called to do. Circumcision and ritual cleansing aren’t going to bring us into God’s presence. To refrain from murder, theft, or adultery is good, but it’s not the point. All of these things are secondary—they’re not the *essence* of “doing God’s will,” but rather the *result*. The Torah commands them because they’re all *pictures* of what it means to “believe in Him whom Yahweh has sent.” We are not only to *believe* Him, but to believe *in* Him—rely upon Him, trust Him. Perhaps the precept that illustrates this principle best is the Law of the Sabbath—the Torah/instruction that tells us that on the last day of the week, we are not to work to provide for ourselves, but rather rest in what Yahweh has already provided. It says basically the same thing that Yahshua said above: the “work” that God requires of us, in the end, is simply to *rely on Him* to do the work of our salvation.

That’s not to say this whole thing isn’t maddeningly counterintuitive. First, God says, “Do these things, and refrain from doing these other things.” The list of do’s and don’ts is a mile long, and none of us is able to keep them all perfectly, especially if we use Yahshua’s criteria for compliance: mere hatred is tantamount to murder; lustful thoughts might as well be adultery, and so forth. But Yahweh says through Moses, “**See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have**

**not known.”** (Deuteronomy 11:26-28) The word translated “commandments” here is the Hebrew *mitzvot*, the plural of *mitzvah*: a command, order, or authoritative directive, given as a prescription or instruction to a subordinate. It’s the terms of a covenant—the written, legal conditions that are binding in a contract. There’s nothing about the word that is “optional,” and yet the whole proposition is presented in terms of choice. *Choose whether you want to be blessed or cursed—if you want blessing, obey Yahweh’s commandments, but if you’d rather be cursed, then don’t.*

I realize that it doesn’t *sound* much like a choice, but it is. It’s like God is saying, *Don’t jump off the roof of the seventy-story building, if you want to live.* There’s a choice involved, as obvious as it might seem. Remarkably, most people *do* end up jumping. But they can’t logically blame God for the sidewalk that awaits them at the end of their journey. It was their choice to jump, and they were warned not to. Twice in the Torah (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) Yahweh informed Israel in detailed and graphic terms what their choices would result in—both what the blessed life on the “roof” would be like, and what the cursed “sidewalk” would feel like. Unlike my skyscraper parable, though, the curses for disobedience would be progressive and cumulative—if God’s discipline wasn’t heeded by His people, life would get worse, and then worse again, by stages. Things would move from misfortune, to tragedy, to catastrophe, to utter devastation. Nobody was going to be saying “So far, so good” as he whizzed past the twentieth floor. Yet Yahweh, in His mercy, promised to honor our repentance—our willingness to change our mind and our direction—at any point between our first infraction and our ultimate destruction. However, once we “hit the sidewalk” (so to speak), repentance is no longer an option.

Thus it’s clear that Yahweh *wants us* to observe the precepts of the Torah, and promises to bless us if we do. So it comes as something of a shock to discover passages like this: **“Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but You have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.”** (Psalm 40:6) Or this: **“With what shall I come before Yahweh, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”** (Micah 6:6-8) Or this: **“What to Me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says Yahweh; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required of you this trampling of My courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing**



them.” (Isaiah 1:11-14) The Torah was full of blood sacrifices, some mandatory, some voluntary. The olive oil, incense, new moon and Sabbath celebrations, and the seven appointed feasts were all things Yahweh had *commanded* Israel to observe. Has God changed His mind? Does He now want us *not* to do the things He previously told us to do? If all He really wanted us to do was **“Do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God,”** or as Isaiah would put it following the verses quoted above, **“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause,”** (Isaiah 1:16-17) then why did He tell us—*command* us—to do all those other things in the first place?

The answer lies in the fact that all of the rites of the Torah—those things the apostate Jews of the prophetic era were doing out of cold religious obligation, not out of love and reverence for Yahweh—were *symbolic*: signposts intended to point the way toward the Messiah. As I said, the human Messiah, Yahshua of Nazareth, came to offer us a choice—the same choice presented in the Torah’s precepts: trust Yahweh and receive life and blessing, or reject Him and bring the curse to your door. Did you notice, in the Deuteronomy 11 passage I quoted above, that “not obeying the commandments of Yahweh your God” was equated to “going after other gods that you have not known”? In short, disobedience to Yahweh’s commands is *idolatry*: the rebel has shown through his actions that he trusts some agent other than Yahweh to “save” him. It doesn’t matter if the “other god” is Ba’al, Zeus, Allah, or his own two hands. Like a hundred dollar bill, there are only two kinds, real and fake—and only the Real Thing has value.

It follows, then, that observing the Torah in spirit and truth is tantamount to receiving and owning Yahshua as your Savior. The Torah’s sacrifices were pictures of *His* sacrifice; the Torah’s rules were illustrative of what *His* mission would accomplish if our trust was placed in Yahweh. Or, they were pictures of our proper response (so murder—attacking someone’s *mortal* life—was a picture of preventing someone from having *eternal* life by purposefully leading him into idolatry and error). But it is at this point that we run into trouble again: if (for example) you slay and eat the Passover lamb (as required), he has sustained you, but the lamb no longer lives. If you eat the unleavened bread of life, if you pour out the drink offering as an oblation, if you kill the firstborn animal of your flock or herd—all things required by the Torah—then these things, all representative of the Messiah, are no longer available to you. Does this mean that Yahshua’s presence in our lives ceased when they laid His broken body in the tomb? Of course not. The Passover lamb was dead, but the flock thrived; the loaf of bread had been consumed, but the wheat field was still bursting with life; the wine had been poured out like the blood of the sacrifice, but the vineyard flourished. God blesses our trust with continuity of life, and this principle (like everything else in

the Torah) is fulfilled in the Messiah: God's Anointed died, and yet He lives—and through Him we live as well. Life does indeed go on.

This dichotomy between the slain Passover Lamb (the *real* one—Yahshua) and the subsequent life we enjoy as a result of His sacrifice (a pattern repeated a hundred different ways in scripture) is reflected in a parallel systemic “contradiction” we find scattered throughout the Tanach. On the one hand, we see passages predicting a “Suffering Servant,” prophesying how Yahshua of Nazareth would live and die in order that we who were dead might live. Perhaps the most striking example is Isaiah 53: **“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him [that is, we thought of Him—we judged or reckoned Him to have been] stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed.”** In other words, we made a horrible miscalculation: we (primarily the Jews) thought that God had forsaken and abandoned Yahshua, afflicting Him for some incomprehensible infraction. But in truth, He was only enduring this wrath so that *we* wouldn't have to—the only guilt here was ours. **“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Yahweh has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush Him; He has put Him to grief.”** (Isaiah 53:3-10) There are no fewer than twelve distinct prophecies in this passage that point unequivocally to the life and mission of Yahshua of Nazareth.

On the other hand, there are other prophecies that foresee a majestic, reigning King—Someone sitting on the throne of David ruling in righteousness forever with a scepter of iron—Someone who bears virtually no resemblance to the Suffering Servant described above. But they are the *same* Messiah. As if to make my point for me, Isaiah continues without taking a breath: **“...When His soul makes an offering for sin, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of Yahweh shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous one, My servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”** (Isaiah 53:10-12) The temporal rewards we see in these verses

(“a portion with the many”) and earthly authority (the “will of Yahweh prospering in His hand”) are fundamentally incompatible with having been despised and rejected by men, wounded, crushed, scourged, oppressed, afflicted, stricken, crushed, led to the slaughter, cut off from the land of the living, and interred in death in a rich man’s grave. No, the enjoyment of riches and power require one to be *alive*. Seeing one’s offspring, prolonging one’s days, and being satisfied all imply *life*. And causing people to be accounted as righteous, bearing the iniquities of others, and making intercession with God on behalf of us transgressors takes a *special kind* of life: the essential life only Yahweh has “within Himself.” The continuity of life that’s indicated through the rites of the Torah is thus brought to fruition in the continuity of life of Yahweh’s Anointed One.

Because they didn’t really understand that the two Messiahs were to be the *same* Messiah, the people of Yahshua’s day had a hard time seeing Him as the promised King. They understood and eagerly anticipated the reigning King, spoken of so often in the Tanach, but the Suffering Servant, who would be “cut off, but not for Himself”—i.e., not because of His own sins (see Daniel 9:27)—was harder to comprehend. It occurred to practically no one that the sacrifices prescribed in the Torah prophesied the sacrifice of a *Man* on their behalf—the Son of Man, the Son of God.

No one saw that these two personalities would have the same identity, though appearing in radically different forms. After all, most of the Old Covenant prophecies concerning the reigning Messiah actually placed *God* on the throne, making it a bit difficult to understand precisely what was meant without resorting to allegory. For example, we read, “**For Yahweh, the Most High, is to be feared, a great King over all the earth.... For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.**” (Psalm 47:2, 7-8) Or how about this? “**Give ear to my words, O Yahweh; consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to You do I pray.**” (Psalm 5:1-2) The “King,” the One to whom we rightly direct our praises and our prayers, is identified as Yahweh—Elohiym’s self-revealed name.

But there are glimmers of light that—if we’re willing to take them at face value—help us sort out Who is doing what. “**Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness beyond Your companions.**” (Psalm 45:6-7) The key here is the phrase “anointed You.” This *anointing* of a descendant of David to be the everlasting King, worthy to sit on the very throne of Yahweh, is what *defines* “Messiah”—it’s what the word means. The King is not only anointed *by* God, the King *is* God.

And consider this: “**Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh and**

against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst Their bonds apart and cast away Their cords from us.'" Yahweh and His Anointed (that is, Messiah) are seen here as distinct personalities but acting in one accord and with one mind. It's the same "father and son" relationship we looked at a few pages back. **"He who sits in the heavens laughs; Yahweh holds them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath, and terrify them in His fury, saying, 'As for Me, I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill.' I will tell of the decree: Yahweh said to Me, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'" Yahweh says He will make His Son (who we now know to be Yahshua) the King. But as we learned in the Psalm 47, *Yahweh* is the King. So Yahshua and Yahweh are *both* "the King," sharing the same identity, though not the same form. **"Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him."** (Psalm 2) Reverence for Yahweh and affection for Yahshua are in effect the same thing. Those who fancy themselves "kings" in this earth should heed the warning: take refuge in Yahshua, for there is no such thing as refuge *from* Yahweh.**

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When manufacturers wish to introduce new products into the marketplace, they can't just put them out on the store shelves and hope for the best. First, they have to persuade their retailers and affiliates to stock them. They advertise, trying to create interest in the marketplace. They create packaging and point-of-sale materials. And sometimes they arrange publicity events, sneak previews, or grand product-launch happenings. Yahweh too used a "multiple warhead" approach like this to prepare the world for His reigning Messiah. Through His prophets and apostles, Yahweh laid the groundwork, first with Israel, and then with the Ekklesia. By the time Yahshua of Nazareth began His ministry, the word was out—half-understood perhaps, but still, there was great anticipation that the Messiah was coming to rule the earth from Jerusalem. All the prophets had said so, and Daniel had even told them *when*—or so they thought. (Right Messiah, wrong manifestation, as it turned out.)

The reigning King, at the moment, rules in absentia. As He put it in some of His parables, He is "on a long journey." His faithful servants watchfully anticipate His return, but the King is not presently in our midst, not physically, anyway. In terms of my marketing metaphor above, the "Product" has not yet hit the stores. But the Manufacturer (Yahweh) provided a sneak preview, so to speak, allowing a few selected "media personalities" (in this case, three of Yahshua's disciples) to

witness and report the glory that would characterize the King when He finally returned. After reminding them of the cost of following Him in this world, Yahshua revealed why they should do so anyway: **“The Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done.”** There’s the “continuity of life” I was talking about: the Son of Man, the human Messiah, was going to appear in the “glory of His Father.” Only after the function of “seeking and saving that which was lost” had been fulfilled could God address the function of “ruling with a rod of iron” as the promised King. No judgment (the prerogative of the King) would occur until this paradigm shift took place. But rather than merely telling them about it, Yahshua promised to *show* them: **“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”** (Matthew 16:27-28)

That was pretty exciting stuff, though the disciples still had no idea what He meant. But **“after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.”** (Matthew 17:1-2) For one brief moment, He dropped the mask of humanity that defined His “Suffering Servant” role, and revealed a bit of the magnificence that was His by virtue of actually being the Son of God. In this glorified form, Yahshua was seen speaking with the souls of Moses and Elijah. Peter, who was apparently *never* struck speechless (even when he should have been) began blathering on about providing accommodations for the esteemed visitors. But he received a lesson we should all heed: *Shut up and pay attention.* **“He [Peter] was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’”** (Matthew 17:5-7) *Easy for You to say: You’re used to hearing the audible voice of God!* But Yahshua was perfectly correct, of course: when we rise and stand upright before Yahweh, cloaked in the white light robes of His imputed righteousness, we will have no reason to fear, for “perfect love casts out fear.”

This brief encounter with the glorified Christ was necessary, I believe, because Yahshua’s disciples were about to have their faith tested to the limit: their Master was about to be betrayed, crucified, and entombed, and He would rise from the dead under His own power on the third day. The fact that all of this had been symbolically prophesied in the Torah (in the celebration of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits) doesn’t mean that anybody actually understood what these things meant—yet. They wouldn’t “get it” until the risen Yahshua explained things to them—*after* His resurrection (see Luke 24:25, 44).

Why were Peter, James, and John chosen to see this? Perhaps the reason was the wide-eyed, unrestrained enthusiasm toward Yahshua and His Kingdom that they had in common. The most child-like of the twelve in their faith (as far as I can tell), they were chosen to lead the Messiah's flock into the post-ascension world. All three had made disastrous blunders—and had learned valuable lessons from them. But they had also soared to unprecedented heights of spiritual insight. Their love and trust in Yahshua was unreserved and passionate, if sometimes misapplied. There was nothing “lukewarm” about them. In short, I believe they represent those of us who, in the coming age, will also see Yahshua resplendent in glory. They are precursors of those among us who crave Yahshua's presence with every fiber of our being.

We note however, with some confusion, that the risen Messiah did not manifest Himself precisely as the “transfigured” Christ had. There was no glowing countenance or wardrobe of pure light, but rather Someone who looked like an ordinary human being, with flesh and bones. That's not to say He was “human” at this point, a corpse raised back to life as Lazarus had been. This “body” had properties never before seen among men. The risen Yahshua could cloak His identity among people who had known Him quite well as a Man—only to “turn on” their recognition whenever He wished. He could move from place to place instantaneously, and enter a locked room without bothering to open the door. Although He no longer needed nutrition to sustain life, He could eat food—When's the last time you saw a ghost do *that*? And—when He wished—He could manifest the scars of the torture He endured for our sakes. Clearly, this resurrection body was more unlike our mortal bodies than it was similar.

Paul explains how it works (sort of). **“But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.”** In other words, expect transformation from one form to another to be part of the process. **“For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory....”** This transformation, he says, involves an upgrade: we trade in an acorn for an oak tree, a caterpillar for a butterfly, a star for a supernova—or a mortal human body for one that cannot perish—*ever*.

**“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”** This is precisely what we saw in the case of Yahshua: the spiritual body with which He rose from the

dead was fundamentally different from the natural one in which He had been crucified, though their identity remained unchanged. **“If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.”** You want evolution? *That’s* evolution, the way Yahweh does it. **“The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”** Paul is comparing Adam’s race to Yahshua’s “race.” If we’re born from above (as required in John 3:3) we have acquired a whole new type of “DNA.” And why does it matter? **“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”** (I Corinthians 15:35-50)

I’ll skip over the *really* cool part, where Paul describes the event, yet future, in which not only the dead in Christ, but also an entire generation of *living* believers will be “raised in glory.” (As I said, it’s known as the “rapture,” the *harpazo*, in Greek: the “catching up.”) I’ll just cut to the chase: **“The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’”** (I Corinthians 15:52-55) In a roundabout way, we have discovered a stunning truth: the same kind of transformation that took place in Yahshua’s case will also take place in the lives of us who are counted among His redeemed: we too will someday be equipped with “spiritual bodies” like His—the ultimate “upgrade” from these vulnerable, sickly, sin-prone carcasses we have today. It’s not that I don’t appreciate the marvelous machine that is the human body. It is perhaps Yahweh’s finest piece of engineering—and He’s got a lot of stuff worth bragging about. But what’s in store for us who are in Yahshua’s family is infinitely better, *literally*. Our new bodies will never die.

But we were considering the type of “body” the reigning Messiah will inhabit. The question is, which one—the resurrection body or the transfigured body—represents the form Yahshua will assume when He returns to reign over His Millennial Kingdom? Based on the magnificent visions of Ezekiel, Daniel, and John, I’d be inclined to say the latter, the glowing, brilliant presence that Peter, James, and John saw on the mountaintop. But to insist on this would be to put limits on Yahweh’s volition. The truth is that, within the confines of His character, there are no limits to how Yahshua may manifest Himself. This final *Logos* permutation will, I suspect, reveal Yahweh’s true nature (Love, Light, and Life) more clearly than ever before. But remember, during Yahshua’s Millennial Kingdom, the world will still be populated by mortal men, the redeemed remnant

of Israel, the gentile “sheep” who put their lives on the line on their behalf during the Tribulation years (see Matthew 25:31-46), and their offspring. In other words, Yahweh can’t reveal Himself in His full glory without damaging some of His beloved children—not yet, anyway. So the reigning Messiah-King must still manifest Himself in a diminished form: His love for humanity requires it. That being said, I rather suspect that the transformed body in which Yahshua appeared during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension is the type of body we’ll inhabit as immortal individuals sharing the earth with the belatedly redeemed mortals of the Millennial Kingdom. Yahshua’s Millennial manifestation, on the other hand, need not be quite *that* restrained any more.

One thing’s for sure. There will be no question that He is God. His authority will be absolute, and His beneficence will know no bounds. This is how John saw Him in his apocalyptic vision: **“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The One sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems, and He has a name written that no one knows but Himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is The Word [*Logos*] of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”** (Revelation 19:11-16) This description is literally peppered with Old Testament allusions. One that jumps out at me is the description “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

In Daniel 2, the young prophet has been called before the most powerful man on the earth at the time—Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon—to interpret a dream. And Daniel complies, placing the credit for his wisdom where it’s due: upon Yahweh. Nebuchadnezzar’s response is to acknowledge an authority even greater than his own (which, humanly speaking, was absolute and unprecedented). It’s a remarkable scene: **“Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. The king answered and said to Daniel, ‘Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.’”** (Daniel 2:46-47) If the greatest, most powerful, monarch of his day—someone who *himself* had been rightfully called a “king of kings” (Daniel 2:37)—could honor Yahweh like this on the basis of merely having had his dream explained, how do you suppose the “kings” and “lords” who lead nations during the Millennial Kingdom will respond to the Ultimate King, the *Logos* of Yahweh? If they’re smart, they’ll take Nebuchadnezzar’s cue, for as King Yahshua, the reigning Messiah, Yahweh will no longer be restricting His involvement in the affairs of man to a spiritual presence indwelling His followers; He will no longer be cloaking His identity in the guise of human flesh. He will no longer sporadically appear in human form to



select individuals in need of guidance. He will no longer rely on dreams and visions to communicate His word; And He will no longer present Himself as smoke, fire, lightning, and thunder in order to get our attention.

No, when our Messiah returns, He will assume a form that is as God-like as a human witness can endure. After all, we will be only one step away from dwelling with Yahweh in His undiminished glory for eternity. I can't imagine what that will be like, but it's something Yahweh has been planning since before creation.

## Yahweh’s Self-Portrait

When Yahweh instructed His people, **“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth,”** (Exodus 20:4) the stated reason for the Commandment was that He was a “jealous” God; that is, because of His zeal, ardor, and passion for that which was His (i.e., *us*) we were not to give our devotion to some other god, whether one of our own manufacture or something else that *He’d* made. We were not to guess at what God might “look” like, and then make visual representations based on our conjectures. And we were certainly not to serve or bow down to our own conception of what God was.

No, the “image” Yahweh wanted us to see was the one *He Himself* had “carved.” But unlike the idol makers of Egypt, Yahweh didn’t fashion His self-portrait out of stone, wood, or metal (and His image in flesh, Yahshua, had a different job to do). Rather, His medium was more intangible and elusive, consisting of concepts and ideas, of thought and will. The image He fashioned wasn’t material, but metaphorical; it wasn’t corporeal, but conceptual. It consists of seven things (no surprise there) that are fundamental to our very existence—for He is the essence and first cause of that existence. Throughout scripture, Yahweh describes Himself in terms of these seven elemental symbols, all of which should be considered collectively as one comprehensive concept. (There’s our SeptiUnity theme again.) They’re essential to our understanding of who He is and what He’s like. These are not so much things Yahweh *does* (like creating, loving, judging, saving, and forgiving) but rather things He *is*—models drawn from our common human experience that reveal His nature and personality. Take away any one of the seven and our picture of Yahweh becomes unbalanced—incomplete and inadequate. Add to the list and it loses focus, becoming a reflection not of God’s revelation but of our own desires and preconceptions.

It’s remarkable, of course, that God should reveal Himself at all. If He is “big enough” to have created the physical universe, logic would tell us that we humans are insignificant specks within it. How could we possibly merit such close attention from such an awesome deity? But such a train of thought would reveal a fundamental misperception: that we could merely be one species of intelligent beings (intelligent enough to ponder such things) among millions that might have evolved on planets like ours throughout the universe. In other words, the theory (taught as gospel truth in every public school in the land) is that we are nothing

but a happy accident, and that if there were a God, He'd be rather surprised to find us here looking for Him.

My view is precisely the opposite of this: we humans are the *whole point* of creation. No, we don't *merit* God's attention. He's not involved here because we're so all-fired interesting in our own right. He's here in our lives because He *wants* to be, because He *planned* to be. Call me crazy, but I believe that Yahweh created the entire infrastructure of the universe in order to support the kind of life we mortals possess. And why would He do that? So He could interact with us as we exercise the free will He gave us: choosing our own destinies—and ideally, seizing the opportunity to joyfully reciprocate His love. The poets tell us that “Love makes the world go 'round.” I would submit to you that Love makes the universe exist!

If I'm right about any of this, then any attempt on our part to elevate ourselves above our brothers, any display of pride, any hint of self-importance, is the height of stupidity. From God's point of view (based on what He told us), it's like one paramecium in the petri dish trying to gain political ascendancy over his fellow microbes. *Pointless*. It's like a man trying to reach heaven by standing on a chair. *Not remotely enough*. And yet, if God had *not* told us what He's all about, we would have been left with no alternative but to do something very much like that. We would have been as clueless to the nature of our real surroundings as single-celled creatures under a microscope. We would have been left longing for something we couldn't even define, much less attain. The problem is that if we ignore what God had to say about His own nature we will be just as deluded, and just as frustrated, as if He had said nothing at all. Willful ignorance is still ignorance. What was it Yahweh said through His prophet Hosea? **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** (Hosea 4:6)

So Yahweh has painted for us a self-portrait, rendered in concepts that recur constantly in His written Word. The seven symbols He uses are like primary colors in His palette: He seldom utilizes them raw and unmixed, but more often employs them as ingredients or components in more complex expressions, blending them together into composite colors of inexpressible beauty. His “masterpiece” in this regard is Yahshua, the Messiah. But throughout creation, His “artwork” reveals the lengths to which God has gone for our benefit. If we know the Artist's mind and method, we can perceive that everything good we see before us is comprised of these seven pure “colors.” That is, everything truly good, one way or another, reveals God's personality or plan. He Himself is the source and substance of whatever life, peace, hope, love, beauty, and comfort we find in this world. Satan, meanwhile, does what he can to destroy or obfuscate what God has portrayed, like a vandal spraying gang signs on a pristine wall or

scribbling a moustache on the Mona Lisa. It's not terribly hard to identify his ugly handiwork, though: he's only got one color to play with—black.

But there's something going on here that might lead to an epiphany. There are two ways to bring color into your world—either (1) by applying pigments or (2) by projecting light. I hope this illustration won't be too technical to follow, but it seems to me to be a perfect picture of how Yahweh communicates with these seven “colors.” God *isn't* “painting” with pigments: paints, dyes, or inks—colorants that when applied to a white surface create visual impressions by absorbing various wavelengths of pure “white” light. An example of how this works would be a full-color magazine photograph. The picture is actually composed of tiny dots of color: in this system, they're cyan—i.e., bright blue—magenta, and yellow. When they're combined in full strength, they produce black, in theory, anyway. (The magazine will actually use black ink too, but mostly for “punch.” The color theory doesn't require it, but real-world printing technology does.) This process is called “subtractive color synthesis” because the more ink you lay onto the page, the less light is reflected back to the eye.

But as I said, that's not the system Yahweh is using. Color is transmitted differently when you're looking at a television or a computer screen. In “additive color synthesis,” dots or pixels of pure colored light are introduced into a black, lightless environment. (Does the phrase **“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light”** ring any bells? Genesis 1:3) Typically, these dots of light are red, blue, and green. In this system, the more color you add, the brighter the image becomes: you get “white” when all of the colors are presented in full strength and in perfect balance. In my admittedly overactive imagination, this is the system that symbolizes the way Yahweh reveals His character to us. The seven characteristics we're about to study are, as I said, the “primary colors” in His personal palette. They're beautiful all by themselves—rich and intense—but when we consider them all, blended together in perfect equilibrium, God's “true color” is revealed: a brilliant, blinding white light.

Thinking of it in these terms, it becomes apparent that Satan, our adversary, can't really add anything to the picture. Unlike Yahweh, he doesn't have a creative nature: the apex of Satan's “achievement” is to *subtract* something from the way we see the self-portrait God has painted for us. He can't actually “add” black spots to the picture; all he can do is try to prevent us from seeing the light that's there. And since he's not part of the image Yahweh has “projected on the screen,” the darkness Satan shows us is actually an *external* impediment: he's nothing but a big black bug buzzing around trying to distract us by blocking our view to God. (Don't you just *hate* that?) It's up to us to brush him away.

## LIGHT

### ❧ 1.3.1 ❧

#### *Perception*

I once took my family on a “field trip” to Baltimore’s “Inner Harbor.” There’s a great aquarium there, among other things. One of the exhibits showed photos of dozens of different kinds of eyes found among the creatures of the earth. They ranged from rudimentary light-sensitive “eye-spots,” to the compound eyes of insects, to the sophisticated eyes of mammals, fish, and reptiles, to the even more highly developed eyes of birds. I think the intended idea was to support the presuppositions of Darwinian evolutionists by showing how vision had developed in the animal kingdom in many different ways in response to a common environmental stimulus—light. It had precisely the opposite effect on me: I ended up praising God—not blind chance—for having invented such a fascinating variety of solutions to the same problem, each one perfectly suited to its own needs. Far from bolstering Darwin’s theory, to my mind the exhibit destroyed it—pointing out, for example, that an octopus’ eye is almost identical to a human’s, though they share no plausible common ancestor. The math just plain doesn’t add up. One miracle is, well, *miraculous*. Two identical miracles require an engineer.

My purpose here isn’t to trash evolutionary theory—science does a fine job of that without my help. Rather, I’d merely like to point out that sight and light are a symbiotic system—either one is pointless without the other. Call me naïve, but I believe Yahweh gave us eyes so that we might be able to observe something about His nature and character. That’s the key to understanding this first facet of Yahweh’s self-portrait: *Perception*. He doesn’t want to remain unknown to us, mysterious and vague. He wants to be seen, to be understood, to be known, to be perceived as the One who loves us. He wants to shed *light* upon our lives.

We’re introduced to the concept of light in the first few verses of Genesis. Actually, it should be noted that *all seven* of these elemental concepts are presented in the very first chapter of the Bible, if we’re willing to recognize this portrait of God for what it is. Remarkably, the same thing is also true of the last chapter in God’s Word—Revelation 22. All seven concepts are woven into that narrative as well. In this context, it’s hard to miss the significance of Yahshua’s statement: “**I am the Alpha and the Omega,**’ says the Lord God, **‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty...Fear not; I am the first and the last.’**” (Revelation 1:8, 17)

Let’s begin at the beginning, then: **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.”** (Genesis 1:1-4)

In modern terminology, this tells us that having made space-time and matter-energy as raw and unformed entities, God instituted the forces of physics that now govern our universe: gravity, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, and the strong nuclear force—four things that many scientists suspect have a common basis, though they haven't been able to prove it. (The irony here is deafening: the “common basis” is their Designer, Yahweh.) Technically, light began shortly after the big bang, when particles of matter were acted upon by gravitational forces, bringing them together in such vast quantities that nuclear fusion—the same engine that powers stars today—spontaneously erupted. As these first-generation stars burn through their nuclear fuel, they collapse, creating such immense pressures that the heavier elements of the universe are produced—the elements from which “the dust of the earth,” along with our mortal bodies, are made. So as far as I can tell, God “saw that the light was good” because it brought Him one step closer to realizing His purpose: to love and to be loved in return.

The really fascinating thing about the Genesis creation account is that although light is spoken of as part of the primeval events of the “first day,” the stars and the sun (along with the moon to reflect its light) were said to be the products of the *fourth* day of creation—after plant life! **“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. And God made [*asah*] the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.”** (Genesis 1:14-19) Scientists who don't know Yahweh presume that some guy putting words in His mouth made an atrocious blunder here: the sun was formed at the same time as the rest of the solar system—it's therefore impossible for plant life on earth to show up before the sun. I, however, happen to know that Yahweh doesn't make stupid mistakes. From a literal viewpoint, it would seem that the atmosphere (here called “the expanse”) became transparent enough for one to clearly discern the sun, moon, and stars only after photosynthetic plant life had “exhaled” megatons of free oxygen into the air.

But there's more to this. Though the word (*asah*) translated “made” *can* mean to fashion or form, its primary meaning is “to do, to accomplish.” If God had meant to say that He *created* the sun at this time, He would surely have used the verb *bara* (translated “created” in Genesis 1:1). The thrust of this passage, however, is that here on the “fourth day,” God invested the heavenly bodies with significance, not only as a means to mark the passing of the days and seasons, but also as signs to begin telling us of His grand plan. So the question begging to be answered is, *Why did God tell us that the sun showed up on the fourth day?*

First, we need to grasp the literal truth of: **“with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”** (II Peter 3:8; cf. Psalm 90:4) We will establish in a coming chapter that the story of God’s redemption of mankind is a seven-thousand-year saga, beginning with Adam’s fall into sin, and ending with the final separation of the saved from the lost. Here we learn that Yahweh has structured His plan in one-thousand-year increments. Second, we need to factor in something that was said in the very last chapter of the Old Covenant scriptures: **“But for you who revere My name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its [literally, *Her*] wings.”** (Malachi 4:2) Ask yourself: whose name are we to revere? Yahweh’s—*only* Yahweh’s. Through what agency does Yahweh heal us, whether spiritually or physically? That would be through His Holy Spirit, which explains why the feminine possessive pronoun was used—*Ruach* (Spirit) is a feminine noun in Hebrew. *She* is the “sun of righteousness” of which Malachi speaks. And when in Yahweh’s grand plan was this healing to be accomplished? When was the Spirit’s power to heal shown among men? It was when Yahshua the Messiah walked the earth as God clothed in flesh, empowered only by the Spirit indwelling Him (the *same* Spirit who empowers us today, if only we’ll let Her). One final question: when within Yahweh’s seven-thousand-year plan did this take place? Do the math: it was at the very end of the fourth millennium of fallen man—the *fourth day*.

Putting it all together then, we have learned that in God’s metaphor, the “sun” *did indeed* appear on the fourth day, just as the creation account had prophesied. Paul explained it like this: **“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** (II Corinthians 4:6) Yahshua, empowered by God’s Spirit, made the knowledge of His glory a living reality in the life of everyone who chooses to trust in Him. This is the “healing” that follows the “rising of the sun of righteousness,” the only possible cure for our fatal malady—sin.

Not all of us are healed, however, but only those who revere, honor, and respect the name of Yahweh. We alone “see the light” that God has provided for our salvation—the sun of righteousness. That is why Isaiah writes, **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”** (Isaiah 60:1-3) Isaiah was speaking to Israel, the nation through whom the Messiah would come into the world, the people upon whom Yahweh would arise in glory. The nations—the gentiles who lived in darkness—were naturally attracted to the light. How sad and ironic it is that Israel, as a whole, was not. But things change. Later in the same passage, Isaiah reports, **“The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but Yahweh will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no**

**more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for Yahweh will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.**" (Isaiah 60:19-20) There will come a day when the sun and moon—mere metaphors for God's true light—will give way to the awesome reality of His presence in our lives. Yahweh Himself will be our everlasting light.

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In the creation account of the fourth day, we saw that the function of the sun was **"to separate the light from the darkness."** This same goal had been stated earlier: **"And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night."** (Genesis 1:4-5) If we correlate this to the concept that Yahweh is our "everlasting light," we can begin to see God's purpose in presenting Himself this way. It's a picture of what it means to be "holy." As I've stated before (and will again, no doubt) holiness has nothing to do with good behavior *per se*. Rather, it means being set apart, and specifically, set apart *from* the world, *for* God's purpose. Yahweh Himself is said to be "holy," that is, separate and distinct from the universe He created for us. Isaiah experienced a vision in which the seraphim—a special class of angelic spirit messengers—described Yahweh: **"Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"** (Isaiah 6:3) So we who are looking for it can perceive His glory, even though Yahweh is actually separate, detached from, *beyond* our physical world.

As Yahweh is distinct from His creation, we are to be set apart from it as well, even though we're living within it. God told Israel through Moses, **"You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy."** (Leviticus 19:2) But He immediately explained this imprecation by recounting dozens of instructions He had previously given, seemingly gleaned at random from the Torah as it had been revealed at that point. God wasn't suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder; He was merely explaining what it meant to "be holy as Yahweh your God is holy." *Fourteen times* in this one chapter, the phrase **"I am Yahweh"** or **"I am Yahweh your God"** punctuates the instructions, as if to say "Do this *because* I am Yahweh your God: this is what it means to be set apart to Me." But a careful analysis of the list of "rules" used to define "holiness" here reveals that they're all symbolic of Yahweh's character: together they define goodness, justice, mercy, purity, loyalty, relationship, discernment, and love—all the attributes of God that can define us as "godly."

The problem is that a casual glance at this list may lead us to conclude that holiness *is* "being good," or "keeping the Torah." But good behavior (as defined by Leviticus 19) is only a *byproduct* of being set apart to Yahweh—it's not a method for attaining this state. The more we're set apart to Yahweh, the more our



character will parallel His. One example among many (from verse 18): you won't *become* godly by refraining from taking vengeance (as Gandhi heroically tried to do, for example) or by not bearing grudges. Rather, by separating yourself from the world and becoming set apart to Yahweh, you will find yourself naturally loving your neighbor, not harboring ill-will toward him, and relying instead on God to set right the evil we see about us, all in His own good time.

Isaiah explains how this “set-apartness,” resulting in Torah observance, relates to the separation of light from darkness: **“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”** (Isaiah 5:20) If we're walking in God's light, a path that is sweet and good, we won't leave bitterness, darkness, or evil in our wake. The world will find itself better off for our having been here because we've allowed Yahweh to light our path. All the world can do is redefine the terminology: black and white are shades of gray; bad is good and good is bad; men and women aren't so much equal as they are interchangeable. Islam is said to be a “religion of peace,” which might be a good thing if it were true. But to get to that definition, they have to redefine what “peace” is. In Muslim theology, it's a state in which everyone alive has been forced to surrender to Allah and his messenger, submitting and paying taxes to them. “Peace,” to the Islamic apologist, is merely the absence of one type of war—a *jihad* or holy war he is required by his religion to fight until the whole world either surrenders or perishes. In other words, “peace” to the serious Muslim is virtually the opposite of what a Jew would call *shalom*.

Who (or what) do we allow to influence us? Is it the darkness of the world, or the light of God's truth? If we choose to live in the dark, we're going to trip over obstacles, fall down, and hurt ourselves. If our roadmap through life is a lie, we're going to remain lost, no matter how far we go. As the Psalmist said, **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** (Psalm 119:105) Just as the sun is used by Yahweh as a metaphor for His light—a comprehensive force that provides life and warmth to the whole world—He enlists other kinds of light sources to instruct us as well. A lamp is an intimate, personal source of light that can keep us—as individuals—from stumbling in the darkness. But it's our choice as to whether or not to use it, and where to go once the path is illuminated. As Solomon says, **“The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out.”** (Proverbs 13:9) How could this happen? Is not the light of a lamp a metaphor for Yahweh's truth and guidance? Yes, but remember, a lamp requires fuel—in the culture of the Bible's time and place, lamps were fueled with olive oil, symbolic of Yahweh's Spirit. The metaphor is explained by Zechariah: **“Behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left. And I said to the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ ...Then he said to me, ‘This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by**

power, but by My Spirit, says Yahweh of hosts.” (Zechariah 4:2-6) The “lamp of the wicked” *cannot* remain lit, for He has no “oil.” That is, the Spirit of God does not abide within him.

This illuminates the imagery that’s so carefully crafted in God’s design for the Tabernacle furnishings: **“You shall make a lampstand of pure gold.... You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent of pure gold. And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.”** (Exodus 25:31, 39-40) The golden lampstand stood in the Holy Place, which one could not enter without first encountering the altar of sacrifice and the laver of cleansing. These point toward the atonement provided by the Messiah’s sacrifice and the subsequent purification of one’s works and walk (the washing of the hands and feet)—the removal of our sin. As you entered from the east, the lampstand stood against the south (or left) interior “wall” of the Tabernacle, focusing all of its light toward the north (on your right side). And what was there? What were the seven lamps designed to illuminate? It was the table of showbread, which symbolized Yahweh’s provision of our salvation. The twelve loaves of bread (six each representing Israel and the church, the focus of God’s sustenance) were unleavened (symbolizing sinlessness) and were to be sprinkled separately with frankincense (indicating purity through sacrifice). One had to encounter all of this before he could approach the heart of the Tabernacle—the Most Holy Place, where Yahweh’s *Shekinah* dwelt between the cherubim above the mercy seat. Standing in front of the curtain separating the two rooms was the altar of incense, symbolic of the offering of prayer to God.

The point I want to make is that one cannot petition God if he has not first seen the light and tasted of His mercy, and he cannot do this if he hasn’t first received God’s atonement and cleansing. Yahweh sacrifices, purifies, and provides life. We perceive, receive, and offer thanks. That’s the order of things.

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Another form of light Yahweh employs to teach us about His nature is lightning—swift, awesomely powerful discharges of static electricity in the atmosphere that light up the sky and speak in thunderous eloquence. Like a man’s children (see Psalm 127:4), lightning is described as the “arrows” of Yahweh: **“The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; Your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; Your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook.”** (Psalm 77:17-18) And as if to confirm the picture of a man’s arrow-children “speaking with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:5)

Yahshua described His own impending return as being as sudden and brilliant (and obvious) as a bolt of lightning: **“For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”** (Matthew 24:27)

Although it’s not fully understood, it appears that lightning is a phenomenon caused by the forcible separation of charged particles in the atmosphere. If this is true, it’s one more in a long string of natural examples demonstrating Yahweh’s signature characteristic: that of being set apart—in common parlance, “holiness.” Think of it this way: within a thundercloud (the world), positively charged particles (Yahweh and His children) are constantly being separated from negatively charged particles (Satan’s kingdom). That’s a picture of the holiness, the “set-apartness,” to which we’re being called. The greater the imbalance, the more potential there is for a bolt of lightning to “announce” that this imbalance, this separation, has taken place. Maybe I’m extrapolating (or hallucinating), but it seems to me that every lightning strike is therefore a picture of the coming day when the dichotomy between good and evil, between Yahweh’s kingdom and our adversary’s, will be shown for what it is—with all of the appropriate sound and fury that goes with it. What we see in today’s world, a growing imbalance between positive and negative, between good and evil, will someday (*soon*, in point of fact) explode in a paroxysm of white-hot total separation. If I’m right about any of this, the fact that the world experiences something on the order of sixteen million lightning storms per year (the number of actual *strikes* is in the neighborhood of a thousand times a second, worldwide—upwards of *300 billion* strikes) should tell us something about Yahweh’s willingness to warn us of the coming spiritual storm far beyond what is reasonable or “fair.”

