

Chapter 3

In a Manner of Speaking

Our little encounter with *'asher*, the primitive Hebrew pronoun in II Samuel 7, warns us of another potential roadblock to the understanding of Biblical prophecy: Language. As I said, language itself can sometimes get in the way of our understanding. Our English translations don't supply the nuances and innuendoes of the original text, and the cultural baggage that the scriptures' first hearers carried with them is now on its way to Cleveland. What's more, languages shift and warp over time. And societal and technological changes accelerate the shift in a language's lexicon.

To my mind, it's just one more indication of God's provision for us that Hebrew was on its way out as a living language by the close of the Old Testament canon, about four hundred years before Christ—supplanted by Aramaic, a close cognate of Hebrew, and later by Greek. In the first century, *koine*, common or Hellenistic Greek—a dialect distinct from classical, or *Attic* Greek—was the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world. But it too was destined for the linguistic scrap heap, to be replaced in common use by Latin. Thus both original Biblical languages were functionally dead, or at least very quiet, shortly after the Scriptures that relied upon them were completed. The benefit for us, of course, is that the lexicons are no longer moving targets. Hebrew and koine Greek words no longer change meaning over time like English words do.

This is good news and bad news. On the one hand, we can be reasonably sure what the Biblical writers actually meant to say (which is not to say our translations accurately transmit this). But it also means that they didn't have the vocabulary needed to express some of the things they saw in their dreams and visions.

For example, if John had been shown a vision of the Hiroshima bombing at the end of World War II, he could not have used koine Greek to say, "On Monday, August 6, 1945, at 8:15 AM, America used a B-29 airplane to drop a 12.5 kiloton atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, destroying everything within one and a half miles and creating a huge, black mushroom cloud." John didn't have the right linguistic tools for the job. The Gregorian calendar wouldn't be invented for another six hundred years. No clock capable of pinning time down to the minute would come along for over a millennium. And the names of the nations involved would just have been odd sounding words that couldn't have been translated or understood. He not only had no word for "airplane," he couldn't even have conceived of manned flight. He had never seen an explosion of any kind, so the phrase "twelve and a half kilotons"—meaning to us that the bomb

produced an explosion equivalent to that much trinitrotoluene—would be gibberish to him. He *did* have a word for atom, though—Greek is where *we* got it. But the idea of making a bomb by *splitting* an atom? No way. An atom was something John, had he been a philosopher, would have known as a fundamental, indivisible particle of matter.

No, the best John could have done with this vision, with the vocabulary available to him, would have come out something like this: “About the eighth hour on the second day of the week in the fifth month of the reign of the thirty-second King of the West, a great silver eagle dropped a stone to the earth. It fell upon a city of the King of the East. And as I, John, watched, it grew as brilliant as the sun, so no man could look upon it, and a mighty wind blew north, south, east, and west, from the place where the stone came to rest upon the earth. No man, nor beast, nor house, nor tree could stand against the wind and against the fire which proceeded from the stone for the space of thirteen stadia. And the heavens became as black as sackcloth, and the sky rolled up like a scroll....”

We’ve all seen atomic explosions (on film, anyway). And this is precisely how we might describe one if limited to a first-century vocabulary. So I think we can cut John and the other prophets a little slack. They weren’t trying to be coy or mysterious with their prognostications. They just didn’t have the words to express themselves.

The lesson for us today is *Prophecy Principle Number Nine*: we must try to see things through the eyes of the prophet. What was he shown? Is there a logical, visual explanation for what was recorded? Often there is, but I’ll give you fair warning: there are times when prophets describe things that have no more objective basis in our experience than in theirs. God is, so to speak, a master of “special effects.” If the prophet needs to see a dragon in order to understand the evil nature of Satan, then a dragon he shall see. Even if the devil *can* transform himself into an angel of light, God shows His prophets the unvarnished truth.

But speaking of Satan, there is another issue we need to be aware of. The devil may be evil, but he’s not stupid. *Prophecy Principle Number Ten*: the fraud factor. There are many times in history and scripture when Satan has engineered counterfeit fulfillments to God’s purposes and prophecies.

Perhaps the most striking example from history is the incredibly pervasive mother-and-child cult of Nimrod and his wife Semiramis. It took many forms over the centuries, but the basic ingredients were the exalted mother (often presented as a virgin) and the heroic son (or husband) who died and rose, in some form, from the dead—sound familiar? The scenario gave rise to a plethora of fertility cults, showing up throughout the ancient world long before the time of Christ. Their “worship” centered on ritual orgiastic sex—they were, after all, fertility cults—which manifested itself in male and female temple prostitution, the

antithesis of God’s plan for family-centered social stability, which in turn is a purposeful metaphorical reflection of the godhead. In some extreme permutations, such as the worship of Molech and Chemosh in the land of Canaan, the rituals went so far as to include human sacrifice—“passing children through the fire”—where infants were burned alive in the outstretched arms of a red-hot metal statue of the god. Satan must have loved the irony of that.

This sort of behavior explains why Yahweh insisted that the Canaanites be totally wiped out when the Jews entered the promised land. There could be no compromise—no peaceful coexistence—between light and darkness, between life and death. Those who accuse God of being overly harsh and judgmental are simply misinformed.

