

ADVANCE PRAISE

“*Sinai to Zion* is an earthy, concrete account of an oft-forgotten aspect of Jesus’ second coming. Many are unaware of the “under our nose all this time” prophecies about Israel and the Gentile nations. God works out His redemptive promises in time and space, hot deserts and dusty paths, not in amorphous, over-spiritualized platitudes. This book will allow you to vividly see, smell, touch, and hear Jesus during His return. It will make you love Him more.”

—ALAN E. KURSCHNER, PHD, ESCHATOS MINISTRIES

“Joel Richardson has written a truly unique book about the return of Jesus. This study should be carefully considered by every serious student of the Scriptures. He deals with many overlooked details concerning the return of Jesus found throughout both the Old and New Testaments. I pray that this book will be a blessing to you.”

—R. T. KENDALL, BESTSELLING AUTHOR AND TEACHER

“Joel Richardson has genuinely challenged me on what I thought I knew about the second coming of Jesus Christ. The way in which His return is tied into the story of the Exodus is especially enlightening. Throughout the book, I couldn’t help but envision the grand depictions the author so expertly presented.”

—MATTHEW BRYCE ERVIN, PASTOR, ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH,
WORLAND, WYOMING, AND ADVISING PROFESSOR, TYNDALE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“From the moment I became a follower of Jesus, I was taught to look forward to His return. But I’ll admit that over the years, that eager anticipation has ebbed and flowed. Joel Richardson has magnificently rekindled the biblical hope of Jesus’ imminent coming. *Sinai to Zion* demonstrates that redemption’s romance is deeply rooted in Old Testament Scripture, and the Holy Spirit is its Grand Architect who has intentionally left His fingerprints for us to discover. This book will help you frame the scriptural past and focus your eyes on our sensational future.”

—SKIP HEITZIG, PASTOR OF CALVARY CHURCH, ALBUQUERQUE, NM, AND
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE BIBLE FROM 30,000 FEET*

“Based upon the Scriptures and Jewish tradition, Joel Richardson has outlined a plausible scenario for the day of the Lord. Written in his usual engaging style, he brings the possibilities of the Parousia of Christ to life. As this age draws to a close, I believe the Lord will use this book to cause the body of Christ to set her hope more fully on the revelation of Christ Jesus.”

—JOHN HARRIGAN, MISSIONARY AND AUTHOR OF *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST
CRUCIFIED: A THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING BEFORE GLORY*

There is so much to learn from this book. It is saturated with the exposition of Scripture, especially the section of the Scriptures that is unstudied by most Christians, the Old Testament prophets. Richardson shines a bright light on passage after passage, skillfully explaining how the prophets’ messages fit together with other parts of the Bible to reveal what will happen at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I think that I also came to love God more as I read this book and was reminded that He is a faithful, long-suffering, forgiving, and compassionate God.

—LARRY PETTEGREW, TH.D., RESEARCH PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, SHEPHERDS
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“Joel Richardson has an amazing ability to bring a systematic understanding to us from his study of the Bible. There is depth and thoroughness at a grand level. This study on biblical texts that can be interpreted as referring to the second coming of Yeshua is profound. It presses us to wrestle with the interpretations he puts forth because he marshals the evidence to support his interpretations. Richardson’s presentation shows that the second coming of Yeshua may be more

complex than the conceptions held by many. A process of leading Israel out of captivity, to fighting against nations, and only finally ending up on the Mount of Olives, is presented. I am not convinced that all of his conclusions on the texts in question are correct, but I am convinced that many are. I am also convinced that he makes a credible case even where I may disagree. The key thing about this book is that it can be a means for us to increase our passion for Yeshua's return and to embrace the judgments and deliverance that are part of this return. In the Bible, the day of the Lord is the day of God's intervention in judgment of the wicked and deliverance for His people. We get a very comprehensive picture of texts that are relevant to understanding that day."

—DANIEL C. JUSTER, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF TIKKUN INTERNATIONAL

"From my earliest days as a believer in the Messiah, reading about the return of Jesus was something I often avoided. Why? Because I figured if people who are way smarter than I could have such differing opinions about when and how that glorious day would transpire, it would be a waste of time for me to even consider figuring it out. I determined to let them argue about the particulars of the Lord's return, while I went on to topics that I perceived as more important and relevant. However, when your friend writes a brilliant book about a topic that you've not spent a whole lot of time studying, the least you can do is read it, right? The book that you're holding in your hands will inform you, challenge you, and stretch you regarding the issue that will be the culmination of the ages. It will bring to life a subject that ought to cause our hearts to burn with anticipation as we consider the day of the Messiah's return. Thanks, Joel, for writing this book. My days of minimizing the importance of this ultimate issue are over, thanks to your brilliant mind, your skilled pen, and your heart to see Israel welcome back their king."

—SCOTT VOLK, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF TOGETHER FOR ISRAEL MINISTRIES

"This is by far the best book that I have ever read on the biblical narrative related to the second coming of Jesus. I highly recommend it. I have known Joel Richardson for nearly thirty years, and I have witnessed his relentless hunger to devour God's Word. For these many years, he has been consistent in his devotion to love Jesus, to savor His beauty, and to be a faithful witness of truth. I have been inspired by the depth of the understanding that the Spirit has given him over these many years. Joel is a precious gift to the body of Christ in this generation."

—MIKE BICKLE, INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PRAYER OF KANSAS CITY

“It is always a joy to read what Joel Richardson has to say, especially on the topic of the second Coming of our Lord. Once again he has delivered a fascinating study that begins at Sinai and goes all the way to Jerusalem. Even if Joel does not turn out being 100 percent correct in every avenue he explores, his work surely should be given careful consideration. His explanations are well thought out. I urge you to enjoy this challenging work on what will take place when Christ returns.”

—WALTER C. KAISER, JR. PRESIDENT EMERITUS GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY HAMILTON, MASSACHUSETTS

“Joel’s wisdom and ability to lead readers into profound themes within the Scriptures is amazing. His approach is solid in conveying the brilliant technicolor imagery of the most important and urgent subject of all: the glorious return of our Lord Jesus. Joel has nailed it again in *Sinai to Zion!* This is his best book yet and I’m sure it will inspire both awe and tears, as it did to me. My prayer is that your heart burns with holy love as you find the beautiful Jesus in the Scriptures.”

—VICTOR VIEIRA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ABASE.ORG, VITORIA, BRAZIL, AUTHOR OF ESSENTIAL ESCHATOLOGY.

“Each day, I feel increasingly indebted to the Lord for what he has done in my life through the ministry of my brother Joel Richardson. As a pastor of a young congregation, preaching the gospel and fostering a gospel-centered community is my main goal. There is a temptation however, to leave the eschatological elements of Jesus’ teachings out of our message as so many today argue that eschatology is expendable. Joel has taught me how eschatology actually provides the very framework for the entire story of redemption as painted throughout the Scriptures. Understanding the narratives that surround Sinai is like an explosive revelation in my spirit. Knowing that the Exodus is an archetype of redemption and a shadow of what Jesus will do in the parousia, I feel obliged to tell you that this book is central to your life individually as well as to take a step further in “Ecclesia semper reformanda est.”

—ANGELO BAZZO, SENIOR LEADER CONVERGENCIA, BRAZIL

SINAI T O ZION

THE UNTOLD STORY *of the*
TRIUMPHANT RETURN *of* JESUS

JOEL RICHARDSON



WINEPRESS

SINAI TO ZION

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TO MY WIFE, AMY

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?”

(Song of Songs 8:5)

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INTRODUCTION

RECOVERING THE MARANATHA CRY

I love Jesus. I love scouring the Gospels in order that I might know Him better. I love praying through His Sermon on the Mount, His parables, and His hard sayings. I love studying His life and ministry, and the manner in which He interacted with different people. Perhaps more than anything else, however, I personally love studying what the Bible has to say about His return. I love nothing more than meditating on this glorious future reality. Yes, Jesus has come, but He's also coming back. My relationship to Jesus is not merely one of studying who He was, but joyfully looking forward to seeing Him with my own eyes and meeting Him face to face. From the beginning of the Bible to the end, the return of Jesus and the establishment of His kingdom is the primary focal point of all expectation, longing, and hope. This is why the apostle Peter urged us to "fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 1:13). This is also why, at the conclusion of the book of Revelation, the apostle John declared that "The Spirit and the bride" (and anyone else who has ears to hear) are crying out, "Come!" (Rv 22:17). This is also why the cry of the early church was not simply "Hallelujah" (Praise the Lord), but also, "*Maranatha!*" (Come Lord Jesus!).¹

If the biblical prophets, the New Testament, the Holy Spirit Himself, and the early church all placed such a high level of

emphasis on crying out for the return of Jesus, why then does it receive such relatively little attention within the modern Christian church? Why have we made it such a secondary and even negotiable matter? Why do we give it so much less attention than the Bible itself gives it? While the hope of Jesus' return and the glories of His kingdom should be the primary focus of all believers, to most modern Christians, it is much more of a side note. Without question, *this must change*.

If the biblical prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, and the early church all proclaimed the coming of our Lord, then so must the modern church return to doing so just as vigorously. I'm convinced that if the church will prioritize meditating upon, teaching, and emphasizing the hope of Jesus' return, we will reap tremendous good fruit. No doubt, we will find great encouragement for our spirits. I personally know this to be true, because time and time again, I've experienced it. As the writer of Hebrews said, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast" (Heb 6:19). When the storms of this life test us, the good news of His coming will become our unmovable and rock-solid foundation. Christians today, instead of having our minds stuck in the endless daily news cycles highlighting the latest tragedy, outrage, or injustice, must learn to redirect our attention to the good news that when He arrives, this wicked current system will come to a decisive end. Hopefully it will be soon. Not only do the Scriptures inspire us to regularly encourage one another concerning His coming, but we are to do so "all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:25). The coming of Jesus and the judgment to follow is also a powerful motivator to holiness. As the apostle John said, "when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn 3:2-3). Finally, Jesus Himself integrally linked the message of His return and the completion of the Great Commission among the unreached peoples of the earth. The Great Commission is a mandate that lasts until "the end of the age" (Mt

28:18–20). It is the finish line that we must collectively cross before this present wicked system comes to an end. For as Jesus has also said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14). The more that we recover an unshakable passion for His return, the more eager the church will be to finish the Great Commission.

Such then is the purpose and hope of this book: to recover some of the wonder and the majesty of the story of His “glorious appearing” (Ti 2:13 NKJV). It is, however, actually much more than that. We will also seek to show the Old Testament backstory of His coming. From the beginning to the end of the Bible, a glorious narrative is being told. It is a story of great promise, failure, and finally, complete restoration. This book represents one attempt to communicate portions of the greatest story that has ever been told, *as it was intended to be heard*. We will seek to view His coming through the eyes of the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and the early disciples. What this means first is that we will seek to recover the very Jewish nature of the story. The apostles themselves were Jewish, after all, and seeing the return of the Messiah through their eyes requires understanding its original context. When Jesus or the disciples spoke of the coming of the Messiah, long before any New Testament even existed, they had only the Old Testament to reference. We will do the same. While we will, of course, examine what the New Testament has to say about the return of Jesus, the vast majority of our attention will be directed to the Old Testament. As we will see, from Moses to Malachi, the Old Testament is brimming with visions of the coming of Jesus. In fact, the texts we will examine are some of the most beautiful, detailed, richly textured, technicolor descriptions of His return in the whole Bible.

What makes this book unique, and what has thrilled me to no end, is its special focus on exploring the connection between the Exodus and the return of Jesus. As we will see, the foundational story of the Exodus is the key that unlocks a proper understanding

of the second coming. Whereas the book of Exodus tells the story of the historical Exodus, the Bible also speaks of a second Exodus in the last days. It is this concept of the final, ultimate, or greater Exodus that forms the very backbone of the story of Jesus' return. Whereas God came down so long ago in a thick cloud, in blazing fire, with the flashing of lightning, the blasting of trumpets, and a mighty earthquake, so also is the day rapidly approaching when Jesus will return in a thick cloud, in blazing fire, with the flashing of lightning, the blasting of trumpets, and a mighty earthquake. Further, in the same way that the Lord led His people through the desert of the Exodus, so also will Jesus personally march before His people in a glorious procession through the desert when He returns. Although rarely considered by modern Christians, this perspective was understood, believed, and taught by Jesus and the apostles. Although the story of the return of Jesus is the most important and wonderful story in all of Scripture, even many life-long, devoted students of the Scriptures have never really heard the full story told. This is why I've subtitled this book "The forgotten story of the triumphant return of Jesus the Messiah." It is through understanding the story of the Exodus and the covenant made at Mount Sinai that the multifaceted beauty of Jesus is demonstrated in a way that is truly unparalleled. Through this study, we will see Jesus not only as the One who was pinned upon the crossbeams of Golgotha, but also as the fiery warrior, deliverer, and Bridegroom God of Sinai, who is coming back to save His people. Writing this book has invigorated my spirit and inspired me like almost nothing else in my life. My most earnest prayer is that everyone who reads it will also be filled with a new-found excitement and passion for Jesus and His glorious return. May the Lord use this book to help recover that burning prayer-cry of the early church:

"Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!"

PART 1

THE MARRIAGE COVENANT AT SINAI

Our study begins by surveying the story of the Exodus, Israel's miraculous departure from Egypt, and God's covenant with them at Mount Sinai. It is, by far, the most significant, towering story in the entire Old Testament. Here we will find some of the most foundational revelations of the Lord's personality and character in the whole Bible. As John the apostle would later declare: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). We shouldn't be surprised then to learn that at the heart of the epic tale of the Exodus is a love story. Yet far from any fairy-tale romance, this story is also painfully real. Many portions are messy, heartbreaking, and downright ugly. Israel's story is punctuated by cycles of zealous commitment, followed by backsliding, and brazen unfaithfulness. Yet there is so much more. It is also an epic adventure and a story of war, rife with graphic content. Far from a sanitized, decaffeinated, or flowery romance, in this love story, the Bridegroom literally arrives to the wedding in a thick cloud, with flashes of lightning, and in blazing fire. Far more than some perfumed Prince Charming, this groom is a warrior. Because of His unrelenting love for His bride, He is driven to take some extreme actions. He is who He is and does what He does because of love. In fact, it is His fiery passion for His bride that is the most consistent thread that runs throughout the entire Book of Exodus. As such, as we are about to see, the story of the Exodus revolves around the theme of God as the Bridegroom pursuing Israel, His bride.

THE EXODUS ROMANCE

Most Christians are familiar with references to the church as the bride of Christ, however, many are not aware that it was with Israel, the chosen seed-line, that the Lord began using this kind of language. The Lord's plan of redemption, with an aim of ultimately reaching people from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation, began with Israel. This is why Jesus would later declare that "salvation is from the Jews" (Jn 4:22). It is so critical for Christians to recognize the fact that the imagery of betrothal and marriage, the language of husband and wife, does not begin in the New Testament. It began with the Exodus at Mount Sinai. As we are about to see, the covenant between God and Israel at Sinai features all of the most important elements of a marriage or betrothal ceremony—a Jewish ceremony, of course. This covenant with the Israelites was indeed a betrothal covenant, sealed at the foot of the mountain. And since the Exodus story leads to a wedding, we are not surprised to learn that it begins with a courtship.

THE COURTSHIP BEGINS

At the onset of any romance, certainly before any marriage can take place, there is a process of wooing and pursuit. This is when the hopeful bridegroom-to-be sets out to win the heart of the woman he loves. Any man who hopes to make a woman his wife must first gain her admiration, her love, and her trust. Of course, few things are

more destructive to gaining the trust of a woman than wishy-washy indecisiveness. No woman wants to marry a man who is questioning his commitment to her. In the story of the Exodus, God showed Himself to be the antithesis of indecisive. From the very onset of the story, the Lord made His intentions to Israel absolutely clear. Multiple times did He state His plans outright. He was going to deliver her from bondage to the false gods of Egypt, to take her as His own, and to be her God forever. Israel had been living in Egypt for four hundred years, much of that time as a slave class, and now the time had come to fulfill the word that the Lord had spoken to Abraham so long ago:

God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.” (Genesis 15:13–14)

As the Bible transitions from Genesis to the story of the Exodus, we’re told of Israel’s resilience under tremendous difficulty: “the more [the Egyptians] afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out” (Ex 1:12; cf. Gn 35:11). Then, the time had come; the Lord raised up Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. This is where our study of the story will begin, with the Lord’s command to Moses:

Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, “I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” (Exodus 6:6–7)

The promise both begins and ends with God declaring His name: “I am YHVH.” It is upon His own name that He makes the following threefold promise: (1) to deliver His people from slavery, (2) to adopt them as His chosen ones, and (3) to lead them into and give them the promised land. In essence, this was a reiteration of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is what we see, at least on the surface. Jewish exegetes, however, have long recognized this promise as having strong overtones of marital commitment. According to Nahum Sarna, author of *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*:

This declaration prefigures the covenant that is to be established at Sinai. The phraseology suggests the institution of marriage, a familiar biblical metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel. The first two verbs, l-k-h, “to take,” and h-y-h le-, “to be (someone’s),” are both used in connection with matrimony; the second is also characteristic covenant language.¹

I WILL TAKE YOU

Within the phrase “I will take you to be my people” (Ex 6:7), the key word is “take” (Hebrew: *laqach*). This term is frequently used specifically for marriage many times throughout the Bible. For example, Abram and Nahor “took wives for themselves” (Gn 11:29); Ishmael’s mother Hagar “took a wife for him from the land of Egypt” (Gn 21:21); Isaac “took Rebekah and she became his wife” (Gn 24:67); and Esau “took his wives from the daughters of Canaan” (Gn 36:2). Very interestingly, this is also the word used when it was said that “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gn 5:24). So, from the very beginning of the story of the Exodus, as the Lord pursued Israel, He used language that pointed to a very special, even marital relationship. He stated His plans and intentions to “take” Israel for Himself and make her His own chosen and special people. Thus, as is the case in with traditional courting, the Lord clearly declared His intentions and plans. He was not pursuing Israel

for any temporary or common relationship. The Lord was singling Israel out from every other nation or people throughout the world to be His unique and exclusive people.

CONCLUSION

It is critical that we understand how the primary theme of Genesis and the primary theme of Exodus are related. In Genesis, the focus was the Lord's plan to create a chosen people through which He would bring forth the promised one (Gn 3:15). Now that the chosen people had been brought forth, it was time for Him to take them out from the nations to set them apart as a holy people prepared to fulfill their calling. Through Israel, the promised one would come. Through Him would come the redemption of multitudes from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. Through Him would come the restoration of all things. Before this could happen, however, the Lord had to cultivate in Israel a suitable culture to bring forth the Messiah. To do so, He would draw near to them in the most intimate fashion. He would make them His very own. Israel would become His bride, and He would be their husband.

YHVH FLEXES

Because the Exodus account is told structured as a love story, it is fitting that the Lord kicked things off with some serious displays of His absolute superiority. First, He picked a fight, initiating a very direct head-on confrontation with Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler in the world, as well as with his famed magicians and priests. This was no casual confrontation; rather it was a full-blown showdown to the death. It all began with the very direct demand: “Let the sons of Israel go out of his land” (Exodus 7:2). Although it was the Lord (through Moses) making the demands, it was also the Lord’s intention to provoke Pharaoh into a confrontation. The Lord declared, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex 7:3) and thus, Pharaoh refused Moses’ demands. The Lord’s reasons were clear:

[T]hat I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst. So Moses and Aaron did it; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. (Exodus 7:3–6)

Thus, Pharaoh indeed refused the Lord's demands, and YHVH went to work. Although we normally hear of ten "plagues," they are better referred to as "miraculous signs," and, in fact, there were actually eleven. Through these eleven signs, the Lord systematically waged war against Pharaoh and his kingdom, demonstrating His absolute superiority over the most powerful gods in the world. The haughty Egyptians quickly learned how impotent they and their gods were compared to the might of YHVH, the God of the Hebrews. We won't enter into an extensive discussion of each sign, but for reference, they unfolded in the following order:

1. Moses' staff becomes a snake
2. The Nile River turns to blood
3. Swarms of frogs
4. Gnat infestation
5. Fly infestation
6. Death of the Egyptian livestock
7. Breakout of boils
8. Hail
9. Locusts
10. Darkness
11. Death of the firstborn

The signs were designed to progressively demonstrate YHVH's power and superiority over the gods of Egypt. In keeping with the theme of the Lord essentially picking a fight, it is appropriate that the

Lord described His own actions as “laying His hand” or “stretching out His hand” against Pharaoh and his armies. Through the plagues, God was giving the mighty Egyptians a serious *smack down*.

REMEMBER

As the final plague—the death of the firstborn—brought terror and chaos to the land of Egypt, the Egyptians were pleading with Israel to leave. Before they did, however,

the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:35–36).

Before their big break, the Lord had already predetermined that future generations would forever commemorate what He was about to do. Thus, before the Exodus flight even took place, the Lord instituted both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Through these feasts, all who were present and every future generation thereafter would take time to remember the miraculous things the Lord did when He led Israel out of Egypt: “Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place” (Ex 13:3).

Henceforth, Israel was commanded to observe these feasts as a perpetual reminder of YHVH’s mighty acts: “It shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month” (Ex 13:5). Before Israel left Egypt, it was clear that His purpose was to bring them into the land promised to them through the Abrahamic covenant. Then, after they

had entered the land, they were to celebrate these feasts so that they would never forget all that the Lord had done for them:

For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. You shall tell your son on that day, saying, “It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.” And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year. (Exodus 13:6–10)

Today, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread together comprise the oldest and most continuously celebrated holiday on the face of this earth, having been remembered for close to 3,500 years.

YHVH APPEARS: THE PILLAR OF CLOUD

After the escape from Egypt, YHVH continued to put His power on full display, this time through an actual physical manifestation of His presence. Although it is difficult to imagine precisely how this all would have actually appeared, the Exodus account describes it in a fairly straightforward manner:

The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. (Exodus 13:21–22).

The “pillar” is an absolutely fascinating and critical part of the story. Although the pillar manifested itself in various forms, the Scrip-

tures seem to consistently describe a single pillar. The same pillar took either the form of fire at night or cloud during the day (Ex 14:24). We're not told exactly how high the pillar extended, although we are told that it was from the cloud that YHVH "looked down on the army of the Egyptians" below (Ex 14:24). In Psalm 105:39, we learn that it was through this pillar that the Lord "spread a cloud for a covering," indicating that the top of the cloud was extremely wide, large enough to provide shade from the sun for the entire congregation. Interestingly, while the book of Numbers refers at times to the pillar, the term used far more frequently is "the cloud," giving the impression that its form was often much more canopy-like, most often hanging in the sky above them, while at times moving ahead of them (Nm 9:15–23; 10:11,12,34; 11:25; 12:5,10; 14:14).

Here is where things become truly fascinating. In Exodus 14:19, "the pillar" is revealed to actually be a manifestation of God: "The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them" (Ex 14:19). The terms "the angel of God," "the angel of the Lord," or other variations have baffled Jewish interpreters down through history. On one hand, it is an angel, and on the other hand, it is actually God Himself. In this case, this unique manifestation was a pillar, a cloud, and an angel. A few chapters later, the pillar is described again as an angel whose voice was to be obeyed and in whom the very name of God resided (Ex 23:20–23). This is such a critical point. Later we will discuss the fact that this angel-cloud was actually God the Son, a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus.

The purpose of the pillar was to watch over the Israelites, to guide them into the promised land, and to enable them to travel at great distances unrestricted by the darkness of night or the heat of the day. Imagine what kind of awe the Israelites must have felt as they walked and looked upon this unexplainable marvel, this glorious manifestation of the angel of the Lord, looming in the sky above and before them.

PINNED AGAINST THE SEA

From the heights of such an amazingly miraculous story, as real life so often goes, the fallible human element brings the whole thing crashing to the ground. The Israelites had just witnessed God strike the Egyptians with the ten plagues. This was followed by weeks of looking upon and following the cloud, an open physical manifestation of God Almighty. Yet despite all this, after one glimpse of Pharaoh and his armies thundering toward them, fear overtook the Israelites, and they began wishing out loud that they had never left Egypt:

As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” (Exodus 14:10–13)

It may be easy for us to look back on this story and wonder how in the world the Israelites could have so quickly doubted the Lord’s ability to protect them. I doubt, however, that anyone reading this book has ever had the full fury of the most powerful army in the world barreling down upon them and their families. Talmudic scholar Louis Ginzberg describes the scene: “The mind of the Egyptians was in no wise directed toward spoil and plunder. . . . Their sole and determined purpose was to exterminate Israel, kith and kin.”¹ In such times of great distress, very real human weaknesses inevitably emerge. If the option of going back to Egypt had been on the table, if there had been any door of escape, the Israelites would have taken it in a heartbeat. It was by divine design, however, that there was no natural exit. As the Psalmist declared, so did the

Israelites experience: “[Lord], [y]ou hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me” (Ps 139:5 ESV). All of this was part of the Lord’s plan to demonstrate His unmatched power over the Egyptian armies. By allowing the Israelites to become pinned against the Red Sea with no route of escape, the Lord seized the opportunity to demonstrate both His ability and His commitment to take care of the Israelites—even if it meant tearing the very ocean itself in half.

As persistent as the Israelites were in giving themselves over to fear and complaint, far more persistent was the Lord’s determination to deliver them from the Egyptians. The Lord both rebuked and reassured them through Moses, His mouthpiece: “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent” (Ex 14:13–14). The Lord’s commitment to His people was expressed through far more than mere words but also through action. In the case of what He was about to do, it was a most extravagant act.

YHVH KILLS THE COMPETITION

Now we arrive at the most iconic part of the Exodus story. With the most powerful army in the world rushing toward them on one side and the sea on the other, the Lord spoke to Moses and commanded him, “lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land” (Ex 14:16). There is an entertaining Jewish legend that tells the following account:

God spake to Moses, saying . . . [t]ake the rod that I gave unto thee, and go to the sea upon Mine errand, and speak thus: “I am the messenger sent by the Creator of the world! Uncover thy paths, O sea, for My children, that they may go through the midst of thee on dry ground.” Moses spoke to the sea as God had bidden him, but it replied, “I will not do according to thy words, for thou art only a man born of woman, and, besides, I am three days older than thou, O man, for I was brought forth on the third day of creation, and thou on the sixth.” Moses lost no time, but carried back to God the words the sea had spoken, and the LORD said: “Moses, what does a master do with an intractable servant?” “He beats him with a rod,” said Moses. “Do thus!” ordered God. “Lift up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it.”¹

Extra-biblical traditions aside, the Scriptures inform us that after the Lord commanded Moses to lift his staff, the angel of the Lord

moved between Israel and the Egyptian armies. Then the Lord went into total “shock and awe” mode:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty. (Exodus 14:21–24)

It’s fascinating to note that the Egyptians were fully aware that God was fighting for His people: “So the Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians’” (Ex 14:25) The Egyptians knew they were in trouble, but they didn’t know that it was already too late to escape. The gates of the Red Sea had been opened up, and the waters were as two great walls on either side. Finally, with the Israelites safely on the opposite shore and the Egyptians behind them, the largest trap in history was about to close on them. Thus, the Lord once more commanded Moses:

“Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.” So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus the

LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses. (Exodus 14:26–31)

So the mighty Egyptians, the ones who had just struck so much fear and terror into the heart of Israel, were gone—down to the very last one. The Lord made certain that the destruction of His enemies and the deliverance of His people was, quite literally, a roaring success. Because YHVH desired Israel’s exclusive devotion, to be her “one and only,” He began by clearing the playing field. By drowning Pharaoh and his best, most elite warriors in the Red Sea, the Lord not only displayed His superiority over the gods of Egypt, He also quite literally killed the competition.

THE VICTORY HYMN OF MOSES

After this unimaginably momentous victory, Moses was so ecstatic that he and the people burst forth into a spontaneous victory song. We are told, “Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD” (Ex 15:1). The song is called by many names: the Song of Moses and Miriam, the Song of Miriam, or simply the Song of Moses. My favorite title is the Victory Hymn of Moses. Regardless of what we call it, it is among the most glorious and beautiful songs in all of the Bible. According to Old Testament scholar Douglas Stuart, the first words of the song, “I will sing,” can also be translated as, “I must sing,” or “Let me sing!”² The song then takes on a very personal tone, as God’s name “YHVH” is used fourteen times throughout. The hymn triumphantly celebrates the complete and utter destruction of Pharaoh’s army, including the most elite units—the Navy SEALs or Green Berets of the day (Ex 15:4). They were helpless to stand against the power and ferocity of Israel’s God: “YHVH is a warrior; YHVH is His name” (Ex 15:3). The song was such an instant hit that Moses’ sister Miriam immediately began to teach it to the women of Israel:

Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. Miriam answered them, "Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea." (Exodus 15:20–21)

Ginzberg relays another traditional, and very enjoyable, account of how the song was inspired by the Holy Spirit to be sung antiphonally between Moses and the people:

The song by the Red Sea was as much the song of Moses as of all Israel. . . . In virtue of the spirit of God that possessed them while they sang, Moses and the people mutually supplemented each other, so that, as soon as Moses spoke half the verse, the people repeated it, and linked the second complementary part to it. So Moses began with the half verse, "I will sing unto the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously," whereupon the people answered, "The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." And in this wise developed the whole song.³

Whether there is any truth to this, we cannot know. Regardless, it is exhilarating to imagine joining the celebration that ensued as Moses, Miriam, and all the peoples rejoiced and sang their hearts out to YHVH, having just personally experienced the greatest corporate miracle in all of redemptive history! So important, in fact, was this event that the Song of Moses was sung at the close of each sabbath morning service.⁴ Many also view the song as having a prophetic component, pointing to Israel's future victories under the Messiah. As the great Jewish commentator Alfred Edersheim states: "Thus that great event is really not solitary, nor yet its hymn without an echo. For all times, it has been a prophecy, a comfort, and a song of anticipated sure victory."⁵

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us summarize: Through the Exodus, YHVH entered into a dramatic courtship with His people Israel. His first acts consisted of saving His future bride from the burden of slavery. Through the eleven miraculous plagues/signs and the unforgettable miracle at the Red Sea, He displayed His power, His ferocity, and His jealousy for His people. After witnessing all these things, surely they would be confident that with YHVH as their God, no one would ever be able to bring them harm. As awesome as all these things were to behold, however, the Lord's personal revelation of His character was still far from complete.

