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Introduction

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you that your joy may be full.” (1 John 1:3, 4)

Shortly following my conversion to Biblical Christianity, and membership within the Creation Seventh-day Adventist Church, I began to receive letters from a certain young woman who had known something of my previous state in worldliness, occultism, and rebellion. She had many questions concerning the specifics of the experiences I had undergone prior to my spiritual transformation, but it seems like Yahweh had other ideas for our conversation. As we communicated, the topics shifted to Heavenly matters.

As Rachel became more interested in the condition of the world and how we, as residents of this planet, fell from the perfect, holy creation in the beginning to this corrupt shadow of its former self, I was inspired to write a series of letters to her outlining just that.

Here are those letters, reproduced in as close to their original format as possible, with only a few slight alterations and omissions of various, less relevant information. May they be as much a blessing to you as they have been for me to write them and for her (I pray) to have read them.

Letter 1: The Fall of An Archangel

Dear Rachel,

The reason I asked about your previous spiritual experiences was because I wasn't sure which angle to approach the telling of this from, but as you describe your present state as relative agnosticism, perhaps I should start from the top. I don't mean this by way of belittlement, of course, but this way, I can sort of "cover all bases." Anyway, from the top:

Imagine you were born in such a way that your first thought was one of happiness. You didn't come into the world cold and wet and covered with blood, crying for the traumatic way in which you were made. That was what the creation of angels was like. The first one made knew nothing but the joy of self-awareness, and gratitude for the One who made it. And this creative force wasn't shy either, in the details of this first being. To him He gave a great amount of beauty and strength and intelligence, and love, which is the force from which the One was made, and which would hold all things together (after they were formed, of course).

Afterwards, many others were made. Each had varying strengths and areas of expertise (singing, wisdom, reflection of the character of the One, etc.), but even with this great variety, none could compare to this first creature, a bearer of the Light of creation, whose name reflected his high station and responsibility. His name, which was once held in such high esteem, is now a lowly title, ground into the earth, and often not even taken seriously. Such are the denotations now attached to the name "Lucifer." Even he, however, is pleased that this situation stands as it is; but more on that later.

To this mighty angel was committed the leadership of all the others. To them he revealed the character and workings of their Father, which he was best equipped to understand. He was a "covering cherub," the highest order of archangel, and his delight was to perform the tasks to which he was set. Then arose a mystery. Into this perfect, harmonious society, in which sadness, pain, doubt and worry were unknown, something new was added.

Angels were created a little higher than man. These days they are a LOT higher than man's current state, and so it is difficult to try and grasp some of the concepts involved, but as best it can be understood, Lucifer began to question if this was the ONLY way to exist. There was nothing wrong with this, for angels are brilliant beings, and their thoughts are God's delight. However, and for reasons I don't get, Lucifer kept this question to himself, and rather than discussing it with his Father as was his perfect right to do, he began to draw away from the Presence he had always known, to see if he could figure it out for himself.

Rather than going to the source of all knowledge, he began to convey his questions and doubts to others around him, not so much as to find an answer, but to get others to share these new feelings that he had. In all this, though, his communication with God was not broken, and some deception must have been used to keep the archangel's doubts from coming to light. Gradually, you can see things were getting worse. From questions, to doubts to lies... at what point did it become rebellion? It happened so gradually that Lucifer didn't even understand it himself, just how far from his joy and peace he had descended.

With growing apprehension, the other angels watched the changes in their firstborn brother, and wondered what would become of this all. There was still hope, for a God who is love never wastes an opportunity to restore happiness. He sent another representative to plead with Lucifer, to get him to try to understand what was happening. The archangel Michael didn't seem to be a created being at all. It is with the shout of this

angel that the Prince of Heaven will come to earth, (1 Thess 4:16) yet in the book of Daniel, (21:1) he himself is described as the Prince.

Long did God try to make Lucifer see where he was heading. Michael tried to explain the very simple concept that if the universe is created out of love, then any being which is driven by a force other than love is of necessity out of harmony with all things, and how can such a being continue to exist? Every mercy, every pitying request for an intelligent discussion was seen by Lucifer as an invitation to return to slavery. His doubts had caused him to forget all the joy and happiness he had felt while doing the very job he was created for. He began to think himself worthy of deciding for himself what he would do with the rest of his existence, and a sense of pride was added to the growing horrors.

With every rejection of his Father's love, Lucifer's pride grew. How could Michael's statement be true? He was in opposition to God, yet he lived. Was he stronger then, than love? He rejected the force that God supposedly created him out of, yet here he still stood, stronger than ever, in his own mind. Little did he realize that even then, his Father was holding his very essence together against the forces that were even then able to rip him out of existence. For Yah so loved His firstborn angel that He suffered Himself to bear the weight of this new "anti-love" for just a chance that He could restore the happiness of His most perfect child.

It was a mercy that Lucifer was not allowed to feel the pressure exerted on him by his rebellion, yet the explanation of what was truly going on only led him to a deeper and deeper conviction that Michael was lying. This sentiment was echoed later on to man by this very same being, in the words, "Ye shall not surely die," when he was tempting Eve away from her obedience to God and Adam. Now, instead of merely lying himself, he was in fact accusing the Father of the very crime of which HE was guilty! For what, indeed, was this "death?" The archangel could not even conceive of such a thing. A fable, perhaps, to scare him into submission; but his pride would not let him have any of it. How often do we do this even today? If we examined ourselves, we might see in many with whom we are angry the very traits which we find so objectionable firmly cherished in our own hearts.

So subtle the fall was, but there came a point when he knew he was standing against the Throne. He had not been silent among the other angels either, and was ever willing to encourage their doubts and fears. More than this, though, he was looking for sympathy from the others, trying to get them to see him as being oppressed by Yah, lied to by Michael, and misunderstood and undervalued by the other, still-loyal angels. Some of these hearers made the same mistake Lucifer did. Instead of exercising their freedom of access to the Father, they let themselves be convinced, controlled, and ultimately enslaved by their former leader.

The rebel's pride grew ever stronger, each gracious gesture by his Father and brothers was seen as an insult. Eventually, he no longer hid his contempt for his Creator, and desired to prove to all of Heaven that His was not the only way to be happy. Many who had allowed their minds to be controlled by Lucifer joined him in his disdain for their former ways, and united with him under a new banner of transgression, a force we now call Sin.

Hatred is not the opposite of love. It is only one of the faces of its true opposite, that of sin. Its other faces are anger, uncaring, worry, fear, meanness, pride, lying... all things that show rejection of the basic force of creation. All of these were made manifest in Lucifer, "And there was war in Heaven," when it did. "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was there place found anymore in Heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent,

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called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out onto the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Rev 12:7-9)

Even his name was changed on that day. No more was Lucifer a fitting title for this one, for God created the angels with names that meant something. Nothing is an accident in Heaven, nor is it on earth, if His will is followed. Even the prophets had names which were significant, such as Elijah, (God is Yah) his successor Elisha, (God is salvation) Jeremiah (Upheld by Yah). Even Jesus’ name was significant. The archangel Gabriel, who took Lucifer’s place as covering cherub, told his mother to name him Yahshua (Yah saves), “for He shall save His people from their sins.” (Mat 1:21) This is the true translation of His name.

Lucifer became Satan, a name which means “adversary,” and it was rightly so. One who had once “sealed up the sum of wisdom and beauty” would now be “brought down to the pit” for his pride, so spoke the prophet Ezekiel. The story can be read in the 28th chapter of his book. Yet, perhaps Lucifer as a name should not be wholly cast off either, for even in his rebellion, even in his fall and continued battle against Yah, he cannot help but reveal the character of the One who first created him. In that sense, he is still a “bearer of light.” All of heaven was brought into a clearer understanding of love and sin, to be illuminated even on earth in the light of his great fall.

This is only the beginning of the story, for the war has continued all through human history, and even unto this day, when the final act has just begun. I’m aware that even though the story has been told often before, it’s a lot to read, so I’ll break off here for now, but if you have any interest at all in hearing how this all continued to unfold on earth, please do let me know, and I will be happy to continue. Also, if you have any questions or doubts, take warning from above and bring it to light :) I won’t tell you anything outside of what the Bible says, and which most claim to accept as truth. You see, I don’t even know where you stand on THAT issue, which is why I asked about your past encounters with it. As it is, let me know if any of what I have said above strikes you as true, (or even “likely”) and I will resume where I left off. At the very least, it is an interesting story, which is what you were seeking when you contacted me, isn’t it?

Sincerely,
David.

Letter 2: The Seduction in Eden

Dear Rachel,

I had a feeling you might find the details of some interest. I'm also grateful to you for allowing me the opportunity to relate this to you because, since my change, it has been burning within me, a tale that needs to be told, a burden that needs to be shared, a love that cannot be contained.

As to your thoughts on the Bible, I am glad that you have not dismissed it out of hand, as many have already done. The quote from the movie you mentioned in your reply reflects a broken-hearted bitterness that so very many know these days. I long that others should believe that this is a state which can be overcome, and it is possible to KNOW with assurance that we are being taken care of. What peace such a knowledge would bring! Why would we ever fear anything ever again?

You said you do believe in a light-side and a dark-side. Well, let us see if we aren't the only ones who are currently investigating the nature of these mysterious forces:

When I broke off the last time, Lucifer had just been overcome in a battle which occurred in Heaven, and had been thrown down to earth, along with a third of the original number of angels. He was now called Satan, and his angels called demons. Even this, however, was significant. Why was he sent to Earth? Why was he not just destroyed on the spot? It was already shown that he would only continue to reject the light as offered, and refuse to give up his sin, so what further purpose was there of his continued existence?

The answer to this question is the history of the human race. The newly-created earth was to be the focal point of all the universe, a place where Lucifer would be allowed to have his way for a time, and then all who looked upon it would see exactly what sin was, and why God's law was not some arbitrary set of rules, but a perfectly harmonious system by which all creation would function in unity. All along, Heaven had been proving this by example; now Earth was to prove it again by counter-example.

Even while the rebellion was going on in Heaven, Yah was involved in His greatest project to date. Upon this ball of matter called a planet, He was creating things out of physical particles that represented the various aspects of Himself and His Spiritual kingdom. He created certain "structures" with a property called life, which was a manifestation of love, and represented the force of love in all of ITS aspects. Just as the aspects of sin were anger, hate, etc, the aspects of love were renewal, growth, peace, happiness – all the things which were present in Lucifer at the dawn of his existence.

And when all these things were created, and functioned in perfect unison, He outdid Himself by making a new kind of creature. This creature was not as mighty, or intelligent as His first race, but it had a quality about it that the angels did not possess. In this "Man" was placed a creative drive that was a reflection of Yah Himself. He could think and reason and devise in ways that no other being could, and in a way that made him seem similar to the very God that created him. The day after He did that, the Creator looked down on all He had done and was well pleased with it. He rested on that seventh day, and spent time with this Man, the crowning work of all He had made.

Lucifer's rebellion, meanwhile, was continuing to grow both in intensity and range. All the angels were drawn to the creation of Earth, and gloried in its completion, for on that day when Yah rested, there was a

great celebration in His spiritual kingdom, “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” (Job 38:7)

But the rebel did not rejoice. Why should not the greatest of all the angels, the pinnacle of all spiritual creation, have a part in the development of this new physical realm? Why was his opinion not valued in the laying of the foundation of the earth, or his insights not requested concerning the nature of this new “man” creature? While Yah and Michael – through whom “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3) – were planning and building, Lucifer was left to simmer in his own growing sense of self-worth.

After his fall, Satan’s contempt for God was complete, and against nothing was his hatred more fully directed than upon man, who had replaced him as Yah’s greatest work. Here on earth, where he was still permitted to move with some freedom, where he was allowed the power to continue pleading his case against God to the holy angels, he set about to prove that their Father’s law was unjust. But more than that, he wanted to stamp out whatever it was that the unfallen hosts of Heaven recognized in this “man” as being anything even remotely like their mighty Creator.

God had created plants that dropped seeds, which produced other plants. He created animals of one kind in two forms, which, by joining together, could produce other animals of the same kind. Adam saw that each animal God had made was provided with a companion, a partner. When his Father saw that Adam had become aware of this, He said, “It is not good that the man should be alone,” (Gen 2:18) and so He formed the first woman out of the very body of the first man. Now Adam had a companion, and a partner, and someone in whom he could see like traits, reflections of himself in her, even as his Father saw in him.

And even in looking at Eve, Adam felt the force of love, the great creative power from which all existence was knit, and he understood more clearly the ways of his God. His joining with her was the first marriage, a holy act ordained by the Creator Himself, and forever after would it be a symbol of His connection with the people of earth. Even today, the ceremony often includes the famous verse, “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” How much better off we would be if we applied this not only to our connection with our “other,” but with our spirits to God himself.

Glorious Eden was the foremost garden of beauty among all the wonders that Yah had created on earth. Here were examples of all kinds of life, and two kinds that were found nowhere else on the planet. One was the Tree of Life, a symbol of God’s eternal energy, and the means by which immortality was maintained. Its presence ensured the continued growth and development on earth, and while it flourished, nothing else could be destroyed. The other was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This was the temptation the Father allowed to be present in deference to Satan’s claims that His law was unjust. It, as opposed to the Tree of Life, was the symbol of Lucifer’s rebellion, of knowledge gained by deception and mistrust.

For, although it was called the Tree of Knowledge, nothing was truly hidden from Adam. Whatsoever he wished to know, he could have asked from his Creator. With all eternity before him, he would eventually have learned all things anyway, yet Satan must be allowed to present his case, for this was the very issue which began his slow, painful descent into destruction. The fruit of this tree was the original Pandora’s box.

Eve had not heard the words of caution about the Tree from her Father directly. She had not been personally warned against eating of it from God, but from Adam, to whom the commandment was given. Even so, mistrust was as unknown to the first couple as death, and she had no reason to doubt his warning. But

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Lucifer was permitted to guard the tree, and to speak to the pair from that place. Eventually, Eve did wander near enough to the tree that she could hear the voice of the tempter.

Now, when first cast from Heaven, the dark angel was also referred to as the dragon. As such, he was seen to have characteristics in common with the creature known as the serpent. As a result of what followed the fall of man, the snake was given an instinctive aversion to humans, and it has been shown that most humans have a natural fear of snakes. This was only one of the aspects of the curse that was placed upon snake-kind by Yah, the other was that it would now crawl upon its belly in the dust. (Gen 3:14) Before that, it had either legs or wings – characteristics which would make it seem even more like the “dragon,” that Lucifer had become.

With its golden voice, the intelligent viper called to the woman, and began the work which had become its specialty. He called to her, asking along the lines of, “Hasn’t God said that you may eat fruits from any tree in the garden?” Eve responded that this was so, except for that one tree, for if they ate from it, or even touched it, they would die. And the snake responded boldly, “Ye shall NOT surely die.” (Gen 3:4) The reason for the true restriction, Satan said, was that the tree had the power to make humans wise, even to be gods themselves. Now Lucifer had already tasted the fruit of this tree in the spiritual sense, and yet, he lived.

You see the very same process repeated again. A question, “Hasn’t God said that you may eat fruits from any tree in the garden?” which led to a doubt, “Ye shall not surely die (even though God said you would), which led to a lie, “and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” This was the very process which befell the mighty archangel, a question of God’s character, leading to doubts of His love and knowledge, which led to deception, when Lucifer tried to hide his growing rebellion from his Lord.

And Eve was persuaded, and she ate the fruit. When she didn’t die either, she took it to Adam, and he let himself be convinced, and he also ate. Again was God accused of being a liar by the father of lies. He said they would surely die, yet they tasted of the forbidden tree, and still lived. This principle has never changed. Ever has Satan tried to make even God’s most obvious attempts to reveal love and mercy out to be lies – his delays were seen to be weakness, yet in this did Yah reveal his greatest strength, that he could hold together the lives of even those who had placed themselves out of harmony with Himself and the universe.

When Adam bit into the fruit, how exalted Lucifer must have felt! Did he not cast his eyes contemptuously to the Throne with a mocking laugh? The very first man, the “crowning jewel” in the crown of Creation, and he had failed! The most perfect being to come forth from God’s word, and he had been so easily tempted to disobedience, and not even directly, but by a secondary weapon, his own dear wife. To the holy angels, he presented this as conclusive evidence that Yah was an imperfect leader, a creator who couldn’t even exercise control over His creation.

“But isn’t that the point?” comes the answer from the Throne. God’s kingdom is not founded on control. The angels who serve Him are there because they love him, and desire to do His will. They trust that God knows best who they are and, knowing their best characteristics, have placed them in positions where they would be most useful, valued and happy. So could man have done. At any point, Eve could have brought her question to God. She could have turned away from the temptation and discussed it with her husband. Yet she trusted in her own judgement, and forgot trust for her Father.

“Where is this ‘death’?” demands the fallen angel. Is God not proved a liar again, for there stand the couple, looking around in their newfound awareness of good and evil. And an awareness it was, for they were aware that they had done something “wrong.” For the first time, their sense of well-being was marred by imperfection, and they felt shame for this newfound “nakedness.” When God was taking His daily walk through the garden, He looked for His son, to have their accustomed discussion, in the “cool of the day,” when all things were starting to settle in for the night to come. He found His children huddling behind leaves for protection.

When asked why he was hiding, Adam replied, “I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” And God asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten the fruit of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?” Here was where Satan had truly failed. Would Adam now reject this call to repentance also? Would he admit his wrongdoing and responsibility in disobeying his Father? All the angels looked upon this conversation to see what would happen next.

Always was there the potential for wrongdoing in all that God had created. Always was there the ability to decide for ones self. Man and angel were created free, and this freedom does God respect even to the destruction of His children. He would rather we die than be slaves! Such is the principle upon which was founded the Kingdom of Heaven. But did Adam simply admit that he had made a bad choice? No, he blamed Eve. “The woman whom thou hast given me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” And Yah asked her, “What is this that thou hast done?” To her was given the option to admit she was wrong and perhaps avert some of the disaster about to fall on them. Yet sadly, she too passed the blame, and said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.”

And who does the serpent blame in his turn? One of the major points of my last letter to you was this: Satan blames God. Adam blames Eve, who blames the snake, who blames God. Adam, by induction, is blaming God.

Lucifer stood triumphant before the court of Creation. If he, the greatest angel, could find disfavor in God’s eyes, and mankind, who supposedly most perfectly reflected the nature of the Creator, could be led to Sin, what manner of harmony was this? Were these the works of a perfect God? And if he, Lucifer, was to be destroyed, so also must Adam and his wife be killed.

But there was a difference in the actions of Adam and Lucifer. Whereas the angel was created with knowledge of the nature of God, and had for some time been witness to His wonderful acts, Adam was created without some of this insight. To mankind was given the privilege to learn about God for himself. Our Father delights in the fact that we can use our own intelligence and insights to draw our own personal knowledge of Him. We start from nothing, and by allowing Him to show Himself to us in nature, in history, in example, we have the opportunity to grow into beings so like Him that the angels themselves are sent to be our servants.

It is true, this mighty trust was abused by Adam, but whereas Lucifer had willfully, purposely turned away from the Presence, the first man was deceived, and he slipped and fell. Lucifer already knew God. No new knowledge could change his mind, for every mercy was disregarded or misinterpreted. Man, however had one chance left. By learning about God, he could use the very same free will that turned him away from righteousness to turn back to the mercy of his Creator.

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Even so, Lucifer's claims were false. Yah is no liar, and when He had warned the couple about the death that would result from contact with the Tree, He had spoken true. This was not some arbitrary punishment... God feels no delight in doing harm to any creature, but just as Satan will experience at the end of this war, the natural result of Sin is death... not because "God said so," but because of the fact that Sin is direct opposition to the very force that maintains life.

And so it was that death entered our world. The very first human being born of woman became a murderer, and willfully took the life of his brother Abel. Sacrifices were needed as a reminder that sin causes death, and in that one act, the nature of Adam and his descendants became so susceptible to wrongdoing that they needed to constantly guard themselves against submitting to the influence of the poison.

So it has been ever since. Mankind forsook the ease and joy of perfect unity with Yah, and took upon itself a life of struggle and care. The history of our race was plunged into darkness, and today we see the obvious results – wars, suffering, sickness. And worst of all comes the knowledge that it didn't have to be that way. Lucifer is allowed to have his kingdom on this earth. This was displayed in dramatic form during the temptation of Christ in the desert. "And the devil, taking Him up into a high mountain, showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, 'All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.'" (Luke 4:5,6)

So what does this mean, then, for those of us who have to live in Satan's wicked kingdom? Have we been given up to darkness, to wallow in our submission to the prince of this world? The wages of sin is death, so we are born, we live a while, and then we die... That seems quite sad, if that is all that life means. But no, this is just the bare start of this war. The battlefield has fallen from Heaven and down onto the earth. In my next letter, as your interest continues, I will tell you of the next major scene in this drama. As always, I give you an opportunity to ask questions, give comments or disagree :) Let me know how you are finding the story so far.

Sincerely,
David.

Letter 3: The Patience of The Saints

Dear Rachel,

Don't worry about your letter being short. I don't have all that much time in one sitting these days either. I've taken to writing my longer letters in parts in Word, and then just copying them into my composer window to send the emails. I'm glad you find my writing interesting as well :) It isn't that the Bible doesn't have "spark," it's just that unfortunately we're no longer so used to the style of writing that was typical in the days the books were written.

For example, try reading the lineage of Jesus in the early parts of a couple of the Gospel books.... Back then, family lines and historical details were of high importance, and that was the way people's interest was held. Anyway, on to the letter:

As we've seen, the origin of sin took place in the highest of locations, around the very throne of Heaven. From there, it spread like a fearful disease to the very gates of the spiritual kingdom, and then descended like lightning to the earth. Mankind also became subject to its seductive poison, and their lot was (seemingly) thrown in with the rebellious angels. Horrors were seen to unfold in even the very first generation of the children of Adam.

In both the fall of Satan and Adam, we have seen the mystery of evil unfolding along a pattern. A cherished question, left unasked, quickly leads to doubts. These doubts, if also hidden, will eventually lead to even worse conditions. It is often this way even today, and we can see that one of the major hindrances to the best of plans is a lack of communication. Because people are unwilling to communicate, we see marriages break down, we see parents and children at odds, we see people thinking only of themselves, with barely a thought for others to the right and left of them, who could be the dearest of friends, if only a kind word would pass between them.

But neither did Yah leave his children to suffer full separation from His presence. The early history of humanity is a constant display of Heaven's encouragement, punishment and preservation of mankind in an effort to keep the individuals from giving in to the awful power of the adversary. Yes, earth was to be Lucifer's kingdom, but God's mercy was not to be withheld from those willing to accept it either. To humans was given a choice. They could acknowledge the leadership of this planet, and refuse to desire anything better for their lives, or they could say, as have men and women in every generation, "this world is not my home," and look forward with happiness to the day when the war will be over, and life will once again return to what it was supposed to be all along.

Sadly, many was the time that the Father's mercy was almost wholly disregarded. The tower of Babel was an attempt by men to reach Heaven itself, to exalt themselves above the world by their own power, to make a name for themselves that would never be forgotten. Well, they succeeded in that, but only as a warning – an example that trusting in the power of humanity in its fallen state is the surest way to be thrown into confusion.

The days of Noah are an even more tragic tale. The whole world was bowed down to the prince of the earth, and evil was at an all-time high. Only one man, of all the sons of Adam, was left and faithful to Yah's teachings. By his faith, his entire household was spared, while the rest of the world was allowed to sink under the natural weight of its own sin.

Satan cannot maintain a kingdom of mortal beings. The very principles of his rule encourage self-seeking at the expense of others. In every instance where a nation or a people have called upon Lucifer to be their leader (either by word or by deed), the results have always been their own swift destruction. The world that was flooded out in Noah's day, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and even its more modern counterparts, like the French Revolution, which came about when the kings of the country rejected the principles of reform advocated by Martin Luther. They purposely opposed the simple, Godly principles being taught by the ex-monk, and as a result the people of the nation were thrown into a madness that is known even today as one of the darkest periods in recorded history.

Such have been the dealings of God and demon with the people of the earth. The principles have been shown in their true light, and inevitable results, time and time again. Yet, for as many times of darkness when mankind has followed the way of the adversary, there have been wonderful moments when Yah's character has been revealed in His servants to both the world and the heavens.

The case of Job was one such event. Here was a man whose faith even God could boast about. At such a time, before the final blow was struck in the war, Satan still had some limited access to the gates of his former kingdom. He was still allowed to bring his debate before the holy courts, showing to the undefiled angels the events that had taken place on earth as a result of his efforts. As such, when Yah asked where he had been, Satan answered, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." (Job 1:7)

And God pointed downward and said, "See my servant Job, and how faithful he is." And His fallen child answered, "Of course he loves you. You have given him riches, and a large, healthy family, and fame within his community for his wisdom and good works. I'm sure that if all those things were removed from him, we would all see how quickly his faith would fail him."

And so Yah, confident in His servant, gave Lucifer the power to do all he said, with only the restriction that he mustn't physically harm the human. With great pleasure, the dark angel struck at Job's cattle, and they died. He caused his house to be destroyed, and all his children that were in there. His riches were lost, and his reputation soon followed, when people began to suspect that the reason for this destruction was because he had committed some serious sin against God.

Not content with that, Lucifer saw to it that the righteous man received all of this awful news AT THE SAME TIME. In rapid succession did his remaining servants give him the news of the loss of all he had owned. This was a great, fearful trial for the servant of God, but in all this, he never blamed his Father. Also, he was so confident in his own knowledge of heavenly principles that he could say with certainty and conviction that it wasn't even his fault that this calamity had befallen him, for he knew he had not sinned. This was not some arrogant assumption, but a statement of great faith and a true declaration of integrity. He did not understand why such awful things were happening, but he knew where the blame did NOT lie, and his faith was unbroken. His feelings he summed up in a prayer from which the now-famous line is quoted, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away."