Isis and Osiris in Egypt, Astarte (or Ishtar, the origin of our word Easter) and Tammuz in Mesopotamia, Rhea and Kronos in Babylon, Parvati and Iswara in India, Diana and Apollo, Venus and Cupid, Fortuna and Jupiter, Athena and Bacchus among others in the Greco-Roman world—these and many more are simply variations on the theme. As a matter of fact, the lineages of most gods of antiquity lead directly back to Nimrod, and through him to his father Cush—the brother of Canaan, son of Ham, and grandson of Noah. You may know Cush as Bel, Hermes, Mercury, Janus, Chaos, Vulcan, Merodach, or somebody else. When you sort it all out, it’s amazing how few “gods” there really were—we find, rather, hundreds of different permutations of the same prototypical fraud. For a fascinating look at how it all ties together, see Alexander Hislop’s classic *The Two Babylons*. This treatise traces the false religion’s roots and drops its legacy squarely in the lap of the Roman Catholic Church, many of whose rites and traditions stem directly from the Babylonian mystery religion. Although Hislop’s methodology has come under fire in recent years, it’s still enough to make you give up Christmas.

Satan’s frauds will naturally play a major role in things to come, as well. Without getting too far ahead of ourselves, it can be said here that the man commonly referred to as the Antichrist will become the devil’s ultimate attempt to foist a counterfeit savior upon an unsuspecting world. But we’ll save the details on that bad boy for later.

Because of the limitations of language and the prevalence of impostors, Yahweh chose to be less than straightforward with his revelations at times. He could have just told us the straight scoop about a great many things—but not if He wanted us to appreciate the significance of what would happen. Somehow, saying

“Don’t trust this Antichrist fellow; he’s not a very nice man,” doesn’t seem sufficient, though it’s true enough. But calling him the “beast from the sea” might get our attention. *Prophecy Principle Number Eleven*, then, is that God uses symbols, types, and dress rehearsals, not just flat predictions.

When Jeremiah bought a clay jar from the potter, and then broke it to smithereens before the priests and elders, it was a symbol of what God was about to do to Judah—break *it* in pieces. When Ezekiel was told to take two sticks, write “Judah” on one and “Ephraim” on the other, and then join them together in his hand, it symbolized the future regathering of all Israel as one nation under one King, something that hadn’t been seen since Solomon’s day. Symbols like this are powerful pictures of what God intends to do.

Types are similar to symbols. These are things or people in history that foreshadow future events in some way. It is often said that Joseph was a “type” of Christ. One commentator counted forty-two different places in the story of Joseph that had a direct parallel in the ministry of Yahshua—well beyond coincidence. Melchizedek, the mysterious priest-king of Salem mentioned in Genesis 14, was clearly identified in Hebrews 7 as a type of Christ. The writer of Hebrews even quotes Psalm 110:4, where David said in the middle of a clearly Messianic passage, “...**You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.**” So we can learn something important about Christ by studying His “types,” Joseph, Melchizedek, and others. Likewise, we should be aware of types in our study of prophecy. Was Noah’s ark, for example, a type of something yet to come?

Another way God has chosen to deliver his prophecies is through what I’d call “dress rehearsals.” These are similar to types, but the future event is acted out, as though by characters in a play. Like other metaphors, you can’t stretch them too far without breaking them, but they can shed valuable insight into things yet to come. Yahshua Himself referred to the misadventures of the prophet Jonah as a sign, a dress rehearsal, for His generation. Jonah spent three days in the belly of the great fish, and through the ordeal made possible the salvation of a wicked and idolatrous city. Yahshua likewise spent three days in the belly of the earth (actually, “heart of the land”—Jerusalem), and through His ordeal made possible the salvation of the whole world—if only we would repent as the Ninevites did.

To my mind, the most striking dress rehearsal in the whole Bible is Abraham’s offering of Isaac on Mt. Moriah. The story, related in Genesis 22, is the very image of God’s offering up of his Son on the cross of Calvary. The father and the promised son go on a three-day journey. The mode of travel? A donkey. Their destination? The “region of Moriah”—not, I suspect, the knoll that would someday serve as the location of Solomon’s Temple, but a location nearer Moriah’s actual summit, a few hundred yards further north, the very spot where Christ would be executed on a rough wooden cross two thousand years later.

What does the obedient son carry upon his back? Wood, necessary for the sacrifice. And what did God provide? A ram—a male lamb, if you will—whose destiny was sealed with a thicket of thorns upon his head. And if all of this is still sounding like a coincidence to you, listen to verse 14: **“And Abraham called the name of the place Yahweh Will Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.’”**

God’s provision for our salvation, though, wouldn’t have done us much good if we had never heard about it. Oh, I won’t debate that people *can* be saved without ever hearing the name of Yahshua—a.k.a. Jesus—every Old Testament saint falls into that category, including quite a roster of gentile believers. It’s clear that the blood of the Messiah is what atones for the sins of all worshippers of the true and living God in all ages, whether they are familiar with the historical events surrounding His sacrifice or not. But there’s a reason Yahshua issued the Great Commission: truth is much more accessible if it’s taught, not just absorbed. Our salvation isn’t a game to God. He’s quite serious about it. He wants a personal relationship with us. That’s why He made us. Our salvation gives us a sinless standing before him. An honest seeker may come to a knowledge of God by observing creation (**“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.”**—Psalm 19:1) but the fact remains, he’s much more likely to discover God’s greatness and love if he’s *told* about it.