YHVH THE PROVIDER

Through the many miraculous events of the Exodus leading up to Mount Sinai, the Lord would win the love and confidence of His future bride. Because He was after Israel's heart and her trust, He wooed her not only through mighty acts of power, but also through thoughtful acts of compassion. After they were miraculously delivered to the eastern side of the Red Sea, the Israelites began making their way through the desert toward Mount Sinai. Although they no longer needed to fear the Egyptians, they would still encounter great trials, foremost of which was meeting their most basic needs for food and water. In such a desolate desert, how would the Lord be able to provide for such a large number of people?¹ Despite all of the wonders that the people had just witnessed, it didn't take long before their hunger got the best of them. Again they complained to Moses in fairly dramatic fashion, "Would that we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex 16:3). The Lord was once again more than patient with them, despite their absolute lack of gratitude or trust in Him. Instead of issuing them a much-deserved rebuke, He graciously met their needs. YHVH's glory appeared in the cloud, and He spoke to Moses, saying:

“I have heard the grumbings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’” So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. (Exodus 16:11–15)

Thus, through the miraculous provision of their God, the people ate meat and bread made from manna, and they were satisfied, at least for the time being. Although they had plenty of food, soon enough, they became thirsty. They found themselves in need again as they reached the place called Rephidim, for “there was no water for the people to drink” (Ex 17:1). And so, as if by reflex, they returned almost immediately to complaining to Moses and making demands: “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” (Ex 17:4). And once more, as if reflexively, the Lord showed compassion toward His bride-to-be:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. (Exodus 17:5–6)

Drawing from Jewish traditions, Flavius Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, gives a very interesting expanded description of that miraculous day:

[T]hey came to Rephidim, being distressed to the last degree by thirst; and while in the foregoing days they had lit on a few small fountains, but now found the earth entirely destitute of water, they were in an evil case. They again turned their anger against Moses; but he at first avoided the fury of the multitude, and then betook himself to prayer to God, beseeching him, that as he had given them food when they were in the greatest want of it, so he would give them drink, since the favor of giving them food was of no value to them while they had nothing to drink: and God did not long delay to give it them, but promised Moses that he would procure them a fountain, and plenty of water from a place they did not expect any; so he commanded him to smite the rock which they saw lying there, with his rod, and out of it to receive plenty of what they wanted: for he had taken care that drink should come to them without any labor or painstaking. When Moses had received this command from God, he came to the people, who waited for him, and looked upon him; for they saw already that he was coming apace from his eminence. As soon as he was come, he told them that God would deliver them from their present distress, and had granted them an unexpected favor; and informed them, that a river should run for their sakes out of the rock; but they were amazed at that hearing, supposing they were of necessity to cut the rock in pieces, now they were distressed by their thirst, and by their journey—while Moses, only smiting the rock with his rod, opened a passage, and out of it burst water, and that in great abundance, and very clear; but they were astonished at this wonderful effect, and, as it were, quenched their thirst by the very sight of it. So they drank this pleasant, this sweet water; and such it seemed to be, as might well be expected where God was the donor. They were also in admiration how Moses was honored by God; and they made grateful returns of sacrifices to God for his providence towards them. Now that Scripture which is laid up in the temple, informs us, how God foretold to Moses, that water should in this manner be derived out the rock.²

In his commentary, Philo also mentions the miracle of the water from the split rock, along with all of the other miracles of provision. The reason the Lord supplied all of these things in such

a supernatural and compassionate manner was to leave Israel with a perpetual testimony and “proof” that the commandments it was about to receive were indeed from the hand of God:

After having found themselves in want of necessary food, and expecting to be destroyed by hunger and thirst, they should on a sudden find themselves amid abundance of all necessary things, spontaneously springing up around them; the heaven itself raining down upon them food called manna, and as a seasoning delicacy to that meat an abundance of quails from the air; and the bitter water being sweetened so as to become drinkable, and the precipitous rock pouring forth springs of sweet water; then they might no longer look back upon the Nile with wonder, nor be in doubt as to whether those laws were the laws of God, having received a most manifest proof of the fact from the supplies by which they now found their scarcity relieved beyond all their previous expectations.³

CONCLUSION

In the previous two chapters, we looked at the Lord’s mighty displays of power. Through the plagues in Egypt and splitting the Red Sea, the Lord was placing His might on full display before Israel and the nations. After seeing all these things, Israel would be fully confident in YHVH’s ability to protect them. Then, by miraculously providing quail, manna, and water from the rock, the Lord also demonstrated His tenderness and care for His beloved. The Lord made it clear to His future bride that He was both fully capable and entirely willing to care for her. Not only is He an eminently capable protector, but also the most compassionate of providers. As true love requires, the Lord proved Himself, in both word and deed. Behind all of the Lord’s actions was His determination to prove to His future bride that He alone is worthy of her complete trust, unreserved devotion, and wholehearted love. Despite her fickle nature, by the time Israel reached the mountain at Sinai, she was as ready as she’d ever be. The moment for the proposal had come.

THE PROPOSAL

We previously saw how YHVH had declared His intention to “take” Israel as His own. Now, “In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt,” they finally arrived at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:1-2). This is where YHVH went beyond merely making His intentions known, and actually proposed to Israel: “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine” (Ex 19:5). The word here for “possession” is a very special Hebrew word: *segullah*. It refers to a king’s most highly prized and most treasured possession. In essence, Israel was being offered the opportunity to be YHVH’s crown jewel. The final clause calls attention to the fact that although every nation and people throughout the world belong to God, His intention was to set Israel aside as a special people, uniquely called above any other.

A HOLY KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

The next verse elaborates on the specific nature of the proposal and thus Israel’s calling: “and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). Intertwined with Israel’s calling to be YHVH’s treasured possession was the call to become a kingdom of priests. As priests, they were to serve as God’s mediators, representatives, or ambassadors to the rest of the world. The call was both

corporate and individual. The invitation to become a kingdom was to fulfill the promises made to both Abraham and Judah. The Lord had promised Abraham that His seed would “possess” the promised land (Gn 15:18–21). In order to possess the land, He would have to rule over it. Thus Abraham’s seed would, by necessity, be a king. Every king of course, needs a kingdom. Further, the Lord clearly promised to Judah that a king would come from his line and rule over all of Israel (Gn 49:8–10). Thus, if Israel accepted the proposal at the base of Mount Sinai, God’s promised kingdom program would be initiated. The Lord’s plan to fix everything, to restore the Garden of Eden, to heal the cosmos, was no longer merely a concept. At Sinai, the Lord’s promise to undo the damage done in the garden began to take form.

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE CHOSE ISRAEL

There is such an important point here that needs to be unpacked a bit. The Lord invited Israel to become a special kingdom, distinct from all of the other nations of the world. This often becomes a matter of confusion or even offense to Gentile Christians. Does this mean that Gentiles are less valuable in God’s eyes than Israelites? Certainly not. As the apostle Peter said, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (Acts 10:34–35). The reason the Lord chose Israel was to serve as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). A priest acts as a mediator between God and man. Israel was being called to function as a people uniquely devoted to YHVH, who would introduce Him to the rest of the world. As Stuart so rightly states:

They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him.¹

This calling was a clear reiteration of what the Lord had already stated hundreds of years previously to Abraham, “I will make you a great nation . . . and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gn 12:2–3). The Lord’s purpose from the very beginning was to bless “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). The reason that God called Israel and made them special is because He loves every nation! One may thus quite rightly say, in agreement with Anglican scholar Christopher J.H. Wright, that “God so loved the world that He chose Israel.”² They were called to serve as a priestly nation, as YHVH’s special ambassadors and representatives. Readers of the New Testament will recognize this call to be a “kingdom of priests,” a phrase that was used by the apostle John to refer to all believers, both Jew and Gentile. In the book of Revelation, we are told that Jesus “has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (1:6; cf. 5:10). The Lord first called Israel to be a unique people who would function in a priestly role. Today this calling remains, and it has also been openly extended to the collective community of the servants of Jesus the Messiah, Jew or Gentile. If you are a disciple of Jesus, then, like Israel, you have been called to be God’s representative, His witness, and His ambassador of blessing to the world.

ISRAEL ACCEPTS YHVH’S PROPOSAL

Finally, we come to Israel’s response to YHVH’s proposal. Although the Lord didn’t literally get down on one knee, it was no less a proposal by YHVH to enter into a special intimate relationship. The response of the people was a resounding acceptance of God’s proposal: “So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD” (Ex 19:7–8a). The offer was not only accepted by the representative elders, but all of the people also enthusiastically said “yes!” to the proposal. As exciting as this was, however, Sarna ominously points

out that Israel accepted the proposal, “even before hearing the terms of the covenant.”³ For as we will see, much of Israel’s subsequent history falls far short of their initial enthusiastic “yes!” No doubt, many reading this will recognize their own fickleness in Israel’s behavior.

Even though YHVH knew that Israel would fall short of fulfilling their commitment, it was still received by Him with great joy. We see the Lord’s happy response in the Deuteronomy account, where He declared:

I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever! (Deuteronomy 5:28–29)

Despite the fact that the Lord knew that Israel would later stumble and fail to fully live up to all that they had committed themselves to, He still very enthusiastically welcomed and affirmed their collective “yes.”

CONCLUSION

By the time that Israel had reached Mount Sinai, YHVH had revealed Himself as the Sovereign God of the whole world, unparalleled in power, and yet tender in mercy and filled with compassion. In both word and deed, He had demonstrated His ability to protect and provide. He had chosen Israel to be His one and only out of all of the nations throughout the world. Then, there at the base of the mountain, the Lord proposed to His hopeful bride-to-be. If she said yes, He promised that she would be His prized and most treasured possession. It is no wonder that the people promptly responded so positively. As a young woman who looks excitedly into the eyes of her future husband and says “yes!” so did Israel respond with great enthusiasm. Their commitment, however, was made before they actually heard what they were agreeing to. Soon enough, the actual details of the covenant would be revealed.

THE MARRIAGE COVENANT AT SINAI

Now that the whole assembly had enthusiastically accepted YHVH's proposal to be His treasured possession, the time for the actual betrothal ceremony had arrived. In order to truly understand this, we must understand some things about the customs and rituals related to marriage and betrothal from a biblical perspective. While there remain many similarities between a biblical wedding and modern forms of marriage, there are also some fairly significant differences. In most modern, Western cultures, before any actual wedding, there is the engagement process. Traditionally, this begins with the proposal in which the man gets down on one knee, presents his hopeful bride-to-be with a ring, and asks if she will agree to marry him. If she accepts the proposal, he places the ring on her finger. In contrast, rather than engagement, the ancient Near Eastern culture of the Bible practiced "betrothal." Like engagement, betrothal preceded the actual marriage. Engagement, however, is merely a verbal agreement to eventually get married. It is not a legally binding matter. Betrothal, on the other hand, is actually a legally binding condition in which the couple is viewed as being married. The distinction, however, is that the betrothed couple has not yet consummated the marriage and does not live together. Nevertheless, throughout this period, infidelity is considered to be adultery.¹ In Deuteronomy, the Lord declared the penalty for any betrothed woman caught having sexual relations

with a man. They were both to be stoned to death as adulterers: “the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor’s wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you” (Dt 22:24). Elsewhere, in Genesis 19:14, men betrothed to Lot’s daughters are described as his “sons-in-law.” And in Matthew 1:18–20, because Mary was found to be pregnant during the betrothal period, she was exposed both to the charges of adultery and the potentially, the deadly penalty if she had been found guilty.

How is betrothal distinct from marriage? In the simplest terms, betrothal is *the first phase* of the marriage covenant. The second phase is the consummation of the marriage, moving in together, combining all property, and sharing the same bed. Within the pages of the Bible, this distinction between betrothal and marriage is seen when Jacob demanded of his father-in-law Laban: “Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her” (Gn 29:21). Although they had not yet consummated the marriage, Jacob already referred to Rachel as his wife.

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE COVENANT RITUALS

There are some other practices and rituals common to the biblical marriage ceremony that we also need to understand. The first is the *mikveh*. This was a ritual washing or cleansing that the bride would undergo before the wedding ceremony. Another essential element of any Jewish wedding ceremony is the *ketubah*. The *ketubah* is a legally binding contract that contains the obligations of both parties. It is read aloud and signed during the wedding ceremony. Interestingly, the earliest clear reference to a Jewish *ketubah* contract is found in the third century BC, apocryphal Book of Tobit:

Then Raguel summoned his daughter Sarah. When she came to him he took her by the hand and gave her to Tobias, saying, “Take her to be your wife in accordance with the law and decree written in the book of Moses. . . . Then he called her mother and told her to bring writing material; and he wrote out a copy of a

marriage contract, to the effect that he gave her to him as wife according to the decree of the law of Moses. Then they began to eat and drink. (Tobit 7:12-14 NRSV, italics mine)

Although we cannot know for sure when this practice of writing a *ketubah* as a marriage contract began, according to the second-century rabbi Simon ben Gamliel, it dates back to ancient biblical times.² Regardless of its origins, the practice of reciting the *ketubah* at the wedding eventually evolved into the exchanging of vows that we see in most modern weddings.

Another essential and conspicuous element of any biblical or Jewish wedding is the *chuppah*. A *chuppah* in its most basic form simply means “a canopy” or a “chamber.”³ In Jewish weddings, the *chuppah* is the ever-conspicuous structure that the bride and groom stand under or inside as they read and sign the *ketubah*. Finally, there is a visible *sign*. In modern times, this is most often the wedding ring. As we will see, at Mount Sinai there was another visible sign that was given. In fact, all of these important elements of the biblical wedding are found in the Sinaitic covenant. Let’s continue to follow the story to Mount Sinai, where, as we will see, YHVH indeed betrothed Himself to His people Israel.

THE RITUAL MIKVEH

The first component of the biblical betrothal-wedding ceremony is the *mikveh*. Before the ceremony could begin, YHVH commanded the people to wash and consecrate themselves for the ceremony: “The LORD also said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready’” (Ex 19:10). Of course, in order for there to be a wedding, there also had to be a bridegroom. As such, the Lord declared that “on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people” (v. 11).

Because of the holiness of the Lord’s presence, the people were warned not to step foot on the mountain lest they be killed. The

method was either by stoning or by being shot through with arrows. It seems as though the manner of execution was specified to avoid even coming into contact with the disobedient. As the mountain itself became a holy space, Old Testament scholar Gordon J. Wenham explains its fascinating transformation into a kind of holy temple:

Mount Sinai is about to become a sacred place, where only those authorized by God may enter. Like the tabernacle, whose construction is ordered in Exodus 25–30, Mount Sinai is divided into three zones. The summit corresponds to the innermost sanctum, the Holy of Holies, to which only Moses could go to meet the LORD.⁴

The vast assembly of people were only allowed to come to the base of the mountain, but even then, it was not until they heard the blast of the shofar: “when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain” (Ex 9:14). After receiving these instructions, “Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. He said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman’” (Ex 19:14-15). Thus, the bride-to-be performed the ritual *mikveh* cleansing. The betrothal ceremony had begun. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (most commonly known simply as “Rashi”) says of this moment: “When they came to present themselves at the foot of the mountain, He came forth to meet them as a groom comes forth to welcome a bride.”⁵ The marital imagery of the covenant, while often missed by Christian commentators, is widely recognized by Jewish exegetes.

THE CHUPPAH

Since the ceremony had begun, we would expect to see another telltale sign of any biblical or Jewish wedding ceremony: the *chuppah*. This is the special covering or canopy under which the bride and groom stand. In the case of Sinaitic wedding, the *chuppah* was provided by God Himself:

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (Exodus 19:16–17)

YHVH Himself had covered the entire mountain with a thick cloud. As we saw previously, when the cloud of the Lord's presence had both led and followed the Israelites across the desert, it was large enough to serve as a canopy that provided shade for the entire company of Israelites. Now, this great cloud canopy moved and rested over the mountain. There is also another phrase used here that we might miss in most English translations. When it says that they stood at "the foot of the mountain," a more literal rendering of the Hebrew essentially says that they stood "under the mountain." Thus, there at the foot of the mountain, under the *chuppah*, YHVH's bride stood before Him. That the Lord intended to specifically use the imagery of a *chuppah* here was not lost on later prophets. Isaiah for example, draws from the imagery present at the Sinaitic covenant and applies them to the messianic age (Is 4:4-5). As it was at Mount Sinai, so will it be at Mount Zion when the Messiah is present. As it will be when the Messiah is present, so was it at Mount Sinai. The Lord Himself was actually present, having come down in a cloud and fire:

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. (Exodus 19:18–20)

Although the great theophany was accompanied by several phenomena, clouds and fire seem to be the most prominent features. After Sinai, both will appear numerous times throughout the Bible.

They had previously been present when God made the Abrahamic Covenant and personally appeared as “a smoking oven and a flaming torch” (Gn 15:17). As we will discuss in Part 3, both elements will be a prominent feature when Jesus returns.

THE BRIDEGROOM ARRIVES

Finally, after the long, harrowing, and exhausting journey out of Egypt, the moment for the wedding had arrived. The late nineteenth century Anglican Bible scholar Donald Spence Jones captures the drama of this long-anticipated moment:

Every necessary preparation had now been made. The priests, as well as the people, had “sanctified themselves.” A wholesome dread of “breaking” through the fence, and “touching” the mount, had spread itself among the people. Moses had returned from the camp to the summit of the mount; and both he and the people were attent to hear the words of the “covenant,” which had been announced to them.⁶

Although He had been with them all along, in a far more demonstrable manifestation, the Bridegroom God of Sinai had arrived. Now, for the first time, He spoke directly to the whole assembly: “Then God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery’” (Ex 20:1–2). It is interesting to note that God did not begin by appealing to His authority as the Creator of all things; instead, He reminded them of His tender mercy, His kindness, and His proven track record as deliverer, protector, and provider. It is also stunning to note that the words of the covenant were not communicated through the lips of Moses. Though he had served until this point as a mediator between God and Israel, the wedding ceremony did not have an officiating priest, as it were. YHVH Himself was speaking from the mountain. The ceremony had begun.

THE WEDDING VOWS

Earlier we referenced the *ketubah*—the legally binding contract that, at any biblical or Jewish wedding, is both read aloud and signed. Whether or not a formal marriage contract was common during the time of the Exodus is not known. What is clear, however, is that the reading aloud of the Torah is treated within the biblical narrative like a marriage contract. The Ten Commandments, then, may be viewed as a summary of the wedding vows. They form the legal framework and very foundation of the Sinaitic covenant. They also comprise what German commentators Keil and Delitzsch call “the kernel and essence of the law.”⁷⁷ In other words, the Ten Commandments are a representation of the fullness of Torah. The distinguished and foundational nature of the Ten Commandments is also seen in that they are the only portion of the Torah that was actually written on stone by God Himself: “When [YHVH] had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God” (Ex 31:18; cf. Dt 5:22; 9:10; 10:4). Later, by citing only two commandments (love God and love your fellow man), Jesus further summarized the essence of Torah, stating: “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt 22:40 KJV).

The Ten Commandments shouldn't be understood merely as “laws.” Who would refer to their wedding vows as “laws”? The word *devarim* is better translated as the “words” or “pronouncements” of God. As Stuart says, “What the chapter contains . . . is more like the content of a national constitution than merely the content of one section of codified law or another.”⁷⁸ The covenant was made between YHVH and the whole assembly, both corporately and individually.

In Deuteronomy 5:6–18, the Ten Commandments are repeated with some slight variations, none of which affect their meaning. In that account, I love the reference that says YHVH “spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire” (Dt 5:4). The poetic power of this story is too much to capture with words. From

out of the fire, the Bridegroom God of Sinai spoke the conditions of the covenant—the *wedding vows*—to His beloved people.

THE FIRST AND SECOND COMMANDMENTS

The first commandment served as the foundation for all of the others: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Ex 20:3). This was to be a marriage established on absolute exclusivity. Isaiah the prophet would later reiterate this beautiful theme: “For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the LORD of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth” (Is 54:5).

Any healthy marriage must have well-defined and well-defended boundaries. In an exclusive relationship, there is no room for any outside or third parties. As such, the second “word” continues the theme of the first. It is specifically because YHVH alone was their God that they were never to “make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Ex 20:4–5a). Something innate within mankind is the tendency of worshippers to create an earthly representation of the thing being worshipped. In ancient times, this nearly always meant some kind of statue or carving. The second word forbidding the creation of idols should not be understood as a proscription against creating any form of art or representation of a human or animal. If such were the case, then the Lord later contradicted Himself. For within the divine design for the future Ark of the Covenant, for example, YHVH commanded that images of cherubim be placed on top (Ex 25:19; 37:8). When the priestly garments were made for Aaron, the hem of the garment was decorated with bells and hand-crafted pomegranates (Ex 28:33–34; 39:24–26). Numerous other examples of the Lord sanctioning the creation of items or images representing things on earth could be cited. The point is two-fold. First, I believe it is important that

God's people never think that their Creator is opposed to artistic creativity. As a lifelong artist, I believe that God's people actually allow creativity to flow through them specifically as a form of worship. Every one of us is that little infant who picks up crayons and begins scribbling on nearly anything in sight. The reason we are creative from birth is because all of us were created in the image of our Creator. It's very simple. When we are creative, we are actually being like Him. Second, the point is to emphasize that the second "word" specifically concerns idolatry. From the perspective of the covenant, any worship given to another god was unfaithfulness to YHVH; it was spiritual adultery.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

The next pronouncement concerns the proper use of YHVH's name: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (Ex 20:7). Although the commandment is worded broadly enough to encompass any misuse of YHVH's name, it specifically means to carefully avoid using God's name as a guarantee of one's words or promises. Stuart describes it as "the prohibition of perjury."⁹ Jesus reiterated and expanded the commandment, warning against making any promises using the name of God, or even anything associated with God. Instead, He said, "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil. (Matt 5:33–37; 23:16–22).

More than any of this, however, is the fact that someone's name is integrally intertwined with his reputation; it is a verbal representation of who that person is. YHVH's "name" represents His very essence. This commandment flows from God's zeal to preserve the purity of the testimony; we may even say the good news, or Gospel, concerning who He really is. For it is only in Him that anyone in the world may find true life.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

The fourth pronouncement concerns the sabbath:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8–11)

As we discussed earlier, at any wedding there is a seal or a visible sign of the marriage covenant. Today, this is nearly always a pair of rings. As Stuart explains:

Many ancient covenants had some sort of sign—something visible that would remind people of the covenant, lest they forget it. The sabbath functions as such a sign for the Mosaic or Sinai covenant. . . . It provides a regular weekly reminder for everyone: as people keep the sabbath, stopping their work and devoting themselves to worship, they demonstrate openly that they are keeping the covenant.

Whereas modern married couples wear a ring to remind themselves, one another, and the whole world, that they are in covenant and belong to one another, so also was the sabbath to function as such a sign. Exodus 31 states this outright:

‘So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’ *It is a sign* between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:16–17, italics mine)

Thus, as a seal and a sign of the marriage covenant, the people of Israel were not to merely observe the sabbath as though it were a law, they were to *reserve it*. Every seven days, one day was to be set aside to continually remind, rejuvenate, and refresh the covenant relationship. The sabbath should be seen a gift rather than a toilsome obligation. No couple dedicated to loving one another would ever look at the concept of a dedicated date night as legalism. Neither should the sabbath be looked upon as a mere commandment but as a blessing.

THE FIFTH TO THE TENTH COMMANDMENTS

The fifth to the tenth commandments now shift from an emphasis on loving God to a focus on healthy and loving relationships with others. This encompasses a range of moral and ethical precepts. The first concerns showing proper honor to one's parents: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you" (Ex 20:12). The next commandment is to never commit murder (v. 13). Then there are proscriptions against adultery (v. 14), theft (v. 15), lying, deception, or "bearing false witness" (v. 16), and finally, a warning against jealousy or "covetousness" (v. 17).

THE POWER OF THE THEOPHANY

All of these words, we are told, were spoken aloud by God before the people (Ex 20:1). At their conclusion we're told, "All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance" (Ex 20:18). It was at this point within the covenant ceremony that the people were simply overwhelmed. The thunder, the trumpets, the sound of God's voice, was simply too much. They pleaded for God to stop talking to them directly. "Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die'" (v. 19). Thus, it

is from this point forward that Moses stepped in as the mediator between God and Israel. And so, “the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was” (v. 21). In the three chapters that follow, (21–23), the Lord continues to instruct the people how to live. The emphasis of the commandments concerned not only exclusive love for God but also how they were to relate to others. One can see why Jesus summarized the entire law under the two categories of loving God and loving others (Mt 5; 22:40).

TILL DEATH DO US PART

Exodus 24 is entirely dedicated to the ratification of the covenant. As usual, it continued as a very formal process. First, the Lord called Moses, Aaron and his two sons, and the seventy elders of Israel to come up the mountain. Before doing so, however, “Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances . . . the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!’” (Ex 24:3). Thus, upon completion of the reading of the *ketubah* in unison, the people agreed. The agreement was both individual and corporate. As Sarna comments:

On the one hand, it is “all the people” as a corporate entity, a psychic unity, that enters into the covenantal relationship with God. On the other hand, each member of the community is addressed individually, as is shown by the consistent use of the second person singular.¹

In other words, the covenant itself was made with the whole assembly, but also with every person present. Further, the covenant even applied to the children and future generations of the Israelites, down to this very day.

SEALED WITH BLOOD

In modern times, when bride and bridegroom finish reciting the vows, they each declare: “Till death do us part.” This phrase signifies their commitment to God and one another to remain married for the rest of their lives. Only death will bring their relationship to an end. Like so many other aspects of the covenant, this very solemn commitment was sealed through a public ceremonial act. After the people agreed to the stipulations of the covenant, the Lord instructed Moses to build “an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel” (Ex 24:4). Because the people were so vast in number, the twelve pillars were to stand beside the altar as representatives of the twelve tribes. After this was all built, Moses had “the sons of Israel” slaughter several young bulls and sacrifice them on the altar. Then,

Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:6–8)

The imagery of all of this is stunning. After sprinkling the blood over the people (or more likely onto the pillars beside the altar, which stood as a representative of the people),² Moses once more read the complete contents of the covenant out loud to the congregation. Out of this context, they again affirmed their commitment to keep “everything” noted within the covenant. Then, one final time Moses splashed the people with more blood. Thus, the Mosaic Covenant was sealed with a vivid, gruesome, and bloody display. Stuart states that the sealing of the covenant with blood symbolized “the shared responsibility of the two parties as well as

the severity of the penalty for breaking the covenant.”³ In other words, as powerful as the conclusion of any marriage ceremony is, with the bride and bridegroom each making vows unto death, the Sinaitic covenant actually took it a step further. If the Israelites failed to keep the conditions of the covenant, the penalty would be death.

THE WEDDING FEAST

Now it was time for Moses and the elders, as representatives of the whole congregation, to ascend the mountain to meet with the Lord and complete the ceremony. Halfway up, on a large plateau, still looking up toward the peak, they enjoyed a feast:

Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself . . . and they saw God, and they ate and drank. (Exodus 24:9–11)

Like any modern wedding, which features a dinner after the ceremony, so also was the Lord’s marriage covenant sealed with a wedding feast. This portion of Exodus is one of the most stunning passages in the Bible. Moses and the elders of Israel ate and drank, then, looking up, saw the God of Israel atop the mountain, in a manner that seems to transcend sufficient description. Like the covenant with Abraham (Gn 15:17), this covenant also was sealed or ratified not only through the bloody act of sacrificing bulls but also with a meal. As Stuart notes:

In the ancient biblical world, covenants were normally concluded with a special covenant meal in which animals were symbolically cut in half (symbolizing the shared responsibility of the two parties as well as the severity of the penalty for breaking the covenant), then the parties to the covenant walked between the pieces, and then the meal was eaten together as a sign of friend-

ship and alliance. God's covenant with Israel, as represented through the now-completed Covenant Code, involved God as one party and the people as the other."⁴

"WITH THIS RING, I THEE WED"

Then the Lord called Moses to "[c]ome up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandments which I have written for their instruction" (v. 12). The account of Moses' ascent to the top of the mountain and his encounter with God there continues one of the most stunning scenes in the whole Bible:

Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Exodus 24:13–18)

While Moses was there on the mountain, the Lord gave Israel a "sign" that is also reflected in modern wedding traditions. Beyond giving Moses the many instructions concerning the tabernacle, the sacred furniture, and the various rituals connected to it, the Lord gave Israel something very special that would serve to forever remind them of the covenant. He gave them the sabbath. While modern wedding ceremonies include the exchanging of rings as visible signs, so was the sabbath to serve as a similar perpetual outward "sign":

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you.

Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:12–17)

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

In modern times, after the ceremony is complete, the bride, the groom, and the officiating minister all sign an official document called a Certificate of Marriage. In the case of the Sinaitic covenant, the "certificate" was the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. After the Lord gave Moses the commands concerning the sabbath, we're told: "When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God" (Ex 31:18). The marriage certificate had been issued, amazingly carved into stone by God's own hand. In accordance with the profoundly sacred nature of these tablets, the Lord had designated that a sacred container be built to house them in (Ex 25:10–22). This is now called The ark of the covenant (Nm 10:33; 14:44; Dt 10:8; etc.). Consider the importance of the marriage certificate. Many years later, after Israel had taken possession of the land, in what we might call a cosmic-biblical perspective, Israel was viewed as being at the center of the nations. At the center of Israel was Jerusalem. The heart of Jerusalem was the temple. The heart of the temple was the Holy of Holies. The fixture reserved for the Holy of Holies was the ark, inside of which were the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments, the divinely ordained certificate of marriage.

