

Israel's Anointing

Your Inheritance *and*
End-Time Destiny *through* Israel

Sandra Teplinsky

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ALL ENDORSEMENTS OF THIS BOOK, AS WELL AS THE FOREWORD, WERE WRITTEN FOR THIS BOOK IN 2008.

THIS 2022 UPDATED VERSION OF *ISRAEL'S ANOINTING* HAS NOT YET BEEN PROOFREAD AT A FINAL LEVEL FOR SCRIPTURE CITATION ACCURACY OR FOR MINOR EDITORIAL DETAILS.

“Some Christians feel that the subject of ‘Israel’ is political at best and carnal at worst. This passionately written book dispels such unbiblical thinking, opening up the deeply spiritual treasures that remain part of Israel’s God-given heritage. If you love Jesus and His Kingdom, you will be blessed and enriched by this book, and you will find yourself loving God’s purposes for Israel as well.”

—**Dr. Michael L. Brown**, president, FIRE School of Ministry, Concord, NC

“A quick scan of the daily news lets us know that God’s timetable for the age has taken a quantum leap forward. At the center of that plan stand His covenant people and His covenant land. It is essential that we as believers understand and embrace the critically decisive role Israel plays in God’s end-time purposes, and that we participate in the prophetic shift toward the emerging destiny of the Church and Israel. Sandra Teplinsky’s new book will give you insight into God’s heart and purpose for Israel in this hour, and how that applies to you personally as part of the body of Messiah.”

—**Jane Hansen Hoyt**, president/CEO, Aglow International

“*Israel’s Anointing* is a catalyst for revival! In the spirit of Elijah, it turns the hearts of the children (the Church) to their spiritual fathers (Israel), and the hearts of the fathers to their children. Sandra Teplinsky combines biblical and prophetic revelation with fiery passion for God to disclose mysteries and engage us with our ancient spiritual heritage. An important book for this hour of history!”

—**Lou Engle**, founder, the Call, International House of Prayer, Kansas City, MO

“Once again Sandra Teplinsky has written a book that is not a rehash of what others are writing but an expression of fresh, deep insight into hearing ‘what the Spirit is saying to the churches’ today. *Israel’s Anointing* is a heart-grabbing, thought-provoking challenge to the Body of Christ (Messiah) worldwide to come to grips with what it means in practical terms to embrace our Jewish roots. Sandra’s fresh revelations carried us much deeper into the heart of God for His chosen people. We found ourselves drawn away from the cares of this world into an even greater longing to know our Jewish Bridegroom-King in all His fullness.”

—**Rick and Patricia Ridings**, international worship leaders; founders and directors, *Succat Hallel* ("House of Praise"), www.jerusalempraise.com

"There are few who can communicate the blueprint of heaven to the earth realm. After reviewing Sandra Teplinsky's *Israel's Anointing*, however, I can honestly say this is a prototype book. With the Church age diminishing and the Kingdom age increasing, *Israel's Anointing* fully communicates God's heart of 'one new man' on the earth. Sandy gracefully blends the old and the new to form a great treasure. If you will embrace what has been written, you will find many yokes in your life broken. This is one of the defining books of this time in history."

—**Dr. Chuck D. Pierce**, president, Glory of Zion International Ministries; harvest watchman, Global Harvest Ministries

"*Israel's Anointing* is a cutting-edge book for the whole body of Messiah. Sandy's compelling writing style combines with prophetic insight and biblical truth to draw you into God's presence as you read. Her book sheds much-needed light on critical issues important to both Gentile and Jewish believers, guiding us toward maturity as one new man in Messiah. Be forewarned, however: Sandra's passion for Yeshua (Jesus), His people, the Scriptures and end-times revival is contagious!"

—**Jonathan Bernis**, Messianic rabbi; president, Jewish Voice Ministries International

"Sandra Teplinsky's *Israel's Anointing* intertwines two destinies: the calling of the Church to connect to her Jewish origins, and the challenge to Jewish believers to be a light to the nations and to unite with their brothers and sisters from the nations, so that we can all press into the future with strength. As a Jewish believer, Sandra is herself a prophetic statement to her people and the Church. She unequivocally proclaims Israel's need for her Messiah while reminding the Church that Jesus was a Jew, still is a Jew and will return as a Jew to reign as King over a world at peace."

—**Don Finto**, director, the Caleb Company; pastor emeritus, Belmont Church, Nashville; author, *Your People Shall Be My People*

"Sandra Teplinsky's book *Israel's Anointing* releases revelation for the whole

Bride of Christ. This is a powerful book, drawing us to love-based clarity of thought. It will be used by God to help unfold some of the mysteries of God.”

—**Heidi Baker**, Ph.D., founding director, Iris Ministries

“Sandra Teplinsky has offered a book of balanced scholarship and sensitive treatment of God’s redemptive love for all peoples—Jew and Gentile—while retrieving to a high degree the depths of divine revelatory mysteries embedded in four thousand years of God’s unique involvement with Israel and the Jewish people, and offering them up afresh for the Church at large. Herein are uncovered gems of insight, facets of which you will find nowhere else, that deepen our understanding of God’s purposes, the wonder of His story and clear signs as to current movements toward the consummation of His story.

“Fittingly, in this year of the sixtieth birthday of the modern state of Israel, this book is nothing less than an epic philosophy of history comprising in its scope major themes of God’s work of restoration in process throughout the universe. The book gives due place to Israel’s significance, and does so in a holistic, Hebraic and heartfelt medium, without which the message of these truths is not complete.”

—**William D. Bjoraker**, Ph.D., Operation Ezekiel and
William Carey International University

“As a wife and mother serving the Lord in Israel, I find Sandra’s book extremely encouraging and relevant. All of creation is groaning in labor before the Messiah’s Second Coming. We who follow Him are being groomed to take our place as His Bride. We must avail ourselves of every resource He provides to help us stay focused in these coming days, and this book is a treasure-packed cache! Here we find practical and timely tools to breathe through the birthing pains of today and tomorrow, strength to keep our eyes on our Jewish Bridegroom-King and a vision of the glorious coming Kingdom we will share with Him.”

—**Rachel Boskey**, Final Frontier Ministries, www.davidstent.org

"It is time to partake of Israel's anointing. When the Jewish spiritual DNA merges with the Christian spiritual DNA, it makes room for the full glory of God. Sandra Teplinsky's book prepares the way."

—**Sid Roth**, host, *It's Supernatural!* TV

"In *Israel's Anointing* Sandra Teplinsky manages to do what is almost impossible. Since Israel reemerged on the scene in a big way sixty years ago, the Church has struggled with how to celebrate the Holy Land where Jesus walked, how to honor the Jewish heritage and people our faith comes from, and how to understand the Hebrew roots of Christianity—all the while celebrating the Gospel given freely to the Gentiles. Sandra is one of the few who have so woven all these things skillfully together while avoiding the legalism trap many fear. As one who has celebrated some of the Jewish feasts, I have greatly benefited from the edification that takes place when I trace my physical and spiritual heritage back to Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Sandra continues the journey of discovery."

—**Steve Shultz**, publisher, the Elijah List; author,
Can't You Talk Louder, God?

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Foreword

Interest concerning God's heart for Israel is on the rise. New organizations are being formed; new houses of prayer are springing up across the nations, carrying portions of God's heart for Israel and the Jewish people worldwide. Teaching is being released from voices both old and new in the body of Messiah. This is good news!

But the waters seem a bit murky as some step out into what has been, for them, unknown territory. Sincere efforts are taking place, for sure. But there is some confusion in the camp as well. Wrong teachings on things like "two-house" theories are permeating different sectors.

Some of the theories even suggest that there is more than one way of salvation: one for the Jew and another for the Gentile. Yet I think I remember Jesus being the One who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father except through me." Did we forget? And in our romantic melancholy, are we forgetting the main and plain teachings of the Gospel of the Kingdom?

Some today are emphasizing that you must identify which of the twelve tribes of Israel you are from, genealogically speaking. Interesting enough—but I thought salvation was a matter of faith in the Son of God and the power of the blood of Jesus, not of your own bloodline.

Please don't get me wrong: I celebrate the feasts of Israel. I pray for the peace of Jerusalem. I call out to the Lord in identificational repentance that the blinders on the eyes of the Church concerning replacement theology [defined in Teplinsky's book] will fall away. I have been deeply involved for

years in the issues of *aliyah*, the return of the Jewish people to their homeland.

Yet I am left with a big “Huh?” over some of what is occurring in some popular circles. While I rejoice in the Lord greatly that the subject of Israel and God’s end time purposes are getting onto the screens of believers today, as a watchman I am concerned lest we become deceived into making trivial issues the main issues. There are lots of side issues today and lots of potholes to avoid!

So if you are searching for clarity and a resource that will drive you to the Word of God and propel you into proper biblical interpretation—all the while steering you into God’s prophetic purposes for our generation and beyond—then I have good news. Your search is over!

You are holding in your hands one of the most concise yet thorough volumes written to date concerning the proper placement of Israel. Sandra Teplinsky has done a marvelous job stating truth, creating hunger and motivating her readers to study to show themselves approved as workmen for God.

Now, don’t just read this book. Get out your Bible and search things out for yourself. But do more than that: Pray as you read. The Spirit of truth will lead you into His truth as you ask Him to be your divine Guide. You can trust the Holy Spirit!

Sandy, you have done the Body of Christ a great service through your sacrificial efforts in this inspiring book. May more voices of clarity arise in this hour for such a time as this!

—Dr. James W. Goll, cofounder, Encounters Network
author, *The Prophetic Intercessor*, *Praying for Israel’s Destiny*,
The Lost Art of Intercession and many more

1

Ancient Paths Revived

Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it. (Jeremiah 6:16)

Long ago, God's people in the Promised Land stood at a crossroads. The world around them was shaking, and they would never be the same again. Radical change and reformation lay ahead. In such a season, how would they reach their destiny? "Ask for the ancient paths," the prophet Jeremiah discerned. It was time, the Spirit was saying, to walk in them. As God's people remembered anew His ways of old, He would restore Israel's anointing.

Today, God is opening the heavens, reviving Israel's anointing for Christians to walk in. Some of you may be unfamiliar with the term *anointing*. In ancient Israel, priests and kings were "anointed" for ministry. Sacred objects in the Tabernacle and Temple were "anointed" or consecrated, with oil for holy service. (See Exodus 28:41; 30:25-33, 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13.) The word "anoint" or "anointing" derives from a Hebrew root pronounced *ma-shakh*, meaning "to rub or smear with oil." The same root is used for the word "Messiah," which can be translated, "Anointed One."

All who trust in and follow Messiah have an anointing of the Holy Spirit (see 1 John 2:27). But that anointing is unique from person to person, ministry to ministry, nation to nation, and

more---because every person, ministry and nation is unique. Israel's anointing refers to the unique, covenant-based presence, irrevocable gifts, calling and blessings of God on the Jewish nation. It is neither superior nor inferior to that of other nations. It is simply unique---and for the benefit of all nations.

As in the days of Jeremiah, once again, the prophetic season is shifting. The destiny of His Church is intersecting anew with Israel's destiny. As a result, the last days body of believers will increasingly resemble the early New Covenant Church, restored in power, love and purity. For this restoration, Israel is integral. A catalyst for revival, she endues us with fresh Kingdom reality from her spiritual progenitors and heritage. Therefore, a company is emerging whose time has come: the Church with Israel, converging in Christ, mediating His Kingdom and preparing the way of His return. You are invited to participate; in fact, it will not be the same without you.

As a Jewish believer in Jesus, I want to see blessings from Israel imparted to the international Body of Christ. Why? Some of God's ways of old have long been set aside. Yet through them, He reveals Himself uniquely and intimately in passionate holiness. He wants you and me to walk in—then mediate to others—renewed realms of His supernatural salvation. At the same time, He is stirring fresh zeal in us to prepare for the days ahead, stay the course and stand firm to the end—even to the consummate coming of our Bridegroom-King. For all this, we will access a long-dormant inheritance in Israel.

Accordingly, after forty years of Messianic ministry, I have witnessed a major shift in the Church. Theological and political controversy over Israel has reached an all time high, internationally. So, if you happen to be one who strongly disagrees with Israeli policies, or even questions that nation's right to exist, I hope you'll set politics aside. I pray you will continue reading this book. I want you, too, enriched by what the Bible surprisingly reveals concerning about your blessed

future, through Israel.¹

At the same time controversy over Israel has increased, steadily growing numbers of believers across the globe are identifying with the Jewish people. They understand that Messiah was, is, and will return as a Jew. More and more, God's New Covenant people are hearing and embracing His heart for His Old Covenant ones. They are recouping lost treasures of the Christian faith. Not coincidentally, Jews are coming to faith in *Yeshua* (Jesus' Hebrew name) in numbers not seen since the book of Acts.

As Gentile and Jewish believers join together, a mystery is materializing in our day. At new levels, God is creating "one new man out of the two" (Ephesians 2:15). This one new man is characterized as a bride purified for her Betrothed. At the same time she is a warrior (see Revelation 19:7; 12:11). For both a wedding and a war are at hand; the One who is just and true said it must be so. His coveted coming will not take place without opposition. Those who comprise this "Messianic warrior bride" company are being outfitted for battle. Refined by fire, they will emerge unstopably ablaze for the King. They will minister His Kingdom and mediate revival in all manner of ways, and in wide-scale Holy Spirit power, fulfill the Great Commission to which they have been called.

This book is about preparing God's people for the closing, crescendo events of this age—and beyond. Each chapter addresses a major shift that will reshape the Body in coming years. These shifts will come from tapping into our spiritual heritage resonant in Israel, revived for these last days.

Some chapters revolve around a single book of the Bible; most are based on themes that develop throughout the Scriptures. The chapters build on each other, taking us from ancient paths into the prophetic future. We will stand at the crossroads and look, seek the good ways, and together walk anew in them.

What is at stake, and how is it relevant to you? Our Messiah is coming back! Heaven is even now bursting into the earth realm. The miraculous is overtaking the mundane. Yet there is more. He is coming again to set in place a totally tangible Kingdom according to the law of love—justice with joy, resplendent righteousness, peace and prosperity—encompassing the earth. As never before, all humanity will be subject to the dominion of Deity. The increase of His Kingdom will *never* end (see Isaiah 9:7). Care to prepare the way for His resplendent return? Again, Israel is integral.

Prophetic Parameters

Israel's Anointing has been written both to Gentile and Jewish believers. My heart is to share with Gentile believers certain select and timeless, Messiah-centered treasures from our Old Covenant heritage (see Matthew 13:52). These truths are God's gifts, that you might be equipped and empowered to know, love and serve Him intimately, creatively and with explosive joy in these last days. For my fellow Messianic Jews, my prayer is that you would gain ever-expanding revelation of the breadth and depth of our calling—and of our Yeshua—in the ardor of His affections and anointing (see Ephesians 3:16–19). Because, really, are we not to be all about *Him*?

Israel's Anointing aims to offer not only prophetic, but also very practical perspectives. I want your heart stirring and your spirit soaring as you learn of God's ways from His Word. I want you to know your Savior from a Hebraic point of view that remains relevant to the challenges of 21st-century life. But be forewarned. You may find yourself provoked to jealousy for more and more of your Jewish Bridegroom-King—and you may never be the same. Once you connect to the ever-mounting glory of His Kingdom—heaven on earth in which you personally participate—you may find that changes everything.

This book is not about politics in the Middle East. It does reflect, and aims to inspire, love for the Jewish nation. However, you will find only love for the Arabs here. Like all other nations, Israel and the Arabic peoples await a salvation only their Messiah can achieve.

As a former attorney and as a teacher of God's Word, I admit to love for truth. In a world where passion for truth can be rare, I want to encourage you in your lifelong study and journey through Scripture.

It is time for the Body of Christ to embrace clarity and acuity of thought at levels not needed in previous generations. Love-based mental acumen is an aspect of the mind of Christ being restored so the Church can move forward in His full counsel. Clear and insightful thinking is not at all contrary, but rather complementary, to heart-level passion for Jesus, supernatural revelation and surrender to the Spirit (see Luke 10:27).

For this reason, as well as the sake of integrity, ample Scripture and other references are noted for those desiring to pursue further study or to fact check. At the same time, my prayer is this book will serve not merely as a good source of information, but as a launch point for personal devotion, worship and intercession for the issues discussed. (One little housekeeping matter: In this updated edition, some of the end notes in the original book have been deleted. In most chapters, this means some end note numbers are removed from the text. It does not, however, alter the correspondence of end note numbers as they appear in the text to the actual end notes themselves at the back of the book.)

New Words of Old

In a book of this nature, some clarification of terms is important. Occasionally I use Hebrew words with translation provided. I substitute Jesus' name in English many times with

His Hebrew name, *Yeshua*, since that is what I love to call Him. In some instances, I refer to God as *YHVH* the English equivalent of the Hebrew tetragrammaton, whichh letters are pronounced *yud-hay-vav-hay*. Because this book is intended for mostly Gentile readers, the Hebrew Scriptures (*Tanakh*) are identified as the *Old Covenant*. Following biblical usage, I employ the word *Israel* interchangeably with *Jewish nation*, meaning either the ethnic descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or the geographic land, or both. The particular meaning should be clear from the context.

When the term *Messianic Jew* appears, it means, for the purposes of this book, any believer in Jesus who is biologically or ethnically Jewish and intentionally identifies as a follower of Yeshua (Jesus). It does not suggest adherence to any particular Torah observant practices associated with contemporary Messianic Judaism. It never implies superiority—or inferiority—to non-Jewish believers.

Christendom refers in this book to historically and politically institutionalized Christianity. In contrast, *Church* is used synonymously with the collective Body of Christ—sometimes called Body of Messiah—or with the word *Christian(s)*. It includes both Jewish and Gentile believers, with rare exception for the sake of a specific point. Where the phrase *warrior bride* appears, it does not suggest followers of Jesus are or should be predominantly female. It does reflect that He is coming back for a collective, purified bride wholly in love with Him (see Revelation 19:7). The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, is used similarly to *warrior bride*. The term refers in this book to wholehearted followers of Yeshua seeking to walk in the spiritual authority He has delegated them, according to His Word.

In this book I usually refer to the present time as the end times or last days (see 1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 1:2). Apocalyptic events associated with the close of this age and the start of the

Messianic Age are often identified as the last of the last days, or end of the end times.

Occasionally, select Jewish traditions and rabbinic interpretations are shared that lend themselves to the exaltation of Yeshua. These are offered as helpful illustrations of biblical thought from a Hebraic perspective to enrich the reader's relationship with Him. Never do I intend for rabbinic insights to detract from a focus on God Himself, the supremacy of His written Word or the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the course of writing this book, I found myself surprisingly immersed in what can only be described as heavenly realms of the Spirit. My prayer is that through these pages you, too, will be drawn higher and deeper into the heart of Messiah. I think--at least I pray--you will emerge transformed.

2

Israel and the Church Converging: The Kingdom of God

All these are the beginning of birth pains . . . but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:8, 13)

Jesus aptly described our day: “These are the beginning of birth pains.” The Savior was referring to shaking events that would shift realities to signal and make way for His return.

I will never forget the first time I witnessed the birth of a baby. The labor was hard and long. Finally, the infant’s head emerged. Holy anticipation filled the room. Then—suddenly—it was over. Within seconds the newborn had journeyed her way out and into the world. And just as suddenly, everything changed for everyone present. Joy exploded. New life! Like nothing I had ever experienced, a spark of eternity intersected dramatically with the natural, blood-and-guts process of life in the earth realm.

So it is with the Kingdom of God. Infinity is infiltrating earth today in answer to the prayers of past millennia: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The King is coming—in glorious Person—as this present age transitions to the next. In the process, new life is coming in the form of a joyful, global harvest. But as in the natural, so it is in the supernatural; there is no birth without

blood, guts and, yes, even pain. This chapter will help you prepare.

Birth Pains

One day Yeshua took His disciples to the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem for a Bible study. “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” they asked (Matthew 24:3).

The Master did not deny the premise of the question. Indeed He would come at the end of the age. It would be wise to know the signs heralding the event. He answered the disciples promptly and to the point. First, He said, would come wide-scale deception, then wars, famines and earthquakes. These would be only the beginning of “birth pains.”¹

The Greek word translated “birth pains” in many modern Bible versions is *odin*. *Odin* refers to odious distress. It is translated “sorrows” by the King James Version and “horrors” by others.² All versions can be considered correct, but the usage of “birth pains” captures a vital point. The odious distress or suffering is related to the inception of something new—a birth. The word *odin* directs our vision beyond the travail or temporary affliction to something ahead much greater and grander: birth of the Messianic Age.

Yeshua says that a steadfast heart, fixated not on the *odin* but on its goal, will stay the course. Meanwhile, because of the increase of evil during this time, “the love of many” (some translations say most)—even believers—“will grow cold.” “But,” He adds, “he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:12–13). Yeshua’s warning is compassionate yet sobering.

I trust you want to understand, and participate in, what God is doing in these last days. Some who have never searched out the Scriptures pertaining to this hour may find their faith

wavering. Like many of the spiritual leaders of Jesus' time, they may take conscious or unconscious offense at His sovereign, unexpectedly different ways. Their love may grow cold. Jesus cautions this will happen to *most*.

But if you love the Lord and pray with even a modicum of militance, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done," you do not want to risk cooling off to Him. Nor do you desire to merely wince and grit your teeth during this pivotal period. Like me, you want to stand firm in Kingdom fervor, substance and dimension in your life. You want revival!

Your heart cries out for the manifest presence of God, the salvation of souls and the righteous deeds of the saints. You already taste the joy set before you and your Beloved, and you will do what it takes for more. You want to be part of the emerging remnant or ekklesia or Messianic warrior bride, engaged to the end in Kingdom expansion—because you want your life spent on Him.

Birth pains of Jesus' resplendent return have begun. Times are proving uniquely replete with rapid and radical global change, including wars and rumors of wars; large scale, natural disasters; major political, social and economic upheaval; food shortages; widespread lawlessness and terror—and, despite sweeping moral depravity, revival of previously unimaginable magnitude. The Holy Spirit is awakening lost humanity as false gods topple, from secularism to Islam and more. God's glory is penetrating the planet. Kingdom expansion will continue through these birth pains, and we will increasingly access heaven right here on earth. In the process, the Body of Christ is being groomed for a wondrous destiny.

Satan is striking back, terrorized that his time is short. But the Omnipotent One is very much in control. Hell's gory incursion will not outmatch heaven's glorious intrusion into neighborhoods and nations. Through increasing darkness on earth, this present generation of believers will be refined to

shine in purity and power. We will be used to prepare the way of the Lord's return.

The Ekklesia: A Messianic warrior bride

As birth pains intensify, Israel and the Church will converge toward a common destiny. To “converge” means to move from different directions toward one point and unite in a common interest or focus, developing similar characteristics.³ The two are converging because, as we will later see, neither can attain to their ultimate destiny apart from the other. God's Old and New Covenant peoples are inextricably bound together. In Christ, the two are now becoming one, maturing into His bride. But this last days betrothed one is also a warrior. Loving the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind—as a Bride awaits a Bridegroom—is fierce in its force, shattering evil and overcoming the world (see 1 John 3:8b; 5:3–4). Such love is warlike.

The warrior bride is an unfolding mystery of God, a people being formed in this generation. Fueled by unquenchable desire for Yeshua, this army of lovers is marked by relentless drive for the things of His Kingdom. They traverse the earth realm in holy authority obtained from heaven. This battalion comprises believers, including Jewish believers, from every nation—including Israel. For on Israel rests an ancient anointing that God is reviving to propel His people into new realities “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

The warrior bride is not about an attitude of crusading triumphalism or carnal emotionalism. It is not about who is better or more blessed: Jewish or Gentile believers. In Jesus, ethnicity is neither a barrier nor a boon for blessing. Rather, this fellowship of friends is about a King who is coming, a love He is unleashing with power for prevailing, and a Kingdom restoration of all things—in the context of Jews and Gentiles

joined together for Jesus.

The Kingdom of God

God's Kingdom is often described as His rule and reign in any given dimension. The word *king* together with the word *domain* communicates the general concept of kingdom. Therefore, when the Son of God came two thousand years ago, He brought spectacularly good news: "The kingdom of heaven is near," or, according to early translations, "at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Heaven and earth were converging in new dimensions through the Person of Yeshua.

Much of Messiah's teaching centered on the theme of the Kingdom of heaven on earth. He instructed His followers to minister the same message in word and deed (see Matthew 10:7–8). He had in mind, as did those to whom He spoke, pardon from sin—and much more. The Gospel of the Kingdom is about forgiveness, which then sets us on course into tremendous, wholly new, eternal realities.

To an extent far greater than you may perceive, the Kingdom of God is already within you if you have surrendered your life to Jesus. As you read these words, you really *are* seated with Him in heavenly places. In spirit, you and I have free access to God's celestial throne of grace (see Luke 17:21; Ephesians 2:6; Hebrews 4:16). As we extend the authority His Holiness delegates to us, we mediate His dominion government around us. This intersection of the natural and supernatural causes the miraculous to become commonplace. All manner of sacred signs and wonders follow those who believe (see Mark 16:16–18). Yet the Kingdom is about still more. It is about what happens when the King personally comes back.

The Old Covenant speaks at length about Messiah's Kingdom rule and reign of righteousness on earth when He

returns. The concept unfolds when God promises to David a descendant who will inherit his throne forever (see 2 Samuel 7:12–13; Isaiah 9:6–7). The New Covenant identifies Yeshua, Son of Man/Son of God, as this descendant (see Luke 1:32–33; Acts 2:29–30). Deity embodied in dust, Yeshua inherits not only the Kingdom of heaven but this Davidic kingdom as well—encompassing earthly Israel and the nations (see Revelation 11:15; 19:16; Isaiah 9:7; Zechariah 14:9, 16). So it is no coincidence that after two thousand years, Israel finds herself once more at a global spiritual epicenter. It is to the Jewish nation, the apple of His eye (see Zechariah 2:8), that Messiah is coming to establish holy headquarters in Jerusalem. From there His manifest Kingdom, in tangible splendor, will transform the earth in glory (see Isaiah 11:6–10).

A series of convulsions will transition us from this age to the next. Some rabbis, as well as some Christians, refer to this period of tribulation as the Day of Jacob's Trouble (see Jeremiah 30:7). Yet it is not the grisly gloom, but the glorious goal, that Israel's prophets keep in sight. To them, the pain is about paradise coming to the planet. Their vision is set on Messiah and His Kingdom-come-to-earth. The New Covenant authors understood this background well and further developed its magnificent theme. Among other things, they tell us this Messianic Age lasts a thousand years (see Revelation 20:2–7). For that reason, it is often called the millennial kingdom, or simply the Millennium.^{3a}

Some believers have been taught that life here on earth will only get better and better until, in some mysterious manner, Jesus and the Kingdom eventually take over everything. Maybe others suffer through hard times, but God offers the faith-filled Christian assurance of a blessed life punctuated by the power to dispel ungodly or unpleasant circumstances.

While this concept might reflect an aspect of truth, it *must* be considered in light of other key Scriptures. All who desire to

live a godly life in Messiah Jesus—who tells us to take up our cross and follow Him—will be persecuted (see 2 Timothy 3:12). Every nation, declares Deity, will hate us because of Him (see Matthew 24:9). We endure afflictions, but those achieve for us an eternal weight of glory (see 2 Corinthians 4:17). Troubles befall us, but they are not synonymous with defeat: “In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

At this point, I can almost hear some of you questioning how this book is going to build your faith. I encourage you to keep reading! The Bible’s message is stupendously positive. I believe the Lord is about to take your faith to dazzling new dimensions. I love and am committed to revival, the miraculous, the prophetic and especially the salvation of nations. Like you, I expect more of heaven’s supernatural realm to materialize in the here and now. But I also want to see believers stay the course through birth pains. I want to see this generation fulfill its grand and unique destiny.

Paradise Restored

Deep in the genetic code of humankind resides a latent longing for something bigger—centered around Someone bigger—than ourselves. You and I were originally designed for a garden called Eden in which all our needs would be perfectly met. Every patch of soil, every living creature, was to submit peaceably and fruitfully to our dominion on the Creator’s behalf. Our Maker hardwired us to walk and talk with Him just as easily and naturally as we breathe air. The fairy tales, adventure novels and redemption-plot dramas through history bespeak this insatiable yearning to fulfill our original call. Not just us, but all creation, longs for it: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22).

God promises to answer that collective groan. His callings are irrevocable (see Romans 11:29). Deity's design for us and for our planet will not be defeated. Yeshua is returning, literally—in glorified flesh and blood—to rule and restore *everything* (see Acts 3:21). The result will resemble a return to Paradise.

Meanwhile, this present age is often described as an “in-between” time of the “already but not yet.” You and I live in between the incursion of the Kingdom of heaven (Messiah's first coming) and its climactic fullness (following His Second Coming).⁴ On the one hand, in this world we will have tribulation (see John 16:33, KJV). On the other hand, during this interim period, mounting supernatural blessing can be available right now to whomever will receive it.

God's glorious government increases through infinity (see Isaiah 9:7). We ought to be inspired, not inhibited, toward ever-increasing faith when, for example, some of the sick for whom we pray are marvelously healed, but not all; or some of the dead are raised, while others are buried. We are commissioned to contend with the Spirit until things on earth are “as it is in heaven.” Many traditional schools of theology teach that divine blessing is not at this time attainable to its complete and totally universal extent. That need not be a statement of unbelief, but of *good* news. The closer we get to the day of His return, the greater the degree to which we will access and mediate the supernatural. Simultaneously, the more we engage with heaven, the closer the time of His return (see 2 Peter 3:12). This divine, back-and-forth synergy is escalating even now. In the process, as God's government increases, it converges more and more with Israel.

Recapturing Biblical Revelation

So that we can track together, allow me to share a bit about

my spiritual journey and how the Lord has shifted my theological grid. My early Bible education took place in a mainstream, modern Orthodox synagogue in the United States. There I learned the traditional Jewish approach to studying the Hebrew Scriptures, which is a straightforward and generally literal one. Words are understood at their normal face value, in their grammatical and historical context. They are given the same plain and ordinary, commonsense meaning that their original listeners or readers would have given them.⁵ This is how the Bible's authors themselves typically interpreted previously penned Scriptures, in both Old and New Covenants. Yeshua and the earliest Church fathers generally followed this method of interpretation.

This general approach is called the literal-grammatical-historical method of Bible study. Its basic rationale is simple. God is a sufficiently skilled communicator to say what He means, and mean what He says, so His people can understand Him.⁶ The Divine Author loves us passionately. He wants to be known intimately by ordinary human beings, not just linguistic scholars. Although there are times He occasionally employs allegory, metaphor and other literary devices, He is not tricky; it is typically not hard to tell when He uses them.

As I studied the Scriptures the way I had learned in synagogue, the most wonderful shock of my life occurred. Yeshua revealed Himself to me through the witness of His Word. Not long thereafter, the Holy Spirit began speaking to my heart very personally through the same written Word. This was and still is both edifying and delightful. Such intimate communication remains a vital, ongoing part of my relationship with the Lord---as it should for all who love and follow Him. But a subtle problem can arise.

Sometimes, the more we sense the Lord speaking personally to us, the more we are tempted to start reading the Bible mainly symbolically rather than straightforwardly.

Unfortunately, a mainly symbolic interpretation of Scripture can easily lead to deception, which is not what we want in these last days.

Let me give you an example. Years ago I was praying about whether to speak at a particular Christian conference that was far from my home and would require extensive travel. As I prayed, the Spirit highlighted to my attention Isaiah 2:3, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.” From that, I understood He was leading me to attend the event. So I went—and it proved to be a very positive experience. But soon after that, I found myself metaphorically referring to other places of powerful encounter with God as “the mountain of the Lord.” This was not in itself bad or wrong, but let me explain more.

Isaiah’s prophecy is one of hundreds throughout the Scriptures that foretell the literal future of Israel and the Davidic kingdom. In context, it objectively describes a decidedly material mountain of the Lord, which is located in the literal City of Jerusalem, where I now live.

My very subjective and limited application of Isaiah 2:3 to any place of powerful encounter with God was not incorrect so long as it remained just that—my very subjective and limited application. It stemmed, after all, from a personal word of direction by the Holy Spirit. But it was not God’s intended *fundamental* meaning of the verse. It would be a serious mistake to ignore or replace the fundamental meaning with a symbolic one.

If the fundamental meaning of the Scriptures is discounted, we miss what God is fundamentally saying to us in His Word about who He is and how He operates. As a result, we can easily mistake how He has called us to live, particularly as we approach the last of these last days. We will likely neglect the critical Israel component of the Kingdom, because many Old Covenant Scriptures refer fundamentally—though not exclusively—to Israel.

If we forget this and interpret the Word primarily symbolically instead of more literally, we can easily, albeit unconsciously, misinterpret "Israel" to mean "the Church." Sadly, this has often been the case through Church history, giving rise to so-called replacement theology. (Replacement theology is the mistaken but long-entrenched belief that God has replaced Israel in His heart and His plans with the Church.) This erroneous doctrine has caused the institutional Church to compromise its understanding of the character of God and the nature of His Kingdom for nearly two thousand years. It has led to all manner of deception on the part of sincere Christians.

But we are in a new era. God is aligning His ekklesia with His Word and His ancient covenant people, the Jews, as never before. This is changing history.

The Presence of the Future

When we "correctly handle the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) the imminence of Messiah's appearing sharpens into focus. We better discern the times and seasons, what the Master is doing and how He calls us to respond. Allow me to illustrate.

For much of my life as a believer, I found that most Christians expected Yeshua to someday appear on earth, but only long after they expired from their own mortal houses of clay. They did expect He would have His literal Temple on His holy hill in His Holy City. Some even hoped to catch a bird's-eye view of things from their eternal, heavenly home. But with heaven being heaven, most felt that scenarios on earth would not grab their attention once they were in the presence of the King.

The Bible, however, is full of specific revelation God wants us to have *now* of our role in the future as active players in the prophetic age to come, and ages beyond that. That revelation

is key to understanding our destiny in His Kingdom as we engage in it now, in this age. Here's why:

- The literal, future fulfillment of prophecy concerning Messiah's return and establishment of His Kingdom is dear to His heart, evidenced in part by the large percentage of Bible text dedicated to it. If we love Yeshua, we want whatever is important to Him to be important to us.
- Many passages we may have assumed would be fulfilled only in heaven are actually going to materialize to a significant degree here on this earth.
- Heaven is our home, but not quite the way many of us have been taught. The kingdom of heaven is coming to earth.
- Messiah's return is likely closer than many used to think. Some of us just might be around for it. In any case, you and I are encouraged to do certain things that can actually hasten or expedite it (see 2 Peter 3:12a).
- Even if our earthly bodies give out before the Lord returns, we will come back with Him—not just for an instant, but for a period described as a thousand years of glory.
- Ancient, covenant-based prophecies pertaining to Israel and the Kingdom of God are coming to pass. If we want to participate in what He is doing, we want to understand these events with factual accuracy and biblical integrity.
- Historically, spiritual revival is related to the Church's conscious anticipation of, and preparation for, the Second Coming of our King. If you're reading this book, I believe you want revival!

From this perspective, it is not premature or irrelevant to consider the future while living wholeheartedly in the present;

it is both prophetic and practical. It is said that in God's Kingdom, we live in the presence of the future. The "here and now" is affected by the "there and then." Here and now, everything must be shaken that can be shaken because a Kingdom is coming that cannot be shaken (see Haggai 2:6–7; Hebrews 12:27). It can, however, be *taken*.

Love: Way of the Warrior

The Kingdom of heaven is not taken through passive inaction. Rather, Yeshua said, "The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." Or as the Amplified Bible translates, "The kingdom of heaven has endured *violent assault*, and *violent* men *seize* it by force [as a precious prize—a share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion]" (Matthew 11:12, emphasis added).⁷

Realities shake in spiritual and natural realms when, to any extent, heaven's Kingdom is magnetized to earth. The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil (see 1 John 3:8). That process is inherently violent. Sweet, gentle Jesus spent His life demolishing demonic clutches on humanity. There was nothing passive on the part of our tenderhearted, merciful Savior, also known as Captain of the Armies of Heaven (see Joshua 5:14). His valiant life and death embodied love's most aggressive assault ever executed. Yeshua instigated whole-scale war, it cost Him His life, and He won.

The same Messiah who ascended to the Father as Suffering Servant will descend as Conquering King. Meanwhile, the war, though already won, is not over. You and I still contend against rulers, powers and spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places (see Ephesians 6:12). Our stance is offensive rather than defensive in nature, but the weapons we wield are not of this world (see 2 Corinthians 10:4). We brandish a message of fiery

love not just in word, but in demonstrable deed. We take that message, through every mode and means, into a world dying without God. In Holy Spirit *dunamis* (power), we invade darkness with light, following in, mediating and inheriting Messiah's life by loving, if need be, even unto death (see Acts 1:8).

The way of God's warrior is the way of love. How could it be otherwise? He who is the Way is *Himself*, Love (see 1 John 4:16). We war because of love, energized by love, for the sake of love. Unassailable, all-consuming ardor for the Bridegroom King fuels our authority in Him.

Years ago, I was blessed with what I can best describe as a dream-experience of God's love. In the dream, I suddenly found myself in a realm of heaven. I did not visibly see the Lord, but I did experience His almost tangible presence. In a word, His presence was Love. Pure, unreserved love saturated the entire atmosphere. It was not like anything I have experienced on earth.

In the dream I related to many individuals I did not recognize. We easily communicated heart to heart without needing to vocalize words. In every communication, no matter the topic, love was freely released and received. Pure, glorious, infinite love served as the oxygen, or life-force, of this heavenly realm. Love was inhaled, infused into one's whole being, and exhaled afresh to bless others. No thought was given to self-preservation, self-indulgence or self, period. There was only joyfully buoyant awareness of being loved and loving others as we went about our "business." Love kept synergistically increasing.

The dream proved so life-altering for me that to this day, I wonder if it was an actual encounter in the Spirit (see 1 Kings 3:5-15). In any case, God graciously allowed me to experience a foretaste of heaven's love, which we are going to need, more and more, right here on earth. Moreover, this unparalleled

love of God is destined to connect His New Covenant people like never before to His Old Covenant people, Israel.

Why Israel?

Long ago, in the sun-baked deserts of the Middle East, God entered into holy, unconditional and irrevocable covenant with a nation through which He'd reveal Himself to all others. Through Israel, the Creator would become Savior of humankind. In the Divine Person of Jesus the Jew, the Kingdom of Heaven would break through on earth. That process has begun but is not yet done---and Israel must be here to do it. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that like the Church, Israel has through history endured hellish opposition and murderous push back.

Those of us who were not alive when Israel became a recognized, modern nation in 1948 can sometimes take her existence for granted. Never have we known a world without a Middle Eastern Jewish State. But if we take a step back in history, our view adjusts, and we gain perspective. We can better appreciate the profound majesty of this hour. By standards of human history, it was but a moment ago the Jews began returning in large numbers to their ancestral homeland. The majority of them do not yet know their Messiah is Yeshua of Nazareth, but a good many do. Messianic Jewish believers in Jesus are growing around the world in both numbers and maturity. Salvations and dramatic miracles are not the extreme rarity they were for over 1,500 years in the Holy Land. Fulfillments of ancient biblical prophecies about Israel in the past century would have boggled the minds of many of our most august Church fathers.

Even among Jews who do not worship Yeshua, an unprecedented trend toward camaraderie with Christians is

undeniable. Many freely express, for the first time, both affection and appreciation for believers. While writing this book, for instance, I happened across an article published in a respected international news periodical, written by a deputy director of communications under a former Israeli prime minister. Says the writer, who is *not* a follower of Yeshua:

Israeli officials have at last begun to appreciate . . . evangelical support. What was once unthinkable has now become routine, as leading Christian pastors and Israeli government representatives regularly confer . . . on the principal issues of the day. [Read between the lines: God is raising up prophets from the nations for Israel.] . . . It is this genuine affection that contains the potential to forge an historic alliance.⁸

The writer goes on to suggest that Israel organize prayer battalions for the Jewish State in Christian churches.

Organized by the Holy Spirit, however, prayer battalions for Israel are already in place in congregations worldwide. From far-flung villages in rural China and remote Pacific Islands, to tundra-laced towns in Siberia, I have witnessed believers passionately petition heaven's throne of grace for the salvation of the Jewish people. Represented by this interceding remnant, the global Body of Messiah is hearing God's heart for His ancient covenant people as never before. As a result, more and more descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are coming to faith in Yeshua. In the not-too-distant future, revival will sweep across Israel. In the process, the Messianic warrior bride will comprise that glorious convergence of Jew and Gentile as one in Christ—a convergence that crescendos when, as promised, “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).

Israel's Salvation

The promise of Israel's salvation is given in response to questions that arose in the early Church. As fewer Jewish

people came to faith in Yeshua, some Christians wondered if the biblical promises to them were now null and void. Was God finished, they asked, with Israel? If so, that was worrisome. If He had revoked His covenant with the Jews, could He not also revoke His word to the Gentiles? If He had replaced Israel with the Church in His heart and plans, could He not someday replace the Church? The apostle Paul speaks to this issue in his letter to the Romans:

Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. . . . There is a [Jewish] remnant chosen by grace.

Romans 11:1–2, 5

Paul adamantly affirms God's continuing covenant with the Jewish nation. Our ever-faithful Father has reserved for Himself a remnant chosen by grace, including the apostle himself. In the Bible, a remnant serves as a basis on which God preserves a whole people. The continued existence of a faithful remnant in Israel assures He will fulfill His plans for the nation's collective spiritual restoration. Today's remnant of Israel is found in her body of faithful Messianic Jewish believers. This remnant reminds us that, for His glory, Israel will yet be saved—"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob'" (Romans 11:26, amplifying Isaiah 59:20).

Does this promise mean that every Jew who ever lived gets saved? Of course not. First, both the Old and New Covenants often use the word "all" to refer to a large majority. In such instances, the meaning is similar to the phrase "nearly all."

Second, Yeshua Himself told the Jewish people of His day that He alone is the way to salvation and that *nobody* comes to the Father except through Him (see John 14:6). The "all Israel" passage does not suggest a special route to redemption

available to the bloodline of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It does not imply Jews get any unique, second chance to be saved.⁹ Those who wishfully think so, even if out of sincere compassion, run the serious risk of neglecting the biblical mandate to share the Gospel with their Jewish friends (see Romans 1:16; 11:11, 31).