That, I suspect, is why Yahweh chose to reveal his plan to us, telling us in advance what he planned to do, and why. This plan is woven throughout scripture, made known and worked out, for the most part, through the life of the Nation of Israel. But it started before Moses, even before Abraham. Actually, the first indication we have of a master plan goes all the way back to the creation account.

Whatever you think of the scientific merits of the Genesis creation record (a subject *way* beyond the scope of this book), it is obvious that the primary reason God described it this way was to teach *spiritual* truths—not geology or physics. God says he worked for six “days” (Hebrew *yowm*, literally “hot periods”) creating the universe, and rested on the seventh. Then, when giving the Law to the people of Israel, He reiterated the pattern, actually writing it in stone with His own finger: **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of Yahweh your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days Yahweh made the**

heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” (Exodus 20:8-11)

All the word “Sabbath” means is “intermission.” It’s from a primitive root meaning “to repose, or to desist from exertion.” The people of Israel must have appreciated getting a day off, of course, but could it be there was more to the Fourth Commandment than merely making sure these ex-slaves didn’t work too hard? I mean, it’s the lengthiest commandment of the ten; it seems to me that it’s *got* to have a deeper meaning than “Kick back and relax now and then, folks. You look like you could use a break.” The commandment doesn’t even say anything about going to church (okay, *tabernacle*), just “Rest on the seventh day.”

It’s also pretty obvious that Yahweh didn’t *need* to rest after the sixth day of creation. The Islamic scriptures, confused as always, have great fun with that concept. After giving *scores* of silly and conflicting creation accounts, most of them loosely based on the creation week concept Muhammad borrowed from the Talmud, they berate the Jewish God for getting tired—poor, weak god that he is. Allah, they insist, *never* needs to sit down and catch his breath. I must agree: figments of the imagination like Allah seldom get weary. Snoopy and Charlie Brown never get tired either.

Since God didn’t need to rest after creating the universe, there must be some *other* reason He wanted the Sabbath rest memorialized. If we poke around a little, we find this pattern of seven (more specifically, six-plus-one) popping up all over the place, leading us to the universally held conclusion that seven is the scriptural number for perfection, or completion. The creation period was described as a week (or “seven”) of days. There was a week of weeks—forty-nine days—between the feast of Firstfruits and the feast of Pentecost. (We’ll look closer at these feasts in a moment.) A week of months comprised the Jewish religious calendar, the cycle of all seven Levitical feasts. Then there was the sabbatical year, when the *land* was to lie fallow and rest after six years of farming it: **“When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to Yahweh. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Yahweh.”** (Leviticus 25:2-4) There was even a week of weeks of years (*also* in Leviticus 25), called Jubilee, Hebrew for “free-for-all” (just kidding; it’s a transliteration of *yobel*, which is the blast of the trumpet that signaled the beginning of the festival). Jubilee was an additional year added to the seventh sabbatical year (i.e., the fiftieth) in which bondslaves received their freedom, “leased” land reverted to its original owners, and so forth.

And there’s more. The allotted typical span of a man’s life was pegged at seven decades (Psalm 90:10) by the world’s first actuary, Moses—who himself lived to the ripe old age of 120. John wrote to seven Asian churches with

messages that were apparently prophetic of the entire future history of the Church age. And finally, in one of the most intriguing prophecies in the Bible, Daniel was told that 490 years (seventy “sevens” or septades), would wrap up the history of his people, the Jews. (Don’t get all excited; there’s a gap of indeterminate length after the 489th week.) We’ll get to that one in detail later. It’s enough to make you a raving septophile.

It shouldn’t be too surprising, then, that even before the time of Christ, Jewish sages had come to the conclusion that humanity would run a seven-millennium course. The Torah never actually *says* it, you understand, but there are hints and indications galore. According to the Talmud, the first 2000 years would be a time of chaos; the next 2000 would mark the years of Torah, when the Law of Moses would reign; the third 2000-year period would be the Messianic age (and remember, these are *Jewish* writings, not Christian), followed by 1000 years of peace, after which Messiah would renew the world. Rabbi Benjamin Blech, Professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University, states, “God created the world in six days and then completed it with a Sabbath—a day dedicated to spirituality and the soul as opposed to the secular emphasis of the weekdays. Every thousand-year period corresponds to a day of creation. Six thousand years complete the cycle of the secular. According to tradition, the seventh millennium, the one coming in the year 2240, will introduce a new Sabbath-like kind of existence different than any other mankind has ever experienced. Life will be...attuned to the holy, the sacred, the good and the Godly.”

So the Jewish scholars have predicted a millennium of peace, starting in the year A.D. 2240 (i.e., the year 6000 on the Jewish calendar). Meanwhile, Christian chronology takes its traditional cues from an Irish bishop, James Ussher, who in the early 17th century pinned down the date of creation at 6:00 P.M. on Saturday, October 22, 4004 B.C. Nobody takes Ussher seriously today. He is held up as an object of ridicule. His ideas are considered preposterous and naive. But are they? After reading about his painstaking research and scholarship, I found myself admiring and respecting the good bishop. And I came to the conclusion that he may have been right after all, sort of. Could it be that he came close to the right date—for the *wrong thing*?