THE SHEMA

Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord has much to say to Israel about reminding themselves and their children concerning the marvelous things that He did during the Exodus. Beyond the sabbath, another significant way in which Judaism practices the command to remember is through the regular recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4. Due to the imperative first word in the verse meaning “hear,” or “obey,” this passage has come to be known as “the Shema.” The full passage reads as follows:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4–9)

Even as we likened the sabbath to the visible sign of a wedding ring, so also was the Shema to be written on a small scroll and literally bound to the hand and forehead as a kind of sign, a constant reminder. Today, observant Jews fulfill this by binding a small leather box containing the Shema written on a piece of calf skin on both their forearms and foreheads called phylacteries or *tefillin* in Hebrew. Many Jews today see the placement of the phylacteries as pointing to the fact that the commandments must always be in the forefront of our thoughts, represented by the forehead, and our actions, represented by the hand. Old Testament scholar Eugene H. Merrill describes the centrality of the Shema at the heart of Judaism from ancient times to this very day:

Postbiblical rabbinic exegesis understood the role of the Shema to be the heart of all the law. When Jesus was asked about the greatest of the commandments, He cited this (and its companion in Lev 19:18) as the fundamental tenet of Jewish faith, an opinion with which his hearers obviously concurred (Matt 22:34–39; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–28). So much so did the centrality of this confession find root in the Jewish consciousness that to this very day the observant Jew will recite the Shema at least twice daily.⁵

The first declaration of the Shema, “The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” is often interpreted and understood to be a doctrinal declaration of strict, unitarian monotheism, expressing the belief that God exists as a strictly singular “one-ness.” By understanding the Sinai Covenant as a marriage covenant, however, we recognize the Shema to be far less about the mere quantification of God and far more about declaring the absolutely exclusive nature of the relationship. This is why the 1985 Jewish Publication Society Tanakh translation renders it, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” While the Israelites agreed to keep all of the Lord’s commandments at the base of the mountain, the Shema serves as a perpetual reminder of that original declaration. What was affirmed aloud at Sinai is now reaffirmed on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

Beyond the *mikveh* (ritual washing), the *chuppah* (canopy), and the *ketubah* (wedding vows), so also did the ratification of the covenant continue to reflect the rituals of a wedding. For example, Israel sealed the covenant with multiple enthusiastic affirmations (“I do! I do!”). Furthermore, the Lord gave Israel the outward and perpetual sign of the sabbath (the wedding ring). Half way up the mountain, Moses and the 70 elders ate together as part of the process of sealing the covenant (the wedding feast). Finally, the stone tablets, written by the very finger of God (the marriage certificate), was given to Moses to be enshrined indefinitely within the Ark of the Covenant.

Like any modern marriage, the covenant was made “till death.” Yet taking this concept even further by sealing the covenant with blood, it was clearly understood (and verbally stated outright many times) that the penalty for violating the covenant was death.

THE ADULTEROUS BRIDE

Few stories in the Bible showcase the sinful and fickle nature of man more painfully than the story of the golden calf. From the heights of the most glorious theophany on the mountain, the story abruptly shifts into a total rebellion on the ground. It is a catastrophe so severe as to stand shoulder to shoulder with the tragic fall of mankind in the garden and the destruction of the world by the Flood. While Moses stood in the presence of God at the top of the mountain, the people below plunged themselves to a new spiritual low. Upon hearing the words of the covenant, they fervently committed themselves to keep “all the words” of God. Rarely, however, do well-intentioned impulses convert into a sustainable way of life. At the first opportunity that presented itself, they shamelessly violated multiple commandments. The wedding ceremony was not even over yet, and in the full sight of her husband, the people cheated with a man-made calf-god from Egypt:

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” (Exodus 32:1)

THE GOLDEN CALF

Moses had been on the mountain for forty days and forty nights (Ex 24:18). Perhaps the people had not been told how long he would be gone. It's not clear if Moses himself even had any idea how long he would be gone. What is clear is that in their leader's absence, the people quickly became impatient. Various commentators have tried to explain what may have led the Israelites to turn so quickly from such a firm commitment to YHVH to such a gross rebellion. Apart from the simple human propensity toward sin, however, none of the explanations suffice. They were completely without excuse. As the late nineteenth century commentator Edward Dennett rightly observes, "The act of the people is no less than open apostasy."¹ Making matters worse, Aaron fell with them, apparently without a struggle. Moses' very brother, who had walked by his side and witnessed firsthand the power of YHVH, took a leading role in the whole affair. He was the one who actually crafted the idol itself and built an altar for it:

Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf. (Exodus 32:2–4a)

This "molten calf" that Aaron crafted was actually made of wood but overlaid with gold. Not only do the Scriptures describe this as a common method of idol-making (Is 30:22; 40:19; Hos 8:6; cf. Hos. 8:4; Hb 2:19) but the fact that Moses later burned it confirms this fact (v. 20). Despite its having just been crafted by human hands, they immediately began to credit it with the mighty deeds that YHVH had accomplished. As they worshipped, they cried out, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (v. 4b). Beyond making the idol, Aaron also dedicated a feast to the

calf-god: “Aaron made a proclamation and said, ‘Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD. So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play’” (vv. 5–6). One of our favorite Old Testament scholars, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., describes the meaning of this passage: “the people satisfy their own desires and proceed to indulge in revelry. The verb *ṣāḥaq* signifies drunken, immoral orgies and sexual play.”²

THE GREAT CATASTROPHE

It would have been nearly impossible to have more perfectly violated multiple commandments at once. First, this was a very deliberately made “idol.” They sacrificed to it, bowed down before to it, worshipped it, and even declared it to be “their god.” They even gave it credit for leading them out of Egypt! On top of that, the feast was accompanied by all kinds of sexual debauchery. Making the story even more unfathomable is the fact that while the people were doing all of this, the Lord’s glorious and fiery presence continued to cover the mountain (Dt 9:15). Not only were they cheating on their husband during the actual wedding, they were doing it in His full view.

At the top of the mountain, the Lord was fully aware of what was happening on the ground. “Go down at once,” the Lord told Moses, for the people “have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them” (Ex 32:7-8). The word used here for corruption is rather intense. It is the same word used in Genesis 6:12 for the corruption that the whole world had given itself over to in Noah’s day.³ The remedy then was nothing short of total purgation and complete annihilation.

THE CONSEQUENCES

Like the annihilation of the world in Noah’s day, so did the Lord declare His intention to destroy all of Israel: “I have seen this people,

and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation” (vv. 9-10). Although only some of the people actively participated in this rebellion, the Lord was prepared to destroy the entire nation. As Stuart notes, “Even if every single person had not participated, many had eagerly done so, and the rest had not acted to repudiate them, with the result that the nation as a whole, the nation on balance, can be described simply as ‘they.’”⁴ The offer was to make Moses a kind of new Abraham, through whom a new nation would emerge. Moses, however, interceded, appealing to God’s good name, His international reputation, and His covenantal promises made to his forefathers (Ex 32:12-13). As a result of Moses’ appeal, “the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people” (v. 14). All was not simply forgiven and forgotten, however. Although the Lord had decided not to utterly annihilate them, there would still be severe consequences. Moses would now serve as YHVH’s agent of judgment.

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE IS DESTROYED

Upon the Lord’s command, Moses descended the mountain, with the two tablets—the marriage certificate—in his hands (v. 15). Though he had been told what was happening, now he saw it for himself: “It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses’ anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain” (v. 19). Thus, Moses’ first act was to publicly annul the marriage covenant. Moses threw the two tablets onto the rocky ground and broke them before the whole assembly. As Sarna explains, “This was not an impetuous act; rather, it quite deliberately signified the abrogation of the covenant.”⁵ The wedding ceremony was not even complete and the deal was off.

MOSES BURNS THE IDOL

The Lord's second act of judgment through Moses was to burn the idol itself, to publicly destroy the "god" to which the people had given themselves to: "He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it" (v. 20). In burning the idol, Moses demonstrated its utter powerlessness. The act of sprinkling the ashes on the water and making the people drink them had at least three symbolic purposes. First, by making the people drink the remains of the idol, Moses was making them literally internalize and personally bear the responsibility for their own sins. Second, by mixing the remains of the idol into their only water supply, Moses saw to it that the residue of the idol would actually pass through their bodies and become human waste on the ground. One can hear the chiding tone of the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:37: "Now where are your gods?" This was the ultimate act of humiliation. Third, another very interesting point that was being made concerns the nature of the sin of idolatry. In Numbers 5:11–31, a ritual is described that the Israelites were to carry out if they suspected a wife had been unfaithful and committed adultery. The husband was to take his wife to the priest, who would "take holy water in an earthenware vessel; and he shall take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water" (Nm 5:17). After the woman was made to drink the mixture, if she was guilty, her stomach would swell up. If it didn't, she was innocent (Nm 5:27–28). As strange as this ritual may be, the point is that by having the people drink a mixture of water and the ashes of the idol, Moses was clearly communicating that the people had, like an unfaithful wife, committed adultery and violated the marriage covenant.

MOSES CONFRONTS AARON

Moses' third act was to rebuke his brother, the ringleader of the rebellion: "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?'" (v. 21) According to Sarna, the great sin that Aaron led the people into "is a legal term found . . . in Egyptian marriage contracts, always referring to adultery."⁶ Aaron first attempted to distract the attention on himself by vilifying the people: "Aaron said, 'Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil'" (v. 22). Some commentators actually try to downplay Aaron's sin, casting him as a passive participant pressured into caving in to the people's demands. This simply doesn't square with the Scriptures, however. When the people pressured Aaron, he could have reminded them that Moses had commanded them to wait for his return (24:14), but he didn't. Instead, he took a leadership role in the rebellion. As the beloved British biblical expositor J. Alec Motyer says, "The part Aaron played in this was, of course, criminally feeble."⁷ The fact that Aaron felt the need to make up the most ridiculous of lies proves that he knew he was guilty: "I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf" (v. 24). Keil notes, "This excuse was so contemptible that Moses did not think it worthy of a reply."⁸ In a parallel text in Deuteronomy, we read that the Lord was so angry with Aaron, that he almost killed him (Dt 9:20). Like the rest of the rebels, it was only through Moses' intercession that his brother Aaron was saved.

THE IDOLATERS ARE SLAUGHTERED

Moses' fourth act was to turn his rage toward those who were still unrepentant. Rather than settling down after Moses appeared and destroyed the calf-idol, many had continued in open rebellion: "Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies" (v.

25). Kaiser notes “that there is a type of religious prostitution connected with the people’s worship of the golden calf.” The people were running wild, having cast off all restraints. Moses knew that something had to be done, and thus the execution of three thousand rebels took place that day:

Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. He said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’” So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. (Exodus 32:26–28)

When Moses called upon those who were “for the LORD” to step forward, it was primarily those from the Levites, his own tribe, who did so. The call to literally slay their own brothers, friends, and neighbors would no doubt have been an intensely agonizing commandment to carry out. It is for this reason that later, when Moses blessed the twelve tribes, he spoke of Levi as the tribe, “Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, nor did he regard his own sons, for they observed Your word, and kept Your covenant” (Dt 33:9).

MOSES PERSISTS IN INTERCESSION

Despite all that Moses had done, having burned the golden calf and killed three thousand people, there was still no assurance from the Lord that all would be forgiven. Moses thus issued another stiff rebuke to those who remained and went back up the mountain to talk to God (Ex 32:30-31). There, Moses made his appeal by tying his own eternal destiny to Israel’s future: “Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, ‘Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and

they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” (Ex 32:31–32). Moses acknowledged the peoples’ sins, but his intercessory appeal was essentially: “Spare the people. Take me instead.” As Sarna describes, “[T]he prayer blends confession with a plea for pardon; but another element is introduced. Moses nobly ties his personal destiny to his people’s fate. There can hardly be a more impressive example of selfless ‘love of Israel’ (in Hebrew *’ahavat yisra’el*).”¹⁰ Readers of the New Testament will immediately recognize this as a clear foreshadowing of the prayer of the apostle Paul who would also cry out on behalf of Israel: “I am telling the truth in Christ. . . . For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites” (Rom 9:1–4). The Lord responded to Moses by explaining that He would punish only those who are guilty. Moses would not be able to absorb Israel’s punishment.

Next, the Lord gave instructions to Moses to proceed leading the people toward the promised land. This was good news, because it meant that the mission had not been aborted. This was accompanied by the devastating news, however, that YHVH was not going to accompany them as He had done until that point: “I will send an angel before you . . . [but] I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way” (33:2–3). Once again, Moses continued to persist in intercession, refusing to lead Israel into the promised land unless the Lord would personally accompany them (33:12–16). Not only did the Lord relent at Moses’ intercession, something else very special happened.

COMPASSIONATE AND GRACIOUS

Moses asked the Lord for a greater revelation of who YHVH is. The Lord informed Moses that He was going to reveal Himself to Moses in a way that he had not previously witnessed (33:18–33). In the

midst of this powerful self-revelation, YHVH described Himself to Moses in the following terms:

The LORD [YHVH], the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations. (Exodus 34:6–7)

In these verses, YHVH relays five specific attributes that characterize who He is. Together these attributes define what every human heart longs for from heaven. No doubt, all of these self-descriptions were greatly welcomed by Moses. The first attribute listed was YHVH's "compassionate" nature. The God of glory that had manifested on the mountain is the God who genuinely cares about humans. He carries actual emotions toward them that are expressed as tenderness and mercy. The second attribute concerns the Lord's graciousness. YHVH is one who does good things for people who do not actually deserve such kindness. The Lord is not one who merely does what is expected or required, but actually goes so much above and beyond. Third, the Lord described Himself as one who is "slow to anger." YHVH's patience with sinful and rebellious people actually defines Him. Next, He declared Himself to be one who possesses a tremendous or great measure of covenant love and loyalty. The Hebrew word here, *hesed*, translated as "lovingkindness," points to the kind of long-term, reliable loyalty that defines a truly faithful spouse. While Israel had already proven herself to be both fickle and unreliable, YHVH revealed Himself to be just the opposite; He is one who can be fully trusted. Fifth and finally, the Lord described Himself as abounding in truth. All that the Lord declares is true. His word, just like His heart, can be fully trusted.

FORGIVENESS

Upon hearing God's self-description, Moses jumped at the opportunity and appealed for the Lord's complete forgiveness: "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O LORD, I pray, let the LORD go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession" (Ex 34:9). On one hand, the story causes us to praise Moses for his persistence in intercession. What a tenacious spirit he had! On the other hand, if it had not been for the Lord's self-revelation as the One abounding in mercy and compassion, it's doubtful that Moses would have made such a bold appeal. Nevertheless, when Moses' resolute spirit and the Lord's merciful heart met in intercession, forgiveness was the inevitable result. So the Lord declared that the broken marriage covenant would be restored. Despite the horror of all that had just transpired, YHVH determined to give Israel another chance: "Then God said, 'Behold, I am going to make a covenant'" (Ex 34:10). This is not to be understood as the Lord making a second covenant, rather He was affirming the renewal of the initial covenant.¹¹ Since it was renewed, the marriage contract needed to be drawn back up. Thus, the Lord commanded Moses: "'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' . . . And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments" (Ex 34:27–28). Although the first marriage contract was written by the very finger of God, the renewed contract would be carved into the tablets by Moses. Thus Moses returned to the camp, his face glowing from the glory of God, with the restored marriage certificate (Ex 34:29–30).

A SECOND CHANCE

Although the Lord had decided to take His wayward bride back, things would not be as they were before. The renewal of the covenant came with many new, stricter conditions and warnings.¹² Israel was repeatedly warned to never again play "the harlot" with foreign gods (Ex 34:15).

The warnings against acting like prostitutes were metaphorical, of course, speaking of worshipping foreign gods. Further, from this point forward, YHVH would repeatedly express His “jealously,” or, more rightly, His passion for the singular devotion of His bride. Although the jealousy of God is not like the carnal jealousy of man, it is also not entirely different. It’s not surprising that after the golden calf betrayal, the word jealousy suddenly appears again and again. Like any marriage that has endured betrayal, although forgiveness had been extended, the painful wounds often linger. The covenant had been renewed, but the grievous memory of what happened remained.

CYCLES OF ADULTERY

It would be wonderful to conclude this story with the report that after the renewal of the covenant, Israel learned her lesson and remained faithful from that point forward. Sadly, this is not how the story unfolds. Quite the contrary, Israel’s history is the story of repeated offenses against the Lord. As the Lord spoke to Moses just before his death:

“Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.
(Deuteronomy 31:16)

Moses also rebuked the people, speaking of their future unfaithfulness to God. He said, “I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more, then, after my death?” (Dt 31:27). Numerous times throughout Israel’s history, she violated her covenant with God. There is even evidence that they never fully put away their “love” of Apis and Hathor, the Egyptian cow gods worshipped during the golden calf incident. In the days of King Jeroboam, around five hundred years after the Exodus, the people again created and worshipped golden calf idols:

So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.” He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. (1 Kings 12:28–30)

In the decades and generations that followed, the pattern is fairly consistent. First, the people would zealously commit themselves to the Lord. Second, they would fail to live up to their commitment. Third, the Lord lovingly, though sometimes very painfully, would chastise them. Fourth, they would repent and return to the Lord who forgives and restores them.

CONCLUSION

The theme of the Lord’s faithfulness toward Israel, His adulterous bride, is actually a significant theme throughout the later prophets. If we are to be honest, we will admit that Israel’s story is the same as all of our stories. This point is so important to make, because it might be easy to judge Israel for her repeated unfaithfulness. In truth, however, Israel’s story as a repeat offender, a serial adulteress, is no different than that of anyone who has sought to live wholly for the Lord. Everyone needs God’s mercy to be renewed every morning. Thankfully, we serve a God who is indeed “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin” (Ex 34:6). The reality, however, is that He is also the God who “will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Ex 34:6–7). God is merciful, but He is also just. Like a loving father, God chastises those He loves to bring back to Himself. We will discuss this subject in the next few chapters. But first, in the next chapter, we will briefly summarize the various marriage motifs that permeate the Exodus account.

SUMMARY OF MARRIAGE MOTIFS IN THE EXODUS

Having completed our overview of the Exodus, let us now summarize the many romance and marital motifs featured within the biblical narrative.

1. YHVH STATED HIS INTENTIONS TOWARD ISRAEL.

Before the actual Exodus from Egypt, the Lord clearly stated His intentions to Israel: “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD” (Ex 6:6–8). The specific phrase “I will take you to be my people” (v. 7) carries the inference that the Lord was inviting Israel into a very special, exclusive, and intimate relationship with Himself.

2. YHVH DISPLAYED HIS POWER BEFORE ISRAEL.

Having determined to ‘catch the eye’ of Israel, His prospective love interest, the Lord initiated a series of events in which He could place His might and His power on full display. This included a head-on confrontation with Pharaoh, the plagues, appearing over the Israelites in the form of the pillar of cloud and fire, and finally, splitting the Red Sea. The Lord stated that He specifically did these things in order that, “I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 7:3).

3. YHVH KILLED HIS COMPETITION.

By parting the Red Sea and drowning Pharaoh and his armies in such an extraordinary manner, the Lord was not merely displaying His power, He was actually putting competitors to complete shame and removing them entirely from the picture. Even from the onset of their relationship, the Lord was determined that He be the sole recipient of Israel’s affections.

4. YHVH DEMONSTRATED HIS COMPASSIONATE, NURTURING, AND TENDER SIDE.

The Lord didn’t merely demonstrate His might and His strength. By providing for Israel’s needs in the desert, He also demonstrated His thoughtful, caring, and compassionate side as well. Through the miracle of manna, the quail, and the water from the rock, the Lord demonstrated His ability to care for and provide for His bride-to-be. “I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. As they had their pasture, they became satisfied” (Hos 13:5–6a). “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions. The Lord alone guided him, and there was no foreign god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he ate the produce of the field; and He made him suck honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock, curds of cows, and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs and rams, the breed of Bashan, and goats, with

the finest of the wheat—and of the blood of grapes you drank wine” (Dt 32:11–14). “They did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He made the water flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock and the water gushed forth” (Is 48:21).

5. YHVH PROPOSED TO ISRAEL.

At the foot of Mount Sinai, the Lord proposed to Israel: “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine” (Ex 19:5). If Israel said yes, she was agreeing to become YHVH’s *segullah*, His most highly prized and special treasure. Beyond any other nation or people throughout the world, Israel was called into a special, exclusive relationship with God.

6. ISRAEL ACCEPTED THE PROPOSAL.

The people’s response to the Lord’s proposal was enthusiastic acceptance: “So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD” (Ex 19:7–8a).

7. ISRAEL UNDERWENT THE PRE-WEDDING RITUAL *MIKVEH*-BATH.

Before the wedding ceremony could begin, the Lord commanded the people to wash and consecrate themselves: The Lord also said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people” (Ex 19:10–11).

8. YHVH, THE BRIDEGROOM, ARRIVED FOR THE WEDDING CEREMONY.

Now that the people had consecrated themselves, YHVH, the Bridegroom arrived at Mount Sinai: “So it came about on the third day,

when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up” (Ex 19:16–20).

9. YHVH PROVIDED A WEDDING *CHUPPAH*-CANOPY.

Before the wedding ceremony began, the Lord provided the wedding canopy over the whole mountain: “So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain” (Ex 19:16). Later, in the book of Isaiah, the prophet used identical imagery and applied it to Mount Zion during the messianic kingdom: “When the LORD has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy (Hebrew: *chuppah*)” (Is 4:4–5).

10. YHVH DICTATED THE *KETUBAH* WEDDING VOWS TO ISRAEL.

The Ten Commandments, as a representation of the whole Torah served as the legal framework, known as the *ketubah*, that would be read during the biblical marriage covenant. To take the matter even more powerful, the wedding vows were spoken by YHVH to Israel, “face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire” (Dt 5:4).

11. THE RELATIONSHIP IS OVERWHELMINGLY DEFINED AS EXCLUSIVE.

The exclusive nature of the relationship is first defined in the first two commandments, or the first two terms of the *ketubah*: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Ex 20:2–5). Numerous times after this would the Lord reiterate the exclusive nature of the relationship and refer to Himself as jealous.

12. ISRAEL AGREED TO THE *KETUBAH* WEDDING VOWS.

After the *ketubah* was read, the people corporately affirmed their “I do!”: “Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances . . . the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!’” (Ex 24:3).

13. THE MARRIAGE COVENANT WAS DEFINED AS A BLOOD COVENANT UNTO DEATH.

The marriage was sealed with blood, thus defining it as a blood covenant unto death: “Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’” So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Ex 24:6–8).

14. THE MARRIAGE COVENANT WAS SEALED WITH A MARRIAGE FEAST.

After the bulls were sacrificed, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up on top of the mountain and

“ate and drank.” This is reflected today in modern weddings with a dinner at the conclusion of the wedding.

15. YHVH GAVE ISRAEL THE SABBATH AS AN OUTWARD SIGN.

In similar form to modern wedding ceremonies concluding with the exchange of wedding rings, the Lord gave the sabbath as an outward sign: “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you’” (Ex 31:12–13).

16. YHVH GAVE ISRAEL SABBATH AS “DATE-NIGHT.”

In the same way that any married couple who seeks to keep the flame of their romance alive knows that they need to spend time together, so also did YHVH ordain that Israel would spend regular scheduled time with Him on a weekly basis.

17. YHVH GAVE ISRAEL THE STONE TABLETS AS A KIND OF MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE.

At the conclusion of the Sinaitic covenant, the “certificate” was the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. After the Lord gave Moses the commands concerning the sabbath, we are told: “When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God” (Ex 31:18). Further demonstrating the profound sacred nature of these tablets, the Lord designated that a sacred container be built in which to keep the tablets in (Ex 25:10–22). This is now called the ark of the covenant (cf. Nm 10:33; 14:44; Dt 10:8).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, any careful analysis of the Exodus and the Sinaitic covenant will reveal the many components that reflect a romance, a wedding, and a marital relationship. We may rightly ascertain this not only through a careful reading of the book of Exodus, but also Deuteronomy. As Messianic Jewish scholar Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum summarizes:

The entire format of the Book of Deuteronomy is that of both an ancient suzerain-vassal treaty and an ancient marriage contract. In other words, what Moses did in Deuteronomy was to take all the various facets of the three earlier books and present them in the form of an ancient marriage contract. This book contains the marriage contract signed between Israel and God—where Israel became the Wife of Jehovah.¹

Having made this point, however, we must add an important qualifier. The imagery of husband and wife, as important and central as it is within the narrative, is certainly not the only metaphor that the Lord uses in Scripture to speak of His relationship with Israel. Throughout the Bible, the Lord also commonly speaks of Himself as a father and His people as His children. He uses other metaphors as well. He is the Shepherd and Israel His flock. Of course, behind all of these metaphors, the true relationship is this: He is their God and they are His people. This calling first appears in the Abrahamic Covenant: “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gn 17:8). It is then reiterated in the story of the Exodus: “I will take you for My people, and I will be your God” (Ex 6:7). Similar statements are repeated throughout Scripture (Ex 34:24,28; Jer 7:23; 30:22; 31:33). As we’ve already stated, regardless of which metaphor we use, they all point to the fact that the Lord was calling His people Israel into a unique relationship with Himself, a relationship of absolute exclusivity and intimacy.

Thus, from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came the people of Israel. After they spent four hundred years in Egypt as slaves, YHVH called Israel into an exclusive, committed, and intimate relationship with Himself. He invited them to become a kingdom of priests. He would be their God and King, and they would be His people. Exuberantly, they accepted His proposal. Thus He gave them His commandments, He gave them their national charter, He gave them instructions how to live in ways starkly different from the surrounding peoples. The original theocratic kingdom was established. As their God and King, YHVH would now cultivate Israel to become a people suitable to bring forth His promised king who would establish His kingdom here on earth and bring about the complete healing and restoration of all things.

PART 2

RESTORATION OF THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

Having examined the covenant made at Mount Sinai, we now shift to discuss the stipulations of the covenant, how they have played out within Israel's history, and how they will impact her future. Here we will examine how the Sinaitic covenant will determine Israel's future chastisement, followed by her ultimate salvation. As we will see, the story of Israel's last-days restoration is not only prophesied by Moses, but the manner in which it will occur is patterned after the story of the Exodus. This is one of the primary underlying themes of the entire Bible. In fact, as we are about to see, understanding the Exodus as the pattern for the biblical story of redemption is the key, purposefully embedded within the biblical narrative, that unlocks so much of the words of the prophets and the New Testament.

THE CURSES OF THE COVENANT

In this chapter, we will begin by discussing the blessings and the curses of the covenant at Mount Sinai. If we wish to properly understand both Israel's history and their future, we must begin by understanding this critical theme within Torah. Through the covenant at Sinai, God promised that if Israel remained obedient, He would bless them. If Israel was disobedient, however, He would bring all manner of curses, or, more properly, chastisements, upon them. These chastisements follow a very specific cycle that already has partially played out a few times in Israel's history. We will begin with the blessings and then look at the chastisements.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT

In the early chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses called upon Israel to obey the tenets of the covenant:

“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. (Deuteronomy 4:1)

The results of obedience concern both entering and taking “possession” of the land that was first promised to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant. The promise is reiterated and expanded upon in Leviticus 26:

If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. ‘Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land. (Leviticus 26:3–5)

As Wenham says, “[O]bedience to the law is the key to Israel’s survival and success.”¹ Obedience would bring prosperity and peace; simple things like rain in its proper season, an abundant harvest, and good relations with her neighbors.

THE CHASTISEMENTS OF THE COVENANT

Conversely, if Israel is disobedient to the Lord, then there is a series of very specific stated punishments that will befall them. In Deuteronomy 4, Moses began to prophesy to Israel concerning what they would experience if they rebelled in future:

When you become the father of children and children’s children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger. (Deuteronomy 4:25)

Then, using the language of a legal proceeding, calling heaven and earth as his witnesses, Moses summarized the punishments that would come upon Israel, if and when they would enter into rebellion against God and provoke His anger:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the

LORD drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. (Deuteronomy 4:26–28)

Whereas obedience would result in Israel possessing and remaining in the land, disobedience would result in many of the Israelites being killed, and many others being driven out of the land and scattered among the Gentile nations. In Deuteronomy 32, the Lord expands upon this theme:

I will heap misfortunes on them;
I will use My arrows on them.
They will be wasted by famine, and consumed by plague
And bitter destruction;
And the teeth of beasts I will send upon them,
With the venom of crawling things of the dust.
Outside the sword will bereave,
And inside terror—
Both young man and virgin,
The nursling with the man of gray hair.
(Deuteronomy 32:23–25)

Again, Leviticus 26 reiterates and expands the same theme:

But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up. I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you. (Leviticus 26:14–17)

In summary, if Israel violates the covenant, the Lord will bring a variety of national catastrophes upon them. It begins with things such as disease, wild animals, and failed crops, and is followed by more dramatic catastrophes such as foreign invasion, defeat, and, ultimately, exile from the land.

THE COVENANT CHASTISEMENT CYCLE

When we survey all the passages above, we discover a very clear pattern or cycle that unfolds in the following order:

1. Israel breaks the covenant and commits idolatry.
2. God disciplines them first with various national calamities.
3. Next, the land is invaded.
4. Finally, the people are exiled from the land.
5. Eventually, they repent.
6. The Lord restores them back to the land.

Recognizing and understanding this pattern is essential to understanding the end times. As we will see, this is a cycle that has already played out in Israel's history, but it will also be repeated in the last days.