Lightning does more than announce Yahweh’s holiness, however. It also protects us. Here’s how: the intense heat of a lightning strike—as much as three or four times the temperature of the surface of the sun—doesn’t leave the surrounding air unaffected. Rather, it is heated by the electrical discharge to about 50,000 degrees F. The expansion of this suddenly heated air is heard as thunder. But beyond making rumbly noises and shaking windows, this intense burst of energy is precisely what’s needed to produce ozone, the substance in the stratosphere that shields us from 93% to 99% of the ultraviolet radiation that bombards the earth. A healthy ozone layer is essential for life as we know it. Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) is an allotrope of oxygen that’s formed when a free oxygen atom (O) is bonded to a stable O<sub>2</sub> molecule. But ozone is a relatively unstable molecule—it breaks down naturally over time, and in recent decades, the breakdown rate has been accelerated somewhat by pollutants we’ve introduced into the atmosphere. It’s a little known fact that even if the ozone layer were to magically disappear overnight, it would be replaced through a normal level thunderstorm activity—*lightning strikes*—in four or five years. But here’s the scary part: during the last half of the coming seven-year Tribulation, a worldwide drought is prophesied.

Because of the high degree of correlation between thunderstorms and rainfall, it is likely that by the end of the Tribulation, the earth's protective ozone shield will be in tatters. No rain usually means no lightning, which means no replenishment of the ozone layer, which means don't go outdoors without your SPF-777 sun block on. Bottom line: the light God provides when demonstrating His holiness is ultimately what protects us from harm.

So for my money, it's more than mere coincidence that Yahweh made lightning a big part of His spectacular *Shekinah* manifestation at Mount Sinai. **"On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because Yahweh had descended on it in fire."** (Exodus 19:16-18) Here lightning and fire are seen in the same context as sources of light. Whereas lightning (Hebrew: *baraq*) emphasized the flash of light, and is thus often used metaphorically to indicate sharp, swift weapons, such as glittering arrows (invariably in Yahweh's hand), fire (*esh*) indicates combustion, flame, or the light of a torch.

There is at least one instance, however, where lightning is apparently described as *esh*: **"Then Yahweh said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt.' Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and Yahweh sent thunder and hail, and fire (*esh*) ran down to the earth. And Yahweh rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire (*esh*) flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation."** (Exodus 9:22-24) It is possible, however, that the "hail" here was not the icy variety, but a meteor shower or volcanic fallout. It's hard to be dogmatic, nor does it really matter (or at least it didn't to the hapless Egyptians).

Fire, of course, was the most common source of manufactured light known to men of this age. The light of the "burning bush" through which Moses was introduced to Yahweh is described with three different words: (1) *esh*, the ordinary word for fire; (2) *lehabah*, a flame or blaze (also used to describe the business end of a weapon or a flash of lightning); and (3) *ba'ah*, a verb meaning to burn, consume, or be kindled. Thus we aren't surprised to see the "pillar of cloud and fire" that led the Israelites in the wilderness described as a form of combustion with which they were familiar: **"And Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud [*anan*: either water vapor or smoke] to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire [*esh*] to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."** (Exodus 13:21-22) The purpose, as always, was to enable God's people to perceive the path He had set before them. (The *shape* of the phenomenon—a

pillar or column—is significant, but I’d like to defer our discussion of that factor to the final section of this chapter.) It’s clear that in this case, the light Yahweh provided was intended to be an agent of guidance. Even in the darkest hour, God wants us to be able to see what we’re doing, where we’re going, and Who it is that’s leading us.

But as we noted in Malachi 4:2 above, the light of guidance isn’t for everyone—it’s only for Yahweh’s children. The story of the Red Sea adventure is telling: **“Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.”** (Exodus 14:19-20) To this day this same counterintuitive phenomenon holds true: though the light of God’s word is readily available to the whole world, only those who *choose* to see it actually benefit. Everyone else stumbles about in the “cloud and the darkness” of spiritual ignorance. Once again, we see the principle of holiness here: the light is separated—set-apart—from the darkness, and only those who choose to walk in the light can perceive where they really are. As David wrote, **“With You is the fountain of life; in Your light do we see light.”** (Psalm 36:9)

On a related note, we see that as the light of Yahweh guides us, so does His law. In other words, the Torah’s precepts, the instructions of Yahweh, are another permutation of the light He provides. Solomon explains: **“The commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.”** (Proverbs 6:23) Isaiah too sees the parallel: **“Many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths....’ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of Yahweh.”** (Isaiah 2:3-5) Christians (and Jews) who willfully ignore the lessons of the Torah are walking about with their eyes shut, wondering why they keep tripping over things that lurk in the dark. We need to open our eyes: that which was entrusted to Israel—the Torah—is the very light of Yahweh.

Perhaps the most enigmatic reference to God’s light is part of the wardrobe of the High Priest: the *urim*, along with its companion, the *thummim*. We don’t really know what these were, but they were to be placed “in the breastplate (or ephod) of judgment...over Aaron’s heart.” (Exodus 28:30) It’s the *meanings* of these two words that are significant: *thummim* means “perfections,” and *urim* is the plural form of the ordinary Hebrew word for “light”—*owr*: it means “lights.” These were somehow to be consulted (though precisely how is a matter lost to us) in cases where specific instructions were not provided by the Torah. Interestingly, we aren’t told of a single instance in which a solution was provided by this means. But I’m willing to take a guess at what Yahweh might have meant—in terms germane to us today. “Lights” and “perfections” seem to be a reference to taking

the “whole counsel of God”—considering what the totality of scripture had to say about a matter (that’s the *perfections* part)—and then applying insight provided by the Holy Spirit (that’s the *lights* component) to come to a decision. You don’t have to be the High Priest of Israel to find value in such an approach.

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God’s light is *personified* in the Messiah. It is no coincidence that kings and priests were *anointed* (which is what the title “Messiah” means) with olive oil—both the consistent scriptural metaphor for the Set-Apart Spirit of Yahweh, and the fuel that provided light in every home. So the prophet writes: **“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.”** (Isaiah 9:2) Yahshua was the fulfillment of this prophecy. **“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** (John 1:4-5)

It’s one thing, of course, to quote vague prophecies and proclaim equally nonspecific fulfillments. But Yahweh’s requirements also had blatantly literal ramifications. God said, **“I am Yahweh; I have called You [i.e., Yahshua, the Messiah] in righteousness; I will take You by the hand and keep You; I will give You as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”** (Isaiah 42:6-7) And Yahshua responded to the prophecy. First He said, **“We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** (John 9:4-5) But He didn’t stop there. Without further ado, He proceeded to cure the lifelong blindness of a man about whom His disciples had been enquiring. (Yahshua spat on the ground, made some mud, and rubbed it in the guy’s eyeballs, as if to say, “Pay attention, guys. The miracle you’re about to see is no coincidence: I meant to do it.”)

Healing the man’s eyes was only half the battle, though. The *real* miracle was releasing him from the prison of *spiritual* darkness. This act would make the man “holy.” That is, it would set him apart *to* Yahweh, and set him apart *from* the religious elite. These Pharisees were so put out that Yahshua had healed the man on the Sabbath (in violation of their traditions—*gasp!*), they couldn’t comprehend the obvious fact that only Yahweh Himself could give sight to the blind; only God could provide light within a man’s soul. In the end, it was the Pharisees who were proved to be blind, even though they claimed to have 20-20 spiritual vision. As Yahshua told the formerly blind man, **“For judgment [*krima*, a legal decision or verdict that separates the innocent from the guilty] I came into this world, that those**

**who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”** (John 9:39) There are none quite so blind as those who refuse to see.

Yahshua had previously explained this “judgment”—this function of separating right from wrong—that light performs: **“This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”** (John 3:19-21) Every time we turn around, it seems, light is being employed in scripture to demonstrate the concept of division, of separation, of being set apart, of being *holy*. In this case, what’s being brought to light is our works, or more properly, how we honestly feel about them. As long as our consciences are functioning, we naturally try to keep our evil deeds hidden, out of the light. And conversely, if our deeds are pure and good, we don’t mind letting them be displayed in the open light of day. The problem is, the time is fast approaching when people whose consciences no longer function will be calling the shots: **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.”** (I Timothy 4:1-2) Their natural sense of right and wrong has become calloused and insensitive: they have become blind to the truth.

What’s the proper response to these proponents of compromise, shades-of-gray morality, and spiritual apostasy? It’s to shine the light of God’s truth on them: **“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.”** (Ephesians 5:11-14) The point here is *not* to force the heathen to behave themselves so religious people can lead nice, lukewarm suburban lives without being confronted with the dark, ugly underbelly of sinful society. No, we should expose sin, corruption, and evil for what they are because there are people out there who are in danger of becoming convinced that sin is normal—and thus obligatory. It is neither. But it’s hard to turn toward the light if you can’t see it. Sometimes it seems as if “everybody’s doing it,” though this is never really the case. The exercise of free will is our birthright. Though it may be costly to choose to walk God’s path, we always have that choice. We can’t, however, make choices on behalf of others. Following Yahweh (or not) is an individual decision. Your country or culture can’t select your eternal destiny for you, whether good or bad. Nor can we force our convictions on those around us. We are never told to *reform* Babylon; we’re only told—time after time—to flee from it.

John points out that self-deception is no substitute for truth: merely *saying* you’re walking in the light doesn’t prove you are. **“This is the message we have heard**

from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (I John 1:5-7) So how are we to know? What criteria has Yahweh given us to measure the success of our walk? Is it piety? Penance? Prosperity? Is it impeccable orthodoxy, a spotless reputation, a theological vocabulary free of pagan influence, the respect of one’s peers? No. The litmus test is love. **“Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”** (I John 2:9-11)

This, of course, begs the question: how does God define love for one’s brother? It used to be obvious what love meant. It was personal involvement in somebody’s life that left him or her somehow better off than it was before. But these days, prevalent political theory has conspired to muddy the waters a bit. It is suggested in some circles that “love” can (and should) be packaged and administered as a byproduct of government’s power. Are people hungry? Then people who *aren’t* should be taxed to raise money to feed them. Do some people hold unconventional moral viewpoints? Then everyone else should be forced—by law—to tolerate, or even *support*, their unnatural proclivities. Has health care grown too expensive for most people to afford? Then the burden of caring for the ill must be borne by the healthy (or at least the wealthy), whether they want to or not. Has a minority (whether of race, gender, cultural heritage, or spiritual opinion) been unfairly discriminated against by the majority sometime in the past? (This, by the way, is the very *definition* of the democratic process.) Then reparations must be made. Does someone have more than I do? Then what they have must be taken away from them and given to me! All wealth must be redistributed—spread evenly between those who are productive and industrious (or merely blessed) and those who are not.

Is any of this really love? No. Even if some of these socialist/progressive goals do end up helping some of the people they were intended to assist (a proposition that is by no means guaranteed), the fact that others were *forced* to fund the solutions negates the concept of love. A loving act is, by definition, some good thing we choose to do, not something we’re compelled to do. If your idea of “loving your neighbor” is to steal from me and give the booty to him, then your view is incorrect. After all, when Yahweh said, “You shall not steal,” He didn’t go on to say, *...unless you plan to give the plunder away*. “Social justice” is anything but just. How is it *supposed* to work? A couple of decades back, my wife and I adopted nine children (out of our eleven). Four of these nine were physically handicapped, and all of them were disadvantaged in some way. The financial



burden was heavy, but Yahweh provided all our needs. Would this have been possible today? God's arm is not shortened, of course, but let's just say that what took constant providence back then would have required nothing short of an ongoing miracle today. My point is that as government seizes more and more power and resources, the average individual's ability to tangibly show his love is curtailed. You can't choose to give someone a thousand dollars if all you've got left is a hundred.

And yet, if someone expresses his opinion that the government should not take his hard-earned money—even if he would rather spend it, like the “good Samaritan,” in alleviating the suffering he *personally* sees about him—he is accused of being “greedy.” Who is walking in darkness here, and who's in the light? None of us gets it totally right, of course, but Yahweh knows where our allegiances rest; He knows who we trust: **“Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, Yahweh will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of Yahweh because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon His vindication.”** (Micah 7:8-9) Or as David put it, **“Commit your way to Yahweh; trust in Him, and He will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.”** (Psalm 37:5-6) There it is again: Yahweh is presented as light—as righteousness personified, vindication brought to fruition.

Nowhere is the concept of “God as light” seen in more splendor than in the Book of Revelation. The operative word in Greek is the adjective *leukos*, usually translated “white,” though it's clear that something far more spectacular is meant: *light*—bright, radiant, gleaming, brilliant, the most dazzling white one can imagine. *Leukos* is used in Revelation to describe the head and hair of the glorified Son of God; the “white stone” of judicial vindication given to the overcomers of the ekklesia; the garments of light that clothe the redeemed; the white horse upon which the Messiah triumphantly proceeds (not to mention the horses the saints will ride as we accompany Him); and finally, the great throne of light from which the final judgment is pronounced. But perhaps the most stunning revelation of Yahweh as light in our future experience is this: **“And the city [New Jerusalem] has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.”** (Revelation 20:23-25)

So what can I conclude about this first magnificent aspect of Yahweh's self-portrait? I can only reiterate the words with which Yahweh Himself instructed Moses and Aaron to bless Israel: **“Yahweh bless you and keep you; Yahweh make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; Yahweh lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.”** (Numbers 6:24-26) May we all walk in Yahweh's light.

## THE WORD

### ❧ 1.3.2 ❧

#### *Knowledge & Communication*

If we consider the vast dichotomy of scale, significance, or strength between our Creator and ourselves, it is remarkable—even astonishing—that He might want to communicate with us. Do elephants seek to converse with dust mites? Do humans take a personal interest in what individual bacteria might have to say? Of course not. And yet God, who is infinitely bigger than we are, has from the very beginning sought to communicate with man—as *individuals*—going so far as to equip us with the ability—unique in His creation—to “host” His eternal Spirit within ourselves. As amazing as it is, it appears (if our eyes are open) that God’s whole purpose in creating us was to share the most intimate sort of fellowship with us. He created us with the ability to think abstractly and communicate complex concepts verbally (also gifts unique to man, apparently) so that we might not only react to what He was doing, but also exchange dialog with Him.

So (as we saw in the previous chapter) Yahweh has made Himself known to those of us who want to know Him—who *choose* to know Him. To that end, He has manifested Himself in a variety of diminished forms, collectively called “the Word,” that reveal who He is and what He’s like in terms of personal relationship, personal contact. John told us that **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:1-5, 14)

The word translated “Word” here is the Greek noun *logos*. The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* lists ten definitions for *logos*, all of which have some bearing on Yahweh’s chosen method for revealing Himself to us: “1. Statement (that which is said); 2. Speech (the act of speaking); 3. Gospel (the content of what is preached about Christ); 4. Treatise (a systematic treatment of a subject); 5. Word (Message—a title for Christ); 6. Account (a record of assets and liabilities); 7. Reason (a cause for something); 8. Event (a matter or thing); 9. Appearance (what seems to be); and 10. Accusation (a legal charge of wrongdoing).” It seems that if you wanted to pick a word that communicated the sum total of God’s personal involvement in the collective life of our race, you couldn’t have chosen a better one than *logos*: Yahweh talks to us; He actively communicates. His “subject matter” is usually the Messiah, for Yahshua is the primary interface between us and His own undiminished existence. The

systematic and comprehensive revelation of Yahshua's mission explains how our spiritual liabilities can be reconciled with Yahweh's holy assets. This is the reason, the cause, for the singular climactic historical event recorded in scripture—His appearance. The purpose of that appearance was to provide atonement—covering—for the sins with which we were rightly accused. *All of that* is summarized in the concept of the *logos*.

*Logos* appears 330 times in the Greek New Testament. Most of these instances refer to statements that were made—often either uttered by Yahshua personally or quoted from the Old Covenant scriptures, statements that reveal the mind of God. But the exceptions can provide new insight into the depth of the *logos* concept. For example, **“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.”** (Matthew 18:23) The word translated “accounts” is actually *logos*. The idea is that of communicating one's worthiness or unworthiness by examining the evidence: the *logos* is a statement of what you say and do, and why. (And of course, it's also a statement of what *Yahweh* has said and done, and why.) In a similar vein, the Jewish elders demanded to know by what authority Yahshua did and taught as He did ('cause it certainly wasn't by *theirs*). **“Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.”** (Matthew 21:24) The word translated “question” is *logos*. Yahshua was demanding that they account for their unbelief—to identify and communicate the reason for their irrational antagonism.

In Mark 4, Yahshua used the word *logos* seven times in the “parable of the sower” to explain what was meant by the seed that was being broadcast. **“The sower sows the word.”** Here, the word is obviously the content of the Good News, the Message of God's redemption, personified in Yahshua the Messiah. It's not so much what Yahshua said, though that's part of it; it's the sum total of His life and mission, from sacrifice, to the fulfillment of God's promise of redemption, to glorification—including its effect on those of us who choose to embrace it: reconciliation with Yahweh leading to eternal life in Him. It is this comprehensive view of *logos* that Yahshua had in mind when He said, **“Truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death.”** (John 8:51)

There is a sobering application of this principle in Acts 8. A man named Simon, formerly a sorcerer, was confronted with the message of Christ and “got religion.” **“Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.”** (Acts 8:13) But then Simon offered to *pay* for the power of God so he could bestow the Holy Spirit on people. So Peter rebuked him, declaring, **“You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.”**

(Acts 8:21-22) The word translated “matter” here is *logos*. Peter was saying that although Simon intellectually believed the good news of the kingdom of God, the Word had not (as yet) had any effect on his life: in short, he was *not* saved, redeemed, or reconciled to Yahweh. But how could this be? The record plainly says that he *believed*. He had even been baptized. The word translated “believe” is *pisteuo*, and it basically means: to think something to be true, to be persuaded of its veracity—even to place one’s confidence in it. But it doesn’t necessarily imply anything beyond mere acknowledgment that a thing is factual or that an event has actually occurred. As James put it, **“But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe [*pisteuo*] that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe [*pisteuo*]*—and shudder!*”** (James 2:18-19) Belief—assent to the facts—is a good, even essential, start. But to be reconciled to Yahweh, we must embrace His *Word*, His *logos*. It’s not enough to believe that God exists, or even that His Son died on Calvary to pay for our sins. Anybody with a firm grasp on reality can discover these things. We must move beyond belief to acceptance, to reliance. As we read above in John 8:51, we must *keep* His Word. “Keep” is *tereo*: to attend carefully; to keep in view, take care of or guard; to obey or observe; to keep on—i.e., to continue—in a state of being. If we do this, we will never see death.

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The “Word” isn’t just a Renewed Covenant concept. A Hebrew word with virtually the same meaning as the Greek *logos* is ubiquitous in the Tanach, appearing 1,439 times. *Dabar* is a statement, saying, word, speech, or utterance; the act of speaking; an account, treatise, record, or accusation; a happening or event; an act, business, or occupation. If we recognize *dabar* as presenting the same concept as *logos*, certain passages jump out and bite us: **“Yahweh spoke [*dabar*] to Moses, saying, ‘Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting.’ And Moses did as Yahweh commanded him, and the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And Moses said to the congregation, ‘This is the thing [*dabar*] that Yahweh has commanded to be done.’”** (Leviticus 8:1-5) There are no fewer than *ten* Messianic symbols in these few short verses (all of which we’ll cover eventually)—and they’re all collectively described with a single designation: *dabar*.

And here’s a concept guaranteed to turn a rabbi’s hair white: **“Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Write these words [*dabar*], for in accordance with these words [*dabar*] I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with Yahweh forty days and**

**forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words [dabar] of the covenant, the Ten Commandments [dabar].”** (Exodus 34:27-28) Follow the train of thought here: both the Law and the vehicle of the Covenant were *dabar*—God’s “Word.” But *dabar* is equivalent to *logos*. The *Logos*, the One who was with God and who was God, the One who “was made flesh and dwelled among us,” was Yahshua the Messiah. Therefore, the Torah, the commandments, the oracles, precepts, and covenants of Yahweh are all, in effect, *Christ Himself!*

But wait; it gets better. **“Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, ‘These are the things [dabar] that Yahweh has commanded you to do. Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.’”** (Exodus 35:1-3) Yahshua the Messiah—the *Dabar/Logos/Word*—is our Sabbath rest. He personifies the conclusion of Yahweh’s plan of redemption. We’ll cover the whole work/rest symbol in detail later, but for now, let’s just tie a few seemingly random facts together:

(1) Creation was described as six days of God’s work followed by one day of rest, establishing what would be scripture’s most prevalent numerical pattern—six-plus-one, adding up to seven. The seven-day week, six days of work followed by the Sabbath day of rest, was instituted to echo God’s creation.

(2) Yahweh is inordinately serious about “keeping” the Sabbath, promising death to anyone who works on the “day of rest.” (Preview: that warning about kindling a fire is a metaphor: fire is symbolic of judgment. There will be no judgment on the ultimate Sabbath day for those who rest in Yahweh.)

(3) II Peter 3:8 equates one day in God’s mind to one thousand years in our experience, meaning (if I’m seeing this correctly) that His plan of redemption, from the fall of Adam to the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom at the Great White Throne judgment, will span exactly seven thousand years. This means that the Millennial reign of Yahshua (that is, the final thousand-year stage of Yahweh’s seven-thousand-year plan) is the *actual* “day of rest” of which the weekly Sabbath is a prophetic symbol. (This “Millennium” is right around the corner, by the way.)

(4) Yahshua defined “doing the works of God” as “believing in Him whom He has sent” (see John 6:28-29)—in other words, *Himself*. To “believe” here is our old friend *pisteuo*—the “work” we are required to do consists merely of acknowledging the fact that Yahshua is God incarnate, and that He paid the penalty for our sins. Our “work” is for us to recognize that this is true, and to place our confidence in the fact. Our actual salvation, redemption, reconciliation, and sanctification, however, are *not our job*—they’re Yahweh’s work. It is *He*

who creates new life within us. We have only to let Him do His work and embrace (*tereo*) the result.

(5) The “rest from our labors” spoken of so eloquently in the observance of the Sabbath, then, is nothing more or less than the state of having allowed Yahweh to redeem us. Our simple *pisteuo*-belief is all we can achieve on our own. The “rest” (the remainder *and* the repose) will be brought to fruition by the atoning work of Christ, if we will only allow Him to do so in our lives. The result will be that we are at last able to “keep” (*tereo*: carefully attend, keep in view, guard, observe, and continue in) His Word.

Although this state of rest is a *fait accompli* to believers in this life, don’t ignore the eschatological ramifications of the Sabbath. The Kingdom age is approaching like a freight train. People who refuse to “do the work of God” (i.e., assent to the fact of His love and provision, not to mention His existence) in the present age will find themselves prohibited from doing it in the next, for we may not “work” on the Sabbath. Yahshua—who *is* our Sabbath rest, personified—has already accomplished everything He’s going to. Remember, the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in Her wings on the *fourth* day. It is finished.

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Another Hebrew word that demonstrates Yahweh’s preoccupation with communication is the verb *’amar*. It means to say, speak, utter, declare, tell, ask, answer, or promise. It’s used incessantly, over five thousand times in the Old Covenant, and a goodly percentage of those instances describe Yahweh speaking to someone, somebody reporting what He had said, or someone speaking to Yahweh. Speech—the capacity for communication—is really important to Yahweh. Man is apparently the only species blessed with the ability to communicate abstract concepts verbally, but if we look around us, we see that the entire biosphere is littered with examples of “speech.” And think beyond audible signals like the howling of a wolf or the song of a whale. I’m talking about the myriad of ways our Creator has devised for His creatures to communicate with each other and with their surroundings. Bats and dolphins employ sonar to navigate and locate food. Migratory animals “listen” and respond to the magnetic field of the earth. A spider “hears” vibrations in her web. Insects emit pheromones that impart information to their peers. Mating rituals employ “languages” that are as varied and exclusive as the animals speaking them.

I think Yahweh is trying to tell us through His creation that if we hope to enjoy anything beyond the most rudimentary and temporary existence, we must learn to listen to what He’s telling us. In our first look at Yahweh’s self-portrait,

we were instructed to use our eyes to perceive the light of God’s persona. Here, we’re being admonished to open our ears to what He has to say. The Hebrew word *shema* is used to express this thought. Again, it appears every time you turn around—1,159 occurrences in the Old Covenant scriptures. Perhaps the most well known instance is the viscerally significant passage actually *referred to* as “*the shema*” by Orthodox Jews (because it begins with the word): **“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”** (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) *Shema* means to hear, to listen, or to receive news—with attention, interest, and understanding. It means to obey, to consent, to give heed, and to agree. There’s nothing optional about the word: it doesn’t mean to merely consider something, to think it over, or “take it under advisement.” It doesn’t allow you to ignore the message or treat it as background noise. We must not listen to God’s Word the same way we “listen” to the music piped into our dentist’s office.

*Shema* invariably carries with it a warning, admonition, or encouragement. A few verses from Isaiah will demonstrate. First, the bad news for those who refuse to hear God’s word: **“Now, go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever. For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear [*shema*] the instruction of Yahweh.”** (Isaiah 30:8-9) **“I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke [*dabar*], you did not listen [*shema*], but you did what was evil in My eyes and chose what I did not delight in.”** (Isaiah 65:12) The Hebrew *dabar*, you’ll recall, is equivalent to the Greek *logos*. Yahweh is saying, for all intents and purposes, that disaster looms for those who refuse to attentively heed His Messiah—the Word made flesh. On the other hand, there’s good news for those who are receptive to Him: **“Listen [*shema*] to Me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation [*yâshuw`ah*, the Messiah’s name] to all generations.”** (Isaiah 51:7-8)

It’s clear, then, that hearing Yahweh—paying heed to what He’s telling us in His Word and through His Spirit—is to be our pursuit. Good things await those who do, and destruction is decreed for those who do not. But our *ability* to hear God is dependent upon our willingness to do so. Every single one of the seven letters to the seven called-out assemblies of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3 included the phrase, **“He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches [*ekklesia*—the called-out].”** (e.g. Revelation 3:6) This implies that there are some—even within the *ekklesia*, who *don’t* have an ear to hear—they have lost (or abandoned) the ability to discern what Yahweh is telling them.

How could this be? It is instructive to read the instructions given to Isaiah: **“And I heard the voice of my Lord [Hebrew: *adonay*—probably Yahweh (vs. 5) but maybe one of the seraphim (vs. 6)] saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’ And He said, ‘Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”** (Isaiah 6:8-10) Israel’s unwillingness to hear and heed Yahweh’s Word would be met with a disability imposed upon them: they would henceforth be unable to discern God’s truth. And this fate is not reserved for Israel alone; it could happen to *anyone* who refuses to listen to Yahweh.

Paul’s letter to the Romans makes it clear that this spiritual blindness and deafness is a self-imposed malady: the reason evil men don’t hear is that they don’t *want* to hear—and they don’t want *you* to hear, either. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”** The truth isn’t intrinsically hidden or hard to understand. Rather, men have purposely hidden it. **“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”** All one has to do to perceive the glory of God is to look at His creation. Atheism often seems to be a religion for people with bad math skills—who can’t put two and two together. But nobody is *that* stupid: this is the *purposeful* repression of the knowledge of God, perpetrated in the pursuit of unrighteousness. **“For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles....”** The worship of birds and animals isn’t terribly popular any more (except among environmentalists). These days such primitive paganism has been swept aside and replaced with the more insidious worship of mortal man—an idol every bit as ridiculous. The sad fact is, the vast majority of people today venerate not Yahweh, but false gods, whether overt (like Allah) or covert—counterfeit Christs or cynical substitutes. And don’t kid yourself. Atheistic secular humanism—the worship of man—is a religion in the worst sense of the word, aggressively proselytizing among the world’s apathetic, unaffiliated, and ignorant masses, “suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.”

So we see that as Yahweh reserves the right to withhold sight from those who refuse to see, He’s willing to stop the ears of men who rebel against the Word of truth. Yes, God is very serious about letting us make our own choices. But if we slam the door in His face often enough, He will simply lock it, leaving us to the fate we ourselves have chosen. **“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God**



**gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”** I don’t want to sound like an alarmist, but these evil things characterize our world today as never before. Worse, they are not the result of ignorance or apathy, but the consequence of choice. **“Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”** (Romans 1:18-23, 28-32) Yahweh makes a distinction between those who merely live in error and those who actively promote it. It’s one thing to choose darkness for yourself; it’s quite another to hide the light from others. Suicide is stupid, but at least it’s your choice; murder, on the other hand, is a crime punishable by death.

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Communication is a two-way street: we must not only listen to what Yahweh has to say (and He speaks to us in many different ways), but also speak to Him—respond, answer, converse, even petition. And because nothing is hidden from Him, speaking *about* Yahweh is pretty much the same thing as speaking *to* Him: **“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what He has done for my soul. I cried to Him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, Yahweh would not have listened. But truly God has listened; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer or removed His steadfast love from me!”** (Psalm 66:16-20) It’s sobering, of course, to realize that Yahweh pointedly ignores the prayers of those who “cherish iniquity in their hearts.” That doesn’t mean we must be perfect in order for God to hear us, but it does mean that our love must be for Him, not for our sin, if we wish to be heard. “Oh God, help me rob this bank” is a prayer that doesn’t have a prayer.

And here’s a concept that might give one pause: Yahweh eavesdrops. **“And Yahweh heard your words, when you spoke to me. And Yahweh said to me, ‘I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear Me and to keep all My commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!’”** (Deuteronomy 5:28-29) Like I said, what we say *about* Yahweh is heard *by* Him.

As small children, we were appropriately terrified when daddy raised his voice. So it shouldn’t be too surprising to read about God’s “voice” demonstrating His awesome power or announcing His judgment—dozens of times in scripture. For instance, **“The voice of Yahweh is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, Yahweh, over many waters. The voice of Yahweh is powerful; the voice of Yahweh is full of majesty.**

**The voice of Yahweh breaks the cedars; Yahweh breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of Yahweh flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of Yahweh shakes the wilderness; Yahweh shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of Yahweh makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in His temple all cry, ‘Glory!’”** (Psalm 29:3-9) The word translated “voice” here is *qowl*: a voice (either of man or God), sound, or noise—anything from the music of an instrument to the crash of thunder.

Typical of passages describing God’s voice as a weapon is this vignette of His defense of Zion—probably during the battle of Armageddon. **“But the multitude of your [i.e., Jerusalem’s] foreign foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff. And in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by Yahweh of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise [*qowl*], with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel [literally, the “Lion of God”—Jerusalem], all that fight against her and her stronghold and distress her, shall be like a dream, a vision of the night.”** (Isaiah 29:5-7) That’s the “voice” Yahweh’s enemies will hear when He’s angry.

But does He speak to His own children in the same tone? Apparently not. At one point, the prophet Elijah felt like he was the last believer on the face of the earth. In fear and frustration, he fled from Queen Jezebel, hid out in a cave, and cried out to God. We can almost imagine His Fatherly arm around his shoulder as Yahweh asked him, “What are you doing here, Elijah? Go outside and stand before Me.” **“And a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before Yahweh, but Yahweh was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire.”** It was as if Yahweh was telling his servant that these terrifying manifestations were reserved for His enemies, but His children would not have to be confronted with such awesome display. **“And after the fire the sound of a low whisper [*qowl*].”** (I Kings 19:11-12) *That’s* how Yahweh spoke to His frightened, faithful child—in a still, small, voice.

No, God doesn’t have to “raise His voice” to us. If we’re His children, we’re *already* listening intently, hungering for knowledge, begging for understanding, and craving close, intimate fellowship with Him. We welcome Yahweh’s communication with us, for we know that when He speaks, His Word brings us that much closer to Him. And we know that He is just as eager to hear from us as we are to hear from Him. But let’s be honest. Sometimes we tune Him out. Or we imagine He’s talking to somebody else. Or we assume that we’ve done as He instructed, when we’ve actually been following our own path, our own traditions. The Torah in particular is neglected by Christians because we think it’s only for our siblings, the Jews. But its lessons are for us. He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says!

## LIFE / FAMILY

### ❧ 1.3.3 ❧

#### *Relationship*

So far, we have seen two facets of the self-portrait of God—Light, that which allows and facilitates perception, and the Word, enabling communication. We should not be too surprised, then, to find both of these things used to illuminate and communicate the third facet of Yahweh’s personality: the concept of Life itself. David writes, **“For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light do we see light.”** (Psalm 36:9) He’s reminding us that Yahweh is the source of life (something that’s by no means taken for granted any more in our world, though it’s obvious to anyone who’s seeing things by the light of God’s Word). Yahshua said, **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”** (John 6:27-28) Everlasting life and eternal security are enjoyed *only* by Yahshua’s “sheep,” those of us who know His voice and follow His leading. In other words, the Word of God, personified in Yahshua, is like the door to the “sheepfold” of heaven, and the light of His life is what allows us to find our way to this door.

This, of course, flies in the face of what passes for “science” in our world. We believers in Yahweh are patted on the head like idiot children by condescending cognoscenti who claim that the faith we place in Yahweh (a God they can’t see) is irrational, unwarranted, and foolish. But they doth protest too much, methinks. Is it really idiotic to embrace a hypothesis that the wisest men in human history have taken for granted—not because they thought it all out and came to a rational, fact-based conclusion, but because the God who created organic life *told them* He had? Today’s scientists may protest, “Well, God doesn’t speak to *me*. Really? He speaks to me, even before I open up His scriptures. In the previous section, we were reminded of something I’ve found to be true a thousand times over: the glory of God is blatantly evident in the works of His creation. Could it be that the reason these scientists don’t believe there’s a God who lives and creates is simply because they don’t *want to*? As Paul wrote, **“They did not honor him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.”** (Romans 1:21-22) Smart isn’t necessarily wise. I’m not saying all scientists are fools, but if the shoe fits....

In a nutshell, Yahweh declared that only life begets life. He says He created all life, man included, and He was able to do this because He has life within Himself. That is, He is eternally self-existent (not that we can really comprehend what that means). I’m the first to admit that He didn’t tell us *everything*—how He did it, what processes He used, or how long He took to do it. He used the broadest

of brushstrokes and spoke in the most sweeping of generalities. And adding to our confusion, He used symbolic language designed not to teach us about biology or physics but rather about His plan for our redemption. So He describes creation with seemingly goofy statements like, “I made everything in six days, and on the seventh day, I rested.” In the light of what we can perceive of the age and nature of the universe, if we can’t see (or accept) that Yahweh was speaking metaphorically—that the “seven days” represent a spiritual truth and establish a spiritual paradigm concerning His plan for mankind—then maybe we *deserve* to wallow in ignorance. But if we’re willing to let Him teach us through His word and His creation, it all becomes clear—and startlingly beautiful.

So that’s Yahweh’s version. Unbelievable? I’ll answer that question with a question: *Compared to what?* My youngest son has recently been taking university-level biology courses, so I borrowed a couple of his hundred-dollar textbooks (one copyrighted 2006, the other 2008—in other words, up to date, as I’m writing this). Both textbooks, as well as Internet sources I consulted, are in basic agreement as to how they think life might have begun. All the sources I checked began with the Miller-Urey experiments of 1953 (building on the work of Oparin and Haldane in the 1920s), even though everyone now agrees that they started with some flawed assumptions. One author (Starr, in *Biology: Concepts and Applications*) writes, “Recent geologic evidence suggests that Earth’s early atmosphere was not quite like Miller’s mixture. But simulations that used other gasses have also yielded different organic compounds, including some types that can act as nucleotide precursors of nucleic acids.” No *life*, you understand, just relatively simple chemical compounds that *could*, under the *perfect* conditions, *lead to* something that *might someday* end up being a *component* of a living organism. It’s like saying, “I’ve got a bit of wire here, and a chunk of silicon, so I’m well on my way toward having my own computer!”

Campbell and Reese (in the textbook *Biology*) add, “It is unclear whether the atmosphere of young Earth contained enough methane and ammonia to be reducing [i.e., electron-adding]. Growing evidence suggests that the early atmosphere was made up primarily of nitrogen and carbon dioxide and was neither reducing nor oxidizing (electron removing).” Having thus made a convincing case that life *couldn’t* and *didn’t* spontaneously arise in the earth’s atmosphere, Campbell and Reese irrationally persist: “Miller-Urey-type experiments demonstrate that the abiotic [i.e., nonliving] synthesis of organic molecules is possible.” It just had to happen *somewhere else*, that’s all—submerged volcanoes, or deep-sea vents, maybe. Or perhaps it didn’t happen here at all. Starr writes: “By another hypothesis, simple organic compounds formed in outer space. Researchers detect amino acids in interstellar clouds and in some of the carbon-rich meteorites that have landed on earth.”

Of course, having amino acids and “nucleotide precursors of nucleic acids” is light years away from having even one DNA molecule—the recognized building blocks of life—never mind having life itself. C&R write, “While Miller-Urey-type experiments have yielded some of the nitrogenous bases of DNA and RNA, they have not produced anything like nucleotides. If building blocks of nucleic acids were not part of the early organic soup, self-replicating molecules and a metabolism-like source of the building blocks must have appeared together.” How? “The necessary conditions may have been met by protobionts, collections of abiotically produced molecules surrounded by a membrane-like structure. Protobionts may exhibit some properties of life, including simple reproduction and metabolism, as well as the maintenance of an internal chemical environment different from that of their surroundings.” May have... Might have... Could have... Must have... Perhaps... Hypothetically. Basically, they’re asking us to believe that nonliving globs of matter act like they’re alive, and then somehow *become* living organisms, all quite by chance. *Abiotic is simply another word for prebiotic, right?* It’s biology by Murphy’s Law: whatever can happen, did happen. (And even if it *can’t*, it still must have.) But then they admit, “The presence of small organic molecules, such as amino acids, is not sufficient for the emergence of life as we know it. Every cell has a vast assortment of macromolecules, including enzymes and other proteins and the nucleic acids that are essential for self-replication.” Their problem is that the math simply doesn’t work. Multiple miracles are required, but no “god” is allowed to perform them.

How do the “scientists” bridge this unbridgeable chasm? They posit an “RNA World,” in which life arose not with the complicated DNA double helix, but through the relatively rudimentary RNA molecule. In *The Search for Life on Other Planets*, Bruce M. Jakosky writes, “We can imagine a simpler world than one in which both DNA and RNA are involved in the reproduction of cells. The RNA molecule is less complex than the DNA molecule, since it usually is a single rather than a double chain. One can imagine that RNA might have been the means of transferring genetic information from a cell to its offspring prior to the evolution of DNA....” The problem is, you’d *have to* imagine it: it doesn’t actually happen in real life. He admits: “The RNA molecule cannot reproduce itself without the catalytic activity of enzymes. The enzymes are composed of proteins that are produced by using the genetic information contained within the RNA molecule, and the RNA molecule cannot be created without the catalytic activity of the enzymes. We are faced with a ‘chicken or egg’ dilemma.” He goes on to note, “Even the simplest RNA molecule is very complex; it is unlikely that it would be created by the random combinations of organic molecules in a prebiotic soup.” “Unlikely?” Is that what they’re calling *impossible* now?

The “scientists” agree: the DNA upon which all life is based is obviously far too complex to have assembled itself by chance, so RNA, which “cannot

reproduce itself' without a whole lot of impossibly fortuitous help, is recruited to save the day. Enough of this foolishness. Wake up, ladies and gentlemen. This is like insisting that although it is patently impossible for a tornado to sweep through a junkyard and assemble a Boeing 777 jet airliner, this same tornado could—*and did*—manage to cobble together a fully functioning Model T Ford, fueled, running, and licensed with the DMV. And they accuse *me* of having too much faith! They think *I'm* a fool for believing in a God I can't see except through the evidence He's left behind. Sorry, guys. I'm going to stick with what the scientists *know* to be true: what they've actually observed in nature—not what they merely *wish* to be true. Life comes from life. Period. I'll put my money on Yahweh's awesome intellect, unlimited resources, and passionate motivation, over dumb luck, blind chance, and serendipitous happenstance, any day of the week.