Today there is a plethora of solid scientific evidence that the universe is somewhere in the neighborhood of fourteen billion years old. Further, I am convinced that the Genesis record is not at odds with this evidence. (For an intriguing explanation, read MIT graduate Gerald L. Schroeder’s *The Science of God*, Broadway Books, 1997.) But the Bible has one central theme: Yahweh’s redemption of our sinful race. Humanity’s countdown, therefore, started not at the beginning of creation, but at the *fall of Adam*. If the Jewish sages are right about God’s 7000 year cycle, and if Ussher’s starting point is even remotely correct,

then the “Seventh Millennium” will start sometime in the next couple of hundred years. Between Ussher and the Rabbis, it appears that the world as we know it should go poof sometime between 1995 and 2240.

Some interesting things pop up when you look at the millennial milestones. They all represent high and/or low points of human history—watershed eras or turning points. Keep in mind that a detailed timeline was passed down to us in scripture for a reason—God wants us to know *when* these things happened. Why?

We begin with the fall of man and the expulsion from the garden, roughly 4000 B.C. by Ussher’s reckoning. By 3000 B.C. the human race, now millions strong, was pretty much a lost cause. But a gentleman named Noah appeared about this time, and God used him and his family to rekindle the human race after the flood. So the earth was repopulated, and sometime around 2000 B.C., Abram, a.k.a. Abraham, showed up. He was called by God to be the father of the Jews, His own chosen people, through whom He would bless the rest of us. Abe believed Him, and his faith went down in legend and history.

By 1000 B.C., Abraham’s descendents numbered in the tens of millions. One of them, David, became Israel’s greatest king, a “man after God’s own heart.” Spiritually, I’m afraid, the Jewish nation went pretty much downhill from there. But a thousand years after David, one of *his* descendants, as prophesied, turned out to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Yahshua of Nazareth, son of Yahweh, born of a virgin in the Jewish royal line, gave us a very good reason to start our calendar over from the date of his birth. (Naturally, we got it wrong by a year or two.)

I was puzzled by the seeming lack of milestone material at A.D. 1000. What man, what event, marked God’s plan at this time? While I looked at tree after insignificant tree, the forest loomed before me, dark and forbidding. Yahshua had told the Church at Thyatira, **“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants...”** (Revelation 2:19-20) This admonition would ring loud and true throughout the whole of Christendom in A.D. 1000, and indeed, from the time of Charlemagne until the Reformation. This time marked the ascendance of ecclesiastical power in Europe—a unified (until the final Catholic/Orthodox split in 1054) and militant church, pervasive in its influence and aggressive in its lust for power and wealth. But it was also an age of simple faith among those who showed a depth of devotion rarely seen in later times.

The Catholic Church had at this crucial time the means to spread the love of Christ far and wide. But instead, it was seduced by the false doctrine of “that woman Jezebel.” Who? “Jezebel” was not those within the Church whose “love, service, faith, and patience” were commended by Yahshua. She was not the

common laity, who were purposely kept in the dark about the love of God and their freedom in Christ. (Freedom is *so* untidy in the hands of the masses, isn't it?) No, she's the Kings, the Archbishops, and Popes who used their offices for their own selfish gain, for money, power, and prestige—not unlike the evil Queen Jezebel of old, who, you will recall, was destined to get eaten by dogs in the street. Then as now, a politicized clergy is only marginally better (if at all) than a government totally bereft of God's influence.

In the next chapter I will discuss—briefly—the entire course of Christian history as revealed in Revelation, for it leads us right up to tomorrow's doorstep. But for now let's skip ahead to the next, the last, general milestone: A.D. 2000. What happened? *Nothing*. Anybody remember the Y2K bug? But the harbingers of a major shift in the economy of God are all around us, like—to use Yahshua's metaphor—a fig tree sprouting buds when summer is approaching. For one thing, Israel is back in the Land as a national entity. Who saw that one coming? Half a dozen specifically predicted Last Days “signs” show up in our newspapers regularly. And look at the weapons of mass destruction we invented during the cold war. Never before in history has man had the technology to bring about the kind of destruction described in the Book of Revelation—though God has always had it. So although we didn't see “the second coming of Christ” at the stroke of midnight, January 1, 2000, the stage is set for His return.

At first glance, then, it seemed that none of these millennium markers were precise, set-your-clock-by-it sort of affairs. The milestones appeared, rather, to be indistinct wrinkles in the continuum of God's interaction with man. At none of these junctures did anyone even realize what was happening until it was all over (with the possible exception of Anna and Simeon—Luke 2:21-38). But think about it: there is no reason God's milestones should be tied to round-numbered years like 1000 or 2000 on our admittedly contrived Gregorian calendar. If we choose another series of thousand-year-apart markers, this time counting from A.D. 33, the whole subject comes into focus. Why 33? Because that's the year Yahshua of Nazareth proved He was God's Messiah by fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel 9, followed a few days later by proving He was *God Himself* by rising from the dead under His own power. 33 was a very good year for Bible prophecy.

Moving backward from there to the first thousand-year increment (967 B.C.), we come to Solomon, heir to the throne of King David. This was the very year he began construction of the Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. This was to be the legacy, the outward manifestation of the worshipful heart of his illustrious father—a man after God's own heart.