The best interpretation of the “all Israel” passage refers to the time of Yeshua’s return, when His Messiahship is openly revealed in a singular manner. The leaders of Israel and practically all of the Jewish people who are alive at that time will believe in Him and be saved.¹⁰ The immediate context of the passage helps clarify the issue, because the same verse also contains a prophecy about the Second Coming: “The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob” (Romans 11:26).

The first time Yeshua came, Israel’s leaders rejected Him as their King, despite His popularity with the common folk. But someday Israel’s future leaders will reverse their former decision and invite Him back as King. *This will inaugurate Messiah’s return to earth (see Matthew 23:39).* Untold blessing will be unleashed not only to the Jews, but to the nations (see Daniel 7:27; Psalm 67:5–7; Isaiah 2:3–4; Zephaniah 2:11).

Common Ground

Meanwhile, one---but not the only---reason God's Old and New Covenant people stand on common ground is that His enemies target us both together. The world's drive toward radical secularism, with its "cancel culture" and castigation of Judeo-Christian values, aims to annihilate both the worship and worshipers of YHVH.

In this respect, extremist Islam is similar. “*First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people!*” resounds the jihadist cry.¹¹ The Saturday people are Jews, observing the Sabbath on Saturday. The Sunday people are Christians, worshipping God

on Sunday. Ultimately, extremist Islam interweaves with secularism, humanism, globalism and Communism. (The technical term for this phenomenon is intersectionality.) These combined forces target not only Judeo-Christian values, but Jews and Christians. The Church is awakening to this reality and learning to wield weapons of militant love, as one Christian author suggested many years ago:

We who have chosen life must do more than pray. We must fight for our children, our nations, our faith, our future. . . . Thankfully, with entwined roots planted in common ground, neither Christians nor Jews need fight the battle alone.¹²

Sometimes Christians are afraid to align with Israel for fear of harm, real or perceived, that might come their way. To be sure, standing firmly with Israel (or with any of God's purposes) can involve spiritual warfare. Such is the temporal price of following Jesus. What, however, is the eternal price of not following Him?

As global conflict escalates, bear in mind that mounting enmity against the Church is not primarily backlash for standing with Israel. Consciously or unconsciously blaming the Jews for persecution against Christians can lead to a subtle, anti-Jewish deception. All who live godly in Messiah Jesus will be persecuted (see 2 Timothy 3:12). Those who love Him passionately also love the people He loves. True, sometimes there can be temporary trouble for believers willing to identify with His “kinsmen according to the flesh” (Romans 9:3, KJV). But the Bible says even worse troubles await those who will not stand with them (see Genesis 12:3; Obadiah 1:10–11, 15).

A spirit of anti-Semitism is inevitably the flip side of an anti-Christ spirit. Whenever anti-Semitism flares up, if it is not quelled, anti-Christian flames are likely to be similarly stoked. Nevertheless, God is well in control. He will use the enemy's ploys to further unite His covenant peoples, purifying and

empowering us in love and war (see Daniel 11:35). For He has “created the destroyer to work havoc [for His good purposes]; no weapon forged against you will prevail” (Isaiah 54:16–17).

Standing with Israel does not mean agreeing with all her policies and practices, assuming one is able to discern through the media and rumor swirl what the country is in fact doing. Bible-based love for Israel should not limit love and blessing toward the Arabic peoples. Indeed, if our hearts’ position regarding Israel results in lovelessness toward Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims or others, I daresay something is not quite right with our hearts’ position for Israel.

To stand with Israel as a believer is to cooperate with her as God’s covenant nation. It involves ministering the reality of His unconditional love through global birth pains that particularly shake the Jewish nation posted at earth’s spiritual epicenter. Standing with Israel takes the form of fervent prayer¹³ and practical aid at all levels. Sharing the good news of eternal life in Messiah is a priority transcending all others.

A Test of Faith

World pressure to disassociate with Israel will intensify in these last days. If we do not engage with God’s heart for her now, we may find ourselves ill-prepared to align with His Kingdom purposes for the Jewish people in the future. As the love of many grows cold, we may unwittingly position ourselves against God and His Word. Jesus’ striking parable about sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31–46 cautions us concerning this last days phenomenon.

The events in the parable take place in the context of worldwide judgment: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory . . . All the nations will be gathered before him” (Matthew 25:31–32). At that time, Messiah will separate the righteous, or those who feed, clothe, nurse and care for His needs, from

the unrighteous, or those who do not. The righteous (sheep) receive their inheritance in the Kingdom of God; the unrighteous (goats) are forever cast from His presence. At that time, you and I will ask when it was that we saw and cared for Him—or did not. He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Christian commentators in recent centuries have interpreted “these brothers of mine” specifically as referring to the Jews. States an *NIV Study Bible* note, “Ultimately, how a person treats the Jewish people will reveal whether or not he is saved.”¹⁴

To be sure, this parable refers and applies, in a broader sense, to other people groups in other situations. Its foundational meaning, however, relates to Jesus’ physical brothers during the time of tribulation associated with the last days. Israel remains near and dear to His heart, and He eternally rewards those who embrace her.

The Metanarrative

The relationship of Israel and the Church is ultimately about something much bigger than Israel or the Church, or even the Kingdom age to come. It derives from a stupendous eternal plan, one proclaiming God’s praises for His unsearchable, manifold wisdom (see Romans 11:33–36). The bigger picture is that of God Himself and His overarching design for all creation:

He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Ephesians 1:9–10

All things in heaven and on earth will magnificently converge under the Person of the Son of Man/Son of God. YHWH's mysterious will, from before the creation of the world, is to gather a redeemed created order under Messiah's government of love (see Ephesians 1:4, 11; Colossians 1:19–20). His plan is stellar: "That in the coming *ages* he might show the incomparable riches of his grace . . . in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7, emphasis added). Deity's dominion, which knows no end, showcases His unparalleled, rich grace forever, to His good pleasure.

Would you let the Holy Spirit soak you for a moment—or longer—in that reality? Through ages yet to come, His splendor saturates everything. You and I will never cease to marvel in wonder and worship at the brilliance of God's blueprints for eternity, and at our unending, active role in their unfolding.

It is in the context of this larger, matchless plan that we are "God's workmanship," joined together as Jew and Gentile in Christ "to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). To show us why and how, and the boundless blessing that results, He gives us a beautiful, tangible tale in His Word. A prophetic glimpse of Israel and the Church in their intertwined last days destiny pops alive for us in the book of Ruth, reflecting and revealing God's mystery of one new man in Messiah.

3

Mystery of Jew and Gentile in Messiah

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.

Ephesians 2:14–16

An unprecedented move of the Spirit, destined to increase in coming years, is the global rejoining of Gentile to Jewish believers in Messiah. When I came to faith in Yeshua in 1975, only a dozen or so Messianic congregations existed in the world. A few decades later, at this writing, some estimate that up to half a million Jews presently follow Jesus.¹ Of these, most are in mainstream churches. Others affiliate either with Messianic congregations or house-type fellowships. More than a few undoubtedly keep their faith secret.²

Like estranged family members reunited after too many years apart, Gentile and Jewish believers are at long last becoming reacquainted—joyously, but not without occasional stretch or strain. Each is restoring to the other essential dimensions of the Kingdom of God and the knowledge of His ways. In the process, the whole Body is being given

opportunity to mature in love.

The concept of Jews and Gentiles together in Christ as “one new man” is articulated in the book of Ephesians. In context, it flows from the broad description of God’s redemptive plan from before creation. The one new man is not an isolated phenomenon. We exist and function within a much larger Kingdom reality than simply Jews and Gentiles getting along well together—though that is an important start. God’s plan is to bring *all things* in heaven and on earth together under the dominion of Christ. Within this larger Kingdom context, non-Jewish believers are “no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people.” They are “heirs together with Israel, members together of one body” (Ephesians 2:19; 3:6). In this chapter, we look at the blessing and glory that results.

One New Humanity in the Book of Ruth

Throughout the Bible, people from all nations are invited to worship Israel’s God. We learn of Abraham’s servant Eliezer; a “mixed multitude” leaving Egypt in the Hebrew exodus; Moses’ Gentile wife Zipporah and father-in-law Jethro; Rahab of Jericho; and converts from King Xerxes’s empire during Esther’s day. In the New Covenant, God-fearing Gentiles worship in synagogues even before the Gospel is preached to them. Then, through Jesus, the door to the Kingdom opens even wider to whoever, wherever, believes in Him. The Scriptures refer to this transcendent phenomenon of Jew and Gentile as one new “man.” (Because the meaning is identical, I often use the translation “humanity.”)

The early Church, which was mostly Jewish, quickly discerned that nationality alone did not confer spiritual standing before God. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female when it comes to partaking of the

blessings of salvation (see Galatians 3:28). These distinctions, of course, still exist in the earth realm. They bear upon our daily lives and have some relevance to our redemptive destinies.³ But they are not relevant to our sanctification or status in God's Spirit.

To help flesh out reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in Christ, two biblical heroines of the faith, our elder sisters Ruth and Naomi, serve as vivid prototypes. The unswerving devotion of the Gentile Ruth to the Jewish Naomi, together with Naomi's sacrificial deference to Ruth, shines as a revelatory glimpse into the matchless mystery of one new humanity. The serendipitous tale demonstrates how Jew and Gentile together, serving one another in a relationship of mutual love, proved instrumental to Yeshua's first coming. Assuredly, it will again take Jew and Gentile together, each preferring the other in divine reciprocity, to bring about His Second Coming.

Israel's Desolation

The book of Ruth is primarily a Spirit-breathed, literal account of historical events.⁴ But it also constitutes a typology or prophetic allegory especially befitting the 21st-century Church. The narrative takes place approximately three thousand years ago. In the opening scene, an Israelite named Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons leave home to escape a famine. As you may know, names in the Scriptures are significant, reflecting the characteristics and callings of persons and places. In Ruth, names bespeak much of the book's prophetic and instructive message. Allow me, therefore, to give you a fast and easy lesson in Hebrew, the language of your spiritual forebears.

The name Elimelech means "My God is King," while Naomi translates into "Pleasant." The couple has two sons, Mahlon,

meaning “Weak,” “Sickly” or “Afflicted,” and Kilion, meaning “Wasting Away.” The family belongs to the clan of Ephrathites, which means “Fruitful Ones.” They come from Bethlehem, or “House of Bread,” which is located in Judah, meaning “Praise.” So at the outset, we know we have met a fruitful family called to nourish others. But there is a famine in the land, and so their offspring are weak, sickly, afflicted and wasting away.

Famine in the Scriptures represents a form of judgment. We need not delve too deeply to know that the story transpired during a time of rebellion against God. The first sentence in Ruth tells us the events took place “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). The book of Judges, which immediately precedes Ruth, concludes with this sorry remark: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). The famine was deserved, and it was devastating.

Times being so trying, Elimelech and his family seek refuge in the land of Moab—Israel’s longstanding enemy. Moab, meaning “From Father,” was the son resulting from an incestuous union between Lot and one of his daughters (see Genesis 19:33–37). Despite their dubious ancestry, Moab’s descendants grew into a prosperous nation. But they were cruel to Israel, and consequently, God cursed them:

No . . . Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you [Israel] with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam . . . to pronounce a curse on you.

Deuteronomy 23:3–4

Moab was not the sort of sanctuary you would think a starving Jewish family from the Province of Praise would pick. It seemed the Moabites had forgotten that their very existence as a people, as well as their land, was due to the generosity of the progenitor of the Jews, namely Abraham. Recall that it was

Abraham who ceded the lushest-looking land in Canaan to Lot. Years later, it was Abraham's relationship with him that resulted in Lot and his family's deliverance from the brimstone annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah. But as the years passed, so did any sense of kinship on the part of Moab's descendants with Abraham's covenant children. (Could the same be said, perhaps, of some in the Church?)

Nonetheless, Moab finds itself hosting a displaced Jewish family of destiny. There the head of the household, Elimelech ("My God is King"), dies. It is as if the kingship of God is no more for this family. Sons Mahlon and Kilion marry Moabite women, but, being the weak, sickly, afflicted and wasting away souls that they are, these two young men also die, and without children. The family's attempt to escape judgment has failed, and as a result, Naomi is "Pleasant" no longer. Soon she will change her name to Mara, meaning "Bitter."

Meanwhile, news arrives that Israel's famine has come to an end. The season of judgment is over; Naomi decides to go home. She bids her two daughters-in-law a difficult farewell. Blessing them both, she tells them to stay in Moab, make new lives, find new husbands and start new families. At this, the young women are genuinely distressed. They weep together in protest and grief. But then Orpah, whose name means "Back of the Neck," says good-bye, turning the back of her neck to her mother-in-law and "going back to her people and her gods" (Ruth 1:15). She backslides in her faith.

Crossroads for the Church

Ruth, however, whose name means "Friend" or "Clinging One," will not be dissuaded. Instead, she clings all the more tenaciously to Naomi. Ruth utters words that have come to represent a commitment so supreme as to find place in many marriage vows today:

Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.

Ruth 1:16–17

At this juncture the book's allegorical symbolism sharpens into focus. We see that Naomi personifies Israel as a whole, God's "pleasant" people. But just as Naomi becomes Mara when the living presence of God as King is removed from her, so does Israel's pleasantness turn bitter without Him. Israel today, like other nations, has not collectively surrendered to the living God. Millennia of murderous persecutions, followed by a century of terror, have also taken their tragic toll. As a result, the Jewish State has endured a type of pervasive spiritual famine. But the story is not over. Israel's suffering will be used by YHWH for something ultimately far grander than she, like Naomi, can imagine.

Ruth, meanwhile, portrays Gentile Christians from the nations who have so joined themselves to Israel and her God that they cannot, under any circumstance, return to Moab or their Moabite gods. Ruth's choice to stick with embittered Naomi, come what may, turns on two firmly resolved matters. First, she is thoroughly devoted to YHWH. Second, because of her faithfulness to Him, she sincerely and unconditionally loves her mother-in-law. In other words, she identifies fully with the family into which she has married. In so doing, Ruth depicts Christians who fully identify with the family of their Bridegroom-King. Orpah, on the other hand, decides differently. At first, hers seems the more sensible choice. But Orpah depicts Christians who, in crisis, revert to the security and society of the world.

The opposite choices made by the two daughters-in-law portentously parallel those we will make as believers today. As

with Orpah and Ruth, our decisions will affect our destinies. Like them, Gentile believers have joined themselves to faith in the God of Israel. They have reaped blessing through the Jewish Scriptures, as well as through the Jewish patriarchs, prophets, apostles and Messiah—*through whom they have married, so to speak, into a Jewish family.*

The two Moabite women come to a crossroads. To continue on with God in the totality of what He has for them, they must cling to Naomi. The alternative is not to go forward in Him at all, but to go back to familiar gods of the world. Similarly, in these last days, those who comprise His warrior bride will cling tenaciously to Israel. To go forward in God in the years ahead, we must, like Ruth, go forward with Israel—or we shall not truly go forward at all.

Those radically in love with their Bridegroom-King will love His Jewish people. Having touched the inner chambers of God's heart, their own hearts resonate to His yearning for His ancient ones. Most wholly in love with the Most Holy, the warrior bride is so resolute in courage as to advance headlong, like Ruth, into a future fraught with uncertainty. Dependent entirely on God, she is willing to be escorted by a covenant counterpart who, like Naomi, may at times prove a bit more bitter than pleasant.

Catch the full extent of young Ruth's valiant humility. From a rather sordid background and cursed family lineage, she refuses to let her past impede her future. Ruth may or may not know that God's curse on Moab—lasting ten generations—is just now at its end.⁵ What she does know is that God is worth *everything*. Those of us with personal or family histories of dysfunction can take heart. The past prevails no more when He is our Chief Goal.

Here I would like to share a side note with fellow Jewish believers in Yeshua. Years ago, when preparing my first message on the book of Ruth, I realized I did not fit neatly into any category represented by the story's cast of characters. I asked the Lord, "Are Messianic Jews Ruth, or are we Naomi?"

The answer came clearly: *Yes. You are Rumi.* Instantly, I knew He was saying to make room to humbly embrace and embody the exemplary characteristics of both Ruth and Naomi. He wants us joyfully appropriating and modeling His grace for roomy hearts and lives toward both covenant peoples.

Gleaning Blessings

Resuming our biblical tale, Ruth and Naomi set out for Bethlehem, where their arrival generates a veritable stir. Elimelech's widow has changed so much that she is barely recognizable to her countrymen. Plus, she has brought with her an unenviable Moabitess. Naomi bemoans, "The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" (Ruth 1:21). Despondent and hopeless, she changes her name from Naomi (meaning "Pleasant") to Mara (meaning "Bitter").

In modern times, Naomi's moan has been shared by many in Israel. It echoes each time another Jewish life is ravaged by yet another violent assault, or genocidal threat, aimed at the beleaguered sliver of a State. Yet this groaning of the country's corporate soul, like Naomi's, reflects an abiding—albeit perplexed—awareness that somehow God is still involved. Israel's groan will not dissuade Christians who, in the spirit of Ruth, refuse to let go of the Jewish people because they know it is alongside them that God's greatest blessings will be found. As our destinies increasingly converge, unredeemed Israel will likewise discover that her Savior and her salvation manifest through the Body of Christ.

The last days warrior bride will be a radical firebrand that provokes many Jews to envy for her Messiah. According to Romans 11:11, "Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious." For almost two thousand years, this mandate has gone largely unfulfilled. But when the Jewish people encounter a company of militant lovers in whose midst Yeshua

awesomely dwells, many of them will see Him at last—and they will reclaim the Desired of all Nations (see Haggai 2:7).

There's still more. In a sense, Ruth serves as a prototype of the friendship, mutual love and unity that is starting to blossom, in Messiah, between the children of Jacob and the children of Ishmael and Esau. Isaiah 19:19-25 prophesies a beautiful, future highway of worship by the sons and daughters of Abraham across the Middle East. This will not be climactically fulfilled until the Messianic Age (see also Psalm 76:11). However, I (along with many others) have been blessed and honored to participate in the beginning stages of what is sometimes called the Isaiah 19 movement. At this writing, not only are Israeli Messianic Jews and Arabic speaking Christians across the Middle East coming together in worship, prayer and fellowship, but some Arabic speaking nations are now establishing formal diplomatic ties with Israel.

Meanwhile, back in Ruth, the timing of Naomi's return home proves providential. It happens to be harvest season—and what better place to find food than in the House of Bread (Bethlehem)? Prophetically, Ruth's emergence in Israel at harvest season corresponds to the Church's embrace of the Jewish nation as part of the end times spiritual harvest. In Ruth's day, even the neediest in Israel could find food during a harvest, for with the season came the opportunity to glean. Gleaning was God's merciful form of social welfare whereby designated portions of crops were left for the poor to gather freely (see Leviticus 23:22).

Therefore, Ruth goes gleaning. The younger and presumably physically sturdier of the two, she undertakes the taxing job to nourish and sustain both Naomi and herself. Remarkably, from this point on Naomi never again refers to her as a daughter-in-law, but as "my daughter." Ruth is blessing Naomi as typically only a daughter (or son) would bless a mother, in covenant love and faithfulness. The profound significance of Ruth's sacrifice

is more fully grasped when we consider that the Hebrew root-based definition of the word *bless* means to “kneel to enrich.”⁶ Ruth’s kneeling in the sweltering, sunbaked fields to enrich Naomi offers a poignant picture of blessing.

God promises to bless those who bless Israel (see Genesis 12:3). Ruth, therefore, is about to glean a great deal more than grain. She quickly catches the eye of a chivalrous chap named Boaz, owner of the field in which she is studiously looking for leftovers. Tenderheartedly, he tells her, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. . . . I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled” (Ruth 2:8–9).

Ruth is honored, but baffled. We can imagine her mopping a sweaty brow, fingering sticky strands of hair from her face. “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” she asks (verse 10).

Boaz’s reply reflects his own magnanimity of spirit. “I’ve been told,” he says, “all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge” (verses 11–12).

Kinsman-Redeemer Comes in Strength

The Hebrew name Boaz means “In Him is Strength” or “Come in Strength.” As it happens, Boaz is one of Naomi’s relatives from Elimelech’s side of the family. So when Ruth comes home and reports the day’s good turn of events, Naomi is elated. She exclaims, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers” (Ruth 2:20).

The role of kinsman-redeemer was prescribed in the Old Covenant Law (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10). Certain relatives of a deceased Israelite were designated to protect the interests and inheritance of the surviving family. The kinsman-redeemer served, among other things, to father an heir for a brother who had died, thereby securing family property that would otherwise be lost due to death. But redemption by a kinsman—or his refusal to do so and his relegation of those duties to another—had to occur pursuant to specific procedures.

Naomi knows the rules. Learning of Boaz’s benevolence toward Ruth, she dares to dream again. Suddenly we hear the pleasant/bitter one praising the Lord. “Could this man be the hope of our redemption?” she perhaps thinks aloud. A strange flicker of faith—ignited by her Gentile daughter—sparks her soul. That flicker is about to explode into the surprise of a lifetime for Ruth, shaping history. Similarly, as Christians today bless the Jewish people, the question will arise in Jewish hearts, *Could this Man be the hope of our redemption?* The answer will reshape the future.

Notice what has drawn this kinsman-redeemer to the practically penniless Arab widow. The Scriptures are to the point: Ruth’s faithful and unconditional love for her Jewish mother, for the Jewish people and for their God wins his heart. Boaz is captivated by her clinging friendship to YHVH and His people. As you may know, Boaz is regarded as a type or foreshadow of Messiah.⁷ He prophetically depicts Yeshua as our Kinsman and Redeemer.

Like Boaz of Bethlehem, Yeshua redeems all that was lost due to sin and death. And like Boaz, Yeshua is captivated by our clinging friendship to His Old Covenant people. His heart is won by believers from the nations demonstrating loving faithfulness to Israel. To those aligned with His kinfolk—His brethren according to the flesh—He is revealed as Kinsman.

The Church's relationship with Israel, which parallels Ruth's relationship with Naomi, is ultimately about Messiah and following Him intimately. "May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge," Boaz says in blessing the Moabitess (Ruth 2:12). Ruth has sought refuge not so much with Naomi as with Naomi's God. The Hebrew word translated "wings" in this verse can also refer to the corner of a garment or *tallit* (prayer shawl). Unconditional love for the Jewish nation is associated with coming under the Kinsman-Redeemer's *tallit*-like cover (see Ruth 3:9). As warrior, we dare not battle without His covering; as bride, we cannot bear life apart from it.

Divine Reciprocity

Up until now in the drama, Ruth has been the one kneeling to enrich Naomi. As a result, she has curried unexpected favor from a man possessing the potential to alter the course of her life. This in turn quickens Naomi's soul to the present reality of God in *her* life. Now Naomi kneels to enrich Ruth—beyond imagination.

According to the Law, Naomi herself, as surviving spouse of the deceased—not Ruth—inherits the right of kinsman-redemption. Not only does Naomi have legal right to Boaz, but he is much closer in age to her than to Ruth (see Deuteronomy 25:5; Ruth 3:10). Surely he would make a terrific husband for the older, impecunious widow. Naomi has every commonsense reason to present herself to him for marriage. Only if she voluntarily sacrifices her rights, and all the restorative blessings associated with them, can Ruth be redeemed. Amazingly and without hesitation, this is precisely what she sets out to do. The matter is quickly resolved as far as Naomi is concerned. She approaches Ruth and says, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you

will be well provided for?" (Ruth 3:1).

Though embittered by life's hard blows, and perhaps all the more because of them, Naomi is extravagantly grateful for Ruth's loyalty and love. The young woman's steadfast devotion has transformed her, and she is able to reciprocate when the right time comes. With Ruth's best interest at heart, this consummate Jewish mother risks losing whatever she could possibly gain for her daughter's sake. For if Boaz redeems and marries Ruth, under normal circumstances Naomi is likely to fade from the scene. How probable is it a new bride will cling to a distressed, former mother-in-law once she has remarried into a prominent, upscale family?⁸ Won't a new husband and future children eventually crowd her out? Naomi takes the chance.

In a certain sense, Israel has done the same for the Church. On a national level, she has deliberately—albeit somewhat unknowingly—forgone (temporarily) the blessings of redemption. As a result, salvation has come to the Gentiles. The Jewish people's corporate rejection of Kinsman-Redeemer Yeshua has meant the reconciliation of the world through Him (see Romans 11:11, 15). To the extent the Church benefits from unsaved Israel's national spurning of salvation in Messiah, the two covenant peoples of God resemble Ruth and Naomi at the deepest level of sacrifice at this juncture in the book.

Bear in mind that if Israel's recalcitrance has benefited the nations, her repentance will propel the world toward climactic blessing:

Moreover, if their stumbling is bringing riches to the world—that is, if Israel's being placed temporarily in a condition less favored than that of the Gentiles is bringing riches to the latter—how much greater riches will Israel in its fullness bring them! . . . For if their casting Yeshua aside means reconciliation for the world, what will their accepting Him mean? It will be life

from the dead!

Romans 11:12, 15, CJB⁹

Israel's redemption will mean nothing less than life from the dead. At its apex, the Lord will literally come back and redeem the earth. Recall that Yeshua conditioned His return on the Jews' repentant embrace of Him (see Matthew 23:39). As today's Ruth blesses today's Naomi, Naomi will bless Ruth in return. This back-and-forth synergy of relationship will escalate until blessing crescendos in the Person of the Redeemer who, like Boaz, comes in strength. For this divine, mutual reciprocity between Jew and Gentile, this exquisite interdependence and fruit thereof, the warrior bride will love and fight—and never give up.

Threshing Floor Test

But back in the book of Ruth, matters are still at stake. If the Moabite is to be redeemed, Naomi must carefully prepare her according to God's ways and means. She therefore instructs Ruth scrupulously according to protocol. Her advice is not just kindly and motherly; any deviation from God's Word could backfire, dashing all their hopes to bits.

At first, Naomi's advice sounds reasonable: "Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes" (Ruth 3:3). But next it gets a little quirky and even kinky: "Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down . . . go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do" (verses 3–4). That sounds, I daresay, downright scandalous.

We can assume that Ruth, who has demonstrated nothing less than stellar character, is a chaste woman of moral purity. Could she not have balked at Naomi's "teaching"? Might she have been tempted to conclude that these Jewish ways were

getting a bit too bizarre for her? (“I’ve gone along with this ‘Israel thing’ up till now, but that’s just not how we Gentiles do it. . . .”) But no—not missing a beat, she replies, “I will do whatever you say” (verse 5).

Naomi has surrendered her rights to Ruth; Ruth surrenders hers to Naomi. Divine reciprocity between Jew and Gentile is about mutual submission and humble service. There can be no arrogance or conceit on the part of Christians toward Israel (see Romans 11:20–21, 25). Just as certain, there is no place for Jewish pride toward Gentiles. Any sense of self-importance will find itself exposed on threshing floors made manifest through birth-pain shakings. Just as Ruth’s embrace of her Jewish mother is tested on a threshing floor, there the Church’s embrace of Israel will be tested, refined and rewarded (see Matthew 3:12).

Down at the threshing floor, Ruth follows through on all she was told to do. We are allowed to eavesdrop on her encounter with Boaz—one that commences almost comically. According to the narrative,

In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.”

“The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. . . . “I will do for you all you ask.”

Ruth 3:8–11

Like Ruth, Gentile believers will emerge from their threshing floor test lavished with favor. It is there the Kinsman-Redeemer will spread over them the corner of His garment, His *tallit*. Their relationship with Him will be taken to new levels.

Jew and Gentile Together Bring Redemption

Boaz readily fulfills all the requirements of the Law to complete Ruth's redemption, just as Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the Law to redeem you and me. Then Boaz announces confidently to the community of Israel, "I have bought . . . all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife" (Ruth 4:9–10).

Boaz has rightfully been given all that belonged to Elimelech ("My God is King"), even as Yeshua has been given all things by our God who is King (see Ephesians 1:22). Like Yeshua, Boaz has also rightfully taken all that belonged to "Weakness, Sickliness, Affliction" (Mahlon) and "Wasting Away" (Kilion). As Israel and the Church join together in the spirit of Ruth and Naomi, they will be catapulted as one new humanity into new dimensions of life, freed from levels of weakness, sickliness, affliction and wasting away that have beset them both.

When Boaz claims Ruth as his, the whole community joyfully welcomes her in. No longer is Ruth a lowly foreigner; she is a full member of the household of Israel, the recipient of eternal esteem: "May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem" (Ruth 4:11). Like our forebears, we Messianic Jews must rejoice over, fully welcome, honor and bless our redeemed brothers and sisters in Yeshua from the nations.

Blessings spoken over Ruth come to pass. In the closing scene of the book, she gives birth to a son named Obed ("Servant"). Obed becomes the grandfather of King David and a direct ancestor of Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, Obed's honored mother finds herself in the lineage of the Savior of humanity, her story preserved forever. She shines into infinity as the prototypical Gentile believer who partakes of all God's

blessings of redemption because of her alignment with His Jewish people. She especially foreshadows redeemed Arabic peoples destined to uniquely receive and mediate those blessings back to Israel and the nations.

Baby Obed, meanwhile, is nurtured by Naomi as if he were her own son. Obed serves to revive Naomi to the extent that she becomes pleasant again, shedding her name and identity as Mara, or “Bitter” (see Ruth 4:16–17). By the fruit of Ruth’s redemption, she is in a sense brought back to life from the dead. She prophetically depicts Israel’s response to Christian love in hard times. The warrior bride’s relationship with the Incarnate Kinsman-Redeemer will bear fruit that serves to revive Israel, in turn unleashing blessing for the world.

God used Jew and Gentile together to bring about Messiah’s first coming. So, too, it will take Jew and Gentile together, in the spirit of Ruth and Naomi, to bring about His Second Coming. Israel will not turn to Him and be saved without the love, intercession and support of the international body of believers. This exquisite interdependence plays out in the mystery of one new humanity—a mystery the Master is unraveling in our day.

The manifest reality of one new humanity is essential to the core identity of the ekklesia. It will represent a major last days shift in the Church, further converging heaven with earth. But it will not go unopposed. As birth pains intensify, opposition against Israel and the Jewish people will also escalate, even among Christians. Only supernatural, Christlike love will keep Jewish and Gentile believers fervidly united as one.

To that end, you and I are invited to access ancient Hebraic, biblical truth about love relationship with our Bridegroom-King. God’s love affair with Israel, though described throughout Scripture, is uniquely depicted in the Song of Solomon. This incomparable book of the Bible foreshadows the love that burns in His heart for you and me today. In the years ahead,

we'll discover we must engage with, surrender to and be driven
by this holy, ardent love as never before.

4

Coming for a Bride

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4–5)

The cornerstone Hebrew prayer of traditional Judaism, called the *Shema* (meaning “Hear”), is based on the Deuteronomy passage above. Jesus calls this Scripture “the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:38). As a child, I recited it thousands of times as part of the regular, Orthodox synagogue liturgy—and I was left with a troubling question.

Why, I wondered, was it not possible to actually live out the *Shema*? Nobody I knew loved the Lord with all of his or her heart, let alone soul and strength. Not even my esteemed rabbi or devout congregational elders gave evidence of an experiential love relationship with God. None of them knew Him intimately, as had our ancestors in the Bible. Our patriarchs and prophets had all talked to God, and He talked back. They had encounters with the King; they connected with Him. If my chief command was to love the Lord with all my heart, soul and strength, I was failing miserably—and obviously I was not alone. *Why?*

I spent years searching for an answer. Never during that time did I suspect it would be found in Jesus. I had been taught that at best, Jesus was irrelevant to the Jews. At worst, He was

my enemy, responsible for unending murders, atrocities and persecutions of my people.

Growing up in a violently anti-Semitic community in the US, I personally experienced verbal and physical assault throughout my childhood by so-called Christians. The attacks, I was told, were for my alleged sin of killing Christ. Needless to say, of Christianity I was not a fan. I was certain this Christ (whoever He was) hated me. In return, I hated Him and His people--so much so, that eventually I launched a project to try to disprove the Gospels. Thankfully, the project was doomed to fail. At the end of it, Yeshua mercifully revealed Himself to me through the witness of genuine Christian love. Shocked and humbled, I gratefully gave Him my life.

From then on, the reality of the *Shema* burned in my bones. Because He first loved me, by His Spirit I could love the Lord my God, despite my weakness and sin. Today I *must*—I *want*—to love Him more and more, and then, still *more*. By grace, I want to love Him with all my heart, all my soul and all my strength. And I think you do, too.

You and I love God as our Father, as well as Creator and King. But we are also a bride with respect to God Incarnate, Yeshua the Son. The consummate relationship of Messiah to His Church, the Bible says, is akin to that of a husband and wife (see Ephesians 5:32). When Yeshua returns, He is coming for a bride who has made intentionally made herself ready for Him (see Revelation 19:7).

His bride makes herself ready through intimate devotion, worshipful affection, and heartfelt, obedient surrender. Testing and refining of her (actually, our) faith through challenging times is also part of the process. As the end of the age approaches, God will use mounting anti-Christian resistance against His people to refine and help prepare us for His return. In this chapter, we'll see how love's fire of desire for our Bridegroom-King can be kept ablaze, even in future times

of great challenge.

Some of my brothers in Christ may find the bridal theme a bit challenging. Men, allow me to point out that in biblical parlance, you are just as much part of His bride as women are part of the collective “sons of God” (see Matthew 5:9; Romans 8:14, 19; Galatians 3:26). It may surprise you to learn the overwhelming majority of expositors and teachers on bridal relationship with the Lord through the millennia have been *men*, not women. The apostle Paul, himself a rather steely sort of guy, said this: “I promised you [the Church] to one husband, to Christ . . . as a pure virgin” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Contracting Marriage with Israel

To begin, the biblical prophets vividly portray Israel as God’s bride or wife: “I was a husband to them” (Jeremiah 31:32, see also Ezekiel 16:8); “As a bride you loved Me” (Jeremiah 2:2); “You will call Me ‘my husband’” (Hosea 2:16); “Your Maker is your husband” (Isaiah 54:5); “As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you” (Isaiah 62:5). Traditionally, Psalm 45 is regarded as a Messianic depiction of that love, extolling the majesty of Israel’s Bridegroom King.

The prophets’ words are more than poetic metaphor. They reflect a very real transaction that took place in the Spirit with the sons and daughters of Jacob. That transaction resulted in a type of legal marriage ceremony according to the cultural practice of the day.

The earliest weddings in the Bible involved a man “taking” a woman to be his wife. First, he would obtain the permission of her father or male guardian, who then secured the consent of the bride-to-be. Next, the groom would simply take the young woman into his tent and consummate the union, as did Isaac with Rebecca (see Genesis 24:67). From then on, the bride belonged to him. She not only became family; she was grafted

into her husband's community.

God used this same word for “taking” when He delivered the Israelites from Egypt. He graciously told them, “I will *take* you as My own people, and I will be your God.” Most likely, they understood He was referring to marriage (Exodus 6:7). They also understood that to be “taken” by God required their active consent. He wanted a willing lover whose heart was freely given to Him.

Years later, “taking” developed into a two-stage process of formalized Jewish marriage. The first stage became known as “betrothal,” or what could today be called engagement. At betrothal, the groom-to-be presented a written proposal, which a young woman's father (or male guardian) would accept or reject. Generally, the woman's consent was also required. If accepted, the bride price would be paid at that time, and the couple was as legally bound to each other as they would ever be.¹

In like manner, not long after God spoke of “taking” Israel, He offered her a type of written marriage contract through Moses at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:5).² Its terms, set forth in the Torah, are summed up in the Ten Commandments. Most notably and primarily, the relationship was to be strictly monogamous: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). For millennia, Jewish rabbis and scholars have viewed Israel's response to God at Sinai as a formal acceptance of the proposal:

Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

Exodus 19:7–8

Much later, the ultimate bride price would prove staggering.

Nothing less than the sacrificial, atoning death of God's Son could pay for His treasured betrothed—from *all* nations (see 1 Peter 1:18–19). Consider this: The uncreated Sovereign of the universe arranged a marriage with mankind in which He fully foreknew the anguished sufferings His heart would endure paying the bride price (see Deuteronomy 31:16, 21). Realize how precious we are to Him!

Sadly, Israel showed herself unfaithful over and again to this God of perfect love. He repeatedly grieved over the wandering heart of His beloved. “You adulterous wife!” declares the spurned and jealous Holy One (Ezekiel 16:32).

Before long, sin threatened to destroy the relationship. But God remains forever faithful on His part to His vow. With stunning mercy, He prophesies reconciliation and restoration with His people:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised My oath by breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.

Ezekiel 16:59–60

Recall that God established an *unconditional*, everlasting covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, known as the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant depends not on Israel's performance, but solely on God's Word (see Genesis 12:1-3, 15:17-21). It was followed by the Mosaic covenant, which included Israel's contract for "marriage" with YHVH. Next came the Davidic covenant,^{2a} with its promise of Messiah (see 2 Samuel 7:10-16, 28-29; Psalm 132:11-12). The everlasting covenant promised by Ezekiel is called a "new covenant." Given specifically to Israel, in Yeshua it extends to anyone from any nation who believes:

"I will make a new covenant *with the house of Judah*---not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, *though I was a husband to them*, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be My people....I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34, NKJV, emphases mine)

In the New Covenant, you and I receive a new heart with which to fully love the Lord by His indwelling Spirit. By grace, we can and will fulfill that cornerstone command, the *Shema*: "The first of all the commandments is 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord Is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength'." (Mark 12:29-30)

The Bride of Messiah

In the New Covenant, Yeshua and the authors of Scripture use wedding imagery from beginning to end. At the outset John the Baptist declares, "I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of Him. The bride belongs to the Bridegroom" (John 3:28–29). Not coincidentally, Jesus' first public miracle takes place at a wedding. In the book of Revelation, heaven explodes with joy at the marriage of the Lamb (see Revelation 19:7). In between, and just before His Crucifixion, Yeshua's tells the disciples He is going to prepare a place for them (see John 14:2–3).

What would this have meant to the Twelve? They would have understood their Rabbi mysteriously referred to Himself as a bridegroom, and to His followers as a bride.

According to ancient Hebrew custom, after an espoused

groom left his intended, he zealously began preparing a place for her. The place would serve as the couple's new home. Often he simply built a bridal chamber onto his father's house, much as an add-on unit.

When it was finished, the young man was usually not the one to decide when to get his betrothed. The bridegroom himself would not know in advance the day or hour of his return for his bride. That task typically fell to his father. Then, when the father gave word, the eager groom quickly left to claim and carry away his beloved.

Meanwhile, the engaged bride was called in Hebrew a *kiddushin*, literally meaning a "sanctified one" or "set apart one." She would spend the period of separation from her fiancée preparing herself for marriage. The bride price that had been paid for her, which included monetary and other gifts, was used in part for this purpose. It is not unlike how the Holy Spirit is given to the saints to prepare for our Bridegroom-King.

The set apart *kiddushin* had but one goal: to make herself ready for the groom's return. Assisting her were close female friends and relatives, serving a bit like bridesmaids. Similarly, Messiah's collective *kiddushin*, or set apart ones, are to spur one another on toward holiness and good deeds in preparation for His return.

By ancient custom, the bridegroom could come without warning, at any hour, once his father gave word to go. To heighten the romance, he often chose to arrive in the middle of the night. This meant the bride and her attendants were responsible to watch diligently for signs of his coming. They would not want to be caught unaware or worse, asleep, at that hour. Therefore, it became customary for them to sleep with oil lamps beside their beds, with a plentiful supply of oil. Oil would be needed to light the way to journey to the wedding, which might take place nearby--or quite far away.³

Weddings were merry public events. When the bridegroom

left for the home of his betrothed, his close friends accompanied him. This made for no quiet affair. Often the exuberant young men blasted trumpets to announce their arrival. They danced and shouted in whooping excitement.

At that moment, the bride and her attendants would quickly get up, dress the *kiddushin*, and summon her family. She and her entourage would leave the house and join with the groom and his friends. Together they'd form a lively, festal procession back to his father's house. There the wedding itself would take place. And there the bridal chamber waited.

The bride and groom secreted themselves in the chamber, intimately enjoying each other for several days on end. Outside the chamber, wedding attendants, neighbors and family spent the time feasting, singing and dancing in happy celebration. The start of a marriage was a blessed community event.⁴

Yeshua's disciples would have been familiar with these customs when He spoke to them in wedding terms. His parting words in John 14 (and elsewhere) were charged, therefore, with meaning and prophetic nuance. He communicated that He Himself would pay the price for His bride. Then He would leave to prepare a place for her. Without doubt He would return for her, but only the Father knew when. Meanwhile, His set apart *kiddushin* was to keep watch and prepare for that joyful day. For this purpose, she was to use all the gifts He would graciously give her. Their reunion, at the appointed day and hour, would be rapturous and worth the wait.

Oil in Your Lamp

In Matthew 25:1-13, Yeshua urges us to prepare expectantly for the day and hour of His return. There He tells a parable about ten virgins. Half of them are wise and half of them are foolish. The virgins serve as bridal attendants before a wedding, but they can also represent the Lord's collective

bride. That each possesses lamps and some measure of oil indicates they are all bearers and carriers of light. They represent us, the corporate Body of Messiah.

Suddenly, one night as they are sleeping, a midnight cry awakens them. The bridegroom is coming! But only half the virgins have enough oil to journey out to meet him. Symbolically, only half the virgins, or believers, have enough of the Spirit of God to stay ignited to the time of His return and accompany Him in the journey. The wise virgins joyfully join Yeshua in the bridal chamber (or wedding feast or both; interpretations vary⁵).

The foolish virgins, however, must first go and find more oil. By the time they do, and catch up with the others, the door to the chamber (or feast or both) has been shut. Sadly, they are excluded from the climactic event. "Therefore, keep watch," Yeshua urges, "because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matthew 25:13).

The parable can be a bit unsettling! I don't want to be among those shut out, even temporarily, from the Lord's presence, and I trust you don't either. The fact that one day in 1975, I knelt and opened my heart to Him as Savior, does not in itself guarantee I will have oil reserves today, tomorrow or whenever He comes.

Yeshua wants us to be wise, filled and refilled with the Spirit. Whether He comes for us personally at our death, or collectively at His return, we're to stay watchful and sober, anticipating that special hour. A spectacular little book in the Bible, Song of Songs, helps show us how.