The next time Yah and Lucifer met, the situation was unchanged. The Creator pointed out His faithful servant with even more pleasure than before, declaring that it was not for the sake of physical wealth or the praise of men that Job was faithful to Him. Ever the malcontent, Satan said, "Well, just let me take away the one thing you have left him, his health, and he will curse you to your face." God, ever patient, ever

willing to let evil play out its course, let him have his way again, giving only one restriction, that the illness should not be fatal.

Job's body broke out in sores and boils that itched and burned and caused no end to his misery by day or night. His friends and even his wife added further to his trial by declaring that this MUST be a sign from God that he had fallen out of righteousness somehow, and that he should either repent, or just curse God and die to end his suffering. And Job was indeed tempted to do just that. He wished he had never been born, or that he had died in infancy, so he could have remained ignorant that such suffering was possible.

And... he did indeed question God. He asked why such horrible things happened. He declared himself blameless before the invisible throne, and protested that he should be treated so poorly, while even those who shunned the righteousness of heaven were allowed to prosper right in front of his face. Here was where the cycle of sin was broken. By taking his question to his Father in faith, he did not allow the course of his thoughts to fall into doubt, and harbored no ill feelings in his heart, although he was sorely inclined to do so as he sat upon ashes, dressed in rags and scratching at his abused skin with bits of broken pottery.

Yah's case was proved. Here was a man, a being with even less knowledge of Him than Lucifer had, yet he stood firm in his convictions despite the most terrible trials heaped upon him. If Satan had any capacity left for shame, he should have felt it in its full measure. He had been bested by a "mere human," and under conditions that he himself had never had to endure. The former pride of heaven was shown to be weaker than a member of the lesser race.

It was past time for Job's unfair sufferings to end. God revealed himself to his faithful servant in dramatic fashion, and though he did offer some chastisement for the manner in which the questions were asked of Him, He nonetheless held His servant up as the true example of a Godly man, as opposed to the doubting character of his friends. He told Job to pray for his friends, as they had displeased Him, and when he did so, God accepted his sacrifice, and the rest of Job's life was blessed, "more than his beginning, for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He also had seven sons and three daughters." (Job 42:12, 13)

So it is today with many people. Suffering comes to us all. "The rain falls alike on both the righteous and unrighteous," but the difference is that when trials come to someone who is a servant of the Most High, we may see it as a blessed opportunity to prove our faith to both the heavens and the earth. Angels will rejoice as we prove our Father's love, and many may be the blessings that fall on those around us if they choose to learn from the example we set.

As Paul said, "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgement of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer." (1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5)

In every generation of history, there have been faithful servants of God to be the "lights of the world." For a time after the death of Christ, Satan was doing his utmost to destroy the memory of God's work upon the earth, and he succeeded to a large extent. Many of the truths so clearly expressed in the examples of the prophets were all but erased from the knowledge of man. The teachings of the Messiah himself were misrepresented, and his plainest lessons were but poorly understood.

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As a result, reformers such as the above mentioned Martin Luther, as well as many others have appeared from time to time, and the truths that were once so greatly prized were once again set forth before the people. The steps have been gradual, for there has been much to re-learn, and many deeply-rooted traditions needed to be put away. But to those who had been faithful in small matters, greater and greater light was revealed. And we have been promised that as this last act unfolds, there would come a set of people very much like Job.

They will know God so well they can say with confidence that they have been following the principles of Heaven to the utmost, and indeed, they will become so very much like Jesus himself that when the very force of Sin itself is destroyed, these people will remain untouched. Like Enoch and the prophet Elijah, they will be taken directly up to heaven without ever experiencing death, “caught up together with them [those who died in Christ] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Even though the war between Heaven and Satan’s kingdom rages to this day, and with a greater intensity than before, the truth is that the victory has already been won. The decisive blow has already fallen, and Lucifer has received a fatal wound. He has been allowed to live for a time, though, for the last act must be undertaken for the benefit of we here on earth. Heaven had already witnessed the victory of Yah over His adversary, but there is still a question of the controversy in the human mind, and so our Father has allowed the season of evil to continue for a little while longer, so that on the last day, “every knee shall bow,” and acknowledge that God is just.

Satan is defeated, as surely as if he had been struck by a poisoned dart. But the working of that poison has been slow to take effect, not that suffering may be continued, but that everyone would have a chance to see and understand the results of the war. To all who see and understand, we have one last opportunity to leave the leadership of that evil prince, to make our last stand on the side of Heaven. When Sin is finally wiped out of the universe, we will have had a blessed chance to cleanse it from our souls and live.

The plan for the redemption of man only becomes more beautiful and poetic the more we learn about it. Here we see a wonder. Just as Sin began in heaven itself, before the very throne of God, so it was that this “final blow” was struck here on earth. The conflict which began in the holy Kingdom of Yah was to see its true end at the very heart of the Kingdom of Satan. I pause here for now, and await your response to what I have written so far, with the promise that the best part of this story is yet to come :)

Sincerely,
David.

Letter 4: The Avatar of YAHWEH

Dear Rachel,

I'm glad to hear from you. I'm sorry that you are more busy than you would like, but I can completely understand not having a lot of time to write. As it is, I'll continue filling you in on the details of this story, and hopefully, by the time you have more occasion to write, you'll have a fairly good idea of the entire chain of events. Now we've gotten to a most important topic in regards to the war between Michael and Lucifer. For that reason, be warned, this letter may get a bit long :)

Anyway, let's continue. When I left off last time, I promised to tell you of the "final blow" that fell against Satan from the forces of Heaven. Well, since this entire controversy has been about the character of Yah, and whether or not His government is just or unjust, and how mercy and justice can coexist in perfect harmony, naturally, this decisive move would have to be an expression of the goodness of God that would be so plain, so clear, that no one could deny it.

"O my people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron and Miriam." (Micah 6:3, 4)

Do these sound like the words of an exacting and harsh God? Does this sound like a being that delights in the destruction of the very creatures He made, just waiting for us to slip up so He can punish us? And yet, these have been the pictures painted of Yah by humanity through the years, even (shamefully) among those who claim to be His servants. Our Father is not one who lays traps for His children. Even in His most terrifying moments, His intention is to correct wrongs, to bring the erring individuals into a greater understanding of the benefits of right and the consequences of wrong actions.

The book of Job is a dramatic example of this; in which we have a cut-away view of the two worlds, spiritual and material, and how they relate to each other. It was not God who struck at Job's livelihood, but Satan. If we remember that the world is truly Lucifer's kingdom, we can appreciate the futility of relying on the things of this world for our happiness. For God allows the dark angel almost as much control as he can grasp here, so that the difference between good and evil can be thrown into as stark a contrast as possible. It is at times a hard lesson to learn, but humanity has shown itself to be a stubborn student on occasion.

As the quotation from Micah has stated, not only does Yah lead us out of troublesome situations if we allow Him, but He also sets before us examples, so that we do not fall again into such states. Moses before the people of Israel, Job before his three friends. The prophet Elijah was a man who stood alone against kings and armies, fearlessly speaking out against the evils of those in even the highest offices of government. So courageously did he stand up for righteousness, and so closely did he come to know the God on whose behalf he spoke, that he was allowed to pass into the Heavenly kingdom untouched by death. Even so, Elijah, who so perfectly reflected the Father's character, was not the most impressive example of Yah's love to His wayward children.

The history of God's chosen people is a tale of ups and downs. The people of Israel seemed to be stuck in a real rut. They would sin, calamity would befall them, they would repent and turn back to God, He would forgive them, they would prosper, and then they would sin again. They seemed powerless to avoid the influence of nearby nations, and fell often into the evils of idolatry, ignoring the God who had done so

much for them, to bow at the statues of animals and deities that had never sent them so much as a ray of sunshine, nor had they the power to do so. So it is with many who claim to be God's people today. They are stuck in a "sin/repent" cycle, which offers neither security against the consequences of the sinful actions, nor the promise and assurance of life ever after.

The nation of God eventually came to so low a point that even the prophets Yah sent to them were rejected, exiled, or even killed. They had been in this cycle for so long that their hearts had become hardened against the messages of warning and love being sent to them from Heaven. Satan's corruptive influence had become so widespread that there seemed nothing that could be done to remind them of their dependence on the Creator.

All along, the faithful of God had been sacrificing animals as an atonement for sin. By killing innocent lambs and goats and birds, they were reminded continually of the evil that results from turning to ungodly practices. The blood of the sacrifices reminded them that the penalty of these practices was death, yet at the same time, they lived. Another could be chosen to die for their sins, and this was a faithful promise of Yah's desire to forgive them for their fallen state. But now in the nation of Israel, the temples were run by corrupt priests. The people had forgotten the reason for the sacrifices, and it had become formalized, it became a mere "mass," a mere set of motions that had no significance other than the fact that it was a tradition.

Now came the time for the ultimate sacrifice; the death of the final lamb, the last and sufficient atonement for the sins of all the people from the beginning of history to the end of time. This symbol would be lifted up ever after as a reminder of both the evils of sin and the love of God. The cross became an emblem of the lamb provided by God for our salvation, and also a symbol of the snake lifted up in defeat.

"And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us.' And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.'" (Numbers 21:6 – 9)

The foreshadowing of this great sacrifice was given even from the days of Abraham, when he was told by God to sacrifice his son. When Abraham was about to do so, Yah stayed his hand, and provided instead an alternate sacrifice, a young ram. In the days of Moses, the other side of the sacrifice was displayed. All the sons and daughters of Adam today (as in all ages) have been "bitten by the serpent," and it is by beholding the snake lifted up on a pole that we may live. In the death of Jesus, Satan also was lifted up on a "pole" as it were – displayed to the heavens as a murderer and a liar. This was the "final blow," that ended forever the question of God's mercy before the courts of Heaven, and gained the sure victory for the side of good and light.

To the people of earth, Christ's death was as the "lamb of God," the utmost reminder of the consequences of sin, the purest innocent to die for the sins of their own hearts and hands. To the citizens of Heaven, it was the decisive end of the battle, and the holding out of the defeated serpent for all to see. But why was Jesus chosen? What was so special about Him that made him an acceptable sacrifice to Yah for, not only all the sins that had ever occurred, but all that would ever occur even after such a time passed?

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The answer to this is found in the entire Bible. From cover to cover it points to the love of Yah, and the redemption of mankind and the destruction of Sin. To understand the life of Yahshua (Jesus), is to understand all that I have said before and more. To know it is to know all of the Scriptures at their plainest meaning, and to accept it is to live forever.

In no plainer manner than the life and death of Christ could the words of the prophet Micah be made more manifest – that of a pleading God, eager to show us the way out of destruction and willing to heal every sickness of body, mind and spirit. In no purer fashion could the laws of God be shown to be the way to live in happiness both on this earth and in the world to come. The Gospels are like a textbook for humanity.

And so it came to be that God Himself stepped down from His throne. The Prince of the everlasting Kingdom, He who had at times been in the form of the archangel Michael, the One through whom all things were created, lay aside His crown and descended to earth as a man to do what the prophets and angels could not do. Even the faithful Elijah was not a fitting candidate for this job. However magnificently he reflected God's character, he too fell short of perfection, for he fled for his life from the wrath of queen Jezebel, forgetting for a moment that his Father was the very source of life and protection. But in the person of Yahshua, filled with the Holy Spirit from His conception, was one who would never break His connection to the Father, not even for an instant, and would be preserved as the "lamb without spot," for the final true Passover.

In the book of Daniel, Christ is seen in the prophet's visions as a rock. This rock would come and smash a gigantic statue in the shape of a man, and then would grow into a mountain which would cover the entire world. The Jews saw this prophecy as a great hope, for they knew what the vision meant. The head of the statue was of gold, the chest of silver, the abdomen and thighs were of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet were made of iron mixed with clay. The golden head of the statue was the kingdom of Babylon, and the other lesser kingdoms were the ones which would succeed it, the Media-Persians, then the Greeks, then the Roman empire, and finally a mixed empire, which was never fully unified (as iron will not form an alloy with clay).

The end of the vision had the rock striking the feet of the statue and breaking it all into pieces, and then the rock grew to cover the world. The people of Israel looked forward to this day as the coming of their Messiah, a king to lead God's people out of bondage, and establish a monarchy which would cover the whole world, replacing all the kingdoms that existed before it on earth. Whereas this is a true statement, it is also true that they completely missed the nature of their King when He did appear.

Not in glory and power was He to appear at first, but as a servant. He was to be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; and we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:3 – 7)

Oh, if only they could see! The Jews were SO blinded by their ambition for an earthly kingdom, for a life of wealth and ease, that they completely overlooked this scripture. Either that, or they applied it to their own faltering nation's history. To the letter was this passage reflected in the life of Yahshua. Had they

realized the true significance of these words, they would have recognized in the life of the man of Galilee the one they had been awaiting from the calling of Abraham, even from the fall of Adam.

There have been several wonderful books written about the life of Jesus. Some go into great and wonderful detail, and indeed, if I tried to include all the important things He did in this letter, there would be no room for anything else. In fact, as John said, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” (John 21:25) So, that having been established, I won’t even try. There are a few incidents, however, which are worthy of note from the perspective of the sin war, and those will I relate – not to indicate that there was anything “unimportant” about His life, but you get my meaning, hopefully.

If you take a browse through the first chapter of the four gospels, you’ll find that each tells the beginning of the life of Yahshua from a slightly different perspective. Some have Him just appearing on the scene, one tells in detail the events that took place leading up to His birth, and another describes the annunciation, conception and birth in regards to Mary His mother. The place at which they all seem to converge is at His baptism by John and the leading out of His ministry at the age of 30. This specific number is of some significance, but I’ll get to that in a later letter.

Anyway, immediately after He went into the water and came up, the Spirit of His Father descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and in the very language of the humans that stood nearby, the Heavens declared the divinity of Christ, and the sanction of His mission. He then immediately left inhabited regions and went into a desert, where He fasted for 40 days. There, in that desolate place, the battle between Michael and Lucifer continued.

Satan did not fully understand the mission of his former Commander on earth. He knew that having the incarnated god around was bad news for him, because Christ was turning his slaves’ minds to Yah, and setting them free by the multitude. Wherever He went, He demonstrated God’s love; with every word and deed, humans were reminded of the purity that their souls longed for. The blessings being poured out upon humanity were without count or value, and when Yahshua taught in the temple, the building was more blessed than its previous structure, when in the days of Solomon there was a ball of heavenly fire glowing forth from the inner room of God’s house.

Yah’s law was being plainly revealed to mankind in simple, easy language. From a perfect vessel fell the exact words the listeners needed to hear, each lesson a seed that would grow into the mighty tree of truth in the hearts of those who accepted them. Lucifer knew that this had to be stopped at any cost. All of his best laid plans were being disrupted. For centuries had he carefully planned the downfall of Yah’s chosen people, and now, finally, when they were slipping into peaceful, Godless routines and traditions, Michael appears and starts throwing wrenches into the machinery. Lucifer could always try to have Him killed, of course, but that would accomplish little.

Destroying Christ in the flesh, he reasoned, would only result in His return in a new body, and a continuation of His work after a minor delay. Besides, all of the fallen angel’s previous attempts via Herod had failed anyway. No, Satan’s ultimate goal was to corrupt the spirit itself, to turn the mind of God Himself to rebellion, producing a lasting failure, and pronouncing the doom of humanity. If Yahshua himself were to sin as a man, it would prove that mankind was INCAPABLE of living up to Yah’s standards, and would validate Lucifer’s charge that they must all be destroyed if he was to be. The adversary seized upon Christ in an apparent moment of weakness, and proceeded to attack.

After 40 days with no food, it seemed a simple thing for the son of God to make bread out of stones. There could be nothing wrong with that, could there? How would satisfying a basic need be a sin? Lucifer tried to get Christ to give in to this temptation.... to simply use His natural, God-given (literally) powers to satisfy His hunger. But Yahshua knew His purpose on earth. He was to do what any of us could do. He was to rely on nothing but what WE have to rely on in our temporal environment. Even with His walking around healing the sick and raising the dead, He did NOTHING that ordinary men cannot do when we have a connection with the Father. In regards to raising the dead... both Elijah and Elisha did this on various occasions, as did Peter and Paul, for they knew the Father and understood His will.

Were Christ to use His abilities for His own purposes, He would be violating His prescribed role to come as a servant to mankind, and this He was not willing to do. In realizing His role, and submitting to the office of humility, He turned aside the first temptation.

Not giving up, Satan was given charge to transport the Son of God to the top of a high tower. "If you are truly who you say you are," he said, "cast yourself down from here, for it was written that when the Messiah appears, Yah will send the angels out to protect Him." Now this may seem simple enough a temptation to overcome, but remember, Christ took on a fully human nature, and had little if any memory of His former self as the commander of the forces of Heaven. He had to go on faith, just as we do, and the potential for doubt was always there. However, it was not because He doubted that He did not throw Himself from the top. "It is written," He said, "that we should not attempt to test the Lord our God."

Of course, in our lives we are invited to prove our Father's power. He delights in revealing Himself to us as we draw closer to Him in both time and character. What we are NOT to do, however, is to deliberately set out to force His hand. What if all Christians could fly? We would have droves of people flocking to churches to learn this skill – all seeking our teachings for the wrong reason. Aside from that, and even worse, there would be such an exaltation of SELF among those who had learned that the message would quickly shift from the putting away of sins. In short, it would be a disaster.

There is a time and a place for miracles, but alone in the desert, Christ being floated gently to the earth by invisible servants would have been for the benefit of no one.

The adversary had one more weapon to try. He caused all the kingdoms of the earth to flash before the Savior's eyes. He revealed to Him the glory and riches of the nations around Him, the gold of the eastern regions, the precious jewels of countries as yet unknown... and made the offer: "All these things can I give to you, if you will but bow down and worship me." Even coming from a life of relative poverty, a quick response was on Yahshua's lips, along with a rebuke, "Get thee behind me Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him alone shalt thou serve." Defeated for the moment, Lucifer fled from the victorious Avatar.

Having prepared Himself in this way, He went out from the desert to draw His disciples and preach the will of His Father.

It is of significance to note that it was not from the rabbis and scribes, not from the governors or wealthy landowners that Christ won His first followers. He called the fishermen, the tax collectors, the workmen, whose simple lives had provided them with a humility which allowed them to see through the plain clothing

of our Redeemer, and to behold the true majesty and greatness of His character. They did not even hesitate when they were invited to follow our Lord.

This isn't to say that these are the only kinds who may be of use to our Father, of course. They were taken from all walks of life, and each used his skills and position for the furtherance of the gospel. Remember always, it is not slaves our Father desires. Yah delights when we use our individual gifts and talents to work for the improvement of the world. Luke was a doctor, and to him was committed in later years the writing of one of the most detailed of the Gospels, as well as the book of Acts, the only Canonized record of the early church, from which many important lessons have been preserved. Paul was in a very high position within the Jewish religious hierarchy, and on more than one occasion, that fact, along with his status as a Roman citizen, allowed him to reach those in positions of authority.

Judas was a very skilled financier, and highly educated as well. Had he committed fully to Heaven's cause, his abilities and mental gifts would have made him a mighty force for the drawing and salvation of souls. Yahshua saw all these things in His betrayer, and loved him for them until the very end.

All of Christ's ministry was one of service. With never a thought for Himself, He ceaselessly travelled where His Father's Spirit sent Him, teaching men how to overcome the burden of sin, and to prepare for the cleansing of the earth and the destruction of evil. He healed all according to their faith – to some, He went to their homes and spoke to the sick or departed, calling them forth from their maladies. To others, they believed in Him enough that they needed only the assurance that He had made them well. A Roman centurion, hearing of Yahshua's powers, went to Him to ask that his sick servant be healed. Demonstrating great faith, he said, "Lord I am not worthy that you should go to my house, but only say the word and my servant will be healed." Even among the Israelites was such faith not found. They, who had historical evidence of Yah's great accomplishments among them... and it took a man from a pagan nation to demonstrate true trust in the Divine Teacher.

But not only healing, Christ gave many opportunities for those who knew Him to prove their faith. Peter's walk on the water is a perfect metaphor for a Christian's walk to Heaven. He and the other disciples were in a boat, and they saw the Messiah coming toward them, walking over the waves. Peter saw him, and said, "Lord, if it is really you, bid me to come to you on the water." And Jesus answered, "Come." With great trust, Peter jumped out of the boat, and started walking towards Him.

Almost there, he took his eyes off of his Master, however, and looked at the stormy waves and began to fear. At that very moment, he started to sink beneath the turbulent waters. It is the same with us. Being born anew in Christ, we become new creatures, able to do things we could not before, to live righteous lives and to "walk toward" Him in character, becoming more like Him, and ever closer to Heaven's ideals. But when we take our eyes off of our goal, when we look around at the turbulent world, and start heeding our own stormy emotions, we start to sink. When we begin to doubt, and to worry about our own safety, we lose the ability to "walk on water," and then our lives are truly in danger – not because of the circumstances, but because we lose our trust in the perfect protection of the one who bids us, "Come."

But neither does our loving Savior leave us to drown in our fears. Peter was not yet fully converted to his Master's way. Even some time later, during Yahshua's trial, he denied Him, proving that he was not yet ready to stand firm in his faith. Jesus understood that like no one else, and with tender mercy, He reached out a hand to help Peter up when he cried out to Him in his distress and fear. Even those who do not fully know Yah's ways, if they sincerely seek Him with their words and with their hearts, He would rather empty

the Heavens of its angels than allow such a one to come to harm. This is a comfort to us in our ignorance, not a warning, that God knows our true hearts.

The fact that Peter and the other disciples did not fully understand their Teacher's way and mission in life was a constant trial for our Redeemer. How lonely it must have been for Him, that even His best friends on earth did not understand Him, and could not even bear to accept His talking about the necessary death that He was to suffer at the hands of unjust civil powers. They all expected Him to set up an earthly kingdom, and all looked forward to their "reward" for following Him with a bit of selfishness in their hearts.

The foremost among these was Judas. The truth is, Judas DID love Christ. No one who met Him and went about preaching in His name and healing the sick with His power could avoid loving Him. This disciple's fatal flaw was similar to Satan's. Whereas all the other disciples also cherished some greed in regards to their desire for position and power, they were willing to give it up if such was not to be. When James and John had their mother come to Jesus to ask that her two sons be given the highest positions in His Kingdom, He answered that they must also be willing to drink from the same cup He was to drink from, meaning His sufferings.

They said they were able, and indeed, when they understood the nature of the "cup," they proved themselves worthy. James was one of the very first martyrs for Christ when the persecutions began, and John was the last of the disciples left alive. He was the one who suffered the longest in this life for Yahshua, and to Him was given the honor of recording the book of Revelation, the signs of things to come.

Judas, however, loved position and power just a little more than he loved Yah's son. He did believe that He was the son of God, and he did believe that He was the one chosen to rebuild the Heavenly kingdom, but he also thought that he (Judas) had the better idea of how to go about it. "Why does not Yahshua just reveal His power to the corrupt priests? They will accept Him then, and then He can avoid all the suffering He keeps talking about." But rather than asking his Master this question that plagued him, he kept it to himself, thinking himself clever enough to either figure it out, or find a way around it. Does this sound familiar? That's right... it's the beginning of the Sin cycle.

The cycle continued along its inevitable path in Judas, and he refused to seek Jesus' council in overcoming these temptations. Christ understood very well what was happening to His disciple, and He constantly gave Judas opportunities to confess his troublesome thoughts and be made clean. He put Judas in charge of the apostles' treasury, so that his love of money could be made manifest, and he would see his sins. We are also sometimes put in similar positions so that our faults can be revealed to us. But temptations are not to be lamented, for to be tempted is not to sin. We are to realize, however, when we are in error, and ask that we be given the power to overcome. Judas, however, did not do this.

It did not take long for Judas' questions to degenerate into doubts, and soon, just like Satan, he began to whisper among the disciples; as much as he loved Jesus, misery must have company, and he could not stand to be alone in his quiet rebellion. Just before He was arrested and given over to His executioners, Mary, one of His dearest friends, broke an expensive jar of perfume and anointed Him with it when they were all seated at a meal. She did this with a pure motive, one of inexpressible love and gratitude, for Mary had been forgiven many sins. Judas, however, could not see past the financial implications. "Could not that expensive gift have been sold and the money given to the poor?" he whispered to the disciples that sat around him.

Upon hearing this, Mary became embarrassed, and knowing the degree of respect that Judas held with the other followers of her Lord, she assumed also that Jesus felt the same way. She felt the searing pain of shame, and bitter disappointment that her thoughtful gesture might have been misunderstood by the One she loved best. But she need not have worried. Christ knows and loves each of us as if we were the only person on the earth. “Why trouble ye the woman?” He said, “for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.” (Matthew 26:10 – 13) Such sweet praise! How Mary’s heart must have filled with love, when she realized that her kind act (given at such great personal cost to her, for the ointment described would have cost almost a year’s wages for one in her position in those days) had been understood and appreciated.

But again He had spoken of His death. So often, and yet the disciples could not understand. They still expected that somehow their Master would establish an earthly reign. Christ knew that as long as they felt this way, they would never give up the greed in their hearts. They would never understand the principles of loving others as much as themselves... they could never truly be His Father’s children. When He spoke of knowing the Father as the only way to salvation, Phillip said, “Show us the Father, then, so that we can Love him.” Christ answered, “Have I been with you so long, yet you still don’t understand?” Yah is Spirit, and He is expressed through principles. Those who knew and loved Yahshua in the flesh knew and loved the Father in the spirit. The disciples NEEDED to understand true humility and true love for each other, even at the expense of personal, selfish greed, and this need led our Saviour to give one of his most touching lessons.

On the eve of the Jewish Passover, the disciples and Yahshua gathered to have a meal. Before eating, it was customary that a servant would come in and wash the feet of all the guests of the house. The twelve sat with their beloved Master, and a bowl of water was in the room, but there was no servant. Each of the twelve knew the custom, but not one of them moved to perform the humiliating task. For any to take the bowl and wash the feet of the others was to admit that he was the servant of the others, to admit being inferior and of lesser esteem. Jesus sat and watched them all, reading their hearts to see if any understood the lesson. Sadly, not one of them did.