The farther back we go, of course, the less confident we can be about the accuracy of the dates we're dealing with. The manuscripts and translations vary more in their transmission of numbers than any other subject. There is therefore

no consensus among scholars for dates earlier than about 1000 B.C. However, I found several sources who pinpointed the next milestone back as the year Abraham's promised son, Isaac, was conceived. While that's certainly significant, I'd like to suggest that perhaps this calendar reckoning is off by ten or twelve years. That far back, it's certainly possible. My theory (for which I have no concrete evidence—SF7) is that this millennial milestone marked the almost-sacrifice of Isaac, the child of promise (Genesis 22), on the mountain where the Temple would be built by Solomon (I Kings 6), and also where the ultimate Child of Promise, Yahshua the Messiah, would be sacrificed two thousand years later. The poetry of that scenario is hard to beat (though it's equally hard to verify).

And what of the milestones after A.D. 33? As I said, I found nothing but general malaise in the Church at A.D. 1000. Yes, it had finally achieved dominance throughout Europe and Asia Minor, with virtually every ethnic group and feudal monarchy espousing it—at least nominally. But this was a far cry from the Apostolic Church. It was driven by greed and tradition, bound by ignorance and superstition. Nobody understood the unique relationship God wanted to share with His children. Grace was considered a commodity to be bought and sold—stuffing the already-bulging coffers of the rich and powerful Church of Rome.

The year 1033 represents what has to be the low water mark of Christendom. This was the first full year of the papal reign of Benedict IX. Placed on the throne as a mere youth (some say he was as young as twelve) by his father Alberic, the young Pope was arguably the worst in a long line of bad Popes. Nigel Cawthorne, in his book *Six Lives of the Popes*, said he was a bisexual who sodomized animals and ordered several murders. He practiced witchcraft, necromancy, and Satanism and “abandoned himself to excessive immorality and the most shameful debauchery.” Benedict was said to have lived in the Lateran palace like a Turkish sultan, running what critics called the best brothel in Rome. Meanwhile, his brothers ruled the city as if they owned it, precipitating a crime wave of robbery and murder. He sold the papacy for 500 kilograms of gold to his godfather Gracian (Gregory VI) in 1045 so he could marry his beautiful cousin, the daughter of Girard de Saxo, only to seize it back again two years later. In short, this sick puppy wasn't exactly what Paul had in mind when he described the qualifications for a leader of the Church to young Timothy. A year before Benedict's untimely death in 1055 the Church split forever into warring fragments. So much for **“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:35)

But there's more to it. Numbers 5:11-31 delineates an obscure and odd-sounding procedure for determining the guilt or innocence of a woman suspected by her husband of infidelity. The jealous husband was to bring her before the priest with an “offering of remembrance” of barley meal, *without* the usual olive oil (metaphorical of the Holy Spirit) or frankincense (a symbol of purity through

sacrifice). The priest was to take dust from the floor of the sanctuary, place it into “holy water” in an earthen vessel, and make the woman swear her innocence. She would then drink the water. If she was guilty, her “belly would swell and her thigh would rot,” but if she were innocent, she would be blessed with children.

I’m sure you found all that quite fascinating, but you’re still asking, “So what?” In 1033, a great earthquake shook Jerusalem. Result? The Spring of Gihon (the sole source of water for the old city, located a stone’s throw from the temple mount) turned bitter—a condition that persisted for forty years. This was taken as a bad sign by the Rabbis at the Jerusalem Academy, so they left town and set up shop in Damascus. The Islamic overlords then raised taxes for all non-Muslims, driving out the last remaining Jewish farmers. But there were also ramifications for Christendom. This year saw a great surge in Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, since one millennium had passed since Yahshua’s passion. And Catholic pilgrims, like the departing Jews, found the waters of Gihon (now literally mingled with the dust of the sanctuary) poisonous.

Yahweh has described Himself as “a jealous God” (Exodus 20:6). Through the events of 1033, He flatly stated that both Israel and the Church had been unfaithful to Him. The curse of Numbers 5 had come to pass. Not only did the Jews’ “belly swell and thigh rot,” but the prophecy concerning the Church of Thyatira had come about: **“Indeed, I will cast her [the false prophetess “Jezebel,” who had seduced the Church] into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.”** (Revelation 2:22) The beginning of the sixth millennium, 1033, was characterized by spiritual adultery on the part of both Yahweh’s “wife” Israel and Yahshua’s “bride,” the Church.

If this line of reasoning has any merit at all (mind you, it was not overtly predicted) then the last millennial milestone will occur in 2033. If this is correct (and I personally am convinced that it is), then that is when Yahshua will return to earth in glory to reign upon the throne of David for the final millennium. But an awful lot of scripture must be fulfilled between now and then; I’m getting just slightly ahead of myself.

During their wilderness wanderings, the Nation of Israel was instructed to observe a series of seven annual festivals, spread out over a seven month period. There’s that number again: think perfection, completion. Some of these were memorials of previous events in the national life of Israel, days of remembrance of God’s deliverance and provision. But prophetically, they should be of great interest to us today. You see, the first four of these feasts have proved to be

something more: predictions of the Messiah's role in the grand plan of God, dress rehearsals for the death and resurrection of Yahshua the Messiah and the coming of His bride, the Church. These seven festivals are often erroneously referred to as "The Feasts of Israel." Although Israel was instructed to celebrate the holy convocations, Yahweh plainly states that these are *His* feasts, so we can expect them to have ramifications that go beyond Israel's national interests.