PROPHETIC WARNINGS FULFILLED IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

The prophetic warnings contained in the covenant are actually a profound proof that God exists and is intimately involved in the life of His people Israel. The very specific cycle of the covenant chastisements has played out dramatically on the world stage during the following episodes within Israel's history:

1. The Assyrian invasion, defeat, and exile of the ten-tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BC.
2. The Babylonian invasion, defeat, and exile of the southern kingdom of Judah at the beginning of the sixth century BC.
3. The Roman occupation, invasion, and defeat of Jerusalem in AD 70, followed by multiple exiles that were complete by AD 136.

In each of these three examples, Israel's sin led to her defeat and removal from the land. Whereas in many ways, the first exile to Assyria has never fully resolved, the other two deportations of Judah did eventually see a return to the land. So while these three examples certainly validate the divine origin of the covenant, as we will see, they do not complete the full cycle.

RESTORATION

It is also essential to recognize that the chastisements of the covenant are not merely punitive, but because they emanate from God's heart for His people, they always have a redemptive purpose. As painful as the chastisements may be, they must always be seen as God's loving discipline of His children. They are His method of reproofing His people unto their restoration. They are an extension of YHVH's fiery and jealous heart for His bride to return to Him, and Him alone. In an age when irrational hatred of the Jewish people is once more rising across the globe, it is so essential that Christians understand this. Each of the various passages that speaks of the Lord's punishments goes on to explain that after God scatters Israel among the nations, He will have mercy on them and bring them back to the land. As we read in Leviticus:

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God.

But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD. (Leviticus 26:44–45)

Despite the historical exiles that Israel has experienced, eventually they were restored to the land. After the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, many (but certainly not all) eventually returned to the land to rebuild their fallen nation. Nearly two thousand years after the Roman exile, the modern state of Israel was reestablished in 1948. Although no other nation has ever been reformed after such a long time, in such a way, it shouldn't be a surprise, as it is exactly what the Scriptures state would happen. As devastating as the covenant curses are, their purpose is always Israel's return both to the land *and to the Lord*. The ultimate goal of Israel's Redeemer is their complete restoration, and He will always have the last word. We will discuss the important theme of Israel's ultimate restoration in much more detail as we move forward.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the covenant made at Mount Sinai contains both blessings and curses related to either obedience or disobedience. If Israel obeyed the Lord, then they would be blessed and possess the land. If Israel was disobedient and broke the Lord's covenant, then after a series of warnings and various calamities, they would essentially be spit out of the land. Finally, after some time, the Lord would restore them to the land. All of this is for the purpose of giving Israel an opportunity to repent of their idolatry and unfaithfulness and return to the Lord. This has happened fully at least twice in Israel's history. To the shock of many, however, Israel will undergo one final period of chastisement, exile, and restoration.

THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE

While the cycle of national rebellion, foreign invasion, exile, and restoration has already occurred at least twice in Israel's history, the Scriptures present us with the shocking and unfathomably sobering reality that the cycle will be repeated yet again in the future. Before Jesus returns, the current state of Israel will largely experience another significant chastisement and exile experience. In the opinion of this author, this terrifying and painful reality is consistently taught, quite clearly, throughout the Bible. As we will see, the Scriptures teach that just prior to the Messiah's return there will be another dramatic, though very brief, season of great calamity. It is important to state that the subject matter covered in this chapter is, by far, the most sensitive, and dangerous material covered in this book. In no way should this material ever be used to rebuke Jewish people or the current state of Israel. Quite to the contrary, the only proper biblical response from Gentile Christians to the passages discussed here should be to seek substantive ways to stand with the Jewish people and the state of Israel, particularly as global hatred spreads. To be clear, at times the Scriptures emphasize the global nature of this period of great tribulation, which is to say that it will indeed affect the global Christian community just as significantly as it will affect Israel and the Jewish people. Other passages, however, emphasize the impact of the coming trouble specifically on Israel. This period is commonly

referred to as variously as “the last days,” “the end times,” “the great tribulation,” or “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” As we will see, the Lord’s purpose for this period aligns perfectly with the cycle of covenant chastisements discussed in the previous chapter.

THE SONG OF MOSES

The concept of Israel undergoing a great chastisement before the time of redemption begins in the Torah. Perhaps the most foundational passage is called the Song of Moses. Just before Moses died, the Lord told him to write a song “and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel” (Dt 31:19). After Moses died, the Lord explained that Israel would “arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land” and “forsake Me and break My covenant.” As a result:

My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them. . . . For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant. (Deuteronomy 31:17,20)

Thus, Moses wrote the prophecy down and taught it to the people (v. 22). It is not an overstatement to say that this song is one of the most important and foundational prophetic texts in the entire Bible. A careful study of the Song of Moses and a comparison to so many later comments by the prophets will reveal that they continually point back to this foundational prophetic text. It begins by describing the first phases of the covenant chastisement cycle, Israel’s turning to idolatry and breaking of the covenant. Then, as a result of their rebellion:

The LORD saw this, and spurned them because of the provocation of His sons and daughters. Then He said, "I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness. They have made Me jealous with what is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." (Deuteronomy 32:19–21)

This is the second phase of the cycle. The Lord will respond to Israel's idolatry by allowing all kinds of calamities to come upon them. These serve largely as warnings. He will withdraw His blessings and protection. The next two phases of the chastisement cycle involve invasion and exile. Moses had already addressed these matters in Deuteronomy 4: "The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you" (v. 27). As biblical scholar and commentator Peter C. Craigie notes, "They would survive, few in number—although they would not be completely wiped out, to survive few in number would be a tragic contrast to the promise of the covenant, according to which the Israelites were to become as numerous as the stars of heaven."¹ Further, because Israel would provoke YHWH to anger with their idols, He promises to use a foolish people (if you are a Gentile, then raise your hand) to provoke them to anger. Paul the apostle would later refer to this passage when he spoke about preaching to Gentiles in order that they would in turn provoke his Jewish countrymen, in the hope of saving some (Rom 11:14).

JACOB'S TROUBLE ACCORDING TO JEREMIAH

Many generations later, expounding upon the words of Moses, Jeremiah the prophet spoke of these terrible days: "For thus says the LORD, 'I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace' (30:5). After setting the tone, he then asks the question as to whether or not a man can give birth. It is a rhetorical question, of

course, to which the answer is a resounding no. If males cannot give birth, then: “Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale?” (v. 6). The people of the land of Israel are portrayed as being gripped by agony and fear. Jeremiah concludes: “Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress” (v. 7a). The KJV calls it the time of “Jacob’s trouble.” When the prophet says that this particular day is “great,” it means terribly horrible. As the prophet Malachi would later call it: “the great and terrible day of the LORD” (Mal 4:5). By stressing that there is no day like it, the prophet was emphasizing the unparalleled horror of this time.

What will this time of unequalled trouble for Israel look like? Jeremiah goes on to speak of Israel’s enslavement among the nations that attacked them. In verse 8, the Lord declares, “I will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves.” As was the case with the historical cycles when the Assyrians and Babylonians conquered and led the people away in chains, so also does Jeremiah foretell Israel undergoing one final episode of calamity in which many of its people will actually become enslaved or taken as prisoners of war. Of course, it is essential to note that in the midst of such calamity, the prophet adds a powerful statement of hope: “[B]ut he will be saved from it” (v. 7b). Despite the cataclysmic nature of this coming day of trouble, a remnant of Israel will be saved from out of this period. This salvation, of course, is the primary focus of the story, and will thus be the subject of the next several chapters.

JACOB’S TROUBLE ACCORDING TO THE ANGEL GABRIEL

Nearly a century after Jeremiah, the prophecy of Daniel also addresses the time of Jacob’s trouble. When asked how long the period of Israel’s final chastisement would last, an angel raises his hands to heaven and declares that it would take three and a half years for the armies of the Antichrist to “finish shattering the power

of the holy people, [then] all these events will be completed” (Dn 12:7). Earlier in Daniel’s prophecy, this same time period describes the Antichrist thusly:

His power will be mighty, but not by his own power,
And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree
And prosper and perform his will;
He will destroy mighty men and the holy people. (Daniel 8:24)

In Daniel 11, after detailing the many terrible things that will take place in Jerusalem at the hands of the Antichrist (vv. 21–45), the angel Gabriel issues the following terrifying statement: “[T]here will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (12:1). Then, to make it very clear when it would happen, he immediately identifies this time of tribulation as taking place just before the resurrection of the dead: “[A]t that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt” (Dn 12:1–2). Whereas Jeremiah refers generally to this period as an unparalleled time of calamity, Gabriel is much more specific, referring to it as the worst time of distress ever to befall a nation in the history of mankind. Then he specifically connects it to the time when the dead are resurrected, at the end of the age. Finally, another angel interjects, reiterating the duration of this time of tribulation as lasting, “a time, times, and half a time” (Dn 12:7). Christian interpreters all agree that this refers to the final three and a half years before Jesus returns.

JACOB’S TROUBLE ACCORDING TO ISAIAH

The concept of Israel enduring great suffering before the age of redemption was deeply embedded in Israel’s national consciousness. Isaiah 26, often referred to as “Isaiah’s little apocalypse,” vividly communicates this expectation:

As the pregnant woman approaches the time to give birth,
 She writhes and cries out in her labor pains,
 Thus were we before You, O LORD.
 We were pregnant, we writhed in labor,
 We gave birth, as it seems, only to wind.
 We could not accomplish deliverance for the earth,
 Nor were inhabitants of the world born. (Isaiah 26:17–18)

Here, Israel collectively laments the fact that despite having endured great suffering, likened unto labor pains, they did not give birth to a baby. Instead, they merely broke wind. What exactly did they expect the pains to produce? We must pay very careful attention. They expected “deliverance for the earth” and for “the inhabitants of the world [to be] born” as unto new life. Israel understood that after a period of their own corporate suffering, the world would be delivered from the curses of the fall. This undoing of the curse would entail much more than merely attaining rest and deliverance from their labor and toil (Gn 5:28–29) but would also be the end of death itself. The righteous dead would actually come back to life. The very next verse makes this crystal clear. The Lord responds to Israel’s cry by comforting them with the following promise:

Your dead will live;
 Their corpses will rise.
 You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
 For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,
 And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits. (Isaiah 26:19)

YHVH assures His people that despite their disappointment, their hope is valid, and indeed the “birth” will come. The corpses of the righteous dead will literally rise from the ground and shout for joy! Israel’s “labor” pains will result in the earth “giving birth” to those presently buried under the soil. This is one of the clearest passages, using such vivid detail, describing the resurrection of the

dead. Commentator Gary V. Smith, calls this passage “God’s salvation oracle of hope.”² That Isaiah is speaking here of the resurrection becomes even clearer when we look to the previous chapter of Isaiah’s oracle where he speaks of the time when God “will swallow up death for all time, and . . . will wipe tears away from all faces” (Is 25:8). When the Messiah comes, He will undo the curse, and even death itself will be defeated. Just before that time, however, Israel and the people of God around the world, will endure a brief period of unparalleled tribulation.

JACOB’S TROUBLE ACCORDING TO EZEKIEL

One of the most gripping passages in the whole Bible concerning Israel’s long and storied history is found in Ezekiel 16. The passage begins with YHVH calling upon the prophet to “make known to Jerusalem her abominations” (v. 2). Using imagery that seizes the hearers’ attention, Israel is described as having been like a baby who was discarded at birth, who the Lord found lying by the side of the road

on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ (Ezekiel 16:4–6)

After rescuing Israel from death, the Lord describes how He committed Himself wholeheartedly to her specifically through *a marriage covenant*: “[I] entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the LORD God” (v. 8). The Lord cared for His bride, blessed her, and adorned her with jewelry and gifts (vv. 9–14). From a rejected orphan, Israel became a queen. Then,

from such heights, she became a prostitute: “But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing. You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen” (vv. 15-16). To make matters far, far worse: “Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire (vv. 20, 21). The rebuke continues as Israel committed adultery with the Egyptians (v. 26), the Assyrians (v. 28), and the Chaldeans (v. 29). The Lord does not hold back in His pained rebuke: “*You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!*” (v. 32). Then the Lord describes the chastisements that He would bring upon Israel to teach her the errors of her ways:

[T]herefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated. So I will gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness. Thus I will judge you like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. I will also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare. They will incite a crowd against you and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. (Ezekiel 16:38–40)

Ezekiel describes, in vivid detail, the time of Jacob’s trouble. At that time, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans will form a coalition and gather together against her for her destruction. Through exposure, fire, and swords, the Lord says that Israel will be chastised in the harshest manner imaginable. The story, however,

does not end there. Later, we will look at the glorious conclusion of this gripping prophecy, in which we will see the Lord's never-ending compassion and for His people and His ultimate intentions to restore her forever.

JACOB'S TROUBLE ACCORDING TO ZECHARIAH

The prophet Zechariah, one of the last of the prophets, also very clearly described this time of tribulation for Israel. He specifically spoke of the last days invasion of the nation, with many of its people going into exile. In the last chapter of his prophecy for example, we are given a very detailed description of this time:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. (Zechariah 14:1–3)

Zechariah speaks of the nations gathering together to attack Jerusalem; the invaders will plunder homes, rape the woman, divide the spoils of war, and lead many of the people away as prisoners of war. The prophecy also specifically states that half of the city's inhabitants will remain in Jerusalem. In this sense, Zechariah describes these things in much greater detail than any of the previous prophets. Several other prophetic passages throughout the Scriptures also describe this same invasion (cf. Zec 12:2–9; Jl 3:2; Ez 38–39; Dn 9:26; 11:31,41; Rv 11:3–10). We know that Zechariah's prophecy pertains to the end times, because the subject of the entire chapter is the day of the Lord. Beyond this, the description of the Lord going forth to fight the invading nations is referring to the coming of the Messiah. In the very next verse, we're told that, "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (v. 4). The culmination of

the Lord's personal intervention is seen in the statement "the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one" (Zec 14:9). As commentator F. Duane Lindsey summarizes: "This chapter pictures the triumphant return of Israel's Messiah as the divine King."³ He comes, however, immediately after Israel's invasion and defeat. As David Baron, the great early twentieth century Messianic Jewish exegete and missionary, commented: "After a brief interval of prosperity, there comes a night of anguish. What occasions the darkest hour in the night of Israel's sad history since their rejection of Christ is the gathering of the nations and the siege predicted in this chapter."⁴

JACOB'S TROUBLE ACCORDING TO JESUS

When Jesus teaches His disciples about the last days, He specifically refers back to many of the passages that we've just looked at. First, He refers to the beginning of this period of suffering as "the beginning of birth pangs" (Mt 24:8). The KJV translates this as "the beginning of sorrows." This imagery is drawn directly from Isaiah 26. Like Isaiah, Jesus uses the imagery of a painful birth to describe the suffering Israel will experience before her final redemption. Second, Jesus also draws directly from Jeremiah 30 and Daniel 12 to describe what will befall Israel:

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Matthew 24:21-22)

Like Gabriel, Jesus casts this time as the most horrific period in the history of the world. Whereas Jeremiah called this time "Jacob's distress," Jesus refers to it as the "great tribulation." In Luke's account, Jesus adds a very detailed description of this time and some strong warnings:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:20–24)

Within His discourse, Jesus also makes some additional comments in Luke that are not found in either Matthew or Mark's account. First, He calls this period the "days of vengeance." This is a direct reference back to the foundational text of the Song of Moses:

“Rejoice, O nations, with His people;
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
And will render vengeance on His adversaries,
And will atone for His land and His people.”
(Deuteronomy 32:43)

Drawing from this same passage, Isaiah also connects the days of vengeance to the coming of the Messiah: “For the LORD has a day of vengeance, A year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Is 34:8; cf. 35:4; 63:4). Second, Jesus also says that during this time, many within Israel will either “fall by the edge of the sword” or “be led captive into all the nations” (Lk 21:24). Again, this is a perfect description of the final portions of the covenant chastisement cycle as described in Torah (Dt 4:26–28; 32:23–25; Lv 26:14–17). Finally, Jesus says that this period will not conclude until the “times of the Gentiles” comes to an end. Israel would remain in a position of relative oppression under the world Gentile system, *until* the nations are judged in day of the Lord. All of these references connect this

time of suffering to the end of the age and the coming of the Messiah. Thus, within Jesus' sermon on the end times, He draws from the Song of Moses and the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Zechariah to teach that the full cycle of the covenant curses will unfold one final time just before He returns. If one wants to know where all of Jesus' information comes from, all one must do is look back to the words of Moses and the prophets that we just reviewed. Jesus is not presenting anything new or revolutionary here. He is simply summarizing all that had already been declared and issuing the most relevant warning imaginable concerning those days, to anyone who will listen.

CONCLUSION

Before the Messiah returns to begin His global rule from Jerusalem, Satan will launch his last great resistance effort. The state of Israel and Jerusalem, in particular, will be invaded, plundered, and occupied by the armies of the Antichrist. This is one of the final phases of the last cycle of the covenant chastisements. Although the cycle of national rebellion, invasion, defeat, exile, and restoration to the land has already happened twice in Israel's history, the Bible clearly teaches that it will happen yet again, one last time, at the end of this age. Moses, the prophets, Gabriel, and even Jesus Himself all testify to this terrifying reality. As unfathomably horrifying and painful as this may be, the current state of Israel, having been reestablished in 1948, will yet one more time experience the chastisements associated with the curses of the covenant. *That, however, is not the end of the story.* The covenant cycle will not be complete until ultimate salvation and restoration comes. That will be the subject of the next six chapters.

ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SALVATION

Despite the tremendously painful realities discussed in the previous chapter, the Scriptures are clear that the pattern of the covenant chastisements have a redemptive purpose. They will not be complete until Israel is fully restored—both to their land and to the Lord. Israel's final restoration to the land will be accompanied by the following truly beautiful realities:

1. National repentance.
2. The outpouring of God's Spirit on all of the people of Israel.
3. All of the surviving remnant of Israel being spiritually saved or renewed.
4. The completion of the new covenant.
5. The return and enthronement of the King Messiah.

It is important to note that none of these things may be said concerning Israel's recent re-establishment in 1948. To be clear, I am personally a firm supporter of the Jewish state, and see clear evidence of the hand of the Lord in its modern restoration. That said, the Scriptures teach that the *final* return to the land will not merely be a revival of Jewish nationalism but a spiritual revival of the whole

nation, a complete return to the Lord, forever. Let's consider some key texts where this is made clear.

ISRAEL'S LAST DAYS REPENTANCE ACCORDING TO MOSES

In both of the previous two chapters, we began with Deuteronomy 4, which contains the prophetic summary of Israel's future. There, Moses describes how Israel would turn to idolatry with the result being their eventual exile from the land and scattering among the nations. Moses then goes on, however, to speak of Israel's repentance that will follow:

But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them. (Deuteronomy 4:29–31)

This passage describes the Lord's ultimate purpose for the covenant chastisements. After Israel experiences exile into the land of their enemies, the pain they experience there will afford them the opportunity to repent and return to their God. Repentance here is described as a result of the Lord's surgical work in their hearts. Israel's ultimate return to the Lord is thus not cast as being due to Israel's goodness, rather it is the result of YHVH's merciful compassion toward them. Their return is a powerful testimony to God's zeal and commitment to His people. As Craigie states, "[T]hough the people might be unfaithful, yet God would remain faithful."¹ Although Israel's unfaithfulness legally dissolves the covenant, the Lord's faithfulness will supersede their rebellion. YHVH will personally see to it that Israel will return to Him, and He will receive them back with wide open and joyful arms.

We must note the issue of timing. According to this passage, Israel's return to the land comes after their earnest return to the Lord. They are portrayed here as returning to the land in full obedience to the Lord. When will this happen? Moses says "in the latter days." As Jack S. Deere in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* notes, the "ultimate reference is to the time when the Lord Jesus will return to earth to establish His one-thousand-year kingdom (Rv 20:4). At that time, repentant Israel will finally seek the Lord . . . look for Him with all her heart and soul and will obey Him."² While a portion of those who returned from the Babylonian exile did so in a spirit of repentance, Scripture does not describe the return from Babylon as a national revival. Similarly, we cannot claim that the whole nation returned to Israel in a spirit of repentance in 1948. The modern repatriation and reformation of Israel was primarily a nationalist revival greatly fueled by the horrors of the Holocaust. The vast majority of Israelis today are not living in full obedience to God and His Messiah. While there is a growing remnant of Messianic Jews who do serve the Lord and His Messiah, and *for whom we should be truly grateful*, the sad reality is that the vast majority do not.³

Toward the conclusion of Deuteronomy, Moses reiterates the same things, though in slightly different form. Within the following comments, we see a near perfect overview of the restorative nature of the covenant chastisements:

So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring

you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:1–6)

What must be highlighted here are the final comments regarding the Lord circumcising the hearts of His people, after they have returned to the land. Here is perhaps the clearest early prophecy concerning the new covenant in the writings of Moses. The Lord says that after His people have been exiled, having suffered the purifying effects of the curses of the covenant, they will return to their home, and in accordance with their physical restoration to the land, will also experience an inner circumcision of their hearts resulting in total obedience. As we will see, the prophets picked up on this theme and expanded greatly on it to develop the concept that came to be specifically referred to as “the new covenant.”

ISRAEL'S LAST DAYS AWAKENING IN THE SONG OF MOSES

In the previous two chapters, we also discussed how the foundational prophetic passage of the Song of Moses predicts an unparalleled calamity that would befall Israel in the last days. The Song of Moses doesn't end, however, with Israel's idolatry and punishment. Like chapter 30, here Moses again goes on to explain that like a loving father, the Lord will use the pain of the last days chastisements to bring Israel to repentance and complete, permanent covenantal faithfulness:

For the LORD will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants, When He sees that their strength is gone, and there is none remaining, bond or free. And He will say, “Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge? Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you, let them be your hiding

place! See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.” (Deuteronomy 32:36–39)

In His mercy, the Lord will allow Israel to awaken to the absolute worthlessness of the false gods in whom they’ve too often trusted. As John D. Currid comments, “The gods of the nations are not like Yahweh. They cannot deliver. They give no aid. They are of no help at all!”⁴ Then the Lord quite terrifyingly states that He will purposefully allow Israel to come to the absolute end of their strength, with many perishing in the process. Yet, as it says in the book of Job: “[D]oes not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand, or in his disaster therefore cry out for help?” (Job 30:24). It is there, in the place of complete brokenness, like a severely pruned branch, that Israel will cry out, and the Lord will speak tenderly to them, revealing Himself as the only true God and source of all life. Although the Lord will wound them, He will also bring healing and restoration. Although He will bring death, He also will bring them new life. He is entirely unlike the false gods that they’ve been worshipping. Thus after the extraordinary devastation wrought by the Antichrist shatters the people and the state of Israel, they will corporately experience a great awakening and ultimate restoration to the Lord.

ISRAEL'S LAST DAYS SALVATION ACCORDING TO ISAIAH

Building upon the words of Moses, Isaiah the prophet also spoke with eloquent poetic beauty concerning Israel’s ultimate restoration:

“A Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” declares the LORD. “As for Me, this is My covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,” says the LORD, “from now and forever.” (Isaiah 59:20–21)

We note that Isaiah specifically linked the following four very important events: (1) the coming of the Messiah, (2) Israel's national repentance, (3) the Lord making a new covenant with Israel, and (4) the Lord pouring out His Spirit on Israel. First, this passage describes the Redeemer coming to Zion. Paul the apostle, in the New Testament, interprets this as referring to the return of the Messiah (Rom 11:26). He will come to those who have turned from their sins in repentance. Then the Lord specifically announces the new covenant. This covenant entails the Lord placing His Spirit within the people of Israel, never to depart. As John A. Martin in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* summarizes: "When the Messiah returns in judgment (v. 18), He will inaugurate His covenant . . . pouring His Spirit on believing Israelites."⁵ Here, the Israel-centered nature of the new covenant is made clear. As much as Christians may seek to take these promises away from Israel and claim them entirely for themselves, their actual context must be recognized as promises made for Israel. While the new covenant was established in the first century through Jesus' atoning death on the cross, and while a multitude of believers, both Jew and Gentile, now enjoy the spiritual benefits of that covenant, it will not actually be complete until the return of Jesus and the complete salvation of Israel.

ISRAEL'S LAST DAYS SALVATION ACCORDING TO JOEL

In speaking about the day of the Lord, the prophet Joel also looks to the great outpouring of God's Spirit on Israel in the last days. At the conclusion of the day of the Lord, after He has finished judging the nations, then the Lord declares that He will pour out His Spirit on the Jewish people (Jl 2:28–32). They will experience complete vindication and healing (Jl 3:18–21). Thus the final phase of the covenant cycle, namely Israel's complete restoration, cannot happen until the judgment of the nations during the day of the Lord, at the conclusion of the last days.

ISRAEL'S LAST DAYS SALVATION IN JEREMIAH

Beyond tying Israel's national repentance to the new covenant and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Jeremiah also specifically tied it to the coming of the Messiah to rule as King over Israel. In Jeremiah 30, the passage that we previously discussed, which speaks of the time of Jacob's trouble, we find a clear description of Israel being freed from enslavement:

"It shall come about on that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them." (Jeremiah 30:8–9)

Although the oppressor is not named, the last-days context of this passage points us to the Antichrist. After their deliverance, the Lord will remove the yoke of the Antichrist from their neck and his bonds from their wrists. This is a direct reference back to the curses of the covenant, where Moses declared: "[Y]ou shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you . . . and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you" (Dt 28:48). After their deliverance, no longer will they be enslaved to the oppressor. Instead, they will serve the great King, the son of David. As Lange so eloquently states, "This salvation is to be communicated by the anointed of the Lord, the second David. The Messiah is called David, not merely as a descendant of David still called by his name, but as a real David in the highest degree. As David was the founder of the earthly throne of David, so the Messiah as the fulfiller is the founder and occupant of the eternal throne of David."⁶ As the passage continues, it is again made clear that all of this will happen when Israel is restored back to their land:

“Fear not, O Jacob My servant,” declares the LORD,
 “And do not be dismayed, O Israel;
 For behold, I will save you from afar
 And your offspring from the land of their captivity.
 And Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease,
 And no one will make him afraid.
 “For I am with you,” declares the LORD, “to save you;
 For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered
 you.” (Jeremiah 30:10–11)

Israel will be delivered from the lands where they were scattered and imprisoned. After being returned home, with all of their enemies defeated, then they will live in quietness and peace. The cycle of the covenant chastisements will be complete. From that day forward, Israel will only enjoy the blessings of the covenant described within the covenant.

In chapter 31, Jeremiah returns to the theme of Israel’s scattering among the nations: “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, ‘when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast’” (Jer 31:27). Then He immediately shifts back to speak about their restoration: “As I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,’ declares the LORD” (v. 28). Then, exactly like Isaiah, his predecessor, Jeremiah also ties Israel’s final restoration back to the land, with the Lord making a new covenant with them:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:27–34).

The new covenant is specifically contrasted here with the Sinaitic covenant. Whereas Israel broke the covenant at Sinai, the new covenant would not be broken. Why? Because it entails the Lord actually putting His Spirit in them. The Lord Himself will dwell within each individual, and as a result, they would all know Him and willingly obey Him. As He had promised both Abraham and Moses so long ago (Gn 17:7; Ex 6:7), YHVH will be Israel’s God and they will be His people. Thus the passage ends with the Lord declaring that from that day forward, Israel’s sins will be permanently forgiven. Jeremiah predicts and links all of the various phases of the covenant chastisements together with Israel’s ultimate last days salvation and final restoration to the land with the Messiah ruling over them as King.

ISRAEL’S LAST DAYS SALVATION IN EZEKIEL 34

So also did Ezekiel the prophet connect Israel’s restoration to the coming of the Messiah: “I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God” (Ez 34:23–24). It is during that time, when Messiah is on the throne, that the Lord promises to bless Israel with a permanent covenant of peace and security:

“I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land.” (Ezekiel 34:25–27a)

Once the Messiah is present as Israel's King, then the blessings of the covenant will be lavished freely upon the nation. When will this happen? The Lord reiterates exactly when:

Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. (Ezekiel 34:27b)

Like Jeremiah before him, Ezekiel points back to the curses of the covenant and speaks of Israel's deliverance from enslavement, prison bars, and shackles of the Antichrist. He connects this deliverance to the time when the Messiah, the Son of David, will be present, ruling on His throne in Jerusalem (vv. 23–24).

ISRAEL'S LAST DAYS SALVATION IN EZEKIEL 36

Yet again, in chapter 36, Ezekiel connects the great end time outpouring of the Holy Spirit to Israel's regathering to their land:

“I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the LORD God, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then

you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.” (Ezekiel 36:23–31; cf. 39:29)

Like both Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel clearly connects the Holy Spirit being placed “within” Israel, her corporate sins being forgiven, and her ultimate restoration to the land. The ancient promise that YHVH would be Israel’s God and they would be His people is reiterated here yet again. The prophecy ends with Israel living in their land without fear, no longer experiencing the curses of the covenant, but instead enjoying only its blessings. Ezekiel thus casts the new covenant outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the culmination and fulfillment of all of the previous covenants. The new covenant will make the following things possible: (1) Israel’s inheritance of the land as promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, (2) with all of the blessings described in the Mosaic Covenant, (3) and with the King Messiah ruling over them, as promised in the Davidic Covenant.

ISRAEL’S LAST DAYS SALVATION ACCORDING TO ZECHARIAH

Perhaps the most commonly referenced passage about Israel’s salvation is found in the prophet Zechariah:

“And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem. . . . The land will mourn, every family by itself. . . . In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. It will come about in that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.” (Zechariah 12:9–13:2)

As one of the final prophets, in speaking of Israel's future corporate salvation, Zechariah ties together several themes from previous messianic passages. First, he speaks of the Lord punishing the nations that invaded Israel. Then he speaks of the new covenant outpouring of the Lord's Spirit on His people. Zechariah, however, adds some important details as to how this event will unfold. Whereas Isaiah ties Israel's salvation to the coming of the Messiah, Zechariah actually describes it. In this most glorious *prophecy of prophecies*, Zechariah describes the Messiah bursting forth from heaven to save Israel. When Israel sees that their Savior is the One whom they (and we all have) pierced, then the spirit of repentance will be poured out on them all. Each family will process this new revelation with mourning and great weeping.