Model of Divine Love: Song of Songs

The Song of Songs (sometimes called, Song of Solomon) models for us the dizzying depths and heavenly heights of love relationship that God desires with His people. One of the

shorter books of Scripture, it describes the marriage of King Solomon to his beautiful young bride. It takes us through the up-and-down stages of their maturing love. In Solomon's bride, we can see ourselves. In King Solomon, we see a type or picture of King Jesus.

At different times through history, both Jews and Christians have found the zenith expression of intimacy with YHVH in the Song of Songs. They have discovered dazzling dimensions of His fervid affections for them both personally and as part of His collective *kiddushin*. They have been ignited and re-ignited with passion for Jesus.

What might the Song of Songs hold for us in these last days? First, please recall that Scripture was usually written to be understood in a plain and straightforward manner, according to its grammatical-historical context. For this reason, the Song of Songs is often interpreted mostly or entirely literally, as a picture of human, marital love. To be sure, that is one valid Interpretation and application.⁶

As you may also recall, however, when God wants His Word fundamentally understood as metaphor or symbolism, He makes that clear from the context. Many Jewish and Christian theologians have concluded such is the case with Song of Songs. They say a literal, grammatical-historical interpretation alone cannot by itself reasonably or sensibly account for unduly large portions of the book. The exceptional characteristics of this masterful story call for a more symbolic interpretation interwoven with the literal. So while Song of Songs does depict the majesty of marital love, at the same time, it also metaphorically portrays the relationship between our Lord and His bride.⁷

I personally believe Song of Songs will prove invaluable to the last days Church. Engaging with the breadth, depth and height of Messiah's fiery passion for us as bride, expressed so beautifully in the Song, will transform us. It will empower us to

stand firm in these last days to the end---and beyond.

Rabbinic Interpretation

Some Jewish schools of thought have long extolled the Song of Songs as “the holy of holies” of all biblical writings. They understand that love is the reason for God's relationship with Israel. They see marital love as the supreme earthly example of that love.⁸

According to Hebrew word usage, the very title of the book, “Song of Songs,” shows it to be the grandest of all songs. One rabbinic sage has said, “The entire universe’s existence was not justified until the day Song of Songs was given it. . . . He who recites a verse of the Song of Songs and treats it as if it were a nonspiritual or secular song . . . brings evil upon the world.”⁹ To my thinking, if unregenerate (but God-fearing) rabbis read this book with such reverent awe, it surely offers tremendous blessing for believers in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

Jewish scholars say the Song of Songs recounts and prophetically foresees, in sparkling imagery, Israel’s past, present and future relationship with God.¹⁰ Following the chapter progression of the Song, the allegory portrays the nation’s betrothal at Sinai, followed by her sin and spurning of YHWH. Israel repents but then backslides again--in the book and sadly, in history after the book was written.

Continued backsliding leads to Israel’s first and second exiles, which the rabbis also see in the progression of the Song. The book’s elusive and sometimes antagonistic third parties, called the “daughters of Jerusalem,” are said to represent the nations which malign and mistreat the Jews. The Song is said to close with a petition for Israel’s anticipated national regathering, future redemption and restoration by her Bridegroom-King.

The rabbis rightly discern that God's love for Israel is poetically and passionately depicted in Solomon's book. As

prophesied in the Song and throughout Scripture, YHVH will rouse and call the Jewish people back to Himself. He will graciously restore them to their destined place in His kingdom. Someday, they will discover that King Solomon writes of King Yeshua, whose love for them has been "as strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6¹¹).

Meanwhile, Christian Bible scholars who, like the rabbis, allegorically interpret the Song, have traditionally seen it as referring exclusively to God's love for the Church. They see Jesus as the Bridegroom-King, with the dedicated ekklesia as His bride. The daughters of Jerusalem are said to portray carnal believers or others who persecute the bride. As the story unfolds, there is backsliding and chastisement. Bridal love falters, then matures and overcomes. In the end, Messiah's bride is restored to her rightful place at His side. By this interpretation, believers have found and gained great strength in times of trial as well as triumph.¹²

A more complete and biblically accurate interpretation of Song of Songs is both literal and allegorical. Allegorically, the book holds meaning for both Israel and the Church. The Church is not called to replace Israel in God's heart, promises or prophetic plans. Rather, the Church is called to hold a place *for* Israel, even as Israel has long held a place for the salvation of the nations. Each of God's covenant peoples is called to bless the other.

Because God's covenant peoples share a common end times destiny, mutuality of blessing will blossom in years ahead. So together, let's tune our hearts to the romance rhythms of heaven as we listen to Solomon's timeless Song. Engage with God's heart for His bride. Hear the unique and special rhythm God would sing over *you*—one blending beautifully with the myriad of harmonies filling celestial realms. Hear the Spirit's new song for today.

The Regal Romance: Chapters 1-2

Song of Songs begins by ushering us into the newlywed relationship of King Solomon and his bride. The young woman is identified only once, in chapter 6 verse 13. There she is called the Shulamite. The name or reference *Shulamite* is said to mean "woman of Jerusalem" or "safe, whole and peaceful one." *Shulamite* stems from the same root as the word *shalom*.

The Shulamite's bridegroom, Solomon son of David, comes from royalty. In contrast, the young woman's background is plain and simple. So while enthralled with her husband, she is understandably insecure in the new, regal marriage. Legally she is a queen, but she does not yet feel "safe, whole and peaceful" in her identity or place in the kingdom. She resembles many of us when we first come to Jesus.

How does Solomon respond to his bride's insecurity? Does he cast her aside and replace her with another? Not at all! Nothing in the story suggests anything less than resolute devotion toward her. Instead, with supreme wisdom, the king helps her mature in confidence and stature. Watching how Solomon and his bride interact, we see how beautifully they mirror our own relationship with our King. (We do learn elsewhere in Scripture that Solomon had many wives. But for our purposes here, that is another matter.)

From the outset, the Shulamite is unabashedly passionate toward her new husband: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine" (Song of Songs 1:2). Solomon's bride does not withhold her desire for him and his kiss. With this he is not the least bit displeased. The two are in a tender and sweet honeymoon phase of their relationship.

Like the Shulamite, many of us experience a type of honeymoon relationship with Yeshua when first we come to Him. Our passions run high. We crave His kiss, meaning the words of His mouth. This pleases Him greatly. The written

Word (in Greek, *logos*) and the personal words He speaks to our hearts (*rhema*) touch and transform us. Yeshua *wants* us enamored with His affections expressed through His words of truth. He wants our yearning for more of Him and the words of His mouth never to end. The intensity of romance experienced during honeymoon may fade, but holy, divine love only deepens with time. It matures.

On closer examination, we see that maturity must take place. We see the bride is actually quite focused on herself. She is enthralled with what her lover brings to her, but not so much with what she brings to him. She's concerned about receiving love, but not in giving it: "Let him kiss me...for your love is...delightful..." Again, she reflects us, the bride of Messiah, in the early phase of our relationship with our King.

Quite soon, precisely because the Shulamite is self-absorbed, her attention turns from her beloved to her own perceived deficiencies. "Dark am I, yet lovely," she laments. "Do not stare at me because I am dark" (Song of Songs 1: 5–6). She, a queen, is ashamed of herself.

The bride's darkness symbolizes those areas where light does not yet shine on her. But notice those areas are only skin deep. They do not define her. They are based on weakness or immaturity stemming from her previous life, not from sin. That is why, despite the fact she is dark, she is also "lovely."

How does the king respond to her self-conscious critique? He calls forth from his bride the light he sees within her and all that is lovely in her. He gently turns her gaze from herself back onto him.

Like you and me, the Shulamite has committed to an unending process of maturation in relationship with her king. You and I, like her, can feel self-conscious or ashamed of our past, our weaknesses or faults. Out of an undue sense of failure, fear or imperfection, we can pull back or withhold ourselves from the Lord. We can wrongly surrender to feelings

of condemnation that do not come from Him.

Sometimes, our emotions reflect the conviction of the Spirit because we have sinned. He may be nudging us to repent so that intimacy with the King can be restored. Other times, the reason for our inhibition is simply our immaturity. When that is the case, we are to take our cue from Solomon's bride. She stops looking at herself and starts looking at her king. She does not withhold herself from him; she responds to his words of truth and surrenders to love. Then, in giving herself to him, she is transformed by the light of his love.

The Lord loves us—and enjoys us—even though we are not yet His fully matured bride. He delights in us during the up-and-down, but earnest, process of spiritual growth. Abiding in His love is not narcissistic; it is biblical. We were created to love and to live in close connection to heaven. When we discover the genuine joy we are to our King, we do not want to withhold ourselves from Him. To do so would deprive Him of the pleasure He takes in us. We would find ourselves grieving at His grieving over the loss of our companionship. Quickly we want to give ourselves back to our King, which is precisely what He wants too.

We are not to wait until we feel we've achieved peak performance or desirability before giving God our all. Such a delay is inevitably deceptive, based on shame or pride or both. If our will is sincerely surrendered to Yeshua, that is enough to intentionally turn and surrender to Him in the manner of the bride in the Song. When we do, He joyfully responds, like Solomon: "How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves" (verse 15).

The bridegroom admires his young wife's eyes as doves. Doves not only mate for life, but they possess a peculiar ability to focus and maintain vision.¹³ In Scripture, they symbolize innocence and purity. It could be said that a pair of doves--love birds--have eyes only for each other. They remind us to

lock in on Jesus.

The Lord loves when your eyes gaze into His despite a world of distraction. Moreover, with your sight set on Him, you will see yourself as He sees you. That is why, when the Shulamite sees herself through the eyes of her beloved, she can rightly declare, “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys” (Song of Songs 2:1). Likewise, your life surrendered to Jesus is fragrant as flowers of the field. And He loves how you smell!

The bride continues to revel in romance with the king: “I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love” (verses 3–4). Similarly, Messiah’s bride sits at heaven’s banqueting table, partaking of His fruit and savoring its sweetness. At His table we are refreshed, nourished, strengthened and matured. (see verse 5).

Time at the table enables King Solomon’s bride to confidently conclude, “My lover is mine and I am his” (verse 16). With these eight words, her focus shifts from romance to reality, from fascination to fact. Her heart begins to pivot; love starts to mature. The Shulamite is a bit more secure now in the marriage.

Similarly, as you and I linger at the table with our King, our hearts begin to beat to the settled knowledge of His love. Spiritual growth—surrender, sanctification, security and service—rests on the blessed assurance that Jesus is ours.

Grooming the Bride: Chapters 2-4

The Lord is committed to conforming us to nothing less than His own likeness (Romans 8:29). This is essential for our future, queen-like role in His eternal kingdom. Sometimes the process is pleasant, but sometimes it is painful. At all times it is driven by love and for our own good. We see this modeled and illustrated in chapters 2-4 of Song of Songs.

The Shulamite has announced, “My lover is mine and I am

his." But again, look closely at her words. She still regards the relationship mostly as one that gives her satisfaction. The king's satisfaction remains secondary. She boasts that he belongs to her--and in this she is correct. She is not so correct, however, in that she does not understand that primarily, *she* is *his*. Yet it is an understandable, forgivable ignorance. The bride is young and still getting to know her king. She is inexperienced. But Solomon cannot let her stay that way.

The wise king knows how best to help his cherished one grow in her identity and role. Her destiny is with him, reigning at his side. She will soon have to rise up to the occasion. And so he challenges her, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me" (Song of Songs 2:10). But when he does, a crisis ensues.

Although she adores her beloved, the bride is afraid. She looks not at him but at the perceived troubles ahead. She sees obstacles in the form of "rugged hills." It is dark and scary and so she shrinks back. She tells him to go without her—but to return soon. "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag [running and returning swiftly] on the rugged hills" (verse 17). The bride is unwilling or unable to trust.

In gentle chastisement, but as she requested, the king leaves. He temporarily withdraws his manifest presence from her.

Soon the Shulamite is lovesick, feeling lost apart from her king. She is compelled to find "the one my heart loves" (see Song of Songs 3:2). She still has to rise up—but she must do it alone. She, not Solomon, will now be the one to go after the beloved. This proves harder than having said "yes" to him at the outset would have been. Yet through it, the bride gains strength and confidence. The power of love overcomes (see Song of Songs 3:1–3).

To the bride's delight, the king allows himself to be readily

found. At that moment she cries, "I held him and would not let him go" (verse 3:4). At their reunion, Solomon reveals to her, for the first time, aspects of his character, together with his royal power and authority, that bedazzle her. She sees that her husband can and will protect her. She begins to understand he will keep her in good care wherever they go (see verses 7–11). He is trustworthy. A lesson has been learned and devotion is deepened.

Not once does the king rebuke his beloved for not having gone with him when he asked. The separation itself has been punishment enough. Instead, he lavishes affection on her: "All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you . . . *You have stolen my heart*, my sister, my bride. . . . How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! . . . You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride." (Song of Songs 4:7, 9, 10, 12, emphasis mine)

Stunningly, you and I have in a sense "stolen" the heart of Yeshua. He has intentionally left Himself vulnerable to us, in a manner of speaking. To understand this dynamic is to understand our very high value, by grace, to our Creator. To understand our high value, by grace, is to understand who we truly are. To understand who we are, by grace, is to fall more and more in love with our Bridegroom-King. It was this way, too, for the Shulamite.

Dark Night of the Soul: Chapters 4-5

The better she comes to know her king, the better the Shulamite knows herself. Before long, she embraces the identity her king calls forth in her. This leads her to fall even more in love with him. Soon, she is more concerned with blessing her king than with getting blessed by the king.

Understanding her high value, she wants to give herself more and more fully to her husband. Her joy is now in knowing

she gives *him* joy. Therefore, she surrenders to, and even invites, discomfort or hardship for this to occur: "Awake, north wind [symbolizing cold hardship], and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits." (Song of Songs 4:16)

Likewise, Messiah's bride surrenders to, and even invites, both north and south winds to blow on her garden. She is willing to submit to discomfort or hardship, if necessary, for Jesus' sake. In this context, north winds symbolize the testing of our faith during seasons of difficulty. South winds represent gentler breezes that stir and carry the fragrance of our fruitfulness, casting seeds for more fruitfulness.

Now, I am not suggesting we pray for hardship. Nevertheless, it is typically in times of testing that you and I are most conformed to the likeness of Christ. Through difficulty, our faith is stretched; our pride, pulverized. We die to self that He might live in us, that we might carry His Presence wherever we go. Then, when gentler south winds blow on our garden, the fragrance of fruitfulness gives Him pleasure and glory. (See 2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

In Song of Songs 5:2-7, a north wind blows. Unexpectedly, one night the king comes to visit his bride. He knocks at her door, asking to please be let in. But the Shulamite, not wanting to be inconvenienced, says no. She has already gone to bed.

Responding to her recalcitrance, and still hoping to get in, Solomon thrusts his hand through a window latch. This gesture of passion stirs the bride's heart. She gets up but by the time she opens the door, her beloved is gone. She cries, "I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure" (verse 6). The north winds kick in.

What follows is an excruciating period of the bride searching for the presence of her king. She spends a tortuous night roaming city streets, plaintively hunting for her husband. In the

process, she is terribly misunderstood by others. She is cruelly attacked and wounded by local authorities who themselves are subjects of the king. Nevertheless, the bride persists, steadfastly praising her beloved despite her confusion at what he has done. To her accusers and abusers, she is never mean spirited. She stays focused on her king, extolling his singular beauty in grand detail. In every respect, she insists, he remains altogether worthy (see verses 10–16). He is worth searching and waiting for, whatever it takes.

Believers have long identified with this experience as the “dark night of the soul.” Virtually all of us have felt, at different times, the absence of God’s manifest, intimate or personal presence. Sometimes this is because we have sinned, perhaps consciously or unconsciously resisting Him, not unlike the Shulamite. But sometimes, His spiritually palpable presence is withdrawn for no apparent reason. Never is it enjoyable.

I have learned my responsibility during such times is to steadfastly trust and praise the Lord. These tests, however confounding, are temporary. My Messiah is always faithful to reveal Himself at the right time. When He withholds understanding of the process, it is because I myself am *in* process. He is answering my prayers for north and south winds to blow, that He might possess me more fully. Afterward, I am always thankful and glad He did.

On another level, the dark night of the soul paints a prophetic picture of Israel in her estrangement from God. Recognizing this, one Jewish scholar goes so far as to say that in that portion of the Song, Israel is saying to the nations:

When you recognize God’s greatness, testify that I realize the cause of my sufferings is not due to His inability to rescue me, or because He has cast me off, never to return to me. I am fully aware my travail is because His chastisements of love are designed to awaken me to repentance.¹⁴

Could there be a more penetrating and prophetic confession by the Jewish nation? Israel foresees the Gentiles will recognize God's greatness in the future. She pleads with them not to regard her as cast off forever. Instead, she asks them to testify on her behalf that she suffers only temporarily, and only because of God's jealous love for her. In this poignant admission she comes so near---yet sadly remains so far from---the genuine repentance of which she speaks. Nevertheless, Israel's dark night of the soul, like ours, is designed for her own good. Someday soon, it will cause her to turn to Yeshua and be wholly and gloriously possessed by Him.

Transformed Bride at His Side: Chapters 6-8

The day is coming when redeemed Israel declares as a nation, "I am my lover's and my lover is mine" (Song of Songs 6:3). A similar day lies ahead for Yeshua's corporate bride from all nations. She will have made herself ready with passionate anticipation for His appearing and return (see Revelation 19:7). Meanwhile, even today, you and I can boldly profess, by grace, those same words of intimate, infinite love.

Back in the Song of Songs, the bride's dark night of the soul is coming to an end. As it does, she confidently proclaims, "I am my lover's and my lover is mine." She has proved faithful to the king in his absence. Now, when he reappears, she basks in his glory and light.

Though still in process, Solomon's bride has been transformed. She has persevered through tough times, resisting the temptation to quit. She has given public witness of her faith and of her king through word and deed. She has fought the good fight and overcome, emerging in the beauty of regal humility. Again, she models for us the process of spiritual growth and maturing in love for our King.

With ardent affection, Solomon praises his beloved. He

extols her not only as cherished bride, but now, as valiant warrior: "You are beautiful, my darling. majestic as troops with banners" (verse 4). In fact, she so captivates his heart that he goes on to say, "Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me" (verse 5).

Solomon's words reflect the passion of Yeshua for His beloved warrior bride. He is overwhelmed and overcome, so to speak, with desire for us. The concept is dizzying!

Years ago, during a time of contemplative prayer and worship, I experienced a vision of this immense and passionate, holy love. A vivid picture popped into my "mind's eye" wherein I saw Yeshua seated on a magnificently blazing, heavenly throne. His eyes were set intently on His beloved ones below, His bride on the earth. His heart pounded with passion that reverberated through the heavens. His muscles flexed as if poised for action. At the same time, all over the planet, His worshiping bride looked up at Him with fiery passion and purity. So steadfast was her gaze that she appeared oblivious to a ferocious battle raging all around her. The irresistible power of Yeshua's heart for her, and her heart for Him, literally magnetized each to the other. This reciprocal attraction proved so powerful as to disrupt natural laws of the physical universe. With great anticipation, the Lord began to descend toward His bride, almost as if pulled down. As He approached, she ascended toward Him. They met in the air with glorious, unspeakable joy.

It is possible, I suppose, that I was given a glimpse of the Rapture, the bridal ekklesia caught up in the clouds, described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. I do not know. What I do know is that His impassioned love for His bride "burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench [this] love; rivers cannot wash it away" (Song of Songs 8:6–7). I also know the Uncreated Sovereign of the Universe has left Himself eternally desirous of the love and affection of flesh-and-blood human

beings like you and me. Therefore, He tenderly, endlessly drives us to the perfection of that love. As does Solomon with his bride in the Song of Songs.

The Shulamite has come far in her relationship and journey with her king. She has declared, "I am my lover's and my lover is mine." The statement is highly laudable and reflects her beautifully maturing heart. Yet there is more.

Still greater heights and depths of love await King Solomon's bride. The call to surrender to love never ends. This time, however, there is not another dark night of the soul. At this phase of the relationship, love will mature through her choice to simply linger in the presence of the king, allowing him to love on her.

Ravished by his presence, the bride is transformed. We hear her say, "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me" (Song of Songs 7:10). From her perspective, the relationship is no longer mostly about her. She belongs to her king. The fire of love has consumed self-interest and self-consciousness.

Possessed by love, the bride is so transformed as to prove unrecognizable. Now she is willing and able to walk alongside her king as she'd always been destined to do. But as she walks, she leans on him. She no longer walks on her own. Surprised onlookers ask, "Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?" (Song of Songs 8:5).

Similarly, you and I emerge from our desert journey, or dark night of the soul, leaning on Jesus like never before. Dependence on our own strength gives way to the power and beauty of His life and His leadership in us. Together we walk, placed as a seal on His heart, for "love is as strong as death" (see verse 6). Anticipating the moment of Messiah's return, we cry, "Make haste, my beloved!" (verse 14, NKJV). The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" (Revelation 22:17)

Until that glorious day, God has given us a special, set apart time to engage in the holy romance of His love. That day is

called the Sabbath, or in Hebrew, *Shabbat*. The Sabbath mysteriously converges heaven with earth--and all humankind is Invited (actually, commanded) to enter In. In the next chapter, we see why and how.

5

Sabbath Rest

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:9–11)

"Come, my beloved, let us welcome and greet the Sabbath bride." So begins the Hebrew song *Lekha Dodi*,¹ sung by Jewish families around the world for centuries to inaugurate the seventh day of the week. For observant Jews, Sabbath celebration takes on bridal undertones. A foretaste of the Kingdom of God during the Messianic Age and beyond, it is a date with Deity, His set-apart time for Israel to celebrate her love relationship with the King. A type of weekly, metaphoric wedding chamber, the Sabbath provides a place in time for intimate communion between YHWH and His betrothed. In the Sabbath a dimension of heaven and earth converge.

In Messianic grace, the Sabbath is a gift of exceeding joy. A burned-out bride cannot keep extra oil in her lamp. A battle-fatigued warrior endangers not just himself, but his entire company and possibly the conquest. Lack of rest can easily mean loss of intimacy with Yeshua—and from intimacy flows true Kingdom advance. Today the Spirit is restoring God's rest with fresh anointing for the Sabbath day. Old fears about

legalism are yielding to the delight of the divine romance revived through Sabbath sanctification.

Sabbath observance is not a matter of earning or keeping salvation. It has nothing to do with somber restrictions or religious rules. These inevitably convert a day of grace and joy into a work of the flesh. Sadly, some Christians and Jews throughout history have succumbed to legalism regarding the Sabbath. But that does not mean the gift no longer serves as a portal to genuine spiritual renewal.

Have you perhaps been taught the New Covenant abolishes the command or need for Sabbath rest? Bear in mind the Sabbath existed even before God's laws were given to Israel. It is one of several biblical principles so reflective of the created order as to transcend the written Law. Other pre-Law principles include the prohibition against murder (see Genesis 4:10–11) and the practice of tithing (see Genesis 14:18–20). These fundamental standards of human behavior were observed long before Israel came into existence, and few if any Bible believers would presume they are no longer relevant. Consider also that Jesus, the apostles and New Covenant churches all kept the Sabbath. Though some chose to observe it the first day of the week rather than the seventh, is it possible they knew something we today have forgotten?

God Rested

After Deity fashioned from dust the climax of His creation—mankind made in His image—the universe experienced a profound, holy hush:

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and *made it holy*, because on it he

rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Genesis 2:2–3, emphasis added

Can you imagine the incomparable cosmic event?

The original Sabbath, hallowed from *before* the fall to sin, was surely a special, singular event shared between Creator and creation. Every other day God would set apart in Scripture would relate to redemption from sin. But the Sabbath stands alone. It is ordained and set apart notwithstanding the rebellion of the created. It becomes the first thing under heaven God declares holy. Day Seven—in Hebrew, *Yom Shabbat*, from which the English word “Sabbath” is derived—is uniquely identified with YHWH. Not coincidentally, the number seven in the Scriptures represents completion and wholeness.

I imagine God spent the inaugural seventh day taking immense pleasure in His completed handiwork—an untainted world that intrinsically worshiped Him (see Psalm 19:1). All creation declared His glory as we've never seen or heard! I also believe He very much enjoyed *Himself* within the Godhead. Divine delight was shared in intimate, pure and unparalleled communion with human beings created in His image.

For our progenitors Adam and Eve, the Sabbath served as a day to partake uniquely of God's joy in His majestic handiwork. They would cease from their own creative endeavors associated with subduing the earth (see Genesis 1:28). The day was a set apart and precious, necessary gift: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). This is why dishonoring the gift of Shabbat dishonors the Giver of the Shabbat.

God did not do *nothing* on the initial seventh day. He did do something quite significant. He rested. The Omnipotent One, of course, was not tired and did not need to refresh Himself. But He did refrain from creative activity on earth. The Hebrew

word for “rest” simply means to cease from activity. In ceasing to work, however, God did not cease *being* God Almighty. From the essential core of His being, YHVH continued to infuse love, goodness, peace, joy, glory and His other divine attributes throughout the universe (see John 5:17). Somehow, He actively imparted blessing to the day itself (see Genesis 2:3).

There is still more to the mystery of Shabbat. The seventh day would comprise an everlasting memorial to Creation. An act of worship, Sabbath observance would attribute praise to the Creator, rededicating to Him all He had made. In return, He would revive creation, reinvigorating the works of His hands.

Through Church history, most Christians attributed high value to the Sabbath. When I grew up in mid-20th-century America, many cities still maintained strict Sabbath laws. Virtually all businesses, shops and nonessential service providers were closed on Sunday. It was simply a fact of life, even for us Jews who observed Shabbat on Saturday.

Widespread disregard of the Sabbath on the part of Christians did not take place with the inception of the New Covenant. Rather, it evolved only recently, largely as a byproduct of post-World War II prosperity. As Western society grew busier and busier, so too did many of us believers in the West. Today, the Sabbath often means a couple of hours at a worship service (which might merely be watched online) followed by lunch with friends, then hasty preparation for the next week’s schedule of events.

What is the result? For many, life has become its own hard-driving taskmaster. Each day offers a steady stream of mounting complexities, stresses and strains. The bottom line is that consumption is king, compelling many of us to acquire an overabundance of information or opinions or material things. Secular sociologists have coined the term *affluenza*,^{1a} combining the words affluence and influenza, to describe our culture’s dis-ease of obsessively striving for more.

Not surprisingly, a perplexing new disease called chronic fatigue syndrome struck the West toward the end of the twentieth century. The natural speaks of the supernatural; our culture was growing chronically fatigued. Today, as perhaps never before, believers and nonbelievers alike are “dis-eased” and aware of a clamoring need to quiet their souls. With global shaking upon shaking, the *shalom* of genuine rest eludes even many Christians. Could it be found in restoring the Shabbat?

For the Rest of Us

When God created and blessed the Sabbath, it stands to reason a seventh day of rest was incorporated into the genetic structure of life on earth. Before sin infected our world, a weekly day of rest was already part of the ordered rhythm of life. Later, God would tell His covenant people to give the animal, plant and even mineral life under their stewardship the enjoyment of weekly Sabbath rest (see Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 25).

Man’s fall into sin soon changed everything. Not only did we lose original and ongoing connection with the Creator, but the whole earth was cursed on our account. As a result of human rebellion, the soil would yield its substance by the sweat of our brow (see Genesis 3:17–19). No longer would the Sabbath serve solely as a hallowed memorial to creation. It would become a day of much-needed rest to recover from the fatigue associated with hard labor.

Following the Fall, God next speaks of the Sabbath after Israel’s exodus and redemption from Egypt. Camped out in the desert, His people are hungry and cannot find food. Graciously, the King says He will rain down bread from heaven (manna) sufficient for them to eat. Each day they were to go out and collect the manna they needed—except on the Sabbath, for that was their day of rest. He promises, however, to provide

enough manna on the sixth day to last through the seventh. “In this way,” He says, “I will test them and see whether they will follow My instructions” (Exodus 16:4).

Notice that God tests the Jews on their obedience to the Sabbath *before* giving them the gift of Torah, or even the Ten Commandments. The Law of Moses did not institute the Sabbath. But it did include it. The main reason the Sabbath is significant is not because it is in the Ten Commandments. Rather, the main reason the Sabbath is in the Ten Commandments is because it is so significant.

From God's perspective, the Sabbath is fundamental to His interaction with humankind. It is part of the spiritual and natural rhythms of life. Moreover, God is a jealous Lover. He wants us to lay aside our personal goals one day a week to worship, adore and focus on Him.

So significant is the Shabbat that He did not want the Israelites preoccupied with even simple matters, such as collecting manna. It was “to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.” (Exodus 16:23). The loving Creator intended to tangibly reveal Himself as faithful Provider and Sustainer. On the Sabbath, there was no need for His loved ones to try to get ahead. Instead, they were to stay put and enjoy the Lord:

The Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out. (Exodus 16:29)

Sadly, on the first Sabbath day in the desert, some of the Israelites disobeyed (see Exodus 16:27). Despite all God had done and given them, out they went in search of more. They did not trust He would meet their needs; they did not really know their God. From that ancient time on, the Sabbath has been associated with an exercise of either faith or unbelief (see Hebrews 4:2).

Does anything today prevent you from engaging with God in

weekly Sabbath rest? Have you carefully and properly studied the Scriptures and concluded the day is irrelevant to New Covenant faith? To be sure, Sabbath celebration is no more a matter of earning or keeping salvation than other disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, tithing, or regular gathering with the saints. But for some of us, could it be that if we are downright honest, the reason we do not remember the Sabbath is that we do not trust God to provide all we need---or want---in just six days a week? The truth is our Creator King wants not only to provide but—according to *His* perfect understanding—to abundantly bless.

The Fourth Commandment

With a heart pulsating to bless humanity, God took His finger of fire and with it engraved His Word in stone. He included Sabbath sanctification as the fourth of ten holy commandments:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8–11)

The gift of Sabbath rest is taken in the Decalogue to new dimensions. It now includes all Gentiles who are part of the Israelite community (“aliens” in the passage above). The Divine Lover wants the seventh day holy and labor-free for them, too. Everybody, regardless of ethnic lineage, gets to “remember” and enjoy Him in sanctified rest.

To “remember,” according to the Hebrew concept, is to do much more than intellectually recount a fact or event. Biblical remembrance involves engaging one’s heart, soul and spirit with the mind in order to reexperience a dynamic truth. Israel’s remembrance of the Sabbath was meant to facilitate renewal of her love relationship with YHWH by sharing in His intimate rest. This weekly reconsecration of creation to the Creator would also serve as a “sign” or national testimony:

You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a *sign* between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. . . . The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a *lasting* covenant. It will be a *sign* between me and the Israelites *forever*. (Exodus 31:13, 16–17, emphases added)

Israel’s weekly respite in her God was to be a sign *forever*. In every generation it would testify to the nations, and internally to Israel herself, of holy covenant with Deity. In a world whose false gods afforded humanity no reprieve, Sabbath observance was a signpost of sovereign grace, a gift that distinguished the God of Israel from all other gods.

The gift of Shabbat was also a banner of redemption for those delivered from bondage to freedom:

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:15)

Does that include you? Have you been brought out of slavery (to sin) from a metaphorical Egypt by His mighty hand? If you identify with freedom in Christ by grace through faith, consider this: So supreme is the Sabbath that its desecration incurred death.

Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. (Exodus 31:14–15; see also Exodus 35:2)

To the extent we reject God’s Sabbath rest, could something of the life in us die? Without weekly cessation from work and renewal in Him, do our minds, emotions and bodies prematurely wear out? Spiritually, do we lose the fullness of His *shalom*—the peace, wholeness and abundance of life which Messiah suffered and died to give us? I believe so.

Wresting the Sabbath

Some believers say that because Jesus Himself is their Sabbath rest, they feel no need to dedicate a day a week to that purpose. Their energy level seems just fine and their connection with God, quite good. They spend prolonged, focused time communing with Him daily. They study the Bible and worship regularly. Might I suggest, nevertheless, they would likely last even longer and serve the Lord even better if they honored His sanctified, seventh-day rest?

If you are like most believers, you probably want to live more fully, moment-by-moment, in Yeshua’s promised rest. In this increasingly turbulent era, stresses and strains will escalate like labor pains as we approach the hour of His return. But even in troubling times, you and are I afforded a protective and empowering Shabbat shalom (see Habakkuk 3:16, KJV). We must jealously guard and protect it, not out of superficial religious duty, but as an act of holy love.

More than a few revivalists have learned Sabbath rest is critical to sustaining a long-term outpouring of the Holy Spirit. According to Heidi Baker, a weekly, set-apart day enables us to

maintain intimacy with God and engage in the rhythm of heaven.² Jill Austin points out that rest is a form of spiritual warfare as well as obedience. She concludes, “We . . . get our batteries charged and then go. [But often] we fail to rest, and then we break down and are forced to rest. There is a lot of exhaustion that is not from God.”³

Sometimes believers who zealously love the Lord find it hard to cease from the work of ministry to Him and His people. The needs of others are so great they do not feel it is right to take a day off. I confess I was one of them. For many years as a believer, I did not think it particularly important to remember the Sabbath day. I dedicated intimate, devotional time *every* day to God. Ministry in the Spirit did not tire me out; it energized me. There was so much Kingdom work to do—that I loved doing. The fields were ripe for harvest, and I had been called to them. Besides, none of the Christian leaders I knew seemed to care about Sabbath day celebration. Resting for 24 hours straight seemed either irrelevant or outmoded or impractical.

Eventually, however, I came into a season when, despite many deep encounters with the Spirit of God, I was not living in His settled *shalom*. For even at the time of harvest, God summons us to rest: “Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest” (Exodus 34:21). Laboring in spiritual harvest fields could no longer provide an excuse for my dismissing of Sabbath rest.

Moreover, during that same season, I happened to be teaching a series about Old Covenant roots of New Covenant faith. The sessions all went well until a week before I was to teach about Shabbat. I sat down at my desk to prayerfully prepare and immediately realized I could not minister about a reality to which I did not personally connect. I had no alternative but to observe the next Saturday as a day of rest—

gladly and wholeheartedly—in order to teach about it with integrity the following Sunday.

I had no idea where to begin. My only experience with attempting to hallow the Sabbath was in traditional, religious Judaism. So I prayed---a bit desperately---and was led to observe the upcoming Sabbath in a very simple way. I would set the day apart according to the Scriptures, but in a fresh, very personal manner. I was not led to follow the Jewish traditions I grew up with, though much beauty and blessing can be found in them. (A few months later, some of those traditions did become part of our family Sabbath practice.)

To be quite transparent, I viewed that initial Shabbat almost as an experiment. Yet the results amazed me. I share with you the day's events not at all as a formula, but as a personal testimony of what the Spirit can do.

First, I spent prolonged time with God in the Scriptures, worship and prayer. I did not travail in intercession; that would have been work! To celebrate Him as Creator, I took a long, leisurely walk outdoors, praising Him for His creative handiwork: trees, flowers, birds, breezes, even neighborhood dogs barking at me along the way. I rejected any stress-generating or work-related thought, refused phone calls and abstained from electronics. I did not cook, having prepared meals the day before. I read an uplifting devotional and spent peaceful, enjoyable time with my family. Toward evening I listened to worship music and soaked in a heavenly presence of the Spirit. By the end of the day, my heart was soaring in God's love. I went to bed early, and my sleep was sweet.

This holy and jealously guarded rest in the intimate presence of my Savior was thoroughly and wonderfully refreshing. Surprisingly, its impact did not wear off the next day. In fact, I found it easier to abide in His rest throughout the whole next week. The experiment was enough to convince me of the transformative reality, not tiresome ritual, of God's

set apart, seventh day. It was the beginning of a Sabbath lifestyle He has since called me to embrace.

Sabbath in the Holy Land

My favorite Sabbaths are now in Jerusalem, where we currently live. If you have been to Israel on a Saturday, you know that parts of the country come to a complete, 24-hour halt, starting Friday at sundown. Jerusalem, in particular, goes on a type of sacred lockdown. Quiet calm descends over the usual clamor of bustling city life, punctuated by cheery voices of families strolling to or from neighborhood houses of worship. In accordance with God's command and the local culture, Messianic congregations also meet either on Friday or Saturday. Shabbat in the Holy City saturates my soul with a heavenly hush, perhaps reminiscent of the first Day Seven and prophetic of the Messianic Age to come.

In the Law of Moses, and apart from the Ten Commandments, God gave Israel new instructions pertaining to Shabbat in the land of covenant promise. He provided for regular rest, rededication and renewal of the land itself. The earth and everything in it belongs to Him (see Psalm 24:1). The Creator Redeemer is our Owner; we are but stewards of what He has entrusted to our care. Accordingly, every seventh year the ground was to be given a complete rest. No planting, pruning or harvesting was to take place (see Leviticus 25:2–5). During the Sabbatical year the land lay fallow, God would supernaturally provide. He promised to release “such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years” (Leviticus 25:21).⁴

Consider the awesome beneficence of our King who gives His people a whole year off! What a potential testimony to the neighboring nations—and what tragic consequences if the Israelites spurned His good gift:

I will scatter you among the nations . . . then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it. (Leviticus 26:33–35)

Sadly, there is no biblical record of the Israelites ever fully keeping a Sabbath year. Warnings of judgment came from the prophets—but to no avail. Finally, the seemingly unthinkable occurred when God’s holy zeal forced temporary eviction from the land to enforce, among other things, Sabbath rest. Then “the land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested” (2 Chronicles 36:21).

Israel’s failure to remain in her place of promise was due in significant part to neglecting Shabbat. Habitual desecration of the seventh day became reason for her exile from the Holy Land. Since her history serves as an example for New Covenant believers, what might it speak to us today?

Idolatry and Unbelief

According to the Scriptures, the underlying reason Israel dishonored the Sabbath was idolatry:

They rejected My laws and did not follow My decrees and desecrated My Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to their idols. . . . They had not obeyed My laws but had rejected My decrees and desecrated My Sabbaths, and their eyes lusted after their fathers’ idols. (Ezekiel 20:16, 24)

To be blunt, sometimes the reason we do not sanctify the Sabbath is that, like the Israelites, we are busy worshiping other gods. Anything we might consciously or unconsciously value more than the Lord—including family, friends or (even good) achievements—will often keep us from a day of rest. Sometimes the unconscious idol is mammon, or money (see

Matthew 6:24). Preoccupation with money can stem from greed, or just as often, from fear of lack of provision.⁵

Serving in ministry, caring for family and functioning in a fast changing world, I sometimes feel there were not nearly enough hours in the week to care for the responsibilities I had to juggle. Admittedly, I am still sometimes tempted to forgo a Shabbat to tackle an endless list of personal chores or ministry needs. Early in my Sabbath experience, however, the Holy Spirit whispered a gentle rebuke that still resounds in my heart. *The reason you're driven to take care of endless things, He said, is that you're bowing to an idol of self-preservation. Honoring My Shabbat will break its hold on you.*

I was stunned. His loving words gripped me with a conviction that staked claim to my soul. At the core of my being, I was trusting myself more than Him to keep my life in order. *You forget*, He went on to say, *that My ability to create includes My ability to sustain.*

Friends, a very real dynamic exists between idolatry and unbelief. In matters where you or I do not believe the one true God, we can unconsciously bow to another.

The children of Israel did not enter God's rest because of idolatry and unbelief. Yet a promised rest remains for all who *do* believe. Jesus makes available to you and me, every moment of every day, a certain, very real Sabbath rest. In Messiah, a dimension of this blessed and holy seventh day is available to us always, transcending time. But His blessing does not eradicate the Sabbath day itself. Rather, it extends and expands the scope of seventh day rest. In the Kingdom, God graciously gives us more of the Sabbath—and in the Sabbath He graciously gives us more of the Kingdom.

Sabbath As Prophetic Intercession

The Jewish people have long regarded the Sabbath as a

foretaste of the Messianic Age to come. Abraham Joshua Heschel summarizes:

The essence of the world to come is Sabbath eternal, and the seventh day in time is an example . . . given as a foretaste of that world to come; *ot hi le-o'lam*, a token of eternity.⁶

Ceasing from work, delighting in Deity and abiding in His *shalom* connects us with heaven. The manifest reality of Shabbat ushers in a dimension of the Kingdom of God with all the combined nuances of Day Seven—completion, wholeness, total restoration and peace.

The Bible says a thousand years are as one day in God's view of time (see Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, some speculate that the inception of a seventh millennium of history will herald a seventh "day." By this reckoning, the seventh "day" ushers in the pinnacle Sabbath of all time—the rule of Messiah on earth for a thousand years. This would coincide with the thousand years of Jesus' reign, usually called the Millennium, described in the book of Revelation (see Revelation 20:2–7).

To some Jewish scholars and rabbis, hints of the Messianic Sabbath age are disclosed by the Hebrew calendar. In their thinking, aspects of God's dealings with the world can be divided into seven increments of approximately a thousand years. The revision of this book in 2022 coincides with the Hebrew year 5782; therefore, we are nearing completion of the sixth increment, or the year 6000. At that time, some expect the dawning of the Messianic Age, the start of the seventh increment or seventh millennium. To prepare, they are zealously praying for King Messiah to come.

Their hypothesis may or may not prove correct; time will tell. In any event, it is interesting to note that six is the number representing mankind in Scriptures. From a New Covenant perspective, following man's ways apart from Messiah for six

thousand years culminates in the rule and reign of the Antichrist. That culmination heralds the ripeness of time for the release of God's righteous judgments in the nations, including Israel. Then, after this period of fiery judgment comes a glorious, global Shabbat, the Millennium or Messianic Age. It lasts for a thousand years, or earth's seventh "day."⁷ Then comes a new heaven and earth, amazingly resplendent beyond human imagination (see Revelation 21:1; 1 Corinthians 15:24).

Meanwhile, as God's people remember and rejoice in the Sabbath, by our words and deeds we proclaim YHVH as Creator and Sovereign of the Universe. This, I believe, actually serves as a form of prophetic intercession for the Sabbath age to come---and for the Lord's return. When by the Spirit we engage with Shabbat, supernatural and natural realms are transformed. In a real sense, the Spirit and the bride cry out to Messiah, "Come!" And soon He will.