Then He rose, and took off His outer garment, and took the bowl of water. To the amazement of those seated, He, who had healed the sick and raised the dead... He who Peter, James and John had seen in His angelic form, transfigured on the mountain top talking to Elijah and Moses... He who had so often left the Rabbis and teachers in the temple confused and wrapped up in their own stupidity... He who has been their Master for three and a half years, knelt before them and washed the dirt from their feet, all the dignity and majesty of Heaven bowed before them and served.

Finally, they began to understand. His words, “Let him who would be great among you be your servant,” began to ring in their ears. All realized the utter self-seeking nature of their hearts, and they were extremely ashamed and sorrowful. The perfect example had been before them for years, yet they had thought only of themselves and their futures, when their Friend was facing the prospect of the most painful possible death, and was looking to them for love and comfort. When it was Peter’s turn, he could not hold back the tears any longer. Looking down on his beloved Teacher, he asked, “Lord, dost thou wash my feet?” He answered, “What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”

Peter was overcome by emotion, and unable to bear it anymore, he said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But he needed the lesson, he needed to fully understand the patient, loving and kind nature of his Father, or else he would never be able to have this example ever before him when he would be called to teach Yah's principles to the world. Jesus said, "If I wash thee not, thou has no part with me." Peter, ever impulsive, but nonetheless thinking that nothing could be worse than separation from Yahshua, said, "Lord not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Peter still had some lessons to learn about hasty actions, it seemed, but all that would come in time. There was a more important issue going on in that room. Though He had washed them all, yet Christ declared, "Ye are not all clean."

When he had completed his task, Jesus returned to the table, and proceeded to explain the lesson. "Know ye what I have done to you?" He asked. "Ye call me master and lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I, then, your lord and master, have washed your feet; ye also are to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." They needed to have it ever before them that humility is a vital step to understanding the principles of Heaven, to becoming as Christ Himself, and to overcoming the snare that even the greatest of angels fell prey to. And Lucifer was not quiet during this time either.

Over one of the twelve he still had control, and as Christ knelt before the feet of Judas, he entered the heart of the stubborn disciple, and urged upon him how unlikely it was that this servile Teacher would ever reign as King over the earth. It filled Judas with disgust to think that the One whom he had trusted in to obtain for him wealth and influence would do something as selfless as this humiliating labor. Little did he understand that he was being offered one last chance to let the tender mercy of Yah influence him, to shame him into repentance over his greed and to save his own soul from the slavery of the dark angel.

But just as Lucifer in Heaven, the stubborn soul saw Michael's pleading mercy as an insult, as a violation of his pride, and in that moment, Judas turned his heart fully away from the principles of life, and passed under the shadow of death.

After he had rejected this final lesson, what more could Jesus do or say to bring him back to the light? The cycle of Sin was complete, and it was not that Yah was unwilling to forgive, but that evil had become so much a part of the human's essence, that he no longer had any desire for love or mercy. Anyone who asks for forgiveness with a sincere heart is given this priceless gift. The true danger of sin lies in its effectiveness of changing US. God is always willing to save, it is WE who may become unwilling to accept, if we dwell too long in the shadow of evil. His heart breaking within Him, Yahshua proclaimed, "Verily, verily, I say unto you that one of you shall betray me."

What a shock this must have been to the disciples! Such a thing was unthinkable to them, especially just after they had been so humiliated by their own selfishness. They were in a repentant attitude, in realization of their need for Christ, and with tender hearts for the love of the Father. How could it be that any of them would stand against their Master? One to another, they looked, trying to figure out who among them could be so evil.

One by one they asked their master, doubting even their own love, "Lord, is it I?" Peter asked Jesus directly, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered that the one who dipped his bread into the bowl at the same time as He did would be the one. Judas alone of the twelve did not hear this. While the others were searching their souls to see if they could possibly have the potential to betray their Master, his mind was dwelling on the new plans that were forming in his mind. Because of this, when Christ dipped his bread into the bowl, he did so at the same time, unaware of the sign this would be to the other eleven.

Letters To Rachel

After he had done so, Lucifer no longer had any reason to hide his influence. He knew his servant had been found out, and he had leave to take full possession of Judas' mind. The plans that had been filling the betrayer's mind bloomed full. If Christ is lord, he reasoned, then if He was turned in to the civil authorities He would HAVE to use His powers to free Himself. He would use His divine abilities to overcome His enemies, and that would force the Rabbis and teachers to believe in Him, and so the earthly kingdom would be established.

Remember the way Christ resisted the second temptation? "Thou shalt not test the Lord thy God." This was just what Judas was doing with his rationalization. It has often been said by those benefiting from evil practices, "What does it matter if I do it? If I don't someone else will." This is the rationale behind the actions of many who sell guns or drugs or any questionable items. To them Christ has an answer. "It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." (Luke 17: 1, 2)

As Yahshua saw the evil traits of His ancient enemy become fully manifest in Judas, He felt keen pain for his lost child. So shall He weep over all unrepentant sinners on the day of the judgement, bemoaning the loss of so many wonderful souls, who were too blinded to desire freedom and life eternal. "How can I give you up?" He will ask, "How can I let you go? Will not any be willing to accept My gift of salvation?" To Judas he said, "What you are planning to do, do quickly." Judas ran out into the darkness of the night, his soul empty of the capacity for love, the very essence of life. To the Jewish authorities he went, to those who had been seeking the life of the great Teacher ever since He began to teach the people the true spirit of Godliness, so different from the hardened forms and neglected principles from which they were so far removed. Such a great tragedy; such an incalculable loss...

Though there is a bit more on this particular topic, I fear I have run on very long with this one letter, and I think I should give you a break here to absorb what I have said so far. I will wait and see if you have any questions or comments so far before continuing. I will await your reply. Yah be with you.

Sincerely,
David.

Letter 5: The Death-Knell of The Dragon

Dear Rachel,

In your last letter, you asked how it was that I know this much about the details of the spiritual war. The truth is, all the really relevant facts are right there in the Bible. To those who read and ask for understanding of those sacred words, greater and greater insight will be given. The Bible student who reads with love will never be turned away without a blessing. As I referred to before (and this is relevant to just that question), after the death of Christ, Satan's fury turned with full force on those who had determined to follow in His way. Unto these "Christians" was poured out his rage and frustration at the steadfast way in which Michael had turned aside his impotent attacks. With his now practiced and refined techniques, he infiltrated the Apostolic church of Christ, gradually allowing errors to seep in, and guiding others to exterminate mercilessly those who would not yield.

In this way, many of the principles held dear to the early followers were all but forgotten, and it took a long and painful series of reformations to just get back to where we are now. Imagine where we would be if the true teachings of our beloved Savior had never been opposed! But His will is never truly diverted, and to each of us whom He calls to know Him, (and truly, He calls all of us) there is as much knowledge as we desire. In my case, as with many others, just by reading His word, I have at times been granted sharp, and sometimes painful, insight into the events that took place.

When I read the incident of Lucifer's rejection of Heavenly mercies, for example, I was seized with a unutterable, depthless, uncontainable sorrow. I don't think that I have felt such pain but a few times before, and never for such a reason. It was as if Yah let me just glimpse a portion of His sorrow at losing His firstborn angel, and it nearly unraveled my heart. In my words to you about that stage of the story, and its earthly reflection in the betrayal of Judas, I have tried to portray a little bit of what I felt.

Another incident I was allowed the honor of feeling rather clearly was the death of our Master Himself, the topic of this fifth section, and so we return to the final segment of the earthly battle between Michael and Lucifer. Perhaps you will see what I mean:

The disciples did not fully understand what had passed between their Master and Judas before he fled the feast chamber. They knew, upon the dipping of the bread, that he had been predicted as the one to betray Yahshua, but they did not fully grasp the significance of the action, that it would lead to His death, and even less clearly did they realize that the prophesied treachery would take place that very night.

After this, Christ performed what came to be known ever after as the "last supper," a lesson which would not only remind the disciples again of His impending death – oh, so very near now... but also to point out the true significance of the Passover festival that the Jewish nation was to celebrate in the coming days. He said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15, 16) He took the bread and broke it, giving it to His followers to share out, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." (Mat 26:26) This broken food was to be a symbol of His own flesh, as His physical form was to be destroyed at the hands of the Romans for the sake of all who would inherit the glory of Heaven.

After this, He took a cup of wine and gave thanks for it, and then He passed it to the remaining eleven, saying, "Drink ye, all of it. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the

remission of sins.” (Mat 26:27, 28) Right after that, in verse 29, He reminds them again of His coming death. “But I say unto you” He said, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” With the crucifixion so near, Yahshua needed to have His followers strengthened as never before, and their faith at its highest point, for a fearsome test was about to come upon them. Their trust in Yah was to be tested in fire, as they saw the one in whom rested all their hopes led away to death by His enemies.

Remember Peter’s impulsive nature? Yahshua saw in him great potential for leadership, and desired that he be especially warned against giving in to his favorite temptation. He said to him, “Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, Simon, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31, 32) Again, in what must have been a severe shock to those seated around Him, and knowing what each of the disciples’ reactions would be, He made His warning even plainer by saying, “This very night you will all fall away because of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered abroad.’ (Zechariah 13:7) But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” (Mat 26:31, 32)

As predicted, Peter jumped in, saying, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” Yahshua responded, “I tell you the truth, today – yes, tonight – before the rooster crows, you yourself will disown me three times.” Peter insisted, however, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you!” And all the others said the same. (Mark 14:30, 31) Their Master knew fully well what would happen, but as is His divine nature, He gave every opportunity to strengthen and aid. He gave every means and measure so that the disciples could fortify their faith for the struggle to come. He led them in the signing of a hymn, and then He took three of them with Him for a final night of prayer.

You may notice that in my above references, I have been skipping back and forth among the first three gospels. The reason for this is that as the events draw closer to the actual death of the Messiah, we need to be aware as clearly as possible of the state of mind of those involved. Lucifer and Michael were about to meet in conflict for the very last time, and the decisive battle was already beginning; for this reason I’ve picked the passages that give the clearest meaning for each event. John’s writings have less than these three about the specifics that took place that night, for he instead chose to focus more on what happened afterwards, the blessed hope that Yahshua left them with, even while speaking of His death, when He said, “But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

John does, however, record a beautiful teaching by Christ that last night. After He told them of His death and resurrection, the disciples were quite disturbed, and Yahshua comforted them, saying, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me?’ I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

“In that day, you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete... In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father Himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I come from God.” (John 16:19 – 23, 26, 27)

What a thought! The Father Himself loves us! And yet some Christians often portray the Father as a harsh, exacting judge, and the Son as the kindhearted one who has to convince Yah to forgive us and reinstate us into His graces if we slip up. The most often-repeated scripture of our time is probably John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Christ's death was not to create in the Father love for us, but it was because of the love that was ALREADY there that He (the Father) GAVE the Son as atonement for our fallen state. Yahshua came to reveal the love, not to produce it. And if the Father is for us, and the Son is for us, how can we ever fail of gaining the victory over self and Satan in our lives? Truly, those who cannot do so are those who never asked for help from this ultimate source of all power.

Though fully God in the flesh, Yahshua nonetheless did not exercise His Heavenly authority for His own good alone. By accepting His role as a man, He turned aside Satan's temptations in the desert. Though without sin, He instructed John the Baptist to immerse Him in water to signify a death to the sinful nature, just as we are to do. And again, with His final conflict against the arch-demon impending, He did just as we are to do... He prayed to His Father for divine strength.

With Peter, James and John, the same three who saw Him transfigured on the Mount of Olives, He went out to a garden at the foot of the same mountain, a place called Gethsemane, and there He instructed them to wait for Him, and to pray. Had they done so, they would have received a double blessing. First of all, they would have had the great privilege of helping their Redeemer to prepare for His trials, being a source of comfort to Him, and secondly, they themselves would have received the grace to overcome the temptations about to befall them, and Peter in particular would have been spared his predicted betrayal, which became a source of great guilt to him for some time afterwards.

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto the point of death," He said to them. "Tarry ye here and watch." (Mark 14:34)

As Yahshua walked on deeper into the garden, He began to experience the effects of Sin for the first time on an "inward" level. Before, He had always bemoaned its presence in those around Him, even in those He loved best, but this was something different. In order to reconcile His Father's decree that the "wages of sin is death," while at the same time showing that mercy can coexist with Justice, He, who had never transgressed the Law, must be made to suffer the penalty of the transgression.

As the weight of guilt and sorrow attacked Him, He fell to the earth under the weight of His own sin-laden body, and prayed, "Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Just as Job righteously protested his suffering, and asked the meaning of his trials, so could Christ pray that if it were possible, His suffering be removed. But also, He added a most important idea, that it is God's will we are subject to, not our own, regardless of the circumstances.

Receiving a little strength from His prayer, His thoughts turned to the three disciples He had left to watch and pray. Returning to them, He found them asleep, having missed much of what had passed just before. "Simon," He said to Peter, "sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:37, 38)

Having set them back to their appointed task, He became overwhelmed again with the burden of sin, and hastened back to His previous place, and prayed again, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." And He came and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy.

And He left them and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (Mat 26:42-44) This time, Luke records that an angel from Heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22:43, 44)

This scene has held comfort for many Christians in the ages since, a reminder that they are never alone in their trials and sorrow. We may mourn even as Christ mourned, when difficult times arise, but we also have the assurance that we will be heard, and that if necessary, even the angels are sent to minister to us and give us comfort. “The prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” as the proverb says.

When He returned to Peter, James and John, He found them again sleeping. Luke is kindest in his explanation as to why this happened, saying they were “exhausted from sorrow.” Nonetheless, Christ admonished them, saying, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; Lo, he that betrayeth me has come.” (Mark 14:41, 42)

Judas came up leading a crowd composed of villagers along with even the chief priests and teachers of the law. How strange this must have looked, those in charge of leading others to Yah’s Heavenly principles of peace traveling in companionship with those armed with clubs and swords! This did not pass the Redeemer unnoticed, who commented, “Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not; but the scriptures must be fulfilled.” (Mark 14:48, 49)

When Judas betrayed their Teacher with a kiss, the arranged-upon sign to those who had come to arrest Him, Peter in his usual intemperance, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high-priest’s servant, Malchus. But Christ rebuked him, saying “Put your sword away, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.” This statement has an implication in both the material and spiritual worlds, and I will explain that shortly. In any case, I find it interesting that only Luke (the doctor) records that Yahshua healed Malchus’ ear before then allowing Himself to be led away. All the disciples that were with Him scattered in fear, just as He had predicted, and one young man had the misfortune of having his garment grasped by one of the crowd. So eager was he to get away that he left it behind and fled, naked. And naked are we indeed, when we leave the side of our Savior.

Yahshua was first taken to the Jewish religious authorities. To the house of Annas, the former high priest, the crowd led Him. Now, the true high priest was a man named Caiaphas, Annas’ son-in-law, but because he was newly elected, the teachers of the law feared that with Christ’s wisdom at interpreting the law He would be able to talk His way out of trouble. They therefore brought him to the older, more severe man, in the hopes that they would secure a more rapid condemnation.

At this point, Peter’s great test came. Though he had fled from the mob, he nonetheless followed behind, and when he drew near to the crowd to warm himself by the fire, one of the serving girls of the high-priest’s court recognized him, and asked if he wasn’t one of the disciples. He denied the charge.

While this was going on, Yahshua was defending himself before the cruel and proud magistrate. “I have always spoken openly in the world. I always taught in the synagogues or at the temple. I said nothing in secret, so why are you questioning me? Ask those who heard me, surely they know what I said.” One of the guards struck Him across the face, saying, “Is this the manner in which you answer the high priest?” “If

I said something wrong,” came the reply, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” Annas, his own pride hurt, and unable to truly find justification for condemning the well-spoken Teacher, passed the responsibility of accepting the blame by sending the mob over to Caiaphas anyway.

At Caiaphas’ house, Peter drew near again to the crowd and their fire to warm himself, and yet another servant girl saw him and recognized him. In the company of believers as Christ traveled the land in the previous months, rash and impulsive Peter was probably a hard one to forget. Yet again, the faltering follower denied his association with Christ, this time adding an oath. But the girl went to others who stood around and asked them, in response to which they went up to him and said, “Surely thou art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee.” (Mat 26:73) Seeing he was in desperate trouble, Peter began to curse himself and them, denying his discipleship, saying, with many oaths, “I don’t know the man!”

They did not press him anymore, because the followers of Christ were known for many things, among them the purity and gentleness of their language. Peter’s crude words and excited denials seemed to them evidence enough that they were mistaken. They left him in safety. But Peter was perhaps the least “safe” at that moment than he had been before. The call of a rooster rang out, and Peter remembered the warnings of his beloved Master, and he ran from the assembly, tears of shame searing his eyes.

Lucifer was far from idle during this time. One after the other, he touched the minds and led the lips of those attending the trial of Christ. He had finally realized that attempting to seduce the Majesty of Heaven to sin was not going to be possible, so he determined that the best way to deal with the situation was to remove Him. He knew this would do little to undo the work already done, but he decided that at least it would slow down the work already begun, and after all, he could always work on those left behind, as he had been doing since our ancestors were turned out of Eden.

The mockery of a trial that took place at Caiaphas’ location lasted all the rest of the night. False witnesses were called upon to give evidence against Yahshua, but their stories were conflicting, and far from conclusive. Finally, the dark angel seized upon his Adversary’s own words, and had his human servants twist their meanings to make it seem like a blasphemous statement. Christ had said, speaking of His own body, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” (John2:19) This was taken by the assembled teachers to mean that He had been planning a rebellion. Trying to get at His motive for declaring Himself a religious authority, they said to Him, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” He responded, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You are right in saying I am.” (Luke 22:67 – 70) His enemies, of course, took this as the most blatant blasphemy, and so they sent Him to the Roman authorities for sentence to be passed.

By now, it was morning, and the crowd finally arrived before the Roman civil authorities’ representative, a man named Pilate. He asked what the charges against Yahshua were, and the people responded, “If he were not a criminal, he would not have been handed over to you.” Pilate then said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The Jews responded, “But we have no right to execute anyone.” Do you remember the statement Christ made to Peter, “All who draw the sword will die by the sword?” Herein is seen the spiritual implications of that statement. The Jews, being a religious body, were under civil law, and as such, they had forfeited their right to execute punishment on an offender.

By taking Yahshua to a civil court, they had “drawn the sword” which was not theirs, declaring that they were no longer under the authority of God, but man. I will revisit this point in a short while. In Pilate’s

defense, he DID try to give Christ something resembling a fair trial. However, among the ranks of the assembled mob were those who were more than human. Lucifer's fallen angels had taken physical form, and while the arch-tempter was working on their minds to secure the destruction of his ancient Enemy, the demons were working the crowd into a murderous rage.

Pilate had little faith of his own, and was easily swept away by the swelling emotion of those gathered before him. To his questions, Yahshua responded little, if at all, for it was said in the books of the prophets, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." (Isaiah 53:7) Knowing that Christ was accused of usurping the Jewish authorities' power, he asked Him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Yahshua knew, though, that Pilate had already decided to go along with the crowd, and knew his true motive: to clear his conscience by finding fault in the gentle Teacher. He replied, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" He followed with, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But now is my kingdom not from hence." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "Thou sayest (rightly) that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." "What is truth?" Pilate asked, (John 18:34, 36-38) but Christ did not answer him.

Judas, in the meantime, saw that his former Master had been condemned, and even worse, He didn't seem to be resisting the secular authorities at all. He was filled with remorse, and went to the chief priests and the elders and tried to return the money he had received for betraying Yahshua. He said, "I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us," they replied, "that is your responsibility." Just like Satan, his new master, Judas had allowed his temptations to overcome him, and he knew that his pride would never allow him to humble himself before Yahshua and ask forgiveness. Throwing the thirty pieces of silver back into the temple, he ran out into a lonely field and took his own life, the ultimate act of desperation and hopeless pain.

Lucifer was finished with his tool, and cast him aside, as he would do to us all, were it not for the saving grace of our Father. Almost unto the close of this age will the tender mercy of Yah be extended to us, ever patient, ever willing to spare us the natural result of rebellion. Not to condemn, but to save, did our Creator come into the world, and how His heart must have broken within Him when He felt the life of His former companion pass away. So will His heart break over every one of us who will not turn back from our paths of destruction and with humility and sorrow ask to be shown the way, the truth and the life. "How can I give you up?" He will ask over the unredeemed. "How can I let you go?"

It was the custom of the people to release one condemned prisoner during the time of Passover. In this, Pilate saw another chance to relieve his troubled spirit. He could indeed find nothing in Yahshua's character or actions worthy of condemnation, and in contrast with the demon-driven crowd, he wanted nothing to do with the death of someone like this. He had agreed to this only because he was more concerned with his standing in the community than in doing what he knew to be right – an important lesson for us all even to this day.

Before the people he presented Christ, and "another" criminal named Barabbas. Now this individual had led a long career of violent and open crime. Pilate felt sure that the mob before him would choose to have

this miscreant put to death rather than their silent captive. Sadly, he had no conception of what was truly going on in front of him. He had no idea of the spiritual forces that were assembled to secure the destruction of the Redeemer, or how vehemently the crowd was now crying out for His blood.

In an act of marked injustice, they chose the rebellious criminal rather than the Desire of ages, though Pilate admitted before them all that he could find no valid charge against Him. Pilate was astonished at their reaction, and he asked them again, just to be sure, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" "Barabbas," came the reply again.

Earlier that day, Pilate's wife had received a strange dream. In it, she was warned of the existence of the Messiah, and that he was going to be unjustly tried. She was told of the disasters that would befall if He were allowed to be convicted, and she sent a messenger to her husband with this information. The message said, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." (Mat 27:19) But the chief priests and the elders were adamant as to who they wanted released, and Pilate went along with it, as he had done so many times before in his career.

"What shall I do, then, with the 'King of the Jews?'" Pilate asked. "Crucify him!" came the cry of the demons within the crowd, and the unruly humans soon took up the shout. In an effort to pacify the crowd, Pilate had Yahshua whipped instead, hoping that they would be satisfied with this punishment, and that his hands would remain free of blood. He noted well the quiet dignity of the prisoner and that, combined with the warning from his wife, was starting to convince him that perhaps this man WAS indeed more than He appeared to be. While he was contemplating this, Christ was being subjected to some truly humiliating treatment.

Aside from being whipped, the soldiers placed upon him a purple robe, and gave him a crown made of the twisted-together branches of a thorn bush. He was struck repeatedly, and spit upon, and jeered at, but in all this, He kept silent. After this scourging, He was returned to the place of judgement before Pilate, and hoping the crowd's inexplicable frenzy had abated, he said, "Here He is." Again, the crowd chanted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said, "I find no basis for crucifixion in any of the charges He is accused of, even if they are true." The Jewish authorities said, "We have a law, and according to that law He must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." (John 19:6-11)

By this Yahshua meant that all of this was according to His Father's will, but that Caiaphas, who was supposed to be the high priest, and guardian of Godly behavior and mercy, was more guilty in his condemnation of Christ than Pilate, who had little but secular knowledge to draw upon. Pilate was not seeking the Messiah as the Jewish nation was, so he had no reason to suppose that Christ was anything like what He claimed to be. And yet, to all of us comes a clear choice. Pilate had ample evidence that he was sentencing an innocent man to die, and more than this, his own wife tried to persuade him to do the right thing.

After this last statement, Pilate was fully convinced that Yahshua should be set free, yet because of the weakness of his character, and fear for his position, he continued to go along with the crowd. The mob said to him, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend. Anyone who maketh himself a king speakest

against Caesar.” (John 19:12) When he heard this, he asked the crowd, “Shall I crucify your king?” They responded, the chief priests themselves, “We have no king but Caesar!” What a significant statement this was! In that action, spoken by the priests and sanctioned by the mob, the Jewish nation declared themselves an earthly organization, no longer under the rule of the Almighty, but under the government of pagan Rome. The sword was drawn fully, and they determined to use the state’s authority to carry out their apostate religious commands. Yet let the words of Christ be remembered, “All who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

As you can see, Pilate was stuck in the valley of decision for some time. Back and forth he had gone with the crowd, desperately trying to find a way to do the “right thing,” without jeopardizing his worldly success. He was being given a blessed opportunity to acknowledge his belief in the innocence of our Lord, yet like Judas, like Lucifer, he was letting his pride and desire for selfish ambition overrule the integrity of his heart. He knew what was right to do, yet he didn’t follow through. All who allow this to take place in their lives invite the same destruction that befell this weak-willed politician.

When he saw that the crowd would not be satisfied with anything less than the death of the prisoner, he made his final choice, and how great a tragedy! Had he stood firm, he would probably have been overruled, and Christ would have been crucified anyway, for that was what He had come to do by the will of His Father. Yet, even though Pilate would have lost his job, and possibly his material wealth, how much better it would have been for him had he done so! “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mat 16:26) What Pilate lost that day could never be bought back, even if he had received in exchange all the wealth of the earth.

In an effort to calm his raging conscience, he washed his hands before the crowd, saying “I am innocent of the blood of this just person. It is your responsibility.” All the people answered, “Let His blood be on us and on our children.” If they only knew what they were saying! Little did the Jewish nation realize what a curse they were calling down upon themselves! To this day, the nation of Israel has been persecuted from the right and the left, anxiously awaiting their Messiah to come and release them from their secular suffering. They had truly “esteemed Him not” when He was among them.

The mob led Christ to a place called Golgotha, all the while He was still suffering from the burden of the penalty of sin. For indeed, in the long night before, and in the shame of His trial and condemnation, He was still dealing with the sorrow of spirit that had drawn out bloody tears from His forehead. And now, He was being forced along by an armed crowd, exhausted to the point of collapse, in an agony of the spirit, and now carrying a heavy, wooden cross. When it became apparent that the weight of the physical burden was too much for Him with everything else He was dealing with, the crowd forced a man named Simon to help Him carry it. For all of us, there are some burdens that are just so heavy at times... but it is not wrong to accept the help of those who are willing to aid us in bearing our crosses. This is the blessing of fellowship, that we have others with us who march along the same narrow roadway.