ISRAEL'S NATIONAL REPENTANCE ACCORDING TO PAUL

Together, all of the passages cited above formed a rock-solid foundation for the apostle Paul to so confidently expound upon Israel's future national salvation:

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! . . . For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.” “This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” (Romans 11:11–12, 25–27)

In making his case for a last-days revival of all Israel, Paul drew directly from several of the passages that we've just discussed. In verses 11–12, he referred back to the foundation text, the Song of

Moses (Dt 32), which speaks of the Lord bringing Israel to the end of their strength in order to speak tenderly to them. It also speaks, however, of using Gentiles to provoke Israel to anger and jealousy, a concept that Paul elaborates upon specifically. Then, in verses 26–27, Paul drew from two of the most important Old Testament references to the new covenant, both of which we just looked at (Is 59:20 and Jer 31:34). Together these two passages speak of both the new covenant and the Lord pouring out His Spirit on all Israel. Because Paul was well acquainted with these texts that so clearly point to Israel's last-days salvation, he also speaks of these things with great passion and conviction. According to Paul, this will happen only when the Messiah comes to save them. While a remnant was saved in his day and many more have continued to trickle in throughout history, a great national salvation awaits the last days and the end of the times of the Gentiles. When all of redemptive history reaches the time that all of the prophets have been pointing to, then all of Paul's fellow countrymen will experience the shocking revelation that he himself experienced so many years prior on the road to Damascus.

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, we discussed how the cycle of the covenant chastisements will be repeated in the last days. Israel will yet again be attacked, invaded, and defeated. The end result of this will be many of Israel's citizens being led away into exile or taken as prisoners to the nations. In this chapter, we saw that the pattern of the covenant curses will not be complete until Israel is restored to their God and to their land with Messiah ruling over them. Thus, the Scriptures definitively point to Israel's ultimate and final restoration as taking place in the last days. Moses, the prophets, and the apostle Paul all tied Israel's salvation to the end of this age and the coming of the Messiah. Israel's final restoration to the land will be accompanied by the following four realities: (1) national repentance, (2) the outpouring of God's Spirit on all Israel, (3) the completion of the

new covenant, and (4) the enthronement of the King Messiah. As we have pointed out, none of these things may be said concerning the modern repatriation of the state of Israel. The final return to the land will not merely be a revival of Jewish nationalism, nor a partial revival of only a tiny fraction of its people, rather, it will be a spiritual revival of the whole nation, the likes of which the world has never seen. It will be a complete return to the Lord and His Messiah forevermore. After pondering the beauty and glory of this great last-days event, Paul the apostle was unable to contain himself. Thus he ended this portion of his epistle with a jubilant expression of anticipatory celebration and praise:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

ISRAEL'S FINAL REGATHERING TO THE LAND

No doubt, many readers will likely disagree, perhaps quite strongly, with the view that Israel must undergo yet another final great chastisement. I fully understand and sympathize with such reservations. The very real-world implications of such a scenario, its impact on literally millions of people, are unfathomable. The mere suggestion that the Jewish people, who've already endured tremendously depths of pain throughout their history, have yet more crushing heartbreak in their future seems unthinkable. Beyond the unimaginable emotional challenge such a view brings, however, there are also a few key texts that have been popularly misinterpreted so as to cast doubt on such a view. Over the past several decades, many teachers have specifically cited Isaiah 11, and Jeremiah 16 and 23, all of which speak of a second great regathering to the land, as being fulfilled with the reestablishment of the modern state of Israel. Each of these passages speaks of the Lord bringing Israel back to the land "a second time." It is thus argued that the first return to the land was after the Babylonian exile, whereas the return in the twentieth century was the second and final return to the land. Among those who take this position, most view the Holocaust as the final chastisement spoken of in Scripture. Israel is cast as presently experiencing a gradual awakening and revival that will eventually culminate with the return of Jesus the Messiah and Israel's full restoration. To be quite clear, the movement of

Messianic Jewish believers in Israel is growing. It's estimated that roughly twenty thousand presently live in the land. This is in contrast to about six million Jewish citizens of Israel. Despite the very small percentage of Jewish citizens that the messianic community represents, we should still acknowledge, celebrate, and support this movement, while praying for, believing for, and working toward seeing that these numbers continue to rise.

With all of this said, however, as we demonstrated in the previous chapters, the view that the current state of Israel represents *the final* restoration must ignore far too many details within the prophecies that integrally tie the following realities together: (1) the final three and a half years of this age, (2) the covenant chastisements, (3) the great tribulation, (4) the Antichrist, (5) the return of Jesus, and (6) the restoration of Israel. These things are described as unfolding and culminating together in a relatively short period. It is simply not possible to force the primary emphasis of the Scriptures to fit a timeline of a slow and gradual restoration that unfolds over several decades or more. As we will see, the overwhelming emphasis of the Scriptures portray Israel's ultimate and final restoration to the land taking place after the Messiah bursts forth from heaven to save her. The Bible describes the ultimate national restoration coming after the last-days chastisements followed by national repentance. Israel's return to and possession of the land is entirely contingent upon the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through which they will all be able to live in complete obedience to the Lord. So while it is entirely understandable that many who love Israel would vigorously buck against the idea that another great national chastisement is coming, it is a painful reality that the Bible clearly and consistently teaches across a broad range of passages.

How then are we to understand these three passages (Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 16 and 23) that speak of a second and final regathering to the land of Israel? As we will see, a careful examination of each of these texts supports the view that they remain yet unfulfilled.

THE FINAL RESTORATION TO THE LAND IN ISAIAH 11

Isaiah 11 is a messianic prophecy that begins by describing the Messiah who will come forth from the “stump of Jesse,” David’s father (v. 1). The prophecy goes on to describe the reign of the Messiah. He will be a just judge (v. 3), who will rule in righteousness and justice (v. 4). During His rule, the world will return to an Edenic state. During that time, lambs will cuddle up to wolves, and bears will graze with cows, and the present natural order will be transformed (vv. 6–8). The kingdom of Israel will live peacefully, free from adversaries, and the knowledge of God will cover the whole earth (v. 9). Of course, none of this can be said of the present world in which we now live. The prophecy then returns to speak of the Messiah:

Then in that day
The nations will resort to the root of Jesse,
Who will stand as a signal for the peoples;
And His resting place will be glorious. (Isaiah 11:10)

The Messiah Himself will be present, ruling from Jerusalem. Even the Gentile nations will look to Him for guidance. Then comes the following very critical statement:

Then it will happen on that day that the Lord
Will again recover the second time with His hand
The remnant of His people, who will remain,
From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath,
And from the islands of the sea.
And He will lift up a standard for the nations
And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
And will gather the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah 11:11–12)

The Messiah will personally oversee the regathering of the children of Israel, scattered all over the world, back to the promised land. This is said to be a “second” great regathering. As we’ve said,

many look to this passage to support the claim that Israel's recent restoration is her final restoration. Their reasoning is fairly straightforward. They say that Israel's return to the land after the Babylonian exile was the first regathering, whereas the modern repatriation of Israel constitutes the second (and thus final) regathering. There are a few glaring problems with this position. First, as we just saw, the passage clearly portrays the Messiah Himself as being present, personally overseeing this global regathering. Obviously, at the present time, the Messiah is not on the ground in Jerusalem. He is sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Heb 10:12-13). Second, it cannot be said that the people of Israel are presently all living in perfect righteousness.

Another critical point is that when Isaiah issued this prophecy, it was roughly one hundred years before the Babylonian exile had even happened. It would have made no sense for Isaiah to speak of a second return from exile before the first exile had even taken place. When this prophecy was spoken, the only exile type of event that Israel could look back to was their four hundred year stay in Egypt. Thus, the prophecy is speaking of a final regathering that is patterned after the original Exodus from Egypt. The first was out of Egypt, the second is from all over the world, at the end of the great tribulation.

THE FINAL RESTORATION TO THE LAND IN JEREMIAH 16

Another similar passage is found in Jeremiah 16. There the prophet begins by describing the latter phases of the covenant chastisements:

So I will hurl you out of this land into the land which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers; and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will grant you no favor.
(Jeremiah 16:13)

Jeremiah then speaks of the final phase of the covenant cycle in which Israel is restored back to her land. In doing so, Jeremiah again contrasts the final restoration with the first Exodus:

“Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them,’ for I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.” (Jeremiah 16:14–15)

In Jeremiah’s mind, the final restoration to the land is a kind of ultimate Exodus, far superior to the historical Exodus.

THE FINAL RESTORATION TO THE LAND IN JEREMIAH 23

In Jeremiah 23, the same concept is repeated. There, the prophecy begins with another reference to the Messiah, called here “the Branch of David”:

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land.
In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell securely;
And this is His name by which He will be called,
‘The LORD our righteousness.’” (Jeremiah 23:5–6)

The context of the prophecy is easy to recognize. It concerns the age of the redemption when the King will be present in Jerusalem:

“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when they will no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from the north land and from all the countries where I had driven them.’ Then they will live on their own soil.” (Jeremiah 23:7–8)

As expositor F. B. Huey comments, “When God brings his people back from the lands where they have been scattered, it will be an event of such magnitude that their ancestors’ liberation from Egypt will be forgotten. This second Exodus promises to be greater than the first.”¹ The first Exodus was a mere prelude, a faint foreshadow of the ultimate deliverance and restoration to the land. As we have said, it is impossible to say that these passages are speaking of Israel’s recent return to the land in the last century.

THE FINAL RESTORATION TO THE LAND IN EZEKIEL 20

There are several other very important passages that also speak of Israel’s final return to the land. One such foundational restoration passage is Ezekiel 20. There, the Lord begins by issuing a stinging rebuke to the representative elders of Israel. The passage begins: “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and. . . . Make them know the abominations of their fathers” (vv. 3–4). As we see over and over again throughout the prophets, the Lord reminds Israel of His graciousness and His powerful deliverance when He led them out of Egypt. Despite all that He did for them, however, throughout their history, the people consistently rebelled. Yet, as grievous as their sins were, the Lord had a plan for their ultimate future restoration: “‘As I live,’ declares the LORD God, ‘surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you’” (Ez 20:33). Then comes something rather fascinating: central to His plan to restore Israel is the plan to bring them back into the desert of the Exodus: “I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face” (v. 35). In the same way that the Lord purified Israel during their wandering in the wilderness, so will He bring them back to purify them yet again:

“As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord God. “I will make you pass under the rod, and

I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.” (Ezekiel 20:36–38)

The Lord portrays Himself as a shepherd who will bring Israel back into the wilderness to sift them. Like a shepherd who makes the sheep line up single file, each one must pass under His rod. Only those who are truly His will pass through, whereas those who are not His will be “purged.” Old Testament scholar Risa Levitt Kohn summarizes the chapter well:

“[Ezekiel 20] refers to the power Yahweh will exercise in his future deliverance of Israel. After scattering the Israelites among foreign nations, Yahweh will once again rule over them and will use this force to gather them from the lands to which they have been dispersed. . . . For Ezekiel, the coming redemption, the ‘Second Exodus’, overshadows its ancient prototype as the ultimate manifestation of Yahweh’s might.”²

In summary, Israel’s restoration to the land described in Ezekiel 20 occurs in concurrence with the following events and themes: (1) the final Exodus, described elsewhere throughout the prophets, (2) when the Lord purges Israel of her sins, and (3) restores their bond of permanent covenantal faithfulness. These things take place at the end of the age, when King Messiah returns.

THE FINAL RESTORATION TO THE LAND IN EZEKIEL 37

Another very important and striking prophecy that describes Israel’s last-days restoration is found in the first half of Ezekiel 37. Following upon the heels of the prophet’s description of the new covenant in Ezekiel 36, the Lord describes Israel’s national restoration to the land that will take place in clear coordination with the general resurrection of the dead. Ezekiel, through a visionary experience, is

taken into a valley filled with dry bones (v. 1). There he is shown this vast field of bones being covered with sinews, flesh, and skin (vv. 2–7). Lastly, the breath—*or the Spirit*—of the Lord enters into the bodies and they come to life (vv. 8–10). Then the Lord interprets and explains what has just been witnessed:

Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD GOD, “Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD.’” (Ezekiel 37:11–14)

The vision of Israel’s graves being opened, of the dry bones being clothed with flesh and skin, and receiving the breath of God is quite obviously referring to the resurrection of the dead, but also Israel’s national restoration to the land. As Old Testament scholar Daniel Isaac Block notes, “The rabbinic commentaries frequently interpreted this passage as a prophecy of the eschatological resurrection in the messianic age.”³ Interestingly, Tertullian, one the most influential theologians and apologists of the early church, writing in the early third century, confronted the claim of the gnostic heretics of his day concerning this very passage. The gnostics claimed that while the vision is using the imagery of a resurrection, it is only doing so allegorically to speak of the restoration of the Jewish state:

Therefore the image of a resurrection is allegorically applied to their state, since it has to be gathered together, and recompact bone to bone (in other words, tribe to tribe, and people to people), and to be reincorporated by the sinews of power and the nerves of royalty, and to be brought out as it were from sepulchres, that is to say, from the most miserable and degraded abodes of captivity, and to breathe afresh in the way of a restoration, and to live thenceforward in their own land of Judæa.⁴

Sadly, many liberal scholars today continue to make similar claims. The fact, however, is that within this prophecy, both restorations, physical and national, are inseparably intertwined. Tertullian rightly corrects the gnostics:

“In fact, by the very circumstance that the recovery of the Jewish state is prefigured by the reincorporation and reunion of bones, proof is offered that this event will also happen to the bones *themselves*; for the metaphor could not have been formed from bones, if the same thing exactly were not to be realized in them also.”⁵

In other words, the vision does not speak of *either* physical resurrection *or* the restoration of the state of Israel, rather it speaks of both, occurring in perfect conjunction with one another. The vision deliberately intermixes both the figurative and the literal. Ezekiel is simply making the same point that so many of the previous prophecies before him had already made. Israel's ultimate restoration will only occur at the end of this age, at the time of the restoration of all things. Like his contemporary Daniel, Ezekiel saw here the literal resurrection of the dead at the end of the age (Dn 12:2–3). In fact, Block sees the passage as extending hope even beyond Israel: “[T]his text holds out hope for all who accept the grace of God in Christ (Eph 2:1–10). With good reason, we who are heirs of the glorious message of the prophets and apostles may find in this text a dramatic affirmation that the sting of death will be overcome by the animating power of Yahweh's Spirit.”⁶ Thus, we have yet one more powerful

eschatological vision establishing Israel's ultimate restoration to the land in conjunction with the general resurrection and the return of Jesus at the end of this present age. Charles H. Dyer correctly notes the timing of the prophecy: "[I]t will be fulfilled when God regathers believing Israelites to the land (Jer. 31:33; 33:14–16), when Christ returns to establish His kingdom (cf. Matt. 24:30–31)."⁷

THE FINAL RESTORATION TO THE LAND IN MICAH

Like "the big three" major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—so did the prophet Micah envision the final restoration of Israel through the lens of a second Exodus. In chapter 7, the prophet speaks of Israel's eschatological restoration and the expansion of her national borders: "On that day will your boundary be extended" (v. 11). Those who were exiled or taken as prisoners among the nations will return:

It will be a day when they will come to you
From Assyria and the cities of Egypt,
From Egypt even to the Euphrates,
Even from sea to sea and mountain to mountain. (Micah 7:12)

Then, Micah's prophetic and intercessory cry to the Lord rings out: "Shepherd Your people with Your scepter, the flock of Your possession" (v. 14). The Lord responds:

"As in the days of old.
As in the days when you came out from the land of Egypt,
I will show you miracles." (Micah 7:15)

As Martin states, "Once again the nation will have a great 'Exodus' from its places of habitation and God will miraculously move the Israelites into their land. This will occur when the Messiah returns and sets up His millennial rule."⁸ As a result of the Lord's miraculous deliverance of His people:

Nations will see and be ashamed
Of all their might.
They will put their hand on their mouth,
Their ears will be deaf.
They will lick the dust like a serpent,
Like reptiles of the earth.
They will come trembling out of their fortresses;
To the LORD our God they will come in dread
And they will be afraid before You. (Micah 7:16–17)

Thus, like those before him, Micah also compares Israel's final deliverance and restoration to the Exodus. Like the first Exodus, so also will the final Exodus and restoration to the land be accompanied by such great miracles that the nations will be thoroughly ashamed and filled with fear as they acknowledge that God is truly with the remnant of Israel.

CONCLUSION

Several very important passages throughout the prophets speak of Israel's final restoration back to the land as a second, greater, or even ultimate Exodus. The echo of the first Exodus resonates so strongly throughout the Scriptures that it actually serves as the pattern and foreshadowing of the grand climax of the story of redemption. As professor James M. Hamilton Jr. so correctly states:

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve prophesy on the basis of what Moses announced in the Torah, and the Former Prophets narrate in Joshua-Kings. The Latter Prophets, Isaiah to the Twelve [minor prophets], announce that Israel has broken the covenant, that Yahweh has patiently disciplined them, and that if Israel refuses to repent, Yahweh will keep his word and drive them into exile. After exile, the prophets promise a glorious eschatological restoration: new Exodus, return from exile, new David, new covenant, new Eden, new creation.⁹

The concept of Israel's final regathering to the land, cast as a final great 'second Exodus' is not derived from some esoteric or novel interpretation of the Scriptures. Quite to the contrary, it is a theme that is found throughout the biblical narrative.

MODERN ISRAEL'S REBIRTH IN PROPHECY

Before moving forward, we must pause to address a question that will no doubt be raised: If the prophecies that we just discussed in the last chapter don't speak of the rebirth of the modern state of Israel, are there any prophecies that do? Can we rightly say that the modern reestablishment of the state of Israel was even prophetic at all? The answer is that it absolutely was, and there are most certainly prophecies to prove it. The misapplication of some prophecies to the modern rebirth of Israel in no way means that there are no prophecies about the recent return to and repatriation of the land. In no way does it mean that the current state of Israel is not a prophesied regathering. Of course it is; it simply is not the fulfillment of the second Exodus texts that apply to the final and ultimate regathering that occurs at the final redemption, when Jesus returns.

THE PEREQUISITE REGATHERING

There can be no argument that the modern state of Israel is indeed a prophetic regathering brought about by the hand and the will of God. The fact that Israel would be restored in the last days, however, is largely an inferred reality throughout the biblical prophetic testimony. For example, in the prophecies of Joel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Jesus, we read of the Gentile nations invading Jerusalem and attacking the Jewish people before the return of Jesus (Jl 3:12; Ez

38–39; Zec 12:2,9; Lk 21:24). This could not happen unless the Jewish people had first returned to the land of Israel and gained control of Jerusalem. From the second century, when the last of the Jewish inhabitants were exiled from the land, until 1967, when the Israel Defense Forces took control of Jerusalem, it would have been impossible for numerous end-time prophecies to be fulfilled. The neighboring nations could not surround Jerusalem in pursuit of the Jewish people, because the city was not under Jewish control. The modern return to Israel is indeed a necessary precondition for many biblical prophecies to be fulfilled. Several passages in Daniel, for example, (e.g., 8:11–15; 9:26; 11:31; 21:11) indicate that the Antichrist will cause the daily Jewish sacrifices to stop and the temple to become desolate through “the abomination that causes desolation.” Jesus reiterated these warnings (Mt 24:15). The temple sacrifices cannot be stopped unless they are first restarted. The temple cannot be made desolate unless it is first rebuilt. Granted, this could be something as simple as a tent-like structure, but something must be rebuilt that is not presently there. None of these things can take place apart from a vibrant Jewish presence back in the land. Numerous other passages could be cited, but let’s briefly consider what is likely the clearest and most important.

EZEKIEL 38–39

The prophecy of Ezekiel 38–39, often referred to as the battle of Gog and Magog, is a very important, yet widely misinterpreted passage. One of the most commonly held views of this prophecy is that it speaks of a failed invasion of Israel in the last days sometime prior to the Antichrist. If one were to survey any number of popular end-time books and articles on this topic, virtually all would claim that this passage speaks of a multi-national invasion of Israel in which the armies will no sooner enter the land of Israel than they will be supernaturally annihilated. Pastor and author Mark Hitchcock, for example, says, “Ezekiel 38–39 describes what we might call “the One-Day War”—or

even “the One-Hour War”—because God will quickly annihilate the Islamic invaders from the face of the earth by supernatural means.”¹ Is it true that the war will essentially be over before it starts? A more careful examination of the text itself shows that this is not the case at all. The armies of Gog and Magog will indeed be destroyed, but not before Israel suffers catastrophic losses with many of its people fleeing the land or being taken captive into the nations. This is seen when we compare the description of the people of Israel prior to, and after, the invasion. Prior to the invasion, the Jewish people are portrayed as living in the land, with a sense of ease and security, whereas, after the Gog and Magog invasion, they are described as prisoners of war, dispersed among the nations and returning to their land. Let’s look at the text. Before the invasion, Israel is described as

the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. (Ezekiel 38:8)

Further, Israel is described as a place inhabited by “the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world” (v. 12). So Israel is portrayed as a place filled with people who have come back to the land from the nations and acquired abundant material blessings. They were formerly living among the Gentiles but have now returned to resettle that which had been a wasteland for many generations. Surely, this is a perfect description of the state of Israel as it exists today. Further, although they are about to be attacked, they are described as living with a sense of security. Now let’s consider the condition of Israel after Gog and his hordes have been destroyed and the dust has settled:

The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and

I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them. (Ezekiel 39:23–24)

So while the prophecy began with Israel in the land, at the end of the prophecy, they are described as being in exile among the nations. Because of their rebellion, the Lord allowed many of them to perish and go into exile, or become prisoners among the nations. The verses that follow make it clear that this happens at the end of the age:

Therefore thus says the LORD GOD, “Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name. They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,” declares the LORD GOD. (Ezekiel 39:25–29)

There are several very important points made in this passage. First, the phrase “Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob,” as it appears in the NASB is rendered in the KJV as “Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob,” meaning that the Lord will free and bring back Israel’s prisoners and exiles to the land. The specific phrase points to the fact that God’s restoration and blessing of Israel is integrally connected to her people being restored from captivity to the land. Second, the term “Now” establishes that the restoration from captivity occurs after the judgment on Gog and his hordes. It is a future event. Third, it is not until after Gog’s destruction that

Israel truly repents of their rebellion and will be restored. Fourth, when did they rebel so as to incur the Lord's chastisement? The text says: "They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid." The disgrace and treachery is a reference back to the beginning of the prophecy. Sadly, this describes the spiritual condition of the modern state of Israel as it exists now. They have returned to the land and resettled the ancient ruins, but the vast majority are not living in obedience to the Lord. After they have been restored and are finally living in true security, then they will look back at the current State and acknowledge their previous rebellion to the Lord.

Ezekiel 38–39 is thus a clear prophecy that speaks of: (1) the modern reestablishment of the state of Israel, (2) her future invasion, defeat, and exile, which is followed by (3) her future and ultimate restoration. Fifth, the people of Israel are not merely portrayed as being in exile among the Gentile nations but specifically as captives in "the land of their enemies"—*actual prisoners of war*. Sixth, at the conclusion of the prophecy, after the final return, Israel will live in true security, as opposed to the false sense of security that they experienced before the invasion, at the onset of the prophecy. Seventh, after this deliverance from captivity, there is a massive revival and Israel turns to the Lord forever: "And the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God from that day onward" (Ez 39:22). The Lord pours out His spirit upon them and they belong to Him forever. Thus, the prophecy ends by describing the redemptive and final phase of the covenant chastisements: Israel's ultimate and permanent restoration.

To summarize, before the invasion of Gog and Magog, the Jewish people are described as having returned to the land, living with a false sense of security. After the invasion, however, a large percentage of the Jewish people are described as prisoners of war, in the land of their enemies, and the Messiah is bringing them back to the land. It concludes with Israel's complete restoration to both the

Lord and the land. This prophecy has thus been partially fulfilled with the modern reestablishment of the state of Israel, but it also has much that is yet to be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the Bible, there are numerous end-time prophecies that require Israel to be in the land. They describe the Gentile nations invading Jerusalem and attacking the Jewish people before the return of Jesus. From the time that Israel was exiled in the first and second century, until 1967 when the Israel Defense Forces took control of Jerusalem, none of these end-time prophecies could have been fulfilled. Other very specific things must still take place in order for various end time prophecies to unfold. For example, temple sacrifices cannot be stopped by the Antichrist unless they are first restarted. Nor can the temple be made desolate unless it is first rebuilt. Again, none of these things can take place apart from a vibrant Jewish presence back in the land. In this sense, the modern state of Israel is most assuredly the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Yet, while it is the fulfillment of prophecy, as we demonstrated in the last chapter, it is not the ultimate fulfillment that is most often pointed to throughout the prophets. The ultimate fulfillment, as we have shown, will only take place when Jesus returns.

Some have charged that the view that the Lord has brought Israel back to the land knowing that they would yet again suffer greatly is anti-Semitic. The problem with such charges is that this would also mean that Moses, the prophets, and even Jesus Himself are all anti-Semitic. Obviously, no one would make such a charge. Rather than interacting with the actual warnings of Scripture, some choose instead to simply attack those who relay those warnings. And while it is true that various anti-Semitic groups or individuals have used various portions of the Bible for their own ends, in no way does it follow that simply believing such things entails a hatred of the Jewish people. Quite to the contrary, Moses, the prophets, and

Jesus all carried both the word of Lord and the His love for Israel. Another similar charge is that this view casts the Lord in a sadistic light—as if the Lord has set up His people because He actually desires to punish them. I would suggest that this kind of accusation emanates from a perverse heart of accusation against the Lord. Israel has been brought back to the land because the Lord promised that they would be brought back to the land. Today Israel is a living testimony to the world concerning God's faithfulness to His promises and His people. The modern regathering and repatriation of the land has no doubt been accomplished by the hand of God, according to His will. To support the modern state of Israel and stand with the Jewish people today is just and right and holy.

Imagine if someone accused a husband of getting his wife pregnant simply because he is a sadist who only wanted her to suffer the pains of childbirth. One would have to be rather disturbed to make such a ridiculous charge. So is the charge that the Lord has brought His people back to Israel only to suffer, equally gross. Yes, there are birth pains coming. Of this fact, the Scriptures are clear. To ignore them or deny them is to join with the false prophets of old, promising perpetual peace and giving false comfort. Christian leaders today should be preparing their people to stand with Israel, both now and in the difficult days ahead. Simply because there are birth pains coming, we should not shun the pregnancy. We celebrate the pregnancy, because it is holy. We celebrate and support the modern state of Israel. No one longs for the birth pains; they are an unfortunate and natural part of the process of any birth. Such should be our attitude toward Israel today. We support what the Lord has done and is doing now. We pray for revival among the Jewish people now. We support ministries that bless Israel and support Gospel work among the Jewish people. We celebrate the growth of the Messianic Jewish movement. Yet as wonderful as all these things are, we still long for the fullness; we long for the birth. We eagerly yearn for the ultimate redemption; the restoration of the kingdom of Israel that will only come after the King returns.

GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS

In this chapter, we will begin discussing some very important and fascinating specifics concerning *where* this great national salvation will take place. As we've seen, Israel's salvation and regathering to their land will be preceded by the chastisements of the Mosaic covenant. This includes various national calamities, followed by invasion, and then many of the inhabitants of the land being killed, taken as prisoners, or fleeing the land. Then, from that place of having been broken, they will corporately return to YHVH. He will pour His Spirit out upon them and save them. This final restoration will primarily take place, quite literally, in the desert to the east and south of Israel. I say "primarily" because the biblical testimony concerning this subject is actually quite complex. As we will see, the Scriptures speak of a variety of scenarios that require some work to synthesize.

Even in seasons of normalcy, life is often chaotic, but during the three and a half years of "Jacob's trouble," life in Israel will be anything but normal. The Scriptures teach that she will find herself at the center of a vast multi-national invasion (Dn 11:21-45; Ez 38-39; Zec 12-14). Consider what life was like for the people of Syria throughout the period following the revolution of 2011. A country of roughly twenty-two million people saw more than six million internally displaced, five million fled as refugees, and close to a million people died. We can reasonably assume that

the situation in Israel will actually be far more chaotic. When we consider the broad range of statements throughout the Scriptures concerning this time, we can reasonably conclude that there is no single scenario that will apply to every inhabitant of the land. The prophecy of Zechariah 13–14, for example, speaks of the people of Israel experiencing a variety of horrific circumstances during this period. First, the prophet makes the following unthinkable declaration: “It will come about in all the land, declares the LORD, that two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it” (Zec 13:8). After noting that only one-third will survive, Zechariah then states that half of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go into exile, whereas the other half will remain in the city (14:2). Then just a few verses later, it says that after a massive earthquake, those who had remained in the city will flee as refugees (v. 5). The book of Revelation even goes on to say that during this time, one third of the inhabitants of the earth will be killed (Rv 8:1–13; 9:15). So the Scriptures describe the chaos of the last days affecting both Israel and the world, in several very different ways.

QUANTIFYING JACOB’S TROUBLE?

Before moving forward, it is important to return to, and expand, our discussion concerning Zechariah’s prophecy about two thirds in the land being “cut off” and only one third surviving. Obviously this is a very specific and solemn prophecy. Does this really speak of Israel’s future? It is important to note that while many great expositors insist that it does, many other great expositors insist that it does not. Let’s consider just a few.

- John F. Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, states rather dogmatically: “This prophecy will be fulfilled in the Great Tribulation when two out of three of the Jews in the land attempting to flee their persecutor, the future world leader, will perish, and only one-third will escape and be waiting for Christ when He comes.”¹

- Arnold Fruchtenbaum, similarly states, “This will be fulfilled during the Great Tribulation, when Israel will suffer tremendous persecution . . . and two-thirds of the Jewish people will be killed.”²
- Kenneth L. Barker in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says, “While what happened in AD 70 at the hands of the Romans may have been an initial stage in the prophecy’s progressive fulfillment, the final and complete stage is yet future, for Israel as a whole is not in the proper covenantal relationship with God described in v. 9.”³

Following the line of Walvoord, Fruchtenbaum, and Barker, most dispensationalists, particularly classical dispensationalists, would also hold this view.