When Messiah returns, the seventh day will finally be kept according to God's magnificent design. Scriptures describing the Messianic Age point to the continued sanctity of Shabbat. For example: "From one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me" (Isaiah 66:23). "The priests . . . are to keep my laws and my decrees for all my appointed feasts, and they are to keep my Sabbaths holy" (Ezekiel 44:24).

Do these passages suggest that in the future we will revert to observing and relating to the Law the same as before Yeshua atoned for humanity's sin? Not at all! But they do reflect an indelible importance attached to the Sabbath day. Consider this: The prophet Ezekiel foresaw the grandeur of worship in the Messianic Age to come. When our Bridegroom-King dwells in His holy Temple in Jerusalem, the gate to its inner court will be shut six days a week. Yet, on the occasion of Shabbat, the inner gate to His presence will be opened to us. At that time, "On the Sabbaths . . . the people of the land are to worship in the presence of the Lord at the entrance to that gateway"

(Ezekiel 46:1-3). Special entry will be afforded into the majestic presence of Yeshua every seventh day. Sabbath in the Millennium will be spectacular!

Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath Now

Jesus reminded the Jews of His day that the Sabbath was made for them; they were not made for the Sabbath (see Mark 2:27). The Jewish people (like all other nations) were made for God. They were to worship Him alone, not Day Seven. The fact that Jesus corrected some of the religious leaders' wrong attitudes about the Sabbath is sometimes misunderstood to mean that He did away with the Sabbath altogether. But that is not what the Master taught. He did denounce hypocritical, man-made traditions that undermined and violated the purpose and spirit of Shabbat. The manner in which certain religious leaders were observing the day dishonored God precisely because the Sabbath still remained holy. It was, in fact, in this context that Messiah declared He is Lord of the Sabbath, thereby affirming the continued sanctity of the day (see Matthew 12:8).

Yeshua said He did not come to abolish the Law but to *fulfill* it" (see Matthew 5:17). By His Crucifixion and Resurrection, Messiah fills the Sabbath full of Himself. As we have seen, as we abide in Him, He becomes our Sabbath rest. In Him, an aspect of seventh-day rest is graciously accessible to us every day, just as other aspects of the Messianic Age are graciously accessible to us every day in this present age.

This is why, in the New Covenant, Yeshua consistently celebrated the Sabbath and kept it holy.⁸ Never did He desecrate the day or violate Scriptures concerning it. Like Yeshua, the apostle Paul was a dedicated Sabbath keeper. Though Paul never explicitly required Sabbath observance, he never taught believers to forsake it, either. He knew the

Scriptures promised blessing to Gentiles, as well as Jews, for keeping the Sabbath---in the right spirit:

And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord [Gentiles in the Old Covenant] to serve Him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship Him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to My covenant—these I will bring to My holy mountain and give them joy in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on My altar. (Isaiah 56:6–7)

Personally, I have never met a believer, Gentile or Jewish, who chose to embrace a Sabbath lifestyle according to the Scriptures and then regretted it, if their goal and focus was obeisant intimacy with God.

What about Sunday?

Most believers today who keep the Sabbath do so on the first rather than the seventh day of the week. The tradition is mostly based on decisions made by early Church fathers to cut ties with Old Covenant faith and with Jewish Christians.⁹ Before long, Church-state authorities decreed Sabbath observance on the seventh day to be unlawful and to constitute the crime of Judaizing. Believers found guilty of Judaizing were then excommunicated from the Church and ostracized by society. In 364, for example, the Church of Rome issued this statement:

Christians must not Judaize by resting on Saturday, the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day, Sunday; and if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be Judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.¹⁰

Ironically, by this edict believers were *required* to work on the seventh day.

Some Christians have been taught the New Covenant Church started gathering on the first day of the week instead of on the seventh, specifically to honor the Resurrection. To be sure, one (but only one) verse, Acts 20:7, indicates believers gathered on one (but only one) occasion on the first day of the week. The Bible gives no evidence at all that this gathering actually replaced the seventh day of rest.¹¹ The meeting was apparently held as a celebration following, and in addition to, Sabbath worship, much like a midweek church service.

Tradition notwithstanding, some believers will find it genuinely impossible in their country and culture to set apart the seventh day of the week as a day of rest. Will our Creator meet you if you dedicate Sunday (or any other regular day of the week) to honor the Sabbath, worshiping and abiding in His presence? I am certain He is gracious enough to do just that, blessing you richly with His shalom. You will emerge, I believe, with fresh grace and vigor for Kingdom advance in the week ahead.

As you remember and rest in the Sabbath, you may find it serves as a revived Jewish root---and route---to the Holy One in a wholly new way. I suspect you may find yourself on a grand highway of holiness paved by the Spirit, a *high way* to His glory. As we see in the next chapter, this holiness summons the presence of the King and inevitably, more and more of His Kingdom on earth.

6

High Way of Holiness

“Be holy, because I am holy.”
(1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 11:45)

The prophet Isaiah interacted dramatically with heaven, beholding God in His bedazzling and matchless glory (see Isaiah 6:1–13). Following his throne room visitation, he speaks of highways of holiness converging with earth. His heart cry becomes, “Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight . . . a highway for our God. . . A highway. . . will be called the Way of Holiness” (Isaiah 40:3; 35:8, see also 62:10-11). The holiness of God’s people creates a highway in the spiritual realm and righteousness prepares a way for His steps (see Proverbs 15:19; Psalm 85:13).

Many years later, John the Baptizer echoes Isaiah’s words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near . . . ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’ ” (Matthew 3:2–3). John’s proclamation results in the repentance of a nation. A remnant of Israel returns to YHVH, and a highway of holiness is cleared between heaven and earth. Soon thereafter, Yeshua appears publicly as Messiah (see John 1:31).

The Hebrew word for “holy,” as we have seen, means “set apart.” The incomparable Holy One is quintessentially set apart from all of creation. He is set apart in the summation of His divine attributes, including His purity, perfection, sovereignty

and supremacy. In a single word, His Spirit is best characterized as holy; He is God the Holy Spirit. His redeemed people are likewise set apart. “Be holy,” He says, “because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 11:45). The command is the alluring invitation of a jealous Lover wanting to walk with His set apart ones in unending, unbridled intimacy. The call to holiness flows from the romance of redemption. My prayer for you in this chapter, therefore, is that Holy Spirit will ignite in you *His* passion for holiness.

A Passion for Holiness

The apostle John is known as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20; see also 19:26; 20:2). Among the New Covenant authors, John writes supremely on love. It is John who tells us of Yeshua’s tender, parting message to the disciples the night before He is crucified. The beloved apostle also records the penetrating words, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). A consummate carrier of the fire of God’s love, John is passionate about obedience. I think of John as a man, like David, after God’s own heart. So when he tells us, over and over again, that divine love is linked to obedience, it is good to take John at his word:

This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. (2 John 1:6)

We have come to know Him if we obey His commands. (1 John 2:3)

John is chosen to receive and record the most profound, single prophecy in the Bible—the entire book of Revelation.

Could that be on account of the disposition of his heart? Scripture teaches that God's love leads to heart driven obedience, which leads to holiness, which is related to revelation:

Without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)

We shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself... (1 John 3:2–3)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matthew 5:8)

God's gifts and heavenly deposits are dispensed freely by unmerited favor or grace. At the same time, you and I can often position ourselves to receive more by loving Him enough to keep His commands. "If you love Me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15).

In his pulsating, divine visitation, John hears this: "The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7). The bride has purposefully and intentionally made herself ready. She chooses the high way of holiness, surrendering not as a burden of legalism but as a blessing of love. Her Helper, the *Holy* Spirit, empowers her. For as it is said, it takes God to love God.

In these last days, and as we approach the coming of the Lord, the ekklesia bride is gaining a fresh perspective of the ancient Law. She is embracing, in grace, the treasure of this previously neglected portion of God's Word. She will not—and must not—return to observing the Law the same as before Messiah's once-for-all atonement for sin. But she will return---and must return---to the passion for holiness inspired by God's laws.

The Law of Love

Believers through the ages have extolled God's holiness and laws, not religiously, but in sweet adoration for Jesus:

How is godliness achieved? . . . [W]hen you have learned to love, you will not even desire to do those things that might offend the One you love. . . . Once you have established such a relationship with your Lord, you will soon discover that no fault in you escapes.¹

Many have maintained the Gospel has set aside the moral law, so that believers are under no obligation to obey it. Such was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, so severely reprobated by Christ [see Revelation 2:15]. . . . They suppose that Christ has delivered them from the law, and given them the Spirit, and that the leadings of the Spirit are now to be their rule of life, instead of the law of God. . . . This doctrine represents Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost as having taken up arms openly against the government of God. . . . The liberty of the Gospel does not consist in being freed from doing what the law requires, but in a man's being in such a state of mind that doing it is itself a pleasure, instead of a burden.

Charles G. Finney, 1837²

We are justified without the works of the law, as any previous condition of justification; but they are an immediate fruit of that faith whereby we are justified.

John Wesley, 1872³

The grace of God promotes real holiness in men.

Charles H. Spurgeon, 1883⁴

Let us remember that God's Word stands forever, and His commandments mean the same for us today. . . . We obey Your laws with joy, Father. Our eagerness to do so comes not from fear but from love.

These fathers and mothers of faith walked in ways of holiness unfamiliar to most of us today. They were not somber, dour individuals but radical, crazy-for-Jesus firebrands in their generation. They loved God's laws because they loved the Lawgiver, unreservedly. Their passion for obedience mediated, rather than mitigated, grace through faith.

Sometimes we mistake reverence such as theirs, flowing from a life of worship, for mere ritualistic religiosity. We then recoil from God's commands for fear of false restriction. But what proves false is the fear itself. The so-called restriction only releases us deeper into the perfect law of liberty that is love. (see James 1:25)

As the Holy Spirit converges Israel with the Church, a passion for the Law will be restored in holy love. To repeat, I am not suggesting we follow the Law the same as before Yeshua's fulfillment of it. I speak neither of legalism nor of "Judaizing," but of lovestruck obedience to our Bridegroom King. If our hearts beat with His, we want to follow in His ways. From the joy we find in His presence and His pleasure in us, we cannot help but want to obey Him.

As believers connect more and more with redeemed Israel, we will experience a revival of the Law infused with life. This is because God has placed irrevocable gifts and callings on Israel (see Romans 11:29), relating chiefly to His Word: "He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation" (Psalm 147:19–20). The New Covenant affirms, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew . . . Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God" (Romans 3:1–2).

Grace and gifting to minister the Word is not limited to Israel. Many of my favorite Bible teachers are Gentile, not Jewish, believers. Nonetheless, a timeless call exists on Israel pertaining to her entrustment, hands-on experience and

relationship with the Word. In the future, she will humbly impart deep understanding of God's character and ways in Yeshua-centered faith. Ancient treasures and mysteries residing in her will be unleashed to bless the nations (see Matthew 13:52).

Fulfilling the Law

Perhaps by now you are questioning why I would write about ancient treasures and mysteries in the Law which, in Matthew 5:17, Jesus clearly said He came to fulfill. As is almost always the case, context is critical. We need to understand the context of Matthew 5:17, and the use of the word "Law" in the Scriptures, before we can understand what Messiah really taught.

The first five books of the Bible are identified in Greek and English as the Pentateuch, but in Hebrew as the *Torah*. The word *Torah* translates into English as "instruction" or "teaching." It likely stems from a Hebrew root meaning "to aim for a mark or target." Therefore, *Torah* stands in opposition to the concept of sin, which root meaning in Hebrew is "to miss the mark."

In the Bible itself, often the word *Torah* refers not just to Genesis through Deuteronomy, but to the entire body or canon of Hebrew Scriptures (see John 10:34).⁶ At other times, *Torah* designates only God's statutes, commands and decrees. Finally, the term *Torah* can be used to encompass all of the above at the same time, which is how I will generally use it in this chapter.

The Jewish people regard the Torah as a matchless gift, as did the New Covenant apostles: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17). In this

passage, the words *all Scripture* refer to—and affirm the value of—all of the Old Covenant, including the Law of Moses. The New Covenant Scriptures did not yet exist in canonized form, so the writer of 2 Timothy (Paul) could not have been referring to them. The point is the Old Covenant or *Tanakh*, including the Law, equips you and me for every good work of the Kingdom.

Now we can turn our attention to Matthew 5:17, where Jesus says He came to fulfill the Law. As always when studying a passage of Scripture, we must look carefully at its context. The broadest context of Matthew 5:17 is, of course, the overall teaching of the Bible. So at the outset, we are to keep in mind that the New Covenant consistently portrays a positive picture of the Old, including the Law. (We'll view this in more detail momentarily.)

Next, consider that Matthew 5:17 is but one sentence of the Master's Sermon on the Mount. Yeshua delivered this sermon to a Jewish audience who had knowledge of the Torah. Their embrace of the Law was unwavering, at least in theory, if not actual, daily practice. Yeshua's words were carefully chosen, therefore, to show the people how to rightly follow God's instructions. Using examples recorded in Matthew 5:21-7:27, He explains how to interpret and apply the Torah with the right spirit and heart in the new (but not final) era of its fulfillment. He succinctly says:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:17–19)

Messiah Yeshua marvelously fulfills the Torah. We could say that Yeshua fills the words of the Law and prophets full of Himself. Remember that He is the Word, according to John 1:1. His Messianic mission brings into existence the reality to which the words of Torah pointed, carrying those words into a new, kingdom era of their fulfillment.

But as He clearly states, Yeshua does not abolish, destroy or render the Law obsolete. Because He is the Word Incarnate, in a real sense Jesus *is* the Law. He does not, and probably cannot, abolish or destroy Himself, or make Himself obsolete. Rather, because He alone adhered perfectly to all the conditions of the Law, never once missing the mark through sin, He opens up for you and me a new and living way to holiness (see Hebrews 10:20).

The Law of Torah makes us aware of our sin and our need for a Savior. It propels us toward salvation by grace through faith in Yeshua. Once we are saved, God's laws continue to offer essential guidance for holy living. We can think of Torah as a moral compass enlivened by the Spirit.

In the Matthew 5 passage above, Jesus explicitly affirms the continued importance of the Law when He says those practicing and teaching the commands of Torah will be called "great" in the Kingdom of heaven. But those teaching others to break the commands will be deemed the "least." Jesus' fulfillment of the Law does not mean it ceases to have any application to Him or to us. To the contrary, He is its center, fixed focus, life force, supreme purpose and eternal goal (see John 5:46, Luke 24:27). Messiah is the only means by which we can ever rightly relate to the Law. He is at its every juncture, for He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He *is* the "High Way" to holiness.

Torah on the Mount

Yeshua not only affirms the continued importance of the Law, but applies it to our lives at far greater levels than Moses did. Atop a grassy hill in Galilee, He amplifies God's commands in the Sermon on the Mount. "You shall not kill" now means you shall not be angry, or harbor hostility, toward a brother. "Do not commit adultery" becomes an admonishment not to even look lustfully at another. "Do not break a sworn oath" becomes "do not swear at all." An "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" is now "turn the other cheek." "Love your neighbor" will no longer do; the command is to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." A lifestyle of prayer, fasting and giving to the needy—already dutifully undertaken by the Jews of Jesus' day—is not going to be rewarded by God if it is done for the reward of men (see Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28, 33–39, 43–48; 6:1–7, 16–18).

Disciplines and motives of the heart, more difficult to tame than outward behaviors, are of prime concern. Thus Yeshua goes on to say we must not worry about our own needs and we should not judge others. Rather than obsess with our man-made kingdoms, we should seek first the Kingdom of God. Yeshua's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are actually commands. They restate principles of the Law and the prophets. This is why He sums it all up:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37–40, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5)

Yeshua teaches that God's holy standards, impossible for man to attain except through Him, are aimed at transforming our hearts. As a result we will passionately want to do what is

right. By the power of the Spirit, we will surrender daily to Him, and He will lovingly change us from the inside out (see Ezekiel 36:26–27). Holiness will become supernaturally natural. The Torah and its laws, instead of being abolished, will be engraved on our hearts:

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put My law [the Hebrew word used here is Torah] in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people.” (Jeremiah 31:33)⁸

Allow me to illustrate.

Example from the Law of Marriage

In chapter 4 we looked at ancient Jewish bridal practices, where betrothal involved the signing of a formal marriage contract. This contract is called in Hebrew a *ketubah*. The signing by bride and groom of a *ketubah* remains a cherished tradition still part of Jewish weddings today. In Christian weddings, it is typically replaced by the exchange of solemn verbal vows. We saw that God has a type of *ketubah* with Israel, represented by the covenant Law given at Sinai. Through an illustration of the *ketubah* or exchange of wedding vows, we can better understand the value of Torah in our lives today.

Let us suppose a wedding has taken place, and the new marriage has just been spiritually and physically consummated. Now that these anticipated events are past, is the couple’s underlying legal covenant abolished? Of course not. Instead of being rendered obsolete, that covenant is now in the process of being fulfilled. The center, focus, life force, purpose and goal of the *ketubah* or vow becomes the set apart or holy relationship between spouses. Ideally, the hearts of

both partners begin to change. Still, the more one truly loves one's husband or wife, the more the legal terms of the ketubah will be cherished, honored and obeyed. If hard times threaten the relationship, the ketubah might become even more, not less, important to maintaining—even reviving—the marriage. It is similar with our covenant relationship to God.

Now, the marriage ketubah never includes so many legal terms as to describe and explicitly include every possible life circumstance. First, that would prove impossible; second, who would want a marriage like that? However, human beings are imperfect. Uncertainties arise, mistakes are made and sin is inevitable. Therefore, moral principles underlying the legal terms of the ketubah are extrapolated and used to navigate the myriad of complexities comprising life. It is similar with our relationship to our Bridegroom King and Torah.

Yeshua's ketubah-like Torah belongs not only to Israel but to His betrothed from all nations. Its terms, written and fulfilled by Yeshua, are meant to be followed with joy, flowing from sanctified love. The Holy Spirit empowers and guides us in all truth, extrapolating for us timeless moral principles applicable to contemporary life. It is by the Word that we are sanctified (see John 17:17). Torah, which includes the Law, enables the bride to make herself ready, without spot or wrinkle, for her coming King. It represents God's holy kiss, forever relevant, life-giving and passionately prized by His holy ones.

Legalism or Liberty?

The tempestuous times in which we live cry for a cure that comes from the Law of God. The rotten fruits of lawlessness—death, destruction and the deception of calling good evil and evil good—are shredding the fabric of traditional, civilized society. The most fundamental of biblical principles and

realities have been jettisoned by the culture of our day: "He created them male and female" (Genesis 5:2). In Christian circles, even renowned leaders fall prey to material and sensual greed, casting, if it were possible, disgrace on the Holy One. To the extent we have rebelled against God's laws under the false pretense of freedom, we have reaped imprisonment to immorality. We have abused amazing grace, shirking at the prospect of "the Law" and "coming under" it.

The 20th-century Christian leader Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred for his faith, cautioned against "cheap grace," or "grace without discipleship," as opposed to "costly grace," which he described as "the sanctuary of God that must be set apart from the world."⁹ Recently the term "hypergrace" has come into use. It refers to a false grace that excuses even abominable sin for the sake of unsanctified mercy.

How did our formerly Western, Judeo-Christian society deteriorate so dramatically? One reason---but certainly not the only reason---traces to Christendom's historical rejection of the Law. This is explained and documented in detail in my book entitled, *Why Still Care About Israel?* (Published originally by Chosen Books of Baker Publishing Group, the book is now available for free download at lightofzion.org.) As that book points out, early Church fathers intentionally and systematically excluded biblically based Jewish ways and Jewish believers who followed any of those ways. The so-called Jewish Law was jettisoned, and to a large extent outlawed, from Christian practice. Thankfully, over recent centuries, more and more believers have sought to recoup their long-lost, biblical Jewish roots.

If that has not been your personal experience, would you allow the Lord to dispel a myth mistakenly taught about the Torah? Some have nurtured the notion that a New Covenant believer embracing the Old Covenant has automatically lapsed into legalism. In contrast to such thinking, hear how the

Hebrew psalmist below exults in the Torah. The fervid worshiper is far from bound up by statutory restriction. As opposed to shouldering a load of legalism, he offers free and intimate high praise flowing from grace:

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your
law. . . .

I remember your ancient laws, O LORD, and I find
comfort in them. . . .

I delight in your law. . . .

The law from your mouth is more precious to me than
. . . silver and gold. . . .

Oh, how I love your law!

Psalm 119:18, 52, 70, 72, 97

The psalmist extols the Law as revelation of the Lawgiver who is love, grace and truth. The Hebrew word he uses for “Law” in the preceding verses is *Torah*. He cherishes the Torah because rather than constrain him, it liberates him into his destiny in God: “I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. . . . I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts” (Psalm 119:32, 45).

Legalism was a foreign concept to true worshipers of YHWH. It never described the way they related to Him. When the Israelites resorted to shallow or hypocritical adherence to the Law, they earned only His rebuke. Religious-spirited observance of rules saved or sanctified no one in the Old Covenant, much less in the New.¹⁰

Does the New Covenant Set Aside the Law?

Nevertheless, in early first century churches, questions soon arose as to whether salvation in Christ is achieved by following the Law, rather than by grace through faith. Most of those questions were answered by the apostle Paul, a brilliant

scholar of his day. Paul consistently taught strongly against legalism as an attempt to earn or keep salvation. He was greatly challenged, however, by the lack of any existing appropriate terminology in either Hebrew or Greek with which he could express himself. Neither language contained a word or clear concept for what we now call “legalism.” New Covenant realities were, after all, new realities to God's people. As a result, Paul devised the terms *under the law* and *works of the law*.¹¹

These Spirit-inspired phrases are very helpful---when their context is considered. In context, they always relate to specific misuses or abuses of the Law that Paul seeks to correct. Sadly but not surprisingly, when context is disregarded, misinterpretations can abound. Often It is wrongly assumed that Paul teaches the Law is either irrelevant or of minimal importance to followers of Yeshua.

Christian theologian C. E. B. Cranfield comments on this issue:

Pauline statements, which at first sight seem to disparage the law, are really directed not against the law itself, but against that misunderstanding and misuse of it for which we now have a convenient terminology.¹²

The complexity of Paul's teaching on the Law is almost universally acknowledged. The apostle Peter, a simple fisherman, acknowledged this and wrote, “His letters contain some things that are hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16). I do not pretend that we can thoroughly unravel the hard-to-understand complexities in our short time together. Thankfully, however, Paul is not impossible to understand. We can at least summarize his main points.

Keep in mind that Paul's recorded deeds are just as much a part of the inspired canon of Scripture as are his words.

Although his words alone can be difficult to apprehend, if we interpret what he says in light of what he does, we discover that his actions speak at least as loudly as those words and clarify much of what he writes. When we also consider the context of his teaching, much confusion and controversy can be resolved.

In Acts 21, we see a clear example of how Paul relates personally to the Law. In that chapter, he arrives in Jerusalem and meets with local elders of the Church. They quickly inform him that all the Jewish believers in the city remain zealous for the Law. The elders go on to say these same believers are troubled by a false rumor. The apostle, they have heard, has started instructing Jewish Christians to forsake the Law of Moses. The people are concerned that Paul is “telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs” (verse 21). To quell the rumor, the elders encourage Paul to publicly witness to his own continued lifestyle of Torah observance. They suggest he ritually purify himself in the manner of a Nazirite vow (verse 24; see also Numbers 6:1–21). “Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law” (Acts 21:24).

At this point, Paul has an ideal opportunity to correct the believers in Jerusalem for still being zealous for the Law, but he does not. It stands to reason that he either agrees with them on the Law, or finds it unnecessary to rebuke them about it, or both. In fact, nowhere at all does he—or any other New Covenant author—instruct Jewish Christians to abandon the Law. Instead, Paul does what he can to put an end to the rumor, taking the recommended purification vow the very next day (Acts 21:26).

The apostle is not appeasing anyone here. As an act of worship, he'd previously taken the same vow in another city, on his own initiative (see Acts 18:18). Paul does not teach

Messianic Jews to do away with circumcision, the Law of Moses or even Jewish customs---if such endeavors are undertaken with the right spirit, surrendered to God's grace in Yeshua. Recall that Paul even circumcised Timothy in Acts 16:3, presumably for the sake of cultural identification (see 1 Corinthians 9:20-22), since Timothy was half Jewish.

There is more to the story. A few days later, still in Jerusalem, Paul is arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. At that time, he testifies that he not only follows the Law, but that he is still a Pharisee (see Acts 23:1, 6), "believing all things which are written in the Law and the prophets" (Acts 24:14). After this episode he is sent to the civil authorities. There he states, "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple" (Acts 25:8). Finally, when later describing these incidents to Jewish leaders in Rome, Paul repeats, "Although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans" (Acts 28:17).

Keep in mind the apostle has had profound personal encounters with Yeshua. He has visited heaven (2 Corinthians 12: 2-4). The man lives in supernatural realms; he is not bound up in legalism or restrictively tied to tradition. Yet he follows the Law of Moses as well as the extrabiblical customs of his day. To a certain extent this is so he can reach Jews with the Gospel; but even so, he considers himself still under God's law in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 9:20-21). As Bible scholar Dr. Michael L. Brown concludes, the apostle "continued to live as a Torah-observant Jew, even though his primary mission was to take the Good News to the Gentiles."¹³

Paul demonstrates that believers are free to maintain a Torah-observant lifestyle that revolves wholeheartedly and authentically around Messiah and salvation in Him alone. Law

and grace operate *together* in Him, in one new humanity, and in the Kingdom convergence of Israel and the Church, heaven and earth.

God gives grace for any believer to rightly embrace not only the Law, but meaningful Jewish traditions that do not violate the Scriptures or detract from the centrality of Yeshua. One example would be a Messiah-oriented celebration of Shabbat that includes the lighting of candles. Likewise, there is grace for any believer—including Jews—to live holy unto the Lord in a scriptural manner that does *not* conform to extrabiblical, Jewish tradition, such as lighting candles on Shabbat.

What is Judaizing?

Just as some believers have wrongly neglected or dismissed the Torah, others have gone to the opposite extreme. Some have tried to follow God's laws in a manner that is not centered on Yeshua and is contrary to New Covenant teaching. In the early Church, those who advocated for this extreme misuse of the Law, especially to the Gentiles, were called "Judaizers."

The Judaizing controversy is described and addressed directly in the book of Galatians and indirectly, in Acts 15. To understand the stern warning against Judaizing, we must first understand the serious problem that was taking place. The Church in Galatia was overwhelmingly Gentile and had little to no background in the Scriptures. They were being falsely taught that to be saved they must first be circumcised, obey the laws of Moses and convert to Judaism. This is a heresy that Paul needed to firmly refute. His rebuttal was so firm, however, that today it is easily misunderstood apart from its historical context. Paul never intended to suggest the Law was irrelevant or inconsistent with New Covenant life.

In Acts 15:1-29, the same elders of Jerusalem who in Acts 21 urge Paul to take a Temple vow, come against the Judaizers. They authoritatively denounce the idea that

Gentiles must be circumcised or follow the Law of Moses to be saved. The elders were familiar with the prophetic Scriptures extending salvation to the Gentiles and did not want to withhold from them God's grace. So in the opposite spirit of the Judaizers, they open wide the door to His community of faith.

The elders place only four provisions of the Law on nonJewish believers: no eating of blood, strangled animals or food offered to idols; and abstaining from sexual immorality. These four laws appear to have been selected solely to facilitate the unity of one new man between Jews and Gentiles. Without these four conditions or restrictions, Jewish believers would have stumbled over sharing table fellowship with Gentile believers. At the same time, the elders of Jerusalem acknowledge the Gentiles will have ongoing opportunity to learn God's laws as they grow in faith. They expect Gentile believers to seek and gain knowledge of the Torah.

As God shifts hearts and minds to recoup ancient truths, and as Christians engage with Old Covenant Scriptures at new levels, questions naturally arise. To what extent, if any, do we practically live out the ancient commands? Are all laws in Torah equally applicable today? Are Jewish and Gentile believers to have the same relationship with the Law? I freely admit to not having all the answers. Within the global Messianic community, of which I am part, prayerful discussion and respectful debate is ongoing.

Certainly, as you have heard me say more than once, we are not to revert to observing the Law the same as before Jesus died and rose again, and God poured out His Spirit. However, out of passion for the King, we cannot help but want Him to restore the righteousness of His Word and the holiness that befits His return. For that we need some

measure of a revived embrace of His Law.

Practical Points

Below are some suggested, very broad guidelines to consider for those of you who wish to prayerfully reevaluate the role of God's laws in your life. I have intentionally kept these guidelines to a minimum for two reasons. First, any greater detail would exceed the scope of this book. Second, I want you taking the freedom—and responsibility—to meditate on the Scriptures and engage personally with Yeshua on the matter. As no two individuals have the exact same relationship with the Lord, no two will have the exact same relationship with the Law. Plenty of room is left, as a hallmark of grace, for you to journey intimately with the Lord on your own, as well as with others in your community of faith.

1. Purpose of the Law. For nonbelievers, the primary purpose of the Law is to point to salvation by grace, through faith in Yeshua (see Romans 10:4). For believers, it is different. Messiah's atoning sacrifice for sin changes our relationship to the Law (see Hebrews 8:6–10:22). The Law no longer condemns us. It dynamically instructs us in righteousness, escorting us by the Spirit into God's presence. There we surrender at greater and greater levels to Him, being made holy even as He is holy. Our lives reflect "the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5; see also 16:26 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2. Kingdom Perspective. The New Covenant can be sufficient for both salvation and sanctification, but it is only a fraction of the full revelation of God and His ways. The entirety of God's Word, or the full canon of Scripture, is valuable and meant to be cherished---or He would not have given it to us. The Old

Covenant, including the Law, provides the foundation for interpreting the New Covenant. This is especially Important as we approach the last of the last days. Moreover, consider that the laws of heaven are reflected in the laws God gave us on earth. When we honor the laws of heaven, it stands to reason His will is done to a greater extent "on earth as it is in heaven." To a greater extent, His Kingdom comes. (Matthew 6:10)

3. Gentile Believers. In the New Covenant, Gentile believers are never urged to follow the Law the same as Jews—though they are not told to disregard the Law entirely, either. This is not because Gentile believers are either spiritually superior or inferior to Jewish believers, but is a matter of Israel's unique, irrevocable calling. Instead, Gentile believers are encouraged to stay true to their own unique, irrevocable calling (see 1 Corinthians 7:20). Sometimes, when Gentile believers do not understand their identity or calling as children of God, they are prone to self-identify as Jews and attach undue importance to following the Law. The Bible nowhere encourages this.

4. Jewish Believers. The New Covenant never requires Jewish believers to stop following the Law of Moses with an unequivocal focus on Yeshua. The apostles, and Paul in particular, consistently maintain a Torah-observant lifestyle. They seem to simply assume Messianic Jews will continue to follow the Law. At the same time, they make clear there has been a change in the role of the Law under the New (and better) Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-10). Freedom for Jewish believers to adhere to certain aspects of the Law, by grace, with integrity and focus on the absolute supremacy of Yeshua, is needed for the maturity of one new man in Messiah.

5. The Principle Approach. All of the Law remains relevant, but with varying degrees of applicability, to both Gentile and

Jewish believers today. Especially valuable to us are God's moral laws. Many civil, agricultural and ceremonial laws relating to assorted Temple practices are presently not possible to follow. Other laws cannot be followed because they require full operation of a rabbinic judicial system. Still others are gender-specific or applicable only to married persons, priests or other classes of individuals within the Israelite community. But Messiah-centered, moral principles underlying those same laws continue to instruct us in righteousness. They mediate the Kingdom of heaven.

Often the best approach to following the Law, in this present age, can be described as a "principle-oriented" approach. By this approach, we do not necessarily follow all God's laws in a literal and strict manner. Instead, we discern the principles reflective of God and His ways that are embodied in a particular law that might seem obsolete. Then, having discerned the principle underlying the particular law, we apply the principle rather than the law itself.

For example, Deuteronomy 22:8 instructs us to build a parapet or protective wall on the roofs of our homes, in order to avoid bringing upon ourselves the guilt of another's bloodshed. The purpose of this command was to prevent people from getting injured by falling off a roof. This is because in context of ancient Israel, walking across rooftops was a common practice. Now, neither you nor I live in ancient Israel and most of us do not walk across rooftops. So what should we do with Deuteronomy 22:8?

A principle-oriented approach would discern the principles reflective of God's character and ways which underlie and give rise to the parapet law. It is not hard to discern from Scripture overall, and in the book of Deuteronomy, that God wants His people caring for each other, taking reasonable measures to protect one another and honoring human life. The parapet law, which at first glance may appear irrelevant, expresses the

consummate law of God, that of love. So instead of constructing a ledge on your roof, you might take care not to leave objects or conditions on your property that could easily and foreseeably, seriously injure others.

It is my hope these five, general guidelines will help launch you on your journey into depths of the Torah. I pray your love for the Lord will ignite a passion for the portion of His Word known as the Law. May your passion for the Law, in turn, inspire a passion for holiness that serves as a protective stance and proactive assault against the spirit of our age, and in particular lawlessness. For the Bible equates lawlessness with Antichrist.

Lawlessness

When Yeshua speaks of the end of this age, He characterizes it as a time when more and more people reject God's laws. Because of the increase of lawlessness, He says, the love of many or most—even believers—will grow cold (see Matthew 24:12). Lawlessness becomes so rampant that some who are given over to it perform miracles in His Name. Nevertheless, they are ultimately and woefully cast from His presence (see Matthew 7:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:9).

According to 1 John 3:4, lawlessness is sin. The Church is soberly warned to be on guard against "the error of lawless men" and those teaching against God's laws (2 Peter 3:17). So serious is this phenomenon of lawlessness that another name for the Antichrist is "man of lawlessness":

For (that day will not come) until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction . . . proclaiming himself to be God. . . . For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work . . . then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow . . . and destroy

by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan. (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, 7–9)

This man of lawlessness will be recognized, in part, by his blasphemous attempts to change God's laws (see Daniel 7:25). Meanwhile, God's people will withstand increasing lawlessness by embracing the opposite spirit—law-loving and abiding, holy obedience that comes from faith.

Holy obedience that comes from faith will serve as a weapon of warfare. As spiritual warfare heightens in the form of birth pains heralding Jesus' return, a move of the Spirit will revive the ekklesia in holy obedience. Messiah's Bride will be a warrior ablaze in holiness, made perfectly legal by His righteousness. She will be groomed for the honor of great Kingdom battle. In the next chapter, we see how that uniquely relates to Israel's anointing.

7

Warring for Harvest

This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to the whole world
as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.
(Matthew 24:14)

One of the names of God in the Scriptures, used more than 225 times, is *Adonai Tzeva'ot*, meaning "Lord of Hosts" or "Lord of Armies." A fair translation would also be, Commander of the Armies of Heaven. You and I live in an era when we will come to know our Bridegroom King as Commander of the Armies of Heaven like never before. This is because we will face battles--in good and positive respects---as never before.

We are contending for a mass harvest of souls in Israel and the nations. Today's young people could even see the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28 completed in their generation. And that means war, globally:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:17-20)

Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against

principalities, powers and "spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12, NKJV) Yeshua has already won the war in a very real sense; in the battles that remain, hell's gates will not prevail against us. In those battles, the kingdom of heaven suffers violent assault and to this day, violent men seize it by force [as a precious prize]. (Matthew 11:12, Amplified Bible)

As we enter into a season of global harvest, the Spirit is calibrating us to His passion for souls redeemed from hell, justice on earth and the literal coming of our King. He is outfitting the ekklesia with new, sharpened weaponry and valiant nobility. This chapter is about reviving Israel's ancient, warrior spirit anointing for a harvest of humanity.

Warrior Spirit Anointing

To begin, I would like to share a personal story. Years ago I experienced a life-altering lesson on Kingdom warfare. I had been praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, located adjacent to the Temple Mount. While praying, I sensed an almost tangible residue of the glory that had once rested at this holy site. A cry arose from deep within me for an impartation of any ancient, or even future, anointing associated with God's holy hill, as He might see fit.

That same night I experienced a vivid, life-like dream of the armies of heaven. In the dream I stood in a vast, open field. This I understood to represent fields readying for harvest. On the distant horizon, tiny golden trumpets suddenly materialized. At first only a handful were visible. Then, as I continued to watch, more and more trumpets formed, seemingly from nowhere. Soon there were dozens. Eventually I could see that each trumpet was held by an angel. The angels and trumpets were dazzling in beauty, brilliance and stately authority. The scene was electrifying.

As I watched, their ranks multiplied into hundreds, then thousands, tens of thousands, then myriads beyond number. The celestial glory of it all overwhelmed me in my sleep. (My husband said he heard me audibly "oohing and aahing.") Eventually this heavenly host joined together to form what resembled a hurricane. It was gargantuan in size, formidable yet captivatingly beautiful. The hurricane swirled in every direction due to the intensity of angelic activity comprising it. Nevertheless, it moved in a controlled and coordinated fashion, as if under some unseen direction. Transfixed by the scene, I felt power surges, like energizing blasts from a whirlwind, infuse my spirit and body. Then I awoke.

From the dream, I somehow knew that God was about to revive elements of Israel's ancient warrior spirit for the last days ekklesia. In valiant nobility of love-fueled righteousness, His people would contend with, and prevail against, evil as never before. Magnificent angel armies were being commissioned to assist emerging champions of faith in a fight for an unprecedented harvest of souls.

Enjoying the Fight?

In my dream, God was the One initiating Kingdom battle. According to Proverbs 10:25, "When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever." (The Hebrew word for "storm" more literally means whirlwind or hurricane, which is what I saw in the dream.)

Our King is never on the defensive. The omnipotent and omniscient One is always on the glorious offensive. This does *not* mean He does not defend and actively protect His people. But His defense is a response of love aimed at proactive Kingdom advance, on a personal level at the very least. Sometimes, church movements, regions or nations are involved.

In His earthly ministry, Yeshua never allowed Himself to be put on the defensive. The Savior took only the offensive posture of aggressive love (see Matthew 11:12; 21:12-13). Through the Cross and Resurrection, He decisively won the war in which we battle, ensuring His ultimate victory in all things.

Because the Kingdom of God is ever increasing, any posture of defense in warfare of the spirit is really one of offense from the larger, eternal perspective. To be sure, sometimes we genuinely experience a defeat by human measure and perception. The suffering we may endure as a result is quite real. Such suffering can be extreme and I do not purport to minimize it. Nonetheless, as we submit an apparent defeat to God's authority, He wondrously takes what the enemy intends for evil and uses it for good (see Romans 8:28). We are to regard demonic attack from a perspective that includes opportunity for ultimate Kingdom advance. This is why, at times, God wants us to enjoy a good fight.

What do I mean by such a seemingly scandalous phrase as enjoying a good fight? I do *not* refer in this chapter to military warfare or the carnage associated with violence, devastation and death. I speak instead of the power of the Blood of Yeshua to overcome His enemies in supernatural realms. Ephesians 6:12 bears repeating here, in a different translation: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (NIV).

You and I have been entrusted with the Great Commission of taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth and making disciples of all nations. God wants us to rejoice in the good fight of faith this necessarily involves (see Philippians 2:16-18; 3:1; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13; Romans 5:3; Luke 6:22-23).

In the battle for souls, the joy of the Lord sustains us. Recall that for the joy set before Him, Yeshua endured the Cross (see

Hebrews 12:2). His warrior bride is meant to enjoy a good fight when she labors with delight for the salvation of individuals, cities or nations. Despite the hardships and attacks she endures, she revels in the execution of God's righteous justice that glorifies her King. She thrills over the pleasure He takes in each person saved for eternal life. About this, I would like to tell you another story.

The Battle for a Jewish Harvest

In the 1990's, shortly after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Christian missionaries were invited and welcomed in many cities in Russia, Ukraine and other newly formed Eastern European states. Decades of Communist driven atheism had spiritually starved the masses and their leaders. People longed to hear about God and His Word. They were desperate for the love, hope, joy and peace only Jesus could give them. The harvest there was ripe. Revival was taking place.

At that time, my husband and I served as part of a traveling Messianic Jewish evangelism team—a small army—ministering to Jews in different cities of the former Soviet Union. Our purpose was to destroy the work of the devil in keeping Jews of the former Soviet Union from knowing and worshiping their God. But most of us on the team were young and inexperienced. Perhaps that is why we did not realize that in a real sense, we were declaring war: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's works" (1 John 3:8).

We had learned that with proper permits and other advance arrangements, foreign missionaries were treated with favor and hospitably received. So, after prayerfully following all the relevant protocol, we were shocked to find ourselves facing cadres of spiritual enemies when we arrived. To be sure, the opposition we encountered did not compare with the horrific persecutions, including martyrdoms, experienced by countless

of God's people through the ages. But it does illustrate a bit of the warfare--and victory--required for Israel's salvation. Those who desire to share the Gospel with the Jewish people, which should be all of us, be prepared!

Normally all at enmity with each other, a bizarre array of religious and political splinter groups had somehow joined forces in cahoots against our plan to preach the Jewish Messiah to Jewish people. At the outset, we encountered the enraged resistance of religious Jews who call themselves anti-missionaries or counter-missionaries. These are well organized, ultra-Orthodox Jewish brethren fervently dedicated to keeping Jews from coming to faith in Yeshua. Usually dressed mostly in black, they operate not unlike their predecessors who tailed and opposed the apostle Paul and other first century, Jewish believers.

Anti-missionaries flew in from around the world with one goal in mind: shutting down our activities. Initially, they tried to scare local, ex-Soviet Jews away by threatening to invoke ancient Jewish curses, and otherwise punish, any who listened to us. When that did not deter the locals, they contacted hapless Israeli foreign ambassadors and demanded they intervene. One ambassador actually phoned Belarus' President Lukashenko to warn of outright war erupting in the streets if Messianic Jews were to preach the Gospel. But that didn't thwart God's plan, either.¹ (Please understand that in sharing this account, I do not intend to cast aspersions on God's covenant people dear to His heart, my own countrymen, about whom Romans 11:28-29 says this: "As far as the Gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.")

Joining the anti-missionaries were culturally Christian, fascist-oriented Russian (or Ukrainian, etc.) ultra-nationalists. The ultra-nationalists proudly claimed a longstanding history

of murderous anti-Semitism.⁴ Normally they would never align with anti-missionaries because anti-missionaries are Jewish. But the ultra-nationalists were incensed that more Jews had come into their country---and to sponsor, of all things, openly Jewish events. Thankfully, city and national political leaders and courts ignored their complaints. Nonetheless, they followed us about and did what they could: they physically assaulted members of our team, spit on some, beat some up, issued bomb threats, and fabricated lies to the local police. A minor but unexpected price to pay on our part.