I'm not alone in my views, of course. Paul wrote of **"...the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began."** (Titus 1:1-2) Eternal life was promised by God *before the ages began*? Yes. I know it strains credulity, but Yahweh provided the remedy for our sin before we were even here. What's more, He knew which of us would elect to receive His gift and who would not. During the coming dark days of the Great Tribulation, people will no longer sit on the fence, choosing neither Yahweh nor Satan. John prophesied that **"All who dwell on earth will worship it [the "beast from the sea"—the Antichrist or the demon who inhabits him], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain."** (Revelation 13:8) In other words, the identities of those who did, or will, choose to follow Yahweh have been known to Him since before the world even existed, and their eternal life has been *guaranteed* all this time. Life with Yahweh is not an afterthought.

Nor is eternal life merely an extension of the kind of biological life we share with dogs, cats, and garden slugs. This biological life, as marvelously improbable as it is, is temporary: we are all mortal; our bodies are all subject to death and decay. The Hebrew phrase used to describe this kind of life is *chay nephesh*—"living soul." This "soul" is mentioned six times in the first two chapters of Genesis, referring to any living creature in the sea or on the land—including, but not restricted to, man. Man, however, was the only *chay nephesh* who received the "breath of life," (literally, breath of *lives*—plural or abundant life) the *neshamah chayim*: **"Then Yahweh, God, formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [*neshamah chayim*], and the man became a living creature [*chay nephesh*]." (Genesis 2:7) This *neshamah* is apparently what gives human beings the capacity to receive Yahweh's Spirit—His *Ruach*. The word for "life" or "to live" (*chay, chayim, hayah*) is closely related to the verb "to be" (*'eheyeh* or *chayay*), as in "became" in the verse above. The point is: *to be is to live*. If we no longer have life, we *are not*—we don't exist, even though our**

corpse may still be around stinking up the place. Note also that God's self-proclaimed name, Yahweh, is based on the same linguistic root. He's practically screaming that He *is*—His defining self-existence is the source of our life.

Life, then, resides not in the body, but in the soul, the *nephesh*. If the soul leaves the body, neither remains alive—*unless* the soul has in turn been made permanently alive by the indwelling of God's eternal Spirit (His *Ruach*). That's the function we read about above—the “breath of life” (the *neshamah chayim*) that was given to Adam (whose name means “man”). So Job's friend Elihu muses, **“Who gave Him [Yahweh] charge over the earth, and who laid on Him the whole world? If He should set His heart to it and gather to Himself His spirit [*Ruach*] and His breath [*neshamah*], all flesh would perish together, and man [*adam*] would return to dust.”** (Job 34:13-15) Not only is Yahweh the source of all life, He is also its sustainer. But biological life (the kind of thing evolutionary scientists have such a tough time comprehending) is in reality only a symbol for the essential life—the *eternal* life—that is ours if Yahweh's Spirit inhabits our souls. We, as *chay nephesh*—living souls—have the privilege of glimpsing what it really means to be “alive”—we can feel, think, express ourselves, and exercise our free will. But the biological life we experience as we spend our days on this Earth is only a suggestion, a mere hint, of the life that awaits us beyond our mortal existence if Yahweh's Spirit inhabits us.

How can we appropriate this eternal, essential life? How does one transition from biological life to the immortal state? In I Corinthians 15, Paul explains how this transformation involves exchanging our mortal, corruptible bodies for immortal, incorruptible ones. We *will* have bodies in the eternal state; we won't merely be disembodied souls flitting about—ghosts, so to speak. But they won't be like the bodies we now inhabit, either. David tells us: **“My heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let Your Holy One see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”** (Psalm 16:9-11) The “Holy One,” of course, is the Messiah, Yahshua, as Peter pointed out on the Day of Pentecost (See Acts 2:31). But He is the *Firstfruits* offering, the *firstborn* of the dead. We who trust Him will follow Yahshua in this great adventure of bodily transformation and renewal: as He was resurrected, so shall we be also. Job points out this same truth: **“I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold.”** (Job 19:25-27)

So both Job and David linked our eternal hope to Yahweh's set-apart Anointed One, the Redeemer, the Word. Because Yahshua is the Word made flesh, our eternal life is secured by belief in—a trusting reliance upon—the testimony of Yahweh. **“Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.**

**Whoever does not believe God has made Him [i.e., has called Him] a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.**" (I John 5:10-12) Lest this should seem so fundamental and obvious as to not require mention, allow me to remind you that the vast majority in this world believe either that eternal life is impossible—that there is nothing beyond the grave for any of us—or that “heaven” can be earned (at least partially) through good works, sacrifice, penance, obedience, alms, or martyrdom. So although children of Yahweh are comfortable with this concept, most people—even within the “Christian” religion—are not.

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Because Yahweh *is* life—its first cause and sole source—the “Kingdom of God” spoken of throughout scripture is, in the end, tantamount to “the state of being alive.” I speak not of biological life, of course, but of having been made *absolutely, permanently alive* through the indwelling presence of Yahweh’s Spirit. We are citizens of “the Kingdom” only if we have Yahweh’s life—provided by Yahshua His “Son”—within us.

This concept was presented only in the most cryptic of terms in the Tanach, however. There is a familiar, and telling, account in John 3 that makes this fact all too clear. Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin and a respected “expert” in the scriptures, apparently didn’t have a clue as to what David and Job had been talking about: this life beyond sheol that we may experience in “flesh” that has been transformed by the Spirit of God. The story begins, **“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews [*Ioudious*, Judeans]. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him....’**” Nicodemus (whose name means “victor of the people,”) wasn’t ready to admit to his peers (or to himself) that he might not be the “winner” his name and status implied. He visited Yahshua under the cover of darkness, when he hoped nobody would notice that he was beginning to think outside the rabbinical box. But at least he *came*—it was something his peers wouldn’t have done in a million years. Nicodemus had seen something in Yahshua that he couldn’t explain: he had seen a life beyond that which he knew. It intrigued him. And I think it worried him a little.

Yahshua didn’t bother responding to Nick’s somewhat lame attempt at flattery. He merely addressed the question that He knew was *really* on his mind. **“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [literally, “from above”] he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be**



**born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God....'** Nicodemus was, of course, confusing biological life with essential life—an honest, almost universal mistake. Yahshua set him straight, informing him that there are two kinds of life, both of which must be entered into if one wishes to “see the kingdom of God.” Yes, one must be born physically as a human being—born of water. But he must subsequently be born—by his own choice—into the Spirit of Yahweh.

The point is that man is capable of having two natures, biological and spiritual, each of them requiring its own “birth.” **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born [from above].’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit....”** Being “born of water” obviously presents evidence: the body you’re walking around in. Yahshua is pointing out here that being born of the Spirit (not coincidentally symbolized as breath or wind in both Greek and Hebrew) also leaves evidence behind. That evidence, as we saw above (I John 2:9-11) is love: the person born anew in Yahweh’s Spirit will love his brother.

**“Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’”** It wasn’t that Nicodemus couldn’t comprehend the idea of eternal life. After all, he was a Pharisee, and as such believed in the immortality of the soul (something Yahshua was actually saying *wasn’t* true in any universal sense), the resurrection of the body, and the existence of spirits. Pharisees believed that men are rewarded or punished in the future life, based on whether they had lived virtuously or wickedly in this one. (In other words, philosophically they weren’t all that different from many “religious Christians” today.) But virtue for them was defined by how strictly one outwardly kept the Law—something they characterized as consisting of both the Torah and the traditions of the elders (not comprehending that these things were often at cross purposes). So when Yahshua told him that entering the Kingdom of God depended not on his external adherence to the Law (*however* he defined it) but rather on being born from above in Yahweh’s Spirit, Nick’s whole belief system fell apart. **“Jesus answered him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you [as a representative of the Pharisees] do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?’”** Yahshua was telling him four things: first, the concept of being born anew in Yahweh’s Spirit was a fundamental and basic truth, one Nicodemus should have understood from studying the Tanach. Second, the Torah that Nicodemus was so ardently attempting to observe would be fulfilled in Yahshua Himself. That is, the Spirit of God into which one must be “born” in order to see and enter the Kingdom of God would indwell only those

who relied and trusted in the sacrifice Yahshua had come to provide—the very sacrifice prophesied in the rites of the Torah. Third, “earthly things” are merely symbols, teaching aids, for the true reality of “heavenly things.” And fourth, Yahshua was no ordinary rabbi: He alone was in a position to speak of these “heavenly things” because He had “seen” them first hand. **“No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man....”**

Although Nicodemus had intuitively known that there was something different, something unique, about Yahshua, I’m not sure he was quite ready for *this* revelation. Interestingly, no more is recorded of what Nicodemus said this night. (I think I would have been struck speechless, too.) But he’s seen later (in John 7:50-52) trying to head off a witch hunt against Yahshua in the Sanhedrin, and later still (John 19:39) reverently anointing Yahshua’s crucified corpse. So what Yahshua said apparently had a life-changing impact upon him: **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life....”** This incident (recorded in Numbers 21:6-9) required the rebellious, snake-bitten Israelites to “look at” a bronze image of a serpent, placed upon a pole in their midst. This is but one example (among many) of “earthly things” pointing toward “heavenly things.” The operative verb in the people’s salvation was *ra’ah*: to see, look at, inspect, consider, perceive, and pay attention to the uplifted serpent. The same thing would be true of Yahshua’s execution upon Calvary’s pole: those who ignored it would die, while those who looked at it, considered it, and discovered through attentive observation what it meant, could live.

This life, however, wouldn’t be the sort we entered by being “born of water”—vulnerable, conditional, and temporary. It was, rather, the kind of life we commence when we’re born of the Spirit—perpetual, essential, absolute life, that sort of life of which mortal existence is but a shadow, a symbol, a preview. **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned....”** The word translated “believe” so many times in this passage is our old friend *pisteuo*: to think something to be true, to be persuaded of its veracity, and to place one’s confidence in it. Although James reminds us that even demons “believe” (*pisteuo*) that there is one God and therefore tremble, I am convinced that for beings endowed with free will, to “believe” implies an element of trust and reliance. Here’s what I mean: you may say you “believe” that the spindly rope bridge across the gorge will hold you. A demon may say the same thing. What’s the difference? If told by God to cross the gorge on the rickety bridge, the demon has no choice: he must obey. We, on the other hand, may refuse: the choice is ours. But by doing so, by acting in disobedience, we have effectively demonstrated our unbelief, no matter what we say with our lips. Our

free will thus compels us to back up our belief with trust, and our trust with action. Our deeds, then, state quite eloquently what we *really* believe.

So let's think this through. Is Yahshua saying that we must either believe in Him—trust and rely upon Him—or He will condemn us to hell? Although our knee-jerk logic might suggest this, He has gone out of His way here to refute that conclusion, stating flatly that such judgment is *not* His objective. Quite the opposite, in fact. He goes on to say: **“But whoever does not believe [in Yahshua] is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”** (John 3:1-18) This is not a threat, just a statement of fact. It's a revelation of the way things are, not a declaration of intent. The word translated “condemned” here is the Greek verb *krino*. While not technically incorrect, the tone of the word “condemned” is a bit misleading. *Krino* actually means to evaluate, to decide or choose, to separate based on preference, to come to a conclusion, or to judge one thing to be better than another. It's the word used to describe making a legal decision—deciding an issue of innocence or guilt, right or wrong.

So what He's really saying is this: *You were born into a state of estrangement from God. Therefore, if you don't proactively alter your existing spiritual status by choosing to trust and rely on My name, you will remain as you began—separated from Me and cut off from the eternal life that results from being born in My Spirit.* We begin our mortal lives as a blank slate: we have chosen nothing. If we choose to believe, trust, and rely upon Yahweh's gift, eternal life is ours (for the simple reason that we now have His eternal Spirit dwelling within us, rendering our souls immortal in the process). If we choose nothing, however, our souls will perish when our bodies do, for there is no longer anything within us to keep them alive. That's why Hezekiah declared, **“In love You have delivered my life [nephesh—soul] from the pit of destruction, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.”** (Isaiah 38:17) The Hebrew word translated “destruction” here is *beliy*, which actually means nothingness—it is the word for negation, literally: “no, not, or without.” By placing our sins out of His sight, Yahweh has prevented our souls from becoming nothing, from dissipating into nonexistence.

The default position, then, is mortality, destruction, separation from God—*nothingness*: **“Whoever does not believe is condemned already.”** But as bad as this sounds, there *is* something worse. Just as we may choose to receive Yahweh's Spirit (being “born from above”), we may also choose to receive Satan's (that would be “born from below,” although that phrase is never actually used), and some do. Since the devil was created as an immortal spirit, a human soul voluntarily hosting *his* spirit will become immortal as well—doomed to sharing Satan's fate for eternity. This is what's commonly known as hell—the eternal anguish of remorse, the constant, unrelenting awareness of everlasting separation from Yahweh—something so horrible, it was apparently never intended as a

destination for the souls of man at all. Compared to this, mere destruction—*nothingness*—at the end of life would seem the most tender of mercies.

So simple failure to choose Yahweh will lead to death—exactly the same fate as any animal. Damnation—something entirely different and infinitely worse—need not be the destiny of any man. But God offers eternal life to all who want to be with Him. We have only to receive it. Yahshua said, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment [*krisis*, the noun based on *krino*—judicial evaluation leading to separation], but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself.”** (John 5:24-26) Life, as I said, comes only from life. Yahweh, being eternally self-existent, has life in Himself, a life He bestowed upon His “Son,” His human manifestation, Yahshua—who in turn bestows it upon us: **“Yet a little while and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live.”** (John 14:19) Note again that the first two facets of God’s personality have been brought to bear on the third: Those who “hear” and those who “see” will live.

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A body that houses a *chay nephesh*—a living soul—is not designed to be eternal. Far from it. Neither men nor animals live forever (in biological terms). In 2007, a team of researchers from Bangor University in Wales dredged up a clam—an “ocean quahog”—in 250 foot deep waters north of Iceland. Only after they had cut open its shell and counted its growth rings did they realize that they’d just killed the oldest living animal on earth. It was (and I do mean *was*) between 405 and 410 years of age. Oops.

Before the flood of Noah, men routinely lived ten times as long as they do today. But even then, nobody was immortal. My point is simply this: life was meant to be passed on. God designed our (that is, all living creatures’) bodies to reproduce themselves. There is a dizzying array of reproduction modes among living things (one more thing to give evolutionists nightmares, if only they were astute enough to do the math on the utter improbability of such a thing). But no single individual endures forever. Whatever life it has must be transferred to the next generation.

In what appears to be highly figurative language, Yahweh described how the process began with neshamah-equipped humans, but more to the point, *why* the process was instituted: **“Then Yahweh, God, said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him....’ So Yahweh, God, caused a deep sleep to fall**

upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that Yahweh, God, had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” Guys, can you imagine what a woman whom God made from scratch—one upon whom He was counting to jump-start the species—might have *looked* like? **“Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man....’”** Perhaps not the greatest pick-up line of all time, but cut him some slack: Adam was new at this. Or could it be that we have a grossly inadequate translation here? He actually said something more like this, if you track down what the Hebrew words really mean: **“This one is the next step in my life: her substance and essence are like mine, and her body is good news to me. She shall be chosen as my wife; surely I will receive her and be a husband to her.”** After having been tasked with naming the animals God brought to him, Adam knew that none of them was “like” him, comparable to him, or suited to him. But when Yahweh brought this wonderful “creature” to him, he got the picture: they were a matched set—made for each other, literally. *Thank you, God!*

Moses then records what we were supposed to observe from this arrangement: **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”** (Genesis 2:18, 21-24) Note three things. First, a man’s relationship with his parents—one of honor, duty, responsibility, and obedience—is fundamentally different from that which he shares with his wife: a bond of love, companionship, allegiance, and fruitfulness. Second, the marriage relationship was to supersede the parent-child bond. A man’s role as “son” would give way to that of husband, and then to father. And third, the reason this paradigm shift was to take place was that a new generation was to emerge from the marriage covenant. The love that connected man and wife symbolically as “one flesh” was to be manifested literally in their offspring: “one flesh” again resulting from their physical union—life derived from life in a matrix of love. I find it significant that the very first command in the entire Bible was to perpetuate this new life: **“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.’”** (Genesis 1:27-28)

One could posit that mankind has obeyed God in this one regard—we have indeed “filled the earth” over the last six thousand years. But is the population boom of the past century what Yahweh had in mind? The issue of *quality* of life must be addressed along with “quantity of life.” Somehow, I get the feeling that poverty-stricken slums and overcrowded crime-infested ghettos aren’t exactly what Yahweh had in mind: **“Blessed is everyone who reveres Yahweh, who walks in His ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who reveres Yahweh.”** (Psalm 128:1-4) I can attest that this has certainly been true in my own

life (at least, it was until my numerous children disobeyed my clear instructions to the contrary, and *grew up*—“leaving their father and their mother”). My wife and I have always revered Yahweh, and we have always been blessed: it always “went well” with us, even in the tough times.

We should not be surprised to find this “leaving one’s parents” and “holding fast to one’s wife” principle being used by Yahweh as a symbol of His pattern for the relationship He wishes to share with us. In different ways, both the ekklesia and Israel are pictured in scripture as metaphors for God’s “wife” or Christ’s “bride.” Paul presents the picture this way: **“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church [the ekklesia—the “called out”], His body, and is Himself its Savior.”** How did Yahshua become our Savior? He left his home in heaven in order to hold fast to us, His bride, so that we could become “one flesh,” just as in the Genesis 2 instruction. **“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”** Why? Because husbands are God’s metaphor for the Messiah, and their wives are symbolic of those whom He has called out of the world—the ekklesia, the church. **“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”** As with our Messiah’s role in His relationship with us, the husband’s responsibilities in the family outweigh the wife’s. All we (as believers) have to do is “submit” to Christ—let Him call the shots in our lives. He, on the other hand, had to lay down His very life to save us. **“...That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”** (Ephesians 5:22-27)

This very thing—this presentation of the ekklesia to Yahshua in splendor and purity—was seen in John’s apocalyptic vision: **“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.’ It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’”** (Revelation 19:6-9) Remember back a few pages where Yahshua was explaining things to Nicodemus? **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”** (John 3:5) These are different ways of expressing an identical truth: being born anew in Yahweh’s Spirit, entering the Kingdom of God, and being “invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb,” are all *exactly the same thing*: eternal life. **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”** (John 3:36)

The *wrath* of God? Once again, our English translation creates the erroneous impression that Yahweh is some kind of vindictive bully who says, “Love me or I’ll torment you in hell.” But that’s not what this is saying. The word translated “wrath” is *orge*, which primarily indicates one’s natural disposition, one’s temper, in the face of rejection or opposition. A different Greek word, *thumos*, also translated “wrath,” comes closer, but even this doesn’t mean punishment or punitive judgment so much as it does passionate, heated anger. *Orge* is derived from a word that means “to covet after, to desire.” Aristotle characterized *orge* as “desire with grief,” the emotion expressed in Mark 3:5 where Yahshua was grieved (and not a little angry) at the hateful response of the Pharisees to His willingness to heal people on the Sabbath. *Orge* is the kind of anger with which God responds to sin: utter abhorrence tempered by longing and grief for those who live in it (*Zodhaites*). It’s movement or agitation of the soul, an impulse, desire, or violent emotion (*Strong’s*). I see it (having been there) as akin to the response of a loving but frustrated parent to the antics of a recalcitrant and rebellious teenager: for their own good, you *have to* ground them now and then. But the idea isn’t *wrath*—vindictively cutting off all hope of reconciliation, the imposition of permanent, irrevocable punishment. Quite the opposite: it’s an angry response calculated to inspire repentance. That’s the kind of indignation that remains upon the one who chooses not to believe in the Son of God. *Oy!* You’ve gotta watch the translators (and their agenda) like a hawk.

But I digress. We were talking about how Yahweh’s relationship with us is mirrored in the structure of the family: the husband and wife becoming “one flesh.” Because Yahweh has imbued us with free will, the process isn’t always as straightforward as He’d like. The life and writings of the prophet Hosea speak of God’s “marriage” relationship with Israel, but it’s not a pretty picture. Basically, He calls her a whore, and her children bastards: Lo-Ruhamah (No Mercy) and Lo-Ammi (Not My People). Yahweh, who *hates* divorce (see Malachi 2:16), is forced by Israel’s idolatries to divorce her, to strip her of her privileges, prosperity, and status as His wife. But at the same time, He promises that in the end, Israel will be restored. He even tells us *when*: **“Come, let us return to Yahweh; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him.”** (Hosea 6:1-2) Two “days” equals two thousand years, according to II Peter 3:8. Yahweh “struck Israel” in 33 A.D., when they crucified His Messiah. He will therefore restore them two thousand years later (you can do the math, can’t you?) and for the next thousand years (i.e., the “third day,” otherwise known as “the Millennium”—actually the seventh of seven millennia in God’s plan for man’s redemption) Israel will at last be restored, exalted, and will live in God’s presence.

So Hosea reports Yahweh’s intentions: **“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her**

**vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope....**" The valley of Achor (which literally means "trouble") is where Israel came to terms with the sin among them after their ignominious defeat at the hands of Ai (on the heels of the great Jericho victory). It speaks of trouble leading to repentance and a willingness to admit one's error—something Israel has been disinclined to do for the past two millennia now. I'm pretty sure the "wilderness" remark refers to the same Tribulation event prophesied in Revelation 12:6 (and instructed about in Matthew 24:15-21) in which Israel, having witnessed the power of Yahweh in destroying the armies of Gog (Ezekiel 38-39) is faced less than a year later with another challenge: fleeing from Satan's false messiah and hiding out in the mountainous Jordanian wilderness for three and a half years.

**"And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt...."** This is when Israel had enthusiastically affirmed, "All that Yahweh has spoken, we will do." (Exodus 19:8) The word translated "answer" (*anah*) is incredibly significant, for it is at the heart of the requirements for the Day of Atonement. It's invariably translated (in that context) "to afflict one's soul," but the word also means to answer, to respond as a witness, testify, speak, shout, or even sing. What we're seeing here is the ultimate fulfillment of the prophetic convocation of *Yom Kippurim*—the day when Israel will finally be reconciled to Yahweh, the day when she will at last recognize and respond to Yahshua as her Messiah. (See also, Zechariah 12:10.)

**"And in that day, declares Yahweh, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.'" There's something significant here that's largely lost in translation. "My Ba'al" (usually translated "my lord") is *Ba'ali*, based on the name of the Canaanite deity Ba'al. But Ba'al not only means lord or master; it also means "husband." The Israelites would eventually forsake the name Yahweh altogether and replace it with a title, *Adonay*—which, like Ba'al, means "lord," thoroughly obfuscating the distinction between the eternal, self-existent Creator-deity and some moldy Canaanite wannabe god. Although Yahweh is the source of all authority, He apparently *hates* being called "Lord," because it obscures the familial relationship He seeks to share with us. But at the same time, He kind of likes being thought of as our "Husband," with all the imagery that symbol brings with it. So the word He's chosen for "My Husband" here is not *ba'ali*, but *ishi*—a word that stresses not a husband's authority, but his maleness, his humanity, and his subsequent relationship to his wife. *Ishi*, then, is a code word for the "husband" role of the Messiah. **"For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more."** (Hosea 2:14-17) In the end, Israel will no longer even remember her old "boyfriends."**

He concludes by pledging to renew the relationship that had been severed. **"And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice,**



**in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know Yahweh.**" (Hosea 2:19-20) The promise of restoration for Israel is the single most often-repeated prophecy in the entire Bible, stated scores of times in a wide variety of ways. This presents a logistics problem for Yahweh, however, for the Torah—*His own instructions*—state that **"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife...then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before Yahweh."** (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) If God has "divorced" unfaithful Israel for her idolatries, how can He take her back again? How can He restore her as His wife? If she were really the "same old girl," He couldn't: His own law forbids it. But, **"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."** (II Corinthians 5:17) Restoration is in Yahweh's nature, and the path to restoration is His Messiah. There is no other way.

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So biological life, meant to be passed from one generation to the next, is a symbol of what Yahweh intended us to observe in the spiritual realm. And God's metaphorical mechanism for this perpetuation of life is the family, in which Yahshua figuratively left His "Father" (Yahweh) and "Mother" (the Spirit of God) to be joined with us, His bride, in a blessed and fruitful union. Yahweh's original "Go forth and multiply" commandment is echoed in Yahshua's ultimate instructions to us: **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."** (Matthew 28:18-20) **"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** (Acts 1:8) Just as bearing children is the transmission of biological life from one generation to the next, "making disciples of all nations" is, for all intents and purposes, the passing along of spiritual life. And ideally, it's achieved pretty much the same way: through intimate association, lifelong commitment, and above all, love. The only real difference is that in the creation of spiritual life, one's parents never die.

## WATER

### ❧ 1.3.4 ❧

#### *Restoration and Cleansing*

With good reason, we find comfort in the words: **“Yahweh is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.”** (Psalm 23:1-3) **“They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for He who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.”** (Isaiah 49:9-10) Restoration, refreshing, life itself—that is how water is perceived by a thirsty man, and rightly so. Our bodies are about sixty percent water: we can’t live very long without it. Once again, the parallels between the way Yahweh has built our bodies and the way He communicates His character to us are too blatant to ignore. Every time we turn around, we’re being asked to see water as a symbol: the water that makes our physical life possible is a metaphor for the nature of God—that which makes our *spiritual* life possible.

Today, many of us tend to take water for granted, but we shouldn’t. Civilizations live and die based upon the availability of water. The idea of turning on a tap and dispensing clean, fresh water in your home would have been considered utterly miraculous to most people living more than a century ago. Settlements were built only where water was available, and they never grew into cities unless the water supply was abundant and steady. One cannot imagine ancient Egyptian civilization without the Nile, the glories of Mesopotamia without the Tigris and Euphrates, nor Rome without the Tiber (supplemented by some amazing aqueducts in later times). Even a dump like Muhammad’s Mecca could not have existed without the well of ZamZam.

Just as you’d be crazy to build a home where you couldn’t get water, you’d be insane (in my opinion) to build a life without the living water of God’s love. So the prophet writes, **“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for Yah, Yahweh, is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”** (Isaiah 12:2-3) It’s poetic, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t factual. “Water” here is obviously a metaphor for all the good things Isaiah is joyfully “drawing” from Yahweh’s “well,” that is, salvation, plus someone in whom he can confidently place his trust, a refuge from fear, a source of strength, and a reason to sing. All of this is said to come from “the wells of salvation.” The word translated “salvation” here (all three times) is the Hebrew *yāshuw`ah*, phonetically indistinguishable from the Messiah’s given name: Yahshua. Between the lines, Isaiah is declaring that Yahshua the Messiah is the source of all these good things, and that Yahweh *has become* Him. (Note also that

the shortened form of Yahweh's self-revealed name, "Yah," used seventy-seven times in scripture, is paralleled with "Yahweh," confirming their equivalence.)

Productive wells, of course, were guarded jealously, for their waters were a valuable, even essential, commodity to their owners. But in both the Tanach and the Renewed Covenant scriptures, Yahweh makes it clear that His water is given away freely to anyone who wants to live. First, He says, **"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."** (Isaiah 55:1) Those who would have you believe that the cost of salvation is your obedience, your obeisance, alms, penance, or good behavior are lying to you. Yes, those things may (and should) be offered to God *in response* to having been freely given the water of life, but its actual cost is so high you can't even *begin* to pay for it: it's the innocent blood of God's own Anointed One. Having personally paid that price, Yahshua Himself now tells us the same thing: **"And He who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.'"**

(Revelation 21:5-6) The water of life isn't so much "free" as it is "already-paid-for." **"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.... The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."**

(Revelation 22:1-2, 17) All we have to do is realize—and admit—that we're thirsty. The invitation stands: come, satisfy the desire for life that burns within you.

The symbolic connection between water and eternal life was explained (sort of) by Yahshua to a Samaritan woman. He and His disciples were passing through town, and He asked her for a drink, since she was drawing water from a well. When she expressed surprise that a Jew like Him would even condescend to speak with her, He replied, **"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.... Everyone who drinks of this water [from the well] will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** (John 4:10, 13-14) Several things bear mention. First, the "water" that Yahshua was offering the woman couldn't have been H<sub>2</sub>O, the same stuff she was offering to Him. It was, rather, the symbolic spiritual equivalent: it was "water" that would do for her soul what her well water would do for His body—keep it alive. Second, just as He was asking her for a drink, so she (and we) must *ask* for the living water—He didn't force her to take it. Third, He alone is the source of the living water, the bearer of the "gift of God." She couldn't have procured it from another source—the elders of Israel,

for example, or some false Messiah that might come along, her own Samaritan religious traditions, or her self-centered, hedonistic lifestyle. Fourth, the “water” Yahshua offered her was provided just as freely as the water she was drawing for Him. And fifth, the living water Yahshua was prepared to give her would henceforth well up eternally within her—she would never again have to feel spiritual “thirst” or emptiness for lack of God’s indwelling presence.

This wasn’t the only time Yahshua used the “water” metaphor to explain the principle of spiritual indwelling. **“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”** (John 7:37-39) The eighth and last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, called here “the great day,” is indicative of the eternal state, a factor that invests Yahshua’s words with undying significance. Again, the picture of a spring-fed river is presented, leading us to reflect on something important: the water in a river brings life not only to itself, but to all of the places it touches. If you look out upon a rural landscape, you can tell instantly if there’s a creek running through the scene, even if you can’t see the creek itself. Where the water flows, plant life will flourish: trees will be bigger and closer together; vegetation will be noticeably more lush and dense. And so it is where the Spirit of Yahweh flows as living water out of the hearts of those who believe in and rely upon Him. Life, like truth, tends to be contagious.

Rivers tend to follow certain patterns of behavior, and perhaps we can draw some cogent analogies from the way water flows in nature. The “point” of a river is to get the water from the headwaters, high in the mountains, to the sea, providing life and sustenance to whatever it encounters along the way. We can view the mountains as the majestic throne of God, and the sea as the mass of lost and needy humanity. We believers are the river connecting the two, carrying the Spirit to its intended destination. So how do the waters (the Spirit) move? The driving force is gravity: water flows downhill. Gravity, I’d say, is analogous to the urgency, the seriousness, with which we approach the Word of God.

From the high ground of Eden, we’re told that four rivers flowed—in four different directions. This may indicate Yahweh’s initial willingness to allow His truth to be disseminated among a variety of human cultural traditions (though all originating from the same source), so it’s worth noting that ever since the flood of Noah, two of those rivers can no longer be identified with any certainty, and the other two (the *Hiddekel*, or Tigris, and the Euphrates) roughly parallel each other for most of their course—the headwaters of the Tigris being within a few miles of the course of the Euphrates in modern Turkey. If this line of inquiry has any validity at all (and I’m the first to admit that I’m thinking outside the box here)

God may be telling us that in light of the present fallen condition of man, His Spirit flows only one way, in one direction. I find it fascinating that the Tigris (Hiddekel means “rapid”) and Euphrates (meaning “fruitfulness”) join to become *one river* just before they finally reach their destination. Could it be that Yahweh is teaching us something about Israel and the ekklesia? I think He might be.

Lending credence to this hypothesis is that Ezekiel, having been among the Jews hauled off to Babylon in chains, was tasked to help dig Nebuchadnezzar’s grand canal joining the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers near Baghdad—the Chebar “River.” If a project instigated by a man who was known as a “king of kings” (Daniel 2:37) was designed to join two rivers that are metaphorical (according to the theory) of Israel and the ekklesia (or alternately, the gentiles who, throughout man’s history, have chosen to honor Yahweh), then it would be instructive indeed to look into what Ezekiel was shown there. It was at the River Chebar that Ezekiel saw the stunning “wheel within a wheel” vision confirming God’s glory. It was here that he received his prophetic mandate to fearlessly warn Israel to cease their rebellious ways. And this was where he saw the vision of the *Shekinah*, the glory of Yahweh—abandoning the temple in disgust at Israel’s idolatry. The convergence of Israel’s failure and the gentiles’ opportunity (ultimately realized in the ekklesia) is thus pictured by the Chebar Canal as nowhere else on earth.

But if we take this geographical metaphor to its logical conclusion, several interesting factors emerge: (1) Which represents whom? The Tigris/Hiddekel apparently represents Israel, while the Euphrates represents the gentile nations, since the gentile (Euphrates) “lifeline” is longer and considerably more convoluted. (2) If the two rivers are seen as a timeline, then the location of the Chebar Canal is roughly equivalent to the First Century advent of Yahshua the Messiah—where Israel and the nations had their greatest opportunity to come together and “channel” the Spirit of Yahweh as one entity. A quick look at the map reveals what actually happened: abrupt divergence. The unity that the “King of kings” intended us to share has been postponed, deferred until much later in the story. (3) How will this finally be achieved? At the end of the line, the Euphrates becomes part of the Tigris, not the other way around. That is, *Israel* will emerge in the end as Yahweh’s conduit in the world, His restored and redeemed chosen nation—just as He promised in soon-to-be-fulfilled prophecies like Zechariah 8:21-23. I just love it when a metaphor comes together.

But I digress. We were talking about how rivers can teach us something about the “flow” of Yahweh’s Spirit in our world. Let’s return to the beginning. Driven by the force of gravity, small rivulets and brooks join to form larger streams and rivers. This is what we saw in the early ekklesia: unrestrained passion, the irresistible force of truth, and motives as pure as the water in a spring-fed mountain brook. As long as the downhill slope (the influence of gravity) is

considerable, a stream will flow rapidly and with purpose, without deviating in its course. But what happens when a river (or a person) encounters a level plain, with no motivation, no compelling forces driving it? (This, not coincidentally, is the literal case with both the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.) It slows down, broadens, and begins to meander. This is a poignant picture of what happens when we lose focus, when we forget that our job is to transmit God's love to the world. Apathy breeds apostasy. Our doctrine wanders off, seeking its own path; our beliefs become broad, inclusive, and confused; our own spiritual progress slows to a crawl, and the water—the spiritual enlightenment—that's supposed to pour unabated into the ocean of lost humanity becomes trapped in the stagnant, fetid swamp of religion.

But even in the most torpid of times, Yahweh has been known to cause new springs to come bubbling up to the surface, reinvigorating the spiritual river, causing it to once again begin flowing toward a thirsty world. As if to shake a stern finger of rebuke at well-meaning religious people who are all too happy to drift languidly along in their lukewarm religious swamp, Yahshua instructed His disciples not to criticize someone who does His work differently than they do—someone who has thrown off the shackles of traditional religious torpor and injected some *gravity* into the situation: **“Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.”** (Mark: 9:39-41) In other words, don't be too hasty to call your brother a heretic.

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In the Torah, we find ourselves time and again faced with instructions concerning cleansing with water, ritually or otherwise. Standing immediately outside the tabernacle or temple was to be a bronze laver or basin. **“Yahweh said to Moses, ‘You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing.’** Bronze or brass is a metaphor for judgment, which in God's mindset is not so much indicative of condemnation as it is separation—in this case, the clean from the defiled. **“You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar.”** Its location was strategic, placed between the altar (where sacrifice was made) and the tabernacle itself (where one would encounter Yahweh). The point is that Christ's sacrifice would do you no good if you were not willing to be cleansed. **“And you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet.”** The priests are those who would intercede and minister before God—metaphorical in the end of all believers, led by our High Priest Yahshua. The washing of our hands and feet is symbolic of letting God's Spirit purify our works and walk.

**“When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to make a burnt offering to Yahweh, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die.”**

This time, the water isn't for drinking, but rather for cleansing. The result of using it, however, remains the same: life is preserved. **“They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.”** (Exodus 30:17-21)

Reconciliation with God, then, was a two-step process. Step one was sacrifice, performed at the altar—the shedding of innocent blood. Step two was cleansing—washing by water (as before, symbolic of the Word of God, conveyed by His Holy Spirit). Both steps had to be completed before one could come before Yahweh: before he could see by the light of the seven-branched lampstand, partake of the provision of God at the table of showbread, communicate with our Father through prayer at the altar of incense, and ultimately, step into the Most Holy Place, into the very presence of Yahweh. A study of the tabernacle's layout and furnishings reveals that virtually everything was given specific dimensions and specifications. But the bronze laver is a notable exception. It is as if Yahweh is telling us, “There's no limit to My capacity for cleansing you; there is no amount of filth I can't wash away in the shadow of the Messiah's perfect sacrifice.

A perusal of the Torah (especially the book of Leviticus) reveals that every time we turn around, God is instructing a ritual cleansing of one sort or another—usually achieved through washing with water. Priests, for example, were to be ritually bathed during their ordination ceremony. **“Moses said to the congregation, ‘This is the thing that Yahweh has commanded to be done.’ And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water.”** (Leviticus 8:5-6) Washing with water was also prescribed for all sorts of bodily functions that, while part of the ordinary course of life, were defined as “ritually defiling.” They could imply illness, but didn't necessarily. For example, **“When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. And this is the law of his uncleanness for a discharge: whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is blocked up by his discharge, it is his uncleanness.”** (Leviticus 15:2-3) This could include anything from emissions of semen to the common cold to bubonic plague. For women, very specific instructions along similar lines were given concerning menses and childbirth. Israelites were to avoid physical contact with the one who had any of these “discharges,” and the remedy for having such contact was (as we read dozens of times) that the defiled person was to **“wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.”**

Nobody could completely avoid becoming ceremonially “unclean,” of course. The state of ritual impurity was inevitable and unavoidable, though being clean and undefiled was clearly to be preferred. Priests, for example, could not perform

certain of their duties while ceremonially defiled. But the human condition *guaranteed* ritual defilement from time to time. Sex, for instance, made both partners “ritually unclean,” and yet without it, the human race would disappear in one generation—clearly violating God’s command to “Be fruitful and multiply.” So it should come as no surprise that Yahweh never prohibited the things that caused defilement; He only insisted that we take pains to become clean again.

The ultimate permutation of defilement or uncleanness was death. But Yahweh had a remedy for this as well: the ordinance of the “Red Heifer.” Basically, a young cow, red in color, was to be sacrificed and burned to ashes, which were to be mixed with water and sprinkled upon anyone who had come in contact with a dead body. The whole complicated ritual, fraught with prophetic significance, is recounted in Numbers 19. The bottom line: **“If the man who is unclean [through contact with death] does not cleanse himself, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, since he has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh. Because the water for impurity has not been thrown on him, he is unclean. And it shall be a statute forever for them. The one who sprinkles the water for impurity shall wash his clothes, and the one who touches the water for impurity shall be unclean until evening. And whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean, and anyone who touches it shall be unclean until evening.”** (Numbers 19:20-22) Everybody involved, the one who had come in contact with death and those who were tasked with administering his remedy, were defiled—made ritually impure—in the process. The whole thing is a microcosm of the human condition. Being mortal, we all “touch death.” Even those who are part of that solution—preparing and delivering the “water of purification”—are in need of cleansing. The question is: are we willing to accept Yahweh’s solution to our problem?

These purification rituals we find in the Torah are of little *practical* use. That is, although practicing good basic hygiene is no doubt a good first step in remaining healthy, the rites as described in the Torah would have minimal effect in actually warding off disease. The ordinance of the red heifer, in particular, would seem less than efficacious in physically ensuring that contact with dead bodies did not result in life threatening illnesses. No, we really need to examine the *symbolic* aspects of these things if we hope to discern God’s life-lessons. The oft-repeated formula, you’ll recall, was for the defiled person to **“wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.”** Let us therefore examine what these three things mean.

First, what we’re wearing is a common scriptural metaphor for our status before God—our clothes represent how He sees us. Are we butt naked, or wearing fig leaf aprons we’ve cobbled together to hide our shame, or have we donned the tunics of innocent-animal skins He made for us? Do we, with Daniel, put on sackcloth and ashes when appropriate? Do we, with David, strip down to our bare



necessities and dance with passionate abandon before Yahweh when it's time to celebrate His awesome love? Do we prefer the scratchy wool of works-based religion, or the brilliant white linen garments of imputed righteousness? We aren't called to monastic isolation: we're commanded, rather, to go into all the world as witnesses of God's love. But as we walk through the world as mortal believers, it's inevitable that we'll brush up against things that render us unclean. It can't be helped. We aren't to stay that way, however. We are told to wash our garments.