- J. Barton Payne on the other hand, in his classic *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, argues that this passage was fulfilled in “the survival of Israel after the flesh following A.D. 70.”⁴
- Barry Webb, in *The Bible Speaks Today Bible Commentary* series, argues against a future application to the state of Israel, saying, “The precise significance of the two-thirds and one-third of v. 8 is not clear. At the very least it speaks of severe suffering and dispersal. In view of the quotation of v. 7 by Jesus in Matt. 26:31 and Mark 14:27, v. 8 should probably be seen as having its fulfillment in the persecution and scattering of the early church (Acts 8:1; 11:19).”⁵
- F. Duane Lindsey views the prophecy as having both a historical and future fulfillment: “Just as the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21) telescopes prophecies of the scattering of the Jewish nation fulfilled in AD 70 with those to be fulfilled in the last half of the future Tribulation period, so Zechariah here combines into one focus the same two periods and scatterings of the Jewish nation. Thus Zechariah 13:8–9 probably will see its final and complete

fulfillment in Israel's dispersion in the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 12:6, 13–17). At that time two-thirds of the Jewish nation will be struck down and perish, but the surviving remnant will be restored, at least for the most part, to their covenant relationship with the Lord.”⁶

Perhaps the most significant problem with detaching the portions of this oracle that speak of tribulation from the positive subsequent references to a “fountain” of national salvation being opened for Israel (Zec 13:1), is that they are fundamentally intertwined within the text. The fire of suffering described in verses 8–9 is specifically what produces the restoration of covenant relationship with the Lord in the very same verses. That said, while the most natural reading of this prophecy in context seems to point to a future fulfillment, we must not be dogmatic. While I would tend to agree with the interpretation of the dispensationalists mentioned above, I would also encourage tremendous caution. In light of the profoundly painful and sensitive nature of the prophecy's subject matter, we should all approach it with trembling. The point of the prophecy is not to quantify Israel's future suffering. It's more so to provide comfort, so that no matter how catastrophic the losses may be, a remnant will indeed survive. Israel will be saved. On the other hand, to those who would seek to ignore this prophecy entirely, this is simply not an option. *It is imperative to recognize that there is indeed a storm coming.* This is unarguable. What is an absolute non-negotiable, however, is that Christians must resolve now to stand with Israel in full solidarity both today, and during the coming days of fire and great trial.

As we will discuss below, various very important prophecies teach that a large part of the people of Israel will escape and find a place of refuge in the desert during this time. Then, after Jesus returns, He will bring them back to the land from there. Finally, after safely bringing many of the exiles and prisoners back home to the promised land, then the Lord will also gather many others who

remain scattered throughout the world. So why will the Lord bring many of His people specifically into the desert? First, let's discuss the spiritual and symbolic reasons.

THE DESERT WILDERNESS

In most English Bibles, the Hebrew word *midbar* is translated as “wilderness.” The problem with using this word, however, is that it tends to conjure up thoughts of a treed forest. In the biblical world, however, it points to a lonely, desolate, barren desert, far removed from the comforts of inhabited cities and villages. The harsh physical features of the desert actually define its symbolic meaning throughout the Scriptures. The desert-wilderness doesn't just play a central role in the Exodus narrative, it continues to play an important role throughout the remainder of the Scriptures. This hostile world, which loomed over Israel's eastern and southern sides, deeply impressed itself onto the ancient Jewish mind. The Scriptures portray the desert as the place where one must learn how to rely upon God alone. Surviving in the desert truly requires the grace of God. As we saw in chapter 11, the desert is where the Lord provided Israel with manna, quail, water, and protection. The Lord's miraculous provision for Israel was so great, in fact, that for forty years, their clothes never wore out (Dt 29:5). Apart from His compassionate, sustaining, and saving hand, Israel would have perished in the desert.

Because the desert is a place where YHVH sustains His people, it also becomes a place of refuge and sanctuary in times of great danger. When King David was threatened by his enemies, he and his supporters fled into the desert (1 Sm 23:14). Elijah fled from Jezebel and Ahab into the desert where he was miraculously fed by ravens (1 Kgs 17:4–6). Because the desert is so hostile to human life, it was most often avoided. Job referred to it as a wasteland where no one lives (Jb 38:26–27). The desert either toughened or broke those who dwelled there. The conditions during the Exodus were so trying, in fact, that the Israelites actually expressed their preference to return to Egypt to

suffer as slaves over remaining in the wilderness (Ex 14:12). The desert is the place where the Lord tests, chastises, and matures His people. It is also a place of repentance. The Lord declared to Israel that He led them into the desert for forty years, “that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart” (Dt 8:2). The desert is frequently the training ground for genuine discipleship and spirituality. Thus, John the Baptist lived in the desert and preached the message of repentance (Mt 3:1–4). Even Jesus went into the desert to confront the temptation of the devil (Mt 4:1).

The desert is also the place of encounter. Many great men of God went into the desert to encounter the Lord. It was in the desert where Moses encountered the burning bush (Ex 3). It was specifically at Mount Sinai where Israel encountered YHVH in the most powerful theophany in all of redemptive history (Ex 19–20). It is also at Mount Sinai where Elijah had his most powerful encounter with the Lord (1 Kgs 19:10–18). Finally, a very solid case can be made that Paul the apostle traveled to Mount Sinai to encounter the Lord shortly after his conversion to learn from the Lord and to receive “his gospel” (Gal 1:17; 4:25; 2 Tm 2:8).⁷

It is for all of these reasons and more that the Lord will lead many from the remnant of Israel back into the desert in the last days. There they will flee and find a place of refuge. There they will once more discover the Lord’s miraculous provision and protection. There they will once more encounter YHVH the God of their salvation. There they will experience the repentance necessary for their final and ultimate restoration. Where then do the Scriptures teach this?

FINDING GRACE IN THE DESERT

In Jeremiah 30, the prophet clearly points to the desert of the Exodus as the place where Israel’s final restoration will begin. After his terrifying prophecy concerning the time of Israel’s unparalleled tribulation in the last days, Jeremiah declared that Israel’s survivors will find a place of refuge in the desert:

“At that time,” declares the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.”

Thus says the LORD,

“The people who survived the sword

Found grace in the wilderness—

Israel, when it went to find its rest.” (Jeremiah 31:1–2)

The initial statement regarding all the families of Israel becoming God’s people refers to the ultimate restoration of all twelve tribes from both the northern and southern kingdoms into one united people. Then Jeremiah states that those who survived and escaped the invading armies of the Antichrist will find grace in the desert-wilderness. The context of when this will happen is when Jesus returns:

The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying,

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;

Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

The Lord Himself will personally appear to those in the desert. Roughly a hundred years previous, Isaiah had said essentially the same thing:

[T]he palace has been abandoned, the populated city forsaken. . . .

Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high,

And the wilderness becomes a fertile field,

And the fertile field is considered as a forest. (Isaiah 32:14a–15)

Isaiah says that after the Spirit is poured out on Israel, then all things will be renewed. The desert will become like a lush field, and Israel’s formerly desolated cities will be restored. Yet another century later, the prophet Zechariah would also describe this time:

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

Zechariah describes Israel seeing the One “they have pierced” when He comes, and as a result, will receive the Spirit of grace and repentance. Jeremiah and Zechariah both describe exactly the same event. The survivors of Israel who fled into the desert will (1) see the Lord and (2) receive grace. Later, in the book of Revelation, this exact theme is repeated. We will discuss this below.

WHEN JESUS IS KING

After Jeremiah’s description of Israel receiving grace in the wilderness, then the Lord promises to rebuild Israel, to bless its crops, and to fill the people with an overwhelming joy:

Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!
Again you will take up your tambourines,
And go forth to the dances of the merry-makers.
Again you will plant vineyards
On the hills of Samaria;
The planters will plant
And will enjoy them. (Jeremiah 31:4–5)

This glorious restoration does not happen, of course, until after they have been brought back to their land. This then is the millennial reign of Jesus.

THE GLOBAL REGATHERING

After Jesus has been established as King in Israel, then He will continue His project of bringing back all who have been scattered throughout the earth:

Behold, I am bringing them from the north country,
 And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth,
 Among them the blind and the lame,
 The woman with child and she who is in labor with child,
 together;
 A great company, they will return here.
 With weeping they will come,
 And by supplication I will lead them;
 I will make them walk by streams of waters,
 On a straight path in which they will not stumble;
 For I am a father to Israel,
 And Ephraim is My firstborn.
 Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
 And declare in the coastlands afar off,
 And say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him
 And keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock."
 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob
 And redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger
 than he.
 They will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion.
 (Jeremiah 31:8–11)

After the initial deliverance of the remnant in the desert, then Jesus will bring the surviving remnant of His people throughout the world back to Zion. Several passages throughout the prophets describe this larger regathering from all over the world (Hos 11:10; Is 11:12; 43:5–7; 49:12; 60:4; Jer 3:18; 16:15; 23:8; 31:8; Zec 2:6; 10:6–12). The former exiles are described as being overwhelmed with emotion as they make their way back to Zion, weeping as they go. Upon their arrival, however, their tears will be replaced with unstoppable shouts of joy. As we will see, the Scriptures actu-

ally speak of two distinct phrases to Israel's regathering. The first phase will see those who fled specifically into the desert personally brought back by the Messiah Himself. The second phase of Israel's restoration will take place after Jesus arrives in Zion and will see the exiles return from all over the world.

ON EAGLES' WINGS

The concept of Israel's return to the desert of the Exodus in the last days is also clearly taught in the New Testament. In the book of Revelation, we read of a woman, described as being 'clothed' with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head (12:1). Walvoord accurately notes: "The woman symbolized Israel, as indicated by Genesis 37:9–11, where the sun and the moon referred to Jacob and Rachel, Joseph's parents. The stars in the woman's crown clearly related to the twelve sons of Jacob and identified the woman as Israel."⁸ The vision describes the woman being pregnant and about to give birth to a male child (v. 2). Then, a great red dragon appears, seeking to devour the child as soon as He is born (vv. 3–4). The child is delivered from the dragon's plans, however, as He is caught up to heaven (v. 5). The child, of course, represents Jesus the Messiah, "who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (v. 5), while the dragon represents the devil. Then the concept of Israel fleeing into the desert in the last days is stated outright:

Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Revelation 12:6)

Virtually all commentators acknowledge the explicit Exodus background here.⁹ In His sermon addressing this exact time period, Jesus warned that when the people see the armies of the Antichrist approaching Jerusalem to bring desolation, "then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains" (Mt 24:16–21; Mk 13:14–22; Lk 21:20–24). Jesus' call to flee to the mountains and this vision of

Israel fleeing into the desert would certainly seem to refer to the same event. The mountains and the desert are both wilderness areas, and both terms can rightly be used to describe the Exodus wilderness.¹⁰

The theme of Israel fleeing into the desert for three and a half years is repeated again a few verses later: “But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent” (Rv 12:14). The fact that she is given eagles wings is yet another clear allusion to the first Exodus: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself” (Ex 19:4; cf. Dt 32:11-14). There in the wilderness, she will be fed and cared for by the Lord. As He declared back in Hosea, there He will speak kindly to her. It is there that He will once more reveal Himself as the caring and compassionate God who went before them during the first Exodus.

THE MARRIAGE COVENANT RENEWED

Central to Israel's final restoration is the renewal of her marriage covenant with the Lord. As we discussed in Part 1, the covenant at Mount Sinai was indeed a betrothal or marriage covenant. In this chapter, we will discuss the last-days permanent renewal and consummation of that marriage covenant. While it is indeed a "renewal," it is also a new covenant entirely. Fruchtenbaum states, "What is often known as the New Covenant is in many respects a new marriage contract that God will make with the two houses of Israel and Judah."¹ The first of the prophets who addresses this theme is Hosea. As we will see, Hosea's prophecy ties together so many of the other themes that we've already examined. Throughout Hosea, the grace of God emerges vividly, with striking power. The Lord's long-term redemptive plans for Israel, His bride, are described with profound poignancy.

THE PROPHECY OF HOSEA

The life story and divine commissioning of Hosea the prophet is shocking. Despite the pain and humiliation that this would cause him, the Lord commanded Hosea to marry, love, and have children with a prostitute. "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD" (Hos 1:2). All of this was to serve as a prophetic object lesson demonstrating the nature of Israel's unfaithfulness and

God's unfailing love: "Then the LORD said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is . . . an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods'" (Hos 3:1). Throughout the prophecy, the Lord rebukes Israel for her apostasy, but also predicts her ultimate restoration. In the first chapter, the Lord again specifically indicates where this final restoration will take place:

Where it is said to them,
 "You are not My people,"
 It will be said to them,
 "You are the sons of the living God."
 And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered
 together,
 And they will appoint for themselves one leader,
 And they will go up from the land,
 For great will be the day of Jezreel. (Hosea 1:10–11)

In the same place where it was said that Israel is no longer God's people, there, they will be restored. The restoration pertains to all of Israel and Judah, not merely the northern kingdom.² The location where Israel will once again be restored to YHVH is where the covenant was first broken. This is where the golden calf incident took place, and it is also where Jesus the Messiah will appear to them and lead them back into the land. As Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman in the *Yale Anchor Bible Commentary* state: "As Moses led the united tribes from slavery, so a 'single leader' will lead the reunited nation, both Judah and Israel, out of the destruction into which Yahweh has hurled them."³ In Hosea 3:5, the same theme is repeated, making it clear that the 'leader' is the Messiah: "Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days." So also does Ezekiel reiterate precisely the same theme of all Israel being reunited under one King and being restored to their land:

Say to them, “Thus says the LORD GOD, ‘Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.’” (Ezekiel 37:21–23)

Hosea’s statement concerning Israel “going up from the land” has dual meaning. First, it refers to Israel coming up from Egypt and returning to their land. As Duane Garrett in *The New American Commentary* notes: “It implies that Hosea is talking about a return from exile in a new Exodus, and this is indeed how many scholars take it.”⁴ Andersen and Freedman, however, also see a dual meaning: “[W]e suggest that the statement ‘and they will come up from the land’ has two senses, one historical (the Exodus), one eschatological (resurrection).”⁵ I would argue that the language concerning the Exodus and the resurrection are both eschatological. They will both take place in the future. The resurrection of the dead and Israel’s second Exodus-regathering back into the land both coincide with the return of Messiah. This is also precisely the dual emphasis of Ezekiel 37, which we just cited.

Within the names of Hosea’s children, the Lord encodes His prophetic message to Israel. First, He instructs Hosea to name his first child *Jezreel*, which means “God sows.” The next two children are named *Lo-ruhamah* (“Not loved”) and *Lo-ammi* (“Not my people”). The prophetic inference is that although the Lord has temporarily rejected His people (they are no longer loved and no longer His people), they will be restored and sown into the land, and there they will take root, forever. Like a seed that is sown into the ground (*Jezreel*), they will once again sprout up from the soil

of the land through the resurrection and restoration. Thus, the final two statements—Israel going up from the land and the day of Jezreel—are integrally connected. We cannot help but be reminded of Jesus' statement concerning His own death and resurrection: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). In similar manner, apart from Israel experiencing the deep pains and 'burial' of covenant chastisement, she could not experience such a great renewal and resurrection (cf. Am 9:15).

'ALLURING' ISRAEL BACK INTO THE WILDERNESS

As Hosea's prophecy continues, many of the same themes are repeated. Again, the Lord rebukes Israel: "I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifices to them . . . so that she forgot Me," declares the LORD" (2:13). Then, the Lord makes the following profound declaration: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness and speak kindly to her" (v. 14). Instead of addressing Israel in anger, the Lord's tone shifts markedly. YHVH describes Himself gently drawing Israel into the desert where He will speak directly to her heart. "Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt" (v. 15). The valley of Achor refers to a place of suffering. Thus during this time of such tremendous suffering, Israel will find tremendous hope. In fact, the reference to Israel singing as in the days of her youth, when she came up out of Egypt, is essentially saying that in those days, Israel will sing with the enthusiasm that she did when she was a newlywed. What desert will the Lord lead Israel into? Keil and Delitzsch state: "The desert into which the Lord will lead His people cannot be any other than the desert of Arabia."⁶ There in the desert of Sinai, where the marriage covenant was first made, the Lord will restore His bride to Himself. Thus: "It will come about in that day," declares the LORD, "That

you will call Me Ishi (Husband) and will no longer call Me Baali (Master)” (v. 16). The betrothal ceremony that was made at Mount Sinai will be restored, never to be broken again: “I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD” (vv. 19–20). Returning to the theme of the Lord permanently planting Israel back in her land, verse 23 continues: “I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they will say, ‘You are my God!’” Within this verse are the names of all three of Hosea’s children. The end goal of the covenant will thus be complete.

COME LET US RETURN TO THE LORD

In one of the most beautiful songs in Scripture, Hosea 6 captures Israel’s response to the Lord after enduring the pains of covenant chastisement:

“Come, let us return to the LORD.

For He has torn us, but He will heal us;
He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.
He will revive us after two days;
He will raise us up on the third day,
That we may live before Him.

“So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD.

His going forth is as certain as the dawn;
And He will come to us like the rain,
Like the spring rain watering the earth.” (Hosea 6:1–3)

The reference to the Lord tearing but healing is drawn directly from the Song of Moses. There we read that after Israel comes to the end of her strength, the Lord will say to them: “It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal” (Dt 32:39; cf. Hos 5:14). The remainder of Israel’s confession affirms

their confidence that as surely as the sun rises each day, so also will the promised Messiah come at the appointed time.

ISRAEL'S MARRIAGE RENEWAL IN ISAIAH

If Hosea were the only prophet to speak of this beautiful theme, then it might be viewed only as a minor one within the larger story of redemption. The reality, however, is that the last-days renewal of the Lord's marriage covenant with Israel is championed by other prophets after Hosea and is a prominent theme within the Jewish vision of the future. Isaiah, the great poet-prophet, elaborated greatly upon these things. Throughout the prophecy of Isaiah, Israel is poetically personified as the woman Zion or Jerusalem. Isaiah 54 begins with the Lord speaking to Israel, who in her time of chastisement and exile is likened to an abandoned wife: childless, disgraced, and alone (v. 1). Despite her past circumstances, she is encouraged to prepare for the dramatic growth of her family (vv. 2–3). A complete reversal of her circumstances, a great restoration, is coming. When it comes, she will never again have anything to fear. Her former conditions will all but be forgotten. As Motyer comments, “[F]rom the early spring of youth right through to the sadnesses life holds in store all is subsumed under the category of things past and forgotten, out of sight and out of mind, the slate and the memory both wiped clean.”⁷ Why is this time of great restoration coming? The reason is given:

“For your husband is your Maker,
 Whose name is the LORD of hosts;
 And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,
 Who is called the God of all the earth.
 For the LORD has called you,
 Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
 Even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected,”
 Says your God.
 “For a brief moment I forsook you,
 But with great compassion I will gather you.
 In an outburst of anger

I hid My face from you for a moment,
But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on
you,”
Says the LORD your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:5–8)

First, the Lord declares Himself to be Israel’s husband. While it was her sins that resulted in her chastisement, exile, and estrangement from her husband (50:1), *restoration is coming*. This renewal, however, is not because of her goodness; rather, in His great compassion and lovingkindness, He will take her back. The use of “lovingkindness” (Hebrew: *hesed*) is clearly intended to point back to the Lord’s declaration concerning His own nature at Mount Sinai. There, at the very place where the marriage covenant was first executed, YHVH described Himself as “the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness (*hesed*) and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin” (Ex 34:6). The restoration of Israel to her husband will be permanent, and His loving commitment to her will never end.

In Isaiah 62, the prophet returns to the theme of marriage restoration. As Martin comments, “Much of this chapter speaks of preparation being made for the coming of the Lord and for the restoration of His people.”⁸ The passage begins with the famous intercessory vow that until Israel is fully restored, Isaiah would cry out unceasingly to the Lord:

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,
And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet,
Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness,
And her salvation like a torch that is burning. (Isaiah 62:1)

Isaiah would pray, and continue to pray, until Israel’s salvation radiates forth from Jerusalem like a colossal blaze. He looks forward to those golden days, when:

[T]he nations will see your righteousness,
 And all kings your glory;
 And you will be called by a new name
 Which the mouth of the LORD will designate.
 You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
 And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
 It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken,"
 Nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate";
 But you will be called, "My delight is in her,"
 And your land, "Married";
 For the LORD delights in you,
 And to Him your land will be married. (Isaiah 62:2–4)

During those days, Israel will no longer be ashamed; instead, the inhabitants of the world will be witnesses to her exaltation and glorification. In the modern Western world, most married women take the last name of their husband. At the time of her restoration, Israel will also be given two new names. One is *Hepzibah* and the other is *Beulah*. Both names point to her new and permanent status as the Lord's bride, His beloved. The metaphor points squarely toward the special covenant relationship established at Mount Sinai. Like a queen, she will wear a royal crown or wreath. Like a precious jewel, she will be carried in the hand of YHVH Himself. To hammer the point home even deeper, the prophet continues:

For as a young man marries a virgin,
 So your sons will marry you;
 And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
 So your God will rejoice over you. (Is 61:5)

Gary Smith summarizes the concluding nature of verse 5:

The joy and excitement of newlyweds will surround this event, for God himself will rejoice in finally accomplishing the plan that he set out so many years ago. In the end God's miraculous transformation of the people will bring back the joy and delight

that should have always characterized the relationship between God and his chosen people.⁹

ISRAEL'S MARRIAGE RENEWAL IN JEREMIAH

In chapter 13, as we discussed Israel's last-days salvation, we looked at the very important passage of Jeremiah 31. Not only does this chapter have much to say about Israel's future restoration, it is also one of the primary Old Testament prophetic passages that speaks of the new covenant (cf. Is 59:19–21; Ez 36:23–31). What we didn't elaborate upon there is that its reference to the coming new covenant is tied directly to the marriage covenant made at Mount Sinai:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:31–32)

Thus, Jeremiah also speaks of the Sinaitic covenant as a marriage covenant and of YHVH as a husband to Israel. Similar language is used throughout Jeremiah 2–3. What is so important about this passage is that Jeremiah casts the new covenant as a renewal of the marriage covenant made at Mount Sinai. On the other hand, the new covenant is a new covenant entirely, far superior to the original covenant at Mount Sinai. It is better because it provides the Holy Spirit, through which Israel will be empowered to remain faithful to the Lord forever: “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Jeremiah 31:33)

ISRAEL'S MARRIAGE RENEWAL IN EZEKIEL

In chapter 12, we discussed the gut-wrenching passage of Ezekiel

16. There, the Lord describes finding Israel as a baby, discarded by the side of the road. He gathers her up, washes her, cares for her, and raises her. Ultimately, when she is grown, He enters into covenant with her and marries her. Despite all of this, she gives herself to become a prostitute with the surrounding nations. She even goes so far as to murder her own children. The chapter mixes metaphor with fact to issue a painful rebuke. At the center of the passage, the Lord cries out, “You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!” (Ez 16:32). As a result of Israel’s unfaithfulness, the Lord promises to punish her and judge her in the harshest manner imaginable. The Lord’s chastening judgments, however, will produce their intended effect, and Israel will awaken to the depth of her sins. The passage concludes in the most absolutely stunning way. Despite Israel’s repeat offenses against the Lord, despite her serial adultery, the Lord declares that He will remember the marriage covenant that He made with His bride and He will forgive her. Few portions of Scripture capture the Lord’s forbearing heart toward Israel as poignantly as the final verses of Ezekiel 16.¹⁰ There, the Lord declares:

“Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, so that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done,” the Lord GOD declares. (Ezekiel 16:62–63)

Despite Israel’s repeat offenses, the Lord will remember His covenant commitment to His bride and in the end, He will take her back. He will establish a new covenant (*the new covenant*), forgive her past transgressions, and cleanse her, *forever*.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord uses various analogies to communicate His relationship to His people. As we saw during

our exploration of the Exodus account, the Lord portrayed Himself as an eagle protecting and caring for its young. Many times throughout the Bible the Lord speaks of Himself as Father and His people as His children. Consistent among these analogies is an emphasis on intimate relationships. Likewise, the picture of the Lord as Bridegroom and His people as a bride is a theme that extends throughout the entire biblical narrative. It is one of the most important and prominent of all analogies employed within the Scriptures to convey the Lord's relationship to His people. Using this imagery, in a masterfully poetic and prophetic manner, Hosea the prophet, through his own life experience, presented us with a poignant and effective allegory concerning Israel and the Lord. Later, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel would also describe Israel's relationship to God through the lens of a marriage covenant. YHVH is referred to as Israel's husband and she as the wayward wife who would someday be permanently restored.

Whereas the Sinaitic covenant was patterned after a marriage covenant, Israel's historical sins and rejection of God led to her estrangement from Him. The time of her alienation, however, will come to an end. As Solomon describes, at the end of this age Israel will emerge from her long and painful time in the desert wholeheartedly trusting in the Lord, her husband: "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" (Sg 8:5). When Jesus the Messiah returns, at the end of this present age, Israel's marriage covenant will be restored, forever and always. The grand story of redemption that began in Genesis will have come full circle.

THE WEDDING FEAST

Because the restoration of Israel’s marriage to the Lord will specifically take place at the end of this age, when Jesus the Messiah returns, the first question that many Christians will likely ask is how this all relates to the “marriage supper of the Lamb.” In order to properly answer that question, we must begin by first understanding the foundational Old Testament passages that inform the New Testament on these matters. How would any biblically literate Jewish believer from the first century have understood these things? The first relevant passages to consider, of course, are those that we examined in Part 1 as well as those in the previous chapter. Even more important, however, are a few very key passages in Isaiah. For beyond speaking of the marriage covenant being renewed in the last days, these particular passages specifically speak of a great wedding feast in Zion that will take place after Messiah comes.

ISAIAH 4: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL WEDDING

The first passage in the Old Testament that specifically points to a wedding at the end of the age is Isaiah 4. This passage is part of a larger description of the millennial reign of the Messiah that begins in Isaiah 2:1–5. During that time, Israel will be exalted above all other nations:

And all the nations will stream to it.
And many peoples will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their
spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they learn war. (Isaiah 2:2b–4)

The description of the millennial reign continues in Isaiah 4:

In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning. . . . (Isaiah 4:2–4)

The term “Branch of the Lord” refers to the Messiah (v. 2). He is the branch or shoot that will spring from what appeared to be a dead stump—the royal Davidic dynasty that by all appearances had died. After He returns, Jesus will sit upon the throne of His father David and rule the earth from Jerusalem (2 Sm 7:10–16; Ps 2; 45:5–7; 72:8–20; 102:13–17; 110; Is 9:7). All of the surviving remnant of Israel will be holy, having been filled with the Holy Spirit and the benefits of the blood of the new and better covenant (Heb 8:6). We note the references to the purifying work of the covenant chastisements that will take place during the time of “Jacob’s trouble” As

Martin notes, Isaiah is referring to those Jews “who will survive the difficulties in the Great Tribulation just before the Lord Jesus Christ returns to set up His kingdom.”¹ So the timing is crystal clear; it is the dawn of the messianic kingdom. Which makes what we read in the next two verses so interesting and important. During this time:

the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain. (Isaiah 4:5–6)

Although the English word here is “canopy,” it is actually *chuppah* in Hebrew. In chapter 7, we discussed the concept of the *chuppah* or canopy-shelter under which a bride and bridegroom stood during the biblical wedding ceremony.² As Motyer says, “Canopy (*huppâ*) always denotes the ‘marriage chamber.’”³ *The Complete Jewish Bible* translates this verse much more clearly: “Adonai will create over the whole site of Mount Tziyon and over those who assemble there a smoking cloud by day and a shining, flaming fire by night; for the Glory will be over everything like a hupah.” Thus, at the dawn of the messianic age, as the Lord’s marriage covenant with Israel is restored, the Glory of God will cover Mount Zion like a wedding *chuppah*! Perhaps this canopy-shelter will remain through the entirety of the millennial period, as a perpetual testimony to the marriage covenant and blessed relationship between God and His people. One can hear the declaration of God to Israel echoing down through history: “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Gn 17:7; Ex 6:7; 34:24, 28; Jer 7:23; 30:22; 31:33). As it was at Mount Sinai, so will it be at Mount Zion. Even as the Lord provided a thick cloud to serve as the *chuppah* when the first covenant was made, so shall the new marriage covenant see a new *chuppah* established over Mount Zion in Jerusalem during the messianic kingdom.

ISAIAH 25: THE MARRIAGE BANQUET

Whereas Isaiah 4 begins to set the stage for an eschatological wedding feast, in Isaiah 25 the prophet speaks very specifically of an actual wedding banquet in Jerusalem. In that day: “The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine” (v. 6). It is so important to recognize, as Motyer rightly points out, that “Isaiah looks back to the covenant banquet of Exodus 24.”⁴ As we discussed in chapter 8, in order to ratify and seal the marriage covenant made on Mount Sinai, Moses and Aaron and the seventy elders ate a feast on the mountain, “and they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Ex 24:11). As a covenant banquet-feast was held on Mount Sinai, so also will there be a covenant banquet on Mount Zion.