State-affiliated Orthodox churches joined in the fray. They were incensed because we represented Jesus as a *Jewish* Messiah. They would not stand for the fact we claimed to be part of the Body of Christ, in contrast to the ultra-nationalists who despised us for being Jewish.

Aligning oddly with Orthodox churches against us were groups of atheist Communists who wanted to restore the former Soviet regime. Neo-Nazi groups would not be left out—the issue being, again, the Jewish nature of what we were doing. Local Satanists joined in the mêlée, attempting (unsuccessfully) to burn down a stadium in which one outreach was held, among other things. Meanwhile, witches from local covens found us and cast their spells in front of us, as well as from behind the scenes. Somehow, even the Russian mafia got involved.

Back in those days, before extremist Islam or secularism had made its way to the West, such pushback to sharing the Gospel was unheard of in post-Communist states. Yet our little band of brothers and sisters had unwittingly stirred up a hornet's nest. How, we wondered, had we managed to incite and unite so many frenzied splinter groups—normally all preoccupied with attacking each other?

The answer is that the Jewish people coming to faith in Messiah terrifies the demonic realm. Israel's salvation

ultimately makes way for Jesus' return, which heralds Satan's demise. Allow me to explain.

Battle for Jerusalem

The battle for the last days Jewish harvest must be understood in its larger context, the metanarrative of what is often called the battle for Jerusalem. The battle for Jerusalem, and particularly for the Temple Mount, impacts every nation on earth. It refers to the both the present and consummate, apocalyptic battle over who will be worshiped as King over the earth. Jerusalem, and particularly the Temple Mount, comprise spiritual ground zero in this conflict of kingdoms: the Kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan.

The battle for Jerusalem begins with the fall of humankind, where God first hints at His stellar plan of redemption. The Almighty announces, "I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15, NKJV).

The rabbis interpret "the woman" to be Israel, whereas Christians usually see the woman either as the Church or as Mary, or both. I personally believe the best interpretation is that the woman refers fundamentally to Israel, but also the Church. There is a unique application to Mary, the mother of Yeshua, as well. In any case, both Jewish and Christian Bible scholars tend to agree the "Seed" of Genesis 3:15 refers to Messiah--though they tend to disagree, as you know, as to His identity.

Meanwhile, Satan is enraged. "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth . . . for the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:12, NKJV).

When Genesis 3:15 is studied in connection with Revelation

12:12, an overarching theme of Scripture emerges. God's plan of redemption occurs in phases, and before each new phase, Satan unleashes a murderous wave of warfare to try to prevent it. In particular, he targets "the woman." Recall, for example, Egypt's slaughter of Jewish babies before the Exodus, Saul's attempted murder of David before the latter's kingly rule, and Herod's slaughter of Jewish babies before Yeshua's birth. Consider also the persecution and martyrdom of Christians by the institutional Church before the Great Reformation, the Nazi Holocaust before Israel's restored statehood, the Six Day War before the return of Jerusalem to the Jewish state, and more.

In each instance above where Satan aimed to avert the next, new phase of redemption, he lay his preliminary groundwork in the form of lies. A "murderer from the beginning," the "father of lies" lies to secure the agreement of men to act in accord with his sinister plans (John 8:44). Without human agreement and agency, he cannot effectively operate in the tangible, earthly realm. So, for example, years before the Holocaust, Nazi propaganda officials spread fabrications about the Jewish people, which they themselves knew to be egregious lies. Repeated often enough, these outlandish tales convinced even intelligent German Christians, among others, of a purported need to annihilate all Jews in order to save the human, namely Aryan, race.

Today, strikingly similar lies are spread about Israel, Zionism and the Jews. Daily, hate driven falsehoods and devilish distortions of reality are launched into both mainstream and social media to condemn Israel in the court of world opinion. Such lies will increase as we get closer to the next phase of redemption: global harvest and the return of Yeshua. Repeated often enough, these lies will again convince more than a few intelligent and dedicated Christians of the need to annihilate Jews to save the rest of the world.

There's still more. Satan seeks to thwart not only the harvest, but the Second Coming of Yeshua. By His own Word, our Lord tied His return to a certain, specific event:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (Matthew 23:37–39)

The Scriptures teach the next phase of redemption requires: (1) the existence of the Jewish people; (2) living in their land; and (3) Jews in Jerusalem blessing Yeshua's return. So while God's enemies oppose the salvation of any human being created in His image, they are uniquely threatened by the salvation of individuals who are Jewish. Moreover, if Satan could ever annihilate Israel---which he is again trying to do---he could (theoretically) upend the Lord's return.

Despite his frenetic attempts, the day is coming when Jewish leaders of Jerusalem will collectively welcome Jesus into the city. At His arrival, Messiah will evict Satan from the planet and take up residence on the Temple Mount, God's "holy hill" (Psalm 2:6). From there, He will rule and reign in righteous splendor for one thousand glory-filled years. (See Zechariah 12:2–3; 12:9–13:1; 14:2–9; Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:25–27; 11:31; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:14–15; 20:2–3; Psalm 2:1–9; and many more.)

This scenario, prophetically outlined in Scripture, explains why extremist Islamic jihad rages murderously against God's people in Jerusalem---and elsewhere---as I revise this book. It explains why international bodies such as the United Nations, backed by a growing number of globalist leaders, have long sought control of Jerusalem's Old City, with a focus on the

Temple Mount. Eventually, that control will rest for a brief period with a satanically inspired Antichrist. But, rest it will not bring. (See same Bible verses cited in paragraph above.)

Meanwhile, an increasing remnant of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem is blessing "He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39). The harvest is ripening; the end of the age is approaching.

Let us return now to Jewish evangelism in the former Soviet Union in the 1990's. God's Word assures that Satan is destined for certain defeat. Therefore, despite the weird plethora of forces opposing outreach to the Jews, an estimated 25,000 ex-Soviet sons and daughters of Jacob professed first-time faith in Messiah. The results of other outreaches by other ministries might double the total; exact numbers were impossible to obtain. Many of the new believers immigrated months and years later to Israel. They significantly changed the spiritual climate of the Jewish state, bringing her closer to the day she welcomes Yeshua as her King.

At the same time, countless more Gentiles than Jews came to Jesus through our outreaches. Many government officials, forced by the opposition to attend, were among them. Because of widespread publicity generated by those who'd so zealously withstood us, a far greater harvest was reaped than would have been the case had there been no concerted resistance.

Over and again, we watched the Commander of Heaven's Armies, our Just Judge, work all things for good, orchestrating details to achieve the humanly impossible. And so, I learned to "enjoy a good fight."

Harvest Strategy and Protocol

The pattern of evangelism we followed in Eastern Europe is based on a strategy that unfolds in the New Covenant. Wherever Jesus, Paul and the other apostolic evangelists go,

they intentionally seek out and speak to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles.⁵ The design has nothing to do with racial preference or prejudice. Greater blessing, not lesser, comes to Gentiles when God's protocol is honored (see Romans 1:16; 2:9–10).

Not surprisingly, this approach still leads to harvest breakthrough. Often the local Jewish community reacts in a manner, either positive or negative or both, that stirs the interest of Gentiles. Recall that Romans 11:12 says the Jews' rejection of Messiah means blessing and riches for the Gentiles. But also recall the verse goes on to say that acceptance by the Jews means even greater blessing and riches for the nations. In any case, outreach to Jewish people first—if there are any in the population involved—nearly always means a greater harvest of many others.

The Body of Christ will gain strategic insight and direction for the last days harvest as this pattern is restored in future years. Jewish and Gentile believers will increasingly join forces in mutual humility and collaboration with unprecedented anointing.

Future collaboration will evolve, more and more, from the love and support for Israel demonstrated in recent decades by "Christian Zionists," those Gentile Christians actively supporting and advocating for the Jewish state. Together with other Israeli Messianic Jews, I am deeply grateful for the way God has opened the hearts of Christian Zionists toward His ancient covenant people. They have laid an essential foundation upon which we are to build.

At present, most Christian Zionist love is directed toward expressing support for, and working with, Jews who do not believe in Jesus. On the one side, it is good and right that unconditional Christian love be expressed toward the sons and daughters of Jacob who do not yet—and may never—come to faith in Messiah. On the other side, thorny issues arise in the

process that unintentionally harm Jewish Israeli believers in Yeshua.

Complex challenges occur because of Israel's ongoing, systematic discrimination against Messianic Jews and Messianic faith at many levels of society. As of this writing, the country welcomes and genuinely appreciates Christian support—so long as no mention is made of Yeshua. So as a rule, well known Christian organizations dedicated to blessing Israel or the Jews must deliberately refrain from sharing the Gospel. Often, only leaders at the top of those organizations are fully aware of the scope of concessions that are made. Because those concessions backfire onto Messianic believers, however, we are keenly aware of them.⁶

Consider that for a Christian Zionist organization to operate in good standing with Israel (or a local Jewish community in the nations) it cannot, with extremely rare exception, associate publicly with Jews who themselves publicly identify as Jewish and believing in Jesus. This is because, to the mainstream Jewish world, Messianic Jews are not regarded as Jewish, but are seen as Gentile Christians. Due mostly to the political influence of anti-missionaries, we are viewed as having renounced our Jewishness. We are often seen as traitors to our people and as threats to the State of Israel. At best we are warmly tolerated; at worst, we are despised and sometimes violently persecuted.⁷

When Christian Zionists formally distance themselves from Messianic believers, and never share the Gospel with Jewish people, those same Jewish people interpret this to mean that "good Christians" agree that Jews do not, and clearly need not, believe in Yeshua. This in turn reinforces the widespread misperception that while the Gospel can be good for Gentiles, it is either not necessary or not applicable to the Jews. Sadly, this highly erroneous concept, called "dual covenant theology,"⁸ is now advocated by some evangelical Christians

seeking favor with Israel. Just as sad, the cycle of Israel's rejection of Messiah and ongoing discrimination against Messianic Jews gains further fuel as a result.

To be fair, Gentile Christian reluctance to openly identify with Jewish Christians originally stemmed from godly sensitivity. Christendom's millennia of murderous antisemitism had hardened most Jewish people to Christianity, as well as to Christians. After the Holocaust, humble and sincere believers searched for a way to express unconditional love to Israel, along with repentance for their predecessors' antisemitism.

It is right and commendable to be sensitive to the historical fact that Jews have suffered much antisemitism by the institutional Church. It is appropriate to be aware of their need to build positive experiences and unconditional friendship with Christians. But is it also appropriate to withhold from a friend the only name under heaven by which he or she must be saved (see Acts 4:12)?

I do not intend to level criticism against well-meaning Christian Zionists ablaze with God's heart for Israel. I do believe, however, the Spirit is challenging us all to express His heart for Israel in new ways for new days.

In the end, Christian love, blessing and support for *all* Israel, not excluding Jewish brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, will provoke her to godly jealousy for her King (see Romans 11:11). For the first time in 2,000 years, Israel will witness Messiah's love unifying believing Jews and Gentiles as one new man. The result will propel an answer to Jesus' prayer: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me" (John 17:23; see also verses 11, 21-22). This will prove key to the last days harvest not just in Israel, but the nations.

Things have already begun to change. In recent years, a

remnant of Christian Zionists has wonderfully aligned in bonds of brotherly love with Messianic Jews as "one new man." Much is taking place out of public view. But a day is coming when the courageous ekklesia, as a warrior bride, will boldly identify with its Jewish family as one. Referring to this prophetic phenomenon, one well known Christian leader notes:

When we see the Messianic Jewish Church arising and coming into proper apostolic/prophetic/intercessory alignment, we will see a sweeping move of God across the earth. This should be one of our key prayer points as we pray for God's covenant people.¹¹

Do you desire, along with me, to be one God will mold and mature, commission and consign in this season? Will you embrace the adventure of following Him from glory to ever-increasing glory in pioneering a new era (see 2 Corinthians 3:18)? Be forewarned: It won't happen without war in the realm of the spirit. To understand the implications, we next visit some of the Hebrew concepts of war.

War in Hebrew

Traditional Judaism offers an intriguing perspective into the biblical concept of war. Some rabbis teach a dimension of the glory of God shines through each individual letter of each word in the Old Covenant. Since Hebrew is the original language in which the Master Communicator speaks to His people, every letter of every Hebrew word is said to communicate something of His nature. The full meaning of any word, therefore, can sometimes be seen in the composite definition of its individual letters.¹² By this theory, an analysis of the letters in the Hebrew word commonly used for war, pronounced *mil-kha-ma*, can be

revealing.

Milkhama can refer to a single battle, a recurrent fight or a full-scale military campaign.¹³ It is used, for instance, in Psalm 18:34: “He trains my hands for *battle*,” and in Isaiah 2:4: “Neither shall they learn *war* any more” (κιν). *Milkhama* derives from the root *la-kham*, meaning to feed on, consume or devour. The Bible says the enemy prowls around “looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). He knows a war is on.

Look with me next at the meaning associated with the individual letters in *milkhama*. The first letter, *mem*, is said to represent water. Water is the primary physical substance of the created earth realm (see 2 Peter 3:5; Genesis 1:1–2, 6–10). Water is used frequently in the Bible as a metaphor for life, as well as for death by divine judgment. It also represents cleansing and purification. The second letter of *milkhama*, which is *lamed*, is said to mean both teaching and learning. The third letter, *khet*, refers to an enclosed or defined area. Then comes *mem* again, symbolizing water; followed by *hey*, which denotes an opening, portal or defined sphere of time and space. The letter *hey* is also used to represent God’s holy name.¹⁴

Putting these letter concepts together in the order they appear in *milkhama*, we can view war from a certain Hebraic perspective. By this reasoning, *war is ultimately a tool of God for cleansing and releasing life for the sake of His teaching and us learning, at a set time and place, more about Himself*. In connection with its root definition, war is God’s means of devouring the devourer.

This view is consistent with another word for war in the Hebrew Scriptures, pronounced *tzava*. *Tzava* refers to a tangible battle, an army, or to military service. Interestingly, the same word *tzava* is used for the service of Levites in the Temple. For that reason, in some Jewish Bible translations, the word “army” appears instead of “service” in Numbers 4:3,

referring to "... all who enter into the *army* to do the work in the Tent of Meeting." These Hebrew words underscore that serving God in a fallen world involves confronting evil in a way that is often best described as war.

The ultimate goal of war is a greater expression of God's will on earth and expansion of His Kingdom. Despite the inevitable atrocities and devastating suffering associated with war, the Captain of Heaven's Armies desires to use it all for ultimate good.

Spiritual Plunder

Keeping these concepts in mind, return again with me to the spiritual *milkhama* of Jewish evangelism in the former Soviet Union. Recall that at one point a high-ranking Israeli foreign ambassador phoned the President of Belarus to warn of war erupting in his nation if we publicly preached the Gospel there. Here is what, in fact, happened after that outreach.¹⁵

Several thousand Belarussian Jews *and Gentiles* found eternal life in Messiah, together as one new man. Himself deeply touched, the President communicated to us his "sincere congratulations on the success" of the endeavor. He was especially grateful, he said, for the unity he felt it had brought to the country. Despite a regrettable history of anti-Semitism, Gentiles in Belarus, he said, were now feeling a new warmth toward Jewish people.

Since local Jewish leaders were enjoying this new warmth, they broke rank with the anti-missionaries and gave up the fight against us. Meanwhile, the anti-missionaries had made such a fuss that the country's national and local media were hot on the story. For many days before, during and after the outreach, an extraordinary question was top news: Is Jesus the Jewish Messiah?!

Formal expressions of gratitude came not only from the

President, but from many other, high-ranking politicians. Several government officials openly professed first-time faith in Yeshua. A small church that had graciously served as our local sponsor, initially threatened by state authorities with closure, now received unprecedented favor from those same authorities. As a direct result, they were able to expand their facilities and accommodate many of those who came to faith in the outreach.

I share the story because it illustrates valuable last days battle principles from a Hebraic perspective:

- A key to unlocking gates in the realm of the spirit is in taking the Gospel “to the Jew first.”
- The release of justice often involves God’s judgment against the source of injustice, calling for a bold, confrontational contention in love and faith.
- The degree of opposition to advancing the Kingdom often determines the potential scope of victory and plunder of the enemy’s camp. Recall that war (*milkhama*) can be thought of as a release of cleansing, life-giving as well as destroying waters, to teach more of God. In short, the greater the battle, the greater the final victory.

Spoils of war in the former Soviet Union were immediately and joyfully apparent. Sometimes, however, the tangible results of victory are not quite as quick to be seen. Then we are given grace to persevere in faith for the outcome, reveling in fighting a good fight, fearing not even death. In such a season, and with staunch devotion, the Messianic warrior bride will overcome “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony . . . not lov[ing] their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11).

Blood of the Lamb and Word of Our Testimony

What will it take for a Jewish and global harvest? The end times saints overcome Satan by the "Blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11).

"The Blood of Jesus" is not a magical phrase to invoke or halfheartedly toss about. His holy Blood can be seen as the most powerful reality in our universe. Deep insights into the mystery of the Blood of Jesus will be given to the Church in the days and years ahead.

I believe the single most significant battle on earth probably took place over the shedding of the Blood of Yeshua, fought by our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Imagine the flooding torment that caused Holy God Incarnate to utter the crushing words, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matthew 26:38). Sweating blood, I believe our Savior was tempted to say no to the Cross (see Matthew 26:39, 42; Luke 22:42–44). I suspect the only worse horror for Him would have been the agony of human sin left unresolved (see Genesis 6:6). I believe He carried that agony in His heart from the moment it materialized in another garden, the one called Eden, at the Fall of man.

The power of bloodshed is sometimes better understood and appreciated by those in the occult than by Christians. Through history, blood by animal or human sacrifice has been spilled intentionally to appease and empower the demonic. Through blood, life or death transfers from material to spiritual realms in a manner we do not fully understand. We do know the blood of Abel mysteriously cried---and probably still cries--to God from the dirt that it drenched. The Israelites were forbidden from consuming blood because the life of the creature was in it (see Genesis 4:10, Leviticus 17:11). The prophetic act of Communion is much more than mere ceremony; it is for us as the Blood and body of God Incarnate.

It is often said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of

the Church.¹⁷ Spilt blood can serve as a pinnacle form of spiritual warfare. Believers who are called to martyrdom leave behind blood that continues to battle, in a sense, until Jesus returns. Or, perhaps, even longer.

The last days saints overcome Satan by the Blood of the Lamb. But also required is the word of their testimony. In this context, the word of their testimony is much more than the story of how they (or we) got saved a decade ago. It is our verbal and nonverbal proclamation of, and witness to, truth. The word of our testimony overcomes Satan because it gives testimony to *God's Word*. His Word is outright weaponry in the Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:11–17; Matthew 4:1–11).

The word of our testimony, together with the Blood of the Lamb, escorts us to the place of loving not our lives to the death. In that process, we discover that to the extent we lose ourselves, we gain *Him*. We gain more of Messiah, the One coming for a pure and spotless bride whose love for Him is stronger than death (see Song of Songs 8:7). We will gladly, for the joy set before us, lay down our lives for this King who offered Himself up for us. We will not run from the Cross; in fiery love we will embrace that altar of atonement which binds our hearts to His. This will be our most intimate identification with the Infinite One. To wholly love God is to be compelled, like Jesus, to holy war.

In this holy war, strategic plans and purposes for the last days will unfold for us, as they did long ago, in the battlegrounds of Zion. We visit some of them in the next chapter.

8

From Zion's Battlegrounds

There is ... a time for peace and a time for war.
(Ecclesiastes 3:8)

Israel's modern-day military inductions are like those of no other nation. When I witness them at the Western Wall, I am reminded that the spirited young men and women before me, consigning themselves to service, are the tangible descendants of Israelite warriors who millennia ago beheld the unparalleled miraculous. Their flesh and blood fathers and mothers of ages past witnessed a formidable Egyptian army drown in a sea, walls around Jericho tumble at trumpets, and a sun that refused to set during battle in Canaan's hills and plains. Pages of Scripture pop alive and sweep me into the prophetic future as I watch Jewish armies (in which some precious Arab Israelis also participate) commissioned in the City of the Great King. Singing and dancing like King David before my eyes, these soldiers ultimately fight, whether they know it or not, to defend his covenant throne.

Traditional Judaism does not extol or invite war, but views it as a sadly necessary evil. Based on Deuteronomy 20:10-12, every reasonable effort must be (and still is) made to resolve disputes peaceably and justly before resorting to violence. Israel's conquest of Canaan millennia ago is the sole exception to this normative rule. YHVH's command to utterly

destroy the Canaanites was not based on ethnicity or race. Holy God was judging idolatry and distancing His covenant people and land from it. His instruction was intended for a limited time and purpose.

Consistent with the normative dictates of Torah, the Israeli Defense Forces (the IDF) are, as the name reveals, strictly defensive in nature. There is no goal to offensively attack or conquer other lands or peoples, despite the typically and terribly misrepresented Palestinian dispute.¹ The IDF's goal is the defense of the country as a Jewish state according to biblical inheritance and traditional international law.

The IDF's end times defense of Israel is inextricably linked to the battle for Jerusalem, which is inextricably linked to Jesus assuming His rightful Throne (see Luke 1:32–33; 2 Samuel 7:12–16). Likewise, end times warfare in the Spirit is also linked to the battle for Jerusalem and Jesus assuming His rightful Throne. For that reason, Israel's warfare in the natural will increasingly converge with the Church's war in supernatural realms. So principles in this chapter apply to both.

Christians are not to instigate military assault in an effort to advance God's Kingdom.^{1a} Nothing in this chapter is intended to suggest that we wage war against flesh and blood for the sake of the Great Commission. Because God can work all things for good, the tragedy of war can present opportunities for sharing the good news of eternal life in the Prince of Peace. A nation liberated from evil rule through war can suddenly open to the Gospel. But Jesus never taught His disciples to offensively use physical violence to bring others to faith.

Because of an increasing convergence of end times warfare in Israel and the ekklesia, the battlegrounds of Zion offer lessons for today. In this chapter we look primarily at three of them. First highlighted is a perspective on military

defense in a fallen world. Second is the issue of secular globalism. Lastly, we consider aspects of the gender role controversy and how related shifts in the Church will help turn the tide in the battle for Jerusalem and her coming King.

A Time for War

Israelis are warriors not because they like to fight, but because they desire peace. At this writing, every Jewish citizen of age, with rare exception, becomes a member of the military after secondary school graduation. It is simply the way it must be. It is commonly said that if Israel's enemies put down their weapons, there would be peace; but if Israel laid down her weapons, there would be no Israel. As one of history's most acclaimed military strategists stated, "If you want peace, prepare for war."² Contemporary commentators put it this way: freedom is not free; for evil to prosper, it takes only good people to do nothing.

At this writing, Israel faces a mortal enemy hell-bent on wiping her off the map. The Islamic Republic of Iran is but months away from securing nuclear weapons of mass destruction. That nation's dictatorship has repeatedly stated its intent to annihilate Israel and establish an Islamist caliphate across the Middle East. Meanwhile, it has supplied, at this writing, an estimated 200,000 missiles and rockets aimed and ready to fire at Israel from Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the Palestinian Authority. Collectively, the international community has chosen to do nothing to effectively neutralize the Iranian threat. What, then, is Israel to do?

How does God feel about war? The Bible does not outright condone or condemn war; it assumes war as a fact of life.^{2a} Certainly the Father does not enjoy watching human beings created in His image harm and destroy each other. He does not delight in the death of His enemies—and neither should we

(see Ezekiel 33:11).

To some, YHVH of ancient Israel appears much the warmonger, His wrath eventually subdued by grace through Jesus the peacemaker. But God is the same yesterday, today and forever. His character is beautifully consistent through all of Scripture. At times His justice requires battle and bloodshed; at other times, peace and prosperity. At times, even Christians must take up their swords (see Luke 22:36; Romans 13:4). “To everything there is a season . . . a time for war, and a time for peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8, KJV).

In days to come, as wars and rumors of wars increase, you and I will be tempted to tire of the fight. Cruel suffering associated with war—spiritual as well as military—cause natural human sensibilities to cringe. Transitional birth pains marking the close of this age and start of the next will be painful. Many will crave peace at any price. But an overriding desire for peace that is not Messiah-centered can lead to a deceptive, false peace. It can lay antichristian foundational structures that pave way for the Antichrist figure of the last of the last days. Then, in the end, we shall have no peace at all.

Why War?

War was conceived in heaven with Satan's ignominious revolt against the Most High. With Adam and Eve's fall to sin, he took his ruinous rebellion to the staging area of Earth. There war was waged between brothers a mere generation later when Cain murdered Abel in cold blood. By the time of the patriarchs, war was a crushing fact of life. Our father Abraham did not refrain from violence when his family's life was at stake. The sons of Jacob took up arms as a matter of course to defend family honor. Centuries later, after their exodus from Egypt, the Hebrews were attacked and responded with force (see Genesis 14:14–16; 34:25–31; Exodus 17:8–10). Then, at God's

behest, they entered and inhabited the Promised Land through military means.

The Creator is also Commander of the armies of heaven. When He calls His people to fight, He empowers and engineers, protects and presides over them. Their victory is His.

With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall. . . . He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me. . . . You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet. (Psalm 18:29, 34–35, 39)

When our Sovereign King summons His people to war, spiritual or natural, woe to the man or woman who recoils. One who shrinks from battle may regret it: “A curse on him who is lax in doing the Lord's work! A curse on him who keeps his sword from bloodshed!” (Jeremiah 48:10)

God's Word paints a picture of war that, if we are honest, can appear almost scandalous. His acquiescence to destruction and death seems repugnant to peace seeking, 21st century culture. But as much as some despise the notion of war, we cannot wish war away. It shouts at us from the pages of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation. We watch news of it through mainstream and social media every hour of every day. If we are passionate seekers of truth; if we want to be zealous for that which the Spirit is zealous in our day; if we desire to be unoffendable at His ways which are higher than ours; then we must conclude Messiah's bride is a warrior because *He* is.

Ecclesiastes 3:8 says there is a time for peace and a time for war. The season associated with the coming of our Bridegroom-King will be a time for war. Yeshua said:

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars but see to it that you

are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. (Matthew 24:6-7)

Not coincidentally, this season will also be a time of unprecedented glory, purifying of the Church, with supernatural power poured out on the ekklesia for revival and Kingdom expansion. Eventually, a stupendous time will come when we will not learn war anymore (see Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). Meanwhile we watch and pray. We pray earnestly that war be limited in time and space to that which God decrees. We proclaim that in war, He will accomplish the greatest amount of ultimate good through the least amount of destruction. We prepare for kingdom conflict---by watching and praying over Zion's battlegrounds of today and tomorrow, rightly responding with revived anointing of yesterday

Rules of Engagement in Torah

Every army has its rules of engagement and God enumerates His in the Torah, disclosing dimensions of His divine personality in the process. Issuing a minimum of rules dealing directly with war, He supplements them with battle-specific strategies scattered throughout His Word. In this manner, He nurtures our reliance on Him at every turn.

What are YHWH's direct principles, relevant to us today, when His people must go out and fight? His top order is as simple to understand as it is hard to accomplish in our own strength: Do not fear. Why? *He* will be with us and *His* is the victory.

When you go to war against your enemies and see . . . an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. . . . Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one

who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory. (Deuteronomy 20:1, 3–4)

Over and again, the Lord assures us to trust and not be afraid, whether our battle is in the natural or supernatural realm, or both. His loving directive recurs in the Great Commission: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b). The closer we get to “the very end of the age,” the more His last words to His first followers will empower and embolden His final followers. He will be with us and fight for us, and in His presence of fiery love, we will not be afraid.

Like many of you, I have faced some seriously scary situations in my life, including death threats, terror, dangers on mission fields, loss of loved ones, natural disasters and painful, life-threatening illnesses. Those were very real battles, stretching my faith beyond my ability to endure. But in each case, the same comforting truth carried me through: God Himself was with me. His grace and intimate presence outweighed everything.

Much as God’s Kingdom is ruled by love, Satan’s is ruled by fear. Human agreement with fear, conscious or unconscious, empowers and feeds the demonic devourer. So to the extent you or I give in or surrender to fear, we surrender to the enemy. (Please don’t let this cause you to be afraid of fear! Realize instead how deeply loved and eternally cared for you are by the sovereign King.)

In contrast to fear, faith empowers us to surrender to God. It aligns us with the angel armies of heaven. For this reason, Israel’s battle refrain throughout Scripture is designed to stir up faith: “Be strong and courageous!” (see Deuteronomy 31:6–7, 23; Joshua 1:6, 9, 18; 10:25; 1 Chronicles 22:13; 28:20; 2 Chronicles 32:7). Even today, the divine admonition serves as watchword for the IDF. Military chaplains still bless their troops in the original Hebrew, “*Khazak v’amats!*” (“Be strong and

courageous!")

The Hebrew adage is packed with meaning. The biblical concept of "strong and courageous" differs much from the contemporary notion of stoic bravado. The word *strong* (*khazak*) stems from a Hebrew root that means "to cleave." Our strength derives from the Source to whom we cleave, not from mustering machismo backbone. The word *courageous* (*amats*) comes from the root "to be alert," implying watchful readiness. To be strong and courageous, therefore, is to cleave to the Commander. We focus on Him, watch what He is doing and listen for His command. We stand ready to respond in love-based obedience. Israel's timeless war rally can be ours as believers today: Be strong and courageous; *Khazak v'amats!*

In Deuteronomy 20:5-8, God excludes from battle those who are charged with certain, specified tasks, or who are disheartened. Rabbinic scholars generally interpret "disheartened" to mean cowardly.^{2b} In such instances, to be excluded from battle--at least on a spiritual level---is not a desirable thing. If your passion is for Jesus, cowardly disheartenment is not much of an option. Better to repent and let Him revive your heart.

Sometimes, as the rabbis also acknowledge, disheartenment does not stem from lack of courage or faith. It can result from battle fatigue, war injury, genuine loss or trauma. Then it is time to immerse yourself in God's healing presence. Let Him refresh your spirit and lovingly restore your body and soul. He knows how and when to call you back to active duty.

Sometimes you or I cannot participate in one Kingdom campaign because of service in another. Deuteronomy 20:7, for example, provides a specific exemption from battle for newlyweds. The Master Strategist deploys us however He sees fit. The one sitting at His feet in a prayer closet in worshipful adoration, tending to toddlers full-time or building a righteous

business can help advance the Kingdom as much as the one preaching to unreached souls in a steamy jungle, or serving in the military to defend Tel Aviv, Tonga or Tanzania.

Regardless of the nature of our deployment, the motive and goal is the same. We wage war out of unquenchable, holy love that compels us to mediate God's Kingdom in joyful obedience to the Great Commission. We are governed by the same overriding rule of engagement as Zion: surrender to the will of the Bridegroom-King (see Deuteronomy 28:1).

Spirit of the Age

The armies of Israel have been called to fight battles in the natural that both prefigure and reflect battles the Church is called to fight in the supernatural.³ In particular, Messianic Jewish soldiers prophetically link, by tangible flesh and blood, to Israeli warriors of both the past and future—the radically anointed zealots of the end times harvest. As followers of Yeshua, they foreshadow the growing convergence of Israel and the ekklesia in warfare (see Daniel 7:21–22; Revelation 12:17). More and more, we will contend together against anti-God powers and principalities of this age, preparing the way for the next.

Israel's armies are strictly defense-oriented, seeking no territorial gains, but aiming solely to protect their people.⁴ The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, is lovingly offensive; it is inherently expansionist in nature. The government of God, headquartered in the future in Jerusalem, will territorially encompass the earth after Jesus returns. Then at long last, swords will be beaten into plowshares (see Isaiah 2:2–4). This future convergence of the physical and spiritual manifests in a divine overlay of present purpose in which Israel and the Church will each access anointings of the other.

At this writing, some warn that the survival of the Jewish

nation is in question. Nuclear war, unrelenting terror and other forms of unconventional war threaten her existence. Nevertheless, she stands as Zion, which can mean "Signpost."⁵ The Jewish state serves as a signpost to the nations of God's dealings with humanity. As we watch what He does in Zion, we can better discern what He'll do in the Church. Romans 2:9-11 offers the principle, "First to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

For that reason, blessing on Zion means blessing for all God's people, Christians as well as Jews. Conversely, attack on Zion--or Zionism---usually portends attack on all God's people, Christians as well as Jews.

Controversy of Zion

What exactly is Zionism? The word "Zion" appears in the Bible over 150 times. It is used most often in reference to Jerusalem. But sometimes it refers more broadly to Israel, or more narrowly, to the Temple Mount. The term "Zionism" is based on the word "Zion." It is properly defined as the international liberation movement of the Jewish people to establish and maintain a sovereign Jewish state in their ancestral homeland, according to traditional international law.

Sadly, Israel's detractors now use the word "Zionist" or "Zionism" pejoratively as an antisemitic invective. Intentionally, they distort the movement's goals and malign its meaning. For Bible believers, however, the word should stir godly zeal for His covenant faithfulness.

To zoom in on modern-day Zion as signpost, we must first zoom out for perspective. The contemporary Zionist movement began toward the turn of the 20th century. After nearly two thousand years of exile, God's "set time to favor Zion" had come (Psalm 102:13). In the late 1800s, Protestant believers, particularly in England, began actively aiding European Jewish leaders in a call for Jews everywhere to return to their Promised Land. Together, Christians and Jews

appealed to the international community, which agreed in principle to the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East.^{5a} It is important to note this took place decades *before* the Holocaust.

The Zionist movement signaled God's breaking into the earth realm in a dramatic, new way. As Zionism gained momentum, the Azusa Street Revival erupted, giving rise to Pentecostalism and changing the course of world history. The launch of Zionism, soon followed by Pentecostalism, can be seen as the start of the last days' convergence of Israel's restoration with that of the Church.

Meanwhile, God's enemies did not sit idly by. Within decades, two world wars broke out, climaxing in the Nazi Holocaust. Thousands of young people headed for mission fields were conscripted and killed in battle. Meanwhile, six million Jews were slaughtered, and brutally so. Yet out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the Jewish state was formally birthed.

Within hours of declaring independence in 1948, Israel was attacked by five Arab Muslim nations, buttressed by thousands of irregular troops volunteering from other states. Vastly outnumbered and with an outrageously low weapons supply, the Jews were given virtually no chance of success. But few had factored in God. There were stories and accounts of miracle upon miracle, and to the world's surprise, Israel survived.⁶ A Holy Spirit revival of healing miracles concurrently circled the globe.

It was a season of restoration—but not without resistance. As a result of continued enemy aggression and against all odds, Israel *legally* recouped Gaza, the Golan Heights, Judea and Samaria, including East Jerusalem, in 1967. At the same time, the Jesus Movement exploded in the West. Internationally, supernatural Kingdom activity accelerated. With ancient Jerusalem restored to Israel, ancient anointing was restored to the Church through the simultaneous birth of the

contemporary Messianic Jewish movement.

In the Six Day War of 1967, Israel took a brave, biblical stance of proactive defense against enemy nations ready to imminently attack her. When the fighting started, recouping additional portions of the Promised Land was not the goal. It did become the unforeseen, miraculous result. Moreover, the additional swaths of land were secured, and legally so, according to international and military law. Sadly, however, from that point on things began to turn.

Lawfare

Palestinians and allied Muslim states were enraged. A new form of warfare, now called lawfare, entered the global scene. Lawfare can be defined as the unjust or disingenuous use of law by an enemy, mostly by changing traditional laws based on Judeo-Christian ethics, to further that enemy's disingenuous purposes. To the extent it disregards established law, it can be viewed as a form of lawlessness. An example of lawfare exists in Palestinians' relentless efforts to redefine military law in order to portray Israel's acquisition of land in the Six Day War as illegal, resulting in an illegal occupation. In the court of world opinion, they have succeeded.

Lawfare is based to a large extent on intentional distortion of facts, deceptive propaganda and outright lies. Recall that lies represent Satan's foundational weapon of warfare. Repeated often and long enough to those who are not Bible literate and passionate for truth, lies are eventually believed. Then, propaganda propagates social and political revolution. Not surprisingly, as formerly Christian nations conceded to lawfare against Israel, they eventually encountered it on their own soil. Examples today include laws advocating for revolutionary wokism and cancel culture.

The signpost message? God's people will be tolerated, even

somewhat admired, as long as they present no perceptible or tangible, real threat to the world. However, when heaven's Kingdom breaks through with power, world forces and systems are threatened. Satan's enemy kingdom pushes back, and hard.

Global Secularism

As Israel persisted in the arenas of lawfare and military terror, a new battlefield arose. Related to lawfare, global secularism erupted as an enemy only God Himself could defeat. Global secularism, formerly known as secular humanism,⁷ advocates for mankind's self-realization and self-rule through strictly rational and atheist means. Rejecting God and His Word, humanity---and what humanity creates---is extolled instead. Objective standards of right and wrong do not exist according to secular humanist teaching. Instead, moral truth is seen as relative to the circumstances of collective humanity. This is described by the term *moral relativism*. Under moral relativism, the Bible is no more authoritative than the *Koran*, the *Atheist Manifesto*, the *New York Times* or postings on social media.⁸

Humanism, with its moral relativism, amounts to creation worshiping the created instead of the Creator, and this He cannot bless (see Romans 1:25). Global secularism takes secular humanism to a global level, seeking global or semi-global governance without accountability to God. Democratic style freedoms are usually inconsistent with global secularism because individual freedoms are secondary to the benefit (defined by a select few) of global humanity. Exalting man as god, global secularism is destined to eventually culminate with the coronation of a figure known as the Antichrist. Until the Lord magnificently vanquishes both.

Secularist thought had influenced Israel, as it had most other Western nations, from the very inception of the modern

Jewish state.^{8a} Regrettably, this stronghold further entrenched when many began to attribute the stunning success of the Six Day War to the Jews' own efforts. Failing to acknowledge God's hand in the war, the international community took to assailing Israel with a campaign aimed at appeasement of her enemies, regardless of right or wrong. Because the philosophy of secular humanism does not possess objective moral standards of right and wrong, a rational way for it to resolve conflict is to seek (or enforce) peace at any price. Therefore, before long the nations would collectively persuade Israel to respond to her enemies—who still aggressively sought her demise—by appeasing them.

Appease When There is no Peace

Appeasement can be defined as fear-motivated concession to an evil for the sake of hoped-for relief from that evil. It is not the same as compromise. In and of itself, compromise can refer to morally positive motives, processes and results. Compromise can resolve even serious disputes through mutual concessions that do not necessarily sacrifice God's standards of right and wrong. Compromise should be undertaken in holy love, for the sake of justice, according to biblical righteousness. Unlike compromise, appeasement today is usually inspired by fear of man, not God. A disguised defeat, appeasement presumes or pretends that humans can all get along without Him.

Israel being the first modern-day, democratic nation targeted by Islamic terror, she also became the first modern-day, democratic nation to which the force of global secularist appeasement was applied. Palestinians, the world insisted, could and would make peace if the Jews simply gave terrorists more territory. But they were wrong.

Time and again, the relinquishment of Israeli territory resulted in terror gaining steadily in force and scope. Ground

to God's enemies had been given over not only by Israel, but by the global community. Decades later, and after repeated warnings by Israel, Islamic terror metastasized from Jewish soil to become a global phenomenon. Christian nations in the West were particularly targeted (see Genesis 12:3; Obadiah 1:10–11, 15). Appeasing first terrorists, and then other Judeo-Christian law-rejecting factions, those same nations sadly began morphing into post-Christian nations.

Zion stands as a signpost of what God is doing in the world—and in us. Appeasement has been used in the Church to cause compromise with sin in ways that a century ago would have been unthinkable. Today, you and I are urged to appease everything from the dictates of cancel culture, wokism, gender reassignment and redefinitions of marriage to all manner of so-called progressive causes. But appeasement is not an option for the ekklesia. Her Bridegroom-King was tempted by it, and in His refusal to succumb (see Matthew 4:1–11), she draws strength to stand firm. She refuses to surrender to false gods of this age or say, “ ‘Peace, peace’ . . . when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 8:11). Unquenchable love for Yeshua, His truth and the people for whom He died empowers her to contend for righteousness, and prevail.

In an era of international upheaval, we will do well to remember Jesus' parable of wheat and weeds. He cautioned that good and evil would increase simultaneously at the end of the age (see Matthew 13:24–30). At that time, He said, we are to look up and gaze at Him. We are to focus on the good He is doing (ripening of wheat) rather than the evil Satan is doing (planting of weeds). This does not mean we passively ignore the weeds. It means we overcome evil with good. Filled with faith, hope and love, we're to contend courageously for an end times harvest.

And *none* of us can be excluded.

Women at War

Women, as well as men, have from the beginning served in the armies of Israel. In the time of the judges, Deborah functioned as military accompaniment to Barak in a battle where Jael, another woman, gained honor for the victory (see Judges 4:8-9, 21-22). In the 1940s, Israel began conscripting female soldiers as a matter of course. The issue was simply one of survival. The sliver of a state, with neighboring nations all bent on its destruction, had no choice but to draft virtually everyone. The initiation of Israeli women into active military service, including limited but visible combat duty, raised world awareness. Untapped talents were possibly hidden, it was realized, in half the human race.

In 1969, Israel raised eyebrows by electing a woman, Golda Meir, to the highest executive office in the land.⁹ Tongues wagged. But through the chatter, God Himself was speaking. The time had come to advance His Kingdom purposes for women---and for women to advance His Kingdom purposes unhindered by unbiblical traditions of men.^{9a} However, as sometimes happens when Deity shakes tradition, secular society caught the message first. Not until a couple of decades later did more religious, Judeo-Christian communities begin to grasp the significance of what the Spirit was saying and doing. Regrettably, that delay came with a heavy price.

In 1963, a secular American Jewish author wrote a book entitled *The Feminine Mystique*.^{9b} The controversial book questioned the pervasive belief that, with rare exception, women's roles in life are best limited to that of homemaker, wife and mother. It sparked a social revolution known as the women's liberation movement or women's movement.