After reiterating the law of the Sabbath, Moses writes: **"These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is Yahweh's Passover."** (Leviticus 23:4-5) No Jew in Moses' time could have missed the significance of Passover. The terrifying memory of the tenth and final plague was still very fresh in their minds. God's Destroyer had gone throughout the land of Egypt in a single night and slain the firstborn sons in every household not marked by the blood of the lamb in accordance with God's specific instructions. The ultimate implication of these instructions, however, was certainly lost on the original participants, for they were prophetic of another bloody event still many years in the future.

A perfect one-year-old male lamb was to be selected by each family on the 10th day of Nisan, a month in the spring. (Note: the early Jews observed a lunar calendar of approximately 354 days—12 months of about 29½ days. The sliver of the new moon signaled the beginning of each month. Of course, they added an intercalary month every three or four years (seven years out of nineteen) to keep things in line with the sun's cycle. Thus Nisan could fall in either March or April according to our Gregorian-calendar reckoning—beginning at the new moon closest to the vernal equinox. At the time of the exodus, Yahweh designated Nisan the first month of the Jewish calendar.)

But I digress. The lamb was kept with the family until the 14th day of Nisan. During this time, it was inevitable that a bond, a personal relationship if you will, formed between the lamb and the family. It became almost like a pet. It was therefore a painful experience for everyone, sacrificee and sacrificor, when at twilight on the 14th (literally, "between the two evenings," i.e., between dusk and total darkness, at the very end of the Passover "day") the lamb was publicly killed before "the whole assembly." God designed it so that there was more to this sacrifice than merely the cost of the animal. It wasn't just business. It was personal.

At the first Passover, Yahweh told the Hebrew families to do something that must have seemed really odd: some of the lamb's blood was to be painted onto the entrance of each of their dwellings, on the wooden uprights and the lintel, the horizontal piece at the top. **"And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the**

plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:7, 13) The Israelites did as they were instructed, no doubt scratching their heads. There was no way for them to know they were acting out an elaborate dress rehearsal for an event that would take place fifteen hundred years later. At that time the sacrifice would again bring those who trusted God out of bondage. The blood of the sacrifice would again be smeared on a horizontal wooden beam and the vertical post that supported it—this time a Roman cross. It was still a doorway, in a manner of speaking—one that provided access to God Himself. Again the sacrificial lamb, without spot or blemish, was slain before the whole assembly. Again the children would feel the pain along with the lamb as the father offered up the sacrifice—feeling the agony of knowing that He *must* do so in order that his children might live. This time, the lamb was the Lamb of God, and the father was *The Father*, Yahweh Himself.

When God saw the blood on the wooden beams, He “knew” two things. First, a sacrifice had been made: innocent blood had been shed—atonement had been made for sin. Second, the people in the house were trusting in that blood to keep death at bay. Did you notice what God had said? “The blood shall be a sign *for you...*” He was virtually screaming that the Passover feast was prophetic of things to come.

What was lost on everyone until after the fact was the exquisite detail of the prophecy’s fulfillment. Yahshua’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem coincided with the day the paschal lamb would have been brought into the household, on the tenth day of Nisan. For the next four days He lived and walked among the people. They got to know him well. At the end of the “examination period,” Pontius Pilate pronounced, “I find no fault in Him,” declaring in effect, that the Passover Lamb was indeed without spot or blemish. Since the Jews reckoned their “days” from sundown to sundown, Yahshua and His disciples partook of the “last supper” on the same “day” He was betrayed, crucified, and laid in a borrowed tomb—the fourteenth day of Nisan, A.D. 33. The prophecy of the first feast, Passover (also known as *Pesach*, the Feast of our Freedom), had been fulfilled, literally, down to the last detail.

The next feast started on the very next day: **“And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to Yahweh; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.”** (Leviticus 23:6-8)

The memorial aspect of this festival was, of course, the beginning of the exodus from Egypt. The Jews' departure was so sudden, they didn't even have time to let their bread dough rise: **"And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, 'We shall all be dead.' So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders.... Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of Yahweh went out from the land of Egypt."** (Exodus 12:33-34, 40-41)

This event in turn was the fulfillment of an earlier prophecy, one given to Abraham: **"Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.'"** (Genesis 15:13-14) In case you were wondering about that little 30-year discrepancy, remember, the Israelites were in favor with the Egyptian government for some time after their arrival in the Land of Goshen. The affliction started only after Joseph's Pharaoh died.

To understand the then-future significance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, you need to appreciate the symbolism of leaven, or yeast. It is used throughout scripture as a metaphor for sin. Made from bran, vetch, or barley, ground fine, mixed with water and allowed to rot, the fermentation process made leaven an apt picture of the corruption in our lives—a little bit of it permeates the whole loaf, or the whole *life* as the case may be, changing it from within. So when the Israelites were instructed to remove all the yeast from their homes for seven days, it was a picture of the removal—the *complete* removal—of sin from our lives. And how did that happen? Through God's perfect sacrifice. On the fifteenth of Nisan, A.D. 33, Yahshua's body lay cold and dead in the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea.

And His spirit? Remember the Passover lamb? It was to be completely consumed—what wasn't eaten by the family was to be burned. That's a picture of judgment. On the fifteenth of Nisan, Yahshua was enduring the wrath of God for our sins, so that they would be removed from us forever. And just as the smoke of the burnt sacrifice would rise heavenward as a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, Yahshua would himself rise from the hell he endured because of our transgressions. Is it any wonder that God designated this day a holy convocation—a special Sabbath?