During that time, Isaiah explains that veils will be removed from “all nations” (v. 7). This could be either veils of blindness, freeing the Gentiles from the bondage of idolatry, or it may refer to veils of mourning, that inevitably come through the sin and death of this fallen age. In truth, all of these things (blindness, idolatry, death, and sorrow) are very much related. As Martin notes, “This will fulfill the promise given Abraham that all the world’s nations will be blessed through Israel (Gen. 12:3).”⁵ Throughout the whole world, death will be “swallowed” up (vv. 7–8). Tears and sorrow will be forgotten (v. 8). Israel’s long and tragic history of suffering will be completely reversed:

And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the LORD has spoken.
And it will be said in that day,
“Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He
might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.” (Isaiah 25:8b–9)

Thus, in the context of the age of Israel's salvation, when her relationship to the Lord is healed and her marriage covenant has been fully restored, God will hold a great feast, a lavish wedding banquet, *in Jerusalem*. It is essential to note that by no means does Isaiah describe the wedding-banquet as being exclusively for Israel. Instead, He makes the revolutionary statement that the Lord will specifically prepare a luxurious banquet-feast "*for all peoples*" (v. 6). As Motyer comments, throughout this entire passage "[t]he theme of universality is stressed—all peoples (twice), all nations, all faces, all the earth."⁶ Whereas the covenant feast on Mount Sinai was limited only to Moses and the representative elders of Israel, on Mount Zion, the invitation will go out to the whole world (Mt 24:14; Rv 14:6).

RECLINING AT THE TABLE WITH ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

The great eschatological wedding feast described by Isaiah is a theme that Jesus points to many times throughout His ministry. The first such reference is found in His interaction with a Roman centurion:

And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." (Matthew 8:5–9)

While the majority of the Roman centurions were heathens and idolaters, there were some who "feared God" (Acts 10:2; 13:16, 26; 16:14; 17:4,17; 18:7). Scholars believe that these God-fearers worshipped YHVH and probably observed certain Jewish religious traditions, without necessarily becoming full converts to Judaism.⁷ Matthew 8 tells of Jesus' interaction with such a man. Rather than asking Jesus to

go through all the trouble of traveling to heal his servant, this Roman military leader expresses that a simple word from Jesus' lips will be sufficient. To this humble and faith-filled man, Jesus responds:

Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:10–12., cf. Lk 13:29)

First, Jesus expresses His joy at the great faith shown by this Gentile. Then He begins to expound upon one of the most critical themes of Isaiah 25. When the messianic age comes, when the wedding banquet is celebrated, "many" Gentiles from all over the world will come and "recline at the table" with the great patriarchs of Israel. On the other hand, and shockingly, many Jewish "sons of the kingdom" will be excluded and "cast into the outer darkness." Jesus purposefully shocked and offended the ethnic and nationalist prejudices of His Jewish countrymen. While the primary and original context of the coming wedding feast is the renewal of Israel's wedding covenant, it is not only for the physical descendants of the patriarchs but for all of God's people, both Jews and Gentiles. As David Turner and Darrell L. Bock in *The Cornerstone Bible Commentary* summarize, "Jesus spoke of the future kingdom as a time when 'many Gentiles' . . . from all over the world . . . would sit with Abraham and the patriarchs, enjoying the great eschatological feast . . . while many Israelites would be excluded."⁸ Those throughout the world who, over the past two thousand years, have said yes to the invitation of the gospel, will join with the Jewish patriarchs and other faithful Old Testament saints at the wedding feast in the kingdom of God.

The concept of the great eschatological feast described by Jesus is solidly rooted in Isaiah 25, which in turn points directly back to the

covenant feast of Exodus 24. Thus, the concept of the eschatological wedding feast spoken of so frequently throughout the New Testament is the ultimate feast foreshadowed by that which was eaten by Moses and the elders atop Mount Sinai. Isaiah thus describes the days of that future feast: “For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders” (Is 24:23b). Whereas Moses and the elders saw the God of Israel, and ate and drank, so will the saints of Zion in the age to come eat, drink, and behold Jesus—*YHVH God in the flesh*.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST

On other occasions, Jesus told parables about the coming wedding feast. Speaking to the crowds in Matthew 22, Jesus says:

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. (Matthew 22:2–3)

As is common in various rabbinic parables, the king here stands for God.⁹ It is also important to understand that the term the “kingdom of heaven” is not a reference to a spiritual kingdom somewhere up above. Rather, it is intended to convey the future messianic kingdom of God on the earth. Kingdom of heaven simply means the messianic kingdom of God.¹⁰ This is seen clearly in Luke where Jesus tells His disciples, “[J]ust as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk 22:29–30). As we’ve already noted, the coming wedding feast described by Isaiah takes place on the earth, in Jerusalem, after the Messiah returns. As commentator Louis A. Barieri Jr. rightly states, “The figure of a wedding banquet here portrays the Millennial Age.”¹¹ As the parable continues, the king sent out his servants, telling them to inform those previously invited:

“Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.” But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. (Matthew 22:4–7)

According to New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg, “The people originally invited to the banquet clearly represent Israel.”¹² Sadly, throughout their history, the majority from Israel have rejected the messengers of God. This includes not only the prophets but also John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. Knowing of His own rejection beforehand, Jesus warned His countrymen that God would send armies to invade their land, kill many of them, and burn Jerusalem. None of this was new information, however. As we discussed in chapters 11 and 12, such warnings had long been proclaimed by Moses and the prophets. Interestingly, virtually all commentators view Jesus’ warnings here as pointing solely to the catastrophes that befell Jerusalem in AD 70. One could very fairly argue, however, that it ultimately points to the final cycle of covenant chastisements that will yet befall Israel in the last days.

As a result of the original invitees rejecting the Lord’s generous offer, the king sent out new messengers and told them, “Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast” (Mt 22:9). This second round of appeals points to the gospel invitation that has been extended to virtually the whole world for the past two millennia. Many classical dispensationalist theologians claim that there will be two distinct wedding feasts at the end of the age; one for Israel, and another for Christians. As Fruchtenbaum states, “In a sense then, there will be a double wedding feast: One for the Church as the Bride of the Messiah and one for Israel as the remarried Wife of Jehovah.”¹³ Even more strongly, J. Dwight Pentecost in his classic dispensationalist work *Things to*

Come, states, “[I]t seems necessary to distinguish between the marriage of the Lamb and the marriage supper. The marriage of the Lamb is an event that has particular reference to the church and takes place in heaven. The marriage supper is an event that involves Israel and takes place on the earth.”¹⁴ Biblically speaking, however, there is simply no basis for such a claim. As Jesus’ parable demonstrates, those who received the gospel invitation attend the same wedding feast offered to Israel. In Isaiah 25, Israel’s lavish wedding feast *on Mount Zion* is open to “all peoples.” The Scriptures speak of only one wedding feast. Efforts to overcomplicate matters and create multiple weddings and multiple brides is the result of seeking to impose a rigid theological system onto the Scriptures, creating divisions where the Lord envisions a diverse group of people, all unified at the same great feast.

JESUS’ SERMON ON THE END TIMES

It is very appropriate that, in the midst of His Olivet Discourse, Jesus’ great sermon on the end times, He again speaks of the eschatological marriage feast:

Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the prudent answered, “No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.” And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. (Matthew 25:1–10)

This parable represents a fairly simple warning: Jesus' followers should always be ready for His return, regardless of how long it takes. As Turner and Bock note, "The five foolish bridesmaids expect the groom to arrive rapidly, but the wise are prepared for a possible delay."¹⁵ Are the foolish virgins unbelievers or believers? What exactly does the oil represent? Resolving some of these common interpretive questions is outside of our purposes here. We do note, however, that the Bridegroom clearly represents Jesus. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus refers to Himself by this title several times (Mt 9:15; Mt 25:1,5,6,10; Mk 2:19-20; Lk 5:34-35; Jn 2:9; 3:39). Paul also uses similar terminology: "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Cor 11:2). So, while Christians are quite used to thinking of Jesus as the soon-coming Bridegroom, it is important to recognize that from the perspective of the first century Jews, this term would have pointed to YHVH, the Bridegroom God of Mount Sinai. Thus, by repeatedly referring to Himself as the Bridegroom, Jesus was very deliberately identifying Himself as YHVH. As Turner and Bock comment, "God's relationship with Israel is likened to a bridegroom with a bride in the Old Testament . . . and in this parable Jesus portrays Himself in an equivalent relationship."¹⁶

AWAITING THE MASTER

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus reiterates and summarizes some of the lessons from the parable of the foolish and wise virgins:

Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. (Luke 12:35-37)

Again, the call is to be ready. As Robert L. Stein in *The New American Bible Commentary* notes, “This image of a man who has tucked his long robe up under his belt in order to run is found frequently in the Bible.”¹⁷ The KJV translates this verse much more closely to the Greek: “Let your loins be girded about” (v. 35). This is a clear allusion back to the Passover, during which it was said: “Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD’s Passover” (Ex 12:11). In other words, the *ready-at-any-moment* mentality that the Israelites were commanded to maintain during the Passover meal is how followers of Jesus are to live as they await His return. Thus, only three verses later, Jesus says, “[B]e ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect” (Lk 12:40). As commentators Pao and Schnabel rightly note, by pointing back to Exodus 12:11, Jesus “expresses the conviction that the last redemption will be reminiscent of the redemption of the Exodus.”¹⁸ Again, virtually the whole story of the return of Jesus is foreshadowed within the story of the Exodus.

Using the same terminology here as Matthew 8:10–12, Jesus references the wedding guests once more as “reclining at the table.” This motif, in fact, is the most common way that Jesus made reference to the messianic banquet (Mt 8:11; Lk 12:37; 13:29; 14:15–24; 22:27–30). Most shocking and powerful is the fact that Jesus, who is clearly the master in this parable, says that at the banquet, He will “gird himself” to humbly serve the wedding guests. Only Jesus demonstrates His absolute Lordship through acts of serving others.

THE LAST SUPPER

On the night before His betrayal, arrest, torture, and crucifixion, Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. The Gospel of Matthew tells the following account:

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:26–29)

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, adds a few important details. First, after breaking the bread, Jesus said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (11:24). Second, after blessing the cup of wine, Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (v. 25). Finally, Paul adds, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (v. 26). Thus, Jesus expanded upon the Passover tradition of breaking bread and drinking wine, and created a new tradition that has come to be referred to as “the Lord’s Supper.” Embraced by the early Church (Acts 2:42), regular observation of the Lord’s Supper serves two purposes. First, it looks back in “remembrance” of the shed blood of the new covenant. Second, it looks forward and “proclaims” the marriage supper that will take place “in my Father’s kingdom.” Whereas the old covenant required the shedding of the blood of bulls, the new covenant was made with the blood of Jesus the Messiah. Thus the author of the letter to Hebrews reminds us of the absolute superiority of the new covenant: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. . . . [However], we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:4,10).

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

Finally, in the book of Revelation, we come to the last reference to the eschatological marriage feast in the Scriptures. Looking into the

future, John the apostle saw the culmination of the story of redemption and the celebratory cry that will pour forth from heaven at that time: “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him.” What is the reason for all the rejoicing?

“[F]or the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” (Revelation 19:7–9)

It is indeed a blessing to be invited to the great wedding feast, but the true blessing will be reserved for those who actually attend. So, who exactly will be there? This question is actually quite controversial. The controversy concerns the larger question of “who are the people of God?” The answer is complicated by the fact that its answer changes depending on whether we are inquiring concerning the past, present, or future. Various models and diagrams have been created to explain this matter. Dispensational theologians have various models and Reformed theologians have their own models. Apart from any system, however, the most biblical model is often called “Olive Tree Theology.” This position is articulated by the apostle Paul in Romans 11. Using the analogy of a cultivated olive tree upon which various uncultivated has been grafted. Paul identifies three distinct groups of people:

1. Natural branches, presently joined to the tree. This includes all faithful, believing Jews from both before and after the time of Jesus.
2. Formerly wild, uncultivated branches that have been grafted into the olive tree. This includes Gentile Christians.

3. Natural branches having been cut from the tree. This includes non-Messianic Jews. These are the natural branches who, although they have been removed from the olive tree, can very easily be grafted back in again. In fact, as the Scriptures show, those from this group who survive the final period of Jacob's trouble will all be saved and thus permanently grafted back into the olive tree.

Thus, the happy celebrants at the marriage supper of the Lamb actually consists of the following three groups of people:

1. Faithful Jews and righteous, God-fearing Gentiles who lived before Jesus such as the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
2. Both Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians who lived during or after the earthly ministry of Jesus.
3. Jews who are presently not believers in YHVH *and* His Messiah but who will come to faith in the future, including the vast numbers who will come to faith when Jesus returns.

At the coming eschatological wedding feast, all three groups together will form the collective "Bride of Messiah." As commentator Paige Patterson rightly states, "In the New Testament, the church, consisting of every truly redeemed human, is the bride of Christ."¹⁹

CONCLUSION

The feast that was eaten by Moses and the elders atop Mount Sinai was a prophetic foreshadowing of the coming marriage feast that will be eaten in Zion. Whereas the Sinaitic covenant was a marriage covenant that was repeatedly broken, the new covenant is a permanent marriage covenant. Whereas the glory of YHVH was seen by Moses and the elders on Sinai, Jesus, who is the glory of YHVH (Heb 1:3), will also be seen by everyone present at the marriage

feast held on Mount Zion. Whenever Jesus referred to Himself as “the Bridegroom” He was very specifically identifying Himself as the Bridegroom God of Mount Sinai. It is in the return of Jesus that the culmination of the grand story of redemption will be complete. The plan that the Lord initiated at Mount Sinai will conclude on Mount Zion. The final Exodus will be fulfilled, resulting in the rest, security, and blessings associated with possessing the promised land being secured forever.

PART 3

THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF JESUS

We now turn our focus entirely to the return of Jesus. This is the part of the book that I am personally the most excited about. Here, we will continue to explore the profound biblical relationship between the story of the Exodus and the coming of Jesus the Messiah. We will begin by exploring the most ancient and foundational prophecies in the Bible that specifically describe the return of Jesus. These texts, which scholars sometimes refer to as the “Wilderness Traditions” we will refer to as the “Desert Prophecies.” As we will see, the Bible teaches that when Jesus returns, He will march through the desert, delivering the remnant of His people from captivity and leading them safely back to Zion. Together, the Desert Prophecies provide us with the most detailed, vibrant, glorious descriptions of Jesus’ return in the whole Bible. These prophecies also provide us with the foundation for the New Testament vision of Jesus’ second coming. Strangely, it is a picture that very few Christians have ever seen or heard. Yet, as we will see, it is a vision of such beauty and majesty that it simply cannot remain veiled any longer.

THE BLESSING OF MOSES

The earliest and most foundational passage in the Bible that specifically describes the return of Jesus is found in Deuteronomy 33. This mysterious passage is one of the most ancient texts in the whole Bible. Because of the archaic Hebrew used in the text, as well as the variances among different manuscripts, this passage has mystified scholars, translators, and interpreters alike. As we'll see, it is the foundational passage for the larger body of texts we're referring to as the Desert Prophecies. For the next several chapters, we will examine these rarely discussed yet critical prophecies.

INTRODUCTION

Deuteronomy 33 begins: "Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death." As the patriarch Jacob before him (Gn 49), Moses, like a father to his children, uses his last words to bless the sons of Israel. Later, in similar fashion, Jesus' last act just before His ascension was to bless His twelve disciples: "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Lk 24:50–51). For this reason, Deuteronomy 33 is commonly referred to as the Blessing of Moses. Yet, as the great Jewish exegete Abraham Ibn Ezra points out, "Moses was blessing them prophetically."¹ Moses is called "the man of God," a term consistently used to refer

to prophets (Jo 14:6; 1 Sm 9:6; 1 Kgs 13; 17:18; 2 Kgs 4:7, 9; Ps 90:1). Indeed, Moses was a prophet (Dt 18:15), and this blessing, containing his final words, was a prophecy. While it is most often called the “Blessing of Moses,” it could just as easily be called the “Prophecy of Moses.”

THE LORD COMES FROM SINAI

Before Moses blessed the twelve tribes, he began with a critically important and truly majestic description of YHVH. He said:

“The LORD came from Sinai,
 And dawned on them from Seir;
 He shone forth from Mount Paran,
 And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones;
 At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.
 (Deuteronomy 33:1–2)

Old Testament scholar J.A. Thompson rightly describes the intended meaning of the poetry: “Yahweh is depicted as coming from Sinai and rising like the sun upon Israel from Seir.”² Beyond merely shining forth, however, scholars describe YHVH here as the “Divine Warrior” marching forth from Sinai through the region of Sinai, Seir, and Mount Paran toward Israel. These are all regions to the southeast of Israel, in the modern day kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Jordan. As He marches, the Lord is accompanied by myriads of angels and has lightning (or fire) coming forth from His right hand. After each of the twelve tribes of Israel are given their own personal prophetic blessing (Dt 33:3–25), the conclusion of the prophecy returns to praising the Lord and adds this very important description:

“There is none like the God of Jeshurun,
 Who rides across the heavens to help you
 And on the clouds in his majesty. (Deuteronomy 33:26)

“Jeshurun” is either a pet name or an honorific title given by God to Israel. Fascinatingly, God is described here as He who rides across the heavens on the clouds as He comes to save His people. The prophecy concludes:

“The eternal God is a dwelling place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms;
And He drove out the enemy from before you,
And said, ‘Destroy!’
So Israel dwells in security,
The fountain of Jacob secluded,
In a land of grain and new wine;
His heavens also drop down dew.
Blessed are you, O Israel;
Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD,
Who is the shield of your help
And the sword of your majesty!
So your enemies will cringe before you,
And you will tread upon their high places.”
(Deuteronomy 33:27–29)

In these final few verses are a couple important themes. God is the source of Israel’s salvation and security from her enemies. As He marches forward, His enemies are destroyed before them. The Lord is described as both a shield and sword for His people. As Ibn Ezra says, “The sense is that it is the Lord who is the sword by which you will triumph over all your enemies.”³ As a result of His support for them, they will conquer and possess the “high places” of their enemies. Merrill, however, suggests the imagery conveyed is not Israel standing on their enemies’ land but, instead, standing with their feet on their enemies’ backs. Thus, he renders Deuteronomy 33:39 as: “Your enemies will be forced to prostrate before you; You will then trample upon their backs.”⁴

HISTORY OF FUTURE?

While most commentators interpret this all merely as a poetic and overly dramatized description of God giving the Torah and leading Israel during the time of the Exodus, as we will show, it ultimately looks forward to the return of Jesus. Unfortunately, very few commentators recognize this. The reasons are entirely understandable. First, every English translation renders the verbs within the text in the past tense: “[T]he LORD *came* from Sinai.” The fact, however, is that the verbs used are in the perfect tense. In Hebrew, the perfect verb tense has the potential to be translated as either past, present, or even future tense. Thus the passage could alternately be translated: “[T]he LORD *is coming* from Sinai” or even “[T]he LORD *will come* from Sinai.” Translators determine which tense to use based on the context of the passage. Because the passage uses terms associated with Mount Sinai, it is assumed that it is speaking of history. While there is no question that the passage purposefully uses images of the Exodus, it also expands far beyond anything that took place during that seminal journey. Again, as we will show, the ultimate context of this prophetic text is the future return of Jesus. This pattern, which we’ve now discussed several times, of using the language of the Exodus to speak of the final period of redemption and the return of Jesus, permeates the Scriptures. This prophecy is no different.

THE BLESSING OF MOSES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS

Among the primary reasons to understand the Blessing of Moses as speaking of Jesus’ return is that it features terms and themes consistently found in later texts that are widely recognized as describing His second coming. Deuteronomy 33 describes the following:

- God *coming*. The notion of God coming down, appearing, or being revealed is the dominant term used throughout the New Testament to refer to the return of Jesus (Mt 24:27,30,37,39, 42,44; 25:31; 26:64, Mk 8:38; 13:26; 14:62; Lk 9:26; 12:40; 18:8; 21:27; 23:42; Jn 21:23; 1 Cor

15:23; 1 Thes 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:2,23; 1Thes 2:1, 2, 8; Heb 10:37; Jas 5:7,8; 2 Pt 1:16; 3:4,10; 1 Jn 2:28; Rv 1:7,8; 2:25; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7,12,17,20).

- God coming *with myriads of His holy ones or angels*. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus' return is also repeatedly described as being accompanied by angels, holy ones, the saints, or the armies of heaven (Mt 13:40–42; 16:27; 24:30–31; 25:31–32; Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; 2 Thes 1:7; Jude 14; Rv 19:14). This is also true within various extra-biblical apocalyptic texts that were popular during the period of the early church.⁵
- God coming *on the clouds*. The imagery of Jesus coming back in the clouds is perhaps the most iconic and well known motif of His return in the New Testament. It is how Jesus Himself, as well as both Paul and John describe His return (Mt 24:30; 26:64; Mk 13:26; 14:62; Lk 21:27; Acts 1:9; 1 Thes 4:17; Rv 1:7; 14:14–16; 19:11).
- God coming *from heaven*. The fact that God Almighty comes, specifically with His angels, and on the clouds, infers that He has come forth from heaven. As Keil and Delitzsch note, “The Lord came not only from Sinai, but from heaven, ‘out of holy myriads,’ i.e., out of the midst of the thousands of holy angels who surround His throne.”⁶ Similarly, when Jesus returns, He is consistently described as coming back in the sky, from heaven (Mt 24:30; Mk 14:62; Lk 21:27; Acts 1:11; 1 Thes 1:7,10; Rv 19:11).
- God is shining forth like the sun. Throughout the New Testament, the concept of Jesus returning as the manifest glory of God, *shining forth like the sun*, is seen in multiple passages (Mt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27; 1 Cor 2:8; 2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:3; Ti 2:13).

- God coming *to save His people*. Not only does YHVH ride across the heavens on the clouds to help Israel, but as the final verses show, He comes to save them from their enemies. Similarly, the New Testament says that Jesus comes back to deliver and save His people from their enemies and persecutors (Mt 16:27; 17:2; 24:27; Lk 17:24; 2 Thes 1:6-7; Heb 10:12-13; Rv 6:10; 10:1; 11:18; 18:20; 19:2).
- God coming *with His people, treading upon the their enemies*. The motif of treading on, or crushing the wicked, begins with the foundational messianic prophecy of Genesis 3:15. It is repeated in several other important messianic prophecies and will ultimately be fulfilled when Jesus returns (Gn 3:15; Nm 24:17; 1 Sm 2:10; Jgs 5:26-27; Ps 58:10; 68:21; 110:5; Jl 3:13; Is 63:3; Hb 3:13; Mal 4:3; Rom 16:20; Rv 14:20; 19:15).
- God coming *as the Divine Warrior* to fight on behalf of His people. In the New Testament, at the time of His return, Jesus is described as He who “judges and wages war” (Rv 19:11).
- God coming *as a sword to strike down Israel’s enemies*. In the book of Revelation, we are told: “From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations . . . and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty” (Rv 19:15).

In summary, the imagery ascribed to YHVH in Deuteronomy 33 aligns perfectly (in at least nine distinct ways) with the New Testament vision of the return of Jesus. Any honest assessment of Deuteronomy 33 must acknowledge its foundational contribution to the New Testament doctrine of the return of Jesus.

GOD AS A MAN

The next reason to see Deuteronomy 33 as speaking of the return of Jesus is because, as Craigie notes, God is portrayed as the “Man in

Battle.”⁷ In other words, the prophecy portrays God in anthropomorphic form—in the form of a man—with things such as hands and feet. Needless to say, God did not literally march before the people in the form of a man during the Exodus. While it may be easy for some to dismiss this language as mere poetic hyperbole, it is important to note a principle of interpretation employed throughout the prophets and the New Testament. When Jesus and the other New Testament authors come to passages that describe God (1) in the form of a man, (2) on the earth, and (3) executing judgment, they consistently interpret these texts as speaking of the return of Jesus (e.g., Zec 14:5; Is 63:1-6; 66:15; Hb 3, cf. 1 Thes 3:13; 2 Thes 1:7; Heb 10:37; Jude 14–15; Rv 19:13–15). By recognizing this important New Testament principle of interpretation, Old Testament texts such as Deuteronomy 33, once very mysterious, become clear. In the incarnation, God Almighty became flesh, dwelt among us, and then very specifically and emphatically stated, “I will come again” (Jn 1:1,14; 14:3).

UNFULFILLED PROPHECY

Yet another reason to see Deuteronomy 33 as speaking of the return of Jesus is because it describes events that simply have never happened in history. As George N. H. Peters, in his nineteenth century, three-volume tome *The Theocratic Kingdom*, correctly points out, this prophecy:

shall only be fully realized at the restoration of the nation at the Second Coming of its King. . . . Such a Coming with myriads of saints is only predicated of the still future Advent. We have no account of any other, and this correspondence with what will occur at the predicted Second Advent of Jesus (when myriads of saints are with Him) is indicative of its intended application.⁸

At no time throughout the Exodus account does the Bible ever record God actually appearing with myriads of angels (at least not

visibly). Seeking to apply this verse to the Exodus, some commentators point to the New Testament's reference to the law of Moses having been "mediated through angels" (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). This explanation falls short, however, because it is simply not what the text states. Whereas the biblical account of the Exodus nowhere describes God literally appearing with myriads of angels, the Bible does speak numerous times of Jesus as coming from heaven with myriads of His holy angels. Peters' contention that this passage speaks of yet unfulfilled prophecy is an important point that should not be dismissed.

THE BOOK OF ENOCH

Another reason to see Deuteronomy 33 as speaking of the return of Jesus is because this is how the New Testament interprets it. As we will discuss in chapter 25, the extra-biblical Book of Enoch, so popular among the first century Jews, declares that God will descend from heaven and specifically land on Mount Sinai at the end of the great tribulation. In the New Testament, Jude quotes the prophecy of Enoch and applies it to the return of Jesus (Jude 14). The highly respected biblical scholar D. A. Carson notes that Jude's citation of Enoch points directly back to the Song of Moses: "The image of God coming with his angelic hosts is drawn from Deut. 33:2." To reiterate: Jude 14, a New Testament text that describes the return of Jesus, is a direct quote from Enoch, which is drawn directly from the Blessing of Moses. Understanding this connection, Deuteronomy 33 should be seen as the first prophecy in the Bible that speaks of the return of Jesus, even if only in the form of a powerful foreshadowing. Scholars universally recognize the seed-prophecy of Genesis 3:15 as the earliest and most foundational messianic prophecy in the Bible. Deuteronomy 33, however, should be recognized an equally foundational text. Together, these two passages stand beside one another as the two earliest, most foundational, and important messianic prophecies in all of Scripture.

THE DESERT PROPHECIES

Expanding on this last point, the final reason to see Deuteronomy 33 as speaking of the return of Jesus is because, as we have already stated, it is the foundational passage for a larger family of Old Testament texts that are also interpreted by the New Testament as speaking of the return of Jesus. Together these passages all portray the same general picture: that of YHVH as a man, “coming” from Mount Sinai, marching through the desert of Edom, toward the promised land, to save His people Israel. Scholars have long noted the similarities of these various passages and, occasionally, their connection to the return of Jesus. The Desert Prophecies include:

- The Blessing of Moses (Dt 33)
- The Song of Deborah (Jgs 5)
- David’s Great Processional Psalm (Ps 68)
- Isaiah’s Highway in the Desert Prophecies (Is 35, 40, 42, 63)
- The Prayer of Habakkuk (Hab 3)
- The Prophecy of Zechariah (Zec 9, 14)
- The extrabiblical Prophecy of Enoch (1 Enoch 1)

In the next few chapters, we will examine each of these passages to show that together, they do indeed form the basis for the New Testament vision of the return of Jesus. In conjunction, these prophecies paint a sublime picture of Jesus’ glorious and triumphant return that is beyond exhilarating.

THE SONG OF DEBORAH

The next important Desert Prophecy that expands the theme of YHVH as the coming Divine Warrior is the Song of Deborah. The song is a victory hymn written in the first person by Deborah, prophetess and judge (Jgs 4:4). It was sung after Israel's great military victory over Sisera, commander of Canaanite armies, and his armies. The Hebrew used in this song also reveals it to be one of the most ancient poems in the whole Bible.¹ According to Arthur Cundall of London Bible College, "it is one of the finest examples of an ode of triumph preserved in Israelite literature."² Block describes it as rich with "textual riddles, emotional intensity, psychological energy, and theological profundity."³ Scholars believe that it was likely part of a larger collection of songs commemorating the victories of God, such as *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* mentioned in Numbers 21:14 or *The Book of Jasher* mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.⁴ Like the Blessing of Moses, so also does the Song of Deborah contain powerful prophetic foreshadowing of the return of Jesus.

THE PEOPLE VOLUNTEERED

The passage begins with the heading: "Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day" (Jgs 5:1). By placing Deborah first, her leadership is forever honored, and the shameful passivity of Barak memorialized. Together, they sang:

“That the leaders led in Israel,
That the people volunteered,
Bless the LORD!
Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers!
I—to the LORD, I will sing,
I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.” (Judges 5:2–3)

In the day of battle, both the leaders and the people of Israel willingly, even passionately, gave themselves to the Lord’s cause. As Old Testament professor Lawson G. Stone frames it: “The unleashed passion of the leaders was met by a ready response from the warriors among the people.”⁵ Their enthusiasm extended beyond the battle to the subsequent celebration and singing to the Lord for the great victory that He provided. A strikingly similar passage is found in Psalm 110, one of the great prophetic messianic psalms. The psalm begins by describing the Messiah sitting at the right hand of God, awaiting the appointed time to return from heaven to crush His enemies and establish His global rule. David then spoke of the spirit of willingness that will be present among God’s people in that day:

Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;
In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,
Your youth are to You as the dew. (Psalm 110:3)

Both Judges 5:2 and Psalm 110:3 speak of God’s people enthusiastically volunteering and joyfully giving themselves to the Lord’s cause. Both passages also relate to the Lord’s return. As it was in the day of Deborah, in the day of YHVH’s victory, so will it be when Jesus returns in the day of His power. The people of Israel will join themselves fully, with unbridled enthusiasm and willing spirits, to the cause of YHVH and the celebration of His victories. This is the first parallel within the Song of Deborah to the return of Jesus.