Over half a century ago, I believe God wanted His people at the helm of a life-altering shift in the Spirit concerning women. But it did not happen. The consequences have been

regrettable at best, appallingly tragic at worst. (Please understand, I speak here only of matters pertaining to women according to the biblical understanding of womanhood; specifically, individuals who are born biologically female and continue to identify as such.)

If we the people of God do not stay, by the Spirit, on the cutting, defining edge of our culture or on the loving offensive, we will likely find ourselves either sidelined or relegated to the defensive. Once on the defensive, we run the risk of pushing back not out of love, but from bitter resentment disguised as righteous indignation at the enemy, real or perceived. Or we can turn altogether reactionary, retreating in fear to former, and presumably holier, ground in a culture war.

Kingdom advance is much more difficult, however, from a posture of reactionism. God's purposes will still be achieved, but generally not without greater casualty and delay. Sadly, to a large degree this describes what happened when traditional women's roles were challenged in the Western world during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Without engagement by leaders in the Church, the women's movement launched itself virtually void of biblical parameters. Steeped in wounds that trace back to Eden, but without the moorings of Scripture, the movement radicalized into a variant of humanism called feminism. Many believers were offended and outraged by feminism's anti-God trappings. Consequently, the Church defensively retreated to former, traditional ground, from which advance became nearly impossible. As a result, new freedoms for women became synonymous with rebellion against faith, family and the foundation of all things right and good. More and more, godly but nontraditionally gifted Christian women became doctors, lawyers, scientists, university professors and business leaders. Meanwhile, they stayed seated quietly in church pews, withholding their gifts from the ekklesia,

because "women should remain silent in the churches" (1 Corinthians 14:34).^{9c}

Since then, much has changed. Many liberal Christian denominations have lifted most or all gender-based restrictions and now formally ordain women. Unfortunately, these changes have not always resulted from a careful reexamination of God's Word. Sometimes they have come about merely to accommodate or appease liberal shifts in the social culture. When that is the case, more conservative evangelical and Messianic denominations can be tempted to cling even more tightly to traditions not founded on sound biblical exegesis or principles of interpretation. It is time for truth to break through.

God is giving new opportunities to new generations. Many of the daughters and granddaughters of the former feminist movement have been apprehended by, and remain unstoppably ablaze for, their Bridegroom-King. They are returning to our congregational and ministry doorsteps. More and more, courageous, Word-driven and revival-oriented churches in the nations are welcoming them back. The Messianic Israeli ekklesia must embrace and empower them too, along with all their God-given gifts. We cannot win the war without them.

My Feminine "Mystique"?

A fair discussion on the biblical roles of women in the Body of Christ is well beyond the scope of this book on Israel's anointing. For that reason, I will not present my personal, though seriously studied, understanding of Scripture on the subject. But the topic is critical to the last days' anointing of God's people in both Israel and the Church. So I will simply share my story, amplified with biblical context, and pray it contributes to prayerful reexamination of traditional gender roles in the Body of Messiah.

Back in the 1970s, soon after surrendering my life to Yeshua, I was given a vision and strong sense of how He had called me to serve. That calling or destiny, in all its forms, inevitably involved the possibility of leading or teaching men. But leading or teaching men in the Body was clearly contrary to the theology of those to whom I was spiritually submitted. I was perplexed. Dumbfounded and distressed, I prayed, submitted to spiritual authority, and served cheerfully as best I could--- for twenty years. (More on that momentarily.)

Eventually I felt deeply convicted for not pursuing the vision God had given. I left my profession as an attorney and enrolled in seminary. Not wanting to disobey God's Word, I undertook an intense, prayerful study of the subject of gender roles. In the process, I learned an increasing number of conservative evangelical scholars were agreeing that New Covenant verses about women have been taken *extremely* out of context for much of Church history.¹⁰ When those verses are carefully studied in light of the specific cultures they addressed, it is plain to see they were not meant to be universally applied to all churches in all cultures, at all times.

It is rightly said that biblical text without context is often pretext. Recall, for example, the law of Torah requiring a parapet, or guard rail on roofs, because people in the ancient Middle East walked on roofs. This law was never meant to be universally applied for all time, to all peoples and cultures. Or consider the fact the New Covenant references slavery, but does not condemn it. Does that mean slavery must be universally tolerated, if not accepted?

At least one leading New Covenant scholar, Dr. Craig Keener, compares passages in Scripture about slaves and slavery with passages on women. He notes that historically, "those who identified everything in the Bible's culture with the Bible's message [for all cultures of all times] were obligated to both accept slavery and reject women's ministry."^{10a} In other

words, the Bible's rather tacit acceptance of slavery as a fact of life in the ancient Middle East does *not* mean it teaches or advocates that slavery is God ordained. Similarly, the Bible's rather tacit acceptance of restrictions on women in ancient Greco-Roman culture does not mean it teaches those same restrictions are universally God ordained.

Moreover, biblical passages referring to women must be considered in light of what Jesus, Paul and other authors of Scripture *did* as well as what they said. In the New Covenant, when we examine what Jesus and Paul actually practiced, we find their treatment of women was uniformly progressive for their time. Had they been any more progressive, their actions might have detracted from the centrality of the salvation message of the Gospel.

But now back to my story. After nearly three decades, serious study, and with a very supportive husband, I knew I had to say yes to God's call on my life. To what extent was I wrong, and responsible to my King, for choosing to submit to traditions of men rather than promptly obey Him from faith? I do not know. Sometimes delays are divinely ordered. The Bible teaches submission to leaders in authority, even when those leaders are not always right. (What human leader is always correct?) If I did make a "feminine mys-taque," I trust in God's mercy and grace. He masterfully works all things together for good for those who are called according to His purposes (see Romans 8:28).

Please understand that I do *not* suggest traditional women's roles of homemaking, caring for a husband and raising children are in any respect insufficient or inferior! I highly esteem women who lovingly lay down their lives for their families. Most, if not all, women (like most, if not all, men) are called to serve their spouses and families as their primary service to God. But what about unmarried women? Or married women who cannot have children? Or have only one? Does God always

necessarily gift them for, and confine them to, the kitchen or the nursery?

Long ago I was part of a Messianic congregation whose pastor/rabbi thought so. Not wanting to rebel against spiritual authority, I agreed to "volunteer" in the Shabbat school and teach primary grade youngsters. I was in my mid-30's and not yet married. I had no experience in child care, other than a few baby-sitting gigs as a teenager. For the sake of full disclosure, I cautioned my congregational elders that I knew absolutely nothing about controlling, let alone teaching, a pack of energetic and highly imaginative 6 and 7 year olds.

The first day of walking in what I was told was my calling, I held my breath and prayed as I ventured into class. Naturally, the children sensed my insecurity. Less than half an hour later, and to my utter embarrassment, the kids were so bored with me they literally ran out of the room. Each and every one of them. Several minutes later, I found some scampering about the sanctuary. Others ran outside to play in the parking lot. Their parents insisted I never teach again.

Seeing I'd at least made a sincere effort, the elders next suggested I try writing for the congregational newsletter. They had only one caveat. I was not to author anything that could be construed as teaching because many of the readers would be men.

It would not be honest to say that I was never frustrated, hurt or angry over gender limitations which I (along with more and more New Covenant scholars) did not personally perceive as biblical. But I did not complain or rebel; year after year, I took matters directly to the Lord. After listening to my lament, He'd inevitably draw me into His own, pure heart of effusive love. Then He'd escort me to the Cross. There I found healing and comfort as He challenged me to humble myself, forgive and let love cover the offense. In the process He taught me patience (which I'm still learning) and how to intercede for His

treasured Body (which I'm also still learning.) In retrospect, I would not trade the precious communion we shared on account of the gender issue, for anything.

I am certain that more than a few women reading this book can relate, at least in part, to the dilemma I experienced. If my journey reflects yours, please be encouraged that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. If your heart has been right—and you embrace the humble path of forgiveness—you lose no blessing in the end. Meanwhile, for my younger sisters in faith who cannot relate to my experience, may your destiny *never* be diverted by traditions that find no firm footing in God's Word!

Influence of Jewish Tradition

Why has much of the Church for so long viewed women as ineligible or incapable of ministering to or leading men? It is sometimes said that Christendom's gender-based restrictions trace back to extrabiblical traditions of rabbinic Judaism. But as we have seen, early Church fathers systematically excised Jewish teachings and traditions from New Covenant faith. They intentionally jettisoned the Hebraic roots of Christianity. Today we are in the process of restoring those roots, and hopefully, this book will be part of that process. In reality, the Church's differential treatment of women stems not so much from Judaism as from other sociocultural factors, including ancient Greco-Roman religious traditions, having little to do with God's Word.¹¹ Where gender discrimination still exists in the Body of Christ, the source is rarely found in Jewish teachings. There is however, one clear exception.

Many Messianic faith communities are purposefully founded on traditional, ancient rabbinic texts and tenets. Relying on certain rabbinic texts and tenets which are not found in Scripture and are patently disparaging or even hateful

toward women,^{11a} such congregations typically maintain strict limitations on women's roles. In these communities, gender limitations *can* be traced to extrabiblical or unbiblical rabbinic traditions, to varying degrees.

Historically, Judaism has prohibited women from pursuing advanced, formal Bible study and from serving in ministerial roles. The tradition stems mostly from rabbinic restriction, not the stipulation of Scripture. (The Torah does, however, limit priestly service in the Temple to a narrow and select group of men.)

Yeshua "broke all the rules" in allowing women to sit at His feet, study with Him and journey with His discipleship team. While few, if any, Messianic communities today would prohibit women from studying Scripture at advanced levels, they often robustly uphold restrictive traditions concerning ministerial roles, particularly in Israeli congregations. This may surprise some readers. Could it be, however, that some truths and treasures of Israel's anointing are yet to be recouped by us Israeli believers, as well as believers in the nations?

Fearsome Female Fighters

In the beginning, God made man in His own image. God identifies in Scripture as our Father and as a male. But He possesses traits we associate as both male and female, and possibly Adam originally did, too. In the creation account, the Hebrew word for *man*, from which the name "Adam" derives, refers to humankind. It does not imply gender or "maleness." Only after God fashioned Eve from Adam does the Hebrew shift to specify male and female.

To provide "a helper suitable" for Adam (Genesis 2:18), God separated and took out what could well have been Adam's female nature, thus creating Eve as a perfect complement. Nothing in the Hebrew indicates Eve was subordinate to Adam.

Together, both man and woman were delegated dominion over the earth (see Genesis 1:26–28). Although God cast woman in the role of helper to man, this does not suggest inferiority.

The same Hebrew word for “helper” (*ezer*) is frequently used in Scripture to describe YHWH Himself as our helper or help. Later, in the New Covenant, there is reference to the Holy Spirit as helper. So the relationship of helper to the helped does not in itself denote subjugation. More accurately, it can suggest the helper has power and resources lacking and needed by the one who is helped.

Since the curse of the Fall, a peculiar war has raged between the devil and the daughters of Eve, inspired by Deity: “I will put enmity between you and the *woman*, and between your offspring and *hers*; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15, my emphasis). God did not place direct enmity between the serpent and the man, but, it seems, between the serpent and the woman. As a result, Satan has issues with us women that he does not have with men. I suspect he may hate us more; in any case, I am certain he is really quite afraid of innocent little girls, ladies who are strong and definitely, praying grandmas—all for good reason. Residing in our DNA is, I suspect, an unconscious enmity mysteriously echoing the Creator's prophetic, head crushing mandate. Ever since Eve, females have made for fearsome fighters destined to outmatch hell's fury.

God does not want female fighters opting out of war because of wrong theology. Our gender is not a hindrance but a help in battle. It is no secret, for example, that around the world, women (as a whole) tend to be regarded as more intuitive or “spiritually sensitive” than men. We often sense danger more readily, as if tuned to an internal radar. Noting this phenomenon, some ancient rabbis concluded women were created with an extra dose of wisdom and understanding.¹² Neuroscientists today tell of more complex and interactive right

and left-brain functioning. At this writing, the majority of IDF intelligence operatives happen to be women. In any event, God made us different from men on many levels. He wants His female fighters exploiting a redeemed and surrendered, internal radar for Spirit-strategized maneuvers.

Healing Ancient Hatreds: Misogyny

If women harbor an unconscious recollection of the curse of the Fall, is it possible men also possess a type of mysterious but indelible memory of the event? Could the male gender, in some manner, recall Eve's seductive proposal to partake of forbidden fruit? If so, little appreciation is likely to be triggered for the event. More than a hint of blame-shifting can be heard by God's beloved Adam: "The woman you put here with me—*she* gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12, my emphasis). Is it not conceivable that an unconscious, timeless resentment resides toward her? What about simmering male guilt for succumbing to "the woman you put here with me," rather than rising to the role of interceding for her exculpation?

Such musings may strike some readers as unrealistically far-fetched or overly metaphysical. But consider that social scientists note and track a troubling worldwide phenomenon. Historically, wherever widespread human suffering exists from poverty, disease, famine or war, a disproportionately high percentage of victims have been women. In some cultures, systematic and institutionalized, murderous abuse of women remains commonplace.¹³ This entrenched injustice is called misogyny.

Quite simply, misogyny is defined as the hatred of women. In some societies, misogyny still takes the form of state-sanctioned female honor killings, gender-selective abortion exclusively for female infants, female sex slavery, female rape,

female genital mutilation, femicide (the murder of women solely for being female) and more. In the West, misogynous acts and abuses typically manifest more subtly. The Church is not necessarily exempt.

A common deception about misogyny is that its victims are limited to females, when in fact it degrades men at least as much. By assenting to and participating in acts that defile women, men give ground to the enemy to steal, kill and destroy *themselves* as well. One example that is plain to see is the deleterious effect on men of pornography. Less obvious is the defiling impact on men from engaging in sins such as sex slavery or female infanticide; or concerning the Church, of denying the exercise of spiritual gifts of half the Body of Messiah for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Of course, we women can perpetuate misogyny too. We cannot just blame the guys. How many of us, for instance, can still purposefully flaunt our sexuality or act out, when it seems convenient, the old stereotypical, helpless female? In so doing, we agree unconsciously with the same gender debasing spirit, and God grieves.

I rejoice that we are in a season in which the truth of His Word is setting us free at new levels. As men and women genuinely become one in Christlike humility, the most fundamental reconciliation of the human race will occur. This will both require and release levels of humility, forgiveness, love and purity on the part of both men and women that, in turn, reform the fabric of Christianity. To the extent we wholeheartedly repent of misogyny, I believe we will be delivered and healed of widespread sexual immorality, gender confusion in its many forms, and more.

As the Messianic warrior bride lives out God's destiny for woman as suitable helper and co-regent to man, we will live out more purely and effectively our destiny as suitable helper, even co-regent, to Yeshua. Together in right relationship, man

and woman will beautifully showcase the full revelation of God's personality.

My husband is a retired physician and ordained pastor. He has encouraged me in ministry throughout our marriage. He offers an incisive encouragement to other Messianic Jewish and Christian men:

In my experience, unbiblical restriction of women in ministry often stems from pride and insecurity on the part of male pastors and elders. Male leaders in the Body of Christ should be secure enough in the Lord to receive instruction, impartation, and blessing from those God has gifted and commissioned, regardless of gender. This may mean we step aside so they can rise up. When male leaders intentionally make room for women, not just in the secular world, but in the Church, from informal round tables to pulpits, the whole Body will mature into the One New Man it is called to be.¹⁴

A Messianic Jewish Challenge

Believers have long appreciated the great liberating truth of Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Yeshua, Gentiles as well as Jews can receive all the gracious blessings of salvation. Ethnicity does not determine spiritual standing or status. At the same time, certain distinctions between Jews and Gentiles are not abolished in the natural realm any more than they are abolished between men and women.

As surely as this verse liberates Jews and Gentiles into their destiny as one in Christ, it likewise illustrates that despite their physical distinctions, both men *and women* receive *all* the spiritual blessings of salvation in Messiah. Gender does not determine status or standing in the Spirit any more than national bloodline. Women are not relegated to spiritual inferiority in any respect, or disqualified from serving in

ministry, solely for being female.

I submit the time has come to humbly search our hearts and seek God for fresh insight into His word on women for these last days. We must not dismiss the Deborahs (who exercised authority over men), muzzle the Miriams (she led in more than worship), or prohibit the Priscillas (a pastoral teacher) from serving as fully as they've been called. Let us not forget that our sister Junia proved “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16:7).

One unique consideration in the reconciliation of male and female seems to relate specifically to Messianic Jewish women. Recall the second half of Genesis 3:15 referring to the “offspring” of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head. That heroic Crusher is the God-Man Messiah Yeshua. But in a broader sense, Bible scholars recognize this “offspring” pertains also to Israel, the Jewish nation through whom Yeshua was birthed. Indeed, it was the Jewish woman Miriam (Mary) whom God used to conceive the Messiah for humanity’s redemption. I do not think hell has ever quite gotten over that.

From a still broader perspective, the woman’s offspring includes those born anew by God’s Spirit from all nations. Therefore, the enemy’s enmity seethes toward all Christians. It would stand to reason, then, that Jews who are also Christian *and* also female could be uniquely targeted by Satan. I raise the issue because, while the collective Body of Christ now includes women serving publicly in leadership at practically every level, Messianic Jewish women are rarely, if ever, among them. As mentioned earlier, pre-Messiah rabbinic traditions are still upheld in many Messianic Jewish communities.¹⁵ In future years this will change, and as God raises up female Messianic Jewish leaders, the whole Body will be blessed. The full expression of Israel’s anointing—from both genders—will at last be restored.

An intriguing, yet-to-be fulfilled Old Covenant prophecy

refers to the relationship between Messianic Jewish men and women, and by extension, to all believers. Jeremiah 31 is an exhilarating chapter about Israel's restoration to her land and her Lord. In this context the prophet declares, "The Lord will create a new thing on earth—a woman will surround a man" (Jeremiah 31:22). This verse baffles Bible scholars, many of whom conclude this "new thing" is so unique to the future that its meaning cannot yet be ascertained.¹⁶ With all due respect to modern biblical scholarship, I would like to venture an interpretation.

The Hebrew word translated "surround" has a cooperative, affectionate connotation. The meaning is positive, not negative, suggesting an embrace of tender love.¹⁷ To "surround" implies the protecting of another.¹⁸ To some degree, woman's "surrounding" of man likely relates to her Genesis 2 mandate to "help" man. By this reasoning, in the context of Israel's future restoration, we can conclude that God establishes a new and good expression and exchange of life between man and woman. Male-female relationships are beautifully redeemed according to His original, pre-Fall intent. Israel's rehabilitation in the coming Millennial Age catapults blessing that reaches magnificently into the recesses of humankind's most foundational dyad.¹⁹

In the next chapter, I invite you to taste that heaven on earth with me.

9

Messianic Millennium Coming

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:32–33)

Worldwide, more and more of God's people are praying for Messiah to return. If you are among them, may I ask if you have also prayed through what His return could specifically mean for you? Some Christians think of heaven as their longed-for, trouble-free and ethereal home. They look forward to Jesus whisking them away to be with Him there, forever. Believers who are older in age or face serious illness understandably tend to anticipate the relief heaven will bring. Surely heaven is going to be wondrous beyond words. Yet our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) of eternal life is about a great deal more.

Our Bridegroom-King is returning to the planet for a thousand years of glorious governmental, Kingdom rule (see Revelation 20:2-3). At that time, He will restore life on earth to conditions reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. You and I will be here with Him for that spectacular Messianic Millennium—and beyond. We will discover that heaven on earth, quite *literally*, is even better in God’s masterful design, than heaven alone.

I am not saying that heaven above is not unequivocally,

incomparably stupendous. It is paradisaical beyond what we can imagine. Nor am I saying that certain realms of heaven are not accessible to believers today. Yet the Bible teaches something even more resplendent lies ahead. We can think of it as God's globalism.

Yeshua assured His disciples they would be with Him forever, and the promise applies to Christians through the ages (see Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 2:11–12; 1 Thessalonians 5:10). We are with Him in life and in what we call death, when we live in His presence in heaven. Then, when Messiah comes back physically to earth, believers who have died will return with Him (see 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 3:13). Included are those saints who will have been raptured, or caught up to meet the Lord in the air, in connection with the period of distress known as the Great Tribulation (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17). You and I will be part of that great company—and we are going to absolutely love it—if we stand firm to the end. In this chapter we see why, and delve into the future that is now.

Heaven on Earth

By New Covenant times, the Jews had long known there was coming a day when God's appointed Messiah would rule Israel and the nations in glory and peace. So when Jesus spoke of eternal life and its rewards, as in the passages below, He knew His Jewish audience understood that He referred not just to heaven above, but to a future Kingdom on earth.

“Well done, My good servant! . . . Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities” (Luke 19:17; see also Matthew 25:23).

“I confer on you a kingdom, just as My Father conferred one on Me, so that you may . . . sit on thrones, judging” (Luke 22:29–30).

“At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging” (Matthew 19:28).

Yeshua's original disciples were well acquainted with the Hebrew prophets' inspired, vivid descriptions of the Messianic Age. They looked forward to world peace, global justice, nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord in Jerusalem to learn of His ways, and much more (see Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:4, Psalm 72:11 and much more). When their Rabbi spoke words like those above, they understood He was saying that someday He would give them authority to govern and judge nations (see 1 Corinthians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14).

First century believers anticipated the King returning with “thousands upon thousands of his holy ones” (Jude 1:14) and so should we. What they did not know, and neither do we, was the precise timing of it all. While Messiah's return seems imminent to many of us today, we do not know the precise day and hour (see Acts 1:6-8).

The prophet Daniel, with whom Yeshua's Jewish twelve disciples were certainly familiar, was especially eloquent on the end times. To him it was revealed that deceased, faithful followers of YHWH would be resurrected, “shine like the brightness of the heavens,” and “lead many to righteousness.” They would “receive” and then “possess” the Kingdom (Daniel 12:2–3; 7:18, 22). Daniel explained that following a conflagration on earth with a ruler fitting the description of Antichrist, “the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High” (Daniel 7:27).

To summarize Old and New Covenant teaching on the age to come, Messiah Yeshua returns to earth—to rule from Jerusalem—together with a myriad of angels and resurrected

believers from all nations. At that time, He judges and vanquishes His foes. Converging heaven with earth, He governs, together with the saints, over all nations. This governance lasts for a period described as a thousand years. In confirmation and as recorded in the book of Revelation, the apostle John saw thrones on which resurrected believers sat judging with authority over nations and serving as priests, princes and kings for a thousand years (see Revelation 1:5–6; 2:26; 5:10; 20:4–6).

This Messianic Millennium is followed by Satan's brief, temporary release from prison, when he is permitted to tempt humanity one last time. Sadly, a final war on earth takes place. After that comes the devil's swift and final demise, whereupon God's people inherit a gloriously new heaven and earth. This new heaven realm is spiritual; however, the new earth realm exists in a new type of material form. God's glory, character and personality will manifest uniquely through an ultimate, total convergence of a perfected spiritual realm (new heaven) and perfected physical realm (new earth).

This extremely good news is part of the Gospel of the Kingdom for which we are to zealously prepare, as well as share with the world (see Matthew 24:14). The knowledge of things to come, literally, is an aspect of Israel's anointing God is reviving in His Jewish people and restoring to His ekklesia.

Davidic Covenant of the Kingdom

The Kingdom of God and Messianic Millennial Age is tied to a covenant word God gave King David over three thousand years ago:

I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. . . . I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father,

and he will be my son. . . . Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:12–16)¹

David took the promise literally. He understood that it referred to a physical descendant who would rule from a physical Jerusalem, forever (see 2 Samuel 7:18–29; 1 Chronicles 17:16–27; Psalm 89:3–4, 28–37; 132:11–12). The Hebrew prophets of Scripture confirmed and expounded on this covenant promise (see Jeremiah 33:17; 22, Amos 9:11, Isaiah 9:7). Like David, they understood it would be literally fulfilled.

Recall that many years later, at the heaven-and-earth-shattering annunciation of Messiah's first coming, the angel Gabriel declared, "The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1:32–33). From then on, the New Covenant identifies Jesus as inheritor of the Davidic throne. The title "King of the Jews" refers to this position. Not coincidentally, at the end of His public ministry Yeshua receives this exact appellation—engraved on a cross (see Luke 23:38). Soon thereafter, the apostles perform miraculous signs and wonders in Jesus' name, which they attribute to the restoration of "David's fallen hut"² (see Acts 15:16).

According to the combined genealogies of Luke 3 and Matthew 1, both Mary and Joseph were lineal descendants of King David (see 2 Timothy 2:8).³ Because Mary was familiar with the promise of David's throne, she burst into a song of praise upon Gabriel's annunciation. The words of her song are taken from the Hebrew Scriptures and reflect her son's appointment as royal ruler in a literal and physical sense (see Luke 1:46–55).

To be sure, Yeshua's followers in the New Covenant saw Him as inheritor of a tangible, revived and restored Davidic throne (see Matthew 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–34; 21:9; Acts 3:19–21; 15:13–18). Based on what biblical revelation they had, they

quite logically anticipated an imminent establishment of His governmental rule.⁴ The Hebrew Scriptures only hinted, slightly and enigmatically, at two distinct comings of Messiah. So it was not unreasonable for them to assume the Master would "at this time restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:8).

For us today, the canon of New Covenant teaching clarifies that Yeshua's throne is heavenly as well as earthly, and that He is coming a second time. Yet we stand to make a mistake similar to that of His first disciples if we dismiss one reality for the other. Whereas they did not understand the heavenly dimensions of the Kingdom, some believers today do not understand its earthly dimensions. As we have already and will again see, the implications of such a misunderstanding can significantly impact our destiny.

Thrones of the Kingdom

Although they are on a course to converge, the throne of David is not the same as the throne of God Himself. God's present throne of glory is in heaven, where Yeshua sits at the right hand of His Father, in full expression of His divinity (see Hebrews 8:1; 1 Peter 3:22). The future, Davidic throne is in Jerusalem and expresses Messiah's humanity as well as His divinity (see Psalm 122:5). Jesus did not occupy the physical Davidic throne at His first coming and will not occupy it until He comes again (see Isaiah 9:7; Psalm 2:6; Revelation 5:5; 22:16; Isaiah 24:21–23).

Yeshua Himself differentiates between the two thrones in Revelation 3:21. There He says He will share His throne with those who overcome, just as His Father now shares His throne with Him (Jesus) because He overcame. The point is, there is no such thing as a Messianic throne not occupied by a physical Son of Man—a Jewish son of David—in a physical Jerusalem in a physical Israel. The Gospel of the Kingdom starts with the

good news of salvation through forgiveness of sin by a King who is fully God and, in Israel's covenant anointing, fully human as well.

Why do I spend so much time on the Davidic throne? If we totally spiritualize the Kingdom and Messiah's throne, we not only nullify God's promise to King David and therefore to Israel, but we dismiss many of His promises to us personally. The logical conclusion of a solely spiritual Messianic rule removes the blessed hope of Jesus' literal return. If there is no literal throne of David, there is no biblically qualified Redeemer of Humanity. There is only the intangible Kingdom of the spirit realm, or an ethereal heaven that does not fully redeem the earth. If this is what we believe, we're not likely to connect with or access all the authority God has given us for all He has called us to be and to do in this life--which impacts our life in ages to come.

Our ultimate destiny is to exercise dominion in and from love, as agents of Kingdom thrones, over the material realm created for us. Recall that in the beginning, God delegated legal authority to humankind to rule the earth (see Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:5–6). We lost much of that authority at the Fall, tragically abdicating our rights of dominion to Satan. Within the Godhead, however, a profound plan for redemption had already been conceived (see Isaiah 63:5). God's Son would live among us, a man of flesh and blood—yet perfectly sinless—under the full anointing of His Spirit. Only a Jewish man could or would be in a position to follow and fulfill all the Law. Accordingly, the Son of Man would be a Jew, born into the Davidic lineage as legitimate heir to David's throne.

As such, Yeshua would qualify to atone for the sin of all humanity (see Isaiah 53:2–12; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:11; Hebrews 2:17). In so doing, He would legally and rightfully recover all authority humankind had lost. He could and would qualify to lead us in fulfilling God's mandate of love

to subdue the earth (see Genesis 1:28). In the process, this magnificent Son of God/Son of Man would be given a bride as co-regent with whom to lovingly commune and rule, forever. The implications are nothing less than staggering. So the Davidic nature of our King neither demeans His deity nor subtracts from His splendor; to the contrary, it magnifies His glory forever.

Supersessionism / Replacement Theology

There is another reason we must rightly understand the concept of the Davidic covenant and literal throne of Messiah in these last days. If we dismiss the natural and physical, or earthly dimensions of the Kingdom, we must then dismiss any role in it for natural and physical Israel. If we the present and future role of Israel in the Kingdom, we will very likely find ourselves succumbing to the historical error of supersessionism or replacement theology. Supersessionism, often called replacement theology, is the mistaken belief the Church has replaced Israel and the Jews in God's heart and plans.

Christians who adhere to doctrines of supersessionism or replacement theology find no biblical reason or justification for Israel to exist as a Jewish state. For over two thousand years, various forms of these theologies have made their way through Christendom. Today, as God has regathers the Jewish people to their covenant land as a nation-state, those set against His purposes loudly, even murderously, oppose Him. Sadly, some identify as Christian believers.

At this writing, new forms of evangelical supersessionism have developed out of the 75-year old Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Called liberation theology, fulfillment theology, Palestinian peace theology, or some variant thereof, the new supersessionism teaches that all God's prophetic promises to

Israel were fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. Personal salvation is often secondary to liberation from injustice, real or perceived. While this theology does not outright call for Israel's destruction or the murder of Jews, it does call upon believers everywhere to undertake measures that, in effect, foster terror and the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state.^{4a} The new supersessionism reflects the same Christian antisemitism that has historically plagued the Church, however strenuously its proponents may insist they are not antisemitic.^{4b}

As we have seen, if Satan could ever destroy Israel, he could upend his own eviction from earth. He could also destroy our faith in a covenant keeping God. So it is not unfair to conclude that God is *not* the author of the new Palestinian supersessionism.

Restoration of All Things

There's still more. Without the fuller revelation of Yeshua as Davidic king, dynamic continuity between Old and New Covenants is lost. We can easily find ourselves regarding the physical realm as innately bad or hopelessly carnal. But such a perspective is not biblical. The Hebrew Scriptures consistently represent the material world as God's innately good handiwork. Though corrupted by human sin, it is not in and of itself, not good.

Historically, Christian reviling of the physical realm has reflected cultural paganism and unbiblical philosophies such as Gnosticism. The apostles strenuously opposed these influences, which nonetheless made their way into some of the early churches⁵. Today, some of us still tend to view sin as having irreparably spoiled all things tangible. Yet Creator God repeatedly affirms that everything He made was good, even *very* good (see Genesis 1:31). He was pleased to form and fashion the earth realm, which expresses His character and purposes like

nothing else. His intent was—and still is—for man, together with Him, to enjoy, not deny, material reality.

To be sure, following the Fall, God cursed the ground in Genesis 3:17. But the Hebrew concept of “curse” does not mean the earth itself turned evil. The Hebrew word used here for “curse” more accurately means, as the Genesis passage goes on to describe, a great diminishing of prosperity. In the end, God will not let sin have the final say; He will magnificently redeem and restore “all things” (see Acts 3:21; Colossians 1:19–20; Ephesians 1:9–10).

A large portion of the Old Covenant refers to this restoration of all things during the Messianic Age. In the New Covenant, Messiah speaks often of the Kingdom to come. In follow-up, all the apostolic authors expound on the theme. You and I are meant to be encouraged and empowered by the blessed hope of Jesus not only returning, but residing here. He wants us looking forward to joyful participation in His glorious, governmental, manifest presence and activity in a reformed world.

The expectation of Yeshua’s literal return with deceased or raptured saints, and His subsequent Kingdom rule, was standard Church teaching up to the third and fourth centuries.⁶ Until then, any contradictory theology (which again, traced to pagan influence) was considered to be serious error. As Christianity became politically institutionalized, however, the literal-grammatical-historical approach to studying God’s Word was replaced by a symbolic or allegorical method of interpretation.⁷ As a result, basic doctrines of the faith shifted to accommodate political interests.

We have seen earlier in this book that a symbolic approach enjoyed a politically correct advantage over any literal interpretation of the Bible. By an allegorical interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures, God’s government rule on earth would never actually materialize. No King of Kings would ever

return to tangibly take over the kingdoms of men. Therefore, Yeshua would pose little or no threat to existing political and governing institutions.

As time went on, much of Christendom came to focus on the symbolic, spiritual dimension of God's Kingdom, while denigrating the physical realm. Artificial distinction was then drawn between secular and sacred spheres of life. Unfortunately, the natural (secular) remained important only insofar as it became symbolic of the spiritual (sacred). This thinking eventually gave rise to an end times eschatology known as amillennialism. Amillennial thought was strongly denounced by our Messianic Jewish apostolic fathers as heretical.⁸

Views of the Millennium

Today, amillennialism remains one of three main eschatological (end times) views embraced by the international Body of Christ. To summarize, amillennialism teaches there is no personal, literal return and rule of Messiah. His earthly reign takes place only in the hearts of men, in this present age.

In contrast to amillennialism, a view called postmillennialism holds that Jesus does return—but only after humanity first achieves a symbolic, thousand-year period of perfection. Those who hold this view believe the Church increases in prosperity, power and scope until the whole world worships Yeshua for a symbolic period of a thousand years. Postmillennialists believe this is attainable because, in their understanding, Satan has already been personally and fully bound.⁹ Some postmillennial streams believe the saints take over the governments of nations,¹⁰ then the new heaven and earth appear. The seven-year Great Tribulation of distress is deemed either symbolic or already fulfilled.¹¹

A third perspective, called premillennialism, holds that Messiah's personal and literal return to earth occurs before the thousand-year Kingdom age begins. Most premillennialists believe that spectacular return follows a very real period of great tribulation lasting for seven years. The span of seven years is usually regarded as literal. Most believe the Messianic Age also lasts a literal thousand years; others say the number could be symbolic. Historically, most anticipate that believers will experience some or all of the Great Tribulation. More recently, and as described in fuller detail in the next chapter, many have come to believe the rapture will take place prior to the seven-year period of great distress.^{11a}

Most likely, all three views contain certain elements of truth.¹² They are certainly not the only eschatological views held by respectable followers of Messiah. In the end, I personally suspect most of us will be delightfully surprised at how matters unfold. My own understanding of the Scriptures, however, is most consistent with historic premillennialism. But I also embrace limited aspects of other eschatological schemes. I believe, for example, that in an important---but certainly not complete---sense, Satan was bound by the Cross and Resurrection. I also believe the true Church will be purified, matured and exponentially empowered by the Spirit before the Second Coming. But I am convinced Messiah physically comes back for a resplendent thousand-year reign, prior to which the rapture occurs. In any case, Yeshua will valiantly displace a very real devil who has done all he can to destroy God's people and purposes.

At the same time, I have learned we cannot be dogmatic about when or how future events will precisely unfold. We do our best to interpret God's Word according to biblical principles of interpretation. We take into account the book of Revelation is filled with metaphor. We prayerfully and diligently try to hear and watch what Holy Spirit is saying and

doing. We respectfully consider the counsel of trustworthy elders and prophetic voices, including those with whom we do *not* necessarily agree on matters *not* essential to the faith. In the process, we keep our hearts fixed on the victory, character and nature of YHWH. We trust and love Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Keeping all these matters in mind, we can peek into broad strokes of the glorious future He has promised.

Messiah Makes a Comeback

When Yeshua was lifted to heaven, angels prophesied to wide-eyed apostles standing by, “Men of Galilee, . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Messiah’s return will be as tangibly real as His Ascension. He Himself foretold, “They [all nations] will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30b; see also Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27).

Every eye on earth will see Him return because He is coming back in physical form. The feet of His resurrected body will stand on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Those same beautiful feet will rest in a literal geographic location, specifically Zion (see Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:27; Zechariah 14:4; Isaiah 60:13; Ezekiel 43:7). Yeshua’s resurrected body, though in essence a natural one, will have supernatural dimensions. Recall that after He rose from the dead, the Master ate meals with His disciples. In that same body, the Lord also walked right through walls (see Luke 24:41–43; John 20:19). Believers who return with Him will have similar bodies.

Our glorified Bridegroom-King will unleash God’s Millennial government, a theocracy of love, righteousness, peace, justice and joy such as you and I have never known. The period of a

thousand years could possibly be symbolic, as Revelation is filled with symbolism. In any case, during this time the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (see Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14). How bedazzling is that?!

I had a unique, God-timed opportunity to write this chapter from a lovely cottage on a secluded beach in Hawaii. Just steps from the Pacific Ocean, the place was a gorgeous getaway, a sheer delight to the senses. It was paradise! Captivated by the glistening beauty before my eyes, I found myself meditating hours at a time on God's glory covering the earth as the waters cover the sea.

How majestic is the ocean He has made, interacting endlessly with light and wind to disclose ever-new and changing wave patterns and sounds! Like the knowledge of His glory, the sea does not cease to dazzle and fascinate. As with the Kingdom, treasures hide deep beneath its surface. A colorful and adventurous world awaits those daring to dive in.

The sea offers joyful fun and refreshing recreation. Yet, like the King, its ceaseless roar reminds us that it is untamable. The same sparkling waters that keep us gently afloat can overtake and consume us. The sea can swallow up or pummel to pieces. It can transform rugged rocks of resistance into pristine, powdery white sand. You get the point.

Like the sea, the knowledge of God's glory will be an infinite, incomparable trove of beauty, holy awe, majesty and joy. It will overtake the earth in love, righteousness, justice and peace for all creation.

Shalom on Earth

Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace, referring to much more than the absence of ill will. The biblical concept of shalom includes wholeness, rest, tranquility, safety, security, and well-

being. Under the coming dominion of the Prince of Peace, righteousness and shalom kiss each other (see Psalm 85:10; Isaiah 9:7). “Peace on earth, good will toward men” materializes on far more than Christmas cards. The nations are subdued with unprecedented peace emanating from Jerusalem, known as the City of Peace (see Isaiah 9:7; 57:19; 14:7). Around the world, swords are fashioned into plowshares and implements of fruitful agricultural development. People rest in peace while very much alive (see Isaiah 2:4; 54:13; 55:12).

This peace continually increases. It blankets not only humanity, but all of natural creation, even the wildest beasts (see Isaiah 9:7; Ezekiel 34:25). A dedicated animal lover, I delight to think of what Isaiah 11:6-8 describes as lambs romping with wolves, goats grazing with leopards, and calves skipping among lions, a small child leading them all. Cattle roam alongside grizzly bears while infants toy with cobras.

Peace saturates the planet because true peace is preceded by righteousness, and with the government of man resting fully on the shoulders of Yeshua, righteousness prevails (see Isaiah 32:17; 9:6). Righteousness is one of God’s most essential attributes.¹³ It refers to that which is pure, virtuous and correct, without fault or guilt, and consistent with His holiness.¹⁴ As we will see momentarily, righteousness is tied inextricably to justice. An insuppressible craving for righteousness resides, I believe, in the collective human soul, and to an extent, all creation. For with righteousness comes the settled assurance that things are as they should be; all is *right*.

After Jesus returns, righteousness rains down, effecting a metamorphosis of all the earth.¹⁵ Righteousness characterizes the government of the Kingdom (see Isaiah 45:8; 11:4–5). Hosting Messiah’s headquarters, the City of Jerusalem is reestablished in righteousness, gaining international renown

as the City of Righteousness (see Jeremiah 33:16; Isaiah 1:26). We are commanded to pray for the righteousness of Jerusalem until that time when all nations can see it (see Isaiah 62:1–2).

Righteousness impacts every element of creation and sector of society. Human interactions, from interpersonal relationships to international business deals, are characterized by righteous decisions, just dealings and consequently, the peace of shalom. All creation, which fell and now groans due to humanity's sin, is uplifted and restored in love through Christ's righteous rule (see Romans 8:19–22). In response to widespread righteousness, the ground itself heals and flourishes, not unlike Eden (see 2 Chronicles 7:14; Joel 2:21–23; Ezekiel 47:7–12).

My husband and I lived for many years in the deserts of both Israel and Southern California. Water is always a precious commodity in those chronically arid, thirsty environments. Often the sun is scorching hot. As a result, I have special appreciation for prophecies pertaining to the desert:

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. . . . Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. (Isaiah 35:1, 2, 6–7)

Areas of the world that have experienced major spiritual revival occasionally manifest aspects of this future, miraculous restoration of the land. Otherwise ordinary fruit and vegetable crops have, during periods of revival, spontaneously grown dramatically larger and more abundantly than normal¹⁶—a foretaste of the Messianic Age. To some degree, we see a similar phenomenon in Israel's miraculous restoration over the past century.

The time is coming when earth's produce everywhere will be supernaturally plenteous (see Isaiah 30:23–24; 51:3; Jeremiah 31:12; Ezekiel 34:26–27; Zechariah 8:12). Nature itself will rejoice. The planet will yield bountiful riches and treasures from within (see Joel 2:21–22; Isaiah 14:7–8; Isaiah 55:12–13; Psalm 65:13; 96:12; 98:8).

Survivors of the Great Tribulation who did not align with the Antichrist begin repopulating the planet. Under conditions of righteousness and peace, longevity is restored. Natural people in natural bodies (distinct from the resurrected, returned to earth saints) are still young at the age of one hundred. Individuals who die sooner are considered cursed. A normal lifespan equals “the days of a tree,” or at least several hundred years (see Isaiah 65:20–22). Supernatural healing becomes commonplace for the sick and injured (see Isaiah 29:18–19; 35:5–6; Ezekiel 47:12). To a spectacular extent, the curse of the Fall radically reverses. Eventually all creation resembles the garden God planted in Eden (see Ezekiel 36:33–36).

Despite the amazingly great glory, sadly, some disobedience to God still occurs during the Millennium. Natural people continue to sin and die until the time of the new heaven and earth (see Isaiah 2:4a; 54:15; Zechariah 13:3; 14:16–19). For although Satan will have been sentenced to an abyss, human nature will not.

Men, women and children will retain the priceless gift of free will. Even as peace and righteousness prevail, some will choose to rebel, forcing Messiah to rule with a “rod of iron” (see Psalm 2:9; Revelation 12:5, 19:15, 20:7–10). This rebellion culminates at the end of a thousand years, in connection with Satan's temporary return. Soon thereafter, a final judgment occurs and the devil is consigned to an eternal lake of fire (see Revelation 20:7–10). God will have allowed human nature to run its full course. This grand finale of divine judgment will magnificently showcase His perfect justice.