And so, when they had arrived at the place of execution, they lay Him on the cross He had borne, and drove spikes into His hands and feet, and then planted the base of the wooden structure in the ground, with a sign above the head of the Redeemer declaring in Aramaic, Latin and Greek, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” Pilate had prepared this declaration of his “crime,” and irritated at the connotation the eulogy implied, the chief priests tried to get the governor to have it altered, to say that this was what the prisoner CLAIMED. Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” (John 19:22) By his own words, was he admitting his own condemnation alongside the Son of Yah.

On the right and on the left of Him were also crucified two criminals. Members of the crowd that had instigated the crucifixion wandered by the scene and, recalling Yahshua's earlier words, they taunted Him, saying, "You, who claimed to be able to destroy and rebuild the Temple in three days, come down, if you are truly the Son of God!" One of the two who hung alongside Him also took up the sentiment, saying, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us." But the other one, who had somehow heard of the life of Yahshua, said to him, "Don't you fear God? For you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." To Yahshua he said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Immediately came the reply, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise."

At the last possible moment in his life, this criminal had asked for forgiveness of his sins with a true heart, and in his statement to the other criminal, he confessed his sins, declaring himself suffering justly for his wrongdoing. Even viewing Christ hung upon the cross, His life seeping out of the wounds in His hands, this man believed that Yahshua would receive a kingdom, and with a broken heart, he petitioned the Redeemer for a part in His everlasting inheritance. Faith such as this has never gone unrewarded. Not ever.

John's Gospel also describes an event that took place at the cross which was of particular interest to him. That disciple and Mary, Yahshua's mother, were present at the scene. She was suffering with a mother's love for her dying Son, and even in His own agony, He did not fail to appreciate this. Thinking of her future comfort, He turned to her and said, "Dear woman, behold your son," indicating John. To John He said, "Behold your mother." From then on, Mary lived with the beloved follower. From the first moment of His life until His dying agonies, the life of Christ was one of selfless love, honor and limitless grace.

As time passed, the agony of Yahshua became such that it all but blotted out His physical suffering. The penalty of sin came upon Him in such force that He began to feel the very essence of hell itself, true separation from the Father, and His life-sustaining power. He felt His soul being shredded as the Spirit's presence was forced out by the existence of sin in His being. No longer was the blood flowing from His broken veins the source of His destruction, nor the pressure being exerted upon His lungs by the weight of His body, but the separation of soul and spirit as He was "cast into outer darkness," away from the loving communion with the Father that He had known every moment of every day of His life.

And the Father was in the Son, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19), suffering as He did. Mercifully, some of Yahshua's suffering was veiled from the hateful, inquiring eyes of those who stood around, and from the malicious, triumphant gazes of the humaniform demons who still remained to revel in their apparent victory over the Champion of Heaven. A great darkness fell over the land, as the sun itself refused to give its sanction to the abuse of its Creator, and a dark, dense cloud offered even deeper protection from onlookers, as it formed itself around the cross of our Lord. Human eyes were not permitted to see the ultimate trial, the last clash between Michael and Lucifer. The dark angel had one last chance to turn the soul of God to rebellion and to unravel the hope of humanity, and he determined to make the most of it. In the soul of the man Yahshua, the Prince of Light and the Fallen Archangel met and had their final conflict, even as His physical form was hidden from the world.

At the 9th hour of the day, about 3pm, the sun broke forth and shone again upon the scene, and the cloud of darkness dispersed, so that the eyes of angels and men could behold the triumph of creation's Master. Christ had won the victory, and had accepted the full agony of the penalty of sin, without casting the blame aside. He was aware of this, but also of the awful price. The wages of sin is death, and He could feel the

last of His vitality slipping away, even as He knew He had triumphed. In that last instant of His life, He felt the full separation of a soul from its Maker, and with the last of all that He was, He cried out the first line of the 22nd Psalm, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” This means, “Lord, Lord, why have you forsaken me?” but those who stood by misinterpreted His words, thinking He was speaking in Hebrew and calling out for “Eli” or Elijah. When one kindhearted soul ran up to Him to give Him a drink of wine vinegar, the others said, “Let Him be. We will see if Elijah comes to save Him.”

One last cry escaped our Savior’s lips, “It is finished!” And then He died.

In the Jewish temple, there hung a curtain of cloth. Its purpose was to separate the rest of the interior from a small chamber called the “Holy of holies,” where the Spirit of Yah resided among His people. This was His “earthly home,” and in the days of Solomon, He let His presence be manifest there in a glowing cloud of fire. After the destruction and rebuilding of the temple, this blessed sign was withheld from the backsliding nation, but the curtain remained as a symbol of the hope of the Messiah’s appearance. It was once true that anyone who looked beyond the curtain into this sacred place would immediately be struck down by the brightness of the glory of Yah.

As the Son of God’s presence departed from Him, however, even as His last cry rang out, this curtain was blasted apart by an invisible force. It was split in two from top to bottom, and the basest eye could now behold the nakedness of the inner sanctuary. The glory had departed from the temple in Jerusalem, never to return.

Even more dramatically, many of those who had died in righteousness, understanding the nature of Sin and Love and awaiting the true Sacrifice to be given, were restored to life at that very instant. Their tombs broke open, and like Lazarus, they came forth to their new lives, lives everlasting. Many who beheld these wonders were filled with fear, and one of the centurions at Golgotha guarding the executions declared, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Mat 27:54)

This event took place the day before the Passover, and more importantly, on a Friday (if one reads the Scriptures a certain way), the day before the Holy Sabbath. As evening approached, the Jewish authorities did not want the bodies of the dying to be left in so public a place during those sacred hours, so they sent soldiers to break the legs of the condemned, that their deaths would be hastened, and then the bodies could be removed. The centurions did this with the men on both the right and the left of Christ, but when they came to His body, they found He was already dead. One of the soldiers, to make sure, pierced his side with his spear, and this action, John concludes, was so that the scripture would be fulfilled, “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications; and they shall look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and it shall be bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10)

Joseph, who was a follower of Christ, asked Pilate for His body, and along with another man named Nicodemus, who also believed in Him, he took Yahshua away, and lay Him in a tomb that Joseph had prepared for himself. Nicodemus had been a very wealthy man before meeting Christ, but had acquired much of his fortune by improper means. After his meeting with the Son of God, he had repaid all those whom he had used unjustly, restoring what he had taken several times over. Even so, he still had much wealth left, and he used some of it to buy costly burial ointments and linens for the body of the Redeemer. After this, they and the rest of those assembled went to finish their preparations for the Sabbath.

Early on Sunday morning, Peter and John were walking by the scene of Yahshua's burial. The disciples and all those who loved our Lord suffered greatly the days before, and were worn out from grief. They met Mary Magdalene coming from the direction of the burial site. This was the same Mary who had broken the bottle of perfume over Christ, and she had been there also with Mary (His mother) and John at the foot of the cross. Her grief was beyond compare, and she had been the first to go and visit the site of his interment. But Mary had some distressing news for the two apostles.

Even in their unbelief, the Pharisees still feared the effect that Christ's life had had upon their followers. Knowing that Yahshua had claimed to be able to rise again on the third day, they went to Pilate, and said, "Give the order so the tomb may be made secure for three days, otherwise his disciples may come and take away His body, and tell people He has raised Himself from the dead." Pilate gave his permission, and so the elders took some soldiers, and they proceeded to seal the tomb shut and stand guard.

Before anyone else got to the site on Sunday morning, the archangel Gabriel, the one who had comforted his Commander in the garden of Gethsemane a couple nights before, descended from Heaven with the force of an earthquake and broke the seal of the tomb. When the attending centurions saw this figure with a shining face and brilliant white clothing, they fell on their faces in fear. To their astonished eyes was revealed the covering cherub calling forth our risen Lord. After witnessing this most inexplicable event, they ran off to Pilate, to tell him what had occurred. But when His mother, Salome (King Herod's mistress' daughter, who had apparently had a change of heart since asking for the head of John the Baptist) and a few other women arrived, they found Gabriel calmly standing in the tomb. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" he asked them. "He is not here, but is risen; remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they remembered His words.(John 23:5 – 8)

"But go your way," the angel continued, "tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth forth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." (Luke 16:7) What graciousness he displayed here. Of all Yahshua's followers, Peter was indeed the one who had suffered the most. Because of his thrice-repeated denial of his Master, he among them all was bowed down with an unbearable weight of guilt and remorse. To him by name did Gabriel send the message of comfort and peace. The women hastened off to spread the wondrous news to all of those that had experienced grief at the crucifixion of Christ.

Mary Magdalene, however, had arrived before these others, and she had not seen the archangel speaking with them. She had seen the unguarded tomb, the centurions gone and the rock rolled away, and looking inside, she saw also that the tomb was empty. She ran back to town along another route that the others were arriving by, and in this state she met Peter and John walking towards where she had just come from. "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and I know not where they have laid Him," she said. At this, the two took off running to witness for themselves this horrendous occurrence which Mary described. John outran Peter, and arrived first, and beheld the empty cavern. Peter arrived just after, but not content with seeing the outside, he went also inside, and saw the linen wrappings of his Savior laid neatly aside in a corner. John followed him, and saw also the folded clothing. The pair were filled with grief and outrage, and went off to decide what should be done about the desecration of Yahshua's tomb.

Mary had followed along behind them, returning once again to the tomb, and after Peter and John had left, she remained behind, lamenting the abduction of His body. While still crying, she looked inside the grave, and saw two men dressed in white sitting in there. "Woman, why weepest, thou?" they asked her. She said, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." She stood up and

turned around, and saw another figure standing in front of her. Through her tears, she could not recognize the face that she beheld, but she assumed the man was the gardener. He also asked her, "Woman, why weepest thou? Who seekest thou?" She replied, "Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Gently, then, Yahshua called her name. "Mary," He said, and in that instant, she knew with whom she had been speaking, and she cried out in joy, "Master!" and went towards Him. "Touch me not," He said, "for I am not yet ascended unto my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God and to your God." Christ would not receive praise or adoration until He had first presented His sacrifice before the Father, and received assurance that His atonement had truly done the work of the redemption of man. Until such a time, He would not even receive homage from the holy angels all around, who were eager to sing forth praises for their immortal Creator.

She also left the empty tomb, to bear the blessed news.

Later that day, two of the other disciples were walking along the road, talking about the reports they had received from the women. However they were unable to believe what they had said, and so they were still troubled by the death of their Teacher. Yahshua approached them in another form, so that they did not recognize Him, and He traveled with them for a while. He asked them what they were talking about, and why they seemed so sad. One of them, whose name was Cleopas, replied, "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and has not known the things which are come to pass in these days?" As you can imagine, the countryside must have been abuzz with the news of the trial and crucifixion, with fearful speculation as to the meaning of the great darkness on Friday, and of the stories of the women coming from Christ's tomb; not to mention the reports of the Centurions who were set to guard the sepulcher.

But Yahshua asked them, feigning ignorance, "What things?" They told Him all they were discussing, concluding that the women's report was of a vision, however, and that it could not be that the Messiah had truly risen. Christ said to them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25) He then proceeded to explain to them the Scriptures, with every book pointing to the coming of the Lord, and many speaking of the sacrifice He was to perform on behalf of humanity. Isaiah, Zechariah, the books of Moses; all of these had plainly pointed to the coming of a Lamb, the true Passover sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. And so they passed away the hours of their journey, until finally the disciples came to where they lived.

Seeing that this man was a master at explaining the scriptures, and reveling in the sense of hope and peace His words conveyed to them, they asked that He remain with them for their evening meal. Yahshua consented, and He sat with them at their table. Then, however, He did something that appeared very familiar to the two seated before Him. He took, the bread, blessed it and broke it, and He gave it to them. In that instant, they recognized Him, and immediately He vanished. Mary had been blinded by her sorrow and tears, these two had been weighed down in grief and care, and did not even recognize the blessed and holy character of their Lord through His disguise. When He performed an action they remembered, however, they recognized who He was. When He called her name, Mary lifted up her eyes to behold His familiar, loving face. How often we also may miss the blessings and comfort of Heaven if we are too absorbed in our own affairs to look around us for the signs of Yah's mercy. But He knows our weaknesses, and every now and then, He does something so very familiar to us, that we can't help but see the love of our Father shining forth.

The two disciples, in joy and amazement, immediately ran back to Jerusalem, and went to the other disciples, who were gathered in mourning at the very upper room where Christ had been with them the night He was taken. They also were mystified by the reports of the Marys and the other women, and now Cleopas and his companion added their testimony to the reports. At that moment, Yahshua Himself appeared before them, and said, "Peace be unto you." They were terrified, but Christ comforted them, and showed them His injuries, so that they would indeed know it was Him. While they were still unable to grasp the reality standing before them, reeling with joy, Yahshua did something so incredibly ordinary, that it could not help but have a dramatic effect on those gathered. He asked for food.

And so He ate with them again, dispelling any idea that He was some kind of a vision or a ghost. While they ate, He explained to them more clearly than ever before, and with infinite patience, the reason why He had suffered and died, and why He must soon leave them again to present the sacrifice before the throne of His former glory. After the meal, He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven. (Luke 24:50, 51) The disciples then returned to the city to praise their Master, and to teach His lessons to others.

John records another incident that took place before Yahshua left them. Peter, John, James, Thomas and Nathaniel were fishing, and they had thrown their nets all night without catching anything. Yahshua appeared on the shore, and called out to them, "Children, have ye any meat?" They answered Him, "No." And He said unto them, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. (John 21:5, 6)

Again, a familiar event had reminded them of their Lord, for with this very action did Yahshua first get their attention when He began His ministry. John said, "It is the Lord!" And Peter, overwhelmed with joy, wrapped his garment around himself and jumped out of the boat to swim ashore. The others followed in the boat, dragging their net with them. Peter helped them drag their heavy catch ashore, and though there were a hundred and fifty-three huge fish in the net, the fibers did not break, though they certainly should have. What do the laws of physics matter to He who ordained the sun to rule the day, whose voice spoke the earth into existence, and even to this day heals every disease of mankind with a word? Jesus said unto them, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught." (John 21:10) And they had a last meal together.

There was one more thing Yahshua was to do. Turning to Peter, he asked, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" indicating the other disciples. "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." And Christ responded, "Feed my sheep." A little while later, He asked again, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter noted the change of wording. He had again been impulsive, and had spoken before thinking. With infinite gentleness, Christ showed him, with no wasted words, that he still considered himself foremost among his brothers. With a saddened heart, he repeated, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." "Feed my sheep," came the response.

A third time, Yahshua asked him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter became truly upset, and began to cry, thinking that his Master did not believe him, that He should have to ask three times. But three times did Peter deny his Lord, and three times must he repent, so that the burden of guilt would be fully removed. "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou Knowest that I love thee." Looking at him with kindness and joy, Yahshua said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Letters To Rachel

After this, Christ still had some instructions for Peter, and said to him, "Follow me," and the two of them walked off a little way. Peter turned around, however, and saw that John was following them. He said, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Yahshua responded, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow THOU me." For at time after this, the disciples believed that John would remain alive until the return of their Lord, but John himself points out the error in this, saying that He had not declared that he would not die, only that IF Christ willed it so, it would be so. "Focus on your own part," was what Yahshua was saying to Peter.

And so He left them, and He returned through the Heavenly gates, forever after bearing the marks of His earthy experiences. He did not heal His scars, as He certainly could have, but instead left them as they were, an eternal reminder to the angels and to mankind of the penalty of transgression. The victory has been won, and Satan's kingdom was doomed to destruction. In the very heart of his earthly throne, where the "men of God" had been buying and selling in the holy sanctuary, where the children of the Most High had been guilty of greater cruelty than the heathen nations around them, a deadly wound had been dealt to the unholy archangel. Yah's case had been proven, and no longer was Lucifer allowed access to the Heavenly courts as he was in the days of Job.

Bound on earth, the dark angel twisted in his defeat, and with hellish bitterness, he set about to destroy the work that Christ had done among the humans. Though he could never more attempt to vindicate himself before the holy angels, he nonetheless set about to make sure that he would take as many humans as he could manage with him into oblivion. With a fury never witnessed before, he declared war on the church, and proceeded to draw up his battle plans to stamp out the lights of the world, and the salt of the earth. The adventures of Peter, James, John and the others were just beginning, and to them would be given some divine help. Another hero would rise up from the least likely place, and become to them a source of great strength and hope.

In my next letter, I will tell you about some of the incidents that occurred just after the return of the Redeemer to His heavenly throne. This turned out to be another long letter, and I will give you all the time you need to absorb all of this.

With the love of Yah almighty,
David.

Letter 6: In Spirit and In Truth

Dear Rachel,

The last letter I wrote to you concluded the First Age of the redemption of mankind. The battle was once and for all won by the side of Light and the kingdom of Yah – and yet, this is just the first half of the story! The sounds of the clashing of “swords” in the spiritual world have ceased, and each side now gathers its forces for the final Day. In this Second Age (the Age of Grace, by the terminology of some Christians), the battle has now moved fully to mankind. Michael’s victory was complete over Lucifer, and the Prince of the angels, in His victory, was forever changed into... something else.

Now, instead of ministering to the hosts of Heaven, He has remained our faithful High Priest Yahshua, until such a time as this Age also comes to a close, and then He will be given yet another name. No one knows what this name will be, but John the revelator says that it will mean, “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” (Revelation 19:16) From Divinity to Archangel, to Prophet, to Priest to King – such are the roles that the Logos (Word) has filled and will fill.

But even this battle on earth is of different types. Those who know not our Father soak the earth with the blood of their fellow man, litter the soil with the burnt remains of their enemies, send them to the grave with lung cancer or liver failure in order to line their own pockets. For those of us who DO know this story, our battle is a little different: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12) We struggle with tempting spirits and our own natures in order to hammer out that Christlike character which leads to life eternal.

That is what this second age is for. The conflict is resolved, now all that is left to occur is for the survivors to choose their sides. The dead have chosen theirs already, now it is our turn. Will we stand under the banner of Love, or the banner of Sin? This choice is now the whole purpose of our earthly lives. And when this choice is made, that’s when the fun begins :)

As for the dead, they who have already had their destinies decided await the Day of Judgement foreseen by the prophet Daniel. “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:1, 2)

That “time of trouble” and our role in it will be the subject of my concluding letters, but for now, let’s look at how he describes those who await this Day. He said they “sleep in the dust of the earth.” This concurs with Yah’s original explanation of what death really was, when He was describing to Adam the effects of his sin. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen 3:19)

This was the promise of death’s nature to Adam, not some ethereal, spiritual ghost-life to look forward to. Sadly, even most Christians do not fully understand the nature of life everlasting to which they say they are looking forward. Christ was resurrected as a man. He spoke, He ate... He was physical – only glorified. It is to this life we shall awake when we come forth from our tombs saying, “O death, where is thy sting? O

grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor 15:55) Also, it was the physical forms of the early saints that came forth from their broken sepulchers at the death of Yahshua in Matthew 27:52, 53.

This too was one of Lucifer's great victories in the early church. Very soon after the death of Christ, he started insinuating his doctrines. Many of the Epistles dealt with remaining true to the "first faith," which the Apostles taught, and rejecting teachers bringing in strange new spiritualistic ideas. Satan knows that if he can get people to misunderstand the nature of Heaven and death, people rapidly lose interest. The image most people have of heaven is that it's this wispy, ethereal place full of bodiless spirits. This is not so. It is a spiritual kingdom, true enough, but it is a real place. The physical bodies of Moses, Elijah, Enoch and several others are there. And they are there in person, just as Christ is there in person, for the same body He appeared to the disciples in, this body was glorified to the "warrior archetype" that John saw in his Revelation.

Solomon was another who described death in terms of the human experience. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." (Ecclesiastes 9:10) Whatsoever you want to do, and experience... do it now, while you have life, Solomon says. For death is the end. There is no consciousness there. As he says in an earlier passage, "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." (Ecc 9:5, 6) And his father David contributed, "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psalm 146:4)

Thoughts, consciousness, desires, even love – these are benefits of being alive. They are produced in the mind, which is generated by a physical device: the brain. When the electrical activity therein ceases, there can be no thought. This also addresses the Biblical stand on reincarnation, which you asked about, for it says that the dead are without thought or memory and "neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." And, this is perfectly consistent with the teachings of Christ, who declared that Yah was the God of the living, not the dead. Except for the very few who were translated directly to heaven, or were resurrected early for specific reasons, all humanity is gone from existence, until the Day comes for them to rise and see the Father face to face.

I count this a blessing to know for more reason than one. I am spared the anxiety when thinking of former loved ones, "are they in Heaven or in Hell?" and so on. They are in neither, they don't exist anymore. Not yet. As to their final destiny, that will be decided by the Son and the Saints which are taken alive from the earth during the final time of trouble (a more just and merciful jury I could not ask for). Also, by realizing that Heaven is a REAL place, with real people doing real things, it becomes more than just a hazy concept. It becomes a true hope, a real "something" to look forward to. It becomes "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27) The more truth we learn, the more free we become.

So with that important Biblical teaching understood, we can continue our study of the sin war. Appreciating the events which follow may require a knowledge of the state of the dead. Be warned also that this letter may get very long. There is much to say about the adventures of those Christ left behind to teach in His name, so perhaps you had best read this one in sections – I know I will be writing it that way!

When we left the apostles last, they had just received their final instructions from Yahshua before His last recorded appearance to them. Acts 1:6 states that He was with them for forty days after His resurrection,

teaching them more that they would need to know in the years to come; for during His time on earth, Lucifer had also received much practice at temptation. Aside from that, his rage at having failed so utterly during the 33 year stretch was at its peak, and this new fury he intended to visit upon all the disciples left behind. He had been unable to prevent the sacrifice or the example from being given, but he was surely bent upon stamping out all of its messengers.

During His time there, Christ also had the apostles plan to wait in Jerusalem for a “gift” that He would be sending them after His departure. The eleven remaining used the time wisely, in ministering to the other believers, electing Matthias to replace Judas, and fasting and praying, as it was said, “But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” (Mark 2:20) By the time the day of Pentecost arrived, the twelve seemed to have taken Christ’s lessons of peace among themselves to heart, for it is described that they were in “one accord.” No longer did James and John strive for pre-eminence; no longer did Peter allow his mouth to run ahead of his mind.

During this time of great spiritual harmony, there was a great noise heard in the air all through the house, and flickering flames appeared out of nowhere, coming to rest upon them as they sat. This, then, was the “gift” which Yahshua had promised them, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to equip them for their labors in heralding salvation to all the earth. One of the most noticeable manifestations of the gift was the ability to speak in other languages. The reason for this was the presence of many devout Jews from all parts of the known world. For them also was the message to be given, and when they gathered before the assembled believers, they heard the gospel proclaimed in their own language, “And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, ‘Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?’” (Acts 2:7, 8)

Some of the observers believed that the apostles were just babbling nonsensically, and they said that the speakers were drunk. But Peter, hearing this, spoke up and declared that this was not the case. He pointed out to them a prophecy in Joel 2:28 – 32, concerning the outpouring of the Spirit upon those who awaited Him. He then continued to speak and led their minds back over the events which they had surely heard about concerning the rumored Messiah.

With the power of the Spirit, he revealed to them that Yahshua was indeed the awaited Redeemer, and this was proven in signs and wonders, including the greatest one, the resurrection, which pointed forward to a new and blessed hope for all believers. He then spoke concerning the crucifixion itself, and declared that the blood of the Savior was upon Jewish hands and heads. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom YE have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36)

Despite the fact that many of these Jews were not even present in Jerusalem at the time of the execution, and in fact, were described as “devout,” they nevertheless were considered guilty of the death because of their association with the fallen organization. This fact, and this principle, will become more and more important in these last few letters. Just as the “sin cycle” was one of the main themes of the first five, so shall the concept of “corporate accountability” be one of the vital points of these latter ones.

There are many examples of this running through Scripture, the rebellions of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the loss of many lives by the transgression of one man, Achan, the devastation of Saul’s army by the seemingly harmless act of his son Jonathan, all of these give us examples of how Yah must deal with an appearance of sin in a community of His followers.

For an even clearer example, think on this. Not only were the Jews responsible for Yahshua's death. Not only the Romans. But so are you. And so am I. In fact, every human being had a part in it by virtue of this: Why did He come to earth in the first place? Was it not to save US from sin? Had all the descendants of Adam not taken upon themselves the fallen status as sinners, there would never had been the need for the One most innocent to suffer and die. We are all guilty both collectively and individually, which is one of the reasons why we all need Christ's forgiveness and grace; why even "good" people are in need of repentance and acceptance of the atoning sacrifice.

Lucifer will do anything to prevent an individual from realizing this. For once a person does, he or she will begin to feel the wrongness of Sin, and will then be led to the valley of decision – there to determine his/her eternal destiny. At this point, the fallen angel is closest to losing a soul he has under his dominion, and if he can keep us busy, or distracted, or depressed, or comfortable or just plain in denial for long enough, we may never come to the point of realizing just how much we need the love so freely given by the Son of Yah.

Many of the hearers were brought to the valley that fateful day. Upon hearing Peter's words, they let the Spirit influence them also, and they felt the weight of their past wrongs. They were "pricked in their hearts" as the Scripture says, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) Then Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:38, 39)

Repent, Peter said to them. The word means to "turn away," or to "change your mind." Save yourselves from your previous lives. The life a man is born into is destined for only death. No matter how successful or happy or how much excitement we fill our lives with, "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not," declares Solomon in Ecclesiastes 9:2. All men are destined for the grave.