Second, we are to bathe our bodies. These mortal shells we inhabit aren't designed to last forever, but they *are* gifts from God—necessary tools we all need to employ in the course of our work here on earth. It seems to me, we ought to take care of our tools, keep them sharp and clean, use them as they were intended, and so forth. I fully realize, of course, that you can go *nuts* with this—manifesting mental illnesses ranging from hypochondria to narcissism. But my body is going to look pretty much the same in a hundred years whether I pamper it and take it to the gym six days a week or if I give up and stop taking care of it altogether. It only has to get me to the end of my mortal life. So what is God talking about? I believe He's telling us not to let the world's grime and filth accumulate on us—or *in* us. Our bodies are, after all, the temple of the Holy Spirit. You wouldn't ask Yahweh to live in a pigsty, would you?

Third, we need to face the uncomfortable fact that in reality, we're going to remain "unclean"—even after we've been washed—until the sun goes down. That, my friends, is a thinly veiled euphemism for physical death (or rapture, if you happen to be part of *that* generation). The fact is, we cannot stand before a holy God clothed in these mortal bodies. We were never intended to. Paul reminds us, **"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.... For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory."** (I Corinthians 15:50, 53-55) Every believer in Yahshua will someday receive a body that's built for eternal life with Him—a very different kind of body than the one in which we walk about in this present world. We're going to ditch the defiled and put on the imperishable. Until then, our job is to keep these mortal vessels clean through frequent washing in the Word and immersion in the Spirit of God.

In reality, of course, it is not ourselves, but Yahweh who cleanses us. In what appears to be a reference to the ordinance of the Red Heifer, Yahweh promises this: **"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in**

**My statutes and be careful to obey My rules** [Hebrew *mishpat*—judgments, ordinances, judicial decisions]. **You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be My people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.**" (Ezekiel 36:25-29)

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The Torah's ritual washing instructions aren't the only scriptural examples of cleansing in water. Another equally counterintuitive incident was played out during the time of Elisha the prophet. It seems that Naaman, a top general in the Syrian army and a man held in high regard by his king, was also a leper—something just as socially debilitating in Syria as it was in Israel. A Jewish slave girl in his household, knowing the power of Yahweh, suggested that her illustrious captor visit the prophet in Samaria—Elisha—for a cure. In an hilarious scene (okay, it wasn't funny at the time), Naaman consults with his king, who (*being* a king) presumes that the most powerful guy in Israel is also *its* king, and therefore sends rich gifts to King Jehoram—along with a demand that he cure his leprous commander. Jehoram, of course, knowing that he can't perform the impossible thing being asked of him, rends his clothes in mourning, presuming that this is all merely a perverse pretext for a Syrian declaration of war. But the prophet Elisha (*being* a prophet) gets wind of Jehoram's little conundrum, and tells the king to send Naaman his way.

Here's the scene: **"So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.'** But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, **'Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of Yahweh his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?'"** The Jordan was just as turbid and muddy in those days as it is today. It's not a particularly impressive river. **"So he turned and went away in a rage."** Naaman was a great man. He figured he deserved an equally impressive cure. But God's prophet didn't even bother walking out of his front door to meet the man. He merely sent a messenger to tell him the unspectacular truth. **"But his servants came near and said to him, 'My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? He has only said to you, 'Wash, and be clean.'" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.**" (II Kings 5:9-14)

It should be obvious that it wasn't the water of the Jordan River that cured Naaman; it was his obedience to the Word of God through Elisha His prophet. One further gets the feeling that Naaman's faith at this point was practically non-existent—it was more hope, even desperation. Naaman wasn't really a "believer" until he saw the results of having submitted to God's Word. That is, he "believed" only enough to *admit the possibility* of a cure by Israel's God. In short, he was just the sort of guy Yahweh often calls: an honest searcher. Of course, he had an "advantage" in that he *knew* he needed to be cleansed. Most folks stumble through life in ignorance—or utter denial—of that fact. Naaman's "faith" was actually *created* by observing the results of his own obedience. Religious people tend to think that their faith saves them. It does not. It's Yahweh who saves. Faith is merely a byproduct of God's love and provision. Naaman's cleansing was, in the end, the result of his willingness (as reluctant as it was) to give God's Word the benefit of the doubt. He, being a soldier, was a man who understood the difference between compulsion and free will. In this case, no one with authority was *ordering* him to dip in the Jordan. He could have bailed out at any time. He could have told his slave girl to shut up and go back to work. He could have gone back home and bathed in the Pharpar. He could have stopped after six washings in the Jordan. But in the end, he did as the prophet had told him to do, exercising his own free will, ironically enough, by submitting to the instructions of another.

So what did asking the leprous Naaman to bathe seven times in the Jordan River symbolize? Naaman's name means pleasantness, delight, or beauty. But leprosy is symbolic of sin—a blemish on our character that if not dealt with will spread and fester and in the end consume us. Seven is the number of God's perfection, of spiritual completion. Doing something seven times, then, pictures its full accomplishment, as when Yahshua declared on Calvary, "It is finished." Rivers, as I noted above, are indicative of the course of our lives; and the water within them is symbolic of the moving of the Holy Spirit, whom we are tasked with "channeling" to a lost and thirsty world. And this particular river? The word "Jordan" is a transliteration of the Hebrew *Yarden*, meaning "descender." The unique thing about this river is its destination: not the ocean, but the lowest point on the surface of the earth, the Dead Sea, some 1,400 feet *below* sea level, a place of lifeless desolation.

The picture, then, is something like this: our pleasantness and beauty before God is marred by ugly sin—something that will eventually kill us. This sin *can* be removed—that is, we can be made as innocent as a little child—but only by being washed, cleansed, and immersed in God's Holy Spirit, who is set apart (for this is what "holy" means) from Yahweh on our behalf, descending to the place of death so that we might have life. However, it will not help us to simply "put our toe in the water," to merely become knowledgeable about this Spirit or be aware of its

existence. This cleansing immersion in the Spirit must be complete, unreserved, and totally voluntary: nobody will force us to obey God's instructions.

It is worth noting that Naaman was a gentile—estranged from Yahweh—who was introduced to the cure for his leprosy/sin by an Israelite slave girl, which cure was performed through an Israelite prophet. After his cleansing, he had no choice but to return to his job in a pagan-dominated world. But he was eternally grateful to Israel, and he worshipped Yahweh its God from that day forward. This is (or should be) a picture of the ekklesia of Yahshua: called out of the world, saved by a God who works through Israel, and then sent back to the world to minister there. We, like Naaman, have been made spotless and innocent by the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. Call me crazy, but I think we too ought to show our gratitude—to both Yahweh *and* Israel.

The parallels between Naaman's symbolic cleansing and the New Covenant rite of baptism are too striking to ignore. As if to underscore what we've discovered about the *meaning* of Naaman's experience in the Jordan, the risen Yahshua, just before His ascension, informed His disciples of their own impending immersion in Yahweh's Spirit: **"John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."** (Acts 1:5) This was fulfilled, of course, in the events of the Day of Pentecost—a.k.a. the Feast of Weeks—that was fulfilled seven weeks to the day after Yahshua's resurrection (as required in the Torah). This in turn had been prophesied by John the Baptist at the very beginning of Yahshua's public ministry. **"Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him [John], and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins...."** John warned the scribes and Pharisees, **"I baptize you with water for [i.e., because of] repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."** (Matthew 3:5-6, 11)

John baptized in water people who wished to give evidence of their repentance, their change of mind and heart. But the baptism (literally, immersion) with the Holy Spirit that Yahshua brought us is tantamount to bestowing everlasting life upon someone, for God's Spirit is eternal. Note that it is Yahshua Himself who does this for us. We cannot (as Simon the Sorcerer found out to his chagrin) baptize ourselves or others in the Holy Spirit. John also mentioned Christ "baptizing with fire." The symbolism here is slightly different from baptism with the Spirit. Fire, like water, is spoken of as an agent of purification. Whereas water separates us from impurity by washing it away, fire separates us from impurity by destroying that which is worthless. In a way, this dual baptism is the same picture as that which we see in the tabernacle courtyard: life is bestowed upon us at the altar, where Yahweh's perfect sacrifice is slain in retribution for our sin. This is followed by the cleansing of our hands and feet (our works and walk) at the

bronze laver. If you have indeed been baptized into Christ, then both sides of your salvation—justification and sanctification—have been achieved, for as John said, our Messiah baptizes us with the Holy Spirit *and* with fire.

Paul later alluded to the same principle, stated a bit differently: **“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!”** That would be the spiritual equivalent of offering the sacrifice without availing oneself of the water of cleansing at the laver, or of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, but not with fire: both things are needed. **“How can we who died to sin still live in it?”** Put another way, the inevitable result of uncleanness (read: sin) is death, but you can’t make a corpse alive by washing it. Both life and righteousness are required if we wish to stand before our God. **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.”** (Romans 6:1-5) Like Naaman bathing in the “Descender,” the Jordan River, the baptism we observe today is a picture of the death of Christ and the cleansing it provides by removing our sins from us—followed by the picture of His resurrection (coming up out of the water): being raised into a new, holy, and eternal life. But there is absolutely no value in participating in the symbolic ritual of water baptism if you haven’t both been made eternally alive *and* cleansed through faith in Yahshua the Messiah. If you baptize a pagan, all you get is a wet pagan.

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I’m not in the habit of quoting Shakespeare, but a scene from *Macbeth* comes to mind that vividly illustrates the psychological connection between the guilt of sin and our perception of being unclean. In Act 5, Scene 1, the sleepwalking, guilt-ridden Lady Macbeth is seen—and not for the first time—wringing her hands in anguish, trying to remove an invisible stain, one only she can see. She is heard muttering, “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!... What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?... Here’s the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.”

You’re not alone, Lady M. We all have blood on our hands. The question is: why does it not drive *us* mad, as it did you? Have we become so adept at suppressing our consciences? Why do we find comfort in the fact that “everybody’s doing it”? Do we not realize that our sin has the power of death over us—that the least infraction, the smallest transgression of Yahweh’s standard of righteousness, is enough to separate us from Him forever?

As ironic as it seems, only when we are willing to acknowledge our sin before God in the light of day do we have any hope of being rid of its “damned spot.” David knew what it was like to yield to temptation, to compound his sin by trying to cover it up, and then to live in abject misery, estranged from His God, as he wallowed in denial and self deception. Faced at last with the reality of his sin, David pleaded, **“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”** (Psalm 51:1-3, 7) The hyssop and washings are a reference to the symbols of the ordinance of the red heifer, that which was required to cleanse someone from the defilement of death. Significantly, David appeals not to his own righteousness, something he now knows to be either inadequate or nonexistent. Instead, he asks for mercy based on *God’s* unfathomable love. Christians tend to take this for granted, but we shouldn’t, for it’s totally counterintuitive. In essence, the sinful person stands before God saying, *Since it’s Your standard I’ve violated, only You can pronounce me “not guilty.”* It’s true, of course, but why should He?

The answer is found in the Torah (all of whose symbols were ultimately fulfilled by Yahshua the Messiah). The “Law of Moses” presents a dizzying array of sacrifices and offerings that the Israelites were to present before Yahweh. Basically, there were seven distinct types. (No surprise there.) I’ll cover them in some detail in a later chapter; for now, I’ll just list and define them:

(1) The *olah*, or “burnt offering,” pictured the Messiah’s total commitment. It was a voluntary sacrifice made for atonement, homage to Yahweh, or celebration before Him. Total dedication is implied, for the offering was to be completely consumed by fire.

(2) The *mincha*, or grain offering, was a memorial of the provision of all our needs by Yahweh. The addition of oil symbolized the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the sprinkling of frankincense spoke of the purity that God would provide for us through the sacrifice of Yahshua.

(3) The *selem*, or peace offering, was offered as a spontaneous expression of praise to Yahweh, as a way to express one’s thanksgiving for answered prayer, to underscore the seriousness of a vow, or as a freewill offering to show one’s devotion.

(4) The *chata’t*, or sin offering, was brought by the guilty party when he became aware of his transgression, to the priest to be sacrificed. Blood sacrifices like the *chata’t* speak of atonement for sin, for the life is in the blood.

(5) The *asham*, or trespass offering, was to be provided for our “mistakes,” our offenses in holiness (as the *chata’t* covers our “sins,” our lapses in behavior).

(6) The *neseq*, or drink offering, was wine offered up in conjunction with any animal sacrifice, whether an *olah*, *selem*, *chata't*, or *asham*. It would accompany the grain component that was mixed with oil, and there was to be the same amount of wine as there was oil. All four Gospels tie it directly to the blood of Yahshua that was poured out for us at Calvary.

(7) The *bekor*, or firstborn offering, indicated that the firstborn male of every Israelite family belonged to Yahweh, as well as every firstborn animal. The slain firstborn males were a metaphor for Yahweh's own "firstborn," who would be slain to save men from the consequences of their own transgressions.

All of these sacrifices were administered by priests—male descendents of Moses' brother Aaron. These priests were (like most everything else in the Torah) prophetic of our Messiah, who was said to be a priest not of the Aaronic line, but of the order of Melchizedek (see Psalm 110:4). So the function of cleansing has now been inherited by, and transferred to, Yahshua: **"Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."** (Hebrews 10:21-22) An "evil conscience" is what poor old Lady Macbeth was struggling with—the sure knowledge that she was indeed guilty, even if no one on earth would be able to punish her for her crime. Her conscience was telling her the same thing Paul told the Corinthians: **"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."** This is not a comprehensive no-no list. I'm sure we can include murderers like Lady Macbeth in there (well, we could if she weren't a fictional character), as well as those who practice whatever it is you and I are guilty of. **"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."** (I Corinthians 6:9-11)

God's purification is beginning to sound like a "get out of jail free" card, but it's not, not really. Yes, Yahshua's blood cleanses us; the purifying water of the Holy Spirit welling up within us makes us clean before God. But Yahweh doesn't cleanse us unless we *choose* to submit to His cleansing. We have a part to play in this. Yahweh says, **"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. Come now, let us reason together, says Yahweh: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."** (Isaiah 1:16-18) Like the prodigal son in the parable, we must choose to turn around and return to our Father. His grace is sufficient for all our trespasses, but He won't force us to accept it. It's up to us to make the first move.

We who have accepted God's offer of cleansing have, by doing so, "removed the evil of our deeds from before Yahweh's eyes." Put another way, we have been called out of the world, betrothed as the bride of our Messiah and King. So Paul's admonition to husbands is actually based on what Yahshua has done for us: **"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church [literally, the "called-out"] and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."** (Ephesians 5:25-27) Several words are used here to convey the idea of being made clean by Yahshua and thus made worthy to be in His presence (remarkably, not as subjects or slaves, but as His honored bride). (1) "Sanctify" is the Greek verb *hagiazō*, meaning to render someone holy (that is, set apart for God); to separate from profane things and dedicate to God; to purify, either externally or internally—i.e., by expiation, removing the guilt of sin and renewing the soul. (2) "Cleansed" is the Greek *katharizō*, a verb meaning to make clean, to cleanse, either from physical stains or dirt or in a moral sense—to free from the defilement of sin and wickedness. This is the word one would use to describe being cured of leprosy: to pronounce clean in a Levitical sense (leprosy itself being a symbol of sin and its guilt). (3) "Washing" is *loutron*, the Greek noun used to denote a bath, bathing or washing, or by extension, the laver or basin in which the water for washing is held. These are the things Yahshua's love accomplishes on our behalf.

On the negative side, (1) a "spot" is a *spilos*—a fault, moral blemish, stain, or blot. A related word (*spilas*) denotes a dangerous rock, ledge, or reef in the sea, and hence is metaphorical of people who "shipwreck" others in a moral sense. (2) The word translated "wrinkle" is the Greek noun *rhutis*, used only this once in scripture. It's apparently derived from the verb *rhupōō*, meaning to make filthy, to defile, or to soil. Finally, (3) "blemish" is *mōmos*, a noun denoting blame, fault, blemish, disgrace, a blot on one's character, or an insult. These are the things Christ's love and sacrifice prevents in the life of His people.

Technically, Israel is not coterminous with the ekklesia (the "church"). That is, although the ekklesia, the body and bride of Christ, includes both gentile and Jewish believers, Yahweh has a separate destiny planned for Israel *as a nation*. The prophetic fact is that Israel's inevitable national epiphany reconciling them to their God and His Messiah will not occur until after the ekklesia has been removed from the earthly scene (in the event commonly referred to as "the rapture"). The belatedly restored remnant of Israel will be, as unlikely as it sounds considering the current state of geopolitical affairs, the premier nation in the post-apocalyptic world—the last and only superpower during Yahshua's Millennial Kingdom. But the picture of God's cleansing through the agency of water will be as germane to Israel in the coming age as it is to the ekklesia in the current one. In a clearly Millennial passage, the prophet Zechariah writes, **"On that day there shall**



be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.” (Zechariah 13:1) This isn’t purely metaphorical, either. There are actually going to be two rivers, flowing east and west from beneath the new temple in Jerusalem. They’re described in the following chapter: **“On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter.”** (Zechariah 14:8) The amazing life-giving properties of these rivers are pictured in detail by Ezekiel: **“Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.... And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”** (Ezekiel 47:9, 12) Once again, we see God’s river bringing not only the water of spiritual cleansing, but life itself.

Satan (our adversary) would like us to believe that water’s cleansing, life-giving properties are not a gift from God to us, nor do we owe Him our thanks or allegiance. He would have us suppose that we are both alive and clean (or at least clean *enough*) without Yahweh. But during the coming Tribulation Yahweh will allow mankind to experience a not-so-subtle reminder of how vital this gift of life and cleansing really is. **“The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.”** (Revelation 8:10-11) A big sulfur-rich asteroid breaking up in the earth’s atmosphere would have precisely that effect. I believe (for reasons I hinted at earlier in this chapter) that Yahshua’s Millennial Kingdom will commence in the autumn of 2033. It should be of some interest, then, that just such an asteroid is scheduled for a “razor-burn” fly-by with earth on April 13, 2029. Of course, my “intel” is two thousand years old, and NASA now *swears* it’s going to miss, but you have to at least *wonder*. Don’t let the fact bother you that the verb rendered “fell” here (*pipto*) can mean “to be thrust down” (as in: *it had help*). My point is not that the 99942 Apophis asteroid *has to be* the fulfillment of the prophecy; it’s that the earth’s supply of fresh water exists at Yahweh’s discretion—both metaphorically and literally.

Cleansing comes about neither by our own efforts nor by wishful thinking nor by self-declaration. Solomon asks, **“Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin’?”** (Proverbs 20:9) Along the same lines, Agur notes: **“There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth.”** (Proverbs 30:12) Only Yahweh can define purity; only He can make us clean.

## AIR / BREATH / WIND

### ❧ 1.3.5 ❧

#### *Inspiration*

The English phrase “catching the wind” is a euphemism for harnessing something that is intrinsically elusive, impossible to pin down—in a word, “uncatchable.” Our poets employ sentiments like *the wind beneath my wings* to describe what can’t really be described—something that’s invisible, incorporeal, and intangible, but at the same time ubiquitous, real, and vital, something that’s essential to our very existence. The air we breathe is as necessary to our life as it is taken for granted. It should therefore come as no particular surprise that one of the central themes comprising God’s self-portrait is the metaphor of air, breath, or wind—the symbols used to communicate the elusive, esoteric concept of *spirit*.

The two Hebrew words that most directly communicate this concept are *ruach* (wind or spirit) and *neshamah* (breath). Both concepts are rendered with the same word group in Greek: *pnoe* (wind or breath) is used only twice in scripture, but its cousin, *pneuma*, appears 385 times. The root of both these words is the verb *pneo*, meaning to breathe or blow. We’ll get more deeply into the definitions of these words as we proceed; as you might imagine, they assume (just as they do in English) a broad range of metaphorical nuances and underlying meanings—all of which can help to shed light on what Yahweh wants us to know about Himself, His nature, and His plan.

A third Hebrew word often seen “hanging out on the same street corners” as *ruach* and *neshamah* is *nepesh* (or *nepes*), usually translated “soul” or “life.” This too is also connected etymologically to the concept of breath. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “The original, concrete meaning of the word was probably ‘to breathe.’ The verb occurs three times in the medio-passive Niphal stem with the meaning ‘to refresh oneself’ (Exodus 23:12; 31:17; II Samuel 16:14)... The noun appears to denote ‘breath’ in Genesis 1:30: ‘in which [i.e. the land creatures] is the breath of life.’ The connection between *nepeš* and breath is also suggested by such statements as: ‘and [the Lord] breathed [*nph*] into his [man’s] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living *soul*’ (Genesis 2:7); and ‘the *nepeš* [life/breath/soul] of the child returned and he revived’ (I Kings 21:22).” The Greek equivalent is *psuche*, the breath or soul. But the primary definition of *nepesh* is soul, self, mind, or living being, the seat of emotion, passion, and mental activity, and for this study, I’ll be using that basic definition. Believe me, this is complicated enough already.

At issue here is something that should be of vital interest to anyone seeking to have a relationship with Yahweh. What is His physical nature? What kind of

being is He? Faced with picturing Yahweh on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo basically “punted,” portraying Him as an elderly Caucasian male in marvelous physical condition, wearing a white nightshirt and sporting rather longish gray hair and a windswept beard. (One wonders if the artist consulted with his patron, Pope Julius II, about what God looked like.) Yahweh Himself, in the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4), had warned us about the futility of trying to picture God. And Yahshua described God in terms that defy physical description: **“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”** (John 4:23-24)

The word translated “spirit” here (all three times) is the Greek noun *pneuma*. *Strong’s* defines *pneuma*: “(1) A movement of air (a gentle blast of the wind, hence the wind itself, or the breath of nostrils or mouth). (2) the spirit, i.e. the vital principal by which the body is animated; the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks, decides; the soul. (3) a spirit, i.e. a simple essence, devoid of all or at least all grosser matter, and possessed of the power of knowing, desiring, deciding, and acting; a life giving spirit; a human soul that has left the body; a spirit higher than man but lower than God, i.e. an angel—used of demons, or evil spirits, who were conceived as inhabiting the bodies of men; the spiritual nature of Christ, higher than the highest angels and equal to God, the divine nature of Christ. (4) of God: God’s power and agency distinguishable in thought from his essence in itself considered; manifest in the course of affairs; by its influence upon the souls productive in the theocratic body (the church) of all the higher spiritual gifts and blessings; the third person of the trinity, the God the Holy Spirit. (5) the disposition or influence which fills and governs the soul of anyone; the efficient source of any power, affection, emotion, desire, etc.”

I think it can be safely concluded that two millennia of Christian tradition (known in theological circles as “guessing”) has thoroughly muddied the waters here. If the spirit and the soul were exactly the same thing, scripture wouldn’t have used two different words to describe “it.”

As if to tell us the word defies succinct definition, *Zodhiates* rambles on for five pages trying to pin down *pneuma*. Being merciful, I won’t quote the whole thing, but here are some highlights: “(1) Breath: of the mouth or nostrils, breath of air, air in motion, a breeze, blast, or wind. (2) Spirit: vital spirit or life, the principle of life residing in man and again returning to God; that part that can live independently of the body; the rational spirit, mind, element of life, distinct from the body and soul. (3) A Spirit: a simple, incorporeal immaterial being (thought of as possessing higher capacities than man does in his present state). Created spirits: of the human soul or spirit, after its departure from the body and existing in separate state; of an evil spirit, a demon, mostly used with the adjective

*akatharton*, as an unclean spirit. Of God in reference to His incorporeality; of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ as being communicated by Him after His resurrection and ascension.” And he drones on and on, seemingly finding a slightly different definition of *pneuma* for each and every instance in the New Covenant scriptures.

If you’ll recall, in Chapter 2 I discussed the concept of “spirit” at length, and noted that the *Random House Dictionary* listed thirty-one distinct definitions for “spirit.” And I’ve gone through the painful exercise of reviewing several lexicons’ take on *pneuma*, the Greek word translated spirit, in order to demonstrate the same truth: nobody really seems to know what “spirit” (in the Biblical sense) means. That is, the context determines what shade of meaning *pneuma* (or *ruach*, for that matter) is meant to convey—and for this reason, the preconceptions of the translators and lexicographers have a tremendous impact on how we view the concept of “spirit.” In particular, I believe they’re wrong when they use “spirit” and “soul” interchangeably: these are two distinct concepts, both of which will to some extent remain as elusive and ephemeral as the wind as long as we view them from the vantage point of our mortal existence. I’ll try to explain what I mean more fully as we proceed, but for now, allow me to propose a simpler, more focused definition of *pneuma* and *ruach*—the Biblical concept of spirit:

(1) The literal meaning of *ruach/pneuma* is breath or wind, air in motion—unseen but perceived, invisible but essential, able to bring either life-giving rains or terrifying destruction. A body will die within minutes of its air supply being cut off, and yet we seldom give the process of breathing a second thought. All of these qualities make *ruach/pneuma* a natural metaphor for God’s perplexing nature, and an important component of His self-portrait.

(2) By implication then, a *ruach/pneuma* is an incorporeal living being—one who has no material substance but does have consciousness and personality, one who exercises volition. These beings can be either uncreated or created. Yahweh (undiminished deity) with His Holy Spirit (a diminished manifestation of Yahweh, set apart from Him in order to dwell within believers) is uncreated: He is eternally self-existent. Created spirits are commonly called angels—literally “messengers”—or demons (fallen angels). This type of *ruach/pneuma* may assume visible form, but their nature, the basis of their life and existence, is fundamentally different from that of mortal beings. Created spirits are not subject to the laws of physics or the constraints of molecular structure or biology. And they are apparently immortal—once created, they don’t die.

(3) The third and last definition of *ruach/pneuma* is one’s inspiration, his personality, enthusiasm, or insight—a direct result of the life that is within him. It is his driving force, his motivating influence, his *raison d’être*. This could be a measure of the spiritual anointing with which one is blessed, or it could describe

the attitude that someone derives from association with a spirit (in the sense of Definition #2) dwelling within him. But it is not technically the same thing as one's soul—that which makes any animal biologically alive.

Based on this somewhat simplified definition of *ruach*/pneuma, I think we could safely paraphrase the defining John 4 passage we reviewed above this way: **"The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in a state of enthusiastic inspiration based on His truth, for Father Yahweh is seeking such people to worship Him. God is an uncreated, self-existent, immaterial Being, and those who worship Him must worship through the truth provided by His personal spiritual presence dwelling within them."** Or something like that.

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In order to serve as the basis of a metaphor, a word or concept must have its own independent reality. So when *ruach* or *pneuma* are mentioned in scripture to denote literal "wind," God's Spirit is not necessarily in view. As if to make my point for me, we read, **"And behold, Yahweh passed by, and a great and strong wind [*ruach*] tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before Yahweh, but Yahweh was not in the wind [*ruach*]."** (I Kings 19:11) So we should be cautious about reading too much into verses like this: **"So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and Yahweh brought an east wind [*ruach*] upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind [*ruach*] had brought the locusts."** (Exodus 10:13) Although it's possible, I suppose, for Yahweh's Spirit to have brought the locusts from the east, it seems far more likely that mere "air in motion," the primary meaning of *ruach*, is meant. My personal favorite example of *ruach* literally meaning wind is Job's complaint: **"I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all. Shall windy [*ruach*] words have an end?"** (Job 16:2-3) Sometimes our words are spiritually edifying; sometimes they're just hot air.

The same thing is true of the literal meaning of *neshamah*: breath. In fact, several times in scripture the concept of "breath" is poetically applied to God Himself, even though Yahweh, a spiritual being, doesn't literally have lungs or nostrils. For example, **"Then the channels of the sea were seen; the foundations of the world were laid bare, at the rebuke of Yahweh, at the blast of the breath [*neshamah*] of His nostrils."** (II Samuel 22:16; cf. Psalm 18:15) Or, **"For a burning place has long been prepared; indeed, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath [*neshamah*] of Yahweh, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it."** (Isaiah 30:33) Or, **"As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath [*neshamah*] of God they perish, and by the blast [or spirit: *ruach*] of His anger they are consumed."** (Job 4:8-9)

As if to highlight the interwoven complexity of these word-pictures, Ezekiel's famous "dry bones" vision uses *ruach* (normally rendered spirit or wind) as a euphemism for breath—the cue being the verb *naphach*—to breathe or blow—the same word used in Genesis 2:7 when God *breathed* into Adam's nostrils the breath (*neshamah*) of life, making him a living soul. **"And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath [*ruach*] in them. Then He said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath [*ruach*]; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath [*ruach*], Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Come from the four winds [*ruach*], O breath [*ruach*], and breathe [*naphach*] on these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath [*ruach*] came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army."** (Ezekiel 37:7-10) Keeping in mind that this was a *vision* the prophet was seeing, and not a waking reality, we are still forced to conclude that the substance of God's "breath" is His Spirit—His own personality.

Bottom line: we must come to terms with the fact that even though words like *neshamah*, *ruach*, or *nephesh* can assume technical meanings that might help us understand the nature of God and our relationship to Him, they are at their core just ordinary words that have been pressed into service as symbols of a larger, richer reality. We need to use the brains God gave us to sort it all out. Yahweh, after all, really loves His parables.

The metaphorical connection between "wind" and "spirit" was pointed out by Yahshua as he explained things to Nicodemus: **"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit [*pneuma*], he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit [both *pneuma*]. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind [*pneuma*] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit [*pneuma*].'"** (John 3:5-8) I stated a few paragraphs back that I believed the lexicographers were wrong in assuming that the spirit and the soul were more or less interchangeable concepts. The idea that all men have a body, soul, *and* spirit is flatly denied by Yahshua here. Rather, the nature of our existence as presented in John 3 is that men are first "born of the flesh" (a.k.a. "born of water") with bodies made biologically alive by their souls (*nephesh/psuche*). If the soul and body are parted from each other, physical death is the result—just as with any animal. So if a man has been born *only* of the flesh, he is not (yet) a spiritual being—a second birth is required if he (his soul) is to outlive his frail, mortal body.

That's why Yahshua informed Nicodemus, **"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is**

**condemned already.**” (John 3:17-18) Condemned to what? To the same sort of non-existence any animal has when it dies: the permanent cessation of life and consciousness. We can be “saved” from this fate, He says, by “believing in” (that is, trusting and relying upon) the Son of God—Himself. How does this “salvation” work? Technically, it’s being born of the Spirit of God, just as we were previously born in the flesh. It’s being clothed in a new kind of life.

So it’s being born “again,” but that’s not really an accurate translation: it actually says, **“You must be born from above** [Greek: *anothen*—from *ano*: up, upwards, above].” Why is the distinction important? Because it’s also possible to be “born from below,” so to speak. The condition is described fairly often, although the *phrase* is never used in scripture. Remember, Yahweh is no longer the only spiritual being in existence. Spirits He Himself created (fallen angels, demons) are capable of indwelling people in the same way Yahweh’s Holy Spirit does His children. Yahweh told Noah, **“For behold, I will bring flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath [*ruach*] of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark.”** (Genesis 6:17-18) The point of the flood, then, was to wipe out all of humanity that had received satanic or demonic spirits—people who had been “born from below.” Apparently, they comprised the vast majority of mankind. **“Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath [*neshamah*] of the spirit [*ruach*] of life died.”** (Genesis 7:22) The land animals that died along with the demonically indwelled humans were collateral damage: they were not the target of God’s wrath. Our sins affect more than we might imagine.

This last statement forces us to examine the connection between the *ruach* (wind or spirit) and the *neshamah*—usually translated “breath.” Most lexicons are woefully ambivalent when it comes to distinguishing these concepts. *Baker and Carpenter’s* definition says *neshamah* is “A feminine noun meaning breath, wind, spirit. Its meaning is parallel to *nepes* [or *nephesh*] and *ruah* [*ruach*].” The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* remarks, “It is frequently found in combination with *ruah*, “spirit,” and seems synonymous with *nepes*.” I see a couple of problems here. First, Yahweh is very precise in His use of terminology—especially in Hebrew. He would have not have transmitted His thoughts with three different words if they all meant exactly the same thing, nor would He have used them side by side in the same sentences. Second, the primary meanings of both these words form the basis of a metaphor that runs throughout scripture, and worse (actually, *better*), this metaphor is turning out to be an important component in God’s self-portrait. In other words, it behooves us to get to the bottom of this.

I have likened the *neshamah* to Pascal’s “God-shaped vacuum” that resides within every man, but that’s something of a metaphor in itself. It may describe

what it does, but not what it is. We are given our first clues to the nature of the *neshamah* in the creation account. **“Then Yahweh, God, formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath [*neshamah*] of life, and the man became a living creature [*nephesh*].”** (Genesis 2:7) Notice two things. First, the *neshamah* was purposely and exclusively bestowed upon man (both Adam and Eve) by Yahweh Himself. Animals weren’t given one, nor is the *neshamah* an accident of nature: thus we are by God’s design fundamentally distinct from other living things. Second, the man’s soul was apparently given life by virtue of the *neshamah*—he became a “living soul” only *after* Yahweh breathed the *neshamah* into his nostrils. Since the animals that came before Adam were also described as “living souls” (e.g. Genesis 1:24), we can only conclude that the *kind* of life that came with the introduction of the *neshamah* was somehow different from that which lions and tigers and sea slugs enjoyed.

Perhaps the key to this is what we saw in the *TWOT* definition above (inadvertently, at least): “[*Neshamah*] seems synonymous with *nephesh*.” That is, as the *nephesh* or soul gives biological life to the body, the *neshamah* allows the soul to experience a different kind of life: spiritual life. So the two things, *neshamah* and *nephesh*, aren’t so much synonymous as they are parallel. Like a river and the road built following its banks, the destination (life) is the same, but the vehicle is different. This analysis is in perfect sync with what Yahshua told Nicodemus: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** Being “born of the flesh” is the quickening (that is, the making alive) of the body by the soul. Being “born of the spirit” is the quickening of the soul through the *neshamah*—that which allows us to receive an immortal indwelling spirit.

Job’s young friend Elihu unintentionally explained how the *neshamah* functions as he summoned the boldness to speak his mind among his elders. Basically, his argument was that he had a right to speak out simply by virtue of Yahweh’s spirit-life within him. He was no dumb animal: like Job and his other “comforters,” he too had been made in the very image of God. So he says, **“The Spirit [*ruach*] of God has made me, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives me life.”** (Job 33:4) The heart of his case was the intimate relationship between God’s spirit and the breath of life that is uniquely mankind’s: **“It is the spirit [*ruach*] in man, the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty, that makes him understand.”** (Job 32:8) They are so closely associated that one can’t exist in our experience without the other. God’s Spirit would be inaccessible to someone without a *neshamah*, but a *neshamah* devoid of the Spirit is equally pointless—an empty canteen in an endless desert.

The result of having this spiritual life, Elihu says, is that it allows him to *understand*: it is the conduit of Godly wisdom. Solomon—the wisest man of his age—wrote pretty much the same thing: **“The spirit [*neshamah*] of man is the lamp of**



Yahweh, searching all his innermost parts.” (Proverbs 20:27) As usual, Solomon has hit on something quite profound. The “lamp of Yahweh,” that which lets us see our fallen nature, perceive our hidden depravity, and appreciate our unworthiness before God, is the *neshamah*—the same part of our constitution that makes Yahweh’s Spiritual indwelling possible. And if the *neshamah* is the “lamp,” the oil that fuels it is Yahweh’s Spirit. This the same thing Paul talked about: **“What can be known about God is plain to them [i.e., those who suppress the truth], because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”** (Romans 1:19-20) It is the *neshamah* that reveals Yahweh’s presence and power to unredeemed man. In a way, it’s like your conscience. It’s within you—you can run from it, but you can’t hide. It’s like trying to flee from your own heart.

Isaiah expands the thought. **“Thus says God, Yahweh, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath [*neshamah*] to the people on it and spirit [*ruach*] to those who walk in it: ‘I am Yahweh; I have called You in righteousness; I will take You by the hand and keep You; I will give You as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.’”** (Isaiah 42:5-7) Yes, God has breathed into us His breath of life, His *neshamah*, and has made that breath the vehicle through which His Spirit can give us everlasting life. And yes, this Spirit-filled *neshamah* is the means through which we receive God’s light—the wisdom and understanding that only He can provide. But that’s not the end of it. Though this was written as a Messianic promise, we too are to reflect or transmit this light to those around us. Our *neshamah*, Spirit-filled and shining forth God’s love, is a covenant—a promise from Yahweh—to others that He is willing and able to perform the same miracle of everlasting spiritual life in them.

Having a *neshamah*, then, is not technically the same thing as having God’s *Ruach*. As I’ve said before, Yahweh will not force His love upon us; He will not compel us to receive His Holy Spirit into the *neshamah* He’s given us to make that very thing possible. So scripture also speaks of cases in which *neshamah*-equipped men are *not* associated with Yahweh’s Spirit—or worse, are indwelled with the spirits of demonic beings: **“But in the cities of these peoples that Yahweh your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes [*neshamah*], but you shall devote them to complete destruction: the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as Yahweh your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against Yahweh your God.”** (Deuteronomy 20:16-18) The destruction of the Canaanite tribes and the flood of Noah’s day were both apparently precipitated by the same thing—the whole population had polluted their *neshamah* with satanic spirits.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but we're headed that way again. Yahshua described the last days—the days in which we now live—like being “in the days of Noah.” So in a pointed rebuke to today's secular humanists—those who worship man in the place of God—we are told, **“Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath [*neshamah*], for of what account is he?”** (Isaiah 2:22) It's a rhetorical question, but one for which Job's friend Elihu once again has the answer: **“If He [Yahweh] should set His heart to it and gather to Himself His spirit [*ruach*] and His breath [*neshamah*], all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.”** (Job 34:14-15) In fact, Yahshua bluntly warns us that the earth is going to come within a whisker of that very thing happening: **“Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”** (Matthew 24:21-22)

Who are these “elect” ones? And why will the days be cut short? Isaiah provides the answer using the terminology germane to our present discussion: **“Thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit [*ruach*], to revive the spirit [*ruach*] of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit [*ruach*] would grow faint before Me, and the breath [*neshamah*] of life that I made.”** (Isaiah 57:15-16) As long as unredeemed men walk the earth, Yahweh will “contend” with our race, for He is a holy God. Our fallen race will know no peace until the Prince of Peace reigns among us. Until then, even the redeemed are promised tribulation in this world, tempered with the encouragement that Christ has overcome the world. Let us then stand with Job, who was no stranger to such tribulation, as he declares his undying devotion to Yahweh (and in the process shows us once again how the *nephesh*, *neshamah*, and *ruach* interrelate): **“As God lives, who has taken away my right [i.e., legal recourse], and the Almighty, who has made my soul [*nephesh*] bitter, as long as my breath [*neshamah*] is in me, and the spirit [*ruach*] of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit.”** (Job 27:2-4)

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The words translated “spirit” in scripture can denote (as in common English parlance) more than the type of incorporeal, immaterial being that we're told is Yahweh's intrinsic nature, or alternately, literal wind or breath. The word, as I noted above, is also used symbolically: “*Ruach/pneuma* is one's inspiration, personality, enthusiasm, or insight—a direct result of the life that is within him. It is his driving force, his motivating influence, his *raison d'être*.” We use phrases like “team spirit,” or “being there in spirit” to describe our feelings, our inward

motivation. So in the “spirit” of thorough investigation, perhaps we should examine some scriptural examples of this kind of word usage. We may be able to discern more clearly why God chose to employ this particular symbolic concept. At the very least, we might be able to spot the source of some of our confusion on the matter.