Just is-Righteousness

The nations cry out to our King, whether they know it or not, for justice in a world desperately needing it. In the age to come, the administration of perfect justice will both reflect and mediate God's perfection, righteousness, love and holiness. It will reach into every city and village on every continent, touching every man, woman and child. An essential attribute of the Divine Personality, justice serves as holy hallmark of the millennial Kingdom (see Isaiah 9:7; 11:3–4; 32:16; 42:1, 4; Psalm 72:1–2; 2 Thessalonians 1:6). God's justice will inspire infinite worship and awe in its future, brilliant display (see Isaiah 5:16). Together with righteousness, justice will form the foundation of His throne (see Psalm 89:14).

Biblical justice is inextricably related to biblical righteousness (see Psalm 33:5; 72:2; Isaiah 11:4; 1:27; 9:7; 32:16; 33:5). The two concepts are so closely connected that the same words in both Hebrew and Greek are used in reference to both righteousness and justice. The translation into English depends largely on the specific context in which the word is used. Quite clearly, justice apart from righteousness is not biblical justice.

Biblical justice can be seen as the administration or dispensation of righteousness, or of that which is right. Because that which is right must be true, biblical justice must necessarily rest on biblical truth. In the twenty first century, however, the world's definition of justice is a far cry from the Bible's. Emerging notions of justice seek more and more to simply equalize humanity, regardless of context, factual truth or moral ethics.

In Jewish theology, YHVH's justice is inseparable from His mercy. His judgments are seen as acts of mercy to uphold righteousness and truth for our own good.¹⁷ For His people in both Old and New Covenants, the idea of judgment is primarily

positive and instructive, not negative and injurious. God's holiness and love toward humanity compel, out of mercy, His judgments. Therefore, He is worshiped—on earth as well as in heaven—for His justice, or His righteous judgments (see Revelation 15:3; 16:7).

God's justice is associated in the Scriptures with His deliverance. When He judges His enemies, the righteous are set free. Judgment and its accompanying deliverance begins in the house of the Lord (see 1 Peter 4:17). When judgment comes to us as believers, it is to mercifully rouse us toward beneficial change to set us free.

God disciplines (and discipless) us as a father kindly and wisely disciplines (and discipless) his children. He is determined to remove from our lives all that would hinder love. For together with Yeshua, the ekklesia bride is destined to mediate justice to the nations. In this life and probably in ages to come, that mediation first takes the form of priestly prayer; then secondly, hands-on, tangible deeds. It is in response to our intercession, in all its forms, that God releases righteous judgments and strategies which shake the globe and prepare us to rule and reign with Him forever (see Luke 18:1–8; Revelation 5:8; 8:3–4). He is preparing us for what we could well call our dream jobs.

Progressive Rehabilitation: Your Dream Job

At the Second Coming, most of the planet will be in tremendous need of rehabilitation. By then, the Antichrist will have wreaked havoc on the earth during the Great Tribulation. His heinous crimes, together with human sin, will have resulted in judgments that include perfidious plagues, decimating famines, treacherous wars, upheaving earthquakes and other "natural" disasters, and cosmic distresses, as well as downpours of hail, fire and blood. A third of all plant life will

burn up. Bodies of water will dry up, spoil or turn to blood, causing widespread devastation and death. Locusts and scorpions will invade vast regions of the earth (see Revelation 6:7–8, 12–14; 8:7, 8–12; 9:3).

Over a third of the human population will have been wiped out (see Revelation 9:15, 18). The earth itself will be reeling. (More on this in the next chapter.) Cities will be smoldering and nations will be in ghastly disarray when Messiah appears on the scene, us at His side.

In this context the biblical prophets speak of a time of rebuilding, healing and rehabilitation of the planet. By all accounts, natural agricultural and architectural processes are involved. The soil is worked. Homes are built and enjoyed. Families plant gardens that bear good fruit (see Isaiah 61:4; 60:10; 62:10; 65:21; 30:23; Amos 9:14). Nations reconstruct farms, cities and villages, and repopulate them. Formerly ravaged structures and institutions are rebuilt in righteousness. Leaves from God's tree of life heal the nations (see Ezekiel 47:12; Revelation 22:2).

Life during the millennial rule of our Bridegroom-King will not be boring as we serve Him in a gradual, progressive restoration of the planet. Ministering the Kingdom in very practical ways, you and I will delight in our "dream jobs." Human capacity, intelligence and strength will get restored to pre-Fall proportions. The joy of learning will explode in our spirits (see Isaiah 12:3–6; 35:6; 55:12; 61:7; Psalm 67:4; 48:2). People from all nations will eagerly travel "up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob" to be taught of Him. They will thirst to learn of His ways and how to walk in them (see Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). According to Isaiah 42:4, "In His law the islands [even remote regions] will put their hope."

As humankind learns His ways, the earth is increasingly filled with the knowledge of God's glory. Creativity crescendos as the supernatural and natural, spiritual and secular, converge. No

subject of study is dry and dusty, but each proves wonderfully worshipful. Yeshua's personal teachings, from the study of Scripture to methods of higher math, will prove infinitely more anointed, interesting, life-changing (and I believe, humorous) than any we have heard. His electrifying brilliance, wisdom and explanation of truth—for He is the Truth—will captivate our minds and hearts.

The nations must learn of God's ways because earth's restoration during the Millennium does not occur instantaneously. Righteousness, the knowledge of His glory, and more, will progressively increase in scope as natural people are taught and disciplined. Although Yeshua will descend on the global scene in what may be a sudden moment, He does not immediately make everything whole.

I used to have another view. For many years I simply assumed Messiah would arrive, speak the word, and *voila*, all would be set straight. As the saying goes, there'd be a new sheriff in town. We have instant meals, instant messaging, instant divine healing (sometimes) and instant deliverance (again, sometimes). Why not, I thought, instant world restoration? Is anything too hard for God?

Over the years, however, I discovered the Scriptures did not support my rather nice and neat, instant-perfection perspective. God's miracles—His sudden break-ins on the earth that supersede His natural laws—generally do not effect widespread change apart from human cooperation. While His supernatural interventions often occur suddenly, the changes they initiate are typically progressive or gradual.

Creation itself was a six-day process. The Israelites' dramatic deliverance from Egypt did not quite transpire overnight; it followed a burning bush, ten plagues and a split sea. Their inhabitation of the Promised Land took many years. The Holy Temple was built through natural processes tinged with anointing. The gospels chronicle a miraculous process of

atonement for sin through Christ's birth, teachings, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. His government continually increases; the establishment of His Kingdom on earth is a process.

Accordingly, the Bible does not teach that after Messiah returns, He repeals the natural laws He created and declared were good (see Genesis 1:31). Instead, He will enjoy human beings, both resurrected saints and people in natural bodies, engaging with Him in those laws and in the ongoing, relational dynamic of exercising dominion over the earth. While that process began at Yeshua's first coming, it will escalate in the years ahead.

After His Second Coming, new anointings and miraculous intervention will punctuate the process (see Isaiah 32:15; 44:3). These will mature and prepare us for even greater works in additional ages to come. Meanwhile, there will be no resistance by Satan or his imprisoned, evil hordes. The millennial operation will bless both God and us greatly. Whether the restoration of all things takes decades or centuries, of this I am certain: You and I will love it here.

Meanwhile, we are to bear in mind that many Scriptures pertaining to the millennial restoration also apply, to varying degrees, to Israel and the Church today. God wants us to have sufficient faith *now* to act on His Word; His Kingdom is already at hand. The fact that pinnacle fulfillment of many prophetic promises is still ahead ought to inspire, rather than inhibit, us to believe now for the supernatural and sacred to invade the natural and secular.

For example, at this writing, some prophetic passages in Isaiah 60 are already coming to pass, to a limited but literal degree.¹⁸ Recall that Isaiah 60 is directed fundamentally to the city of Jerusalem. A certain, less literal application can also be made to God's faithful followers in all nations, although total fulfillment of Isaiah 60 does not occur until after Yeshua

returns.

As described in Isaiah 60, we already see "thick darkness" that is "over the peoples," with God's glory rising over Jerusalem and His ekklesia. Living in Jerusalem, I already see nations literally coming to Israel's light and literal kings to the brightness of her dawning. Already I see her "sons come from afar," "the wealth on the sea" and the "riches of the nations" brought to the regathered Jewish state, "to the honor of the Lord our God, the Holy One of Israel." We see "foreigners rebuild [our metaphoric] walls" and more. Such things could not have been seen -- and were not seen -- for two millennia. But a new era is upon us, with indications of Messiah's soon return intensifying.

Training for Reigning

What should be our response today to God's awe-striking promise for tomorrow? In view of the reality that He will do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine," you and I are urged "to live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received" (Ephesians 3:20; 4:1). Yeshua wants us to regularly evaluate our life choices in light of that calling.

Since the end of this age is near, we ought to "look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:12). For the Lord will give "the crown of righteousness . . . to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). Living in light of this blessed hope transforms us---and can even expedite its arrival. As a result, greater and greater dimensions of heaven break into earth *now*.

The Master took opportunity to motivate His disciples toward right living by helping them keep prophetic Kingdom goals in sight:

I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son

of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:28–29)

When the Bridegroom-King taught about the age to come, He said we would receive different levels of rewards and positions in heaven, the Millennium and eternity (new heaven and earth). He taught that our assignments through eternity will be based, in part, on our heart's disposition and our deeds during our short life in this present age (see Luke 14:14; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11–15; Daniel 12:3). The decisions we make here and now have infinite impact. At least as important as what we choose to do, is the heart we choose to do it with. Love, humility, faithfulness, and obedience are all key (see Matthew 5:5; 20:25–28; 25:40; Luke 22:24–30). The greatest of all is love. Life here and now is training for reigning. Let us labor for eternal favor!

Prophetic insight into God's stellar plans can greatly encourage us when we undergo difficulty. Particularly at the end of the end times, He wants His bride courageously persevering, empowered by soul-and-spirit-saturating revelation of Kingdom joys ahead.

The great and dreadful "Day of the Lord" is near; it is a day of trouble and who can endure it (see Joel 2:1, 11)? We shall see why and how that great, yet dreadful day is so *positively* important to you and me.

10

Standing Firm to the End

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

Isaiah 65:17–18

One of my personally prized, hands-on links to Jewish history is a dilapidated Hebrew prayer book printed in Russia in 1890. The timeworn volume belonged to my great-grandfather. It is one of the few possessions he brought to America, before the onset of Communism, from back in the days of the czars. Its pages are browned and crinkly; its fibrous binding barely dangles together by a dozen or so threads. The book represents the hopes and tears of generations, and I finger through it with fondness.

Comprised mostly of Scriptures, the antique compilation contains the ancient Jewish prayer called the “Mourner’s *Kaddish*.”¹ This traditional doxology is soberly proclaimed when mourning the death of a close family member. The Hebrew word *kaddish* means “sanctification.” God desires to use suffering to sanctify His people, the Comforter drawing us deeper and deeper into the fire of His holy, jealous love.² The “Mourner’s *Kaddish*” states, in relevant part:

Magnified and sanctified be His great Name in the world which He created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time. . . . May He make peace for us and for all Israel, and let us say, Amen.³

It is a declaration of praise and blessing, amid sorrow, for the overcoming goodness of God and joy of the Messianic Age ahead.

For thousands of years, Christians as well as Jews have had to stand firm through suffering, just as Jesus foretold. Though troubles and distresses in this world are inevitable, they pale in comparison to the blessings of ages to come. And while some reasons for suffering ultimately remain a mystery, our Savior is with us in times of pain and loss, gracing us and working all things together for good (see Romans 8:28).

From the perspective of traditional Judaism, suffering that is endured rightly before God sanctifies His holy Name in the world.^{3a} It provides testimony and witness of His supreme value, worth, power and love. We would do well to consider that perspective as we prepare for tribulation that lies ahead (see Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1).

The Great Tribulation

The Hebrew prophets foretell a season of incomparable distress to be experienced by Israel and the nations, including faithful worshipers of YHVH. Some refer to this time as the Day of the Lord; others, as the Day of Jacob's Trouble, or both. The season is marked by unprecedented upheaval and fiery judgment that far exceeds a single, 24-hour day. Some say the Day of the Lord or Day of Jacob's Trouble appears in the New Covenant as the seven-year period of global, "great tribulation" at the end of this age referenced in Revelation

7:14. Because this book is about Israel's anointing for believers in these last days, we now turn to the topic of the Great Tribulation. We will take a broad strokes view of these unparalleled, eschatological events so important---in a positive sense---to God's unfolding plans.⁴

Prior to the Great Tribulation, humankind will have strayed greatly from God, and apart from His remnant people, darkness will have covered the earth. There will already be deep (but not total) delusion and widespread (but not total) lawlessness. Circumstances will be sadly ripe for the rise of a notorious international leader, who is called the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:8). He is also given the name Antichrist in 1 John 2:18. The title suits him well; he is quite the opposite of, and counterfeit to, Jesus the Christ.⁵ At the start of the Great Tribulation, he establishes a covenant treaty with Israel and the nations for a purported peace (see Daniel 9:27; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; Jeremiah 6:14). Related to the ascent of the Antichrist is an event known by Christians as the rapture, discussed momentarily.

Under the supervision of the Antichrist, Israel operates—and possibly constructs—its third temple in Jerusalem. In this temple, the former (and ineffective) sacrificial system of atonement for sin according to the Law of Moses is reinstated. Unfortunately, these reinstated rituals deny the power of the blood of Yeshua and fuel the anti-messiah stronghold.

Halfway through the Antichrist's reign, he breaks covenant with Israel and bans temple sacrifice to YHWH. With supernatural signs and wonders, and pointing to his political, economic and military prowess—all of which are satanically inspired—he declares himself God. As such, he demands to be worshiped by all. He commits the “abomination of desolation” by desecrating the holy of holies in the third temple. Very possibly, he seats himself on a literal throne (see Matthew 24:15; Daniel 8:13, 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation

13:8–17). Outraged that a man would claim to be God, religious Jews reject his blasphemous declaration of divinity and rebel against his authority. The battle greatly intensifies.

The Antichrist has already venomously detested and murderously persecuted Christians, Jews and others daring to oppose him. Many do not endure; very sadly, some or many believers fall from faith (see Matthew 24:9–14; 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Many others are courageously martyred and reap eternal rewards. Still others are supernaturally shielded and protected. They witness of God's goodness and salvation in Yeshua. Despite great tribulation, a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit results in a tremendous harvest of souls (see Revelation 7; Romans 11:25-26; Acts 2:17-21).

Meanwhile, in his global bloodbath against those aligned with YHVH, the Antichrist becomes fully animated and possessed by Satan. Recall that Satan is frantically scrambling to prevent his impending demise at Yeshua's Second Coming (see Revelation 12:7, 11–17). The result is earth's most evil of events—a full-blast, heinous campaign against God and humanity that no one would survive, if not for His promised shortening of the time (see Matthew 24:22). In this cataclysmic campaign, Jerusalem is ground zero. The Antichrist attacks the city and aims to destroy the Jews. Ultimately, the battle is over who will be worshiped on God's holy hill, known today as the Temple Mount.

The second half of the Great Tribulation intensifies. It brings an unprecedented release from heaven of God's judgments. These are signaled by seven seals, followed by seven trumpets, and finally, the outpouring of seven bowls of holy wrath. For perspective, the judgments occur in connection with the ongoing prayers and prophetic proclamations of the saints (see Revelation 5:8). The consummate goal of divine judgment is justice. During this time, faithful believers are supernaturally protected either from physical harm or through physical harm

(see Revelation 7:2–4; 9:4; 12:6, 14; Exodus 8:22–23; Zephaniah 2:3). As 1 Thessalonians 5:9 and other Scriptures assure, God has not appointed us to suffer His wrath.

Christians are not necessarily protected, however, from the hellish fury of the Antichrist, and we should distinguish between the two. Because of his satanic rage, countless numbers of believers are martyred—and then eternally, exquisitely rewarded (see Revelation 6:11; 13:7; 16:6; 17:6; James 1:12). But there is also a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and multitudes come to faith in Yeshua (see Matthew 24:14; Joel 2:28–32; Revelation 7:9–14; 11:3–6; 14:6; Haggai 2:6–7; Romans 11:26).

The birth pains we presently experience at the writing of this book are related to the increase and polarization of good and evil that crescendos in the Great Tribulation. Present day birth pains signal not only the coming of Messiah and birth of the Messianic Age, but the coming spiritual birth of multitudes in Israel and the nations. Indeed, this spectacular end times harvest of souls has already begun. The ekklesia is to look up, see that the harvest is ripe, and joyfully do her part to fulfill the glorious Great Commission.

God will be in complete control throughout the seven years of global distress (see Revelation 17:17; Matthew 28:18; Isaiah 54:16; Romans 13:1). The time is identified as the Day of the *Lord*, not the Day of the Devil. During this season of severest trial, the Lord is continuously worshiped in heaven—and *on earth*. The saints experience His powerful presence despite all hell breaking loose. The Great Tribulation is also the great attestation to His sovereign glory and loving justice (see Revelation 4:11; 5:9–14; 7:11–12; 11:13; 14:3, 15–18; 15:2–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–7).

The Messianic warrior bride trusting God will be given extraordinary grace to patiently endure in love. Because the battle is dreadfully fierce the Antichrist will almost, but not

quite, overcome her (see Daniel 7:21; Revelation 13:7, 10; 14:12). Through this viperous onslaught she is sanctified in divine love, her faith refined and purified as gold. In the Great Tribulation she is made ready for her beloved King, without wrinkle or blemish, altogether pleasing in His sight (see 19:7; Ephesians 5:26–27; Daniel 11:33–35; 1 Peter 4:1).

In the crucible of her suffering, the bride enters into the intimate “fellowship of sharing in His sufferings” and emerges in “the power of His Resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). She will have blossomed in the beauty of His love and finish well. Critical to her transformation will have been her unflinching love for, and practical help to, the Jewish people (see Matthew 25:40; Isaiah 40:1–2; Genesis 12:3).

Rap on the Rapture

As an observant Jew, I was taught from childhood about the prophetic Day of the Lord—which always ended, thankfully, with the promise of His eventual deliverance and gracious blessing. Years later, after coming to faith in Yeshua, I was surprised to hear from most all my pastors, friends and seminary professors that should that Day occur in my lifetime, I would happily escape the whole sordid scenario. Apparently, as a believer, I now qualified for a fast exit out before the onset of apocalyptic doom, called the rapture.

Problem was, from a Hebraic perspective, neither I nor most of my Messianic Israeli colleagues interpreted eschatological events exactly the same as most contemporary, evangelical prophecy teachers. In particular, we did not understand the rapture, or “snatching away” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17) of Christians up in the air quite as did they.

The Scriptures teach that in connection with the Great Tribulation, deliverance for the Church comes at a day and hour known only to the Father. At that time, faithful believers

are indeed caught up in the heavens to meet Christ Jesus as He returns (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; Matthew 24:30–31, 39–40; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2). In this broad context, the long-awaited and thrilling marriage supper of the Lamb takes place (see Revelation 19:7–9).

I like to think of the rapture in connection with the beautiful, ancient Jewish wedding traditions described in chapter 4. Recall that a betrothed young woman (*kiddushin* or “set apart one”) would zealously prepare to go out and meet her beloved, together with her attendants, when he came to take her to the place he had prepared. The bride would not know precisely when he would come, but she would eagerly anticipate his return.⁶ The couple would consummate their union in a manner represented by the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then they would emerge, rejoin the larger community and function as one. So it will be with the Church that is raptured and then returns to earth to serve with Yeshua.

The concept of a rapture taking place *before* the Great Tribulation, however, is not found in historic Christianity or Judaism. It is a relatively recent doctrine of American evangelicalism. Developed less than two hundred years ago, the idea of a pre-Tribulation rapture has spread to much of the Pentecostal world.⁷

Recently, more and more contemporary Christian leaders have reexamined this position. Among them is my esteemed friend Don Finto. In his popular book, *Your People Shall Be My People*,⁸ Finto says the words of Scripture do not give us a guarantee of escape. He compares three different Greek words; two of them, *orge* and *thumos*, are translated “wrath,” while the third, *thlipsis*, is translated “tribulation.” *Thlipsis* is also translated “anguish, sufferings, distress, persecution, or trouble.” The New Covenant frequently uses this third word to warn believers they are not exempt from hard times, as in Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 7:14, both of which refer to the

Great Tribulation. For this and other reasons, Finto concludes that while the *ekklesia* does not experience the outpouring of God's wrath, the period of *thlipsis* could find us still very much here. He writes:

I could be wrong, but I would rather be prepared for the worst and be delivered than to be caught off guard. Come to think of it, if the Lord will allow me sufficient strength, I would like to be here to serve during those perilous times.⁹

I agree with Don Finto's biblical reasoning. I believe that a rapture occurring toward the close of the Great Tribulation fits best with the whole canon of Scripture, and in particular, with eschatological passages in both Old and New Covenants.

I expect some of you to disagree with me on this particular point. While I sincerely hope you will be challenged, I have written this chapter—and book—so that you need not agree with my timing of the rapture to benefit much from *Israel's Anointing*. For although Jesus has overcome this world, in it we must all have *some* form of *some* tribulation (see John 16:33, KJV). Plain and simple, tribulation is an inevitable part of the Master's overarching plan of redemptive love, for which we will ultimately be eternally grateful (see 2 Corinthians 4:17). It is best we settle the matter in our hearts, now.

Personally, I want to know God and the truth of His ways with integrity. As a teacher of the Word, I want to see His cherished ones fulfill their destiny with joy, regardless of circumstances that may befall them. Now, I openly admit to not having a handle on every detail of eschatology, including the rapture. (Who does?) Nevertheless, I invite you to at least consider that matters may not unfold precisely as you expect.

Perhaps, at the end of the end times, you will endure difficulties you did not anticipate. If that happens before you are snatched away (or pass away), will you hold steady and firm in faith and love? As for me, if I am mistaken about the timing

of the rapture, I promise to rejoice with you anyway as we are caught up together to meet the Lord in the air!

Israel's Role and Anointing

During the Great Tribulation, Israel as a nation appears devastatingly overrun (see Daniel 8:9; 11:45; 12:7). Some Israelis are temporarily exiled and imprisoned; others flee for their lives. Swaths of land are forcibly taken and many lives sacrificed. As harsh as this will be, however, it is not reason for Jewish people not to live in Israel or relocate there in the future. During the Great Tribulation, *most or all* nations will suffer terribly at the hands of the Antichrist.

Through this genocidal attack, God preserves a remnant of Israel, both in the Holy Land and abroad (see Zechariah 13:8–9; 14:2; Isaiah 11:11–16; Revelation 12:13–17). Some of the saints offer loving assistance to Jewish refugees, for which they are rewarded (see Matthew 25:40). Their witness helps bring many to faith in Yeshua. According to Revelation 14:4, one hundred forty-four thousand fiery Jewish believers are “offered as first fruits” (Revelation 14:4). (The number may be literal but could be figurative.) At the rapture, whenever it occurs, Messianic Jews who are still alive are caught up together with Gentile believers.

Non-Messianic rabbinic leaders left behind are being prepared by God to call on the Name of Yeshua at a soon coming, singular moment. In the second half of the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist’s frenzied focus is his military campaign at Armageddon and the battle over Jerusalem. Although his real target is not Israel, but her coming King, he has fiendishly beaten down the Jews. Desperate for deliverance, Jerusalem’s leaders cry out to Yeshua to save them (see Romans 11:26). The prayerful support and loving witness of the ekklesia will have been used by Him to ready

them for this climactic event.

The Mighty One of Israel emerges from the sky, splendidly outfitted for this consummate battle. Declaring, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David,” He has not relinquished His physical identity as a Jew (Revelation 22:16). With Him are multitudes of His holy ones, an angelic host together with the bride. Resurrected saints are alongside their King when He rescues His ancient covenant people and redeems the earth.

The blessed hope of the Church regarding Yeshua’s Second Coming, therefore, is not that we are leaving, but that He is returning and Satan is leaving. Most of us are destined to depart first for the celestial paradise of heaven through the portal of physical death. But heaven as it currently exists is not our permanent abode. The Bridegroom-King is headed for a comeback—and so are we.

When we return with Yeshua, every eye observes the astounding, holy procession emerging from the sky. Messiah’s reappearance with us is global in size and scope. This colossal company seems to circle the planet as a final witness to humanity of the Way, Truth and Life. Amazingly, however, some people refuse to repent, following the Antichrist to the bitter end. Together with him, they persist in their rage against God. Collectively, the nations are so deceived by then that they are convinced Jesus, despite His majestic, visible appearing, is the bad guy. The war of the worlds is on.

Yeshua returns to Israel, setting foot on the Mount of Olives, causing a mammoth-sized earthquake. Messiah marches across land, delivering the Jews from annihilation by the Antichrist (see Isaiah 63:1–6; Zechariah 14:3–5; Revelation 16:18–19). He directs a spectacular defeat of anti-God nations allied at Armageddon. In a brilliant show of supernatural might, He wins the definitive battle for Jerusalem (see Zechariah 12:2–9; 14:2–3; Joel 3:1–2, 9–17). Resurrected saints take part in this incomparable military conflagration.

Yeshua sentences Satan and his cohorts to the abyss for a thousand years (see Revelation 20:2–3). Regathering repentant, exiled Jewish survivors, Messiah proceeds to judge the nations. Using their treatment of Israel as a critical test, He casts some from His presence forever (see Matthew 25:31–46). Many individuals who come to faith after the rapture, or who paid no homage to the Antichrist, are allowed to stay and participate in the millennial Kingdom. They are known in Scripture as “survivors” of the Great Tribulation or Day of the Lord (see Zechariah 14:16; Isaiah 4:2; 10:20; Joel 2:32). Soon they repopulate the earth with children who are, like them, natural human beings with natural, physical bodies.

Please be aware that discussion of eschatology, especially a pre-Tribulation rapture, can be highly offensive to Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus. Many Jews who are familiar with the Old Covenant do not deny a coming Day of the Lord, or Day of Jacob’s Trouble. But the prospect of calling on the name of Jesus or Yeshua to save them is not (yet) part of their accepted understanding. Moreover, the idea that Christians would be exempt from trial and hardship, while Jews bear the brunt of the global ordeal, is not consistent with their interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures and it generally does not witness well of Yeshua.

More than a few Jewish people have the impression that believers are callous about Jewish suffering in the end times. This is because in the past, many Christians have expressed excitement about Israel's suffering heralding the Lord's return. As a result, some Israelis suspect that Christian concern for them is not ultimately about unconditional love, but about hastening an eschatological scheme with which they disagree.

This misunderstanding must be dealt with sensitively by first ensuring that our hearts are pure. While we eagerly anticipate Messiah’s return and do not compromise the truth of the Gospel, we must embrace and reflect the genuineness of His

heart for Israel and the lost. He does not rejoice at human suffering because it can or will lead to good, and neither should we. Moreover, we are always to share our faith in love-driven discernment, whether speaking to Jews or Gentiles, as did Yeshua.

Why the Tribulation?

Some have been taught that the purpose of the Great Tribulation is strictly punitive. God is angry and can no longer restrain Himself. At long last, He spews out vengeance accumulated since the Fall of mankind. But I am convinced God's purposes are much broader and grander, focused primarily on glorifying our Bridegroom-King. We will be encouraged and empowered in the years ahead to the extent we connect to His positively good, prophetic plans and purposes for the Great Tribulation.

Author and Christian leader Mike Bickle sees at least seven purposes of God (there are likely more) in the Great Tribulation. He writes:

First, God will use the Great Tribulation to purify His people, causing the Church to be as a bride prepared to walk in God's glory without any compromise. God's judgments will remove all that hinders love. . . . Second, [He] will use [it] to cause unbelievers to respond to His grace as eternity bears down on their hearts. He will usher in a great ingathering of souls and Israel's salvation. . . . Third, God will . . . vindicate the saints as He avenges their deaths. . . . Fourth, He demonstrates His power to protect His people as He did in the days of Moses in . . . Goshen. . . . Fifth, God will use the Tribulation to expose false believers within the Church. . . . Sixth, [He] allows evil to be fully manifest and then expresses His justice and righteousness in punishing people for choosing sin. . . . Seventh, God will use [the Great Tribulation] to purge and

cleanse the earth from sin before the Millennial Kingdom.¹⁰

The Great Tribulation, therefore, is not only the most extensive torture by evil, but the most excellent triumph over evil. Those who can embrace this “divine tension” will find it easier to be at peace in the years ahead. They will focus on God’s overarching love and ultimate Kingdom expansion, praying forth a great harvest of souls. Ablaze in His holiness, they will carry tremendous mantles for evangelism with signs and wonders. Many will be divinely protected; many will be given the blessed gift of martyrdom. In any case, the Yeshua-following, warrior bride remnant will not hopelessly resign herself to a passive role. She will proactively love to the death, if need be, for such love is stronger than death.

When the Tribulation?

A biblical perspective on the apocalyptic events associated with Yeshua’s Second Coming is prophetically opened to us in the Levitical fall feasts. The Hebrew word translated “feast” is pronounced *moe-ed*. The word does not carry the connotation of a big, happy meal, but means “appointed time.” The biblical feasts are appointed times, or established dates in God’s calendar, concerning His relationship with humanity. There are seven feasts in total. Four occur in the spring season of each year and three take place every fall. Each has special messianic significance.

Pinnacle events associated with Messiah’s first coming—His Crucifixion, burial, Resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit—all perfectly coincided *to the very day* with the Levitical spring feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits and Weeks, respectively. Because Yeshua fulfilled all the spring feasts the first time He came, it is quite possible He will fulfill all the fall feasts the second time He comes: the Feast of

Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:23–43). Not coincidentally, these feasts all take place in the seventh month of the biblical calendar. In Scripture, the number seven, as we have seen, represents completion. Fulfillment of the fall feasts will likely relate to the completion of this present age. Despite the fact that Yeshua said nobody knows the day or hour of His return, the prophetic significance of the Levitical fall feasts are worth considering.

The first calendar feast is the Feast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*). For historical and cultural---but not biblical---reasons, the day is more commonly known as Rosh Hashanah and regarded as a new year. In Scripture, *Yom Teruah* is occasioned by the blowing of trumpets. Occurring the first day of the seventh month, the blowing of trumpets is meant to sound an alarm, summon God's people to attention, herald His judgments and proclaim His Kingship. During the Great Tribulation, angels in heaven are given seven trumpets to blow that are related to these purposes (see Revelation 8:2, 6–12; 9:1, 13; 11:15). The sound of a trumpet also heralds the rapture and Resurrection of deceased saints (see Matthew 24:29–31; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17). The Feast of Trumpets may be fulfilled, in the context of the Great Tribulation, at the trumpet call associated with believers meeting the Lord in the air.

The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) occurs ten days after the Feast of Trumpets. The day of Israel's national repentance, judgment and salvation, Jewish people would naturally look to *Yom Kippur* as a day of deliverance. Its climactic fulfillment could prophetically take place in connection with Jerusalem's future repentance and Israel's national salvation. *Yom Kippur* could represent the day "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

Five days after *Yom Kippur*, the Feast of Tabernacles

(*Sukkot*) celebrates God's final harvest. It also celebrates His provision for, and dwelling with, His people. *Sukkot*, therefore, seems a perfectly fitting time for Yeshua's personal habitation among us to be celebrated. Accordingly, Zechariah 14 directly associates Messiah's Millennial reign with *Sukkot* and the nations' observance of that feast.

As earth-shaking as the prophetic fulfillments of the spring feasts were, future consummation of the fall feasts might magnificently eclipse them.

Israel's Anointing After the Tribulation

The process of earth's millennial regeneration will emanate from Israel, and especially Jerusalem. The City of the Great King will serve as international hub for global spiritual renewal. The principle of Romans 2:9–10, “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile,” will be in operation. Israel's millennial restoration will flow from the personal presence of the King of all Kings residing there, directing every stage of its completion. As the Jewish nation is made whole, she will minister in humble service to her Maker and the Gentile nations (see Isaiah 49:6, 42:6-7). Her millennial position and role¹¹ do not suggest or imply narcissistic nationalism or spiritual superiority, but reflect her irrevocable calling for the benefit of others (see Romans 9:4; 11:29). God does not show favoritism (see Romans 2:11).

As the nations worship and bless Yeshua, they also bless Israel, extravagantly (see Isaiah 49:22–23; 60:14–16; 61:6–7; 45:14; 66:12; Zephaniah 3:20). Believers everywhere “sing with joy for Jacob . . . the foremost of the nations” (Jeremiah 31:7). They come to her light on account of He who is the Light (see Isaiah 60:3). They extend service to Israel in reciprocal return for her ministry of sacrificial service to them: “The nation or kingdom that will not serve you [Israel] will perish; it will be utterly ruined” (Isaiah 60:12). The honor given Israel is similar

to the honor we are to give those laboring as servant leaders in the Church (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13). Israel herself is never to be an object of worship.

God's restoration of Israel is for the sake of His own great Name. He raises her up to demonstrate His faithfulness, redemption and merciful justice to the world (see Ezekiel 36:22–23, Romans 11:31–36). She exists to glorify YHVH and bless all peoples of the earth (see Genesis 12:3). One Gentile Christian scholar has commented:

It is through the glorification of Israel that the glorification of YHVH is achieved. The sight of the great miracle, which He works for His people in spite of all human probability, makes the other nations submit to Him and . . . worship Him. . . . [T]he other nations share in Israel's . . . blessing.¹²

God's favor toward Zion is not the same as favoritism. His treatment of her will be nothing less than wholly just and loving toward *all* nations. If His favor seems to us unwarranted, we should keep in mind that He uses Israel to test and expose the intents of the human heart. He is likely to continue to do so even during the Millennium (see Zechariah 14:17–19).

Sometimes I am asked if Gentile believers become part of Israel in the Millennium. The Bible addresses this question, teaching that nations will continue to exist, apart from Israel, as distinct nations (see Isaiah 19:23–25; 2:3–4; Zechariah 14:16–19). They will retain their own, special gifts and characteristics, showcasing God's manifold wisdom, creativity and redemptive nature. However, for Gentile believers who have returned to earth with resurrected bodies, the situation appears different. They do not become Jewish, but it seems most will minister in and to the nations, along with resurrected Jewish believers. Together, we seem to gladly call Jerusalem our home (see Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 3:12; 21:2, 10; Philippians 3:20–21).

Regathering and Revival

The dominant feature of Israel's restoration under Messiah's rule is the pinnacle regathering of Jewish people physically to the land and spiritually to the Lord. Old Covenant Scriptures are replete with references to this phenomenon and are affirmed in the New (see Romans 11:1–2, 11–12, 15, 28).

The prophet Ezekiel foretells how the Lord lovingly searches for, assembles and heals the lost sheep of His Israeli flock. He will “gather [them] from all the countries and bring [them] back into [their] own land” (Ezekiel 36:24). He enlists the aid of Gentile nations in the operation (see Isaiah 14:2; 43:6; 49:22; 60:4, 9; 66:19–20). The promise is similar to passages of Isaiah, where the Jews are gathered “from the ends of the earth,” explicitly from the north, south, east and west (see Isaiah 43:5–6; 49:12). Israel is brought back to her land, “never again to be uprooted” (Amos 9:15; see also Zechariah 9:8). Likewise, Jerusalem is never again overtaken by foreign invaders (see Jeremiah 31:40; Joel 3:17; Zechariah 14:11).

God makes a “covenant of peace” with the Jews in which they and their surroundings are paradisaically transformed (see Ezekiel 34:11–16, 25–29). “Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are My people, declares the Sovereign Lord” (Ezekiel 34:30; see also 34:28–29). Israel's hills, valleys and formerly deserted ruins are secure and abundantly fruitful (see Ezekiel 36:1–15). Speaking specifically to their mountains, God says, “I will cause . . . My people Israel to . . . possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children” (Ezekiel 36:12).

At this writing, Israel's mountains are occupied mostly by Palestinians, not Jews. Although geopolitical realities can change rapidly in the Middle East, the prophet foresaw a time of peace that does not yet exist. Accompanying this peace is a promise God will cleanse Israel from her impurities and idols, putting His

Spirit in her so she walks devotedly in His ways (see Ezekiel 36:25–27).

To be sure, this last days phenomenon *has already begun*, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Israel's present restoration is an aspect of the "already/not yet" nature of this age. We cannot deny—and should indeed bless—the current reality of Israel's regathering and revival. The Zionist movement of the past century is no mere human endeavor, but an incipient fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures by the zeal of the Lord of Hosts.

This does not mean that everything accomplished under the rubric of Zionism in this age is in total accord with God's will. The climactic realization of prophecy about Israel's restoration in perfect righteousness and justice still awaits Messiah's physical return. So, during this "in-between" era of birth pains, not all Jews have returned to Israel. Most who have returned do not (yet) believe in Yeshua. Meanwhile, the less-than-holy city of Jerusalem tolerates or even generates sin. It endures division and assault from within its borders as well as from the nations.

Today, as you and I witness and prayerfully bless the "already" dimension of Israel's physical restoration, we must not neglect her need for spiritual restoration. Of prime importance to God through history is the salvation of the Jews. He is more than willing that all people and nations, including all Israel, be saved *now and today* (see 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Corinthians 6:2, Romans 10:1). Through Church history, Gentile lovers of Jesus have been called to provoke Jews to jealousy for relationship with the Savior (see Romans 11:11). Though Israel's collective national salvation is future, He wants us loving and praying for her, laboring in Jewish evangelism, and blessing the growing remnant of believers in Yeshua. This remnant is actively preparing the way for Jerusalem's future invitation to Messiah that will welcome Him back.

Amid global birth pains, God cautions the nations—including the Church and even Israel herself—not to scatter or slaughter His ancient covenant people (see Joel 3:2; Obadiah 1:10, 14; Zechariah 12:9). We are not to wrongly divide the land stewarded to her, dispossess the Jews of that land, or refrain from helping them in times of distress (see Ezekiel 36:4–7; Joel 3:2).

To the extent Israel's troubles must increase in years ahead, so will opportunities to extend practical aid and comfort. There will be a cost to aligning with God's chosen Jewish people. But there will also be a reward. The King will judge us and secure our eternal destinies based, in part, on whether we have heeded His heart for Zion (see Obadiah 1:10–15; Matthew 25:31–40; Genesis 12:3; Romans 11:20b–21).^{12a}

Messiah's Millennial Temple

Many Christians who are zealous for Zion say they feel led to express their zeal by supporting the rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem according to the Mosaic Law. They are "excited" about this next stage of prophecy, as they perceive it, and want to see such prophecy fulfilled. They may be surprised to learn that, concerning the third temple, most Messianic Jews hold a different view. Here is why:

The Hebrew prophets speak eloquently of a holy temple that will exist in times ahead. This temple of splendor is situated on Jerusalem's Mount Zion, known today as the Temple Mount (see Ezekiel 40:2; Isaiah 2:2–3; Micah 4:1; Joel 3:17). It is a spectacular, material structure, an architectural wonder beyond our imagination.

The prophets viewed a palatial compound vastly larger in size and exceedingly more majestic than either the First or Second Temple. God's glory, the *Shekhinah*, which did not return to the Second Temple, comes and fills this future house

(see Ezekiel 43:2–5). Says the Lord, “This is the place of My throne and the place for the soles of My feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever” (Ezekiel 43:7). The verse describes the literal, ruling presence of YHVH Incarnate. As such, it describes Messiah Yeshua, Son of David. The Davidic throne is thereby associated with the *Shekhinah* and holy of holies. With Yeshua reigning as king of all kings, of all nations of all times, the manifest glory of God radiates over the earth.

Housing the millennial temple and Davidic throne, Mount Zion becomes the “chief” mountain in all the world (Isaiah 2:2). It is raised high above all others;¹³ peoples from every nation streaming to it. The Lord creates over Mount Zion a thick cloud of incense-like smoke by day, and a brilliant glow of blazing fire by night. Covering this majestic display is a canopy of even greater glory (see Isaiah 4:5).

The temple itself contains a holy sanctuary and altar at which designated Levitical priests minister directly to YHVH (see Ezekiel 43:15–20; 44:15–16). Messiah-centered oblations take place, not as atonement for sin, but in worshipful commemoration of His once-for-all atonement and redemption of humankind. Flowing from the sacred sanctuary, from under the temple and into the City of Jerusalem, then eastward, is a river reviving the region--and planet--with life (see Ezekiel 47:1–12; Zechariah 14:8). The temple actually operates in conjunction with God's temple in heaven. As rabbinic scholars have long taught, the temple of the Messianic Age will magnificently and mysteriously converge with the temple in heaven. Ah, the splendor ahead!

The Bible indicates this temple will probably not be the next, third temple that religious Jews, together with evangelical Christians, plan to rebuild. The main reason is its size. The biblical dimensions of the future temple compound of Ezekiel 40–46 far exceed the geographic boundaries of Israel's Temple Mount.¹⁴ *In fact, there is not room anywhere in the entire,*

modern City of Jerusalem to accommodate a temple that meets these titanic, biblical proportions.

In the Millennium, however, size will not be a problem. Israel's topography shifts significantly when the Lord returns. Earthquakes and other changes in the landscape occur (see Zechariah 14:4). Geographical transformations could at that time provide plenty of space to accommodate the prophetic superstructure.

A secondary reason why the next temple seems unlikely to be the millennial temple is that the overseer of the millennial temple's construction is described in the same Hebrew terminology used to refer to the Messiah (see Zechariah 6:12–13). It seems, therefore, that Messiah Himself oversees construction of the temple compound in which He is worshiped, resides, rules and reigns. It is a stretch to think He will occupy counterfeit quarters defiled—and possibly built by—the Antichrist (see Daniel 11:31; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4) But, to be fair, God can redeem anything and with Him, nothing is impossible.

A final reason most Messianic Jews do not encourage rebuilding the temple is that once it is up and running according to the Mosaic Law, Israel will place her hope for forgiveness of sin in restored animal sacrifices rather than in the blood of Messiah Yeshua. But "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, when the temple is rebuilt, most Jews will regard Yeshua's "once for all" atonement and redemption as even more irrelevant or ineffective for them than they do now (Hebrews 9:12). Sadly, their anti-Messianic sacrifices will empower the Antichrist and related, demonic strongholds keeping them from the Way, Truth and Life.