Yet, whosoever believes in Yahshua, and the coming resurrection to glory, has no fear of such an event. Peter appealed to them to leave their lives of sin, and legalistic justification, and to be baptized into the body of believers. And so deeply were they convicted of the mis steps of their lives, they received the teaching gladly, and wasted no time in complying. We have the blessed testimony that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)

Near the Temple in Jerusalem, there waited by the gates a man who had been lame from birth. He had never taken a step in his life, and therefore had never developed the muscles in his lower joints, or had the cartilage around his knees and ankles exercised. Sadly, he had arrived in town too late to find an audience with the One who had gone around the region healing all the sick, blind and sinful. However, that day it was revealed to the people of the city that the same energy, the same love that caused the deaf to hear and the paralyzed to move was still alive and well in the persons of those Yahshua left behind to carry on His work.

Peter and John were passing by that day at the "hour of prayer" and were about to go into the Temple to give thanks, when the man saw them and asked them for alms. When they heard this, Peter stared at the man intently, and John said, "Look at us." And the lame beggar did indeed, expecting that he would receive an offering. But Peter said to him, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name

of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” (Acts 3:6) The two disciples reached out their hands to lift him up, and as they did so, his legs received strength, and he started walking and running and jumping into the air, praising Yah for this miraculous healing.

He, who had never taken a step in his life caused a great commotion with all his excited antics. Such is the healing of Yah. It is complete, it is instant, it is always designed to bring perfect joy – the spirit and the flesh combined in worship of our Father. In fact, the stir brought the attention of onlookers sharply into focus upon the two apostles, for many there knew that the man had been lame from birth. But when Peter saw this, he said to them, “Why are you looking at us like that, as if it was by our own power this man was healed? Haven’t you heard? The same God of Abraham you worship sent to us His son, and glorified Him before us. And Him you delivered up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, and chose a murderer to go free in His place, and you killed the Prince of life, of whom we are His witnesses.”

Again he pointed out to them the fact that the blood of Christ lay upon them all, and that they were in need of His forgiveness and grace. And as it was in the day of Pentecost, he began to teach the listeners the way of salvation. But on this occasion, he was interrupted by some Sadducees. Most of the Jewish teachers of the law that Christ encountered in His ministry were Pharisees, for they were by far the majority between the two major divisions. However the Sadducees, followers of a Solomonic priest Zadoc, did not believe at all in angels or spirits, or the possibility of resurrection. They were of the opinion that there was a earthly interpretation for every occurrence of an angelic appearance in the Scriptures, and that “Heaven” was just living a holy life under Yah’s law, and death was the final end.

You can see why they would come to the forefront now! These men were preaching that, not only did a man rise from the dead, but anyone who believed in Him would be able to do the same thing! If the people accepted this “new” teaching, it would mean the destruction of their entire order, and their teachers and priests would be put to public shame for misunderstanding the Law so completely.

Few as they were, however, the Sadducees had much political influence, and they had the two teachers arrested and put in jail. It was late in the evening, so their appearance before the judges would have to wait until the next day. And who would the apostles appear before as acting judges? The same Annas and Caiaphas, the two religious leaders that sent Christ to Pilate... They and their relatives formed the judicial body for this case, and when they had set Peter and John “in their midst” in the hopes of intimidating them, they asked, “By what power, or by what name have you done this?”

The Spirit which had been with them since the day of Pentecost fully unfolded within Peter again at that occasion, and he spoke, saying “If you want to know how this helpless man was made well, let it be known to you – it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” and he drove home the accusation, “whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.” (Acts 4:10)

He continued, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11&12) Annas and Caiaphas must have been furious. After all their beating around the bush to have Yahshua crucified, here now were TWO men who spoke with His boldness and did miracles in His name. Yet, when they saw that a man had indeed been healed, they could not denounce them publicly, for there had been many witnesses to the event.

Instead, they decided to try and suppress the issue. Calling Peter and John before them again, for they had been sent away while the judges debated, they commanded the two not to teach or even speak the name of Yahshua of Nazareth. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than to God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19, 20)

All the council could do was threaten more, and then they were forced to let them go. The two returned to the company of believers, and were received with much thanksgiving, and all the faithful praised Yah for delivering His two servants. Those who awaited the verdict had the injustice that had been done to their Master in the forefront of their minds, and they had feared for the safety of the bold apostles. And as they prayed and gave thanks, “the place was shaken where they assembled together,” and yet another fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit fell upon them, and they experienced such a unity of heart that they as one received boldness to teach the message, and declared that their property and worldly goods were not only theirs, but were at the disposal of the brethren for their own sakes, and for the furtherance of the gospel message. Such commitment!

All that had extra lands or houses or riches brought them before the apostles, and those who were needy among the believers received their “daily bread.”

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, a man named Ananias was convicted to sell a certain piece of property and give the funds to the church for the needy among them. But he and his wife sold the property and, instead of donating all the funds to the cause, they kept back a part of the money for themselves. Now, Yah is not a God of force. He had merely suggested to Ananias by the Spirit that he donate this thing. Ananias was the owner of the property and it was his to do as he would with it. However, he made the vow to his conscience, out of a true and pure motive.

However, when he actually had the money in his hands, he was overcome by greed, and fully knowing that he had already promised the money to the apostles, he deceived them and kept some for himself. His wife also went along with the fraud. When he presented the offering to Peter, the apostle immediately knew what had occurred. Hasty Peter, who had been so rash and impulsive, was now doing the very things he had seen and admired in His teacher. And so may we all change and receive miraculous gifts who accept His love with all our hearts, and with that love will come also great power, for we have shown ourselves capable of shouldering the responsibility of it.

And so Peter read Ananias’s heart, just as Christ would have, and said, “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained (unsold), was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou has not lied unto men, but unto God.” And Ananias, hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came upon all them that heard these things. (Acts 5:3 – 5)

It was not Yah’s purpose to cause fear, or to arbitrarily kill off a believer for a seemingly slight injunction. When Yahshua was on earth, He taught that there was one sin that was unforgivable. This is given in Matthew 3:29 – “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.” Any sin a man does can be forgiven, but what is so special about this one, that even the Father cannot save us from it? The truth is, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit isn’t a single thing. It’s not even really any “thing.” No action is this, but a mindset. Lucifer was repeatedly begged to submit. In

his spirit (after a while) he KNEW he was in rebellion, yet he stubbornly persisted in following his own course.

The Holy Spirit is that part of Yah that works within a person, that works with an individual's conscience to refine the character and develop that lasting glory. To resist this, to consciously persist in acting against your conscience, is to start walking down a road that leads to a very dark place. We eventually get to that point where the "sin cycle" I talked about before is complete. When we have no desire to ask Yah for forgiveness, and we feel no need for grace. At that point, God is as willing to forgive as ever, but we will not, we CAN not accept it.

This is just what had occurred with Ananias. Fully knowing the wrongness of his act, he chose to do it anyway. Like Lucifer, there was no new knowledge that could "change his mind" about Yah: nothing that could lead him to repentance, which is what changing one's mind is. No one forced him to sell his land, or donate the property, but once he decided that it was right to do it, and it was something he WANTED to do, he became bound to it. When the rich young ruler came up to Christ and declared his desire to follow Him, the Messiah didn't congratulate him on his courage or praise his ability to break out of tradition, instead, "Jesus said unto him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.'" (Luke 9:58)

The first thing Yahshua did was to tell this man what the cost of following Him would be: Don't make a promise to me you can't keep. Be sure you know what you are getting into first. It is important that this be understood, for the story of the death of Ananias and his wife in Acts 5:1 – 11 can cause a lot of questions if it isn't.

As the popularity of the new church began to spread to regions around, their numbers began to increase quickly. Now that the apostles truly understood the nature and mission of their beloved Teacher, they too went around casting out demons and healing the sick. By His death, Christ planted seeds which, when they sprung up in the hearts of His followers, did more than He in His one human body could have done. For this reason, while He was with them, He said to them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." (John 14:12) The disciples had succeeded in developing the character that Christ set for them as an example. Because of this, the Spirit could work through them as it had through Him, and whereas He was one, they were many.

And of course, as they were preaching in the name of One raised from the dead, they naturally continued to incite the hatred and anger of the Sadducees, who once again wasted no time in throwing them in jail. The very night this was done, an angel released them, and instructed them to go directly into the temple and teach there. When the high priest and his council sent for the prisoners, they were found instead speaking "words of life" to eager hearers. Still, they went peacefully to the council when they were summoned by the officers.

And when they had been brought (again) to the council, the high priest asked them, "Didn't we order you not to teach in Christ's name?" And Peter responded, "We ought to obey God rather than men." His position was unchanged. And so was this: he again brought to their remembrance who Yahshua was, the one "whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Peter just would not allow them to forget two things: 1) They were guilty of His death and 2) They would someday have to give account of it to the Judge Himself.

And it was not just to annoy Annas and Caiaphas he did this, but he honestly desired to have them accept this message and turn their lives around.

Of course, this did nothing but cause the pompous leaders to become exceedingly angry. Whereas the pious Jews were “pricked in their hearts,” (Acts 2:37), these men were “cut to the heart” (Acts 5:33) and plotted to kill them. Fortunately, the council of teachers was not without its wise men either. One of their number, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, saw that nothing but disaster and further loss of reputation would result if the disciples were openly persecuted for their beliefs.

He also saw some value to their teachings, and he therefore said, “Refrain from these men and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” (Acts 5:39) The council saw the wisdom in this, and had the prisoners beaten and released. They just HAD to have the last word. But nonetheless, the apostles considered it a great honor to have suffered at their hands as Christ did, and they left the presence of the judges with rejoicing, not with shame.

As the number of believers grew even more, it soon became apparent that even the Spirit-filled apostles were not able to do everything to minister to all the church members. Matters of travel, finance, visiting with the sick – there was just not enough time in the day for the few to see to all the needs of the many. Seeing this need, the twelve called the assembly before them and said, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:2-4) The others concurred with the leaders’ need for organization, and they chose a young man named Stephen to be the head deacon. The other six were listed as being named Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas.

Now Stephen in particular had chosen to follow the example of Yahshua, and as a result, he was filled with the Holy Spirit as few others. He was described as being able to do “great wonders and miracles among the people.” He was also, as a true deacon is to be, filled with wisdom, and in teaching those not yet within the body of Christ, his logic and skill with words was unanswerable. Because of this, however, those who chose to remain stubbornly within their comfortable lives of sin were made extremely angry by his calm, kind and logical points, and they stirred up the people against him, falsely accusing him of blasphemy, and hiring lying witnesses to secure his punishment.

When brought before the council, when testified against by false witnesses, when jeered at and put down – in all this he maintained perfect calm and joy to be persecuted in the name of Yahshua. “And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” (Acts 6:15) When questioned regarding the charge of blasphemy, Stephen responded with a most moving speech.

Going back to the time of Abraham, the accepted beginning of the Jewish nation, he began to trace the dealings of Yah with men through Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, and the prophets. When he got to the prophets, he said to the assembled judges, “Which of the prophets have your fathers not persecuted? And they have slain them which showed you before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers. Who have received the law by disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

Letters To Rachel

It seems the demonic spirits which had led the assembly to cry out for the crucifixion of Christ yet abided with the legalistic authoritarians. They “gnashed their teeth” in fury and threatened him. In response to this, Stephen said only, “Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56) And this vision gave him courage and peace, as the grace of the Spirit was fully withdrawn from his persecutors, who were overcome with hellish hatred, and stopping their ears and crying out madly, they rushed at their prisoner, dragged him to the edge of the city, and pelted him with rocks. Even as he was being killed, he had nothing but sympathy and kindness for his executioners, for he cried out, “Lord lay not this sin to their charge.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:60) Blessed sleep awaits those who die in the service of righteousness when their labors on earth are done, and the promise of resurrection unto glory forever more.

At the end of my last letter, I said that the apostles who were left behind when Christ returned to Heaven would receive some help from a most unexpected place, and it was this – there was a member of the Sanhedrin (governing body of Jews) who observed the entire ordeal concerning Stephen and witnessed his execution with pleasure. His name was Saul, and he was one of the Pharisees’ star pupils. By the stoning of Stephen, the followers of the Judaic system had once and for all declared war upon the church of Christ, and this incident was the trumpet blast that began the persecution of the disciples in earnest. Saul was an eager participant in the carnage, for he “made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.” (Acts 8:3)

As a result of this attack, the members of the Jerusalem church were scattered, but this proved to be a good thing, for as a result of Phillip, Peter and the others, many were brought to an understanding of salvation who would not have otherwise heard of it. Not content with having scattered the believers, Saul went to the high priest and received documents of permission to go to Damascus, to where many of the faithful fled, and continue his assault there, including any point along the way to the city. And so he made the journey, but as he neared the gates of his destination, a blinding light flashed around him, and he fell to the earth.

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me,” came a voice from the light, and it was spoken with such authority that the humbled persecutor was moved to ask, “Who art thou, Lord?” “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest,” came the reply. And in response to his question, “Lord, what wilt thou have me do?” Saul was told, “Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” (Acts 9:3-6) But when he got up, Saul discovered that he was still blinded by the radiance, and the men who had travelled with him had to lead him, dependent, into the city he had hoped to enter as a conqueror.

For three days he waited and fasted and prayed to understand the meaning of his vision, and the words he had heard. During this time of preparation, Yahshua spoke to a disciple by the name of Ananias (another one), and told him where to find Saul, and to cure him of his blindness. But of course, the follower had heard the reputation of the Pharisee from Tarsus, and said, “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to the saints in Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” (Acts 9:13 – 16)

Again, it is made clear. Counting the cost of service is a prerequisite – a necessary step to commitment. But look at what great benefits he would gain as a result! Saul’s three days of blindness, without food or drink was spent in contemplation of his life thus far. He now knew for a fact that Christ was indeed risen, and the authority with which He had spoken left no doubt in the human’s mind as to the divinity of the One

crucified. He made his decision in that dark valley, and when Ananias restored his sight, he immediately requested baptism.

“And straightaway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:20) Saul immediately went to work proclaiming the message, much to the amazement of former friend and foe alike. All the logic and mental strength, all the force of will and conviction that the former Sanhedrin member had employed against the believers was now being used on their behalf. With his “thoughts in subjection to Christ” he was now free of his prejudices and slavish clinging to the hopes of an earthly kingdom and an earthly Messiah, and he accepted the atoning sacrifice of Yahshua.

Naturally, those who were once his allies immediately plotted to destroy this new and powerful threat to their authority. For Saul knew them well, and just what arguments would sway the people away from them to the side of truth. The disciples in Damascus heard of the plot, however, and while the new convert’s would-be assassins awaited him at the gates, he was let down by the believers over the wall of the city in a basket. Having escaped his enemies’ plan for the time being, he made his way from Damascus to Jerusalem to join the main body of apostles.

This was not as easy as Saul had hoped, however, for upon arriving there, he found that his reputation had preceded him, and he was viewed with suspicion and fear by those still in Jerusalem. However, one of them, Barnabas, had heard about his conversion and his teaching in Damascus, and spoke with him. As a result, he was convinced that Saul’s change was genuine, and he presented him to the apostles. And so Saul joined forces with the followers of Yahshua, and proved himself a great blessing, for “then all the churches had rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31)

Up until that time, the gospel had been preached mostly to the Jews, but true to His words to Ananias, Yahshua also desired that the disciples develop a strong burden for not only their former brethren, but all the people of earth. To bring this about, He set up a chain of events that would lead to the addition of Gentiles to the number of believers.

When Peter was visiting with some of the followers of the Way in a town called Lydda, and healing the sick there, it came to be that a disciple named Tabitha in a nearby town named Joppa became ill and died. Tabitha was much loved and well known in the area, and those church members in her town heard that Peter was close at hand, and sent word to him, asking if there was anything he could do.

So Peter went with the messengers, and arriving at the house, knelt down and prayed. When he had done so, he turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, arise.” He presented her alive once again to those assembled there. When this miracle became known, many believed, and were ready to hear the gospel told in full, so Peter stayed in that town with a tanner named Simon, teaching the citizens.

There was a man named Cornelius, an Italian Centurion who, though not a Jew, was nevertheless a true believer in Yah, and prayed daily and gave alms generously. One day, as he prayed, an angel came to him in a vision and said, “Thy prayers and thine alms have come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.” (Acts 10:4 – 6) Cornelius called two of his household servants, and one of the soldiers under his authority, and he told them the story, and then sent them to Joppa.

While the men were on their way, Peter also was receiving a vision from Heaven. As he was atop Simon's roof praying, he became very hungry, since it was midday (the "sixth hour" by Judaic reckoning). But the food was not yet prepared, so he continued his prayers while it was being made ready. As he prayed, he fell into a trance, and saw a sheet being let down from Heaven, upon which were all kinds of animals which had been declared unfit for food. And a voice came to him saying, "Rise, Peter, kill, and eat." (Acts 10:13). But Peter knew that such things as were on the sheet were forbidden, and he replied, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice said to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common." This happened three times, and each time Peter resisted the call.

Now, while Peter was wondering what this vision meant (for would Yah contradict Himself, after all?) the three men from Cornelius' household arrived at the house, and inquired about him. Right away, the Spirit spoke to Peter's heart and said, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them." Peter began to get an inkling of what his vision meant. And so he got down from the roof and spoke with them, and journeyed with them the next day (because at that point he wasn't going ANYWHERE without having lunch first), taking with him a few of the members of the Lydda congregation.

When they arrived at Cornelius' house the day after, the centurion had been so moved by his vision that he had called all his near friends and kinsmen together to hear Peter speak. Cornelius fell at the feet of the apostle, and worshipped him. But Peter quickly corrected him in that regard saying, "Stand up: I myself am only a man." And Cornelius stood up, and they went into the house, to the people waiting there. And he spoke to them, explaining his vision, which he now fully understood.

And he said to them, "You know how that it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one that is of another nation; but God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" Peter finally realized what the sheet from heaven meant. It wasn't about food at all. Though some Christians have at times tried to make it look like Yah was saying that what he had formerly declared to be unclean was now clean (e.g., certain foods), Peter understood no such thing from the vision.

Yah simply said "What I HAVE declared clean IS clean." He was not taking back anything He had previously said. In fact, the entire purpose of having a Jewish nation, a called out people, was to be an example to ALL men, so that everyone would know that "every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." (Acts 10:35) This was not some new thing. All men have always been Yah's people; the Jews were the example (supposedly), but all men were equally loved by their Creator.

"And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof" (Exodus 12:48) "And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19:33, 34)

Anyone who dwelt with the people of Yah and kept His ways were to be “as one born among you.” Gentiles were never declared unclean! Somehow the Jews had forgotten this, and saw in themselves a “chosen people,” not as servants to other nations, but as rulers. Christ, by His life and death, showed that they had completely misunderstood what being a “chosen people” meant, and He Himself forgave the Samaritans and Canaanites as easily and as willingly as the Jews for their sins. “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Matt 12:50)

This fact was displayed in most dramatic fashion when, as Peter taught the gospel of Christ to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit descended upon them also! And these Gentiles received the gift of being able to speak in other tongues to preach the Word, and began to praise the name of Yah in the presence of the amazed Jews who had come to Joppa with Peter. And the apostle said, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” And the assembly there was baptized also in the name of Yahshua.

When the people of Judaea heard that Gentiles also had been baptized, Peter’s wisdom in taking witnesses with him to Joppa became apparent, for they stood by him when he related the tale to the believers, and how they also had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!” (Acts 11:18) This began a new and glorious phase of church history, for now the entire world was shown to be under the grace of the Sacrifice which Yahshua gave at the cross.

At that time, Herod, (son of the Herod who tried to have Yahshua killed as an infant) began to perceive a serious threat to his authority in this new “kingdom” that was being preached by the apostles. The same force which inspired his father drove him, and he “stretched forth his hands” to attack the church. True to Yahshua’s prediction, James was among the first to drink of the cup of suffering of his Teacher, and was beheaded by the attackers. Peter was the next target on the list, but at the time of his arrest, there was a feast of unleavened bread taking place, and so his execution was delayed until after the celebration was over. While in prison, all the people of the church prayed for him “without ceasing,” and the very night before he would have been killed, an angel came and released him. This was some task, for Peter was chained to two guards.

The angel caused his chains to fall off, and Peter followed in a dreamy daze out of the cell block and into the street. When he came fully awake, the angel was gone, and he was standing alone in a deserted section of town. Making his way back to Mark’s house, (whose mother’s name was ALSO Mary, Acts records), he knocked at the door for entrance. A servant there whose name was Rhoda went to the door to listen, and when she heard it was Peter’s voice, she became overjoyed. However, instead of letting him in immediately, she instead ran into the house to tell everyone – leaving poor Peter outside even longer, exposed to the danger of being spotted!

He kept on knocking, though, and eventually he was let in. He related his miraculous escape to the believers there, and then left town, giving instructions that the incident be related to James and the other apostles. It seems that the incidents above had taken place so close together in time that Peter was still unaware of what had befallen his brother in Christ (or perhaps he was referring to the other James, who is mentioned later in this letter). Peter need not have feared for his life much longer, however, for the angel which released him from prison ensured an even longer-lasting safety when he struck Herod down during a celebration, just as haughty king was accepting the worship of his countrymen. Any man who tries to take the praise rightly due the Father is in danger of an early judgement.

From the time of his calling, Saul had been feeling a heavy burden. Not only for his Jewish brethren, but also the Gentiles. His mission was to take on a new dimension when the Spirit came upon the body of believers in Antioch where he was currently residing, and said, "Separate [for] me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." And so Barnabas and Saul, who started calling himself Paul, set out on a missionary journey to the surrounding regions, taking Mark along with them.

It was a strange trip indeed, for one of the first incidents recorded that befell them was an encounter with a sorcerer named Elymas. Just as the Holy Spirit had come upon the body of believers after the death of Christ, it seems Lucifer bestowed a similar outpouring of power upon his most advanced servants. Though defeated, he still would not put the sword down, and continued his war upon all the followers of his ancient Enemy. On the island of Paphos they found this false-prophet who attempted to stop the pair from teaching the word to the deputy ruler of the country, a man named Sergius Paulus.

Even as the Jewish mystic stood against them in battle, Paul felt the presence of the Spirit upon him, and staring him in the eyes, he said, "O full of all subtlety and mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season." And immediately there fell on him a mist and darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. (Acts 13:10 – 12)

As much a triumph as this encounter was, it was not without some effect upon the missionary team. Mark, who was younger in the faith than the other two, was so shaken by the incident that as soon as they arrived at their next rest point, he departed from their company and returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continued their journey, however, everywhere spreading the message of salvation in the synagogues and to those they met along the way. A good many of those who heard believed and were converted.

This was to the annoyance of many teachers of the law, who saw that the pair had taken followers from both Jews and Gentiles. To this, Barnabas and Paul responded, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo we turn to the Gentiles." (Acts 13:46) This made those not of "chosen blood" overjoyed, but served only to cause the unconverted Jews to stir up persecution against the travelers, and they had them expelled from the region.

In Iconium, their next stop, Paul and Barnabas were taken to be the gods Mercury and Jupiter, for the people could see the wisdom and the light of heavenly glory upon them. Even the priests of Jupiter were convinced, so powerful were the works of healing that the two did in the sight of people, and would have sacrificed animals to the servants of Yah. Naturally, they were distraught, and quickly attempted to stem the tide of idolatry into which the sin-sick people were rushing. Again they taught about the true Father to the listeners, and in so doing, restrained them (barely) from their error.

Paul and Barnabas took with them on their journey the news that salvation had also passed to the Gentiles, and this caused some issues to come to light in certain areas. Oh, there was rejoicing for the most part, when the unity of Yahshua's real plan was understood, but a few details needed to be ironed out. For example, many of the churches believed that circumcision was still a necessary step (like baptism) to being fully connected with the body of Christ.

Aside from this, they also stated that observation of the Jewish rites and ceremonies (the sacrificial laws of Moses – not to be confused with the 10 commandments), was a necessary part of being a Christian. This term Christian, by the way, was first coined around the time Paul and Barnabas set off on this trip from Antioch. Peter happened to be present during the time the dissonance arose, and he declared that it was faith by which a believer was justified, not by works, and therefore any keeping of the law (of any kind) which was not a result of faith in Yahshua was without value. Of course, this wasn't a new idea either, the first chapter of Isaiah is more than plain on this issue. Paul and Barnabas were summoned to Jerusalem to take council with the other elders and church leaders to settle the dispute.

One of the elders, James (not the beheaded brother of John, of course), presided over the meeting, and they discussed the matter for some time. Paul and Barnabas had much to say regarding the miracles they had been able to work in many parts because of the faith of the Gentiles, and Peter again gave his own experiences among them. After much prayer and talk, they came to the decision which James announced: Just as even the Jewish nation was brought out of a "Gentile" people, so the grace had returned to them (actually, it had never truly left). "Wherefore my sentence is," he concluded, "that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." (Acts 15:19 – 21)

James cautioned them in this not to become like the Pharisees, who added on unreasonable and unnecessary parameters to the law of Yah, making of them burdens. But, he says, rules and order are not to be cast off either. He advised them to write to them concerning only such restrictions as are necessary to being a Christian – the decalogue (of which they seemed to have the biggest problems concerning idolatry and sexual immorality), certain dietary requirements (so much for those who believe Peter's vision declared any and all things fit for food), and if there was anything else concerning dos and don'ts, that's what the sabbath readings were for. But let them not be enforced with strictness or taken as a test of true fellowship except in the case of most blatant rebellion. As Paul said, concerning all else, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." (Romans 14:5)

And this pleased everyone, so they determined to write letters to all the established churches concerning this, and to Antioch they sent Paul, Barnabas, and the prophets Judas (another one, not Iscariot) and Silas. The letter they took with them was very well received by those in Antioch, and there was much rejoicing at the wisdom with which Yah had provided their elders. Yet another of Lucifer's attempts at dissention had fizzled in the face of holiness and unity. Speaking of which...

After a time, Judas returned to Jerusalem, but the others felt led to remain there, preaching to the people and strengthening their faith. After a while, though, Paul began to feel drawn to visit the brethren in all the places his first missionary journey had taken him, and he approached Barnabas about again taking the long journey with him. Barnabas agreed, but he insisted that they take Mark with them (he's referred to as John, his first name, in this particular passage). To this Paul objected, for remember that due to his inexperience, Mark had deserted them a short while after their encounter with the sorcerer Elymas.