In one sense, a person’s “spirit” is synonymous with his inner feelings. So we read, **“So in the morning [Pharaoh’s] spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men.”** (Genesis 41:8) This is clearly a reference to Pharaoh’s demeanor, his state of mind—not a breeze or an immaterial being. The same basic meaning is in view here: **“Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.”** (Exodus 6:9) Depression resulting from their cruel bondage was such a debilitating force, the enslaved Israelites couldn’t even bring themselves to think about gaining their freedom. The “spirit” in this sense need not be a negative thing, however, nor must it be psychological. Physical restoration is spoken of in the same terms: **“They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived.”** (I Samuel 30:11-12)

There is another sense in which one’s “spirit” takes on more personal characteristics, though we’re still not talking about the indwelling Holy Spirit of Yahweh, nor are we mistaking the spirit for the soul—that which defines one’s mortal life. For instance, Yahshua told His disciples, **“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** (Matthew 26:41) He’s saying that our heartfelt intentions may succumb to the weakness of the flesh—and that prayer is the proper recourse under such testing. The “spirit” in this case is the embodiment of what we believe, that about which we are passionate, the thing that moves us. It is, in short, our inspiration.

Several places we are left to ponder whether the “spirit” being spoken of is this kind of motivating mindset or the actual Holy Spirit. **“And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts?’”** (Mark 2:8) Was this perception due to the Holy Spirit, or was it, as the dictionary definition puts it, “the principle of conscious life; the vital principle in humans, animating the body or mediating between body and soul.” I honestly don’t know.

Nor can I be dogmatic about this usage: **“And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”** (Acts 7:59) This occurred after the Day of Pentecost, so Stephen had God’s Spirit dwelling within him at this time (according to the promise of Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8). Was what he called “my spirit” really God’s Spirit within him? Or could it be that Stephen was referring to what we might call his ghost? Although they’re not technically a concept supported by scripture, it is clear that ghosts or apparitions—ostensibly the visible

disembodied souls of dead people walking among us—were as much a part of the common mythology of first-century Judea as they are in twenty-first-century America. In fact, the recently risen Christ was mistaken for a ghost (called a *pneuma*) by His own disciples: **“As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you!’ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”** (Luke 24:36-39) I find it fascinating that Yahshua didn’t inform them that there was no such thing as ghosts, nor did He confirm their existence. He merely asked them to compare what they thought such an apparition would be like to the Person standing there among them. He may not have been mortal any more, but He was most certainly *real*. His physical resurrection gave Him a body that was unlike anything they had ever seen—a body that nobody had even imagined could have existed. And seeing it instantly transformed them from defeated and demoralized victims to confident and optimistic believers. Seeing a ghost would have confirmed Yahshua’s death in their minds. But His resurrection body proved He was *alive*.

Also, the word “spirit” can be used to describe one’s aptitude, gifts, or skills: **“You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.”** (Exodus 28:3) These skills or gifts need not be restricted to artistic aptitude. Such a “spirit” is also spoken of in terms of a calling—especially one into God’s service. Moses’ leadership ability was an example of just such a spiritual gift, and Yahweh saw no problem with spreading the wealth: **“And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.”** (Numbers 11:17) The translators have capitalized “Spirit” here, saying in effect, *the Holy Spirit is what’s meant*. But I doubt that’s the case. I think it’s the same kind of “spirit”—that is, the aptitude and ability—that Bezalel and company exercised as they fashioned the tabernacle and its furnishings.

I believe the same kind of thing is true of Elisha’s bold request: **“When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.’ And Elisha said, ‘Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.’”** (II Kings 2:9) He was not suggesting that the Holy Spirit had only made a half-hearted effort with Elijah, and that Elisha wanted the *whole* Spirit to work through him. After all, Yahshua explained, **“He whom God has sent utters the words of God, for He gives the Spirit without measure.”** (John 3:34). Rather, Elisha was asking that even more of Elijah’s prophetic anointing—his gift or capacity for doing the will of Yahweh before the people—would be granted to him. (Apparently, God liked the spirit of Elisha’s request: he ended up doing precisely twice the number of recorded miracles as his mentor had.)

Several times in scripture the concepts of “spirit” (as generalized motivating influence) and “Spirit” (as the personality of God) are juxtaposed—apparently to point out the contrast. For example: **“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”** (I Corinthians 2:12-13) The “spirit of the world” is not Satan’s spirit *per se*, but rather “human wisdom,” the best we can achieve without God’s influence and guidance. Paul is pointing out the basic dichotomy between the two things: human wisdom is not merely inferior to, but is fundamentally different from Yahweh’s wisdom—spiritual truth. Further, those not indwelt with the Holy Spirit are not capable of understanding spiritual truth—it’s like asking a blind man to contemplate the color blue. That explains a lot about why believers can’t really convince people through argument or logic that Yahweh’s path is the only one that leads toward life. Until someone *chooses* to seek the truth, he won’t be able to recognize it, even if it’s right in front of him.

The same sort of contrast is seen in the ordination of Joshua, Moses’ successor, though here it’s more subtle. **“Moses spoke to Yahweh, saying, ‘Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Yahweh may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.’ So Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him.”** (Numbers 27:15-18) The “spirits of all flesh” refers to the fact that Yahweh is the source of all biological life—life that’s mortal, vulnerable, and apt to go astray (or extinct). In other words, he’s saying we need help. Moses, whose spiritual aptitude had been Israel’s conduit to God for the past forty years, was about to die, and he was concerned about who would lead the “congregation of Yahweh.” God’s answer was to appoint Joshua, a man who, like Moses, was led, motivated, and indwelt by His own Spirit. So again we see the generalized “spirit” of the world contrasted to the specific “Spirit” of Yahweh.

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In the final analysis, perhaps it wouldn’t matter all that much if the concept of *ruach/pneuma* were slightly misunderstood, except for one inconvenient fact: we live in a world of constant spiritual warfare, whether we perceive it or not. **“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** (Ephesians 6:12) Not only is Yahweh a spiritual being—living, immaterial, incorporeal, eternal, and powerful beyond anything we can even

imagine, He has in turn created myriads of spirit “messengers” who share similar characteristics. Though not eternal (since they had a beginning) these angelic beings are immortal from the time they’re created: they apparently cannot be unmade, even by God Himself. Even that shouldn’t have been a problem, since angels, unlike men, have not been given the privilege of choice. They’re more like soldiers: following God’s orders is not optional for them.

But as with human soldiers, rebellion, though forbidden, is physically possible. There’s a word for it: mutiny. A rebellious angel is known as a demon (transliterated from the Greek *daimon*)—a devil, evil spirit, or false god. But though they have followed Lucifer into rebellion, these fallen messengers still find themselves unable to disobey a direct, specific order from God: **“That evening they brought to [Yahshua] many who were oppressed by demons, and He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.’”** (Matthew 8:16-17) Or, **“When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.’ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out.”** (Mark 9:25-26) Or my favorite example: **“Jesus then asked [the demon-possessed man], ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion,’ for many demons had entered him. And they begged Him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged Him to let them enter these. So He gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.”** (Luke 8:30-33)

Full-blown demon possession is rare these days, for Lucifer (a.k.a. *satan*, a Hebrew noun meaning “adversary,” also transliterated into Greek as *satanas*) prefers to work in the shadows, disguising his true agenda. Demon *influence*, however, is quite another matter. Case in point: the devil’s name, Lucifer (*heylel* in Hebrew) is mentioned only once in all of scripture (Isaiah 14:12), and even then, it’s more of a description than an actual name. Yet everybody seems to know who Lucifer is. Compare that to God’s name. It’s used *seven thousand times* in the Tanach, and yet if you ask people on the street what God’s self-revealed name is, very few will be able to tell you it’s Yahweh, because God’s name has been systematically edited out, replaced with a relatively anemic title: “the Lord.” Demonic influence has succeeded in making most people—even *scholars translating the scriptures*—uncomfortable using the name by which God obviously wanted us to know Him: not Ba’al, not Zeus, not Allah, but Yahweh.

Spiritual influence is not exclusive to demons, of course. Throughout scripture the phrase is repeated, “And the word of Yahweh came to [fill in the blank].” The sole requirement for such a thing was apparently the willingness of the subject to be used of God. Some of them expressed reservations about their own

qualifications or abilities (e.g., Moses, Gideon, Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah) but they were all receptive to God's word and willing to do what He asked of them. It's that one factor—receptiveness—that determines the source of one's spiritual influence: if you seek Yahweh's will, His Spirit will influence your life and your impact on the world. But if you're willing to give credence to Satan's side of the story, you can become vulnerable to his suggestions instead.

It may come as something of a shock, but as our attitudes change, so may the source of spiritual influence. Israel's first king, Saul, was the poster child for shifting spiritual receptivity. He began well enough, allowing himself to be a channel of Yahweh's purpose: **"The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled."** (I Samuel 11:6) But before long, he had begun to act like kings usually act—taking what he wanted, doing as he pleased, and believing his own press. As Yahweh Himself put it, **"He has turned back from following Me and has not performed My commandments."** (I Samuel 15:11) As Saul's focus shifted from Yahweh to himself, the inevitable happened, and it wasn't pretty: **"Now the Spirit of Yahweh departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Yahweh tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you.'"** (I Samuel 16:14) We aren't told if this "evil spirit" was an actual demon or merely (as I suspect) the troubled demeanor of one who had once experienced Yahweh's influence and knew that it had left him. (As the poet said, you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.) I don't suppose it mattered to Saul. The point, however, is quite clear: if you reject the guidance and counsel of Yahweh, that with which you replace it will be an "evil spirit" to you, whether in literal fact or merely by comparison.

Faced with the reality of his own sin, David (who had been an eyewitness to the dementia of Saul) pleaded with Yahweh not to withdraw His Spirit: **"Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me."** (Psalm 51:11) Believers today have a degree of assurance David couldn't have dreamed of, for we live in the post-Pentecost age, when the indwelling presence (not merely the transient influence) of the Holy Spirit is something every follower of Yahshua receives. He promised it to His disciples just before His crucifixion: **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** (John 14:15-17) **"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him."** Note that Yahshua is equating Himself, the Father (Yahweh) and the Holy Spirit here. They all share the same identity and the same agenda. **"Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your**

remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard Me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe." (John 14:23-29)

These promises were spoken at the "last supper." The next day, Passover, Yahshua was slain on our behalf. The following day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, He lay in the tomb, forever separating our sins from us. And the *next* day, Yahshua rose from the dead, fulfilling the promise of the Feast of Firstfruits. But then, seven weeks later, right on the Levitical schedule, The Feast of Weeks—a.k.a. Pentecost—brought with it the fulfillment of Yahshua's last-supper promise of spiritual indwelling. In explaining the remarkable transformation that had come over the disciples of Christ, Peter proclaimed on that day, **"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."** (Acts 2:32-33) Peter's description of the Holy Spirit being "poured out" was a reference to a prophecy Joel had made centuries before: **"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit."** (Joel 2:28-29) What was witnessed on the Day of Pentecost was just the beginning. God's Spirit won't be poured out on *all* flesh until Yahshua reigns in glory during the Millennial Kingdom—today a recurring dream of old men like me, tomorrow a reality.

Now that the promise has been fulfilled and the Spirit has been received, we should go back to the John 14 passage to review precisely what the point of the promise was. Why did Yahweh send His Holy Spirit to dwell within us? (1) To encourage us to keep Yahshua's commandments—the foremost of which is to love one another; (2) To separate and distinguish those who are Yahweh's from those who are not: we are *called out* of the world, *set apart* from it; (3) To establish such a close relationship between Yahweh and His people, it can truly be characterized as living together, being at home with one another; (4) To make it possible to remember and comprehend what Yahweh has done for us through the sacrifice of His Son and Messiah; (5) To give us an inner peace that the world cannot shake; (6) To give us cause for rejoicing, even in the face of trial; and (7) To provide confirmation of God's ability and willingness to keep His promises.

It might be objected, *Yes, the Holy Spirit fell upon those gathered in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost, but why should we expect that the same anointing will come upon the rest of us?* Good question, one that Peter answered that same



day: **“And Peter said to [the assembled crowd], ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”** (Acts 2:38) *Okay, but everybody who was there on the Day of Pentecost was Jewish. What about us gentiles?* Luke reports, **“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.”** (Acts 10:44-45)

Paul points out that this Holy Spirit who now indwells the lives of believers is the conduit of Yahweh’s love—the way He manifests Himself to us in the present age: **“We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”** (Romans 5:4-5) This represents a change, not in the means or the reality of our salvation, but in the way it’s delivered, the way we experience it. Yahweh’s approach to this problem before the advent of His Messiah was external: He basically said, *Demonstrate that you take Me as your God and trust in My love by keeping My commandments, and I will bless you in temporal matters.* This is the loud, clear message of passages like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. But His commandments, whether we understood it or not, were a complex and comprehensive picture of the means He would employ to achieve our redemption. After that picture had been unveiled—as Yahshua the Messiah fulfilled the letter and the spirit of the Torah—a whole new paradigm came into view: an *internal* truth. The nature, basis, and reality of our salvation was still the same as it had always been, but our means of perceiving it changed. We no longer saw it through our front windshields, guided by cryptic highway signs and road maps; we now perceived it in our rearview mirrors and in our memories.

So today God says, *Take me as your God and trust in My love by allowing yourself to be born anew in My Spirit, and I will bless you by dwelling within your very soul, enabling you to stand before Me in righteousness, and to withstand the attacks of the world with the inner strength, character, and peace only I can provide.* It’s not that keeping the Torah no longer counts; it’s that we are now counted as having kept it—through our relationship with the One who actually did. Think of it this way: we were once illegal aliens in the Kingdom of God, but now that we have become betrothed to the King Himself, we have been made full citizens. No temporary visas or green cards for us; our status is that of having been born in the Kingdom, for in the eyes of God’s Law, we have.

Paul continues, explaining our new legal status: **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh**

and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit....” No one (excuse the Messiah) has ever kept the Torah flawlessly. Fifteen hundred years of trial and error had made that all too obvious. That’s why Yahshua (if you’ll recall the conversation recorded in John 3) told Nicodemus that being “born of water,” that is, being born in flesh, wasn’t enough. One needed to be born of God’s Spirit as well if he wished his soul to outlive his body.

**“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”** That’s precisely what Yahshua told Nick. So Paul draws the only logical conclusion: **“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.”** It may seem obvious, but it’s not: there is no halfway house here. It’s a binary choice, black or white, on or off, positive or negative, Spirit-in or Spirit-out. So how can you tell if you’re Spirit-positive? Yahshua (in John 15:9-12), Paul (in Galatians 5:22-23), John (in I John 4:7), and Peter (I Peter 1:22-23) all state the same answer: it’s your love for your fellow man. **“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness....”**

Okay, got it. The indwelling Spirit of God gives us who are in Christ the gift of eternal life. But how? With the exception of Enoch and Elijah, every human who ever walked the earth has either suffered physical death or is subject to it. Are we to spend eternity as phantom Spirit-indwelled souls—*ghosts* haunting the world we once knew? In a word, no. **“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”** (Romans 8:1-11) That’s right: we will experience physical, bodily resurrection, the kind of thing numerous eyewitnesses reported concerning the risen Yahshua as He walked among His followers for forty days *after* rising from the dead. It was a body of flesh and bone, not a ghostly apparition—Spiritual and Spirit-filled, but neither immaterial nor incorporeal. This, to my mind, is the kind of thing that makes the Christian scriptures seem so genuine: *nobody* would make up stuff like this.

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The Hebrew word for “spirit” or “wind,” *ruach*, occurs 378 times in the Old Covenant scriptures, although only seventy-three of those instances refer

unmistakably to Yahweh's Spirit. In contrast, God's Spirit is spoken of no fewer than 320 times in the New Covenant. That means that the role of Yahweh's Spirit *per se* is, page for page, only about six percent as prominent in the Old Covenant as it is in the New. Even more startling, we find the phrase "Holy Spirit" (*Ruach Qodesh*) used only *three times* in the Tanach, while it's found ninety times in the New Testament, making the concept of the "Holy Spirit" (as distinct from the concept of the Spirit of God—i.e., the spiritual nature of Yahweh's being) only about *one percent* as pervasive in the Old Covenant as it is in the New Covenant. And actually, the vast majority of New Testament references to God's Spirit clearly indicate the Holy Spirit (i.e., God's indwelling spiritual manifestation, as distinct from Yahweh Himself), as in: **"When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."** (Matthew 10:19-20) This fact makes my "one percent" statistic look more like *a third* of one percent.

These statistics reveal a fundamental change in the way God reveals Himself to individual believers in the post-Pentecost era. The shift from Law to Grace as our primary means of perceiving the Plan of God is *personified* by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The key to understanding this, I believe, is coming to terms with what the word "holy" means. It does not denote "pious" or "well-behaved," as we often think of it. Rather, it means "set apart," and specifically, set apart for a purpose. When we are told to be holy, it means we are to be separated from the world and its influence and placed instead in Yahweh's camp—in Yahweh's *mind*. But what does it mean for God's Spirit to be holy? As we explained in the previous chapter, the *Holy Spirit* is a diminished manifestation of Yahweh that is set apart *from* Him—for our benefit. Undiminished deity could not indwell individual believers without destroying them, any more than Yahweh could have walked among men without cloaking His glory, which explains why Yahshua informed us, **"The Father is greater than I."** (John 14:28)

We should distinguish, then, between Yahweh (who *is* spirit) and the Holy Spirit (who is a diminished manifestation of Yahweh, set apart from Him for the purpose of communing intimately with the object of His love—us). To help us comprehend what's going on, we should examine the few specific mentions of the *Ruach Qodesh* in the Tanach. First, we hear David's plea, **"Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me."** (Psalm 51:11) It is intimated here that the Holy Spirit—that which, according to Yahshua's promise, would indwell all believers from the Day of Pentecost onward—was formerly made available sporadically, temporarily, or otherwise at Yahweh's discretion, to people who honored Him with a whole heart. Moses and Joshua, for example, seem to have fallen into this category. Where influence ceased and indwelling began, we aren't told.

The only other references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Covenant scriptures are found in this passage from Isaiah: **“But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore He turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. Then He remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put in the midst of them His Holy Spirit?”** (Isaiah 63:10-11) It’s a messianic passage, describing in prophetic terms how Yahshua (“the Messenger of [Yahweh’s] presence,” as He’s called in verse 9) would become Israel’s Savior, be afflicted for their salvation, and how He would redeem them and carry them. But then Isaiah goes on to describe how the Holy Spirit had been “at the right hand of Moses” during their exodus deliverance, “dividing the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name.” In other words, the presence and purpose of the Holy Spirit cannot be restricted to its New Testament function—indwelling the believers of Yahshua. He (or is it *She*?) has been there all along. The Spirit was instrumental in creation itself: **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”** (Genesis 1:1-2) And the mortal life of Yahshua was begun through the agency of the same Spirit: **“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”** (Matthew 1:18)

That being said, the vast preponderance of Biblical references to the Holy Spirit concern the personal spiritual indwelling phenomenon that was promised by Yahshua: **“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”** Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:37-39) After His resurrection, He explained what would happen: **“You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now....”** The “when” of it had been predicted in the Torah. It would occur on *Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks—also known as Pentecost. **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** (Acts 1:5, 8)

It all came about precisely as Yahshua had said it would: **“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind [*pnoe*], and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”** (Acts 2:1-4) Suddenly? Does God really do anything suddenly? In Ezekiel 10 and 11, we’re told how the Shekinah—the visible glory of God—departed the temple: in stages, as if reluctant to go though grieved at the apostasy of Israel. Actually, the whole history of Yahweh’s plan of redemption

has been the account of how Yahweh, step by deliberate step, has been moving closer to the object of His love. The Day of Pentecost was the biggest, most “sudden,” step of all—Yahweh’s Set-Apart Spirit moving into the very souls of his redeemed children. I’m pretty sure that as long as we’re mortal, this is as close as we can get to God.

Although it seemed to be a sudden and sweeping event to the participants on that day, and a paradigm shift of unprecedented proportions, this spiritual indwelling was not the result of a snap decision on the part of Yahweh. He had planned on this from the beginning. The date on which it happened is our first clue: **“When the day of Pentecost arrived...”** This was the fourth of seven annual holidays that Israel had been told to observe “throughout their generations,” in other words, forever. We’ll explore all seven in a future chapter. For now, I’d merely like to note that these seven “holy convocations” seem designed to be prophetic of what God considers the seven most significant events in His plan of redemption. The first three were relatively easy to figure out, in retrospect: Christ was crucified on Passover—He was our Passover Lamb; our sins (symbolized by leaven or yeast) were removed from our lives as he lay in the tomb on the following day, the Feast of Unleavened Bread; and when He rose from the dead, Yahshua became the personification of the Feast of Firstfruits—the first among many to be “harvested” by Yahweh.

God didn’t really tell us what to expect as a fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks. The “Feasts” are delineated in Leviticus 23, and are discussed again in both Numbers 28 and Deuteronomy 16. The closest we come to what you could call a hint is found in the Deuteronomy passage: **“You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain.”** That is, forty-nine days after the Feast of Firstfruits. The name “Pentecost” comes from the Leviticus description of counting fifty (Greek: *pente*) days from the previous day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. **“Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to Yahweh your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as Yahweh your God blesses you. And you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that Yahweh your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.”** (Deuteronomy 16:9-12)

The components of the Feast, then, are a convocation of thanksgiving, the acknowledgment of God’s blessing, rejoicing in Yahweh’s presence, celebration among all of mankind, a focus on the time and place of Yahweh’s choosing, and reflection upon our former bondage in the world. If you can figure out from these things that Yahweh was planning to send His own Spirit to dwell within the souls

of those who had chosen to trust His Passover Lamb with their lives, then you're more perceptive than I am. Like many of God's prophecies, the fulfillment of this one is easy enough to see once it's happened, but impossible to pin down until it has. That being said, the promised "baptism of the Holy Spirit" fits the prophecy of the Feast of Weeks like a glove, if you know what to look for.

The Spirit of God dwelling within us is the ultimate expression of Yahweh's intimacy with us—*so far*. But we're mortal, still subject to physical death and still apt to sin against our God. We have not yet reached our final destination as believers: immortal, spiritual beings capable of living in the very presence of God. In other words, for followers of Yahshua, it will only get better. But until we reach that blessed state, I can only echo the Psalmist's prayer: **"Let everything that has breath praise Yahweh!"** (Psalm 150:6)

## THE BREAD OF LIFE

### ❧ 1.3.6 ❧

#### *Provision*

The birth of a child offers a conundrum of sorts for its parents. First, they know that the job of providing for that child—supplying food, clothing, shelter, education, guidance, and encouragement—will be their responsibility for a couple of decades. But at the same time, they know that the whole point of doing this is so that their child will grow up to be self-sufficient, independent, and capable of making his or her own way in the world—without their assistance. The unarticulated hope is that the children will return the favor when their parents reach that point in their lives when it becomes hard for them to cope with the demands of their own failing bodies. As I said, life in this world is designed to be passed on.

Our next look at God’s self-portrait mirrors the fact that parents provide what is needed for their children. Yahweh is heard time and again bringing up the issue of bread, grain, or food, using it as a universal symbol representing His ever-faithful provision for our needs. The second part of the analogy breaks down, however, because Yahweh *doesn’t* grow old and come to need our assistance: He is eternal, infinite in power, and totally unaffected by the laws of thermodynamics that He has instituted to govern our world. In this life, we never outgrow our need for what He provides; we are never intended to become independent and self-sufficient. Our “maturity,” as it’s idealized in scripture, is more like the picture painted in Psalm 127, where a man’s children are seen as arrows in His quiver, contending with their Father’s enemies in the gate. We are (ideally) an extension of our Father in this world, His ambassadors and representatives. We are not meant to live our lives separated from Him, isolated, pursuing our own agenda. We are not meant to outgrow our need for what He provides—everything that pertains to our life and godliness (as it says in II Peter 1:3): faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

The concept of provision requires several things. First, a need—a lack of some necessary thing. Second, a provider, someone who is willing and able to meet that need. And third, for the connection to be made, there must be a willingness on the part of the needy to accept what is being offered. This is by no means automatic. In fact, it’s the trickiest part of the puzzle. At its most fundamental level, the provider is always Yahweh, and we created beings are the needy. What would prevent someone from accepting His help? Pride, ignorance, and suspicion top the list, I suppose, but it’s more complicated than that, for God invariably places His people in the role of intermediaries—priests, if you will—and we “priests” don’t

always do our job properly. And then there's the treachery factor: Satan has a vested interest in keeping the needy isolated from the Provider. A few (admittedly oversimplified) examples will demonstrate how the problem can manifest itself:

(1) A group of people is found to have no knowledge of Yahweh or His plan of salvation. So religious organizations send "missionaries," but rather than delivering God's love, they merely impose their own traditions and cultural norms. The "heathen" see little value in what they're being taught, because it doesn't meet their actual need.

(2) A child in Somalia goes to bed every night hungry and fearful. If someone were to provide food and a safe place to stay, he would gladly accept it, but between him and the willing donors stands a warlord who has enough guns and manpower to intercept and "re-task" whatever aid is sent. Foreign governments could force the issue, but not without endangering their supply of oil from countries sympathetic to the warlords. So the child remains hungry.

(3) A woman has a flat tire on a rural road, but she (having heard horror stories on the six o'clock news) is too terrified to accept help from passing strangers unless they're wearing a uniform or driving a tow truck.

(3a) A man has a flat tire on a rural road, but although he's far more at home in the boardroom than in the garage, his male pride prevents him from accepting the help he needs.

(4) A teenager senses the spiritual emptiness within him, but can't find anyone to fill the void. His parents are wrapped up in the world. His peers are just as clueless as he is. The churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues he visits dispense only dead religion. In the end, he settles for a substitute god—for distraction instead of satisfaction.

These scenarios could be repeated with endless variations, a fact that gives us a hint as to why Yahweh focused on such a basic and fundamental metaphor as bread to communicate His willingness to provide what we need. Food is something we all need on an ongoing basis—if we don't get something to eat every day, something's wrong. Like the air we breathe and the water we drink, it is essential to our continued mortal existence; and like light, communication, and relationship, it contributes as well to the quality—the *flavor*—of our lives. It is no accident that Yahweh has pressed into service all of these symbols to show us what He's like. As Yahshua said, **"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."** That's the provision of which I'm speaking. **"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."** (John 10:9-10)

There's another characteristic of bread/food (one Hebrew word, *lechem*, denotes either thing) that makes it an apt symbol for God as He relates to us. The



things we eat must, in some way, *die* if they are to be of use to us. Dirt, air, grass, and tree bark are not considered food. But the wheat kernels that are ground in the mill to make flour are the seeds of the plant—its genetic identity. Therefore, when we eat bread, we are, in effect, killing the future generations of those wheat seeds: the life of the wheat is sacrificed so that we might live. The same is true with fruit: we eat the part that’s capable of reproducing itself. (Note that God’s initial dietary instructions to man in Genesis 1:29 included only “every herb that *yields seed*” and “every tree whose fruit *yields seed*; to you it shall be for food,” while the animals were given slightly different instructions: they were given “every green herb for food.” In other words, animals could eat grass and leaves, while man was to eat only the parts of the plants that carried life to future generations—the “seed.”) After the flood, animals were added to the menu, and the principle became even more obvious with the consumption of meat or eggs: *something had to die in order to provide life for us*. This fact was central to Yahshua’s mission: **“Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.’”** (John 12:23-26) Yahweh is not only our Creator, the source of our biological life; He is also our Savior, who sacrificed Himself so that we might have spiritual life. In a very real sense, then, He *is* the Bread of Life that keeps us alive. This puts a whole new spin on **“Give us this day our daily bread.”** (Matthew 6:11)

Call it a coincidence if you want, but there is a remarkable similarity between the Hebrews’ word for bread, *lechem*, and their salutation *l’chayim*—meaning “to life!” When *l’chayim* is wished upon someone, something beyond mere mortal existence—the absence of death—is in view. It’s full, abundant, and prosperous life that’s being spoken of. (*Chayim*, as I noted previously, is the plural or intensive form of *chay*—life.) It should not be surprising that the God who created us and loves us wishes us to enjoy nothing less. So Yahweh told Israel, **“If you walk in My statutes and observe My commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely.”** (Leviticus 26:3-5) In so many words, Yahweh is saying, “I *want* to bless you; I’m looking forward to it. I take great pleasure in providing for your needs. I have come that you may have life—*abundant* life. But My statutes and commandments are in themselves a picture of the salvation I’m providing for humanity. It is therefore critical that you—Israel—fulfill the role I’ve assigned for you to play, and reenact the story of My redemption in your national life by observing the Torah. If you will bless mankind by doing this, I will in turn bless

you materially.” In a very real sense, the ability to “eat your bread to the full” would have been the direct result of “walking in Yahweh’s statutes” and “observing His commandments,” for the “bread” to which He referred would, in the end, turn out to be Yahshua the Messiah.

Just because the advent of Yahshua is now historical fact, having fulfilled the prophetic promise of the Torah, it doesn’t mean the principle of literal blessing following faith-based obedience has become obsolete. Paul points out, **“As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.’ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”** Once again, God’s provision in the physical world is being compared to His provision in the spiritual realm. **“You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.”** (II Corinthians 9:9-12) We are meant to be conduits of Yahweh’s provision for the needs of mankind, whether literal bread to feed the body, or symbolic bread to feed the soul.

And that’s important, because Isaiah points out that physical bread isn’t necessarily all the world needs to live on: **“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to Me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant.”** (Isaiah 55:2-3) Bread is good, even necessary. But if it will only keep your mortal body alive, it isn’t really “bread,” by God’s definition. The true bread will keep your *soul* alive. **“Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh.”** (Deuteronomy 8:3; cf. Luke 4:4) Any way you slice it, the true Bread is Yahshua—the Word made flesh.

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Our instruction concerning grain or bread as a symbol begins in the Torah. The “grain offering,” or *minha*, was to mark the harvest feasts, accompany some of the animal sacrifices, play a part in the ordination ceremony of priests, and it was part of the tithe. The rules (as with other types of Levitical sacrifices) are so detailed and specific, we can only conclude that either Yahweh was a micromanaging control freak who delighted in watching His people negotiate an impossibly complex obstacle course of pointless minutiae, or He was trying to teach us something beautiful and profound through His use of symbols and imagery. (I think you know where I stand on that issue.)

The central teaching on the *minha* is found in Leviticus 2. **“When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to Yahweh, his offering shall be of fine flour.”** We’re not talking about the quality or degree of coarseness here, but rather of flour with the husks removed through threshing and winnowing. Thus the bread Yahweh provided for us—Yahshua—would endure tribulation and trial, but He would be offered up with no worthlessness or impurity in His character. **“He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it and bring it to Aaron’s sons the priests.”** Oil is symbolic of the Spirit of God, and frankincense indicates purity through sacrifice. (More on these symbols in a later chapter.) The priests, in the end, represent us believers—who have been given the privilege of coming into the presence of the Living God to offer our praise, supplication, and thanksgiving. **“And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, an offering by fire with a pleasing aroma to Yahweh.”** Note that *all* of the frankincense was to be burned with the offering portion, as if to say, He who was sacrificed in perfect purity is a worthy offering, but that sacrifice won’t help us unless it’s associated with Yahweh. That is, though Christ died for the sins of the whole world, only those who are willing to allow His sacrifice to cover their sins before God will receive atonement. It is not enough that the gift was sent; it must also be received. **“But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of Yahweh’s offerings made by fire....”** Only the priests are qualified to receive what Yahweh has provided, because they represent people who have chosen to reciprocate Yahweh’s love. That is, God provides His love in the person and work of the Messiah, and we who believe in Him get to offer back to Yahweh a token of what He has provided—love. But those who have not believed—those who have chosen not to receive the love of God—subsequently have nothing to offer back to Him.

The instructions continue: **“When you bring a grain offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil or unleavened wafers smeared with oil. And if your offering is a grain offering baked on a griddle, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mixed with oil. You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. And if your offering is a grain offering cooked in a pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. And you shall bring the grain offering that is made of these things to Yahweh, and when it is presented to the priest, he shall bring it to the altar. And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, an offering by fire with a pleasing aroma to Yahweh. But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of Yahweh’s offerings by fire....”** Although all grain offerings had to be of “fine flour,” that is, with none of the inedible husks left on, unleavened (that is, prepared without yeast—a symbol of sin), and accompanied with olive oil (metaphorical of the Holy Spirit), they could assume a variety of forms. The worshipper could bring a measure of uncooked flour, loaves (which would have been like our pita bread) baked in an oven, or wafers cooked

on a griddle like a pancake or tortilla, or fried in a pan. The lesson, I believe, is that God doesn't wish to restrict how we express our love. Rather, He encourages us to be creative, thoughtful, and caring, while remaining cognizant of the broad confines of His revealed Word. In practical terms today, we should give as the Spirit leads us, where He has shown us a need; give in a way that will bring honor to Christ; and don't offer what you haven't come by honestly and with a pure conscience. In other words, taking the proceeds from your latest bank robbery and using them to fund the local abortion clinic is not exactly what God had in mind.

**“No grain offering that you bring to Yahweh shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as an offering by fire to Yahweh. As an offering of firstfruits you may bring them to Yahweh, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing aroma...”** We've mentioned leaven (and will again), but what's the honey prohibition all about? It's sweet and enjoyable, thus appropriate as a gift, but not as a burnt offering, for there was nothing sweet or pleasant about what Yahshua suffered for our sakes. He had been prophesied by Isaiah to be “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief...with no comeliness, that we should desire Him...who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.” No, honey won't do as a symbol of His sacrifice, even though the result of that sacrifice can be sweet communion with God.

Salt, however, is another matter: **“You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt...”** Salt improves the taste of bland food, and it has a long history as a preservative. As cheap as it is today, it was once considered quite valuable. (Our word “salary” is based on *sal*, the Latin word for salt.) One type of covenant, among many mentioned in Scripture, is the covenant of salt, in which two people would seal their agreement by exchanging a pinch of salt. It signaled a truce between parties formerly at enmity with one another. The idea was, we'd both open our salt pouches, I'd take a pinch from yours and mingle it with the salt in mine, and you'd do likewise. The point was that it would henceforth be impossible to separate what was once “yours” from what had been “mine.” Our fortunes, symbolically speaking, had become one. So when we reenact the “covenant of salt” by adding some salt to our grain offerings, we are acknowledging that although we were once enemies or strangers with Yahweh, we are now allies and friends. Our goals and value system have merged.

**“If you offer a grain offering of firstfruits to Yahweh, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits fresh ears [*karmel*—ripe grain, just harvested, in contrast to that which has been in storage], roasted with fire, crushed new grain. And you shall put oil on it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. And the priest shall burn as its memorial portion some of the crushed grain and some of the oil with all of its frankincense; it is an offering by fire to Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 2:1-16) If the worshipper didn't wish to make

his grain into bread or cakes, he could offer the raw, uncooked flour with the chaff removed—with oil, as always, and with frankincense and salt for the portion set apart to be offered up by fire. The emphasis here is that such grain was to be fresh out of the field, not something that had been previously stored in someone's barn. God is not interested in leftovers; He wants to be the first thing on our minds, not our last resort. The word translated “firstfruits” is telling. It's the Hebrew *bikkurim* (plural of *bikkur*, based on the verb *bakar*: to arise, to be born first, to come early). The idea was that the first of the crop to be harvested, the first sheaf ready for consumption, was to be brought in thanksgiving to Yahweh. The same principle would apply in the offering of the firstborn male animals (Hebrew: *bekor*—from the same root verb). Yahweh will not settle for being an afterthought, not after the lengths He's gone to on our account.

Then as now, bread was normally made with yeast to make it rise. Without leaven, it's relatively hard, flat, and chewy. Like life itself, we tend to prefer our bread soft, light, and easy to sink our teeth into. Funny thing about leaven, though. It renders the actual bread-making process more laborious and time consuming. In order for the yeast to function properly—forming bubbles in the dough that expand, causing the dough to rise and soften—the bread dough must be kneaded thoroughly and given time for the yeast to chemically react with the flour. I think maybe Yahweh was telling us, ever so subtly, that the time and effort we expend making things easy and soft for ourselves in this life is a poor use of our resources: we would be better off if we concentrated on learning how to live in freedom before Him—throwing off the shackles of our bondage in the world and following His leading toward the promised land.

We're all familiar with the story of the exodus, how the Israelites were told not to put leaven in their bread dough on the night of Passover, because there wouldn't be enough time for their bread to rise in the morning before they were *ejected* out of Egypt by their former masters (Exodus 12:39). The prohibition against leaven wouldn't extend to the Levitical dietary laws: for most of the year, it would be perfectly okay to prepare one's bread with yeast. But for one week every year, leaven was pressed into service as a symbol of the sin that would have to be removed from our lives if we wished to be part of the congregation of God. **“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”** (Exodus 12:14-15) The deadline for removing the leaven from your house was the same as that for slaying the Passover lamb—sundown on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan. This association of the death of the lamb with the removal of leaven was God's way of teaching us that the sacrifice of Yahshua was indelibly linked to the removal of sin from our lives.

And the fact that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to last seven days (*seven* indicating completion or perfection) tells us that those sins have been permanently removed—all of them, for all time.

This wasn't the only symbolic use of unleavened bread in scripture, but the picture is always the same: the removal or absence of sin. It figured again in the ritual of ordination for the priests of Israel: **"Now this is what you shall do to them [the sons of Aaron] to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour. You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams."** (Exodus 29:1-3) The inclusion of several forms of unleavened bread in the rite says to me that the removal of our sin was to manifest itself in a variety of different ways; and the scriptural association of olive oil with the Holy Spirit gives us another clue. We are therefore reminded of Paul's observation: **"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."** (Galatians 5:22-23) In other words, the removal of sin from our lives, and the simultaneous indwelling of God's Spirit within us, results in a whole variety of new and (dare I say) *unusual* character traits: we've got unleavened bread, cakes, *and* wafers here in this basket we call life.

Another facet of the symbol is this enigmatic instruction, still speaking of the ordination of the priests: **"And if any of the flesh for the ordination or of the bread remain until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy."** (Exodus 29:34) Why can't the meat (symbolic of various aspects of Christ's sacrifice) and bread (symbolic of God's provision) be consumed the following day? It's because God gives us what we need when we need it. As Paul says, **"We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He [in Isaiah 49:8] says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (II Corinthians 6:1-2) Yahweh's provision isn't something to be held in reserve, used only in an emergency, or employed as a last resort. It isn't a hedge against misfortune or a lifeboat you hope you never have to use. It is to be, rather, the central fact of our earthly existence. In case you haven't noticed, *all* of the components of Yahweh's self portrait we've seen so far—life, light, thought, water, air, and food—are essential to our very existence. They're foundational, fundamental, vital. If I may use another of my dumb automotive metaphors, Yahweh isn't the ashtray, the radio, or even the safety belt in the vehicle of your existence—He's the *drive train*. Without Him, you're not going anywhere.

As we have seen, the grain offerings that were burned on the altar with the blood sacrifices were required to be unleavened, for God's sacrifice on our behalf—in the person of Yahshua—was sinless. Since the sacrifices at the altar

were a picture of what Yahweh would accomplish for us on Calvary, everything subjected to the fires of judgment had to be free from corruption. But the Torah holds some surprises for us in the matter of leaven. It is not *always* prohibited in offerings to God, even though it may not be offered on the altar.

Take the matter of the peace offering—the *selem*. **“This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to Yahweh: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving [that is, the clean animal to be sacrificed], unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of blended flour mixed with oil.”** So far, this is just what we would have expected, for a portion of the *minha* grain offering would have accompanied the sacrificial animal on the altar. But wait; there’s more. **“Besides the cakes, as his offering he shall offer leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering. And from it he shall offer one cake from each offering as a heave offering to Yahweh. It shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offering.”** (Leviticus 7:11-14) The “heave offering” (*tarumah*—from *ruwm*, meaning to rise, be exalted, or lift up) was symbolically lifted or “heaved,” as if to say to Yahweh, “I acknowledge that this is Yours—it is You who have provided it.” It was then to be given to the attending priest as his food. Why, then, was leaven allowed? It’s because this portion of the peace offering (since it wasn’t offered on the altar) didn’t represent the sacrifice of Christ, but rather our response to that sacrifice. We are all sinful creatures, permeated with the leaven of our own fallen natures. But God doesn’t require us to become perfect people *before* we can participate in His Kingdom. Rather, all He asks is that we admit that we’re *not* perfect—and to allow Him to do his perfecting work within us, conforming us into the image of His perfect Son. The first part of that—admitting that we fall short—is easy enough if we’re honest with ourselves. The hard part is letting go of our pride (or is it despair?) and inviting Yahweh to make us what we cannot make ourselves: pure, flawless beings in His sight.