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Chag Matzah*) was a week-long celebration, ending with another Sabbath. Although the Exodus record doesn't say so, my guess (SF4) is that the original seventh day marked the Jews' little adventure at the Red Sea. Their miraculous deliverance via the parting of the waters and the drowning of Egypt's army was the defining moment: proof that their slavery was

indeed a thing of the past. There was no going back. Not after that. And the later fulfillment? By the second Sabbath, Yahshua had revealed Himself in his resurrected body no fewer than six times—proving to those disciples who were willing to accept the fact of His resurrection that *our* slavery was a thing of the past. Thomas, as it transpired, had not witnessed the risen Messiah for himself at this point. Doubting, he demanded tangible, hands-on proof; and he received it. I dare say those in the world today who can't quite bring themselves to take the living Christ at face value will also, like Thomas, receive tangible, hands-on proof of their own—whether they want it or not. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

At any rate, by the second Sabbath, the Feast of Unleavened Bread had been fulfilled—literally and in detail. There's a pattern starting to emerge here.

The next feast was called “Firstfruits,” or *Bikurim*. It was described in the Torah like this: **“The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of Yahweh your God.... And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.””** (Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:9-14)

This was to be a time of thanksgiving for God's provision when the children of Israel entered the promised land. It was first celebrated “for real” some thirty-eight years after the law was given, right after Joshua led the people across the Jordan River into Canaan: **“Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.”** (Joshua 5:10-12)

The timing was just as God had planned it. They celebrated the Passover on the appointed day, the fourteenth of Nisan, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the fifteenth, in which they sampled the grain of Canaan for the first

time. The manna—that miraculous substance that had sustained them for forty years during their wilderness wanderings—ceased on the very next day, the sixteenth. That, of course, tended to make them very thankful for the spring barley that was just then ready to be harvested on the plains of Jericho. So on the day following the High Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the appointed day for the Feast of Firstfruits—they were to take a sheaf of grain to the priest, who would wave it before Yahweh in thankful acknowledgement of his provision for them. They were not to partake themselves until they had given thanks to God in this way, with a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a drink offering—all symbolic of Messiah’s future sacrifice, God’s ultimate provision.

Just as the manna was a temporary measure, a harbinger of God’s future provision in the land of promise, the law itself was only meant to be a picture, a prediction, of God’s coming redemption. What form would it take? The feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread had seen literal day-for-day fulfillments in the life and death of Yahshua of Nazareth. What happened, then, on the sixteenth of Nisan, A.D. 33? Well, gee, it was a pretty average day, except for that one little incident in Jerusalem....

“Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they [i.e. the Galilean women], and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!’” (Luke 24:1-6)

You don’t have to be a brilliant Bible scholar to figure this out. That’s what we’ve got Paul for: **“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”** (I Corinthians 15:20-22) *Prophecy Principle Number Twelve*: When scripture interprets scripture, we can be pretty sure we’re on solid ground. The Feast of Firstfruits predicts Yahshua’s bodily resurrection.

And what about the wave offering? There is evidence that Yahshua Himself presented it before the throne of God. One possibility is latent in the passage, **“The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after [Greek: *meta*—in association with] His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”** (Matthew 27:51-53) Could these saints have been the “wave offering” Yahshua our High Priest presented before Yahweh? The Torah had specified that this was to be done on the day after the Sabbath: that’s Yahshua’s resurrection day. However, because

Yahshua is called “the firstborn of the dead” (cf. Acts 26:23, Colossians 1:18), these saints can’t have received their immortal bodies (something we’ll explore in Chapter 8) *before* Yahshua was raised in His. And because they were said to have “appeared to many” in Jerusalem *after* Christ’s resurrection, they probably didn’t (due to the extremely small window of opportunity) physically accompany Him to heaven to be presented there as the wave offering required by the Feast of Firstfruits, though that’s certainly possible. If they were indeed Yahshua’s wave offering, did He offer them *from the earth* in resuscitated but still-mortal bodies like that of Lazarus? That’s problematical, to say the least.

I find it far more likely that *He Himself* was the wave offering. Mary Magdalene encountered the newly risen Yahshua near the tomb on resurrection day. He told her, **“Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”** (John 20:17) Yet later the same day, He was seen taking a leisurely stroll with two followers on the road to Emmaus, chatting with Peter, and then meeting with all of the disciples (except Thomas). He was apparently no longer in a hurry, no longer concerned about not yet having ascended to His Father. What changed? I believe (SF2) that immediately after seeing Mary in the garden, He *did* “ascend to His Father,” presenting Himself as the required wave offering, and returning to earth afterward to spend forty days instructing His disciples. Either way, the Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled, literally and on schedule, in the resurrection of Yahshua from the dead. That’s three for three. We’re on a roll.