Millennial Jerusalem

In contrast to the temple occupied by the Antichrist, the temple from which Yeshua reigns will serve as apex of a revived Jerusalem. It will far surpass the glory and grandeur the city has previously known. God dwells in the midst of her, yet at the same time, He is a wall of fire around her (see Zechariah 2:5). Sin is purged from the place; Jerusalem's residents are holy to the Lord (see Isaiah 4:3–4). Her righteousness radiates as shining brilliance; her salvation, like a blazing torch. God is thoroughly enthralled with her. In His hand, she is transformed into a glistening “crown of splendor” (Isaiah 62:3; see also 62:2, 4–5, 7). The entire city is raised dramatically in elevation, reflecting her convergence with heavenly realms (see Psalm 48:1–2).

In the Messianic Age, Jerusalem is no longer the problem, but the praise of all the earth (see Psalm 48:2). Formerly a war zone, she is the global source of comfort and peace (see Isaiah 66:13). Jerusalem's streets bustle with dancing and laughter, the joy of brides and bridegrooms, and the exuberant worship of multitudes (see Jeremiah 33:11). Peoples of the earth organize tours to Jerusalem to entreat her King. “Let us go at once,” they say to their friends. “I myself am going” (Zechariah 8:21).

The stunning character of Jerusalem is reflected in her new name, “The Lord is There” (Ezekiel 48:35). From the city a far-reaching river of revival flows, teeming with life (see Ezekiel 47:1–12; Psalm 46:4; Zechariah 14:8). The majestic beauty, love and wisdom, celebrated justice and celestial grandeur of Jerusalem's King ripples across the city and abroad to the nations. Kings and peoples of the earth are drawn magnetically to Zion to learn of Yeshua. From Him they gain grace and skill to implement earth's divinely directed, magnificent metamorphosis (see Isaiah 2:2–5).¹⁵

Traditional Jewish interpretation of the Scriptures identifies

two Jerusalems, one above and one below (see Galatians 4:26). This is reflected in the Hebrew name for Jerusalem, pronounced *Yerushalayim*, which is a plural, not singular, proper noun. Jerusalem above is expected to come to earth, superimposing itself somehow upon the concrete, Israeli city below. This basic rabbinic concept fits well with New Covenant eschatology.¹⁶ As a result, Jews who do not yet know Jesus are unwittingly joining believers from the nations who do, both groups already aligning in prophetic intercession for this future city and age to come.

The present heavenly City of Jerusalem is where the spirits of deceased believers now ascend (see Hebrews 11:10; 12:22–23; John 14:2–3). There they worship, serve and await their return with Jesus to earth. At that time, which corresponds to the start of the Millennium, heavenly Jerusalem converges to a considerable (but not complete) extent with earthly Jerusalem (see Revelation 3:12; 21:9–10). Jesus’ Davidic throne intersects with His heavenly throne. The holy of holies in the material temple overlaps with the holy of holies in heaven. This intersection and overlap has been described by some contemporary Christian leaders as a “corridor of glory.”

The corridor of glory encompasses Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the temple, throne, river, smoke, fire, cloud and more. Resurrected saints will experience both heaven and earth realms (including both Jerusalems) to varying degrees, for a thousand years. After the Millennial Age, when new heavens and a new earth¹⁷ are established, then the Jerusalem of above completely manifests and completely converges with the physical city below, resulting in the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:1–4; 2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17). It is a concept not unlike the “already/not yet” of this present age. Because of the overlapping nature of these realities, sometimes we—like the biblical prophets and Jesus’ first disciples—are not able to clearly distinguish every detail between the Millennium and

the new, eternal state. However, one fact is certain: It will be glory upon glory, forever and ever.

New Heaven and Earth

As Yeshua's thousand-year rule draws to a close, Satan is released from prison and allowed to deceive the nations one last time. Recall that individuals born during the Millennium, under Messiah's righteous rule, will never have experienced the opportunity for evil to flourish openly. But now God gives humankind a final test. Sadly, once more an insurrection takes place against the King, led by an unrepentant Satan and his cohorts. War ensues—but just briefly. In a swift demonstration of supreme justice, Yeshua defeats his enemies. He casts them, together with death itself, into an eternal lake of fire (see Revelation 20:7–15; 1 Corinthians 15:26).

The scene that follows, recorded by the apostle John, is matchless in its splendor, the total climactic fulfillment of God's Kingdom:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he . . . himself will be with them . . . for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:1–4)

How can natural words as we know them possibly describe this staggering, whole new order of things? Intrinsically mysterious to mere men, a gloriously distinct mode of existence has been conceived and hidden through the ages deep in the mind of the Godhead. Such is *your* destiny as Messiah's bride.

As part of this new order, "After He has destroyed all

dominion, authority and power,” the Son of Man/Son of God “hands over the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Meditate by the Spirit on what your Jewish Bridegroom-King is about to do for *you*, His prized, beloved espoused. In His own Words, you who overcome as God’s own son or daughter, will inherit all this (see Revelation 21:7, 9):

- The holy, eternal city of Jerusalem, dazzling with celestial glory like a diamond the size of a continent, bedecked by twelve stunningly jeweled, gargantuan gates—with Jewish names—perpetually open to you (see Revelation 21:9–12, 16–21, 25)
- The Holy Temple that *is* YHVH Almighty and the Lamb (see Revelation 21:22–23)
- The most resplendent Garden of Life, supremely surpassing Eden (see Revelation 22:1–5, 17, 19)
- The incomprehensibly matchless expression of Love, the very *Face of God!* (see Revelation 22:4)

When the apostle John was shown these things, the beloved friend of Jesus had but one response. Every cell of his being, it seems, erupted in worship. He heard, and apparently joined, “every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth and upon the seas” in singing, “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13–14, see also 22:8) As you and I join in the mounting celestial refrain, we will have tapped into what much of Israel’s anointing is about.

In Conclusion, Looking Forward

It is written, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”

(1 Corinthians 2:9). The fullness of God's character, conduct and creation exceeds our present physical perception and language. I have shared in these pages what has been seen only in part, heard in part and conceived in part (see 1 Corinthians 13:12). It is my prayer that through this book, new dimensions of heaven on earth have been opened to you, with storerooms of ancient anointings unlocked. May you run with what you have gained, accessing your full inheritance and destiny in God!

Perhaps some readers, however, have never surrendered their lives to Jesus. Others may have assumed they were Christians, but now, at the end of this book, realize they are not. In any case, you can make peace with God right here and now. To follow the One who loves you more than you can possibly imagine, you need only sincerely admit to Him that you, like the rest of us, have sinned. Ask God to forgive you on account of Messiah Jesus' atonement, made once for all time, for sins of all mankind. As an act of your will, surrender your life and your will to Him. Ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit, who will empower you to live according to His will. Then rejoice! According to the Scriptures, you have just been born anew (see John 3:3). Thank God for the amazing gift of salvation and eternal life! And one more thing: Please contact a local, Bible-believing congregation, a Christian friend or our ministry, to help you in a solid start in your relationship with the Bridegroom-King. Meanwhile, I welcome you with God's love into His family!

Together in the Messianic warrior bridal company, let us covenant to give ourselves fully to the One who so extravagantly gives Himself to us. As heaven increasingly converges with earth, we will run as one body of Gentile and Jewish believers, each preferring the other above ourselves. In the fiery love of Messiah's affections and by the kiss of His Word, we will rest as we run in His Sabbath *shalom*. We will

access heaven through highways of holiness, mediating the love-laws of His Kingdom. Birth pains preceding Jesus' return will intensify; His Kingdom does not advance without enemy opposition. But God's people will prevail. They will reap a global harvest of humankind for eternity. Then the greatest reformation of all will take place as the planet is restored to paradise. *Don't miss it!*

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Notes

Chapter 1: Ancient Paths Revived

1. For theological studies on modern Israel, see generally, Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic Press, 2007); Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic Press, 2010); Sandra Teplinsky, *Why STILL Care about Israel? The Sanctity of Covenant, Moral Justice and Prophetic Blessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013).

Chapter 2: Israel and the Church Converging: The Kingdom of God

1. Certain fulfillments of Jesus' Olivet Discourse took place in the century following His Resurrection, but final fulfillment is reserved for the very end of this age and has not yet come to pass.

2. *The New International Version*, *New Living Translation* and *New American Standard* are among those using "birth pains;" *The Living Bible* and others use "horrors."

3. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1994).

3a. Following the thousand year rule and reign of Messiah on earth, a new heaven and earth come into existence (see Revelation 21:1, Isaiah 66:22).

4. See generally, George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

5. This hermeneutic was adopted by leading evangelical seminarians in the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics. See also, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 16–27; see generally, Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991).

6. See, for example, 2 Corinthians 1:13; Deuteronomy 30:11; Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, 16–27; Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 26.

7. This passage should not be misinterpreted so as to suggest or advocate any attempted imposition of faith in Jesus by militaristic or other such force.

8. Michael Freund, "In Praise of Christian Zionists," *International Jerusalem Post*, 5 January 2007, 23. Despite new openness, many Israelis still harbor varying degrees of defensiveness toward Christians and resistance to the Gospel.

9. See, for example, C. E. B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary*,

The Epistle to the Romans, vol. 2., ed. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B Cranfield (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 576–77.

10. See, for example, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 222; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:576–77; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 255–56.

11. Jack Engelhard, “First, the Saturday People,” *Arutz Sheva*, 15 September 2003, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/2747>; David Rahab, “The Beleaguered Christians of the Palestinian-Controlled Areas,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/christianpal.html#56>.

12. Lela Gilbert, “Natural Allies in a Dangerous World,” *The International Jerusalem Post*, 12 October 2007, 13.

13. See James W. Goll, *Praying for Israel’s Destiny* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005); *The Prophetic Intercessor* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2007); and *Intercession: The Power and the Passion to Shape History* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Destiny Image, 2003).

14. *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), see note on Matthew 25:31–46.

Chapter 3: The Mystery of Jew and Gentile in Messiah: One New Man

1. Operation World, <http://www.gmi.org/ow/country/isr/owtext.html>. Other estimates are much lower; precise counts are impossible. See, for example, Mike Decker, “Messianic Jews and the Law of Return,” *Israel Today*, 24 September 2007, <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/default.aspx?tabid=182&view=item&idx=1550>.

2. Operation World, <http://www.gmi.org/ow/country/isr/owtext.html>.

3. Israel’s redemptive destiny means, for example, that she still retains the land covenant promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All nations and people groups carry unique redemptive destinies reflecting God’s glory.

4. The Scriptures are to be interpreted first and foremost in a literal manner, based on the plain meaning of the Word, wherever it is reasonable to do so. Any personal or deeper interpretation and application can then be made based on the literal interpretation.

5. The curse may have been indefinite (see Nehemiah 13:1–2), in which case Ruth’s conversion and reward bear even greater weight.

6. James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Main Concordance* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), see *bless* in Main Concordance and *barakh* in Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), see *barakh*; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 263.

7. Romans 11:26, citing Isaiah 59:20 and 60:16; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, <http://www.ccel.org/h/henry/mhc2/Ru.ii.html>.

8. Ruth's new mother-in-law may have been Rahab the harlot-turned-heroine of faith (see Matthew 1:5).

9. David H. Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'rit Hadashah (New Testament)* (Clarksville, Md.: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998).

Chapter 4: Coming for a Bride

1. P. Trutza, "Marriage," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 96.

2. Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, and Dayton, Ohio: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989), 204; Ariel and Dvorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered: Challenging Centuries of Misinterpretation and Neglect* (Littleton, Colo.: First Fruits of Zion, 1996), 12.

2a. See Chapter 9 for an explanation of the Davidic covenant.

3. A. W. Argyle, "Wedding Customs at the Time of Jesus," *Expository Times*, vol. 86 (1975), 214–15; Trutza, "Marriage," 96; Hazel W. Perkin, "Marriage, Marriage Customs," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 1405–410; Philip Birnbaum, *A Book of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1964), 423–24; "Marriage," in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, ed. Isaac Landman (New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co., 1948), 369–72; "Marriage," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, ed. Isidore Singer (New York and London: Funk and Wagnall's Co., 1904), 337.

4. Ibid.

5. Sincere and godly believers, including scholars, subscribe to different interpretations of this parable. Many see in it the issue of the eternal security of the believer's salvation. Others see in the story a parallel to believers prepared to meet Messiah when He comes for His Church at the end of the age, and those who, though unprepared, eventually enter His presence later on. The main point, in any case, is the same: By the power of His love, we are to stay watchful and ready.

6. R. K. Harrison, "Song of Solomon," in *Zondervan Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, 490–91; Richard S. Hess, "Song of Songs," *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 250–51.

7. See generally, Fr. Juan Gonzalez Arintero, *The Song of Songs: A Mystical Exposition*, trans. James Valendar and Jose L. Morales (Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books and Publishers, 1992); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Sermons on the Song of Solomon* (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1974); and Richard A. Norris Jr., ed., *The Song of Songs Interpreted by Early Christians and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). See also, Duane Garrett, "Song of Songs," *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 23b, ed. Bruce Metzger, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barber (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 64–67, 72–74; and Hess, "Song of Songs," *Old*

Testament Wisdom and Psalms, 250–51, where the author, who adheres to a more literal interpretation, concludes the Song’s consummation is reached with Christ and His Bride.

8. Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Shir ha Shirim/Song of Songs: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, Artscroll Tanach Series (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), 68, quoting Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef; also *Yadayim* 3:6.

9. Ibid, 68–69, citing *Talmud: Sanhedrin* 101a; Yakov Bieler, “Shir haShirim in Light of Sabbath and Yom Tov,” April 2004, <http://www.kmsynagogue.org/Shir.html>, quoting Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef.

10. “Marriage,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Geoffrey Wigooder (Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press and Jerusalem Publishing House, 2002), 503; “Marriage,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 8:338; Garrett, “Song of Songs,” 60–64.

11. In Hebrew, the book’s title literally reads Song of “Songs,” but I have used Song of “Solomon” to conform to the NIV and other contemporary translations.

12. See generally, Richard Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song* (Bartlesville, Okla.: Living Sacrifice Books, 1988). This devotional on the Song of Songs shares how bridal intimacy with Jesus sustained believers who were persecuted and martyred for their faith in the twentieth century.

13. Some currently popular interpretations of Song of Songs profess that doves, which are technically pigeons, have no peripheral vision. However, all scientific evidence is to the contrary. Doves benefit from extraordinarily wide-range, excellent peripheral vision. See, for example, S. Bloch, S. Rivaud and C. Martinoya, “Comparing Frontal and Lateral Viewing in the Pigeon: Different Patterns of Eye Movements for Binocular and Monocular Fixation,” *Behavioral Brain Research* 13, no. 2 (August 1984): 173–82; Patricia M. Blough, “Cognitive Strategies and Foraging in Pigeons,” *Avian Visual Cognition*, ed. R. G. Cook (Medford, Mass: Comparative Cognition Press, 2001), <http://www.pigeon.psy.tufts.edu/avc/>; Dr. John Fowler, American Dove Association, personal email, 26 January 2007.

14. Schermann and Zlotowitz, *Shir ha Shirim/Song of Songs*, 154, quoting Yedidiah Lipman Lipkin, *Divrei Yedidiah*.

Chapter 5: Sabbath Rest

1. The song *Lekha Dodi* reflects certain nonbiblical concepts, including the exaltation of the Sabbath as a bridal partner. I mention *Lekha Dodi* here merely to illustrate the Jewish connection of the Sabbath to bridal intimacy.

1a. See generally, John de Graaf, David Wann and Thomas Naylor, *Affluenza* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001).

2. Heidi Baker, message at Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship in Toronto, Canada, 1 November 2007.

3. Jill Austin, *Dancing with Destiny: Awaken Your Heart to Dream, to Love, to War* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2007), 150.

4. The Torah also provides for Israel to observe a sabbatical year every fifty years, a year of Jubilee (see Leviticus 25:10ff.).

5. This note has been removed.

6. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 74, quoting Rabbi Elijah de Vidas, *Reshit Hokmah, Sha'ar ha'Kedushah*, ch. 2.

7. Jesus said we could not know the day or hour of His return, but He encouraged us to remain watchful of the season. I do not encourage specific date setting, but I do encourage awareness of Messiah's imminent return. The seven-day-millennium possibility is offered as an illustration for this purpose.

8. Time and space do not allow for discussion here of critical issues and Scriptures, such as Colossians 2:16–17. For a more thorough treatment, see David Friedman, *They Loved the Torah: What Yeshua's Followers Really Thought about the Law* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 2001), 9–19.

9. Canon 29 of the Council of Laodicea, 364 A.D. For a more thorough treatment of this issue, see Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, 79–84; and Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977). See also, Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 73–74.

10. Catholic Answers, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3806.htm>. See also New Advent, http://www.catholic.com/library/Sabbath_or_Sunday.asp.

11. The believers' gathering on the first day of the week could actually refer to Saturday evening, not Sunday. According to the biblical, lunar-based calendar marking days from sunset to sunset, Saturday after sunset starts the first day of the week. The believers would probably have been expected to report to work on Sunday after sunrise.

Chapter 6: Highway of Holiness

1. Jeanne Guyon, *Le Moyen Court et Très Facile de Faire Oraison* (Grenoble, France: circa 1685); Gene Edwards, ed., *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (Goleta, Calif.: Christian Books, 1975), 45, 47, 74, 76.

2. Charles G. Finney, "Religion of the Law and Gospel," *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 1836–37, no. 4, <http://www.gospeltruth.net/1836LTTPC/indexltpc.htm>.

3. John Wesley, "The Law Established through Faith: Discourse 1," http://www.wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/sermons/035.htm.

4. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Sermons*, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1735.htm>.

5. Corrie ten Boom, *Each New Day* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour and Co., Inc., 1977), 118.

6. *Torah* can also refer to oral laws allegedly issued by Moses, regarded by some traditional rabbis as equal in authority to the written Torah. Such usage is not included in the definitions or scope of this book.

7. Passages like Hebrews 8:6 are sometimes misunderstood to mean the whole Old Covenant is entirely superseded by the New. In context, however, such passages are explaining more specifically that God's new covenant of salvation, as described in Jeremiah 31 and that exists through Jesus as Messiah, is superior to the priestly sacrificial system of atonement under the old Mosaic covenant. See Dr. Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, vol. 4: *New Testament Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 262–63; David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, Md.: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 683–89; *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), see note on Hebrews 8:7.

8. Jeremiah 31:33 contains another important truth. The New Covenant is a legal and spiritual covenant that was made with Israel. The covenant is extended so as to include believers from all nations; nevertheless, Jeremiah's word is a profound prophecy that has yet to come to pass in fullness for *Israel*.

9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 45.

10. Believers not embracing the Torah can also succumb to religious legalism. Sometimes even Charismatics and Pentecostals can, for example, ritualize what was once a spontaneous manifestation of the Spirit, turning it into an uninspired measure of holiness.

11. Stern, *Commentary*, 535–37.

12. Cranfield, *Romans*, 853.

13. Brown, in his Christian apologetic aimed at Jews, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 4:245. I attribute credit for some of the concepts in this chapter to Dr. Brown's insightful work on the Torah's relevance to believers in Jesus.

Chapter 7: Warring for Harvest

1. See generally, Sandra Teplinsky, *Out of the Darkness: The Untold Story of Jewish Revival in the Former Soviet Union* (Jacksonville Beach, FL.: Hear O Israel Publishing, 1998). The events detailed in this chapter are based on the author's actual experiences in Jewish outreach in the former Soviet Union, 1994–2000.

2. This note has been deleted.

3. This note has been deleted.

4. A thousand years ago, the small Slavic state in Eastern Europe that eventually mushroomed into the vast Union of Soviet Socialist Republics adopted Christianity as its official faith. See Nicholas Zernov, *Eastern Christendom* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), 111; John S. Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State: 1900–1917* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 6–7; Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 4–5.

The form of Christianity that Russia adopted was heavily infused with replacement theology. As a result of politically entrenched replacement theology, both church and state came to regard the Jewish people as rejected by God and repudiated by Him as a covenant people. Contempt toward Jews soon turned to

hatred and then to murderous persecution. See Salo W. Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets* (New York: MacMillan, 1964), 6, 17–18; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1984), 394–96.

Over the next millennia, millions of Russian Jews would be exiled or exterminated. Nearly three million Soviet Jews were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust, aided by Nazi collaborators in the Soviet Union. See Baron, *The Russian Jew*, 32–33; Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, 13; “Pale of Jewish Settlement,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 13, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 24–28; Ilya Altman and David Poltorak, World Holocaust Forum, <http://www.worldholocaustforum.org/eng/history/5/index.wbp>. Meanwhile, Jews were prohibited from leaving the USSR.

5. When Paul says in the synagogue in Corinth, “We now turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46), he is not announcing, or even suggesting, a policy shift to stop going to the Jews and instead go solely to the Gentiles. He is stating that in this particular city, after first sharing with the Jews, he now turns to the Gentiles. This becomes clear because after leaving Corinth, he immediately resumes the pattern of preaching first to the Jew, then to the Gentile (see Acts 17:1–4, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 20:21). His last recorded Gospel outreach, which took place in Rome, began by sharing first with the Jews, and then with the Gentiles (see Acts 28:17–18).

6. As an example, while writing the original version of this book, I was invited to a large-scale Christian Zionist rally in Southern California by one of the pastors scheduled to speak. But when I tried to register and spoke directly with the event’s coordinator, I was told “the situation” was “still too sensitive” for Jewish believers in Yeshua to be openly present. I was welcome to attend if I first gave my word that I would do my very best to hide. I was not to reveal my name, or share who I was or what I did. I was assured, however, that the evening would be lovely and enjoyable.

I did not attend the event, and to my knowledge, no other Messianic leaders were present. Afterward, the unsaved local Jewish community breathed a collective sigh of relief. These Christians, said Jewish news reports, were nice and safe. They did not advocate Jews believing in Jesus, and they did not believe in sharing the Gospel. Plus, they had backed up their complementary words with a very large sum of money, none of which would ever go to Messianic Jews.

Israel is a freedom-loving democracy. However, anti-missionary opposition works through political institutions so as to effect serious discrimination, sometimes violent, against Jewish believers. Israeli Messianics may endure persistent injustice in most sectors of society. Places of employment are prime targets. Jobs are often lost—if they can even be obtained—on account of faith in Messiah. If the brother or sister makes an issue of it, as of this writing they may be threatened with loss of citizenship and deportation.

Jews who are known to follow Yeshua are generally precluded from receiving help from funds or donations made to mainstream Christian or Jewish organizations. As a matter of fact, much of the money donated by Christians uniting for Israel is funneled into Jewish organizations that stand in direct opposition to Jewish evangelism. Yet, we

are told," As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:10)

I am not leveling criticism against well-meaning organizations or beloved Christian friends ablaze with God's heart. Nor do I castigate His ancient covenant people, my own countrymen, about whom He says this: "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Romans 11:28–29).

However, I am not willing to tacitly watch a wily enemy sabotage the blessing of Israel and the building up of the Church. I want to see God's fresh fire impart new ways and means by which we can align with His last days purposes. With Gentile believers' prayers and practical collaboration, Messianic Jews will surely become much more effective in preparing the way of the Lord among their own people. The faithful remnant of Israel holds keys that cannot be turned without Gentile believers' help. When that happens, doors will open wide that bless not just Israel, but the whole Body. "For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings" (Romans 15:27).

As reference, see, for example, Jonathan Bernis, "Jews Need Jesus," *Charisma*, December 2006, 14; Don Finto, *God's Promise and the Future of Israel* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2005), 199–200; Associated Press, "Rabbis Told Jews to Shun Evangelicals," *Jerusalem Post*, 24 September 2007; Daniel C. Juster, "Israel's Restoration," *Tikkun International Newsletter*, August 2007, stating the Christian Allies Caucus in Israel requires, at the government's behest, that every Christian with whom they work expressly commit *not* to share the Gospel with Jews; Ruth Eglash, "Messianic Jews Ousted 'Illegally' in Mevasseret Zion," *Jerusalem Post*, 2 September 2011; Calvin L. Smith, "Faith and Politics in the Holy Land Today," in Calvin L. Smith, ed., *The Jew, Modern Israel and the New Supersessionism* (Lampeter, UK: King's Divinity Press, 2009), 132–34; Teplinsky, Sandra, *Why Still Care about Israel?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2013), 107–109; Donald Zev Uslan, "Response to Christian Missionaries in Israel," *World Israel News*, <https://worldisraelnews.com/a-psychological-exploration-of-the-jewish-response-to-missionaries-in-israel/> (24 May 2022).

7. Decker, "Messianic Jews," *Israel Today*, describing, as an Israeli attorney, laws that prevent Messianic Jews from obtaining Israeli citizenship; Matthew Wagner, "Messianics: Attack One of Many," *Jerusalem Post*, 25 March 2008. <http://www.jpost.com>; AP and Jason Casper, "God TV Dispute has Israel Talking about Messianic Jews," *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/may/god-tv-shelanu-israel-hot-christian-channel-messianic-jews.html>, 22 May 2020.

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual-covenant_theology. Believers Blessing Israel: Dual Covenants?

To be fair, Gentile Christian reluctance to openly identify with Jewish Christians can stem from godly sensitivity toward Jews who do not believe in Jesus. At the outset of believers' interactions with Jewish people, most have good intentions. After

relationships are established, they reason, doors will open to minister the Gospel without causing offense. But in reality, this rarely occurs. More often, fear of offense quietly morphs into a permanently silent “witness.” In other cases, well-meaning saints eventually conclude that Jews do not really need the New Covenant. They align with Israel’s mistaken belief that they can be saved through the Old Covenant Law. The fact that Yeshua is the only Way, Truth and Life, and that no one comes to the Father but by Him (see John 14:6) is first compromised, then flatly denied. Is it not possible, however, that the most offensive and unloving thing we can do to the Jews is to withhold the truth of Yeshua from them when we have opportunity to share it? Could this represent one of the deadliest form of anti-Semitism ever?

9. This note has been deleted.

10. This note has been deleted.

11. Pierce and Systema, *The Future War of the Church*, 225–26.

12. This approach is suggested merely as an interesting supplement to solid, systematic Bible study according to more widely recognized hermeneutics.

13. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 535–36.

14. Dick Mills and David Michael, *Messiah and His Hebrew Alphabet* (Orange, Calif.: Dick Mills Ministries, 1994), 21–22, 35–36, 59–68; Richard Amiel McGough, *The Bible Wheel* (Yakima, Wash.: Bible Wheel Bookhouse, 2006), 183, 213, 247, 261; Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*, (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1995), 5. Hebrew letters also possess numeric values, which are not discussed in this book.

15. The events recounted here are detailed in Teplinsky, *Out of the Darkness*.

16. This note has been deleted.

17. The quote is attributed to Tertullian, a Church father of the second century; history testifies to its accuracy. See http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/05/the_blood_of_the_martyrs.php

Chapter 8: From Zion’s Battlegrounds

1. Israel recouped the areas known as Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) including East Jerusalem, in the defensive Six Day War of 1967. These areas had been previously allotted to Israel by the international community, which then unilaterally gave them to Palestinian Arabs. Historical details, with documented sources, are recounted in Teplinsky, *Why Still Care About Israel?* (Chosen Books, 2013) revised and updated, 2022, Chapter 10.

The Israeli Defense Forces maintain what is probably the strictest and highest moral code of any contemporary army in the world. (See “IDF Code of Ethics,” [https://toolkit.theicenter.org/content/idf-code-ethics/index.html#:~:text=IDF%20soldiers%20will%20not%20use,%2C%20bodis%2C%20dignity%20and%20property](https://toolkit.theicenter.org/content/idf-code-ethics/index.html#:~:text=IDF%20soldiers%20will%20not%20use,%2C%20bodis%2C%20dignity%20and%20property;); “The Spirit of the IDF,” http://azure.org.il/download/magazine/1248az2_hauser.pdf.) Unfortunately, some extremist Jewish zealots wrongly misapply Scripture regarding the

conquest of Canaan and use homemade weapons against Palestinians. Usually this is in response to ongoing Palestinian terror but is nevertheless illegal and violators are punished.

1a. Although this book does not discuss the subject of believers in military service in nations other than Israel, individual Christians whom God has led to join the armed forces of their nations deserve our prayers and support.

2. Flavius Vegetius Renatus, circa 390 A.D., Military Quotes, <http://www.military-quotes.com/vegetius-renatus.htm>. For comparative background to Israel's modern-day situation, see, for example, Nehemiah 4:1–23.

2a. The New Testament neither condemns nor condones fighting as a soldier in a war to achieve justice. In Luke 3:14-15, John the Baptist has an ideal opportunity to denounce those who would take up arms as soldiers but he does not; he merely states a code of ethics for them. Similarly, Jesus never denounced the centurions with whom He dealt; He treated them with respect or even favor. His statement that all who take up the sword will perish by the sword is a statement of fact, not a universal proscription against military battle. T.R. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1989) 232.

2b. Nahum M. Sarana, gen. ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 188.

3. Hostility toward God has found expression in assailing Jews, together with Christians, periodically through history. With the existence of a modern Jewish State, the locus of hostility toward Jews now centers on Israel. It also manifests in hate crimes or terror aimed at Jews in the nations.

4. For an introductory study on Israel's modern wars, see generally, Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East*, updated by Shlomo Gazit (New York: Random House, 2005). See also, *Spirit of the IDF*, <http://dover.idf.il/IDF>.

5. William McKane, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah," *The International Critical Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 803; see also Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 846. While these sources suggest "Zion" could possibly mean "Signpost," its meaning is uncertain.

5b. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 was followed by the San Remo Resolution of 1920, allotting all of Palestine, including what is now Jordan, to the Jewish people for a future state. The San Remo Resolution was adopted by the League of Nations, predecessor to the United Nations.

6. See, for example, *Against All Odds: Israel Survives* DVD series (Chicago: American Trademark Pictures and Questar Inc., 2007); Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*; M. Hayeshua, "Lebanon War Miracles," http://www.aish.com/jewishissues/israeldiary/Lebanon_War_Miracles.asp; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Middle East* (New York: Random House Ballantine, 2003); Marty Shoub, "Under the Shadow of the Almighty," *Oasis* newsletter, December 2006.

7. Secular Humanism, "What is Secular Humanism?"

<https://secularhumanism.org/what-is-secular-humanism/>. The philosophy and movement of secularism, an outgrowth of secular humanism, traces its roots to the European Age of Reason of the 1700's.

8. Michael Onfrey, *The Atheist Manifesto: The Case against Christianity, Judaism and Islam* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2007).

8a. See generally, for example, Walter Laquer, *A History of Zionism* (NY, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972); Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel* (NY, NY: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1976).

9. Golda Meir served as Israeli Prime Minister from 1969–1974. She was the third elected female head of state in the modern world, following Indira Gandhi of India and Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/meir.html>. Like all political leaders (male or female) she made mistakes, some of which were serious. There is no evidence these mistakes were the result of her gender.

9a. Dr. Craig Keener notes, "The Assemblies of God and other denominations birthed in the Holiness and Pentecostal revivals affirmed women's ministry long before the role of women became a secular or liberal agenda. Likewise, in the historic missionary expansion of the 19th century, two thirds of all missionaries were women. The 19th century women's [suffrage] movement that fought for women's right to vote originally grew from the same revival movement led by Charles Finney and others that advocated the abolition of slavery. ("Women in Ministry," <https://craigkeener.com/women-in-ministry/>) 2 September 2019.

9b. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (NYC, NY: W.W. Norton, 1963).

9c. Pastors did not apply the same rule about women keeping silent in the churches to female worship leaders.

10. A more thorough study of relevant, controversial Scriptures and biblical issues pertaining to women's roles in the Body of Christ is beyond the scope of this book. Any comprehensive treatment of the topic would require its own tome. At the same time, a preliminary overview runs the risk of raising more questions than could possibly be answered here and now. That a fair discussion on women in ministry would prove unwieldy in this context underscores its critical nature.

A commendable, scholarly work on the subject is Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004). Non-scholarly books on the topic of women's equalitarian or complementary ministry roles include Cunningham and Hamilton, *Why Not Women?*; J. Lee Grady, *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2006); J. Lee Grady, *Twenty-Five Tough Questions about Women and the Church* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2003); John T. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said about Women* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991); Ed Siloso, *Women: God's Secret Weapon* (Ventura, Calif.: Gospel Light, 2001); Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, ed., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

10a. Dr. Craig Keener, "Women in Ministry," <https://craigkeener.com/women-in-ministry/> (2 September 2019).

11. Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 138–70; Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton, *Why Not Women? A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry and Leadership* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 71–92.

11a. See for example, *Babylonian Talmud*: Genesis Rabbah 18:2, Masechet Sotah 20a, Masechet Kidushin 81a, Ketubot 23a, Megillah 14b, likening Deborah to a wasp and Hulday to a weasel; *Mishnah Avot* 2:7, Shabbat 33b,

12. *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Niddah 45b; Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 161. Portions of the Talmud say women are endowed with a greater degree of *binah* (intuition, understanding, intelligence) than men. The rabbis reportedly infer this from the fact that woman was “built” (Genesis 2:22) rather than “formed” (Genesis 2:7), and in their understanding, the Hebrew root of “build” refers to insight. <http://www.jewfaq.org/women.htm>.

13. Cunningham and Hamilton, *Why Not Women?*, 17–21, 73–92; World Health Organization, “Multi-Country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women, Initial Results, 2005,” http://www.who.int/gener/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/; Amnesty International, “2007 Report: Middle East and Africa,” [14. Dr. Kerry Teplinsky, message given 24 November 2007.](http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Middle-East-and-North-Africa;United Nations, “Women at a Glance,” http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/women96.htm; Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, “International CATW Annual Report, 2006,” http://www.catwinternational.org.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

15. Thankfully there are some exceptions. At this writing, these are still mostly limited to worship leaders. But more and more, wives (who may or may not be biologically Jewish) of Messianic pastors are permitted to speak in the churches and exercise temporary, limited authority over men in Messianic congregations. Other rare exceptions exist; for example, in a startling move, the US based Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations laudably elected a woman as its executive director in 2016.

16. McKane, *Jeremiah*, concluding the verse describes an “indeterminable new thing . . . created by YHVH . . . all but incredible . . . in the Messianic Age,” 807; Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 571; Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 215, stating the verse is “beyond present solution”; Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 109.

17. *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), study note to Jeremiah 31:22.

18. Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, 215, stating the word “surround” is an affectionate term, implying protection; see also, *Strong's Concordance, Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, word 5826.

19. Some Messianic scholars say the Bible's irreducible dyad (or duality) of

human existence is that of Jew and Gentile. I propose, however, that God's most fundamental division of the human race is between man and woman.

Chapter 9: Messianic Millennium Coming

1. David's rule is also identified with David himself resurrected during the Millennium and serving under his biological descendant, Jesus the Messiah, in whom that rule is climactically fulfilled (see Jeremiah 30:9, 15–17; Ezekiel 37:24–25; 34:23; Hosea 3:5).

2. In recent years, many believers have experienced a wonderfully revived focus on the restoration of David's tabernacle relating to worship through music, song and dance. Worship is an important component of the restoration of David's tabernacle. However, it is just one dimension of many. The restoration of David's tabernacle (or hut or booth) refers to the full earthly, governmental Kingdom of Messiah's millennial rule.

3. See also, Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, 4:76–97.

4. See George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 64–65; Saucy, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 242–45.

4a. Teplinsky, *Why Still Care About Israel*, chapter 12.

4b. *Ibid.*

5. Gnosticism is the belief that physical matter is inherently evil and deliverance from it comes through intentional spiritualization of the material realm. The apostolic authors of the New Covenant addressed and refuted issues pertaining to Gnosticism. See for example, *The NIV Study Bible*, 1811, 1833, 1906; A. F. Walls, "Gnosticism," in *Zondervan Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 738.

6. Saucy, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 242, note 52; John F.. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 45–47; Justin Martyr, *The Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. A. Lukyn Williams (London: S.P.C.K., 1930), 52, 169, 172; E. Ferguson, "The Terminology of Kingdom in the Second Century," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 17, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 670.

7. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 45–47; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 52, 169, 172; Dan Juster and Keith Intrater, *Israel, the Church and the Last Days* (Shippensburg, Penn.: Destiny Image, 1990), 57–60; Daniel Gruber, *The Church and the Jews: The Biblical Relationship* (Hanover, N.H.: Elijah Publishing, 1997), 24–41, 213–31.

8. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 47; Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 169, Sec. 80.1–5.

9. The Bible indicates that Satan remains actively influential in the sphere of human activity (see Acts 5:3; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 4:3–4; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:8–9; 1 Timothy 1:20; 1 John 3:8, 10; 1 Peter 5:8; see also Ephesians 6:11–13).

10. Although I personally disagree with much of classic postmillennialism, I do encourage believers to actively influence human governments for good,

especially through prayer (see 1 Timothy 2:1–2; Matthew 28:18–19; Acts 4:19–20; 5:28–29). God sets in place those who rule, and He has instructed us to pray for them (see Romans 13:1–6; John 19:11; 1 Peter 2:13).

11. The preterist view regards the events described in Matthew 24:3ff. as having been totally, climactically fulfilled in the first century A.D.

11a. For a pastoral but scholarly-researched view of historic premillennialism, see Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener, *Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don't Believe in a Pretribulation Rapture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2019).

12. For a non-scholarly book contrasting these views, see generally, Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977).

13. A.H. Leitch, "Righteousness," Tenney, *Zondervan Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, 104.

14. *Ibid.*, 105–6.

15. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 234–41.

16. George Otis, Jr., *Informed Intercession* (Ventura, Calif.: Renew, 1999), 18–23. In a sense, modern Israel has already entered into a dimension of this prophetic reality in the present-day restoration of her land that lay desolate for virtually two millennia.

17. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 16–20.

18. Credit is given to Rev. Rick Ridings, director of Succat Hallel 24/7 House of Praise in Jerusalem, for advocating for this perspective.

Chapter 10: Standing Firm to the End

1. The prayer is an abridged version of a lengthier *Kaddish* that is part of the regular worship liturgy. In use in Jesus' day, the *Kaddish* would have been familiar to His disciples when they asked Him how to pray. He answered their question with what we now call the Lord's Prayer (see Matthew 6:9–13), reflecting words and concepts used in the *Kaddish*. The Lord's Prayer goes on to include portions of other Jewish prayers in standard liturgical use at the time. See James M. Freeman, *The New Manners and Customs of the Bible*, updated by Harold Chadwick (Orlando, Fla.: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 414–15.

1a. See for example, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kiddush-ha-shem-and-x1e24-illul-ha-shem>.

2. Bear in mind, however, that atonement for sin does not exist in any form other than through the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

3. Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, trans., *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, rev. ed. (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1975), 399.

4. For an introductory overview of the Great Tribulation, see generally, David Sliker, *End-Times Simplified: Preparing Your Heart for the Coming Storm* (Kansas City, Mo.: Forerunner Books, 2005); Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener, *Not Afraid of the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2019); and Mike Bickle, *Omega: End Times Teaching* (Kansas City, Mo.: Forerunner Books, 2006).

5. Some, but not all, of the Antichrist prophecies found in Daniel were

foreshadowed and *partially* fulfilled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, ruler of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire in the second century B.C. Those holding to a preterist view reject any future fulfillment of these prophecies or of related prophecies about Israel's restoration and the Great Tribulation.

6. Consistent with this understanding is the broad definition of the Greek word *paralambano*, used in reference to the Rapture in Matthew 24:39–41, and sometimes translated “taken.” *Paralambano* appears in Matthew 1:20 in an angel's instruction to Joseph not to be afraid to “take” Mary as his wife.

7. See for example, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapture> and references.

8. Don Finto, *Your People Shall Be My People* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2001), 170–72. For a similar view, see generally, Marvin J. Rosenthal, *Examining the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994).

9. Finto, *Your People*, 171.

10. Mike Bickle, “Studies in the End-Times (2007): Negative Trends, People and Events in the End-Times” (Kansas City, Mo.: International House of Prayer Mission Base, 2007), 6–7, <http://www.ihop.org/group/group.aspx?id=1000000379>. The study notes provide numerous Scripture references and are quoted here with permission of the author.

11. Some Gentile Christian theologians regularly use the phrase “pre-eminent role.” Saucy, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 231, 303–4; John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 118–31.

12. Sigmund Mowinkle, *He That Cometh*, trans. G.W. Anderson (NY: Abingdon, 1954), 149.

12a. It bears repeating here that salvation is solely by grace through faith in Jesus. However, some of our eternal rewards and destinies will reflect the choices we make in this present age to follow or not follow His leadership in this life.

13. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, Calif.: Ariel Ministries Press, 1989), 809.

14. John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), 200, 204; Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, 809; Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah–Ezekiel*, vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 943.

It is unlikely that Ezekiel's temple describes the temple structure of the new heavens and earth because God Himself is the Holy Temple there (see Revelation 21:22–23). Ezekiel's temple, however, reflects aspects of the new heavens and earth temple as part of the “already/not yet” phenomenon as it will exist in the Millennium.

15. As we have seen, many of the Scriptures that find their ultimate fulfillment in ages to come apply to our life in Yeshua *today*, to varying degrees, as Gentile or Jewish believers. The primary interpretation of these passages is found in their grammatical-historical context, rendering a straightforward, generally literal understanding of the Word of God. However, believers partake *now* of increasing dimensions of the “already/not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God.

16. See also, Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1998), 304–18; Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 635–38.

17. Some Bible scholars believe the new earth may be the same earth we live in today, renewed and purged by fire, thoroughly transformed by its climactic and convergence with heaven.

About the Author

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From an Orthodox Jewish background, Sandra directs Reshet Tefilah, the Israeli prayer network of Jewish and Arab Israeli believers. She also leads intercessory prayer for Israel in the nations. She teaches and ministers internationally on God's prophetic heart and plans for Israel.

Sandra is a former litigation attorney, with a J.D. from Indiana University School of Law and a B.A. from the University of Illinois in political science. She has also attended Talbot Seminary in Los Angeles. Her books include *Why Care about Israel? How the Jewish Nation Is Key to Unleashing God's Blessings in the 21st Century* (Chosen Books, 2004), *Why Still Care About Israel? The Sanctity of Covenant, Moral Justice and Prophetic Blessing* (Chosen Books, 2013, Revised 2022); *Out of the Darkness: The Untold Story of Jewish Revival in the Former Soviet Union*, and *The Blessing of Israel*. You can contact Sandra at:

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