The same sort of “come as you are” attitude is seen in the instructions for the fourth *miqra*, the Feast of Weeks. **“You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to Yahweh. You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 23:15-17) You’ll recall that this annual convocation was instituted to prophesy and commemorate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the faithful—the Pentecost experience of Acts 2. Again, leavened bread speaks to the fact that we needn’t—indeed, we *can’t*—become sinless *before* we follow Christ, but rather that sinlessness (in God’s eyes) is the inevitable result of our having believed in Him. The Feast of Weeks *follows* Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits. That is,

Spiritual indwelling happens after the Messiah's sacrifice, after the removal of our sins, and after God's undeniable demonstration of His willingness and ability to raise the dead to a new kind of life. Our Spiritual indwelling was intended by Yahweh from the very beginning to be the next step in the process of mankind's reconciliation with Him. There will be three more steps in the process, for seven holy convocations are specified in the Torah, but I'm going to have to save that whole discussion for a future chapter.

Another instance of bread used as a symbol is the "Showbread," also known as the "Bread of the Presence." This was to be placed on a special table within the first room of the tabernacle, the "Holy Place." Yahweh instructed Moses, **"You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it. And you shall make a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me regularly."**

(Exodus 25:23-30) The sheer amount of detail provided for the table's construction should give us some indication of how much significance God intended for us to attach to this "bread of the Presence." This had to be one sturdy table. The metaphorical implications are heavy indeed.

The first question we should ask is, *whose* presence? Why, Yahweh's, of course. The bread is said to be a memorial, a reminder of God's provision. As we shall soon see, that provision will ultimately turn out to be the Messiah Himself. **"You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles [or rows; Hebrew *ma'areketh*—orderly rows, layers, or lines], six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before Yahweh. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as an offering by fire to Yahweh. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before Yahweh regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of Yahweh's offerings by fire, a perpetual due."** (Leviticus 24:5-9) There were to be twelve loaves, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel—who are in turn symbolic of believers generally. Notice how the loaves (these were unleavened "loaves," so think of something the shape of pita bread—round and rather flat) were to be arranged: two neat rows of six each. Since six is the number of man, we're being given insight into precisely who it was for whom Yahweh would provide salvation: two groups of men, separate yet side by side—Israel and the Church (more properly, the *ekklesia*—the "called-out"). Both rows were sprinkled



with frankincense, indicating the purity we attain through Christ's sacrifice. Twelve fresh loaves were to be placed on the table every Sabbath, indicating that the provision of salvation and purity they represented would not be achieved through man's efforts (since no work was to be done on the Sabbath). Finally, the bread was to be eaten by the priests, Aaron and his sons—those who minister before Yahweh, interceding with Him on behalf of mankind. This picture is ultimately fulfilled in Yahshua and those of us who follow Him.

Though only the priests were eligible to eat the Showbread, even they could be disqualified from participation: **“No man of the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer Yahweh's offerings by fire; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things, but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am Yahweh who sanctifies them.”** (Leviticus 21:21-23) The word translated “blemish” here is the Hebrew *m'uwm*, a flaw, spot, defect or imperfection. The word is used both in the physical and moral sense; thus a physical imperfection on a priest of Israel would serve as a metaphor for a moral flaw in one of us—something deserving of shame in our behavior or character. Note the distinction in the Torah: the priest with a defect would still be provided for, but his access to the presence of God would be restricted. The lesson is that a believer's bad behavior can hinder his prayers: our heavenly Father can and does relegate His misbehaving children to “time out.”

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Since the fall of Adam, procuring our “daily bread” has been a labor-intensive endeavor. Yahweh told Adam, **“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”** (Genesis 3:17-19) So our food, which Yahweh arranged to just pop up out of the ground or grow on trees, has become something less than the obvious symbol of God's blessing and provision it could have been.

There was one brief forty-year span of time, however, when establishing His symbols in unmistakable terms became incredibly important to Yahweh, for He'd chosen this time and place to reveal—at least in parabolic terms—His entire plan of redemption for mankind. I'm speaking, of course, of the exodus, the wilderness wanderings of the nation of Israel. It was during this time that the Torah was presented, the mindset of God was revealed, and the provision of Yahweh for His

people would first be demonstrated, in unmistakable terms, for all the world to see. And since procuring food for a couple of million hungry pilgrims is obviously problematical, Yahweh seized this moment as the perfect opportunity to transform “our daily bread” back into what it had once so obviously been: a daily miracle of life and provision. You couldn’t very well grow wheat and barley crops as you marched *en masse* through the desert following a pillar of cloud and fire wherever It went. This time, the miracle had to be, well, *miraculous*.

After Israel had had their “duh” moment, realizing that even although they were finally free, there wasn’t anything to eat in the desert except for the sandwich-is there (sorry: too many little kids in my life), Yahweh introduced what I’m sure had been His plan all along: *manna*. **“In the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread that Yahweh has given you to eat....’”** The word is actually the Hebrew *man*; it got transliterated to manna in the Greek Septuagint (the “LXX”). It literally means “What is it?” (It’s based on the Hebrew *mah*, meaning what, how, of what kind, why, etc.) It’s your basic all-purpose interrogative exclamation: *huh?*

**“This is what Yahweh has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’”** An omer is a little over half a gallon, so for each person, they were to gather each day enough to fill the typical human stomach—*twice*. **“And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. And Moses said to them, ‘Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.’ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted....”** Human nature never changes, does it? We aren’t comfortable with the idea of having to trust God for everything, day by day. I’m not saying we shouldn’t plan ahead, prepare for foreseeable contingencies, and work hard to provide for our families. But Americans (in particular) have developed the odd notion that risk and uncertainty have somehow become *unconstitutional*, and that our “inalienable rights” ought to include indemnity from failure. God’s word, however, plainly says that we’ll reap what we sow—our policies and behaviors will have their inevitable consequences. So if our reliance is on ourselves, we will fail, for we are fallen creatures. If our reliance is upon our government, we will fail, for governments are flawed, transient human institutions. But if we rely upon Yahweh, we will prevail, for Yahweh is willing and able to make us stand. Christians, of course, happily embrace this principle in matters they can’t pretend to control, like eternal destiny. But we seldom learn to fully trust God for “little

things” like our food, clothing, and shelter. Sure, God lets us participate in His blessings to us. The manna didn’t just show up in the Israelites’ baskets; they had to go out and collect it when Yahweh provided it (early in the morning, before the sun grew hot), and in the appropriate amounts (precisely as much as they needed for the day). There was no question about where the manna was coming from, or Who was providing it.

**“On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, ‘This is what Yahweh has commanded: “Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to Yahweh; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.”’”** That’s precisely the opposite of their instructions for every other day of the week. **“So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to Yahweh; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.’”** (Exodus 16:15-26) The lesson is one we should not gloss over: whatever was provided by Yahweh would be provided during the work week—not on the Sabbath. And the peoples’ part in the provision process—the gathering and preparing—was also to be done before the Sabbath. There’s a deadline.

It may seem strange to say it, but God, though eternal, is on a schedule. The state of affairs we see in the world today is not how Yahweh intends to let things run forever. If II Peter 3:8—the idea that in God’s plan, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day—is literally true, then any way you slice it we are rapidly approaching the *real* Sabbath, the final one-thousand-year “day” in Yahweh’s timeline. He provided the manna of salvation for us when Yahshua came to die in our place, and in truth, it has been available through faith from the very beginning. But we are running out of time, my friends. The sun is about to set on the sixth day. Remember Yahshua’s words: **“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”** (John 6:29) It’s getting hot outside: the manna is starting to melt. And the Sabbath is coming, when no one can work. If we are to gather what Yahweh has provided—the manna of Christ’s love—if we are to prepare what’s needed by “believing in Him,” we must act now.

**“Now the house of Israel called its name manna.”** Yes, it was basically the same thing they said when their Messiah showed up in response to their desperate need: “Huh?” **“It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”** To this day, we who have tasted the provision of God have found it sweet indeed. **“Moses said, ‘This is what Yahweh has commanded: “Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.”’”** And Moses said to Aaron, **‘Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before Yahweh to be kept throughout your**

generations.' **As Yahweh commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony** [that is, inside the ark of the covenant] **to be kept.**" Yahweh thought the manna was an important enough symbol that a sample should be kept in perpetuity as a tangible reminder of His provision. The destruction of the Temple (in 586 BC) and the disappearance of the ark and its contents only demonstrate that God won't force us to contemplate His symbols if we systematically reject His Word. The choice is ours. **"The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan."** (Exodus 16:31-35) This is a corollary, of sorts, to the lesson we learned about the Sabbath restrictions involving manna: Yahweh's provision is only available during His scheduled window of opportunity. In this case, it's described as the forty years (read: the period of trial and testing) between the time we leave the world (Egypt) and when we finally enter the Kingdom of God (the Promised Land). Only under the reign of Yahweh can the land in which we live truly be called "habitable."

Just before they entered the Promised Land, Moses addressed the Israelites who had enjoyed God's manna provision for all those years. Only then did he tell them what Yahweh had hoped to achieve with His ongoing forty-year miracle: **"You shall remember the whole way that Yahweh your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh."** (Deuteronomy 8:2-3) The whole thing was like a pop quiz, the kind of thing a creative teacher might spring upon his students to wake them up, test their understanding, let them gauge their grasp of the subject, and instruct them about what to expect in the future. Yahweh says He initially let Israel get hungry *on purpose*. He informs them that they needed to be broken of their self-sufficiency and worldly habits before He could truly bless them. The provision of manna was to be a microcosm of the lessons of the Torah: their obedience, their willingness to take God at His Word, would be rewarded with tasty and nutritious food—bread they didn't have to plant, water, harvest, or thresh, but could merely go out and pick up off the ground. All they had to do was receive it. The bottom line was that this "bread from heaven" was a blatant and obvious metaphor for the Word of God—the truth of His life-giving provision, something revealed between every line of the Torah, a symbol that would one day be fulfilled in the personal appearance of their Messiah. As with the manna, all they'd have to do to obtain life was to receive Him.

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The Israelites never forgot the miracle of the manna. It stood in the national memory as a benchmark of God's merciful provision, just as the Red Sea adventure did as a reminder of His power and protection. So when the skeptics encountered Yahshua, they said in effect, *What can you do to top that?* To which Yahshua no doubt replied, *I'm glad you asked.* **"So they said to Him, 'Then what sign do You do, that we may see and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.'** He began by pointing out that the one who announces the miracle is not necessarily the one performing it. Miraculous power and purpose is Yahweh's alone. Manna is but a metaphor. The "true bread" is not merely something that will keep one's mortal body alive for another day, but rather something that will make his soul alive forever. The real bread, as Moses pointed out above, is "every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh." That "Word" would become flesh in the person of Yahshua Himself. **"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'" They still didn't get it, not that I can blame them for failing to understand. He was speaking in parables, in esoteric riddles. But now that they had declared their need and desire for the "bread of God," Yahshua told them plainly that He was speaking of Himself: "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.'" (John 6:30-35)**

After explaining the rather uncomfortable truth that only those who chose to believe would be given the insight to understand the symbolism of what He was talking about, Yahshua continued. **"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This [that is, what manna represents] is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh...."** This was a crucial piece of information, but it would make no sense until Yahshua sacrificed Himself at Calvary. At this stage, it was virtually impossible to see how the puzzle pieces all fit together—that in Yahshua was "the Word of God made flesh," that mankind was to live on "every Word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh," that the sign the Jews were seeking was actually the fulfillment of the prophecy that the manna in the wilderness represented, and that Yahshua's own flesh would nourish mankind as He became "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

So it was not terribly surprising that, **"The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.'** God had declared that "the life is in the blood." And eating blood (not to

mention human flesh) was strictly forbidden by the Torah's dietary laws. So at this point Christ's audience had no choice but to conclude that He was speaking metaphorically, not literally. He was imparting spiritual truth, not giving earthly nutrition advice. **"Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on Me, he also will live because of Me."** The Jewish authorities understood perfectly well that Yahshua wasn't talking about eating His literal flesh and drinking His actual blood. It wasn't His imagery that upset them; it was the fact that by saying this, He had unequivocally identified Himself as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Promised King. **"This is [i.e., I am] the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."** (John 6:47-58)

Never let it be said that Yahshua didn't know how to divide the room. He plainly admitted that He came not to bring the peace of compromise, but the sword of separation and holiness. At this point, the majority of His "disciples" (those who saw Him merely as a charismatic and entertaining religious innovator) called it quits: this was too much; these words were too hard to (pardon the expression) swallow. But to those few who were left—the twelve—Yahshua explained, **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."** (John 6:63)

So having established the metaphor that He Himself was the bread of life, and that it was His blood that would seal the covenant, Yahshua instituted a memorial rite for His followers to observe, one that would commemorate these core principles. **"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Matthew 26:26-28)** Goofy Christianesque superstitions like transubstantiation and consubstantiation have made a shambles of this beautiful picture over the last couple of millennia. I can't understand why we find it so hard to see that this rite is a metaphor, a symbol of a very simple truth: that Yahweh pictures Himself as "bread" in order that we might comprehend that it is in His nature to provide for us. Just as we consume food to keep our bodies alive and healthy, we must assimilate Christ in order to impart life and health to our souls.

There is more to this than providing life to individual believers, however. It's not just life: it's *the same* life: **"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."** (I Corinthians 10:16-17) There's an old saying: *You are*

*what you eat*. In the computer age, it's stated: *Garbage in, garbage out*. It's as true in the spiritual sense as it is in the physical. What you put into your soul will affect how you look, feel, perform, and interact with those around you.

"Participation in the body of Christ" (also known as being indwelt by the Holy Spirit) will result in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—and what's more, it will present as a unity of spirit, for the same Spirit will be producing these traits within each of us.

Partaking of the symbol (receiving the rite of communion) does nothing in and of itself, of course, any more than stepping on someone's shadow can be felt by the one casting it. The reality that casts the shadow is what must be observed. So Paul writes, **"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."** His "death," of course, is the heart of Yahweh's provision for our salvation, as the shed blood is the guarantee of the covenant. Paul hasn't redefined it, just summarized it. **"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."** (I Corinthians 11:23-29) Like mindlessly going through the motions of observing the Torah while remaining impervious to the Yahweh's entreaties of love, participating in the rite of communion as a cold, dead religious obligation is an anathema to God. Again, it's pointless to observe the shadow if we give no thought to what casts it.

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Because the distinction is made so often in scripture, we should note the difference between the part of the grain that's edible and nourishing, and that which is worthless. As I pointed out, the "fine flour" used in the *minha* offerings is a reference to the fact that the chaff or husks that surrounded and protected the wheat or barley as it grew in the field have been removed and discarded. This threshing is a violent, "painful" process for the wheat. In a way, it is analogous to physical death—the "shell" of a mortal body being forcibly stripped away from the "living" part of one's being, the soul. If we follow this train of thought, we come to realize that the sacrifice wasn't so much Christ's *body* nailed to the tree (although He certainly suffered excruciating physical pain on our behalf), but rather of His *soul*. That was the essence of the offering—enduring the spiritual

torment of separation from the Father as He bore our sins. Isaiah 53:5 says that He was *bruised* or *crushed* for our iniquities. The word used is *daka*, which denotes not only physical bruising, but also psychological or emotional harm—according to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, “the emotional and spiritual suffering of the Savior as He became sin for us.”

When Yahshua said, “**It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail,**” (John 6:63) He was pointing out this very thing. God employed grain or bread to teach us about His nature, but He was always careful to draw the distinction between the Spirit and the flesh—or in this case, between the living kernel and its inert shell. It’s not that the husk has no purpose or function: it protects the seed as it grows in the field; it serves for a time as a vehicle or vessel for the life that resides within. But the shell, though necessary by God’s design, is only temporary. Its value is transient; once it has served its purpose, it becomes a worthless, lifeless piece of rubbish. It is thus analogous to our mortal bodies—containing within them the life of the soul (and ideally, the Spirit of God as well) but not designed or intended to house these things forever.

This goes a long way toward explaining Yahweh’s apparent ambivalence toward personally imposing justice and judgment in this world. Why does God let people “get away” with evil behavior in this life? Why is godliness not enforced, and wickedness not summarily punished by divine action? Why do evil men succeed in gathering power to themselves as they crush the innocent under their boots? Job bemoaned this very situation four thousand years ago: “**How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out? That their calamity comes upon them? That God distributes pains in His anger? That they are like straw before the wind, and like chaff that the storm carries away?**” (Job 21:17-18) Not very often, then or now. But in terms germane to our present subject, Job’s rhetorical question actually answers itself: it’s because in this life, our flesh is *all* “chaff” driven before the wind. Our bodies are mere shells, husks that will eventually outlive their usefulness and blow away. It matters not whether God deals with them now or later—or never. Only that which is alive within those husks, if anything, will remain after the storm of death has passed over. Punishing the body is therefore rather pointless, unless that body is being used to prevent others from responding to Yahweh’s love.

Psalms 1 seems at first to contradict this whole line of reasoning, but upon reflection, I don’t think it really does: “**Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.**” So Yahweh proactively blesses the godly man *in this life*—present tense. But although the good man’s body is “along for the ride,” what God is actually blessing is his soul—that which makes his body



alive. On the other hand, **“The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”** (Psalm 1) The wicked, by contrast, are not blessed in this life, not by God, anyway (though they may seize for themselves the same sorts of things with which God might bless His children). But are they “driven away like chaff?” As Job noted, they usually *aren't* in this life. But the Psalmist has phrased that whole “wicked” contingency in the future tense: the wicked *will not* stand; their way *will* perish. And look carefully at the “chaff” statement again. It says that the wicked are like chaff. That is, they are already—in this world—empty shells devoid of life, just lying there on the threshing floor waiting for a good strong wind to blow them away.

This is true for nations as well as for individuals. The prophet Daniel, explaining King Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic dream to him, reported that **“A stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”** (Daniel 2:34-35) The dream had foreseen four great world empires, each of which would, in turn, dominate and control God’s chosen people and their land—Israel. They would summarize the course of gentile world dominance until such time as Yahweh’s “Stone,” (who will turn out to be His Messiah, the risen and reigning Yahshua) comes to reveal them for what they really are: lifeless, inert chaff, the waste product left over when the living grain is forcibly separated from the shell in which it once lived.

This is, in the larger sense, a perfect picture of Yahweh’s people as we live in this world: we who are alive through Him are—for better or worse—resigned to live within the world, though we do not really consist of the same substance. The day is coming—and soon—when the threshing sledge of God’s judgment (see Isaiah 41:14-16) will free us from the prison in which we sojourn. This very thing was foreseen by John the Baptist: **“I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”** (Matthew 3:11-12) We—the “wheat”—have been called out of the world; we have been set apart for God’s glory. If we don’t separate ourselves from the worthless chaff of this world, Yahshua will.

Remember, the grain—the living seed of wheat or barley, set apart from the chaff—is part of Yahweh’s self-portrait. The harvest is about to take place,

followed by the threshing and winnowing process—when His provision will no longer be freely available. The prophetic scriptures speak of a coming time when God will leave mankind alone to fend for himself—something He has never done in our entire history. This terrible time, known as the Tribulation, will continue for 2,520 days. And what will happen when Yahweh removes his hand of provision? Famine. Hunger. Desperation. John reports: **“When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come!’ And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!’”** (Revelation 6:6) Remember the omer of manna Yahweh provided for every Israelite, every day for forty years? Remember the barley fields that were ready to be harvested when the Israelites first entered the Land? Kiss all that provision goodbye. Now it will take a full day’s wage to purchase a single loaf of bread. Those who would like to be free of God’s inconvenient presence, those who wish to be self-sufficient, are about to find out—the hard way—precisely what that means. No more divine insight. No more food. No more water. No more air. No more light. No more life.

## ROCK / FOUNDATION / UPRIGHT PILLAR

### ❧ 1.3.7 ❧

#### *Confidence*

On March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry made a speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses, a stirring, outlandish, seditious, and quintessentially American call to arms. What he said convinced the Virginian leaders (among them, Washington and Jefferson) to commit troops to the revolutionary cause. But of that fiery speech, the only line anybody really remembered was, “Give me liberty, or give me death.” Henry’s point: if one is not free, empowered to make his own choices before God and man, he’s dead where he stands.

It’s important that we understand this, for there’s still something missing from the self-portrait Yahweh has given us. Every one of the attributes we’ve examined so far translates into a benefit for man. God is *light*: by Him we perceive the truth. God is *the Word*: Christ communicates Yahweh’s love to us. God is *living*: He is the first cause of all subsequent life. God is the *water of life*: through Him we are cleansed and restored. God is the *air we breathe*: His Holy Spirit indwells and inspires us. And God is the *bread of life*: He provides everything we need. But for any of that to be a tangible benefit to us, Yahweh must add one more facet to His character: He must make it possible for us to make our own choices. He must make free will a reality. He must therefore be our rock, our fortress, our foundation, our shelter, our hiding place from the spiritual storm, the source of our confidence, and the One able to make us stand upright and unashamed in His presence. Yahweh is the liberty that banishes death.

We’ll find this concept, like the six that preceded it, ubiquitous in scripture. David writes: **“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.... For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.”** (Psalm 62:1-2, 5-8) David knew, more than most of us, what it was like to have to flee from those who sought to take his life. He knew how to hide from his enemies in caves and mountain strongholds. He knew the value of strong city fortifications—a good defense. But he also sensed that these things were merely metaphors for spiritual security: that his real strength was in his relationship with Yahweh. Whether David knew it or not, the refuge and hope of which he spoke would be personified in his own descendent, the eternal heir to his throne. He is identified three times in this passage, when “salvation” is rendered *yāshuw`ah*—that is, Yahshua—the name of the Messiah.

The first time in scripture we see the “rock” used as a symbol of God’s protection is when Moses had expressed his desire to “see” the God who had become so vital to his life. Yahweh told him, **“You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.... Behold, there is a place by Me where you shall stand on the rock, and while My glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.”** (Exodus 33:20-22) A “cleft” is like a crevasse, a split or hollow, a place where Moses would not so much be *on* the rock as *in* it, protected by it. Yahweh was telling us, through Moses, that whatever glory we would perceive of Him could be seen only from this cleft in the “Rock.” We must stand *upon* it to gain the needed perspective, and hide *within* it to receive the necessary shelter. That “Rock” symbolizes Yahshua the Messiah.

Moses had encountered this rock symbol once before, but then it had been a source of a different Messianic symbol: *water*, miraculous and unexpected: **“Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test Yahweh?’ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’ So Moses cried to Yahweh, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”** Not exactly the kind of rocks Moses needed at that moment. **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.”** (Exodus 17:2-6) The word translated “rock” (here and in the passages above) is the Hebrew *tsur*. It denotes a rock outcropping, cliff, boulder, stone mountain, or crag. The picture is one of steadfast endurance, reliability, hardness, irresistibility, impermeability, and stability, hence a place of safety and refuge. A *tsur* is not the kind of thing from which one would ordinarily expect to draw water, but Yahweh was making a prophetic point. The people would be given water—a picture of God’s restoration and cleansing—through the striking of the rock at Horeb. It wouldn’t be just a trickle, either, but enough to sustain *everyone*—a couple of million thirsty Israelites and their flocks. But the source of the water, like the Messiah it represents, would be totally unexpected, the means of its provision mysterious and counterintuitive, not to mention miraculous.

The “rock” would have to be struck in order for the living water to flow from its wound. That’s why **“Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’** Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:37-39) Only after Christ was crucified and had risen would the cleansing, restorative “living water”—the Holy Spirit—be available to the

spiritually thirsty world. But Yahshua had promised this very thing when He'd said, **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."** (Matthew 5:6) So Paul ties the whole metaphor together, linking the Messiah, the Spirit, the water, and the Rock: **"And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed [that is, attended or accompanied] them, and the Rock was Christ."** (I Corinthians 10:4)

But the Israelites didn't spend the whole forty years in the wilderness camped out at Lake Horeb. When the pillar of cloud and fire moved on, so did they. And naturally, they got thirsty again. No surprise there. But they also got angry with Moses again, as if *he* were leading them, as if *he* were responsible for providing whatever food and water they got. Yahweh, of course, merely wanted to teach them another prophetic lesson about their coming salvation: **"And the glory of Yahweh appeared to them, and Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.'" (Numbers 20:7-8)** This time, Moses was just supposed to *talk* to the rock—simply ask it to “yield its water.” Needless to say, this is an even less scientifically sound method for extracting water from a boulder than is hitting it with a stick. It can't “possibly” work—unless, of course, there's a miracle in play, which was the whole point of the object lesson. Note that Yahweh made a point of having the elders of Israel there as witnesses. Getting water out of the rock wasn't the message; doing it by *asking in faith* was what He wanted them to understand.

Unfortunately, Moses was all too human. Instead of asking the rock for water as he'd been instructed to do, He lost his temper and smacked it a couple of times with his staff, spoiling Yahweh's illustration. **"Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?' And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock."** (Numbers 20:10-11) Moses would pay a price for his disobedience, just as we all earn punishment whenever we break God's Law. Moses was denied entrance to the Promised Land. And for roughly the same reasons, we are denied entrance to heaven, the abode of God, when we violate His standards. If it were up to us, heaven would be a very lonely place, populated only by Yahweh and His angels—except for one thing: God's mercy. What happened when Moses sinned by striking the rock instead of speaking to it? Did Yahweh say, *Okay, no water for you guys. Come back tomorrow?* No, He provided the water of life in spite of the sins of Moses and the people—before they deserved it ('cause, let's face it, *that* would have entailed a really long wait).

The point of the illustration, of course, was that once the rock (the Messiah) had been struck once, it (He) would henceforth be accessible through prayer, even though our logic tells us that because God is holy, He is inaccessible and distant. For people who live under the bondage of religion, this may come as something of a shock, but Yahweh *wants* to provide for us—freely and abundantly. He is not a harsh and vindictive tyrant who delights in seeing people trembling and groveling in fear of His righteous wrath. The only reason he let the Israelites experience a little hunger and thirst out there in the desert was that He wanted to teach them how to trust Him. They were never really in danger—not a single Israelite died of hunger or thirst the whole time they were out there wandering in the desert. But Yahshua would later declare: **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”** Our temporal needs are temporary. They are only there to teach us that the life provided by the eternal God is *eternal*.

One more thing is worth noting. There is a subtle shift of terminology between the Exodus incident (when the rock was to be struck) and the Numbers event (where the rock was to be spoken to). We’ve already reviewed the definition of *tsur*, the word translated “rock” in the first case. But the Numbers 20 account employs a different term, *sela*, which, according to most lexicons, is virtually identical in meaning. But the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, “This noun [*sela*] is related to an Arabic root *sala’a*: ‘split’ (hence *sil’n*: ‘fissure’). As opposed to *tsur*, ‘rock,’ (with which it is often used interchangeably, which lays emphasis on a more massive rock; cf. Aramaic *tur*: ‘mountain’), it refers basically to a cleft in a rock, thence a rock or cliff.” Do you recall our discussion of Moses’ position on the “rock” as he was allowed to witness the glory of Yahweh up close and personal? He was not only “on” the rock, but was also “in” it, that is, sheltered in a cleft or fissure in the rock.

If we correlate the word usages and their symbolic functions, the idea that emerges is that the Yahshua we slew on Calvary is the “rock” (*tsur*) upon which we must stand in order to perceive Yahweh. He is God’s love personified, the source of the waters of cleansing. But the Yahshua who rose from the dead under His own power, the Yahshua who will soon reign in glory upon the earth, is the “rock” (*sela*) in which we can find restoration, refreshment, and shelter from the spiritual storm raging about us, if only we’ll ask Him for it. He is the source of the “river of living water,” that is, the Spirit of Yahweh, who will dwell within our souls, making them eternally alive. Yes, they are the same divine “person.” But as we saw in the previous chapter, the form in which Yahweh manifests Himself to us depends upon the function He wishes to perform on our behalf. Perspective and protection are two different things; Yahshua’s sacrifice allows us to see Yahweh’s love, but His unlimited authority enables us to stand before Him as faultless and righteous beings.

*Tsur* is used to describe the idea that Yahweh is our Rock, in the sense of being great, strong, and just: **“For I will proclaim the name of Yahweh; ascribe greatness to our God, the Rock. His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He.”** (Deuteronomy 32:3-4) Of course, having a God whose character is described as this kind of immovable Rock can be problematical if you’re in a state of rebellion or apostasy: **“But Jeshurun [i.e., Israel in its ideal character: literally, “upright one”] grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock [*tsur*] of his salvation [*yâshuw`ah*]... You were unmindful of the Rock [*tsur*] that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth... If they [Israel’s enemies] were wise, they would understand this [i.e., that Yahweh had allowed them to triumph over Israel because of her idolatry]; they would discern their latter end! How could one have chased a thousand, and two have put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock [*tsur*] had sold them, and Yahweh had given them up? For their rock is not as our Rock; our enemies themselves being judges.”** (Deuteronomy 32:15, 18, 29-31) Just as one’s “god” is whatever he worships, one’s “rock” is what he perceives as the source of his strength. Moses is pointing out that Israel’s God, their “Rock”—Yahweh—was the real thing, while their enemies’ gods were imposters without any real power—and on some level, they knew it. Therefore, if Israel got routed in battle, it was because Yahweh had arranged it. Tough love.

More examples: **“And Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in Yahweh; my strength is exalted in Yahweh. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation [*yâshuw`ah*]. There is none holy like Yahweh; there is none besides You; there is no rock [*tsur*] like our God.”** (I Samuel 2:1-2) She wasn’t just spouting poetry. She really trusted in Yahweh’s strength: she was about to entrust her only son, Samuel, into His personal care—sort of a living *bekor*, or firstborn offering. A bit later, David (having been anointed as king of Israel by Hannah’s son) would continue the thought: **“This God—His way is perfect; the word of Yahweh proves true; He is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him. For who is God, but Yahweh? And who is a rock [*tsur*], except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless.... Yahweh lives, and blessed be my rock [*tsur*], and exalted be my God, the rock [*tsur*] of my salvation.”** (II Samuel 22:31-33, 47; cf. Psalm 18) Again, the emphasis is on God’s strength, demonstrated in His perfection and truth. It’s the reason He is exalted.

The shift to *sela*—the rock of refuge and shelter—is subtle. David used both terms in this passage: **“He [David] said, ‘Yahweh is my rock [*sela*] and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock [*tsur*], in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.”** (II Samuel 22:2-4) One could almost say the difference is that of offence versus defense. *Tsur* is the rock—the high ground—upon which we stand when confronting the world in

Yahweh's strength; *sela* is more like the impregnable stronghold within that rock to which we can retreat—where the arrows of the adversary can't reach us.

Isaiah describes the Messiah as just such a haven: **“Behold, a King will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock [*sela*] in a weary land.”** (Isaiah 32:1-2) The “King” in this millennial passage is obviously Yahshua the Messiah. But who are these “princes?” I think it may be a reference to the immortal believers—the participants in the rapture—who will populate the Millennial Kingdom alongside the mortal survivors of the Tribulation and their children. After all, we are described as “kings and priests” in Revelation 1:6. And we are told, **“If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him.”** (II Timothy 2:11-12) Could it be that we believers will be given the privilege of manifesting or communicating our Messiah's “rock-ness” to the world during the Kingdom age? The prospect boggles the mind.

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The picture of “God as a Rock” is not an exclusively Old Testament concept, but there are only a few New Testament instances that don't refer directly to the Tanach. One is this parable from Yahshua: **“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock [*petra*]. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”** The rock here is the Messiah, of course, but it's also the larger concept of God's Word—the comprehensive truth of Yahweh's plan for the redemption of mankind, culminating in Yahshua's life and sacrifice. **“And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”** (Matthew 7:24-27) In other words, it doesn't matter how smart you are, how brilliant your arguments sound, or how skillfully you're able to justify your actions or rationalize your behavior. If your life isn't built on the truth of Yahweh's word, it will all fall apart when trouble comes—and trouble *always* comes.

The central prophetic fact, the foundation upon which the Torah, Psalms and Prophets had been built, was the salvation of mankind through the coming Messiah—first through His sacrifice, and then through His glorious reign. The “house” that God intended to build would be based on this unshakable rock—not the shifting “sand” of human philosophy, wishful thinking, ambition, or apathy. In



order to get His disciples thinking about the big picture in these terms, Yahshua once took a poll, of sorts. He asked them what people were saying about Him. Who did his contemporaries think He was, *really*? The answers are revealing: everybody, it seemed, was so impressed with His words and miracles, they thought He must be one of the giants of Israel's history, come back to life, whether recent (John the Baptist, who had just been beheaded, was suggested) or someone out of the distant past—perhaps Jeremiah (who had not been prophesied to make an appearance) or Elijah (who had). *Nobody* who had actually seen or heard Yahshua in person thought He was just an ordinary rabbi. No one was comparing Him to the celebrated contemporary rival rabbis, Hillel and Shammai. No, He was in a class by Himself.

So “[Yahshua] said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” Peter was the first to recognize (or at least the first to blurt out in public) the nature of the “rock,” the foundation upon which God intended to build His house. It was that Yahshua was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God that the scriptures had promised. **“And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’”** (Matthew 16:15-18) There's a play on words here that's totally lost in the English. “Peter's” real name was Simon (or Simeon), son of Jonah. But Yahshua gave him a nickname, *Petros*. This, the masculine form of the word translated “rock” in the parable above, is the kind of stone one might pick up and throw, whereas *petras* denotes a massive boulder, cliff, or mountain.

If I may *loosely* paraphrase Yahshua's remark for American ears, He said something like, *Nice flash of spiritual insight there. I know your name is Simon Johnson, but I'm going to call you “Rocky” from now on, 'cause you've identified the bedrock foundation upon which I'm going to enable everybody I call out from the world to stand firm and safe from the adversary.* That foundation was obviously not Peter himself. His flicker of spiritual insight proved transient indeed, for in the very next breath, Yahshua was calling *him* the adversary—*satan*—for suggesting that the suffering of the cross shouldn't really be necessary. A while later—during the very time of suffering Simon had thought should be avoidable—Peter would go so far as to deny that he even *knew* the Rock of his salvation. I can relate to Peter: he was slow but teachable, impetuous but persistent, weak but resilient, and intuitively aware that the only thing he had going for him was his relationship with the Messiah. If somebody said they wanted to build their church on *my* performance, they'd be insane, and I think Peter would have said the same thing. No, the Rock of which Yahshua was speaking wasn't Peter; it was the truth that he had confessed: **“You, Yahshua, are the Anointed One, the Son of the living God.”**

The Tanach had clearly characterized Yahweh and His Messiah as our rock and foundation: **“He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.”** (Psalm 62:6-7) So for Peter to be singled out as a “chip off the old block,” so to speak, was a very good thing. But Peter himself would later point out that this is actually true of all of us who answer Yahweh’s call: we all become components of the “house” God is building upon the foundation of Christ. So Peter writes, **“As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”** He’s talking about the church, the *ekklesia*, the called-out assembly of believers that make up the “body of Christ.” **“For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ and ‘A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.’ They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”**

(I Peter 2:4-8) We’ll get to the scriptural premise to which Peter was referring in a moment. But first, I’d like to head off a misconception. Contrary to what it might sound like in this English translation, no one was ever “destined” to “disobey the word.” Rather, those who *do* disobey are destined to *stumble*. The word translated “destined” here is *tithemi*, a verb meaning to appoint, to set in place, hence to establish or ordain. Peter is merely reinforcing what I’ve been saying all along: choices carry consequences. He’s pointing out that stumbling—literally, running into an obstacle—is the inevitable result of disobedience against (or disbelief of) the Word of God, personified in Christ.

Peter was quoting from several passages, one from the Psalms, and others in Isaiah. First, **“Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem! Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter’; therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, ‘Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes will not be dismayed.’”** (Isaiah 28:14-16) Everybody has *something* they consider a foundation, their place of refuge, their source of strength. Isaiah begins by identifying what the errant leaders of Israel were counting on: lies and falsehood. He then reveals the foundation they should have trusted instead: (1) the One laid by Yahweh Himself; (2) who would appear in Zion (that is, He would be an Israelite); (3) a “stone”—unbreakable, solid, and unyielding; (4) tested—examined, tried, and proven to be of great value; (5) precious—valuable, prized, rare, and glorious; (6) a cornerstone—the standard to which everything else must

align itself; and (7) a foundation that is firmly placed, sure-footed, and solidly established.

The Psalmist fills in the blanks: **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is Yahweh’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”** (Psalm 118:22-23) Why did Israel take refuge in lies and falsehood? Because they had already rejected the true foundation. Lies were the only alternative. Having rejected God’s foundation stone, they had nothing left upon which to build but sand. Plucked out of context like this, of course, it may seem like I (with Peter) might be extrapolating, reaching for an unwarranted conclusion. But I’m not. Just prior to this, the Psalmist said, **“I thank You that You have answered me and have become my salvation.”** (Psalm 118:21) *What* has Yahweh become? Perhaps the question is better phrased: *Who*? “Salvation” (as usual) is *yâshuw`ah*—the Messiah’s name, Yahshua: identified in the same breath as **“the stone that the builders rejected.”**

And what follows? **“This is the day that Yahweh has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O Yahweh! O Yahweh, we pray: give us success! Blessed is He who comes in the name of Yahweh!”** What “day” is the Psalmist talking about? You may recognize this as the joyful song of the crowd who laid palm branches on the road before Yahshua’s borrowed donkey as He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophetic requirements of both Exodus 12:3 and Daniel 9:25: *Hosanna!* **“We bless you from the house of Yahweh. Yahweh is God, and He has made His light to shine upon us.”** Yes, we’ve seen that picture before, too. **“Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!”** A mere four days after Yahshua’s triumphal entry, He became the final sacrifice, fulfilling not only the Feast of Passover, but every shred of prophetic symbolism written into the entire Levitical Law. **“You are my God, and I will give thanks to You; You are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!”** (Psalm 118: 24-28) Yes, we are to give thanks to Yahweh; but never forget who satisfied the Psalmist’s imagery. It was *Yahshua*—Yahweh in the flesh, Yahweh’s appointed Cornerstone.

These passages are of such incredible significance, they were quoted not only by Peter, but also by Paul, who used them to explain how God’s “Rock of Salvation” relates to the Torah. **“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works....”** At first, this seems counterintuitive: Israel, at least during some periods in their long and checkered history, tried like crazy to negotiate the impenetrable maze that is the Law of God. But everybody, right up to the most anal Pharisee, blew it one way or another. So having been unsuccessful in their efforts, they remain condemned under the curse of the Law. But then the gentiles came along and,

confronted with the person of Yahshua, recognized their guilt and trusted Him to cover it—all more or less simultaneously. They never even heard of the Torah, much less attempted to keep it. And yet these gentiles who simply believed are accounted by God as righteous because of their faith, while Israel’s “workers”—those who religiously pursued righteousness as if it were something that could be attained through their own efforts—were not even given points for trying. It hardly seems fair. But if we take into account what the Torah *means*, rather than what it merely *requires*, then it all starts to make sense. Though the gentile believers didn’t know to rest on the Sabbath, they *were* resting in Yahshua’s finished work, fulfilling the precept. Though they did not circumcise their male children, they *were*, through their faith, cut off from the world, fulfilling the precept. Though they didn’t physically remove the yeast from their homes for a week every spring, they *did* experience the freedom from corruption that a relationship with Yahweh brings to one’s life, once again, fulfilling the precept. What they believed—who they trusted and relied upon—thus became infinitely more significant than what they did.