The first three feasts were within a few days of each other, and in the minds of the celebrants were lumped into one, commonly called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or simply Passover. (Yahweh had specified three separate feasts, not one three-day event, because of their individual prophetic significance.) The fourth celebration was seven weeks later, and is thus known as the Feast of Weeks, or *Shavuot*. **“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to Yahweh.”** The timing is reminiscent of Jubilee, except that we’re talking about days instead of years. **“You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to Yahweh. And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to Yahweh, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to Yahweh. Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the**

first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before Yahweh, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to Yahweh for the priest. And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations. (Leviticus 23:15-21)

We are now into the third month of the Jewish calendar, Sivan, which falls in May or June. Fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits (hence the Greek name *Pentecost*), on the sixth of Sivan, the people were to observe a holy convocation, a special Sabbath, with wave (grain) offerings, burnt offerings, drink offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings—there was a lot going on. The “firstfruits” reference concerns the wheat harvest, as the previous feast marked the barley harvest. Indeed, this seems to be the primary rationale for the original festival: **“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to Yahweh your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as Yahweh your God blesses you. You shall rejoice before Yahweh your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. (Deuteronomy 16:9-12)**

We should note a few interesting wrinkles in this festival. First, it’s described as a “freewill” offering, predicated upon past—not future—blessings of God. Also, it seems to be quite democratic in its character when compared to Passover. Everybody’s welcome, not only undefiled Jews, not only family members, but the servants, the Levites (who had no territorial inheritance of their own), even the outcasts and unfortunates of society—including the *gentiles* among them. Coming the day *after* the seventh sabbath past the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost is thereby *designed* to fall on Sunday (which it did in 33). This is the only feast of the seven where leavened bread is allowed, indicating a come-as-you-are state of mind: yes, there’s a peace offering; yes, there’s a sin offering, but there’s also openness, forgiveness, rejoicing, and worship.

Is all this ringing any bells? It should. It describes the Church—the *Ekklesia*—or at least what it’s supposed to be. Look around you. If you find Christianity a closed, judgmental, dour and introspective experience, something’s *wrong*. God didn’t design it that way. Perhaps the problem is that you have left “the place where Yahweh your God chooses to make His name abide.” Perhaps the problem is that you have forgotten that you were once a slave.

I’m not extrapolating here; I’m just getting a little ahead of myself. The fulfillment of the prophecy of the feast of Weeks is found in the Book of Acts,

where the feast's common name, Pentecost, is a dead giveaway: **"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.... Then those who gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."** (Acts 2:1-4, 41-47)

Luke here has just related the birth of the Church. Apparently, nobody saw it coming, and nobody figured it would continue for as long as it has—almost two thousand years now. Before the crucifixion *and* after the resurrection, the disciples all thought Yahshua would set up His earthly kingdom immediately—certainly within their own lifetimes. Peter, who had pointed out to Yahshua that he and the others had left everything to follow Him, expected to be *somebody* in the kingdom. But the Master gently popped his bubble, revealing to him exactly what kind of gruesome death he would suffer. The message, for Peter and the rest of us, was "Occupy till I come... Feed my sheep."

At first, it seems ironic that of the seven "Jewish" feasts, the middle one would foreshadow a long hiatus for God's involvement with the nation of Israel. On the other hand, "the Way," as it was called, was considered a *Jewish* sect for over a century. Christians today should thankfully recognize their Jewish legacy. God has not abandoned Israel in favor of the Church, as has been taught by some well-meaning but misinformed theologians. The Artist has merely set aside a half-finished painting for a while so He can work on a new canvas. He'll finish his masterpiece when He's good and ready. Or perhaps a better metaphor would be that of a Playwright who has relegated one of his main characters to the wings in act two, knowing that He intends to bring her back in and tie up all the loose ends in act three. The miraculous history of the Jewish people in the twentieth century is proof to anyone with his eyes open that God is still interested in them. The feast of Pentecost—and indeed, all four Levitical celebrations we have looked at so far—make it clear that Israel is the chosen vehicle for unveiling His grand plan. They are the apple of God's eye, but they aren't the only fruit in His basket.

That makes four out of four feasts (or *miqrym*, holy convocations) that are obviously prophetic of important events in the unfolding plan of Yahweh. Each of the four speaks poignantly of the Messiah's role in the salvation of mankind, with detail after detail pointing directly and unambiguously toward Yahshua the Anointed One. And each of them was fulfilled on *the very day* of its mandated celebration. (That fact alone makes the odds against their coincidental fulfillment over sixteen billion to one.) As interesting as that is, it becomes downright earth-shaking when you realize that there are still three more annual feasts yet to be fulfilled. These all took place in the autumn, in Tishri, the seventh (and final) month of the Jewish religious calendar, which falls in September or October. Each of them predicts some yet-to-be-revealed event in Yahweh's Grand Plan. And more to the point, they will complete the picture Yahweh is painting—they will be the cue that begins the final act of His play.

The fifth feast is called the feast of Trumpets, or *Yom Teruah*. It was celebrated on the first day of Tishri. It's often erroneously referred to as the "Jewish New Year," *Rosh Hashanah* ("Head of the Year") because that date has begun their civil calendar from the time of the Babylonian captivity, even though Yahweh placed the new year in the spring and never changed his mind. On the tenth of Tishri came *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement—seen as the most sacred day of the year. And five days later the Jewish religious calendar concluded with *Succoth*, the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths). We'll discuss what each of these days holds in store for our future when we reach the appropriate points in our chronological study. Based on the first four feasts, I expect significant events in the plan of God to occur on the very days specified in the Torah.

The spring feasts have all come to pass; the fall feasts are yet to come. It's easy to see that God has given us these signs to teach us something. What is it? So far, we have learned that the death, burial, and resurrection of his Messiah were to be followed by a parenthesis—the time of the Church. But the preponderance of prophecy leads us to the inescapable conclusion that Israel will once again be the focus of God's attention at the end of the age. They have waited in the wings for nineteen hundred years. The last half century has seen them walk back onto the stage, but they haven't yet spoken their lines. What does the Great Playwright have in store for them—and for us?