Their dispute became so sharp that they split up, and started their journey at different places. Barnabas did indeed take Mark and began his trip by going first to Cyprus, "And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cicilia, confirming the churches." (Acts 15:40, 41) Paul's second journey was as eventful as his first, encountering the snares

of Satan once again in both the natural and supernatural realms. The Voyages of Sinbad have nothing on these journeys – and these actually happened!

He also made a few good friends. In Lystra, he met Timothy, to whom he would later address two letters which are recorded in the Scriptures, the second of which was the last he wrote before his own execution under the emperor Nero. Timothy had the training afforded by a Greek father, and the faith bestowed upon him by a devout Jewish mother and grandmother. What a blessing a good and holy upbringing is! How assuredly is the world blessed by those who raise godly families, for Timothy proved himself to be a wonderful student of the apostle, and was a great source of comfort to him in his coming trials. On that occasion, they took an immediate liking to each other, and Paul took him along on the rest of the journey.

In all things, they were led by the Spirit, some places they were told by Yah to stay at and preach, and others to pass by. On one occasion, Paul received a vision, directing him to go to Macedonia, and they went to Philippi, a city in their target region, and stayed there a few days. It seems as if the apostle Luke also accompanied Paul on this journey, for he writes, “And on the Sabbath WE went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.” (Acts 16:13)

One of these women was Lydia, who was always a follower of Yah as best she knew. And when she heard Paul’s teachings, she believed them wholeheartedly and accepted the atoning sacrifice of the Son. Her entire household was baptized, and from that point on, they had friends and a place to stay in Philippi.

That was the “good.” Now for the not-so-good. There was a certain girl there possessed by a demon. This was unusual in itself, but this particular spirit allowed her to foresee the future. Some local men, having discovered this, secured her cooperation, and made quite a business of fortune telling around Macedonia. By this unlikely means, however, Satan purposed that he would cast doubt upon the holiness of the travelers’ mission. Fastening her attention on the disciples, she began to follow Paul, Luke, Silas and the other companions on their way to the local place of prayer, and she cried out, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation!” (Acts 16:17) And she did this many days, the Book reports, causing many to doubt if it wasn’t indeed the same spirit which led both the disciples and the girl who seemed to be in agreement with them.

A similar charge was brought against Yahshua, when “the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth He out devils.’” (Mark 3:22) The Messiah quickly set them aright on that point, for “what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14) On that occasion, Yahshua said to His accusers, “How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand; And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.” (Mark 3:23 – 26)

Paul’s response to the demon controlling the damsel was no less forceful. He was filled with the Spirit, and said to the invisible puppeteer, “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that same hour. (Acts 16:18) This did not go unnoticed by the young woman’s visible puppeteers however, and the ones who had been using her for gain quickly brought the local magistrates into the picture. By declaring that the disciples were teaching customs unlawful to be practiced by Romans, they aroused the anger of the people against them, and had them beaten and thrown in prison.

As He did with Peter, however, Yah had other plans for these particular prisoners, and as Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to their Father during the long, lonely hours of their incarceration, there was a great earthquake; all the bonds were loosened, and all the doors were thrown open. At the sound of the shaking, the jailer was awakened from his sleep, and he ran to check on his prisoners. When he found the doors open, he would have slain himself, for sleeping on guard duty was a capital crime. But looking out, Paul saw the warden with drawn sword, and said in a loud voice, “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here!” (Acts 16:28) The guard, shaking from his extreme fear, and overcome with gratitude to Paul for remaining where he had been, fell at his feet.

His heart broken, and knowing his life was meaningless as it was anyway, he listened eagerly to the teachings of the disciples, when they answered his question of, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The spoke to him of Yahshua, who desired to bring peace and life not only to him, but all his household, and the jailer believed. He brought them out of the jail, washed their wounds, and he and all his family received baptism by their hands. He brought them also into his house, and treated them as honored guests.

By this time, the magistrates had realized that the charges against Paul and his companions were unfounded, and they sent word to the prison that the men should be released, and requesting that they leave town quietly. However, Paul would have none of that. He said, “They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.” (Acts 16:37) Not for his own honor was Paul protesting this unfair treatment, but because the actions of the magistrates had cast yet another unnecessary shadow over the work the followers of Yahshua were doing, and he desired that they should be as publicly vindicated as they had been chastised.

Fearing a scandal, the magistrates did this, and offered many soothing words that the matter should not be publicized too greatly. Of course, the incidents were all faithfully recorded by Luke’s inspired pen, and now almost two thousand years later, we can read the indelible record. Upon their release, the disciples returned to Lydia’s house, and comforted those who had feared for their safety, and then they departed.

For three sabbaths after that incident, Paul was in the synagogue in Thessalonica, teaching both Jews and Gentiles the way of salvation. Some of them believed, and many citizens received the words of life, as did not a few of the devout Jews. But naturally, this continued to stir up the evil passions of those not led by the Father, and the unconverted teachers were envious of the attention being given to Paul, and found men who Luke describes as “certain lewd fellows of the baser sort” (Acts 17:5 – much to my personal amusement), and they stirred up the crowd against the travelers and the owner of the house where they stayed. I also smiled when the charges the mob levelled against the apostle and his assistants was that they were “These that have turned the world upside down.” (Acts 17:6) The missionaries left the city at night, and quietly, not wishing to cause Jason, the believer at whose house they had been staying, any further trouble.

In Berea, they were much better received, and in this their next stop, they were greeted by those eager and hungry for the truth. They heard the teachings of Paul and (rightly) searched the Scriptures to see the revelation of Yahshua as Messiah for themselves. A greater harvest would have been brought in there were it not for the continuing envy of the impenitent Jews of Thessalonica. They actually followed the travelers into Berea and stirred up trouble there as well. Paul knew that their fury was mostly against him, the most vocal of the group, and so not wishing to put his friends in the path of undue danger, he decided to go ahead

and await Luke, Silas and Timothy in Athens. This proved to be a great trial for the mighty leader, alone in such a place.

I'm sure you have seen pictures of Athens on TV or in a book. The mighty marble pillars, the gigantic statues, the beautiful temples... All these things are quite appealing to the eye, and indeed, they are beautiful, but poor Paul felt only sorrow as he saw the brilliant white structures. The temples, the idols, all dedicated to gods who could neither save nor bring joy. So much wealth wasted on the deaf ears and blind eyes of deities who, even if they DID exist, were imperfect. The gods of Rome and Greece were selfish, lustful, envious and cruel. It was to these demons in disguise that the residents of this beautiful city built shrines and temples, pouring their income into these pursuits while the less fortunate of their neighbors starved for want of food or simple love.

He did, however, find a way that he could use to reach the people. In his wanderings here and there along the intimidating walkways, he found an altar labelled, "To The Unknown God." By speaking in the synagogues there, and in the marketplace with the common folk, Paul's teachings gradually drew the attention of the philosophers and stoics for which Greece is still famous. Some thought he was just another babbler, but others said, "'He seemeth to be a setter-forth of strange gods,' because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." (Acts 17:18)

Whatever they thought of him, they surely considered him interesting, and so many of the philosophers spoke with him, and eventually he got an audience at the Areopagus, the meeting place of the "great minds," of the people. This place, also called "Mars' Hill" after their god of war (for the disputes sometimes ignited there were legendary) was the scene of Paul's great address to those of respect in Athens.

And so he spoke, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God (he said "Yah" here, remember) that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needeth any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, though He be not far from every one of us. For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your poets have said, for we are also His offspring.

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." (Acts 17:22 – 31)

This teaching received mixed reactions. Some thought the resurrection was just another mindless fable, but some were interested, and said, "We will hear of this matter again." Paul left Athens for Corinth soon after, for the scenes of the great city troubled him deeply (what a change this was in the once haughty and cruel Sadducee!), but his speech upon the Areopagus was not without fruit, for he gained some souls for Yahshua's kingdom in the persons of Dionysus, Damaris, and several others.

In Corinth, Paul stayed with a converted Jew named Aquilla and his wife Priscilla, for he and Aquilla had a trade in common: tent making, by which Paul supported himself when funds and means of travel were low. He stayed in Corinth a year and a half, teaching among the Jews and Greeks. But when the Jews, unwilling to let go of their tradition to learn the truth, started blaspheming the name of Yah in their arguments, Paul was so disturbed that he declared that from that point on, he would direct his efforts to the gentiles in that town. He had desired to see those of his background brought into the truth, where their skills and talents could have been put to use by Yahshua as his were, but they would not hear.

That night, the Savior Himself appeared to Paul in a dream and strengthened his courage, and told him to remain there, teaching for a while. "I have much people in this city," Yahshua declared to him. (Acts 18:10) Just before he left that place, there was an insurrection against him by the Jews, and Paul was brought before Gallo, the ruling magistrate. But as their case had no bearing (Paul wasn't even being accused of a punishable crime), he threw the case out of court. Then all the Greeks who had sided with Paul took the ruler of the synagogue and assaulted him right in plain view of the judgement seat. Gallo discreetly looked away :)

Though vindicated, Paul saw this as his cue to leave, and he took Priscilla and Aquilla with him for a while, as far as Ephesus, but they remained behind when he went on back to Antioch. From there, he went on to Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the believers there.

While he was travelling in these regions, a Jew named Apollos, who had been taught of John the Baptist, went also to Ephesus, and with zeal and conviction, taught the devout there. Fortunately (and Yah knew exactly what He was doing), Apollos encountered Aquilla and Priscilla, and they taught him everything else that occurred after John, and his knowledge was improved and his way made more straight. From that point onward, he taught the risen Savior as the way to life eternal. Some time shortly after that, Paul and Apollos crossed paths, for the former ended up back at Ephesus and the latter at Corinth. In Ephesus, Paul met some who had been taught by Apollos before he had learned the full truth, for these knew nothing about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but when Paul taught them, they received it right away and were given the gifts of languages and prophecy.

In this place, Paul also gave powerful examples of the healing powers of Yahshua. He cast out many demons, and healed the sick, just as Peter and the other apostles were doing in Jerusalem, and on one occasion, it was displayed that his actions were well known to both angel and demon. Other people, who were not fully converted to the truth, had seen many examples of demons being vanquished in the name of Christ, and so these exorcists took it upon themselves to make a profession of the matter. They did have some success, for Yahshua Himself had said of these people, "forbid them not," when James and John had brought it to his attention while He was yet with us.

On this specific occasion, however, a team of seven exorcists (all brothers and the son of Sceva, who was chief of the local Jewish priests), attempted to cast out the devils of a certain man. But when they said, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth," the demon responded candidly, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are YE?" (Acts 19:15 – Another passage that never fails to bring me a chuckle) And without waiting for an answer, the demoniac leaped on them, and overcame all seven of them, tearing off their clothing and cutting their skin. The name of Yahshua received much attention after this, and many more believed in His power.

Though this incident caused Paul to be quite well regarded by the locals, he nevertheless took no thought for his own popularity, and was also eager to see Rome, for if he could establish a church there, in the power-seat of the earthly world, it would be a great victory indeed for the cause of light. But first, he would return to Jerusalem to meet again with the apostles there.

Even the journey home was most eventful, for on his journey back, he had contention with worshippers of the goddess Diana in Ephesus. Fortunately, by then he had reunited with Timothy and his other companions, and by their combined efforts they managed to avoid most of the uproar caused by the devout idolaters. Thereafter, he and his companions passed through Macedonia, and to a new place, Troas. It was the feast of unleavened bread at this time, so Paul, Luke and the others stayed there the week. During that time, one young man became so sleepy during one of Paul's longer sermons that he fell from a high third-floor window into the streets below.

Paul immediately went downstairs and brought him back inside; but though he was dead, Paul said to the assembly, "Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him." (Acts 20:10) And sure enough, the youth opened his eyes, and all there were "not a little comforted," as the Scriptures say.

While in Miletus, Paul realized by the Spirit's leadings that he would not be able to pass again through these regions. He eagerly desired to strengthen the faith of those he had left behind in Ephesus, for he knew that there the opposition was great. He therefore sent for the elders to meet him where he was, so that he could have one last meeting with them. When they had arrived, Paul gently revealed to them that he had a sure knowledge that he would not see any of them again in this life. He took them through the courses of his two journeys, sharing with them the knowledge he had gained, and warning them from slipping away from the truth faith. "For I know this," he said, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:29, 30)

He pointed out to them his own role, of endless prayer for the faith of those younger in Christ than himself, that he had worked with his own hands (at tentmaking) to support himself when money was scarce, having "coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel." He declared that he had experienced a full and happy life in the Spirit, though his labors had been hard, and when he had spoken, he knelt with them and prayed with them all. But the elders "wept sore" at the thought of their beloved teacher's leaving, and made much of him, and accompanied him that last time to his ship.

When he and Luke and the others had nearly reached Jerusalem, he was warned by the Spirit to take a longer route to get there, so they went by another way, and met up with Phillip, one of the seven deacons. They stayed at his house for seven days with him and his "four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." (Acts 21:9) While they were there, another prophet named Abagus came to them from Judea, and he took Paul's belt and tied his own hands with it, saying that in this same way the Jews in Jerusalem would bind the owner of the girdle, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

When Luke and Timothy heard these things, they pleaded with Paul not to go, but the apostle responded, "What mean ye to weep and break my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 21:13) And he could not be persuaded to stay, so Luke gave up, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." And so ended Paul's second missionary journey, for he and his companions met up with James and the other elders in Jerusalem, and gave them a full report of what had occurred in the previous years.

They were much pleased by his tales, especially of the miracles Yah had worked among the Gentiles, and pointed out their own successes, for by now they had thousands of Jews who had accepted Yahshua. There were still some points about circumcision and so forth among these Jews, however, so Paul's return was timely, for he could now give a first-hand account of God's love and acceptance of the uncircumcised. In the same way, they encouraged Paul to take with himself four Jewish converts who had recently completed certain vows – at the end of which they were to purify themselves in the local temple.

By having Paul associate with them on that day, they intended that the local Jews should accept the missionary's appreciation of the Jewish customs, and therefore find an easier audience with them for the preaching of the Gospel. This compromise had severe consequences, however, for the local teachers of the law had it in for Paul, and were looking for the slightest imagined infraction of their rituals with which to condemn him. Seeing that he took with him certain Gentile believers to the temple, they also stated that Paul had taken them INTO the temple, a serious breach of custom for non-Jews, and they took Paul out of the synagogue and started beating him, eager to take his life.

The Roman centurions rushed up to restore order, though, and he was spared this way. But the chief soldier took Paul also to the castle, there to explain all the commotion. He was put in chains, just in case he was indeed the cause of the tumult, and so came true Abagus' prediction that the Jews would hand him over, bound, into the hands of the Gentiles. Eager to stem the tide of anger and demonic hatred he sensed growing in the crowd, Paul asked the centurion for a chance to speak in his defense to the mob, which had followed them all the way up to the steps of the castle.

The soldier gave him leave to do this, and he addressed the assembly in Hebrew. He turned to them, saying, "Men and Brethren, hear ye the defense which I make now unto you." (Acts 22:1) He began to recount the details of his conversion, eager to show them that the love of Yah was for everyone, not just the Jews. He went through his calling by Yahshua on the road to Damascus, but when he got to the part where he was instructed to go "far hence unto the Gentiles," there arose such a protest that he could not continue, and so the soldiers escorted him into the castle with no further delay.

Before the council, and the new high priest who had been elected since Caiaphas, Paul began his defense anew: "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (Acts 23:1) At this, Ananias (yes, another one – this seems to have been a popular name) the high priest commanded that Paul be struck. His guards hit him across the mouth, and Paul retorted, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall! For sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" And those that stood by asked if this was the way Paul would address the high priest of Yah. But Paul, ever willing to avoid unnecessary conflict, retracted his hasty words, saying, "I wist (knew) not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." (Acts 23:5)

But Paul cleverly saw also that the council was composed of both Sadducees and Pharisees, and seeing a chance to throw his accusers into their true light, he said, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee: and of the hope of the resurrection of the dead I am called into question." Now, remember the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection, or in angels or spirits, and because of this, a conflict arose in the body of his judges. At the same time, the Pharisees, seeking yet another chance to put down their spiritual opponents, chose to take the opportunity to side with Paul, choosing politics over even their own twisted idea of justice.

But they would not fully release Paul, despite this, and had him imprisoned within the castle. That night, Yahshua came to Paul in his cell, and strengthened him for the scenes about to unfold, for that same day, more than forty of the Jews that had accused him made a solemn vow not to eat or drink until they saw the unselfish laborer dead. But Paul's nephew heard of the plot, and he went to visit the prisoner, revealing to him what he had learned. And Paul directed him to tell also the warden, and when he learned of this, the jailer had two other guards take the prisoner to the relative safety of Felix, the governor who succeeded Pilate, along with a letter of greeting explaining the situation.

After five days, the council to decide Paul's fate was reconvened, this time under the protection and safety of Felix in king Herod's judgement hall. Again Ananias and his chief speaker (lawyer) named Tertullus levelled the accusation of sedition against their captive. In his defense, Paul spoke eloquently, saying that he felt comforted by the fact that Felix had been a governor for many years, and was therefore most likely a just ruler, and a lover of truth. He explained the situation well, declaring he had violated no Jewish ordinances, and was innocent of all the charges brought against him.

Felix was impressed by the speaker, and determined not to turn him over to the Jews, or condemn him to the Gentiles, but instead to keep him a prisoner for a while and refer his case to the chief captain of the region. Political gain was also a motivating power behind Felix, as it had been with Pilate, for he sought to ever be in favor with the Jews, even at the cost of his own moral code.

But the governor also knew the Jewish system well, and in fact his wife Drusilla was Jewish, and so he was much intrigued by the words of Paul concerning Yahshua. He and his wife visited Paul many times during the term of his incarceration, hearing him speak about Christ. But, as with so many even to this day, when it came to the principles of righteousness, of making a change in one's life to be a true servant, to count the cost of being a disciple, Felix drew back. "Go thy way for a time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." (Acts 24:25) How many evangelists have been turned away with these words! If even an honest seeker waits for Satan to allow him or her a "convenient" season to hear the words of life, he will have a long, long wait. Aside from this, Felix was also hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe for his freedom – boy did HE pick the wrong guy for that.

Two YEARS later, a "convenient season" for Felix had still not come, and he was succeeded by governor Festus. Never again would he have such an opportunity to learn of salvation, and as a favor to the Jews, he left Paul bound in prison when he left.

When the Jews learned that Festus had taken over, they desired to bring the case of Paul to light once again, hoping that the new governor was a less weak-willed man, and that they could finally destroy the follower of Yahshua. Paul had not wasted his time in jail, and had written many of the Epistles we now have from him while awaiting justice in his cell. Nevertheless, he longed for freedom (despite the visits from brethren of various churches), and had been much wearied by his unfair captivity, so when his case finally came up again before Festus, he declared frankly, "I stand at Caesar's judgement seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die, but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar!" (Acts 25:10, 11)

Paul had invoked his right as a Roman citizen to be heard before the highest authority in the land. He wanted his ordeal over with, and would have a speedy resolution of the matter. "Unto Caesar thou shalt go," Festus said.

Before he could be transported to Rome to be heard before Augustus, Agrippa and Bernice, the current king and queen of Judaea, went to visit Festus. During the course of the days they were there, Festus was discussing Paul with them, telling them of the teachings he had regarding Yahshua and the resurrection. He told them that Paul was still there, being held until such a time as he could be taken to Italy to be heard before the Caesar. Agrippa became interested, however, and said, "I would also hear the man myself." And so the next day, Paul was brought before the assembly again, the ragged prisoner before unbearably glorious royalty. A marked contrast.

And Festus began to outline the charges the Jews had brought against him, but Agrippa said to Paul, "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself," for after the reports he had received, he was eager to hear the words of the apostle himself. Again, and with tender eloquence, Paul outlined his conversion and journeys, recounting in vivid and dramatic detail his labors among both Jews and Gentiles, to bring into unity all of the family of Yah. He spoke of Yahshua, that He was predicted even from the time of Moses, to be born and to suffer and die, so that all men might be saved, and he reasoned from the Jewish mindset, knowing that the king was familiar with the faith. "King Agrippa," Paul said, "believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." (Acts 26:27)

And the king said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!" How the mighty and proud king had been touched by the gentle apostle's unselfish ministry. Had he only given in fully with his whole heart, how might the history of the church have been different... Paul said to him, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am." Glancing down at his chains, he added wistfully, "Except for these bonds." (Acts 26:29) Agrippa had to leave the room at this statement, taking with him Bernice and Festus. "This man doeth nothing worthy of death or bonds. This man might have been set at liberty, even if he had not appealed to Caesar." (Acts 26:31, 32)

Nevertheless, the order had been given, and shortly thereafter, Paul set sail in a ship with other prisoners, bound for Italy. He took with him some willing companions as well, including his biographer Luke. As they passed through territory familiar to Paul from his travels, the centurion Julius, under whose guard he was kept, allowed them some refreshing time among friends there. And when they set sail again, a huge storm rose up, and there was a debate as to whether they should head for land close by, or to make for a more hospitable port to wait out the weather.

Paul advised them to stop at the closer place, saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives." But although in the short time the prisoner had earned the great respect of soldier and sailor alike, they yet pressed on with the more risky course. True to Paul's warnings, this proved to be a disaster, for the ship was caught in the wind, and tossed helplessly about. For some time they were spun about helplessly, the sky so dark with clouds it looked like eternal night. "And neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay upon us, all hope that we should be saved was taken away," Luke writes.

Paul stood up and gave something of an "I told you so," speech, but said also, "And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood with me this night an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve." (Acts 27:22, 23) At one point, several of the shipmen were planning to try to escape in the lifeboats, but Paul called Julius' attention to the matter, saying that if these were allowed to leave, all would have been lost. All this while, too, the men on the ship were unsure how long the storm would last, and so they had been conserving their food supplies. It had

been fourteen days, and there was no sign of the winds slowing. Paul said to them, however, “I pray you to take some meat for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.” (Acts 27:34)

When the day after that arrived, the men saw that they were close to land, but couldn’t reach it with their ship, because the passage to get there was too narrow. When the ship ran aground and was wrecked, the guards had it in mind to kill all the prisoners on board, for some were accused of violent crimes, and it was standard procedure to remove them as a survival factor in emergencies such as this one. Julius did not want Paul to be sacrificed along with these others, for he had grown quite fond of the apostle during the course of the voyage, and so for the sake of one righteous man, many were spared the sword.

The swimmers among them jumped into the ocean and swam. Other floated over on boards or pieces of the ship, which was breaking apart by that point. Paul’s words proved true, for not one of the two hundred and seventy-six passengers on the ill-fated voyage was harmed. They discovered that they had been cast unto the island of Melita, which none of the travelers were familiar with. Luke describes that the “barbarians” treated them kindly, though, kindling a fire for them since they were all wet and cold, and it was still raining (no mean feat, if you’ve ever tried to start a fire in the rain).

When Paul tried to help out by putting some sticks on the fire, that old Serpent tried again to cut the evangelist’s career short, and a venomous snake came out of the fire – it may just have been driven out by the heat, we don’t need to assume it was a “magical” snake – and bit him on the hand. The local islanders knew well that the viper was deadly, and they watched Paul with anxiety, saying among themselves, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” (Acts 28:4) But Paul shook the snake casually into the fire and went about his business. When some time passed and he didn’t succumb to the venom, the natives decided instead that he was a god.

Probably due to this in part, Paul, Luke and the others were lodged with the chief of the island – courteously, Luke adds. Paul’s prayers during that time also cured the chief’s father of a fever and a blood disease, and so he healed many others as well. They gave them much praise, and when they departed, they gave them many gifts and supplies. This happened three months later, aboard an Alexandrian ship, “The Castor and Pollux.” And so finally, after a few more stops, the prisoner arrived at Rome, and managed to present his case one last time to Caesar.

While he awaited his trial, he called together the chief of the local Jews, for due to the favor of the centurion Julius, he was allowed to remain in a house, only guarded by a soldier. And speaking to the Jewish leaders, he outlined his case also for them, stating that he had been unjustly accused of breaking their ordinances. He said that he called for them and desired to speak with them before Caesar, though, as a courtesy, for he still felt a heavy burden for his first people. But he made it clear that he knew salvation was also for the Gentiles, “and some believed the things which were spoken, and some not.” (Acts 28:24) But regardless, none of them constrained him from speaking, and went off arguing among themselves as to whether or not it was true that the Gentiles were also “worthy” of eternal life.

And for the two years awaiting his trial, Paul stayed at the house and taught all who would listen about Yahshua and the coming kingdom, “with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” (Acts 28:31) He also wrote quite a number of letters, some of the collection of which constitutes a large part of the New Testament, from this place.

Letters To Rachel

Luke's record ends here, but from the Epistles which the apostle wrote while awaiting his trial and after, we can gather a few more facts. He was eventually released from bondage, and cleared of all charges. While free, he attempted to again visit the churches he had established. However, when the emperor Nero took over as Caesar after Augustus, and discovered that many in his own government were heeding the apostles' teachings, he added his hand also to the persecution.

Paul was again thrown in prison. Many, including Peter, were executed, and John was exiled to a small prison-island called Patmos. During his final imprisonment, Paul wrote his last recorded letter, 2 Timothy. In this, he declares his great love for his pupil, and confidence that he would be a continued blessing to the churches in the area. He spoke of his suffering thus far, of which he was "not ashamed," (2 Tim 1:12) holding fast to faith and love. He also expressed his prayers that Timothy continue to be mighty in wisdom and understanding and to continue to seek holiness in all things.