But the Jews, who managed to keep some of the Torah’s precepts (but only out of sheer religious stubbornness) did not recognize the truth that Yahshua’s life, death, and resurrection comprised the literal fulfillment of the Torah’s requirements. They did not accept that He was the reality that cast the shadow called the Law. So Paul, like Peter, quotes Isaiah: **“They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’”** (Romans 9:30-33) That last phrase deserves a closer look—in Isaiah’s Hebrew original. “Believes” is the Hebrew verb *’aman*, meaning to support, confirm, be faithful, uphold, stand firm, be established, verify, trust, or believe. It’s the root of the familiar conversational affirmation, “Amen,” meaning, “truly, verily,” or “it is so.” The line, “will not be put to shame” is probably a translation mistake—not Peter’s or Paul’s but the Septuagint’s—the Greek translation of the Tanach that they both used. The TWOT notes, “The letters *hš* may be in error for *bš*, ‘be ashamed.’” The Hebrew *hus* means to be agitated, worry about; it’s related to the idea of showing haste, of being excited. So what Isaiah was really trying to say was apparently, “Whoever confirms and upholds the truth, standing in trust upon the concept that Yahweh is our foundation stone, will never have anything to worry about. But those who do not believe will find Yahweh and His Messiah an impediment to their religious pretensions.” Or something like that.

And where did Peter and Paul get that “rock of offense” line? It too comes from Isaiah: **“But Yahweh of hosts, Him you shall regard as holy. Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. And He will become a sanctuary [literally, a holy place] and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they**

**shall be snared and taken.**" (Isaiah 8:13-15) In context, the prophet is taking Israel to task for their fear of the belligerent Assyrian Empire to their north (and I think he's seeing the Babylonian menace in Judah's future as well), when they should be taking Yahweh seriously instead. Just before this, Yahweh says (and I paraphrase), *You guys with your conspiracy theories have it all wrong! You would have nothing to fear from your enemies if only you honored Me.* In mid-thought, the focus is narrowed from Yahweh to His Messiah as the One Israel should fear. The Hebrew noun translated "offense" is *negeph*, which actually denotes a blow, a strike, or a plague. TWOT again: "In several passages our root [*nagaph*: to strike] is applied to a serious striking of one's foot on rocks. Wisdom guides one in walking sure-footedly (Proverbs 3:23). Indeed God promises angelic help in so protecting the godly (Psalm 91:12). Unfaithful Judah is summoned to repentance by the threat of the exile prophetically depicted as constant 'stumbling, across dark mountains' (Jeremiah 13:16). In the eschaton [i.e., the future] all God's enemies will 'stumble' over the Messiah, the stone of stumbling (*negep* is used synonymously parallel to *mikšôl*—'stumbling')." The "stone of offense," then, is a reference to it (Him) being used by God as a weapon against His enemies. That ought to be a sobering thought.

The point of all this is that Yahshua the Messiah is, in the end, either the foundation upon which one stands and the rock in which he seeks refuge, or He is an immovable impediment standing in the way of one's self-centered agenda, ready to trip up his pretensions and pride, or worse, a stone club in the hand of Yahweh with which He intends to strike down His enemies.

This second negative contingency is the basis of the first vision recorded in the Book of Daniel. In the early sixth century B.C., the young Daniel was tasked with interpreting a dream that had troubled the most powerful monarch on the earth at the time, Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. After describing the big statue in the dream the king had seen, Daniel told him what it meant, and how it would all end for the world's great gentile civilizations: **"As you looked, a stone [*eben*] was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone [*eben*] that struck the image became a great mountain [*tuwr*] and filled the whole earth."** (Daniel 2:34-35) Considering the fact that Nebuchadnezzar himself was identified as the head of gold, he took the news pretty well. The image in the dream, it would transpire, was a calendar, a timeline of future events—specifically the course of gentile world power as it related to the coming of Yahweh's Messiah, the "stone cut out by no human hand." The kingdoms began with Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, which would be succeeded by Medo-Persia, then by Alexander's Greece, then by Rome. All of these kingdoms, one after the other, controlled the

Messiah's capital city, Jerusalem. The calendar spanned the time between the Babylonian conquest of Judah and the coming of the Messiah, the "Rock."

But which coming? Analyzing the dream, it's easy to see why the "prophecy buffs" of Yahshua's day expected the Messiah to come in and destroy Rome, ruling in its place: Daniel had revealed this very thing. It's *still* the reason many Jews reject Yahshua's Messianic claims. What they miss is that first century Rome *didn't* completely match the description in the dream. Rome wouldn't be divided into two branches (the legs of the image) until the fourth century AD—a thousand years after Daniel's time. And it couldn't honestly be described as "iron and clay"—partly strong and partly fragile, composed of parts that "will not adhere to each other" (see Daniel 2:42-43), until the twentieth century, with the fall of the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires leading to the rise of a European Union permeated with a large Muslim minority that's neither culturally nor economically integrated within it. Only now—within the last couple of decades—are we at last down to the "toes" of Nebuchadnezzar's big statue.

**"And in the days of those kings** [in context, he's speaking specifically of the toes of iron and clay here—at the very end of revived Rome's tenure: in other words, any time now] **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.**" This is in sharp contrast to every other kingdom that preceded it. **"It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold."** (Daniel 2:44-45) We need to pay close attention to God's imagery here. The stone that destroyed the gentile power structure had been first seen being "cut from a mountain," without human hands. A "mountain" in Yahweh's symbolic playbook is a place of authority or power. This is thus an obvious and transparent reference to Yahshua the Messiah—derived directly from Yahweh, but manifested in a diminished form. Note that He doesn't remain a mere stone implement in Yahweh's hand, but is eventually revealed to be Yahweh Himself: **"But the stone [eben] that struck the image became a great mountain [tuwr] and filled the whole earth."** The lesson: either stand upon Christ, or be crushed by Him. If you find yourself on the wrong side of that equation, it's still not too late to change your position. But that won't be the case forever.

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Let us return to a passage we reviewed previously; I skipped over a couple of key words germane to our present topic. **"Thus says the Lord Yahweh, 'Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone,**

**of a sure foundation.**" (Isaiah 28:16) As we have seen, the concept of God's truth as a firm foundation is an important component of Yahweh's self portrait. And here, as elsewhere, that foundation is personified in the coming Christ. The phrase "laid as a foundation" is a single Hebrew verb, *yasad*, meaning to found, fix firmly, establish, or lay as a foundation, hence to assign, ordain, appoint to a task, or put something solidly in place. This is precisely what Yahweh did when He "ordained" or "assigned" Yahshua to be the foundation upon which our salvation would be built (not to mention being the rock with which His enemies would eventually be "stoned" for their crimes, as we just saw). The phrase "sure foundation" uses the common Hebrew device of combining a verb with its related noun for emphasis: *musad yasad*—literally, "a foundation being founded." We should bear in mind that this expression describes the "precious cornerstone" (Hebrew: *pinnaḥ*). It is this Messianic Cornerstone, Yahshua, that is firmly established by Yahweh's hand.

The tabernacle (though the broader subject must be reserved for a later chapter) is replete with symbols that together tell the story of God's plan for our redemption. Although it had no "cornerstone" *per se* (since it was more like a tent than a building, portable and modular in design), its "foundation," the bases or "sockets" that were to hold up the boards comprising the "walls" of the structure, are an important part of the tabernacle's symbology. **"You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; and forty bases of silver you shall make under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons."** (Exodus 26:18-19) And so forth for the entire structure. The courtyard surrounding the tabernacle was similarly constructed: **"You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twined linen a hundred cubits long for one side. Its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver."** (Exodus 27:9-10)

These "bases" (the Hebrew word is *'eden*) were hunks of solid metal, weighing in at one talent—75 to 90 pounds—apiece. They were cast with holes in the top, "mortises," so to speak, into which would be placed the "tenons" or posts protruding from the bottoms of the pillars or planks comprising the structural framework of the tabernacle or court enclosure. Both the fence surrounding the courtyard and the walls of the tabernacle represent barriers that exist between God and men. These bases therefore help explain what separates us from Yahweh, and suggest how He may be approached.

The metals tell the tale. The *'eden* foundations of the outer court are made of bronze, which symbolizes judgment: our sins separate us from a holy God. ("Judgment" in Biblical usage says far more about the judicial separation of the guilty from the innocent than it does about condemnation and punishment.) Were

it not for the entrance on the eastern side of the courtyard, it would be impossible for us to approach Yahweh. That being said, there is only one door, one way to approach the place where God is said to symbolically dwell. Once someone enters the courtyard, the layout dictates that he'll encounter the altar of sacrifice and the bronze laver of cleansing before he reaches the entrance to the tabernacle itself. Again, there is only one door, facing the east. All other access to God is blocked by "walls" that are upheld by *'eden* foundation bases, this time made of silver. We'll cover more fully what these metals mean in a future chapter, but in God's shorthand, silver represents blood—specifically, the redeeming blood of the Messiah's sacrifice. So in a nutshell, the foundational truth of God's plan for our redemption (that is, the truth being proclaimed by the *'eden* foundations of the tabernacle's architecture) is that (1) we begin outside, in a state of judgment, i.e., separation from God, hence condemnation (See John 3:18). (2) We may approach Him seeking forgiveness, but only if we'll do it His way. And (3) ultimate access to Yahweh's presence is granted exclusively through the redeeming blood of the Messiah. I can only reflect that Christians who think the Torah has nothing to teach them are disastrously mistaken.

Most of scripture's uses of *'eden* refer to the tabernacle architecture we've just reviewed. But the exceptions can be revealing. Remember the big statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Its legs were made of iron—strong, but not particularly valuable—and by the time we got down to the feet upon which it stood, the iron was mixed with worthless, brittle clay, making the whole statue weak and vulnerable. Compare that picture to the image of Christ as seen by His bride in the highly poetic Song of Solomon: **"His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases [*'eden*] of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars."** (Song of Solomon 5:15) The picture is one of unassailable power, inestimable value, and stunning beauty, all rolled into one. Of course, the love-smitten bride (that's *us*) is a bit biased, but that doesn't mean she's wrong. At the very least, this is Someone in an entirely different class than the best the world has to offer: Nebuchadnezzar's tough-guy statue looks positively oafish in comparison—crude and clumsy.

Since Yahweh presents Himself as our rock and foundation, we should not be surprised to learn that He takes His "construction techniques" seriously. Thus we hear Him taking Job to task for presuming to inspect His workmanship, when after all, Yahweh wrote the building code! **"Where were you when I laid the foundation [*yasad*] of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases [*'eden*] sunk, or who laid its cornerstone [*pinnah*—remember the Messianic ramifications of this word we saw in Isaiah 28?], when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"** (Job 38:4-7) A geophysicist could spend his entire career trying to figure these things out, and still not get to the bottom of it. In truth, we will never really understand the building until we come



to know the Builder. In the end, Yahweh Himself is the foundation, the basis, and the cornerstone of our existence.

There is something else about the concept of *'eden*—a base, foundation, or pedestal—of which we should be aware. It shares its linguistic root with the Hebrew noun *adon* and its emphatic form, *adonay*: lord or master. The root verb means to be strong or firm; the emphasis is on solidity. *Adon* is usually used in reference to human relationships—a master to his servant, a king to his subject, or even a husband to his wife—while *adonay*, the intensive plural form, is used in scripture exclusively to describe our relationship with God. One might say that *adon* refers to personal relationships in the same way that *'eden* speaks of the correlation between inanimate objects. And that observation leads us to what might come as a shocking revelation.

Consider this: the *'eden* foundation holds up whatever rests upon it. Its firmness, solidity, and strength make it suited to, and capable of, supporting a burden. I believe *adon/adonay* should be thought of in the same terms. An *adon*—a lord, master, owner, or husband—does not (or at least *should* not) stand upon the shoulders of those to whom he is “lord,” elevating himself at their expense. On the contrary, his proper role is to support them, be their source of strength, their unshakable foundation, their unwavering moral compass. “Lordship” is not a position of privilege, but of responsibility. It’s not an occasion for arrogance, but the requirement of conscientiousness. This truth is the basis for the old European concept of *noblesse oblige*—that with power, wealth, or prestige comes responsibility—though in practice, European nobility almost never rose to the challenge. In our day, a husband who treats his wife and children as mere possessions—who exist only to meet his needs and do his bidding—has it completely backward. An employer who abuses and exploits his workers, seeing them as mere pawns in his own little game, doesn’t have the sense God gave geese. And politicians who act as if their positions of leadership entitle them to special privileges, perks, payoffs, or protection, are similarly deluded. People who find themselves “lords” in this world are required under God to use the power given them to elevate, uphold, and support others—their families, their coworkers, or their constituencies—not aggrandize themselves.

And as counterintuitive as it seems, the same thing appears to be true of Yahweh in His role as *Adonay*—Lord and Master. As we’ve seen, Yahweh consistently presents Himself as our Rock, Fortress, Foundation, and Cornerstone. Even when He’s telling us to obey Him, it’s always for our benefit, not His. As Moses declared, **“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God that I command you today, by loving Yahweh your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land**

**that you are entering to take possession of it.”** (Deuteronomy 30:15-16) Our obedience doesn’t do a thing for Yahweh—but it does a great deal for us. The religions of man can’t seem to comprehend this, but to me it seems obvious: we are not here to support God; we cannot empower Him. The very idea is ludicrous: authority is derived from strength, not from weakness. Rather, Yahweh—in His role as our “Lord”—is here first to create us in love, then to support us, guide us, and teach us what we need to know to enjoy happy and successful lives in His presence. In order to do that, of course, He needs to be better than we are—more worthy, more knowledgeable, more honest, more powerful, and more forgiving. And He is.

But because we’ve been given free will, if one of us feels that we’re better or more qualified than Yahweh in any way, then it’s our right to declare *ourselves* to be “Lords” of our own lives—and many do. That, however, reveals a condition known in theological circles as being “dumb as a box of rocks,” for we aren’t capable for one minute of supporting ourselves, much less providing for our needs, inspiring ourselves, cleansing, quickening, or teaching ourselves, or illuminating our own path (to reflect upon a list of attributes with which you are now quite familiar: the self-portrait of Yahweh). No, the greater blesses the lesser; the stronger empowers the weaker; the solid foundation supports the house. Yahweh is both *’eden* and *Adonay*.

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Another symbol recruited by Yahweh to communicate this general idea of His support and enablement is the pillar, post, or upright pole. The overarching principle is of God standing on our behalf: and by so doing, He makes it possible for mankind to stand in His presence. It’s a recurring theme throughout scripture, but one that’s often overlooked because we’re usually so busy looking at the trees, we lose sight of the forest. Several words are used to convey this idea.

The first permutation of this concept we encounter in scripture is the *mezuzah*, the doorpost. In Exodus 12, we read of the instructions for the first Passover, how the Israelite slaves were to slay the innocent lamb and apply its blood to the doorposts of their houses, a sign to the Destroyer that they were trusting Yahweh to deliver them from death. It doesn’t take a genius to see the prophetic parallel: the blood of the Lamb of God, Yahshua, would later be applied to a Roman cross (Greek: *stauros*—literally, an upright pole) for precisely the same purpose. That’s obvious enough. But things get even more interesting when we explore God’s other instructions and prophecies involving the *mezuzah*.

First, we read, **“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words**

[*dabar*] that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts [*mezuzah*] of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; cf. Deuteronomy 11:18-21) What was to be written on the doorposts? God’s “Word.” If you’ll recall, the Hebrew *dabar* is equivalent to the Greek *logos*—that is (according to John 1:14), that which “became flesh and dwelled among us.” That’s right, folks. Yahweh is instructing the Israelites, in so many words, to teach their children about the coming Messiah (as symbolized by every word of the Torah), keep Him at the forefront of their awareness at all times, and memorialize His mission by writing about it on their doorposts!

Now compare that precept with this proverb: **“Blessed is the one who listens to me [the personified Wisdom], watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors [*mezuzah*]. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from Yahweh.”** (Proverbs 8:34-35) Then factor in this scene from Ezekiel’s vision of the Millennial Temple: **“The prince shall enter by the vestibule of the gate from outside, and shall take his stand by the post [*mezuzah*] of the gate. The priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate.”** (Ezekiel 46:2) In context, the “prince” is apparently the resurrected King David, seen leading the restored Israel in the worship of the reigning Messiah, King Yahshua. Look where he’s standing: by the *mezuzah* of the inner court’s eastern gate—the one in which Yahweh (in the person of the risen and glorified Christ) will appear on Sabbath days and new moon feasts. Putting all of this together, the lesson seems to be that Wisdom personified—Yahweh in the flesh, King Yahshua—wants to meet us at the *mezuzah*, the doorpost, where the blood of the Passover sacrifice was applied in faith in order to save us from condemnation and death.

A second Hebrew word used in scripture to convey the idea of an upright pole (and what that might mean to us) is *nes*. We find it in the familiar story of the wilderness snakebite cure: **“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole [*nes*], and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole [*nes*]. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”** (Numbers 21:8-9) A *nes*, though literally a pole, indicates something more far reaching in Hebrew: it’s something lifted up, hence a euphemism for a standard, a signal, a banner, or an ensign—a rallying point.

We still might have missed the significance of that, had not Yahshua pointed out the parallel to Nicodemus: **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:14-16) The Greek verb translated “lifted up”

picks up the thought begun in Hebrew with *nes*. Based on the word for height, whether of place or rank, *hupsoo* means either to lift up physically or to exalt. Yahshua was thus not only predicting the manner of His own execution, but was also prophesying the effect it would have on the world. His crucifixion, while lifting up His body to ridicule, scorn, and death, also exalted Him, elevating His status from that of beloved rabbi to Savior of mankind. (His resurrection on the third day would finish the job, unquestionably establishing His *deity*.)

The function of His crucifixion was, as with Moses' snake on a stick, to confront people with the reality of their sin. The serpent had always represented evil, sin, and death—ever since it showed up in the Garden of Eden. The slithering menace killing off discontented Israelites in the wilderness was only the latest example; the final permutation—the dragon—is still in our future. By telling Moses to put a bronze snake (symbolic of sin) on a pole and making the people look at it if they wanted to be cured, God was calling for a dress rehearsal—He was establishing a precedent. Paul explains: **“For our sake He [God] made Him [Yahshua] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (II Corinthians 5:21) Our sins were borne by the Messiah on Calvary's pole. If we wish to be saved from the poison we have brought upon ourselves, we must—like the snake-bitten Israelites—face the reality of our sin, looking in faith to what God has provided as the ultimate cure.

The world would do well to heed the admonition revealed through Isaiah: **“All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal [*nes*] is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear!”** (Isaiah 18:3) This verse is in a passage describing the fate of a nation (I'm convinced it's America) during the last days. This nation is seen raising the signal or lifting the banner—that which we have just learned is a scriptural metaphor for the cross of Christ. And the world is commanded to pay heed. Whether it's deserved or not, America is seen by the world as a “Christian nation.” (It's why *dar al-Islam* calls us “the Great Satan.”) The “trumpet” (as we shall see in a later chapter) is intimately associated with the coming harvest of believers commonly known as “the rapture” (something that will fulfill the prophetic requirements of the Feast of Trumpets—*Yom Teruah*—the fifth of the seven “holy convocations” instituted by Yahweh in the Torah). Isaiah seems to be saying that those who disregard the *nes* will be reminded of their folly when the rapture's “last trump” blows, leaving them behind. Will it take the “blowing of the trumpet” for the world to finally pay heed to the banner of the Messiah?

A third Hebrew word used to convey this idea of God's support and enablement through being “upright” is one we've seen before. The word defining the physical form of God's *Shekinah*, you'll recall, was the *amud*—a pillar, column, or supporting post. The visible manifestation of God that the Israelites

followed in the wilderness was described as a pillar of cloud and fire. **“And Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar [*amud*] of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar [*amud*] of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.”** (Exodus 13:21-22)

This same image was built into the wilderness tabernacle, where *everything* was symbolic in some way of Yahweh’s plan of redemption. The portals to both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place incorporated *amud* pillars, and in each case, they are associated with the *eden* foundations we saw earlier: **“And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. And you shall hang it on four pillars [*amud*] of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases [*eden*] of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.”** (Exodus 26:31-33) Since the directions for the construction of the tabernacle were always given from God’s perspective, not man’s, the order is from the inside out. **“You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. And you shall make for the screen five pillars [*amud*] of acacia, and overlay them with gold. Their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases [*eden*] of bronze for them.”** (Exodus 26:36-37)

*Amud*—the pillar—is based on the verb *amad*, meaning to stand, remain, endure, be upright, arise, or cause someone to stand—hence to appoint, ordain, or establish him. So we should not be surprised to find the verb used in the tabernacle instructions as well. For instance: **“You shall make upright [*amad*] frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood.”** (Exodus 26:15) These “frames,” gold-covered boards or wall sections, represent us: the assembly of the faithful. If you’ll recall, these were also supported by silver *eden* foundations. That is, we are upheld by the ransom-blood of the Messiah, setting us apart from the earth, anchoring us, lifting us up, and enabling us to stand upright.

The idea of Yahweh’s people being enabled to stand upright before Him is, if you think about it, totally out of step with the vast preponderance of religious thought—which seems to think that man should grovel in obeisance before God. Yes, it’s true that **“God has highly exalted [Yahshua] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,”** (Philippians 2:9-10) but the respect and deference this implies in no way mitigates the face-to-face relationship Yahweh seeks to establish with His children. Like any good father, He wishes to see His children develop and grow in an atmosphere of love, support, and nurturing kindness—not authoritarian hard-fisted rule. Children should submit to their parents (as we should to God), not

because the parents demand it, but because they deserve it. Such submission is always in the child's best interests: it does nothing for the father when the child obeys, but rather, it keeps the child from harm. Isaiah was shown how the two concepts balance: **"For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain [amad] before Me, says Yahweh, so shall your offspring and your name remain [amad]. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, declares Yahweh."** (Isaiah 66:22-23)

The parent-child picture is mirrored in the master-servant relationship, and again we see that Yahweh wishes His servants to stand upright before Him. **"Praise Yahweh! Praise the name of Yahweh; give praise, O servants of Yahweh, who stand [amad] in the house of Yahweh, in the courts of the house of our God!"** (Psalm 135:2) The proper attitude of praise, worship, and adoration is standing confidently (note: I didn't say *arrogantly*) in God's grace, not cringing before Him in fear of His divine retribution—no matter how much we deserved it. Like any master/employer/leader, Yahweh knows that nothing of value gets done if everybody under you (and in His case, that's *everybody*) is busy covering his butt. He knows we're going to make mistakes. But they're part of the learning curve, not grounds for dismissal.

The Israelite tribe of Levi symbolizes those who serve Yahweh, those who consider *Him* their inheritance and great reward. So we read: **"At that time Yahweh set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to stand [amad] before Yahweh to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day."** (Deuteronomy 10:8) "To bless" (Hebrew: *barak*) is related to the idea of kneeling (the idea being that a subject kneels before his lord in order to be formally blessed: picture being "knighted"). So "standing" and "kneeling" before God are oddly equated here. But as the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* notes, "To bless in the OT means to endue with power for success, prosperity, fecundity [i.e., fruitfulness or productivity], longevity, etc." The Levites were not only blessed themselves by God, they were also tasked with blessing others "in His name." Of course, they couldn't "bless" Israel like this in their own strength: such enabling had to come from the One they served—Yahweh. Blessings (like other things) flow downhill: from Yahweh to His Levite-believers to the rest of the world.

This brings us back to the primary concept being presented here: Yahweh (through Yahshua) stands on our behalf, enabling us to stand before Him. Micah, in the prophecy naming the Messiah's birthplace, describes His mission: **"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.... And He shall stand [amad] and shepherd His flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh His God. And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth."** (Micah 5:2, 4) Sheep don't tremble in terror before

their shepherd—they follow him to safety, green pastures, and abundant water. We are reminded of the scene at Horeb, when the newly freed sheeple of Israel found themselves in need of water: Yahweh told Moses, **“Behold, I will stand [*amad*] before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.”** (Exodus 17:6) Yahweh’s act of *standing* was what enabled Moses to bring forth water from the rock.

One more example: **“Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for Yahweh and use it as a sin offering, but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented [*amad*] alive before Yahweh to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.”** (Leviticus 16:9-10) *Azazel* is usually translated “scapegoat.” It’s from two Hebrew words, *’ez* (goat) and *’azal* (to go away). The idea here is that while one of the goats of the Day of Atonement ritual was to be slain, the other—the scapegoat—would be sent away in to the wilderness, where it would “stand alive” before Yahweh, who would “make atonement over (or upon) it,” that is, cover or purge the sin that it symbolically carried away from the people, providing reconciliation with God in the process. The goat (actually *both* of them) represents Christ—the dead one symbolizing His atoning sacrifice, and the live one His living presence, “standing” before Yahweh on our behalf.

As always, what the Original Covenant scriptures predict, the Renewed Covenant explains. The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew verb *amad* is *histemi*: to stand or cause to stand, to set in place, to establish or authorize. We just saw how the scapegoat of *Yom Kippurim* provided reconciliation—peace with God. The thought is picked up by Paul, who says, **“Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand [*histemi*], and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”** (Romans 5:1-2) In other words, the Day of Atonement scapegoat that brought the people “peace with God” by “standing alive” before Him is a picture of Christ. Through faith in Him, we too are enabled to “stand alive” before Yahweh.

A few chapters later, he states the same basic principle even more clearly: **“Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands [*histemi*] or falls. And he will be upheld [*histemi*], for the Lord is able to make him stand [*histemi*].”** (Romans 14:4) The only reason we are able to stand before the Master is that He has enabled us to do so by standing up for us. In a very real sense, that is what *makes Him* our Master. Remember, our master or lord (*adon*) is analogous to the foundation (*eden*) of our lives: it—*He*—is what supports us. If one’s life is built on lies—if he is the servant of falsehood—then that false foundation will condemn him in the end. But if his life is built on the Rock, the firm foundation of Yahweh’s love, it will stand forever. Our judgmental opinions concerning others, then, are pointless, for it is the foundations upon which they

have built their lives that will either uphold them or bring them down. (I should note, however, that although we aren't to judge *people*, we are required and encouraged to be discerning, discriminating, and judgmental concerning *principles and doctrines*—that which is being presented as truth. One obvious example: though we aren't to attack Muslims, we are to oppose and expose the evil doctrine of Islam that holds them in bondage.)

The key, then, is the *source* of our strength—where it comes from. Are we operating in Yahweh's strength, or something else? In a perfect world, I suppose, it wouldn't matter if we were weak, for no one would attack us. If everyone were meek, merciful peacemakers, pure in heart and thirsty for righteousness, then Paul's admonition to be ready to defend oneself against Satan's wiles wouldn't have been necessary. **“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand [histemi] against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** There's that concept again: it is God's stance that enables us to stand. Our enemy is formidable, clever, and evil to the bone, and he hates us simply because Yahweh loves us. But we're not equipped to fight this battle in our natural state: we're talking about *spiritual* warfare here. It will do us no good to bring a mortal knife to a spiritual gunfight. **“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand [Greek: *anthistemi*—a compound of *anti* (against) and *histemi* (to stand)] in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm [histemi]. Stand [histemi] therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Once again, we see the six-plus-one pattern, Yahweh's ubiquitous septi-unity theme, for the armor is not only *from* God, it *is* God. (1) The “whole armor” is first presented as a unified concept. The Greek *panoplia* is a compound that literally means “all of the tools or weapons.” The point is that to be only partially equipped for spiritual warfare is actually to leave yourself vulnerable. The ensemble must be complete if you wish to stand against the attacks that are coming. (2) Truth is a utility “belt” upon which you can hang everything you might need in the battle. If you're equipped with truth, you won't find yourself unprepared in the face of lies. (3) Righteousness (*dikaiosune*), according to Strong's, is “the condition acceptable to God... integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting.” It is called a “breastplate,” that which guards and protects your heart. (4) The “good news of peace” prepares you—gets you ready—for what's coming. Peace, of course, is the reconciliation



you, as a believer, have with God—you are no longer at enmity with Him (though you certainly are with the devil). This “good news” is described as “shoes” because it’s what you need to keep moving forward in your walk through life—marching, as it were, to the beat of Yahweh’s drum. (5) Faith is described as a shield, a defensive tool needed to ward off temptation, heresy, doubt, and whatever else Satan might throw at you. (6) Salvation is a helmet: it protects your head—you know, that thing you’re supposed to be *thinking* with. God says His people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (see Hosea 4:6). But salvation enables us to think clearly, making good decisions based on truth *and* fact.

And finally, (7) the Holy Spirit residing within you as a believer is described as a sword. Of all your armament, this is your only offensive weapon—but it’s not to be used against other people (remember, we aren’t to pass judgment on the servant of another), and especially not against a brother or sister in Christ. Rather, the sword of the Spirit is to be wielded against our real adversary, Satan, the one who schemes and plots against us in the spiritual realm—the one all of our defensive armor is designed to thwart. Can our ancient adversary really be defeated by us puny humans? Amazingly, yes, but only if our weapon is the one Yahweh has put into our hands: **“And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.’”** (Revelation 12:10-11) What is our sword, then? It’s the word of God—not the *logos* (as we might have expected), but rather the *rhema*, that which has been uttered by a living voice. Our sword is that which has been spoken by the Spirit of God. It’s the scriptures: **“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”** (Hebrews 4:12-13) Again, we see that evil principles, not errant people, are to receive the attention of our sole offensive weapon. And it should go without saying (but it won’t) that the principles, doctrines, and motives that we must test with the Word of God aren’t only those of other people; we must test our own as well.

We’ve been looking at the Greek verb *histemi*, meaning “to stand or cause to stand, to set in place, to establish or authorize.” As so often happens in Koine Greek, *histemi* is the root or a component of several other Biblical words that will help to flesh out the idea of God standing for us, enabling us to stand in Him. One of the most blatant (and well-hidden) examples is the implement of torture upon which the Messiah was executed: the “cross.” The word in English implies a “T” shaped device or an elongated “plus sign”—two elements that “cross” at right angles. But the word in Greek technically denotes an upright stake or pole, of the

kind used in fences or palisades. The word is *stauros*, based on *stao*, of which *histemi* is an extended form meaning the same thing. To the Romans, the whole point of this type of execution (besides the prolonged agony it entailed) was the public display, the shame, the implied warning: “Behave yourself, or this could happen to you.” The victim was made to *stand* and die before society with his crime written large for all the world to see: *See what a bad person I am?* Yahshua’s crime, according to the Roman procurator, was that He was “the King of the Jews.” Well, *that* was true enough, if a little premature. (Pilate’s assessment jumped the gun by *exactly* two thousand years, if I’m reading the prophecies correctly.) The crosspiece (*patibulum* in Latin) upon which the victim’s arms were outstretched and nailed was invented to prolong the torture. It allowed the victim to pull himself up enough to take one more painful breath: without it, he would suffocate in minutes, and where’s the fun—I mean, the *deterrent value*—in that?

If we understand the underlying meaning behind the *stauros*—that it’s a tool upon which one “takes a stand”—then we can glean fresh significance from several familiar passages. **“Then Jesus told His disciples, ‘If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.’”** (Matthew 16:24-25) While it’s literally true that several of the original disciples were crucified for their faith, as were many of Yahshua’s followers until Constantine banned the practice in the early fourth century, Christ’s statement doesn’t necessitate a martyr’s death by crucifixion. But it does demand that we who would follow Him *stand up* for what we believe, as He stood up for our salvation. Self denial in this context is not pointless masochism performed to impress God. It is, rather, a fulfillment of the destiny to which Yahshua called us. He stood for us on that cruel Roman *stauros*, so that...what? So we could live comfortable, lukewarm suburban lives, sit in a pew on Sunday and go through all the motions of rectitude and religiosity that polite society expects of us? So that we could squirm in guilt and shame because we refuse to believe that our sins are actually forgiven? No. He stood for us so that we might stand before Him as blessed children and redeemed saints. He stood for us so that we might stand up for others who might cross our path, investing ourselves in a lost world that desperately needs the love that we have come to know—God’s love.

And what were the mockers *really* saying here? **“Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!’ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.’”** (Mark 15:29-32) *Come down from the cross?* What they were actually suggesting was, “Don’t bother standing up for us: we have no intention of

standing before Yahweh in *Your* righteousness. We'll stand before our maker in our own strength, in our own virtue." It's the same basic suggestion that Peter had made (immediately after the famous "Rock" declaration) that caused Yahshua to tell him, **"Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."** (Matthew 16:23) It wasn't pleasant, but going to the "cross"—literally, *standing up* on our behalf—was the most critical step in the process of our redemption, the fulfillment of scores of prophetic symbols, types, and dress rehearsals going all the way back to the Garden of Eden. (By the way, Eden—the place—and *eden*—the base or foundation—are two completely different words in Hebrew, spelled differently, with different root meanings. Sorry.) The priests and scribes had said, **"Come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."** If Yahshua had done that, the "belief" the mockers belatedly showed would have been sorely misplaced, for believing in someone who *didn't* fulfill Yahweh's mandate is as pointless as trusting any other dumb idol.

Another word based on *histemi* is the compound *anistemi*, meaning to rise or raise up—literally, "to stand in the midst." So we hear Christ instructing one of the lepers He'd healed: **"Rise [*anistemi*] and go your way; your faith has made you well."** (Luke 17:19) Again, Yahshua's willingness to stand up on our behalf enables us to stand—in this case, to stand healed, cleansed, and restored to productive life.

Then we see the concept applied to the act of repentance in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Having come to his senses and dealt with the depth of his own depravity, the son says, **"I will arise [*anistemi*] and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father."** Arising in repentance would have been an exercise in futility if the father had been wrathful and vindictive, unwilling to forgive his wayward son. **"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."** (Luke 15:18-20) The merciful father had apparently done some "standing" and "rising" of his own in anticipation of his son's repentance. It should not be lost on us that Yahshua died for us *while we were yet sinners*: we can arise in repentance only because He first allowed Himself to be lifted up like a serpent on a pole.

So what, precisely, is repentance? It's not merely feeling sorry for your sins—the prodigal no doubt felt plenty sorry the minute he ran out of money. And it's not a solemn pledge to "do better." He could have done that without going home. No, repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of direction. The prodigal didn't just sit there among the pigs he was supposed to be feeding and vow to reform his life. He "arose," he stood up, he changed the direction his life

was headed. And his father, later explaining this to his other son, told us how significant this really was: **“It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”** (Luke 15:32)

Being transformed from dead to alive has to be the best kind of “rising” there is. Not surprisingly, in the real world, Yahshua did it first: **“Then [Yahshua] said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise [*anistemi*] from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”** (Luke 24:44-48) And as always, His rising is designed to be a precursor of our own: **“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise [*anistemi*] first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”** (I Thessalonians 4:16-18) So just as we are able to stand because He stood for us, we will rise from the dead because He first arose.

These symbolic concepts are all interrelated: Yahweh is our rock, our foundation, our fortress, our refuge, our hiding place, our source of refreshing and restoration, our upright pillar, our basis, and our living cornerstone (though a stone of stumbling for those who insist upon walking about in the dark). Moreover, the doorposts of our dwelling places, the flagpole upon which is hoisted the banner of salvation, and the cruel stake of execution all point toward one unassailable truth: the sacrificial death of Yahshua the Messiah is what allows us to stand guiltless before a holy God. And His rising from that death enables us to arise into His presence as well.

The bottom line: **“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in Yahweh forever, for Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting rock.”** (Isaiah 26:3-4) Or, in contemporary parlance, *Yahweh rocks!*

## THE COMING WITHDRAWAL OF GOD'S SYMBOLIC PRESENCE

### ❧ 1.3.8 ❧

There are ubiquitous prophecies concerning a period of time at the end of the age in which sin will be given free reign. It's described as the Time of Jacob's Trouble, the Day of Wrath, and the Hour of Trial that is to come upon the whole world—but its most common title is simply “the Tribulation.” During this time, Satan, barred at last from heaven, will engineer a final offensive upon the earth. We are told, **“Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”** (Revelation 12:12)

We are also given hints that the Spirit of Yahweh will not be operating in the usual manner during this period of time. **“For that day will not come, unless the rebellion [literally, the apostasy, the defection] comes first, and the man of lawlessness [commonly known as the Antichrist] is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.... And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He who now restrains it will do so until He is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed.”** (II Thessalonians 2:3-8) *Who* restrains the mystery (i.e., the secret purpose) of lawlessness? There is only one logical candidate: the Holy Spirit—the manifestation of Yahweh who now (ever since the Day of Pentecost) personally indwells the life of every believer. If the Holy Spirit is to be taken “out of the way” at some point, it follows that those whom He inhabits—the *ekklesia*, the called-out of Yahshua—must be removed from the world as well. And we are told precisely how we can expect this to happen. (See for example, I Corinthians 15:51-54 and I Thessalonians 4:15-17—the fulfillment of the fifth Levitical Appointment with God, the Feast of Trumpets.)

I'm not suggesting that Yahweh will completely abandon the planet to its fate during this horrible time, for I believe Elihu's words still ring true: **“If He [Yahweh] should set his heart to it and gather to Himself His Spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.”** (Job 34:14-15) And besides, even after the *ekklesia* of Philadelphia has been kept out of **“the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth,”** (Revelation 3:10) there is still one more “church” on the Messiah's mailing list, the assembly at Laodicea, those—if I'm reading this correctly—who will come to saving faith *after* the assembly of Philadelphia is gone, belatedly repenting, accepting Yahshua's discipline, and opening the door at which He stands knocking. These neo-Laodiceans, like all believers since Pentecost, will be indwelled with Yahweh's Holy Spirit, but they will be exceedingly few in number at first.

That being said, I can't help but reflect upon a persistent theme running through the Bible's prophetic texts concerning this coming hour of trial. *All seven* of the symbols that define Yahweh's character will be withdrawn, at least partially or temporarily, during the Tribulation. It's as if God is saying to the inhabitants of earth, "*Okay, if you find My presence inconvenient and unsettling, if you'd rather I didn't show My face any more, then I won't—for a little while, anyway. You really don't understand what you're asking for, but perhaps My very absence will convince you to reconsider what I've done for you. In the meantime, I'll be standing out here at the door of your heart, asking you to invite Me in.*"

We've seen seven attributes by which Yahweh revealed His character throughout the age of redemption—His "self portrait," so to speak. Let us now consider them one by one, taking note of how He plans to curtail or conceal the evidence of His existence during the Tribulation. To one who is used to experiencing God in his daily life, who craves His presence and relies upon His counsel, the picture is terribly disturbing. So remember: these conditions will be followed *immediately* by the thousand-year reign of King Yahshua on earth. Relatively few will live to see it, but those who do will be blessed beyond measure.

## LIGHT

Yahweh presents Himself as "light," but the Tribulation will be a time of darkness, figuratively and literally. Paul points out that the light with which we are blessed in this present age will one day give way to a season of spiritual obscurity: **"The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober."** (I Thessalonians 5:2-6) There's a clear distinction here between "them" (the world) and "you" or "us" (believers in Yahshua). He's encouraging us to be watchful, to remain awake, and to maintain sober vigilance in the light of the present age, for the time is coming when these things will no longer be possible.

The coming darkness will not only be a spiritual phenomenon. There will also be literal, physical darkness to contend with, at least sporadically. The prophets of Israel saw this darkness coming, and to a man, they found it a terrifying prospect: **"Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel [i.e., fierce or harsh], with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising,**

**and the moon will not shed its light.”** (Isaiah 13:9-10) This darkness is no accident, no coincidence. It is a manifestation of God’s wrath, anger, and punishment. And why is Yahweh so upset? Because of mankind’s evil, wickedness, iniquity, arrogance, pride, and ruthlessness.

Zephaniah is a bit more specific. **“A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against Yahweh; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.”** (Zephaniah 1:15-17) He ties the darkness and gloom to warfare. Remember what Saddam Hussein’s retreating armies did to the oil fields of Kuwait—setting fires that blackened the skies over hundreds of square miles? Now imagine that kind of thing on a continental scale. Removing our ability to see clearly with physical eyes is God’s poetic response to our unwillingness to perceive His truth and walk in it.

Darkness at midday is not natural; people don’t take things like this in stride. Joel describes the reaction: abject fear. **“Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of Yahweh is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!”** (Joel 2:1-2) It doesn’t much matter whether the reason the light is dimmed is nuclear war, volcanic upheaval, storm clouds, forest fires, or something else. The effect on the populace is the same: they’re terrified. **“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of Yahweh comes.”** (Joel 2:30-31) The reference to “columns of smoke” is a clue that the source of darkness in the sun and moon is actually air pollution on an unprecedented scale, blocking the incoming light. The fact that the moon can be seen at all—though obscured to a blood-red hue—can only mean that the darkness is not total or universal. But it’s widespread enough and serious enough to make men shake with fear. Amos points out that it’s dark outside because Yahweh Himself has arranged it that way. **“‘On that day,’ declares the Lord Yahweh, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.’”** (Amos 8:9) At the very least, He has done nothing to prevent it; at most, He has personally caused it to happen. The Tribulation’s woes as predicted in the Book of Revelation seem to shift from the first of these scenarios to the second during the course of the seven-year “hour of trial.” Man’s folly is answered with God’s wrath.

I should explain the structure of the three series of “judgments” described in Revelation—the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. Although the judgments are apparently chronological within each series (allowing for overlaps), the three series are concurrent, not consecutive. That is, the seals (the only series said to be administered by Christ Himself) are a broad, general description, spanning the

entire 2,520 days. The trumpets define seven key catastrophes within this framework. And the bowls describe events that are specifically described as the proactive wrath of God—not merely His unwillingness to restrain human evil or natural forces (tectonic, meteorological, volcanic, etc.) in the world any longer. The restriction of light is a feature of each of the three judgment series.

Toward the end of the “overview” seal judgments, we read, **“When He opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”** (Revelation 6:12-14) This same great sky-darkening earthquake is mentioned in all three judgment series: the sixth seal, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh bowl, and it is apparently the same one predicted to accompany the resurrection of the two Witnesses. If I’m right about this, then “the big one” will occur very near the end of the Tribulation—five days from the end, to be precise—on the definitive Day of Atonement, the day of Yahshua’s glorious return to planet earth (October 3, 2033, if my math is correct). So it’s rather ironic that as the “Light of the World,” King Yahshua, personally returns to the Mount of Olives, the sun, moon, and stars, the symbols that have been representing Him (and all too often *replacing* Him in the worship practices of foolish men) will find themselves diminished—bowing down before Him as it were, in humble obeisance.

But this won’t be the first time the light of the sun will be diminished during these dark days. **“The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.”** (Revelation 8:12) The first three of these trumpet judgments provide clues as to what will cause the fourth—the cutting of sunlight reaching the earth by one third. The first trumpet (Revelation 8:6-7) predicts widespread nuclear war. Back in the ’50s and early ’60s, when nations were actually contemplating such madness, scientists predicted that full scale nuclear war would result in so much debris being hurled aloft (radioactive and otherwise) that a “nuclear winter” would ensue—a blocking of the sun’s rays, lowering the global temperature and shortening growing seasons, resulting in famine. The second trumpet (Revelation 8:8-9) speaks of what appears to be the collapse of a great mid-ocean volcano. Not coincidentally, the eruption of the historically predictable Cumbre Vieja volcano in the Canary Islands is *decades* overdue, and this time it has the potential to split in two, sending a chunk of rock twice the size of the Isle of Man into the Atlantic, precipitating a mega-tsunami the likes of which mankind has never seen. The third trumpet (Revelation 8:10-11) predicts an asteroid strike, something breaking up in the atmosphere and poisoning the fresh water supply over a third of the earth. Again, scientists have identified a potential candidate,



designated 99942 Apophis, due to come into *very* close proximity to the earth on April 13, 2029. All three of these trumpet judgments (one man-made, the other two “natural phenomena”) would tend to contribute to an atmosphere so polluted that sunlight would have a hard time penetrating.

The next trumpet judgment on the list (this one the result of *spiritual* warfare) won't help matters: **“The fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.”** (Revelation 9:1-2) It's disturbing enough to learn that demons are being incarcerated in a subterranean pit somewhere within the earth. But their release will be a truly terrifying event for the inhabitants of the planet. The added smoke will be the least of their problems, but it *will* be a problem for people accustomed to eating and breathing. It's pointless to speculate as to where this “shaft” might be—there's not a thing anyone can do to stop the fifth angel from blowing his trumpet. (This pit, by the way, is not the same thing as “hell.” It's a temporary holding tank for evil spirits, while hell is a permanent state from which there is no release.)

The last, and perhaps most terrifying, instance of darkness being imposed during the Tribulation is this: **“The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.”** (Revelation 16:10-11) This time the darkness cannot be shrugged off as the inconvenient result of natural or man-caused disasters (in other words, bad luck). It is localized, focused, and—unexpectedly—painful. The first bowl judgment had introduced “foul and loathsome sores” on everyone—worldwide—who had received the mark of the Beast. But this judgment, darkness accompanied by painful sores, is focused upon the “kingdom” of the Antichrist. God is making a statement here—He is singling out the “Beast” as the object of His wrath and anger, and He wants the whole world to know it. It's all reminiscent of the ninth plague of Egypt—the last one before the angel of death slew the firstborn of the land on Passover (Exodus 10:21-23). That one lasted three days, was so thick you could “feel it,” and was restricted to the Egyptians—the Israelites still had light in their homes. The point of the ninth Egyptian plague had been to demonstrate the impotence of the top god in the Egyptian pantheon, Ra, the “sun god.” Something tells me the fifth bowl judgment will say pretty much the same thing: the Beast and the dragon who empowers him are *nothing* when compared to Yahweh's Messiah.

## THE WORD

Communication is a two way street. It's surprising enough to find that the Creator of the universe wishes to communicate with the human race—to listen to us as well as teach us, as in a parent-child relationship. But to me, it's positively astonishing that so many of us would rather not commune with God at all. We either ignore Him altogether, or we prefer lies to truth. Jeremiah laments, **“An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?”** (Jeremiah 5:30-31) A prophet's job is to tell the truth—even if it's unpopular or inconvenient. Since Yahweh is the ultimate source of truth, a true prophet's words and admonitions must necessarily align with Yahweh's—they won't be calculated to please the populace or raise false hopes when repentance is in order.

The “prophets” of today's world do not normally proclaim, “Thus saith the Lord,” because their audience isn't receptive to what Yahweh has to say (besides the fact that these people usually have no earthly idea what Yahweh's word might be). Today, the politicians, the media pundits, and even those who occupy the pulpits of the land have assumed the role of “prophet.” It is their job to speak forth the unvarnished truth. But instead, they say whatever they think will garner them higher ratings, get them reelected, or keep the contributions flowing. Many of them are quite passionate in what they believe. My point is not that they're invariably wrong; it's that even when they're right, they're speaking in man's wisdom, not God's. And this practically guarantees that they'll miss the point; they'll sacrifice truth for mere fact.

Case in point: Americans tend to revere our Constitution, and that's probably a good thing. Every time our elected leaders get “visions of grandeur” and try to reinterpret this venerable institution to their own advantage, the pendulum inevitably swings back to our founding principles. But our founders were only correct insofar as they followed God's Word (which, thankfully, they did in many cases). Having seen what kings and clerics could do, they wisely engineered our system to place as little power as possible in the hands of governments. But they couldn't figure out how to institutionally honor God without giving power to the church, so they placed our fate in the hands of men (the custodians of free will) instead of where they instinctively *knew* it really rested—in the will of God. We therefore run our country according to a manmade Constitution instead of on the Word of Yahweh. We've sacrificed the perfect on the altar of the adequate. That's why Amos was compelled to report, **“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord Yahweh, ‘when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Yahweh. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of Yahweh, but they shall not find**

it.” (Amos 8:11-12) If we refuse to listen to Yahweh, the best advice we’ll be able to get is our own. Man’s wisdom will always run a distant second to God’s.

Solomon told us basically the same thing: **“Because I [the personified Wisdom] have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me.”** You can only find wisdom by looking for it where it lives—in God’s word. **“Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of Yahweh, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.”** (Proverbs 1:24-31) God is (pardon the expression) “pro-choice.” That is, He has gifted us with the ability and privilege to choose our own destiny, our own path. But that doesn’t mean that all paths are equally beneficial to us. Only one road, in point of fact, leads to eternal, abundant life. Yes, it is our choice whether to heed Yahweh’s counsel or not, but He would spare us the consequences of choosing poorly. If we refuse to listen, there is calamity in our future.

Further, if we refuse to listen to God, He will return the favor. **“When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”** (Isaiah 1:15) Our obedience to Yahweh’s precepts is the only valid evidence that demonstrates we’ve been listening to His Word. If our “hands are full of blood” when He has said “You shall not murder,” we obviously haven’t been listening. And if we won’t listen to Him, there’s no earthly reason why He should listen to us. That’s awesome power we wield—the power to cut off communication with Almighty God. It’s like being a child who’s found a loaded gun. We need to put it down before somebody gets hurt.

How does all of this apply to the coming Tribulation? Midway through John’s apocalyptic vision, we’re given this enigmatic snippet. **“Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.’”** (Revelation 10:1-4) The imagery surrounding the mighty messenger tells us that he’s operating as an emissary of Yahweh, and his voice was awesome—it was compared by John to a lion’s roar, or seven peals of thunder, though he himself had no trouble understanding what had been said with such authority. And yet, the prophet was prohibited from telling us what he had heard the angel announce. Why? Looking

at this in isolation, it seems strange that God would withhold information from a needy world. But in context it makes a bit more sense. The scene follows the account of the first six trumpet judgments, meaning that chronologically, we're well into the Tribulation by this time: the Antichrist is wielding uncontested power over all the earth, and demonic activity is rampant. And immediately after the "seven thunders" vignette, we're told of two witnesses who will announce the plagues from God that will mar the Antichrist's three and a half year reign of terror (including all seven bowl judgments, if I'm not mistaken). So we're being told of a window of time when the whole human race (with the sole exception of newly enlightened Jews and small pockets of "neo-Laodicean" Christians hiding out from the authorities as best they can) has turned its back on God's Word, telling Him with a loud, defiant voice, *Go away and leave us alone!*

And as we saw in the Old Covenant passages above, Yahweh will do precisely that: He will withdraw His Word from the collective human experience. In what is probably the most depressing chapter in the entire Bible, John records the scene of unrestrained rebellion against Yahweh: **"And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months."** This will seem like the longest three and a half years in the history of earth, I'm thinking. God's Word will be repressed, reviled, and blasphemed. It'll make living under Nero look like a Sunday School picnic. **"It [the beast in his demonic persona] opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming His name and His dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven."** He's talking about the raptured saints and the faithful martyrs who'll follow them. **"Also it was allowed to make war on the saints [those few who are still alive] and to conquer them. Authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain."** (Revelation 13:5-8) Satan's being given three and a half years to live out his wildest fantasy—to "be like the Most High" (see Isaiah 14:14), and all he can do is bad-mouth the previous administration, like some pitiful insecure politician.

But as with each of these symbols of Yahweh's nature, the Word's withdrawal will be temporary. Revelation ends with an admonition to take it seriously: **"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."** (Revelation 22:18-19) If we know what's good for us, we will neither refuse to listen to Yahweh nor replace His wisdom with our own. We'll keep the lines of communication with our Father wide open.

## LIFE

The first chapter of Genesis is a synopsis of Yahweh's creative obsession with life, recording in cryptic scriptural shorthand the incredible lengths God took in order to arrive at His goal: a man who would walk with Him in Spirit. But the biological life with which Yahweh gifted our race is, I believe, merely a metaphor for the spiritual life that defines His nature—a life we can share if we want to, if we're willing to receive it on God's terms.

So it comes as something of a shock to reach the end of the story—the last seven years of our age—only to find Yahweh undoing so much of what He had previously done. We now see Him enthusiastically *dismantling* biological life in the wake of mankind's almost universal refusal to receive His love and fellowship. **“Behold, Yahweh will empty the earth and make it desolate, and He will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.... The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.”** (Isaiah 24:1, 5-6)

We are used to reading of God's judgment falling upon one nation or another in response to their wickedness, beginning with Israel. These things are a matter of historical record. But this is different: Yahweh is now seen dealing with the entire earth: **“Yahweh is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation.”** (Jeremiah 10:10) And then, **“Behold, the storm of Yahweh! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of Yahweh will not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.”** (Jeremiah 23:19-20) Man has largely ignored the prospect of God's anger for almost five thousand years, because since Noah's day, it has never before loomed as a universal phenomenon. But “in the latter days,” in the next decade or two if I'm seeing this correctly, we will finally begin to understand that although His mercy endures forever, His patience does not. Why? Because “the intents of His heart” are for Yahweh to cleanse the planet of wickedness, set it apart for His own glory, and to celebrate the love that exists between Him and His bride forever, beginning with a thousand-year party—a honeymoon, if you will—the Millennial reign of Christ.

Isaiah, in a passage we visited previously, concurs: **“Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.... I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.”** (Isaiah 13:9, 11-12) Human life won't be extinguished from the earth, but we will become an endangered species. Yahshua Himself explained the grim reality of these days:

**“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”** (Matthew 24:21-22) The book of Revelation lists two separate, specific events that between them account for the deaths of half the world’s population—first a quarter of us, and later, another one third. And there will be hundreds of ways to die (many of which are overtly prophesied) that can’t logically be included in either of these two causes. This all suggests to me that beginning with a population of seven billion souls, more or less, we’re going to be down below the one billion mark—and perhaps *far* below it—by the time the Millennium gets underway, especially after the separation of the sheep and the goats (a process described in Matthew 25:31-46). My own *admittedly wild* guess is that about three hundred million people (including about five million Jews) will enter the Kingdom as mortal believers—roughly the population of the earth when Christ first walked among us two thousand years ago.

This is where confusion ensues for most folks. If the church has been raptured out of the world before the Tribulation begins (in clear fulfillment of Revelation 3:10, not to mention the prophetic requirements of the Feast of Trumpets), then where did all these new believers come from? Where did they hear the truth? From two sources, both of which are spoken of together in Revelation 14. The first is a group of newly enlightened young Jewish men, 144,000 of them. I believe their witness is primarily to the nation of Israel. The second source of truth is the angelic witness, described as flying through the air, having **“an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”** (Revelation 14:6-7)

The 144,000 are “sealed,” that is, they cannot be slain in their mortal bodies during the Tribulation. But the neo-Laodiceans are not similarly protected. They will die in horrendous numbers during the great unpleasantness, whether martyred for their new faith or simply because they’re in the wrong place at the wrong time. (A nuclear weapon or earthquake is very democratic.) Indeed, the same chapter that describes who witnessed to them makes this grim note: **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”** (Revelation 14:13) These Laodicean believers were instructed and encouraged in two different contexts by Yahshua. In the Olivet Discourse, He said to them, **“You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”** (Luke 21:16-19) And in very similar language, He spoke to the Twelve as they were sent out to minister (though the instruction was clearly meant for those who would follow in

their footsteps—especially during the Tribulation): **“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”** (Matthew 10:21-22)

But saved or not, death will be the order of the day during the Tribulation. The seal judgments do not mince words: **“When He [Yahshua] opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, ‘Come!’ And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.”** (Revelation 6:3-4) Then, **“When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, ‘Come!’ And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.”** (Revelation 6:7-8) Lest we should lose our bearings in all this carnage, the One opening the seals unleashing all this death is the *same* One who said, **“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”** (John 10:10) There is no contradiction here. The “they” in Yahshua’s statement refers to His “sheep,” His children, those who have placed themselves under His protection. The “sword and famine and pestilence and wild beasts” are meant for those who do not know—who don’t *want* to know—the Good Shepherd.

I mentioned that there were two well-defined causes of global-scale death in Revelation. The second of these is this: **“Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.”** (Revelation 9:13-15) These demonic messengers inspire the “kings of the east” to perpetrate the last great war—a two hundred million man Chinese army (you can tell by the colors in their flag in verse 17) will ravage the Far East, killing somewhere in the neighborhood of 1.7 billion souls between Japan, Southeast Asia, and India. This—what I’d call World War IV—will follow the Muslim-triggered nuclear holocaust (WWIII) that will decimate one quarter of humanity in the West by only three or four years. What lies between these two wars? The ascension of the Antichrist to the undisputed throne of planet earth. Blessed are the peacemakers. And vice versa.

Both wars are in view in Revelation 14 (yes, the same chapter that told us of the 144,000 and the angelic evangelist). World War III (described under the fourth seal and the first trumpet) is described first: **“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.’ So he who sat on the cloud swung**

his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped....” Grain isn’t supposed to stand out in the field until it’s rotten. At some point it needs to be mown down. And harvest time works out rather better for the farmer than it does for the wheat.

It’s the same basic picture in the vineyard, but this gets a bit messier: **“Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, ‘Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.’”** Note the word “then.” This is a different harvest, a different war. This time World War IV—the war of the kings of the East—is being described. **“So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.”** (Revelation 14:14-20) Now you know why the sixth bowl judgment (Revelation 16:12) required that the Euphrates River must be dried up: The last battle of the last war will commence *west* of where they started, at a place called Har Megiddo—the “mountain of rendezvous”—known to the world as Armageddon. The objective: to annihilate Yahweh’s people Israel, once and for all.

Will Satan’s armies succeed? No. It’s a bloodbath, remember? 1,600 stadia is equivalent to about 180 miles—pretty much the entire north-south length of the land of Israel. Zechariah reports, **“On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it.... And this shall be the plague with which Yahweh will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.”** (Zechariah 12:3, 14:12) That’s a pretty squishy picture: multiplied millions of the bodies of God’s enemies, not just dead, but mashed to bloody goo three or four feet deep. Who’s going to clean up the mess? Yahweh’s taken care of that, too: **“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great....’ And [they] were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of Him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.”** (Revelation 19:17-18, 21)

I could go on, but you get the picture: in the end, life is for the living. Yahweh—in the person of Yahshua the Messiah—will, someday soon, separate the dead from the living, even if those who are dead are “still standing on their feet.”



## WATER

Water is essential for life and efficacious for cleansing, making it, as we have seen, a natural metaphor for the nature of Yahweh. That explains, I suppose, why it has always been used by God as one of the bigger hammers in His toolbox for getting our attention. Only six chapters into the Bible, Yahweh found it necessary to wash the earth clean of its contamination: **“For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you [Noah].”** (Genesis 6:17-18) But normally, judgment via water entails not getting enough of it. Moses warned Israel, **“Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; then the anger of Yahweh will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that Yahweh is giving you.”** (Deuteronomy 11:16-17) When we choose dead idols over the Living God, when we prefer the filth of the world to the purity of Yahweh, we should not be surprised to find ourselves reminded *by drought* of precisely what it is we’re turning our backs on.

Amos, speaking of the rebellion of Ephraim (i.e., Israel’s northern kingdom, Samaria), had revealed Yahweh’s *modus operandi*: the drought He sent upon Israel was designed to get their attention, to encourage them to repent, to turn back to their God. **“I withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest; I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city; one field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither; so two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be satisfied; yet you did not return to Me,’ declares Yahweh.”** (Amos 4:7-8) We see this time and time again in scripture—not wrath, but *discipline* calculated to wake God’s people up to the error of their ways. The severity of the punishment depends upon how often He has had to correct them in times past (as Moses had pointed out with so much detail in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). The eventual conquest of Israel by Assyria wasn’t God’s opening salvo—it was His last resort.

Speaking to the same people a generation later, Hosea offers the following warning: **“Though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of Yahweh, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up; his spring shall be parched; it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing.”** (Hosea 13:15) It’s not all bad news, however, for Ephraim’s repentance will eventually precipitate a very different fate: **“I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon.”** (Hosea 14:4-5)

Sometimes God’s judgment involves not so much the quantity of water available, but its quality. We are reminded of Israel’s long history of dealing with **“bitter water.”** **They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they**

came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?' And he cried to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a log [Hebrew: *'ets*, a tree, wood, plank, timber, or even a gallows], and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet." (Exodus 15:22-25) It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that this "tree" thrown into bitter waters is a picture of the cross of Christ (His *stauros*, a pole or stake), which, after a three-day sojourn in the "wilderness" of God's judgment, turned the bitterness of our lives into something sweet, something that could refresh and cleanse us. But we have to come forward and drink it—it will do us no good if we continue to wander in the desert of our ignorance, searching for some other source of water.

In fact, Yahweh warned us that what had been made sweet could just as easily be made bitter again: "And Yahweh said, 'Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them,' therefore thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.'" (Jeremiah 9:13-15) The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines *la'anah*, translated here as "wormwood," as "a bitter substance: a very unpleasant substance to consume, which may make one sick, either a root herb, leafy plant oil, or liver-bile; wormwood, i.e., a dark green bitter oil used in absinthe, *Artemisia absinthium*. Note: possibly in some contexts 'gall' is the bitter liver-bile of animal used in medical arts."

We see the same imagery in Revelation, this time a judgment upon apostate mankind in general: "The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter." (Revelation 8:10-11) This time (in Greek) "wormwood" is *apsinthos*, which commentaries often link directly to Jeremiah 9:15. The "bitterness" it causes is the Greek *pikraino*, meaning to be or make bitter or sour; figuratively, to render angry, indignant, or irritated—to exasperate or grieve. But remember, we're talking about the effect this "great star," doubtless an asteroid, has upon the fresh water supplies of the earth. It's as if Yahweh were saying, *You insist on grieving my Spirit, making Me bitter, angry, and indignant through your idolatry and wickedness. The least I can do is return the favor.*

The two Witnesses (Elijah and Enoch, if I'm not mistaken) who will be the ants at the Antichrist's picnic during the second half of the Tribulation, will proclaim a plague of good old-fashioned drought upon the earth—widespread and unrelenting. "They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of

**their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.”** (Revelation 11:6) It occurred to me that when these two Witnesses prophesy plagues, the angels of the seven bowls carry them out. So we read, **“The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, ‘Just are You, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!’”** (Revelation 16:4-6)

If you’re keeping score, that makes three different types of water-related judgments during the Tribulation: drought, contamination or poisoning, and being turned to “blood.” (Whether that’s literal or figurative, it’s obvious that the waters so transformed can neither sustain life nor cleanse anything.) Once again, we’re left to ponder what the world will be like when Yahweh withdraws Himself, even if only symbolically, from our world. It’s not going to be a pretty sight.

## SPIRIT

It is said that God’s Spirit is omnipresent. I’m not sure how that idea might help us understand anything about Him as an objective reality, and it would be well beyond our powers of observation or comprehension to verify the truth of the matter anyway. Personally, I am certain only that the Spirit is not limited by time and space—that is, He is wherever He wants to be, doing whatever He wants to do, at any given moment in our experience. That being said, it is clear that the Spirit can—and does—withdraw Himself in response to our heartfelt desire to be cut off from His inconvenient and convicting presence. Faced with the reality of his own sin, King David, who had seen God’s Spirit depart from his predecessor Saul, was terrified by the prospect. He prayed, **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.”** (Psalm 51:10-11) He knew that as uncomfortable as it might be having the Holy Spirit constantly reminding him of how he had failed to meet Yahweh’s standards, it would be infinitely worse to go through life without Him, bereft of fellowship with God. As Yahweh would warn Israel through Hosea, **“Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them!”** (Hosea 9:12)

Omnipresent or not, Yahweh reserves the right to “depart” from people who don’t want Him around. And as with the other symbols that teach of us Yahweh’s nature, this one—spirit, breath, wind, air—will thus be hidden, compromised, and made unavailable to unrepentant man during the coming Tribulation. The hints are there, if only we’ll look for them: **“And from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of**

**a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.”**

(Revelation 9:2) **“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’”** (Revelation 16:17)

Perhaps the clearest use of the air/breath/wind metaphor in the Tribulation is this:

**“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow [*pneo*] on earth or sea or against any tree.”**

(Revelation 7:1) This scene is described just prior to the account of the sealing of the 144,000, something that must precede these things. So it appears that the angel is announcing that the Spirit of God is to cease “blowing” in the lives of men before the unpleasantness gets underway.

Compare these two passages, both of which speak of “breath.” First, the prophet says, **“What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.”** (Habakkuk 2:18-19) Then John informs us of what the world can expect to see during the Tribulation: **“It [the second beast, the “False Prophet” or the demon that inhabits him] performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.”** (Revelation 13:13-15) The “image for the beast” (that is, in honor of, and for the benefit of, the Antichrist) was given both “breath” and the ability to “speak.” But it’s not *real* life, and it’s certainly not the Spirit of God, as he’d like you to believe. It’s either sleight of hand or a demonic operation. Why will it fool so many people? Because they have already turned their backs on the true and living God. When the Spirit of Truth has been asked to leave, the father of lies can start to sound almost believable.

The “problem” that makes unregenerate man unable to comprehend the seriousness of the coming Tribulation is that nothing like this has happened in mankind’s historic memory. God’s personal symbols have always been in evidence, even in the worst of times—perhaps curtailed, often diminished, but always there to some extent. Not since the flood of Noah has judgment of this magnitude been visited upon the earth—and for roughly the same reason: universal apostasy. So we might expect what Yahweh said then to be useful to us in understanding what’s going on now. **“And Yahweh said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.’”** (Genesis 6:3) I’ve never understood why God would say His Spirit would not “strive” with man. To “strive” means to exert oneself, try hard, to make strenuous efforts; or to contend in opposition, battle, or conflict—to compete. But not only has Yahweh gone to unprecedented lengths to create, love,

and redeem us, He has never been in competition with us. This *seems* to be saying that someday Yahweh's Spirit will stop trying to reach us—He'll quit, give up, take His ball and go home. While this might be true, we've got a bit of a mistranslation here. The Hebrew word translated “strive,” *diyn*, actually means to plead a cause, administer judgment, requite, or vindicate. It's a legal term. What Yahweh was really saying to Noah was that there would come a time when the process of divine justice would be complete: the righteous would be vindicated and the wicked would receive their just due. The trial phase would be over, and guilt or innocence would be pronounced. But until then, the Spirit would plead our cause, intercede for us with the Judge, and—if we'll agree that we'd rather have mercy than justice—work toward getting the charges dropped.

Now compare that to Yahshua's promise concerning the Holy Spirit: **“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.... The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”** (John 14:16-17, 26) In the final analysis, He's saying the same thing Yahweh told Noah: there will be a division between those who have the Spirit advocating their case before God, and those who cannot and will not receive His counsel. The same thing that happened to those left behind in the flood is about to happen to those left behind during the Tribulation. God's Spirit will be withdrawn from the earth. He's described here as the “Helper.” That's the Greek *parakletos*—literally, one who is called to someone's side to plead their cause—an intercessor. Is this ringing any bells? It's the very thing that Yahweh warned Noah would someday cease: **“My Spirit shall not plead man's cause forever.”**

But if the *parakletos*, the Holy Spirit, would be with (and *within*) Yahshua's people forever, and if the Spirit is withdrawn during the Tribulation (as the pattern is revealing), then the ekklesia must be withdrawn as well—for they (we) now share a symbiotic relationship: we are one. Paul confirms this line of reasoning, stating that the Holy Spirit (called here the “restrainer”) will be “out of the way” *before* the lawless one (i.e., the Antichrist) is revealed in the world. **“And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He who now restrains it will do so until He is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed.”** (II Thessalonians 2:6-8)

Yahweh will not force anyone to receive His Spirit—to do so would violate the primary gift He has given to mankind: free will. But if we desire to form a familial relationship with our Heavenly Father, if we want to participate in the second birth described in John 3—being born from above in God's Spirit—all we have to do is ask. As Yahshua pointed out, **“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a**

scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:11-13) But the Tribulation will be a time when, at least at first, nobody wants such a relationship. And although the nature of the times will convince many people over the course of these seven last years that the God they once ignored is real, vital, and willing to give them one last chance to put their faith in Him, the vast majority will choose poorly: they will escalate their apathy and hedonism into active and enthusiastic hostility against the God who created them.

This contrast can be seen clearly in two passages from John. First, he describes the reality of our present age: **"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.... By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."** (I John 4:2-3, 13) Yes, we're living in a world of spiritual warfare, but at least it's possible to tell whose side you're on. It has nothing to do with religion or culture or political viewpoint. The dividing line is as simple as it is clear: if you believe that Yahshua (Jesus) is Yahweh's Messiah, God's Anointed One who has come in the flesh, if you're willing to confess this truth and rely upon the implications of grace this implies, then you are abiding in God's Spirit, and the Spirit dwells within you. But if you refuse to believe this, if you deny this truth, then you are following the spirit of the antichrist—not necessarily a demon (at least not yet) but the same motivation, the same attitude, the same world view that will characterize the man of sin in the last days. You can try to sit on the fence, but remember, the Word of God is a razor sharp two-edged sword: you're either on Yahweh's side or you're not.

In the second passage, we learn that the Tribulation will make this division even more obvious: **"Also it [the beast] was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. Authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain."** (Revelation 13:7-8) It's the saints of the neo-Laodicean assembly (those who have belatedly chosen to admit Yahshua into their lives—see Revelation 3:20) versus the Antichrist's machine. This final bloody scenario will present the clearest possible choice: do what you know to be right, or do what the whole world is telling you to do, even though you know it's wrong. It's going to make the temptation of Eden look like a walk in the park. The remarkable thing is that Yahweh has known from the foundation of the world who would choose to be in which camp. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep, even if they're lost.

## BREAD

From the very beginning, God's temporal provision has been an indicator of His favor. Thus Moses' great "blessing and cursing" passage gives us both sides of the same coin. First, **"If you faithfully obey the voice of Yahweh your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today...Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl."** (Deuteronomy 28:1, 5) But conversely, **"But if you will not obey the voice of Yahweh your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today.... Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl."** (Deuteronomy 28:15, 17) Hunger to the point of cannibalism was promised to Israel in the face of unrepentant idolatry.

Not surprisingly, then, the prophets who were tasked with warning God's people of coming disaster spoke of famine as part of the formula. Ezekiel, for instance, told the recalcitrant Judah, **"I [Yahweh] will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment."** (Ezekiel 4:16-17) The same prophet made it clear that this would not be a punishment restricted to Israel: any nation that turned its back on God could suffer the same fate: **"When a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord Yahweh."** (Ezekiel 14:13-14) In an echo of the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, the prophet declares that rescue from hunger (as with any other divinely appointed disaster) is reserved for the righteous. This, it seems to me, is more evidence of a pre-Tribulation rapture—those who are deemed righteous (i.e., clothed in the imputed righteousness of the Messiah's sacrifice) will not suffer from the Tribulation's famine, but will "deliver their own lives by their righteousness."

Joel delivers the same message: the physical is symbolic of the spiritual—unfaithfulness against Yahweh will result in famine. **"Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man.... Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed shrivels under the clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up."** (Joel 1:11-12, 15-17) As with so much dire prophecy, a specific warning to Israel or Judah (such as this is) can and should be taken as a microcosm of the greater warning to the whole world. Joel gives precious little in the way of specific reasons for Yahweh's anger, but the remedy

for Judah is the same as it is for us: **“Yet even now,’ declares Yahweh, ‘return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.’ Return to Yahweh, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster.”** (Joel 2:12-13)

Amos too makes it clear that famine was designed to awaken them (as it will be to us) to the seriousness of our spiritual plight. Hunger was supposed to encourage repentance: **“I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to Me,’ declares Yahweh.”** (Amos 4:6) “Cleanness of teeth,” of course, is a euphemism for hunger—their teeth weren’t clean because they practiced good dental hygiene, because they brushed their teeth after meals, but because they’d had nothing to put into their mouths to get ’em dirty in the first place. Three more times in this passage, Joel lists trials with which Yahweh afflicted His people to encourage them to repent, and each time he notes, **“Yet you did not return to Me.”** If we were smart, we would see everything wrong in our lives as an opportunity, an invitation, to realign ourselves with our heavenly Father’s will—to make a “course correction” in our lives.

Unfortunately, we humans aren’t all that smart. Famine is specifically prophesied to be characteristic of the world’s plight in the days just before the Tribulation begins: **“Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences.”** (Luke 21:10-11) Famines “in various places” implies that lack of bread won’t be a *universal* phenomenon before the day of judgment begins, but with these other signs it will be, rather, a warning that something bad is about to happen on a global scale. Check your favorite media outlet: I can almost guarantee that the lead news story on any give day will be one of these four things: war and conflict (even if it’s only ideological bickering in Congress), earthquakes (and the Greek word *seismos* includes ocean storms and tsunamis), famine or poverty, and disease (the latest pandemic threat). Let us consider these things as warning signs of what’s in our future if we don’t repent: **“When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, ‘Come!’ And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!’ When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, ‘Come!’ And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.”** (Revelation 6:5-8)



## THE ROCK

We have seen that the first six facets of Yahweh's self-portrait—the images through which He reveals Himself to men in this physical world—will be withdrawn during the Tribulation, at least partially. Light will be curtailed. Communication will be compromised. The life of the human species will become endangered. Water will be in short supply. The very air men breathe will be corrupted. And the bread of God's provision will become scarce. All of these things will happen because of mankind's overwhelming rejection of Yahweh and His Messiah. There is only one thing left to explore—the idea that God presents Himself as our sure foundation, our fortress, our shelter from the storms of life, our steadfast Rock. Will this too be taken away?

The principle of Yahweh withdrawing our security and confidence in the face of idolatry and disobedience goes all the way back to the Torah: **“And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but Yahweh will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see.”** (Deuteronomy 28:65-67) It was a warning to Israel but the principle applies to us as well: if we in our pride think we would be better off without Yahweh's supervision and standards, if we despise the shelter He offers through redemption in Christ, then we can't really expect to enjoy the security only He can provide. He would have us lead a life of confidence, secure in the knowledge that our Father is all-powerful, omniscient, and vitally interested in our welfare, both in this life and beyond it. But the dread, paranoia, fear, and uncertainty that will characterize the last days are incompatible with such confidence.

It's one thing to realize that our bodies aren't built to last forever—to come to grips with the fact that when our time is up, we'll shed these mortal shells like a plant's seed throws off its obsolete husk. It is something else entirely to live in fear of this fact, to frantically arrange our entire lives trying to circumvent the inevitable conclusion to our mortal existence, to sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the ephemeral. If Yahweh's Spirit dwells within us, our bodies are of only passing importance, for we will outlive them. And if that is the case, we have nothing to fear—nothing significant, anyway.

A stable earth is an apt metaphor for this stability of spirit one can enjoy in Yahweh's presence. Throughout scripture, we see earthquakes used as a symbol of God's displeasure. For example, **“Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because He was angry.”** (Psalm 18:7) But Yahweh has built our planet with the constant potential for this very thing. We

live out our lives standing on big hunks of the earth's crust, floating about like ice sheets on a frozen river breaking up in the springtime. These crustal plates are absolutely necessary for life as we know it, for our atmosphere would be very different without them—this would be a cold, dead planet without the greenhouse gasses (like carbon dioxide and water vapor) released by the constant shifting of the continental plates beneath our feet. So our world, for all its beauty and bounty, can be a dangerous place. But I think maybe that's the point, if I may be allowed a bit of blue-sky speculation. We live lives that are defined by free will. Like the earth's tectonic plates, our freedom to choose our own destiny is as fraught with peril as it is absolutely necessary to our well-being. If we're smart, we won't build our homes on a known fault line or in the caldera of an active volcano. In the same way, we'd be foolish to build our lives on a shaky or explosive premise like hedonism, humanism, atheism, or an obviously man-made religion. God has spoken to us in His creation and in His Word. We're free to ignore Him if we want, but we've been warned: there's danger in doing so.

So we're told time after time in scripture that we are on shaky ground if we ignore or defy Yahweh: **"The mountains quake before Him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before Him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the heat of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by Him."** (Nahum 1:5-6) This has always been the case to some extent, but as a living symbol, the unstable earth will take center stage when mankind's rebellion approaches the boiling point. We've already seen how the days just prior to the Tribulation will be marked with signs indicating the withdrawal of Yahweh's Spirit. In another context, we read, **"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences."** (Luke 21:10-11)

Once the Tribulation gets underway, earthquakes will take on a more focused role. We'll see one, for example, being used as a weapon in Yahweh's hand during the battle of Magog: **"But on that day, the day that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, declares the Lord Yahweh, My wrath will be roused in My anger. For in My jealousy and in My blazing wrath I declare, On that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all the people who are on the face of the earth, shall quake at My presence. And the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground."** (Ezekiel 38:18-20) This will, according to my calculations, happen about two years into the Tribulation. The earthquake that kills the invading Muslim hordes will be local, but its psychological effect—a quaking fear of the power and purpose of Yahweh—will be felt worldwide.

The most terrifying descriptions of last days seismic activity, however, apparently refer to a single massive earthquake—one felt all over the earth (which I suppose makes it the first *earthquake* worthy of the name). If the prophecies mean what they seem to mean, then this event will herald the return of Yahshua the Messiah to the city of Jerusalem: the long awaited “second coming.” We first read of it in Zechariah: **“On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.”** (Zechariah 14:4) It will mark the definitive fulfillment of the Day of Atonement—*Yom Kippurim*—the sixth *qodesh miqra*, or holy appointment, on Yahweh’s prophetic calendar. The date? I am convinced this will occur on October 3 (that’s Tishri 10 on the Hebrew lunar calendar), 2033. Feel free to disagree with me about the date, but not about the significance of the event.

There will be a lot going on this day, besides the earthquake. First, the two witnesses who had been declaring plagues against the unrepentant earth for the previous three and a half years—and who had been killed by the Antichrist’s demon three and a half days before this—are seen (on live TV all over the world) rising from the dead. **“And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.”** (Revelation 11:13) Second (or simultaneously), as we have seen, Christ physically returns to earth. Job number one for Him is the battle of Armageddon (the sixth bowl judgment—Revelation 16:12-16), which Zechariah describes in the context of His return: **“Then Yahweh will go out and fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle.”** (Zechariah 14:3) Note that the returning Messiah is specifically called “Yahweh” here: there shouldn’t be any confusion as to Yahshua’s real identity.

The same day—and the same earthquake—is in view in the sixth seal judgment, where we are given an overview of the impact of this great day: **“When He opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”** Now *there’s* something you don’t see every day. **“Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”** (Revelation 6:12-17) It’s a bit late in the game for that particular epiphany, guys. It’s not like you weren’t warned that this day was coming. You

didn't have to be here. What did you think, that "Armageddon" was a myth, a religious fairy tale told to intimidate the gullible?

Even now, as bad as it looks, we haven't been given the full picture. But the seventh and final bowl judgment informs us as to just how significant, how unprecedented, this day is—not that our feeble powers of comprehension are anywhere close to being adequate for this. **"And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of His wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found."** (Revelation 16:18-20) Insurance companies like to call things like earthquakes "acts of God." Here at last we see one that actually is.

Having no point of reference, most people who've heard of the Tribulation underestimate it. They don't seem to comprehend that this isn't mere regime change, like voting the corrupt incumbents out of office and trying it again with new faces we hope will do better. It isn't even revolution, scrapping one form of government and replacing it with another more in line with our Judeo-Christian ideology. No, this is renewal, regeneration, rebirth. As with the flood of Noah, God plans to wipe the slate clean and start over. Yahweh isn't just going to "reboot" our world: He plans to totally reformat the hard-drive of planet earth.

Look at the object of His wrath in the passage above. Who is Babylon? Is Yahweh really that upset with an ancient archaeological site in Iraq? No: Babylon is a scriptural symbol for *everything* that's wrong with our world today. It's a catchphrase that encompasses *everything* that fallen man puts before Yahweh in his affections. Babylon has religious, political, cultural, and commercial aspects; it's not one thing, but *everything* that falls short of God's perfect plan. It is the inadequate foundation, the porous and crumbling rock upon which mankind has built its house. Our world can't be fixed by slapping a coat of paint on it and hanging new drapes. Yahweh has told us what He's about to do: He's going to bulldoze the entire structure down to bedrock and start all over again.

Please, my friend. Don't be asleep in the house when the demolition crew arrives.