Of himself, Paul said this, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim 4:6, 7) And yet, he longed to see his loyal student one last time, for in verse 9 he writes, "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me." Some of his former companions had forsaken him, and others he had sent away to fill greater needs among the churches in other areas. "Only Luke is with me," he writes, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry." That verse is significant, for it speaks of a settlement in the dispute that Paul and Barnabas had over the once erring disciple. Paul now considered Mark to be one of the assets of the church community, and desired also to see him before his execution.

He concluded the letter expressing his desire that Timothy greet the friends he had made on the journey, Priscilla and Aquilla, the slave Onesimus (on whose behalf he wrote the book Philemon) and many others. The last written words we have of him were, "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen."

Paul did meet his end, beheaded by a Roman blade. As a citizen of Rome himself, it was unlawful for him to be tortured before execution. Peter, history tells us, was not so lucky, and he was crucified. The story goes that he was still so tortured by his denial of Yahshua during His trial that he considered it too great an honor to be killed in the same way. He had them grant him one last request – to be nailed to the cross upside down.

And so ended the first church age. But if you will remember, it was said of the brothers James and John that they especially would suffer persecution for the name of the One they so dearly loved. This was indeed so. As James was among the first to be martyred after Stephen, so John would remain on earth the longest. Instead of being killed, he was exiled. My next letter will deal with John, then, the last survivor of the apostles, and a very important message he received for the churches before he finally gave in to old age.

I'll draw to a close (finally) here, and give you a chance to breathe. I hope you manage to digest at least some of this, I know it was quite a bit.

Yah's blessings to you,
David.

Letter 7: The Cleansing of The Sanctuary

Dear Rachel,

I know that last letter was rather lengthy, but I think that in the future I will try to make my communications a more palatable read. The latest three letters were really of the utmost importance, for in the first two we had the life of Christ Himself – the clearest revelation of the Father to the planet earth – and in the last were the first years of the church which He established. From the councils of elders to the journeys of Paul, we see the hand of the Father guiding His children to do great things. And that Spirit has never fully died out, regardless of how much Satan’s fury has worked to vanquish it.

Every weapon he has ever leveled against the body of believers has turned into a tool in the hands of Yah. “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.” (Isaiah 54:17) When Lucifer lifted the hands of rulers against the church, the scattering that resulted led to the conversion of many who would not otherwise have heard the message at that time. To this day, people still talk about the martyrdom of the faithful, for even in death, they gave us a testimony that can never be wiped away.

And speaking of martyrdom, I agree with you completely – being upside down for any length of time is painful enough, how much greater then to be affixed to a cross! I’m of the opinion that Peter was a bit hard on himself with that one... Christ, you see, is called the “great physician.” He has only our greatest comfort and joy in mind. An analogy was made once of a patient going to a doctor’s office with a sickness. As the sinner comes to Yahshua, He looks upon the disease and says, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” (Mat 9:22, Mark 5:34 & 10:52, Luke 8:48 & 17:19) He said that a lot, it seems.

And yet, so many people, not fully understanding this, will say to the doctor, “Okay, you’ve given me the cure, and you’ve also put me on this program that will KEEP me well, but... don’t you think I should be punished a little for getting sick? Could I maybe take some nasty-tasting medication to remind me not to play in the cold rain anymore?” The doctor looks up with new concern and says, “No, I never asked you to do that. Just stick to the plan and you’ll be fine.” Long, repetitive penances, self-abasement, guilt for sins that doesn’t lead to a cessation from DOING those sins habitually; these practices do just that, they treat God as a doctor that will patch you up only to send you back out into the battlefield to be shot again. And worst of all, they misrepresent the nature of the Father to the rest of the world.

Besides, this whole war isn’t even about US anyway. The biggest accusations of Satan haven’t been about human beings at all. From the beginning, the dark angel has been questioning Yah, the Throne Itself. These accusations we can’t answer. God Himself dealt with it on the cross, sending His Son as an atonement for sin, showing how both mercy AND justice can coexist in perfect harmony. We can’t do Him a favor. Our efforts can never vindicate the Father. He did it Himself, and we can only watch, approve and celebrate. In everything, we must learn to look at the situation and say, “Now what does this tell me about Yah?” Studying the Bible this way, for example, can lead a reader to some incredible insights.

So let us speak for a while of incredible insights. Last time I told you I would write to you of John, who, exiled to a rocky island during the time of persecution of the church, received one of the most vivid and startling messages in the history of creation. The book of Revelation, in both its symbols and spiritual truths, connect concepts from the writings of Genesis all the way down to Jude, the book just before it. It strings

together combinations of books like Leviticus, Daniel, Ezekiel and Hebrews in arrangements that look like a flower blooming: truths so startling at times that many people tend to avoid the prophecy altogether.

But that is not our calling. John says of this body of work, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” (Rev 1:3) If we read, hear and give heed to the words of John’s prophecy, even if we don’t fully understand every detail, the result is that we will be prepared for what is to come. And when the trials arrive, and we find we are equipped to deal with it, we will consider ourselves “blessed” indeed.

I would love to go through all of the book in this letter, but time and space prohibit such a task. I encourage you to read through it, though, even if you don’t understand it all, and by all means ask about whatever you find confusing or difficult. Right now, perhaps I can give you something of an overview, and some of the more currently relevant concepts. In that way, we can lead in to the last few letters, which deal with just that issue: how it is we fit into this big plan of salvation, and what the events going on around us today mean.

The first thing John records having seen in his vision is Christ Himself, with a transformed and highly symbolic appearance. His eyes were like fire, John says, and His hair white like wool; His voice was at one time like a trumpet, and another like the rushing of waters. His face shone like the sun, and a sharp, two-edged sword came out of His mouth. He held seven stars in His hand, which John explains were revealed to him to be the seven existing churches of the area, and to each, Christ committed a special message through His servant.

The prophet was next transported to Heaven, where he beheld a scene of perfect worship: angels and men praising the One seated on the Throne. And in the hand of the King was a scroll bound with seven seals. But no one was found worthy to open the scroll and reveal the message therein, and John felt a deep sorrow and a keen drive to know what was written on both the front and back of that document. But then, one of the humans around the Throne spoke to John and said, “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” (Rev 5:5) Yet, as John looked on in expectation of this mighty “Lion of Judah,” instead he beheld a gentle Lamb, wounded unto death.

But this Lamb, possessing seven eyes and seven horns, walks over to the One seated on the throne and takes the scroll out of His hand. As the Lamb proceeds to break the seals one by one, we see signs revealed upon the earth which correspond with the timing. Wars, plagues, earthquakes... all of these things were displayed on earth as a sign that the end was approaching. When the sixth seal broke, accompanied by great and unusual signs in the heavens, we see something significant happening.

The earth, already shaken by the results of the previous 5 seals being broken, is now being set up for a new level of destruction, yet an angel is sent to “seal” a number of humans, to protect them from the effects of the coming devastation. The number of those recipients of the seal in their foreheads is given as 144,000. 12 thousand from each of the tribes of Israel. Yet, just as the “Israel” mentioned here is its spiritual counterpart, the body of believers in Christ, so may this number be symbolic: representing “all” those true in faith. John asks the elder who these individuals are, this glorified number leading the multitude from “all nations, and kindreds and peoples and tongues” dressed in white robes. The elder replies, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev 7:14)

And when this sealing of people is complete, then is the seventh seal on the document opened. Whereas before, some great and dramatic event signified the breaking of the seals thus far, this last action produces the opposite effect. There is silence in Heaven for the first time. And during this time, the One seated on the throne listens. The prayers of the saints, the calls for justice, the crying out for vengeance by the spirits of the martyrs under the throne... all of these things, represented by the smoke of incense, ascend to the Most High. When this is complete, the angel fills the container that held the prayers with fire from the altar, with a burning reply, and hurls it towards the earth. This is the beginning of the final judgements.

While Yah was listening to the prayers of the saints, seven angels were given a trumpet each, and now they are commanded to pass over the earth and give their sounds. The first four angels' trumpets call down calamities that wreak havoc upon the earth itself. Nature, the bodies of the heavens and the waters are visited by the destruction. Natural forces cause the death of many animals and people at that time. The final three trumpets, however, are different.

When the fifth trumpet sounds, a line is broken, for actual beings are now sent to torment mankind, and humans die as a result of direct attacks, not just as a result of the assault upon nature. At this point, however, we see another curious thing happen:

“And I saw another mighty angel come down heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, ‘Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.’” (Rev 10:1 – 4)

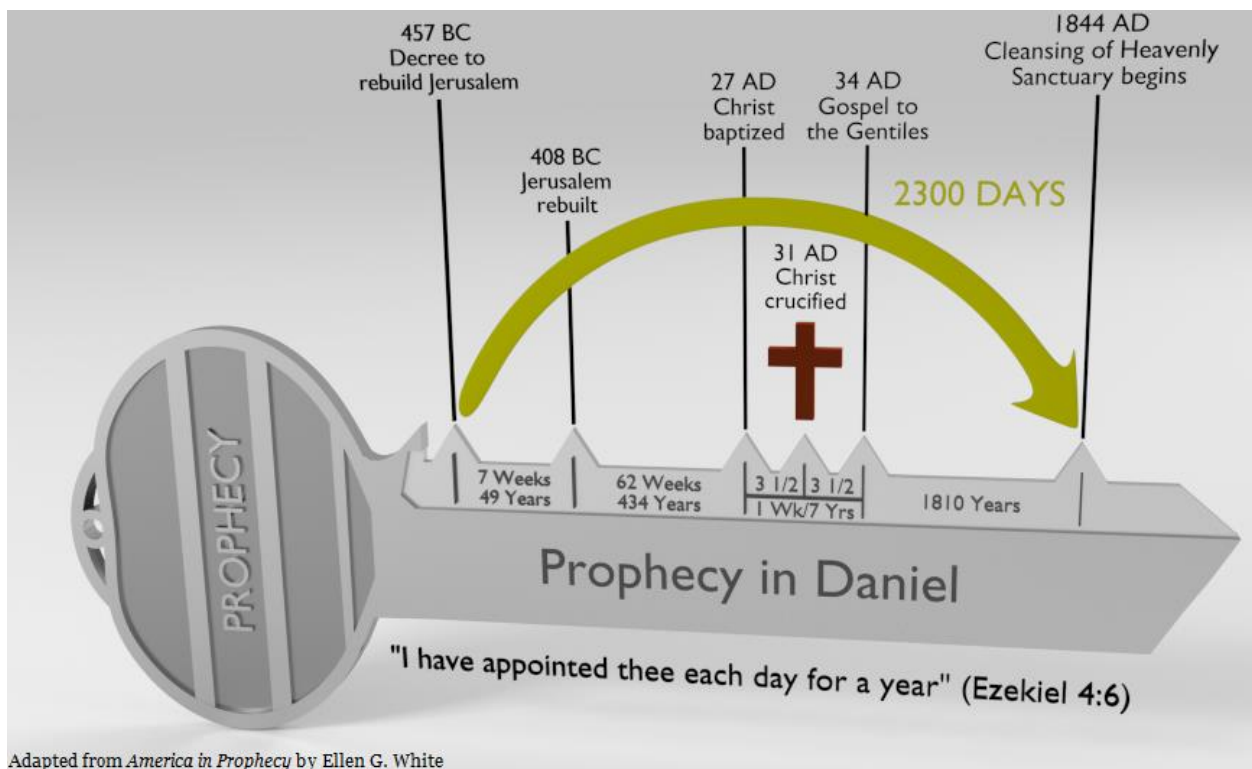
Moreover, verse 9 declares: “And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, ‘Give me the little book.’ And he said unto me, ‘Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.’” Chapter 10 of Revelation brings to our minds two other books of the Bible: Daniel and Ezekiel. At this point, I would like to take a slight detour from John's revelation, with a promise to return to it in the next letter, and let's see if we cannot examine the meaning of Revelation 10 here.

Let's look at the verse 9 statement... John is given a scroll to eat, and it is sweet in his mouth like honey. This is almost the exact thing that happened to a prophet in the Old Testament. A section of the book of Ezekiel reads, “Moreover He said unto me, ‘Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that roll. And He said unto me, ‘Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee.’ Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.” (Eze 3:1 – 3)

We are introduced to Ezekiel's method of prophesying to Israel here, and we see that by a series of symbols, he acted out many events which were to befall the chosen people. In his demonstrations, Yah gave him this instruction: for each day that Ezekiel performed some action (lying down, standing up, besieging a model of a city) He declared, “I have appointed thee each day for a year.” (Eze 4:6) Each day he performed an action was to be taken to mean a year the event symbolized would last. This is the key to another prophecy, so with that in mind, we turn to the other book that Revelation 10 indicates.

John is told to “seal up” certain things he heard, and to not write them out. This also happened once before, when Daniel received HIS visions concerning the final days of earth history. “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Dan 12:4) To no other prophet was this command given, except to John. No other prophecy was given to an individual with the command to “seal it up” until the time of the end. So now that the signs that the end is approaching have been given, is it not fitting that we should understand what Daniel’s prophecies mean? The “little book” which John sees in the hand of the mighty angel is now open, he declares.

There are a few numbers involved in the prophecy, and it may take a little time to grasp it, but for this reason, I have included with my letter to you a diagram adapted from a book written about (among other things) the prophecy of Daniel we are discussing. The prophecy, which covers a period of 2,300 years, points toward an event which is declared thus: “And He said unto me, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.’” (Daniel 8:14) The purpose of the diagram, and of this letter, is to explain to you what it means for the sanctuary to be cleansed, for as John declares, the book must be seen open, and then eaten – taken in – for us to be able to bear witness to what occurs in the closing scenes of the war between Yah and Lucifer.



Adapted from *America in Prophecy* by Ellen G. White

Now, as you have read, in Daniel 8, the prophet receives the message of a period of time to last 2,300 days, which we understand to mean years by Ezekiel’s instructions. But he is given no other information as to what this means, or even when the time period was to begin. For this reason, Yah sent the angel Gabriel to explain it. “And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, ‘Oh, Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.’” (Dan 9:22)

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For the rest of that chapter, Gabriel outlines a series of events which I have displayed on the diagram, including the dates on which they occurred. For those who declare that the Scriptures are vague and inaccurate, this vision is evidence aplenty that Yah is a God of precision and order. The angel declared that the time frame would start at “the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem.” From the historical book of Ezra we see that this command was given in the 7th year of the king named Artaxerxes’s reign. This date has been determined by scholars to be in the autumn of the year 457 B.C. This is the “starting point” for the 2300 years.

How am I sure of this? Well, because of the events along the way that Gabriel pointed out by which we should know we are on track. For example, he declared to Daniel that after this command was given, there would be 70 weeks until the bringing in of “everlasting righteousness” by some great event. But this 70-week period he further subdivides into 7 weeks, 62 weeks and then one final week. $62 + 7 + 1 = 70$. All of this is in Daniel 9:24 – 27.

The breakdown has played out as follows. After that first week, the reconstruction of Jerusalem was completed. 7 weeks is 49 days, and as you recall that translates to 49 years. EXACTLY 49 years after the command was given, in 408 B.C. the work on “Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince” was finished.

62 weeks later, Gabriel told Daniel that “the street” would be built again in “troubulous times.”

Christ Yahshua has been described as the “way the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Moreover, Jacob received a vision of a ladder from heaven to earth, a connection between fallen humanity and the divine in Genesis 28:12; and our Redeemer Himself is called that ladder, that way of ascending and descending to and from Heaven, in John 1:51.

Hopefully you can grasp this significance, but if not, the fact remains that exactly 62 prophetic weeks, or 434 literal years later, (for $62 \times 7 = 434$), Christ was announced by John the Baptist, and began His earthly mission. You will remember I told you in an earlier letter that there was significance to the fact that Yahshua began his mission at the age of 30. Here it finally is: when He was 30 years old, it was 27 A.D. – exactly 434 years after Jerusalem had been rebuilt. ($408 - 434 = -26$, or 26 A.D. An extra year needs to be added, since there was no “year 0”. The dates go from 1 B.C. to 1 A.D. with no break, which results in the number 27)

$62 + 7$ is 69. One week (7 years) remained until the age of “everlasting righteousness” was to begin. Gabriel even further subdivides this week into two halves, for this final week is the very time I have discussed in my last three letters. As I may have said, this time period is of the utmost importance to understanding the true purpose of Yahshua’s mission, and therefore all of Christianity, the religion based upon Him.

Read this most significant passage, “And after threescore and two (62) weeks, shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself: and the people of the Prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.” (Daniel 9:26) After the 62 weeks had ended (69 if we include the first seven weeks), some time within His mission, Christ was “cut off” for the sake of others, and by His own people!

Some Christians have tried to declare the “Messiah” mentioned here to be the antichrist, and that has led to much confusion. Doctrines such as the Rapture before the time of trouble, a lack of knowledge about the signs showing the approach of the end time, the belief of a thousand years of peace on earth before the

return of Christ – all of these have resulted. Simply following the math, and understanding what the “cleansing of the sanctuary” means... had these been done, there would have been no need for all the confusion. The Messiah here is obviously Jesus the Christ. Not only do the numbers fit perfectly, but also, He is called in Daniel 9:24 the “Most Holy,” and a bringer of “everlasting righteousness.” What dark deception has led to the application of these titles to the man of sin?

In verse 27, Gabriel continues his breakdown. The Messiah (Christ, NOT His enemy) would confirm the covenant for this one final week, and in the midst of the week, He would cause the ordinances of sacrifice to cease. Until the event called the “consummation,” the desolation of death as atonement for sin was to be rendered forever obsolete.

When Christ first began His earthly ministry, the gospel was given to the Jewish nation for a period of 7 years. In the exact middle of that week, 3 ½ years in, Yahshua was crucified by the condemnation of the very people He had come to save. In the spring of 31 A.D. the cross was raised upon Golgotha for all of Heaven and Earth to see. This was precisely 3 years and a half after 27 A.D. He was “cut off, but not for Himself.” Three and a half years after THAT, the deacon Stephen was stoned to death by the council of religious leaders, and the persecution that resulted led to the scattering of the early church. Not only that, but as you recall from my last letter, this led to Gentiles being converted and included in the Kingdom of Yah!

This began an age of everlasting righteousness, for it was with great joy that the early church declared, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!” (Acts 11:18) Not only to the Jews would Yah be God and Father, but to ANY who would turn away from a life of sin and accept the sacrifice of Christ, the ultimate atonement which caused the “sacrifice and oblation” to cease. Of course, this is the way it was to have been in the first place. Even AFTER so many fell away from the worship of Yah, the Israelites were called to be that “chosen people” who would be the example, and would lead mankind back to the principles of Heaven. When they too rejected this high position through a series of cherished errors, and finally the crucifixion, the gospel passed to the Gentiles and all the world.

However, as I have said before, this does not condemn a single person of the Jewish nation. All this meant was that as a religious system, Judaism could no longer save. Christ’s death had cancelled the law of sacrifices, and now, by relying on Him, we are given an opportunity to return to life eternal, which Adam ransomed away for the price of a fruit. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

At the stoning of Stephen, and the going forth of the Gospel to all mankind, 70 weeks of the 2300 days had been consumed. $2300 - (70 \times 7) = 2300 - 490 = 1810$. One thousand, eight hundred and ten years now remained, “then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,” (Daniel 8:14). Stephen was put to death in the year 34 A.D. which is 7 years after 27 A.D. and 3 ½ years after the spring of 31 A.D. $34 + 1810$ gives us 1844, the year prophesied for this great cleansing. At this point, you can put away your calculator, for the arithmetic is done. Now, all we need to understand is what this “cleansing of the sanctuary” means.

In one of Paul’s discussions with the early church elders concerning the errors which would seep into the doctrine of salvation, he said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the

flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them,” (Acts 20:28 – 30)

So it did indeed happen. For political reasons, and by various persecutions, the early Apostolic church united in a spiritual “marriage” with pagan Rome, and those who would remain true to the Word of God were subjected to the most inhuman suffering the world had yet seen. Unfortunately, this monstrosity, this religio-civil construct, is still most peoples’ concept of what “church” is, and as a result, I really can’t blame many people from being turned off when religion becomes the topic of conversation.

The world in general has no idea what “religion” truly is. It isn’t dead and ritualistic forms and ceremonies. The Bible says, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27) Micah 6:8 says it a slightly different way, but the spirit is the same, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Not about rote and dos and don’ts do these two teachers speak, but of being kind to widows and orphans; to love mercy, and appreciate justice. To follow the example of Christ (He has “shewed thee what is good”) and not be corrupted by the example of the world around us – this is well pleasing to the Father.

It was only by a series of painful and time-consuming reformations that the Church established by Christ is once again approaching the purity of doctrine it once held during the time of the Apostles. Brave men have, through the years, been enlightened with some re-discovered aspect of the Faith, and through their unselfish efforts, have restored the knowledge to the world, often at the cost of their lives.

In the 1800s, just a short time before the 1844 date of the “cleansing,” a man named William Miller turned his life over to Christ, and began to study the Scriptures for himself, rather than simply accepting the traditions of the day. One of the more popular teachings of the time was the belief in 1000 years of peace before the second advent of the Messiah. Miller’s readings, however, led him to a study of Daniel and Revelation, and he uncovered much of what I have shown you just now. He became convinced that the return of the Bridegroom was at hand, and that the church, which had been slumbering like a certain ten virgins (Matthew 25:1 – 7), had best awake and run out to meet Him.

In 1833, Miller, who was a member of the Baptist church at the time, received a license to teach Scripture, and went about sharing the 2300 day revelation with the local churches. That very year, the last of the signs which were to be given regarding the breaking of the 6th seal was observed! Revelation 6:12 and 13 reads, “And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.” In 1755, the most terrible earthquake ever recorded in written history occurred. Though it was actually centered in Lisbon, it was felt not only in Europe, but also Africa, Great Britain, America, Greenland and the West Indies. An estimated 90,000 people died within the 4 million square miles directly affected by the calamity.

On May 19th 1780, 25 years after this, the second of the signs pointed to in Revelation 6:12, Mark 13:24 and Isaiah 13:10 was seen. Three times was this event mentioned, for it was very important, and very dramatic. On that day, at about 9 o’clock in the morning, something resembling a thick, uniformly black cloud spread itself over the sky, and in a large part of the United States, it was so dark that many indeed became convinced it was a supernatural event. Sermons were taught in churches that day concerning this

most unusual occurrence. Even more startlingly, when the darkness finally dissipated at midnight, the moon was as red as blood.

To make such a claim, I know, requires much evidence to convince a person wholly unfamiliar with it. I can quote to you many sources which recorded this phenomenon. Among them were the “Essex Antiquarian” (Vol 3. April 1899), “History of The Rise, Progress and Establishment of The Independence of The USA,” by William Gordon (Vol 3. p. 57), “Massachusetts Spy,” by Isaiah Thomas (May 25th 1780), and there are others.

And finally, on November 13th of 1833, the year Miller received license to preach this newly discovered truth, the most visually striking and longest lasting meteor shower ever seen and put to pen was recorded. It’s majestic appearance and unusual duration is attested to in such publications as “Christian Advocate and Journal” (F. Reed, Dec 13, 1833), New York’s “Journal of Commerce,” (Nov. 14th 1833 – the day after), “Portland Evening Advertiser,” (Nov. 26th 1833). This last, in fact, had this to say, “A more correct picture of a fig tree casting its figs when blown by a mighty wind, it was not possible to behold.” This is the very language used in the prophecy given by John, and seemed to the writer to be the perfect description of that strange night.

However, what Miller did not understand was what the “cleansing of the sanctuary” meant. This is the very thing we are trying to get at, but at the time, he believed it meant the actual return of Christ to the earth. Surprisingly few of the “Christians” of that time welcomed the prospect of Yahshua’s return, but nevertheless, a few hopeful ones believed Miller’s message, and when 1844 rolled around, they gathered together, expecting the blessed event. Absolutely nothing happened.

In light of this great disappointment, Miller and those who chose to remain continued to study the relevant passages, more intently than before, and they discovered that the decree to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the Autumn of 457 BC. So once again, in the Autumn of that year, they gathered together to await Christ’s return. Again nothing happened. At least, nothing that they could see.

Renewing their efforts to discover what was wrong with their calculations, those who had given up their traditions, and those who had been made the object of ridicule and disdain by their former church brethren, particularly after the two flawed interpretations of the prophecy, opened the Word of God again. This time, they discovered what the passages in Daniel really meant.

Those who were chosen by Yah and freed from slavery in Egypt under the care of Moses were given the Tabernacle. They were directed to build a structure to house the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments following instructions given to Moses by a direct revelation. This, we are told, was a representation of an existing Holy place in Heaven itself. Revelation 11:19 speaks of this glorious place, and I want to deal with that in my next letter as well. For now, and for the final thing in this letter, I want to write to you of a ceremony in ancient Israel called the “Day of Atonement.” When I show you what this is and was, hopefully you will understand what the cleansing of the sanctuary that Daniel predicted actually means, and why those who followed the teachings of William Miller were seemingly wrong in their beliefs.

In the 16th chapter of the book of Leviticus, which deals with the ceremonies of the Tabernacle and those who attended it, the ceremony for the Day of Atonement is described. Once a year, on the 10th day of the 7th month, the high priest was to take two goats, and cast lots on them. One of the goats was selected to be killed and the other to live. The goat that was to be killed was used as the sacrifice for the sins of all the

people that year. Its blood was then sprinkled at various points within the Tabernacle. When all this was done, however, the high priest was required to make an atonement for the sanctuary itself. “And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.” (Leviticus 16:16)

Because of the missteps of the Israelites, the most Holy place itself would become polluted, and once a year, this inner area of the Sanctuary needed to be cleansed by the blood of the sacrifice. Dressed in holy garments, the priest would sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat, within the inner sanctuary, where no man BUT the high priest was permitted to enter, or the glory of the Lord itself would slay the offender. After the sanctuary was cleansed, the High Priest, who, having killed the sacrifice, had transferred the sins of all the people unto himself, would take the remaining live goat and transfer the sins once again: from himself to the animal.

The word used for the living creature is the “scapegoat” in most translations. The Hebrew is translated from “eezezel,” or Azazel, which not only means “goat of wandering,” but is also a name following the same angelic pattern as Michael and Gabriel. In the physical realm, the earthly tabernacle’s uncleanness was transferred to a physical goat, and cast out of the camp, to wander in the wilderness until it died, taking with it all the sins of the people. In the true, spiritual sense, Christ is both the slain sacrifice AND the High Priest, who transferred the sins of all the earth unto Himself by His own death. After using His blood to cleanse the sanctuary, He would transfer the sins to a certain angel of whom we know, and that “scapegoat” would be cast into the outer darkness of Hell.

The casting of Satan and those who follow him into the fires of destruction occur after the judgement. We see by the prophecy in Daniel that we are in the phase just before it, for in 1844, the numbers tell us, Christ, who had already transferred the sins of the world unto Himself, entered the most Holy place in the Heavenly Sanctuary to cleanse it from unrighteousness. “And he said unto me, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.’” (Dan 8:14)

This very occasion the prophet Ezekiel saw in vision. “So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. And I heard Him speaking unto me out of the house; and the Man stood by me. And He said unto me, ‘Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places.’” (Ezekiel 43:5 – 7) “And the LORD said unto me, ‘Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the LORD, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary.’” (Ezekiel 44:5)

Yah told Ezekiel that the time of Christ’s entrance into the sanctuary for its cleansing; for this final work of atonement, would be of great significance for mankind. Yet how few realize the value of this symbol today! Over 150 years later, how precious few realize the importance of the event the annual Day of Atonement pointed towards! Note, however, that while the sign of the Day took place once a year, this true Day of Atonement, which unfolds in the Heavenly sanctuary, will happen just once. Just as the cross happened only one time, and there was the sacrifice slain, and Satan will one time be cast into Hell, so will the cleansing of the sanctuary be only one occasion.

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For those who are faithful and confess their sins, relying on the sacrifice of Christ, this is a most joyous time, for it is the time when their names are forever and irrevocably inscribed into the Book of Life, and their sins blotted out of remembrance. This is the very meaning of the “sealing” which is spoken of regarding the 144,000 in Revelation, for their sins are cancelled against them. As the Holy Spirit fills the place left behind, they will have triumphed over the world, and even while alive, will have developed a character able to dwell in the sanctified atmosphere of the Heavenly kingdom. For those “fair-weather” Christians, this is a time of great fear. For who knows when this period of grace will end? The sacrifice was given, and an end should have been made to sin already, but for the sake of we who are left on earth, a “probationary” period has been granted.

Only those who consistently live a life of Victory in Christ are assured of salvation, for after the atonement is ended it will be said, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” (Rev 22:11) “My spirit shall not always strive with man,” Yah said in Genesis 6:3. When this final act of atonement is completed, Christ will have already transferred all the confessed sins of the repentant to Himself. Any who are still unjust by not accepting His sacrifice, “let him be unjust still,” the Scriptures say. That is how important this message is to the world today.

This is how I began my previous letter to you. The war is ended, now all that is left for us to do is to choose which side we will stand on. There is an unbroken harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds, and Christ is that bridge, that ladder between them. But at the same time, since we know that the work which began at the cross has entered its final phase more than a century ago, the commission to tell people the truth about sin and salvation is a most pressing need! For this reason, as we will continue to look at John’s vision in the next letter, we will see that three angels were sent with this message to the world. What became of them, and what that means to us, and what we should DO with the knowledge that Christ has entered the Most Holy Place in Heaven I will also look at when I write to you again.

Until then, it’s only important that you see from this letter that there has been no stagnation of Christianity. Things are happening even as we speak in the Heavenly kingdom in preparation for Christ’s return. The time grows ever nearer, and we must seek to get ourselves and those we know ready for the great and awful end of all days. I included the diagram of the 2300 year prophecy with this letter, and also a summary of the dates, which I hope has helped you to more easily follow along. I hope to hear from you soon.

May Yah bless you richly,
David.

Letter 8: Standing in The Judgment

Dear Rachel,

As these letters have drawn closer and closer to present day events, your reactions to what I have written have been all the more vital – this is how I have been able to tell “where you are” in regards to grasping the many concepts here, and in my knowing how to proceed. I encourage you to always be as curious in your replies and exhaustive in your questions as you need to be. All the same, from what you said, I believe that we can continue our study of Revelation, and as we do so I will point out some new concepts from the chapters after the point at which we left off.

In the last letter, we looked at an overview of John’s vision up until about chapter 10. This is nearly halfway through the Bible’s last book, which has 22 chapters, and at that point we took a detour to establish a few more background details. In the first few letters, I showed the fall of Lucifer, then the fall of Man. In the middle ones, I wrote about the life of Christ and the history of the Church He established. In the previous letter, I pointed out some verses in the Old Testament that clearly mapped out the timeline concerning the mission of Christ, His crucifixion, and the passing of the Gospel to the Gentiles at the stoning of Stephen. The interesting thing is that this prophecy didn’t end there. It also extended to the year 1844, where it was declared that a “cleansing of the sanctuary” would begin.

The question is now: if John’s revelation describes the events in the last days, how and where is this “cleansing” mentioned, and what application does it have to those now living on earth? We can look at that by picking up right where we left off in the Apocalypse, with Chapter 11.

The first thing that happens is that John is told to “measure the temple of God,” the sanctuary, and he is then told that the “court” area is to be given unto the Gentiles. This is a reflection of the earthly temple, where only Jews were allowed within the more central areas of the building. There may be something in that to examine further, but for now we see what happened next: Two “witnesses” are given the ability to prophesy concerning the events to come, and they are empowered to stand against their human enemies. “And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.” (Rev 11:5)

In fact, these two representatives of Christ will have so much grace upon them that it takes an actual demon (or a demon-driven organization) to stop their testimony; and even then, only when Yah’s purpose has been fulfilled. “And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.” (Rev 11:7) But even in “defeat,” their work isn’t over yet. Verse 11 says that they will be resurrected after three and a half days in the sight of those who killed them, and before all “the people and kindreds and tongues and nations,” and ascend into Heaven, causing great fear to those who deny the power of God. The importance of this is that these two witnesses will announce that the coming of Christ is very near, “even at the door,” and will explain to all the world the importance of the heavenly sanctuary, what the “cleansing” of it that we spoke of in the last letter means, and what that signifies to us – just as this letter is doing even now.

At the very end of Revelation 11 there is verse 19, which reads: “And the temple of God was opened in Heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.” After the two witnesses are slain and ascend to Heaven, John sees the temple opened. Its secrets have been exposed, and within the sacred sanctuary we see the “ark

of His testament,” “His” being God – or more specifically, Yahshua. So the question is – what is the “ark of His testament,” and why is it in the sacred Temple?

Well, Noah’s family was preserved in a ship called an Ark, (Gen 7:1) and with him all of humanity also. The child Moses was placed in an Ark and floated down the river to safety, (Exo 2:3) and by him were the Israelites released from their Egyptian bondage. An “Ark,” we see, is a container to keep something precious safe. After Moses had led Yah’s people to freedom, He gave them this command, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. And they shall make an Ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.” (Exo 25:2,8,10,16) This Ark of the Testimony, more commonly called the Ark of the Covenant, (Num 10:33, Deu 10:8, Josh 3:6, etc.) was placed into the sanctuary, and we see from John’s vision that the Heavenly Sanctuary also reflects this idea – in fact, it is the true one upon which the earthly structure was based.

What was in the ark? Several objects were there, but primary among them was the “testimony, of all things which I [Yah] will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.” (Exo 25:22) The testimony which Yah gave to Moses in commandment was just that, the tablet of the decalogue – the Ten Commandments. And what is in the Ark in the Heavenly Sanctuary, if it is the true original? Wouldn’t it be the same thing? Some will say that the commandments of Christ (the “spiritual commandments”) are not the same as the commandments God gave to Moses. Let’s look at that for a moment.

When Yahshua was asked what the greatest commandment was, He gave two answers – the reason for this being that those two principles are interlinked so closely that one cannot exist without the other. “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Mat 22:37-40) Are these two commandments different at all from the 10 given to Moses? Apparently not, for He said, “on these two commandments hang ALL the law and the prophets.” Every principle given in Scripture is fulfilled by love for God and for your fellow man. How is this so? Well, if we love our neighbors as ourselves, will we dishonor our parents (also our fellow humans)? Or kill? Or steal? Or commit adultery? Lie against them? In fact, if we are truly concerned for their happiness, will we even envy them when they come into good fortune? These are the last six commandments – and see, they are fulfilled naturally in anyone who has the love of Christ.

Now what about the first four? Those are covered by the first of the two that Christ gave. If we love God with all our hearts, minds and souls, will we have another God before Him? Will we worship idols? Will we use His name in vain?

The fourth commandment, concerning the Seventh Day, declares it is to be a day of rest. It is an honor to the Father: “For in six days Yah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. (Exo 20:11) This is given as an explanation – a reason why we should keep the day holy, because God is the Creator. Some have said this commandment has passed away, (after all, most churches keep – or at least gather on – Sunday, right?) but has it? We see, even in Revelation, that man is commanded to “Worship Him that made Heaven and earth,” (Rev 14:7) for that is a part of the “commandments of God” that the last people will keep through Christ’s grace. (Rev 14:12) And we see from the Matthew passage

that if we follow the teachings of the Redeemer, and have Him dwelling within us, this is exactly what we will do. It will be natural for us because the same John that recorded this vision said in another letter, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.” (1 John 5:3) If we see God’s laws as being burdens, if we see them as being unnecessary or painful restrictions, we are doing something wrong.

For example, speaking of the fourth commandment, we can see that it is not just a “rule,” not just a restriction, but actually a great blessing. By the time of Christ, the Pharisees and other religious leaders had made it a tremendous burden, and unfortunately, most people today still see it as just that – a burden. This has been Satan’s plan all along, to get humans to disregard the laws of God for either fear, disinterest or false conceptions of the Father’s nature. The truth of Sabbath is like the other 9 commandments; it is also for our great benefit. How does worshipping God and not idols help US? Why, because if we lose respect for our Heavenly Father, how can He influence us to save us from our sins? In the same way, keeping a day holy, to honor Him, this will also bring us to a greater understanding of Him, which is exactly what we need.

Consider the prophet Isaiah’s description of the Seventh Day: “If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.” (Isa 58:13, 14) This was the plan: that humans should keep the day as a celebration of both Creation and re-creation – the renewing presence of Yah in the heart of the believer. All works (like the 6 previous days of creation, and our attempts to be “good” before Christ) are finished, and “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” (Heb 4:9) Sabbath is a memorial of salvation, and it causes us to “delight in Yah,” which is really what gives all the other 9 commandments their meaning.

There is a lot more on that topic, of course, and we can discuss it further as you like. For now let us continue to examine the “sanctuary” doctrine as reflected in both Revelation and Daniel. In my last letter, Daniel’s vision concluded with the promise that in the year 1844 AD, “then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” (Dan 8:14) We saw from our discussion of William Miller (also in the 7th letter) that the believers were disappointed because they believed that this “sanctuary” meant the earth – that Christ would return. After their public humiliation, those who were still eager to learn continued to study, and they soon discovered that which I showed you above.

They began to understand the meaning of the “sanctuary,” and the connection it had with the commandments. Up until that time, Miller and his followers had been keeping Sunday, or at least not having respect to the appointed Day. When they understood, however, that the Sanctuary discussed in Daniel was the one in Heaven, and that it was the spiritual reflection of the earthly Tabernacle containing the Decalogue, the truth of the Sabbath and its importance quickly followed.

So what does the Sanctuary’s cleansing mean? In the last letter, we looked at some passages from Leviticus 16, concerning the annual Day of Atonement, called “Yom Kippur” by modern Jews. The priest would first take all the sins of the congregation and transfer them through himself unto an animal. This animal was slain, and its blood was sprinkled into the tabernacle to “cleanse” it. (Lev 16:15, 16) We saw in the letters about the life of Christ that the Son of God was indeed both the sacrificed animal and the High Priest, who

took the sins of the world unto Himself, and then proceeded to use His own blood to atone for us after His resurrection.

Now, here we go a little deeper. There were two phases to this cleansing. First the priest would sprinkle the blood unto the outer parts of the Temple, and then would go in before the very altar itself, behind the veil, and cleanse the “holy place,” that only the priest could go into, or else the Shekinah (the manifest glory of Yah) would destroy the individual. Ever since His death, Christ has been making an atonement for mankind. But in 1844, we see that the Sanctuary, the innermost, most Holy Place of the Temple was entered.

Essentially, this is the beginning of judgment. Doesn't judgment begin at death? This seems to be the general case, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Heb 9:27) However, there ARE some that are judged even before death. “Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.” (1 Tim 5:24) Some, probably most, are judged after death, but those who will be left alive at the end will necessarily need to be sealed BEFORE the return of Christ... while they are still alive. In Revelation 7:3 the angel says, “Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.”

Would an angel of Yah seal for eternity those not already judged to be righteous? In fact, at the end of Revelation, we see there will come a time when all will already have been judged, both alive AND dead: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” (Rev 22:11) When Christ entered into the sanctuary to cleanse its innermost parts, this is the event that signaled the beginning of the judgment. We know that some time BEFORE He returns, the destiny of every man, woman and child will be determined.

At the end of the ceremony in Leviticus, when the Day of Atonement was done, the Israelites had to wait an entire year to be cleansed again. In this work of Final Atonement, it's a one-time thing. Is this a scary thought? It can be... but not for true believers. “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world.” (1 John 4:17) Boldness in the very day of judgment! Imagine being SURE that we are eternally secure! What a promise, what a blessing. We can know for certain that we will be sealed by the angel if alive when the trouble begins, and the Bible tells us just how to do it.

Those who will be sealed have three characteristics: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Rev 12:17) First of all, they keep the commandments of God, which we saw from above was the decalogue, in both Spirit AND Letter, and they have the testimony of Christ. This is the presence of the Holy Spirit in their minds, hearts and souls. It leads to spiritual gifts – always having the best words to share, a good and kind spirit, sometimes the gift of prophecy (Rev 19:10), but always – it will create in the believer a sense of peace, joy and contentment. What does Yah want with us, if not to make us happy?

This is where the third characteristic comes in. The third thing that separates believers from unbelievers is this: the Dragon hates them. He makes war with them, and tries to make their experience on earth as unpleasant as possible. If it were not for the sense of peace that the Holy Spirit gives them, the elect wouldn't be able to survive their journey on earth. We won't always be smiling: sometimes we will mourn, become angry, and certainly grow weary. BUT (and this is very important), we NEVER lose our sense of inner peace. We may hope for things, we may pray for things to come, but as far as where we are NOW in our

lives, we know this is where Yah has placed us, and despite the circumstances, we rejoice that He is putting us in a place where we can learn to be more like Him – even if it’s just to cause us to develop a deeper level of patience.

In these last days, as those who accept the victory that Christ offers begin to give the final warning, all those caught in their path are forced to choose... will they serve Yah or Satan? Do they love Heaven or this world? When they choose (rightly), they join the callers, and they stand in the judgment of the living. Spiritually speaking, they become the Israelites for whom the atonement is being made in the Leviticus passage. It is for them that the Sanctuary is cleansed. The key to surviving is so simple... it’s so simple those without the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment won’t get it. The Key of David, that opens and shuts the gates of salvation (Isa 22:22, Rev 3:7) is simply this – contentment. If we stand in the judgment, calmly and happily praising the Father that is doing the work of purifying us, how can we ever be lost? We will joyfully and easily pass over into Heaven at the end of the work – and it will be natural for us. That is really all it takes – just a willingness to learn and adapt to the new things He teaches you. It has nothing to do with our own efforts – salvation is a gift. Our only role is to accept it, and He will accomplish it through us.

Paul wrote, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” (Phil 4:11) And how did he do that? How did he learn that? The answer is, he couldn’t. Not in the way the world judges learning. The ability to do that needed to be CREATED there. King David of Israel prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10) There is nothing good but what Yah creates. If we are therefore to be “good,” and holy, we need to be re-created, born again. And this He will do for us, when we realize our need, acknowledge that Christ gave His life for this to be possible, and then accept the gift with thanksgiving. This is the very Gospel that Christ told us to “preach to every creature.”

Returning to John’s vision, we see that this is very much the case in the last days. The true people of Yah ARE preaching the gospel. After Revelation 12 recounts the war in Heaven, and chapter 13 describes in symbols the actions of Lucifer and his demons among the nations of mankind (which we covered briefly in the first three letters I sent), we find ourselves again in the final hours of earth’s history in Revelation 14. Here we see the blessed 144,000, those who have accepted the sacrifice of Christ, and have been purified. And then John sees the Gospel being preached.

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the Everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.’” (Rev 14:6,7) The message carried by this angel is the first of three parts given to the world in this chapter, and this initial third says, “Worship Him that made...” Worship the CREATOR. The reason for this is simple. The Creator is the only One that can create in us that new heart which suits us for Heaven. Yahshua is the name of Christ – “Yah saves.” Worship Him that made heaven, and earth... for He will make YOU also new, renewing you unto repentance and life eternal. This is the true gospel the first of the three angels gives.

What is the commandment that Christ Yahshua considered most important? “And Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.’” (Mark 12:29,30) This is the same thing... love the Creator. This is the Gospel He was giving. The ten commandments are the Gospel Itself.

“And there followed another angel, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’” (Rev 14:8) The second angel’s message continues the words of Yah to the people of earth. Come out of Babylon – come out of confusion. Come out of the fallen systems of earth, including the corrupt and impure denominations of what man’s traditions have named “religion,” and be gathered to the only true and holy institution left, the Church of Yahshua.

This is also not a new message. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4) The Apostle makes the choice clear – you either love this world, or the King of Heaven. The second of the three angels calls us out of the mess that man has made of Creation. This is truly one of James’ primary messages, for he says also in another place, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27)

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.’” (Rev 14:9-11) Now we see from chapters 12 and 13 that the Beast here is Satan’s influence on the earth in its various manifestations – and we will examine some of these shortly. This connects the third angel’s message to both the first one (worship Yah only), and the second (avoid the worldly corruptions), and the punishment attached to rejecting this warning is absolutely the most dire in all the Bible.

While much may be written about the infamous “Mark of The Beast,” here is the basic idea behind it – consider the verse that immediately follows these three angels’ message. “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Rev 14:12) Well the idea of contentment comes back into it – for the saints will need patience to survive this trial, but the twin concepts of obedience and faith are also connected. Again we see the importance of the commandments. To turn away from Yah’s guideline for our lives by either conscious decision or following along with the crowd is to take the mark of the beast in the forehead (decision) or in the hand (following along) respectively.

The importance of this message is seen in the rest of Revelation 14, for verse 14 on down describes the “harvest of earth,” that Christ prophesied in Matthew 13. It’s the very end of the world, and the going forth of the true Gospel is the event that signals its genesis.

Miller’s group, which I’ve mentioned before, continued to study the Scriptures regarding the Sanctuary, and discovered that the “law” was a missing piece of the puzzle in regard to their preparations for Christ’s return. Most of the requirements of the decalogue were obvious from society: don’t kill, don’t steal, don’t worship idols. The Sabbath one, however, was now seen in a new light, and so the faithful began to call themselves Seventh-Day Adventists, a name that seemed to be an answered prayer, for it was a title that described them exactly, and was a living testimony to all who would hear that name and understand its significance.

You may notice here that events on earth began to follow the prophecy of John. Ever since Satan slithered into the Apostolic church, wreaking havoc with their doctrine and causing fracture after fracture... finally

there was a movement that started to return to the early group's purity – casting off all the nonsense and traditions that the Dragon had added and changed. The Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) movement began to understand that here finally was the Everlasting Gospel that must be preached to all the world before Christ returns, and so they began to teach the Word, a work they called, "The Three Angels' Message."

Now, keep in mind that one of the main errors Satan has used to corrupt Christianity is the idea that the law is no longer valid. Truly, in some places in Scripture Paul writes of Christ's death, saying that His sacrifice is life, but the Law is death. This is a faithful saying: but it does nothing to take away from the 10 commandments' validity. In order to even accept the sacrifice of Christ, a believer must "die to self," (Rom 8:13, Gal 5:24, 1 Peter 2:24 etc.) and for this reason, if nothing else, those regulations, given for our own good, are still important. In fact, they are the very sign of the believer in the last days. Turning once more to John's Revelation, we see the natural result of the world's churches having accepted Satan's deception.

The next Chapter of the book (chapter 15) says that the redeemed sing the "Song of Moses." (Rev 15:3) After the last "song" that Moses gave while teaching the Israelites in Deuteronomy, he said this, "Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." (Deu 31:26) This agrees perfectly with Paul, who describes the Law as pointing out the sins that convinced him he was a sinner in need of a savior. (Rom 7:9) The redeemed will know the Law of Moses, and they also (as the rest of 15:3 states), know the song of The Lamb. They have come to that place of balance between Law and Grace, Mercy and Justice – and are fully subject to each. Only the Creator can make in us that perfect balance, and this is why the Gospel is THE way by which a person may call on the name of Christ and be saved.

"And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.'" (Rev 14:3, 15:3)

While the true witnesses are singing this song of the Gospel, blending faith and works in perfect harmony, the final plagues are being prepared for the ungodly. In the next chapter, they begin to be released.

At the end of chapter 15, the seven mighty angels that stand before the Throne are instructed to distribute the plagues, and the reason is given even as the Temple in Heaven is mentioned again. "And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled." (Rev 15:8) From earlier verses, we understand that this "smoke" is a symbol of spiritual communion between Yah and mankind. "And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." (Rev 8:4) The answer in chapter 8 was "fire of the altar," and we see here that the answer in chapter 15 is the set of the seven final plagues for earth. The plagues are Heaven's answer to the prayers of the saints: every prayer for justice, every prayer for God's help against oppression, slavery, discrimination, robbery, murder, rape... The final plagues are Yah's righteous condemnation of the people who willfully commit these great abominations.

Revelation chapter 16 describes the plagues as they fall upon the ungodly, each rich in symbolism – and perhaps too detailed for the overview we are attempting here. Of course, if you have questions about the

specifics of these, we can surely discuss them, but for the sake of brevity and ease of flow, I have only mentioned them in passing here.

The next chapter (17) reveals a great mystery to John, the observer. He is taken away to a high place, and is shown a woman sitting on a very strange animal. It is a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The name of the woman is, "Mystery: Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." The term "mother of harlots" is important here, if you will remember our earlier discussion of denominations. These are religions that have a creed written down, a document in addition to the Bible upon which they base their faith, and have a human or a body of people as their "head of the church." There are many of these, and therefore the beast carrying the woman is seen as having "many heads." Going back to the description of the 144,000 we find this interesting verse: "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." (Rev 14:4)

Some have said that this means the 144,000 are all males, and all literally virgins. From John's description of who the "false woman" is, though, it seems to indicate that it's a spiritual condition – for after all, even Moses and all the other "most holy men" of the Bible were married and had children, with very few exceptions. In light of the mystery revealed to John, the 144,000 are those who have kept themselves pure from denominations, from false teachers, from following the traditions of men rather than the plain word of Yah. Babylon, Satan's great deception, is the "mother of harlots," and the "women" that the redeemed have kept themselves from are these very harlots – false, man-and-demon-made religions. It is to their great benefit that the 144,000, the true Bride, have escaped the beast's attentions, because, "the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." (Rev 17:16)

It is not that the woman is overtly evil, apparently, for verse 6 says she is "drunken" with the blood of the martyrs. She is misled, and it is the beast itself – false religions and traditions – that "goeth into perdition." (Rev 17:11) Here we see the fullness of Satan's plan for the people of earth revealed. From our earliest discussion of him falling from Heaven, Lucifer has been tightening his grip on all the power he has been allowed to wield.

The fallen angel knows the prophecies – he knows the symbolism of Leviticus 16. He knows he is the scapegoat upon whom will eventually fall all the sins of the redeemed. He knows destruction is soon to come upon him, and he is currently in a state of "damage control." If he can get all the humans of the earth to die in their own sins, they bear the heat of the fiery destruction themselves, and he is spared their guilt. Only the sins of the REDEEMED will Satan have to bear, therefore he is naturally trying to ensure that there will be as few redeemed as possible. Because of his hatred of mankind and our Creator, because he has no choice but to try and spare himself as much of the weight of man's sins as he can, his whole purpose is to carry the misled "woman," of all the earth into the pit with him.

But in the midst of this, his final attempt to turn men away from heaven's salvation, Yah also performs His final moves in this cosmic struggle. These final movements are the history of the Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church, which was formed out of those faithful souls in Adventism that have resisted every modern attempt by the Enemy to dilute or corrupt the Gospel. I pray that this series of studies has been an opportunity for you to understand the significance of all that our Father and the Savior have done for our sakes, and while there are many more things we could discuss, and many details of the things I have

Letters To Rachel

mentioned, I believe that what I have written to you so far will serve as a strong foundation for our future conversations.

I look forward to hearing your response to this letter, and to any other questions you may have as a result.

In Yahshua's perfect love,
David.

AFTERWORD

Letters to Rachel is a true transcript of the conversation described in this book, modified only to remove unnecessary details and identifying information. Rachel is a real person, whose permission I obtained to publicize our exchanges when I first began to realize that my description of the Bible's overarching plan of salvation might be of benefit to others.

Sadly, although Rachel did attend several Church meetings during the time of our exchanges, we lost contact over the years. I pray that the short time we spent together has continued to be a positive influence on her life, and that someday, perhaps, her interest in these most important matters of the soul and spirit will be revived.

Until then, these letters may serve others as an introduction to Biblical truth. In addition to the text transcripts that were compiled to form this book, there are audio files available of their contents that may be found here: <http://faithofjesus.to/radio.html>

I invite any and all who have a desire to look deeper into the matters presented here to contact me, or others who are my fellow-laborers in the Gospel of Yahshua the Christ. We may be found at the website, phone numbers, and email address listed below.

May the Creator, Yahweh, and His Dear Son, richly bless you.

David Aguilar Jr.
(February, 2020)

The Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church*

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