YHVH AS DIVINE WARRIOR

After the introduction and praises to God, the most profound portion of the song begins:

LORD, when You went out from Seir,
 When You marched from the field of Edom,
 The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,
 Even the clouds dripped water.
 The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD,
 This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.
 (Judges 5:4–5)

The similarities between the Song of Deborah and the Blessing of Moses are easy for all to see. As in Deuteronomy 33, so also here is the Lord described as marching forth as the Divine Warrior before His people. In both passages, He is specifically marching through the hill country of Seir and the region of Edom. Commentators agree that Deborah draws from the past acts of YHVH during the Exodus and applies them the Lord's victory over Sisera that she had just witnessed. Even as the Lord had figuratively marched before His people during the desert journey, so had the Lord gone before His people in Deborah's day. In the same way that Deborah draws from the imagery of YHVH's presence leading Israel during the Exodus and applies it to her own victory in battle, as we will see, so do the New Testament writers draw from such imagery to describe the future victory of YHVH, when Jesus returns. This, then, is the second key parallel between the Song of Deborah and the return of Jesus.

STORM CLOUDS AND EARTHQUAKES

The third parallel is seen in the references to the storm clouds pouring forth water. This mention of storm clouds likely indicates that Israel's victory (and Sisera's defeat) was accompanied by a dramatic storm. As Old Testament scholar Barry G. Webb comments: "the main theme of the song is 'the righteous acts' of the Lord himself,

who went forth as Israel's champion and overwhelmed his enemies (and Israel's) by unleashing the powers of heaven against them."⁶ The activity of storms assisting Israel's victory would no doubt have been interpreted as a sign of YHVH's supremacy over Baal, Sisera's god. The Canaanites believed that Baal was the storm god, who rode upon the clouds. Deborah interpreted the storms and the Canaanites' defeat as a clear sign of the Lord's sovereign intervention in battle.

This reference to storm clouds also ties the Song of Deborah back to the Blessing of Moses, where God is described as actually riding on the clouds (Dt 33:26). Numerous other Old Testament texts speak of storm clouds as defining the day of the Lord (e.g., Ps 18:9; Jl 2:2; Isa 66:15; Zep 1:15). Regardless as to how popular the idea may be, the Bible does not teach that Jesus will come back in fluffy white cumulus clouds and blue skies. Instead, the Scriptures describe His return as taking place amid dark skies and thick, thundering storm clouds (Mt 24:30; cf. Ex 19:16–17; 2 Sm 22:10; etc.).

Similarly, the fourth parallel in the Song of Deborah with the return of Jesus is the reference to an earthquake. Old Testament professor Mark J. Boda notes, “[T]he march of the Divine Warrior is marked by convulsions in creation, especially those related to violent earthquakes and rainstorms.”⁷ Once again, it is Mount Sinai that Deborah specifically singles out as shaking before the actual presence of YHVH. When the Israelites stood before the presence of God on Mount Sinai, “the whole mountain quaked violently” (Ex 19:18). Being patterned after the first revelation of God on Mount Sinai, the return of Jesus will also be accompanied by an unparalleled earthquake or even multiple earthquakes (Ez 38:19; Zec 14:5; Mt 24:29; Rv 16:18).

FROM MOUNT SINAI

The fifth parallel concerns the references to Mount Sinai. Again, this is the location from where YHVH led Israel during the Exodus, proceeding forth through Seir and Edom. As we will see, however, this is also the region through which Jesus will march when He

returns to save the remnant of His people and bring them back to their land (e.g., Is 63).

This leads us to the sixth parallel within the Song of Deborah and the return of Jesus. Scholars agree that highlighting Mount Sinai is also a likely expansion upon the polemic against Baal. The Canaanites believed that Baal lived on Mount Zaphon in modern day Syria, on the border of Turkey. YHVH, on the other hand, revealed Himself to Israel from Mount Sinai in the south. Thus, YHVH, the god who came from the south, is utterly superior to Baal, *the god from the north*. When Jesus comes back, He will defeat the Antichrist and his armies, who are repeatedly specified as coming from the north (Hebrew: *tsaphon*) (Jer 1:15; 4:6; Ez 38:6,15; 39:2; Dn 11:40-44; Jl 2:20). Thus, in the same way that YHVH defeated the northern armies and their god in Deborah's day, so also will Jesus defeat the northern army and their god when He returns.

CRUSHING GOD'S ENEMIES

The seventh element within the Song of Deborah that ties to the return of Jesus is the theme of crushing the head of God's enemies. As we discussed in the previous chapter, this motif of treading upon or crushing the enemies of God's people begins in the first messianic prophecy in the Bible. There, it is said that the day will come when the Messiah will crush the head of the serpent (Gn 3:15). Later, in Numbers 24, Balaam prophesies that in the last days, the Davidic King will crush the head of Moab and the skulls of the sons of Sheth (Nm 24:8,17). In the Blessing of Moses, when God comes to save His people, they will tread upon the backs of their enemies (Dt 33:29). Here in Judges 5, we see this theme repeated yet again. In the midst of the battle, Sisera had escaped and sought refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael. Sisera, exhausted from the battle, fell into a deep sleep. Using the opportunity, Jael drove a tent peg through Sisera's skull and killed him. Thus, at the end of Deborah's victory hymn is a celebration of Jael:

Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
He asked for water and she gave him milk;
she brought him curds in a noble's bowl.
She sent her hand to the tent peg
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
she struck Sisera;
she crushed his head;
she shattered and pierced his temple.
Between her feet
he sank, he fell, he lay still;
between her feet
he sank, he fell;
where he sank,
there he fell—dead. (Judges 5:24–27 ESV)

Within the statement “she crushed his head” is a clear allusion to the previous messianic texts discussed above. Jael’s “crushing” of Sisera is a kind of prophetic foreshadowing of the coming defeat of God’s enemies in the last days. As we will see, this theme will find its way into several more important messianic prophecies and will continue to feature prominently in various eschatological New Testament texts.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Song of Deborah expands upon the tradition that began in the Song of Moses. Numerous parallels exist between the Song of Deborah’s description of YHVH’s historical acts and the return of Jesus. First, the prophetic hymn begins by noting the willing spirit of the people during the battle against Sisera, a near perfect parallel to the willing spirit that will define God’s people when Jesus returns. Second, the Song of Deborah once again portrays YHVH as the Divine Warrior who marched before His people during the Exodus and who marched before Israel in Deborah’s day.

So also will Jesus the Messiah, God in the flesh, come again at the end of the age to save His people and defeat their enemies. Third, whereas YHVH's revelation to Israel was accompanied by thundering storm clouds, the revelation of Jesus from heaven will also occur in the storm clouds. Fourth, whereas YHVH's revelation to Israel was accompanied by a mighty earthquake, the revelation of Jesus will also be accompanied by a great earthquake. Fifth, whereas YHVH marched from Mount Sinai through the land of Edom, so also will Jesus (as we will continue to see) march from Sinai through the land of Edom, when He returns. Sixth, whereas YHVH, who came from the south and defeated Baal, who lives in the north, so also will Jesus return to defeat the Antichrist and his armies who come from the north. Seventh, and finally, whereas the Song of Deborah celebrates the crushing of God's enemies, so also will Jesus crush His enemies when He returns. The pattern established by YHVH and described in these ancient Desert Prophecies are the oldest and most foundational passages in the Bible that speak of the ultimate end-time coming of God.

DAVID'S GREAT PROCESSIONAL PSALM

The next great passage within the family of Desert Prophecies is Psalm 68. This psalm shares many characteristics and commonalities with both the Blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah but also adds many additional (and truly awesome) details. Like these previous texts, Psalm 68 has also long confounded scholars, translators, and interpreters. In fact, it is universally regarded as the most difficult of all the psalms. This psalm is at once a prayer, a victory hymn, a song of thanksgiving, and a prophecy. As we will see, it is another of the most powerful and foundational descriptions of the return of Jesus in the Old Testament. In *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, scholars deClaisé-Walford and Tanner rightly state that “its theme is one of unflinching praise for the powerful Warrior God of Israel.”¹ In this chapter, we’ll examine how this great psalm of David relates to the return of Jesus. Because of the many difficulties that exist in the original text, English translations vary quite widely. Thus, while we are primarily using the NASB, we will use other translations as well when relevant.

THE GREAT PROCESSIONAL PSALM

In order to understand this psalm, we need to go back to the Exodus and Israel’s forty years of wandering in the desert. The ark of the covenant, which represented God’s presence with Israel, was designed to be carried by the priestly Levites. Throughout this period, whenever

the cloud of God's presence lifted and moved forward, the people would break down their tents, pack all of their belongings, and follow it. The priests would lift the ark, and the next phase of its journey would begin. Each time the ark was lifted, Moses would speak the following words:

“Rise up, O LORD!
 And let Your enemies be scattered,
 And let those who hate You flee before You.” (Numbers 10:35)

Many years after Israel entered the promised land, King David had the ark moved from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem (2 Sm 6:12). Following after the tradition of Moses, David also recited this verse when the ark was lifted. It was at that time that this psalm was likely penned. Thus, Michael Wilcock, author of *The Message of Psalms: Songs for the People* rightly observes, “If the words ‘Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you’ were used, as Numbers tells us, ‘whenever the ark set out,’ they would most certainly have figured among the ceremonies of the last splendid stage of its journey.”² Thus, it begins:

Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered,
 And let those who hate Him flee before Him. (Psalm 68:1)

The procession of the ark to Jerusalem was accompanied by great celebration and singing: “David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals” (2 Sm 6:5; 1 Chr 15:28). As the ark entered the city, David led the way and danced before the ark “with all *his* might” (2 Sm 6:14). This would have been the first time the psalm was sung. Thereafter, it likely became part of the yearly ceremonial procession that took place during the festival of Sukkot.³ Israelites who lived outside of Jerusalem would make a pilgrimage there each year to participate

in the ceremonies and celebrations. It was during this time that the people held a parade of sorts, perhaps even multiple times, and likely sang David's psalm. This was to remember and celebrate the presence of God leading Israel from Sinai, through the desert, and ultimately to Jerusalem. According to professor Marvin E. Tate, at the conclusion of this procession, "there was a celebration of the enthronement of a victorious Yahweh as divine king."⁴ So while the psalm indeed celebrates what had happened in the past, its ultimate emphasis looks forward to the future, when Jesus returns. We will expand greatly on this theme below; but for now, let us note that the tense of the opening verses point to a future event. As the ESV reads, "God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him!" (Ps. 68:1)⁵

LET GOD ARISE

As we consider how Psalm 68 relates to the return of Jesus, the opening reference to God arising is foundational. Whether the verse should be properly read "God shall arise" as a celebratory and prophetic declaration or "Let God arise" as more of an intercessory cry, either is ultimately a direct reference to the return of the Messiah. The imagery of God arising refers to His rising up from His throne in heaven and coming down to save His people. Thus, the very first verse is essentially the *Marantha* cry of the Old Testament: *Arise O God. Come, Lord Jesus!*

LET THE WICKED PERISH

What shall God do after He arises? The next verse immediately shifts to a cry for God to destroy the wicked. Again, as the psalm relates to the return of Jesus, this theme is very important:

[L]et His enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate Him flee before Him.
As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;
As wax melts before the fire,

So let the wicked perish before God.
 But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God;
 Yes, let them rejoice with gladness. (Psalm 68:1b–3)

When we survey many of the passages that speak of the coming of the Messiah and the destruction of God’s enemies, the vindication of Israel is consistently one of the primary underlying themes. This is true throughout the Old Testament and continues to be true throughout the New Testament. The simple fact of the matter is that the Bible is largely written by the godly who are persecuted and threatened for other godly people who are persecuted and threatened. Their ultimate hope is the day of the Lord, which the New Testament refers to as “the day of our LORD Jesus” (2 Cor 1:14). Thus, throughout Scriptures, the day of the Lord/return of Jesus is the omega point of hope and expectation for salvation and deliverance. This is the day when justice will finally come, when the wicked will be judged, and the righteous will be given relief (e.g., Ex 23:22; Lk 1:51–56; 68-75; 2:25; Rm 8:17; 2 Thes 1:5–6; Heb 10:27; 1 Pt 4:12–19; Jude 14; Rv 19:1). By calling for the wicked to be destroyed and the righteous to be vindicated, this psalm begins by pointing directly to the day of the Lord and the return of Jesus. As we will see, this theme is repeated multiple times throughout the psalm.

PRAISE FOR THE CLOUD RIDER

Next, David, who functions throughout the psalm as a worship leader, calls for praises to be sung to God, who is described as the Divine Cloud Rider:

Sing to God! Sing praises to his name!
 Exalt the one who rides on the clouds!
 For the LORD is his name!
 Rejoice before him! (Psalm 68:4 NET)

While several translations speak of God riding “on the clouds” or through “the heavens,”⁶ some speak of Him riding through “the deserts.”⁷ The imagery of God as the Cloud Rider, of course, is rooted in the Exodus, when His presence in the cloud led Israel through the desert and descended on Mount Sinai. In the Blessing of Moses, God was described as He “who rides through the sky to help you, on the clouds in majesty” (Dt 33:26 NET). The same theme is repeated later in verses 33–34. Thus, “clouds” seems to be the more likely meaning here. As we’ve already referenced, the most well-known image for Jesus’ return in the New Testament is His coming back in the clouds. This is important; when New Testament writers read of David singing praise to the Cloud Rider, they would have fully understood it as a song of praise and celebration concerning the future coming of Jesus. On the other hand, if David is speaking of God marching through the “deserts,” we’ve also seen this motif in both the Blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah. As we move forward, we will continue to examine other important passages that describe Jesus marching through the desert of the Exodus when He returns. Thus, Wilcock comments that we need not get too hung up on which translation is accurate. After all, “God rides both upon the clouds and through the deserts, and there are other Scriptures to back each of these two statements.”⁸ Whether this verse is speaking of the Divine Cloud Rider or the Divine Warrior marching through the desert, both images point to the return of Jesus. He comes back in the clouds and then marches through the desert. In fact, later in this psalm, both themes are reiterated multiple times.

SETTING THE PRISONERS FREE

Next, David praises God for His goodness to the poor, such as orphans, widows, the lonely, and prisoners:

A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows,
Is God in His holy habitation.
God makes a home for the lonely;

He leads out the prisoners into prosperity
 Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land. (Psalm 68:5–6)

The emphasis on deliverance for the poor and oppressed—the orphan, the widow, and the prisoner—is also a theme that ties the psalm to the return of Jesus. Deliverance for the oppressed is closely tied to the first few verses, which speak of punishment for the wicked and rewards for the righteous. When we survey various day of the Lord texts, it is the poor, the needy, the hated, the outcast, the sick, the lame, the rejected, the persecuted, etc., who are always singled out as the recipients of God’s vindication (e.g., Ps 72:13; Is 2:11–13; 11:4; 29:19; 35:6; Ez 34:19; Mi 4:6; Zep 3:19). Even as YHVH showed Himself to be both the Divine Warrior and the compassionate Bridegroom during the Exodus, so will He show Himself to be both warrior and bridegroom when He returns.

The NIV captures the beautiful nuance of verse 6, which says that God “leads out the prisoners with singing.” It’s one of my favorite verses in the psalm. As the Divine Warrior makes His way through the desert, He sets prisoners free, reverses their fortunes to such a degree that they break forth with songs. The prisoners go from being bound in chains, to marching freely and joyfully singing praises to God! But who exactly are these prisoners? Should this reference be understood in very general and spiritual terms, as most Christian interpreters would be apt to see it? Does this passage refer to Jesus setting us free from addictions to anger or lust or alcohol? While Jesus has most certainly done those things, that is not the context of this passage. What is being spoken of here is very specific. As we saw in chapter 12, as part of the cycle of covenantal chastisements, many of the inhabitants of Israel will be captured and led away as prisoners of war. Here, Jesus, Israel’s savior, is portrayed as setting them free and personally leading them back home. It’s no surprise that they’re singing so enthusiastically. What a truly glorious vision!

THE DESERT-MARCHER

Next, the theme of God as the Desert Marcher is stated explicitly:

O God, when You went forth before Your people,
When You marched through the wilderness. (Psalm 68:7)

As Tate says, “The two concepts of Cloud Rider and Wilderness Rider seem likely to be merged here.”⁹ As we said above, the One who comes on the clouds is on the ground and marching through the desert. The theme of God marching through the wilderness that first appeared in the Blessing of Moses and was repeated in the Song of Deborah appears here a third time. As new bits of revelation emerge with each new Desert Prophecy, we learn that the great Desert Marcher is not alone. He is specifically leading His people His people, a vast thong, toward Jerusalem.

EARTHQUAKES AND RAINSTORMS

The next portion of the psalm looks strikingly familiar because it is a direct quotation of the Song of Deborah:

The earth quaked;
The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God;
Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
(Psalm 68:8)

Compare it to Deborah's song:

The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,
Even the clouds dripped water.
The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD,
This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.
(Judges 5:4b–5)

Again, the passage emphasizes natural disturbances when the Lord comes, beginning with an earthquake. Referring to that great day when God came down upon Mount Sinai, the great Charles Spurgeon poetically recalls, “That hill, so lone and high, bowed before the manifested God. . . . May the reader’s heart adore the God before whom the unconscious earth and sky act as if they recognized their Maker and were moved with a tremor of reverence.”¹⁰ As there was an earthquake when God came down on Mount Sinai, so will there be a mighty earthquake when Jesus comes down. As there were storm clouds when God came down before, so will the second coming be accompanied with tempestuous storms. Over and over, we will continue to see the same themes repeated.

WATERING THE DESERT

Next, the imagery of dark and gloomy storm clouds of judgment takes a more positive turn. More than simply describing a foreboding storm, David adds some additional details and describes the rain clouds as a great blessing:

You shed abroad a plentiful rain, O God;
 You confirmed Your inheritance when it was parched.
 Your creatures settled in it;
 You provided in Your goodness for the poor, O God. (Psalm
 68:9–10)

Recalling the Lord’s miraculous provision of water for Israel during the Exodus, God again will provide for His people by sending rain to the parched desert. In doing so, He will restore His weary covenant people and display His compassion for “the poor.” In the next chapter, we will see how Isaiah the prophet greatly expanded upon this theme and described how, when the Messiah comes, the desert will rejoice, blossom, and even become like a lavish forest. As Derek Kinder points out, these verses should also be translated in the future tense.¹¹ When YHVH marches forth from Sinai, He

will water the deserts. He will revive His weary people. Finally, and interestingly, the references to rain falling on dry and parched land may also reflect the timing of this all specifically taking place during the fall festivals of Israel, when the nation normally awaits the long dry summer season to break with the first rains that begin in the fall.

KINGS OF ARMIES FLEE!

The tone of the psalm suddenly shifts to that of a victory celebration. As in Israel's past, when they were victorious over their enemies, the women would most often lead the celebrations (e.g., Ex 15:20–21; Jgs 5; 11:34; 1 Sm 18:6–7).

The LORD gives the command;
The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host:
“Kings of armies flee, they flee,
And she who remains at home will divide the spoil!” (Psalm
68:11–12)

Who are these fleeing kings? These are none other the hostile rulers and commanders who had carried the people of Israel away as captives. Tate describes this glorious moment: “The news to be spread is that the Divine Warrior triumphs. Hostile kings are defeated, and a great number of messengers spread the news.”¹² When we consider that this is ultimately speaking of the return of Jesus, then the glory of these verses come to life. As Jesus, the former carpenter and rabbi from Nazareth, marches toward Jerusalem, the hostile commanders of armies aligned with the Antichrist are fleeing. Oh, to join the wild celebration of that day!

THROUGH THE SHEEPFOLD OF EDMOM

Commentators have struggled with the next few verses, and as a result have offered quite a range of interpretations. When we consider the messianic context of this psalm, however, the difficulties seem to quickly dissipate. Speaking to Israel, David describes them

as those who “lie down among the sheepfolds” (v. 13a). As Jesus leads His newly delivered people toward Jerusalem, they are described as sheep lying down in their pens. Certainly, this imagery conveys the idea that with God as their protector, they are completely at ease. The reference to “sheep-fold,” however, is also a likely reference to the actual location through which Jesus and His people will pass. As we’ve seen in the previous two chapters, when Jesus returns, He will pass through the land of Edom. In the next chapter, we will see that Isaiah also refers to Edom as “Bozrah.” Bozrah was a fortified city in ancient Edom. Ancient biblical Bozrah correlates either to Petra or another archeological site about seventy-five kilometers north, both in modern-day Jordan. In Hebrew, the consonants for Bozrah also mean “sheepfold.” Like a sheep pen—designed to keep sheep in and predators out—the imposing mountains of Edom created an impenetrable enclosure-like natural fortification. This verse conveys that within “the sheepfold” of Edom, like sheep in their pen, Israel will be safe, relaxed, and fully at ease, as the “Chief Shepherd” leads them home (1 Pt 5:4). As Fruchtenbaum states, “Israel is the Flock of God, and this flock is to be gathered in Bozrah.”¹³ This idea is also very clearly articulated in a very important portion of the prophecy of Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah. Micah prophesies:

“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture the place will throng with people. or (the cause of their discomfort will be on account of men). One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.” (Micah 2:12–13)

The Hebrew Masoretic Text actually reads, “I will make them all like sheep of Bozrah, like a flock inside its pen” (Mi 2:12 JPS Tanakh). All of the critical themes are here in Micah’s prophecy: (1) The Lord promises to gather the remnant of Israel, (2) specifically

like sheep in their pen, and (3) YHVH will then go before them, (4) leading them out of the sheep pen (5) as their glorious king.¹⁴

Interestingly, when Moses led Israel toward the regions of Edom, he requested that they might pass through, but was refused (Nm 20:18–21). Thus, Israel had to go around the perimeter of the Edomite kingdom (Dt 2:29). When Jesus comes back, however, He will not be refused. Jesus, the greater Moses, will pass through these regions unchallenged, and rightly so, upon the “King’s Highway” (Nm 20:17, 22).

The themes of Israel fleeing to the rugged mountains of Edom and Bozrah are reflected later in Jesus’ Sermon on the end times, when He warned that when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies or “the abomination of desolation” is set up on the Temple Mount, “then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains” (Mt 24:16; Lk 21:20–21). The same idea is conveyed in the book of Revelation, where it states that after the abomination of desolation is set up on the Temple Mount, many from Israel will flee “into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rv 12:6).

THE LORD’S DOVE

The last part of verse 13 has also caused tremendous confusion and a variety of interpretations among commentators:

You are like the wings of a dove covered with silver,
And its pinions with glistening gold. (Psalm 68:13b)

Beyond sheep at rest within their pen, now Israel is described as a dove with glittering wings covered with silver and gold. This actually is not too difficult. In other portions of Scripture, Israel is referred to as the Lord’s dove (Ps 74:19) and a “silly dove without sense” (Hos 7:11). A few chapters later in Hosea, the exiles of Israel in places like Egypt and Assyria are described as returning to Israel

like trembling doves (11:11). Unlike these previous references, here Israel, the Lord's dove, is now safe and with her king. As such, she is beautified and adorned with silver and gold.

SCATTERING SNOWFLAKES

Again, the theme of destroying God's enemies is repeated:

When the Almighty scattered the kings in the land,
it was like snow fallen on Mount Zalmon. (Psalm 68:14 NIV)

The kings of the beast are now likened to snow fallen on Mount Zalmon. We do not know exactly where this mountain is. The best suggestions seem to be one of the mountains to Israel's north, close to Mount Bashan. Some of the peaks there are towers of black volcanic basalt, which greatly contrasts with the white snow that falls there during the winter months. Because the point of the passage is the Lord destroying His opposition, Willem A. VanGemeren, author of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* on the Psalms, seems to have correctly captured the intended imagery of this verse: "The corpses of the victims and their weaponry are lying like scattered snowflakes on the mountains."¹⁵ In recent years, the term "snowflake" has become a popular derogatory term for those who are viewed as being overly sensitive or fragile. Humorously, here we have the Lord using the term three thousand years ahead of its time, referring to the slain armies of the Antichrist as *snowflakes*.

WHEN GOD IS KING IN ZION

David next turns his eyes from Mount Zalmon to Bashan. Bashan here seems to be a reference to the mighty 9,200-foot (2,814 meters) peak today called Mount Hermon, which towers over Israel's northern Golan Heights:

Mount Bashan, majestic mountain,
Mount Bashan, rugged mountain,
why gaze in envy, you rugged mountain,
at the mountain where God chooses to reign,
where the LORD himself will dwell forever?
(Psalm 68:15–16 NIV)

Here is another insult dealt to the false gods of the Canaanites and the powers of darkness. The heathen peoples who had lived in the land had long looked to the tall mountains in the north as the place where their gods dwelled. As we referenced in the previous chapter, Mount Zaphon in northern Syria was believed to be the home of Baal. Similarly, Mount Hermon was viewed as the dwelling place of Baal, called “Baal-Hermon” (Jgs. 3:3; 1 Chr 5:23).¹⁶ Bashan is also associated in Scripture with the Rephaim, descendants of the giant Nephilim (Gn 14:5). Yet here, the personified majestic peak of Bashan looks enviously at Mount Zion in Jerusalem, a mere hill in comparison. For after marching from Sinai, through Edom, YHVH’s final destination is Zion. This is the place where God has determined that *He will dwell forever*. As Derek Kidner notes, the paradox of choosing little Mount Zion over the towering Mount Hermon “is the kind of paradox that God delights in, like the choice of David himself (to whom the psalm is attributed), and of little Bethlehem; indeed of ‘things that are not’” (1 Cor 1:28).¹⁷

These verses are also a devastating blow to those Christian theologians who claim that God no longer has any future special plans for the literal Mount Zion or the Jewish people. As this passage makes clear, Mount Zion will be the Lord’s perpetual dwelling place. This is the mountain where Jesus will sit upon the throne of His father David, ruling over the nations.

THE CHARIOTS OF GOD

The next verse is fascinating. God is described as entering Jerusalem accompanied by a multitude of chariots: “The chariots of God are

twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands” (v. 17a). Of course, God Himself is not riding upon thousands of chariots. Rather He is accompanied by His mighty armies who are riding in chariots. Thus, whereas Jesus’ journey is described as beginning from Sinai with “ten thousand holy ones” (Dt 33:2; cf. 8), it is completed when they all enter Jerusalem together.

The next part of the verse is absolutely magnificent in so many ways: “[T]he Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary” (Ps 68:17b ESV). Now that Jesus has reached His destination, YHVH is actually present among the people of Jerusalem. The statement that Sinai is now in the sanctuary conveys that the God of glory, storm clouds, thunder, and earthquakes, who came down on the mountain in blazing fire so long ago will actually be present, dwelling bodily within the temple. The vision seizes our imaginations.

Verse 18 has invited a wide range of interpretations:

You ascended on high,
 leading a host of captives in your train
 and receiving gifts among men,
 even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there.
 (Psalm 68:18 ESV)

In keeping with the style of a classic victory hymn, the language here now refers to Jesus as having made the ascent up to Jerusalem as a king returning from battle with a host of prisoners of war. Kidner asks, “Who are these captives, and whose are the gifts? The battle imagery and the echoes of the Song of Deborah indicate enemy prisoners and enemy reparations. God has won his war, entered his capital and put the rebellious under tribute.”¹⁸ In Ephesians 4:8, Paul cites this verse but applies it to Christ’s ascension into heaven, from where He distributed the various New Testament offices to men.¹⁹

THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION

David now praises God for the salvation of His people:

Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden,
The God who is our salvation.
God is to us a God of deliverances;
And to God the Lord belong escapes from death. (Psalm
68:19–20)

When Christians think of God bringing salvation, they primarily think in terms of God saving one's soul from the effects of sin and death. From a biblical perspective, however, salvation is far more holistic. Here, God is praised for literally saving and delivering His people from those who had captured them with the intention of killing them. In Psalm 102, we see precisely the same imagery. There, God is described as looking down from heaven and beholding the plight of His people, who are prisoners, condemned to death:

For He looked down from His holy height;
From heaven the LORD gazed upon the earth,
To hear the groaning of the prisoner,
To set free those who were doomed to death,
That men may tell of the name of the LORD in Zion
And His praise in Jerusalem,
When the peoples are gathered together,
And the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. (Psalm 102:19–22)

No doubt these verses describe Jesus preparing for His return when He will personally come down and set literal prisoners free. The return of Jesus will provide for the salvation of His people in a thoroughly holistic way. Before Jesus can save His people spiritually, He must first save them in a very straightforward and literal manner.

THE CRUSHING ONE

Throughout the psalm, the same general themes are repeated multiple times. Next, David returns to the theme of God destroying His adversaries. Whereas the psalm began with a prayer for God to

arise and destroy His enemies, here we have an explicit and graphic description of Him doing just that:

Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies,
 The hairy crown of him who goes on in his guilty deeds.
 The Lord said, "I will bring them back from Bashan.
 I will bring them back from the depths of the sea;
 That your foot may shatter them in blood,
 The tongue of your dogs may have its portion from your
 enemies." (Psalm 68:21–23)

As in the Blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah, here again, the Divine Warrior is portrayed as the Crushing One. As uncomfortable as it may be for some who only know Jesus as a gentle, somewhat hippy-like figure, here David describes Him brutally crushing the heads of His enemies. The One who will crush the head of the serpent alluded to in Genesis 3:15 is now revealed to be both God and Messiah (Gn 3:15; Nm 24:17; Dt 32:35; 33:21; Sam 2:10; Jgs 5:26–27; Ps 58:10; 68:21; 110:5; Jl 3:13; Is 63:3; Hb 3:13; Mal 4:3; Rm 16:20; Rv 14:20; 19:15). Even more gruesome is the imagery of God's enemies being brought back in order that those present at the inaugural celebrations in Jerusalem may bathe their feet in their blood. As gory as this all is, the imagery is carried into the New Testament, where Paul encourages believers by reminding them, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rm 16:20). Taking the bloody imagery a step further, the dogs will feast on the flesh of the wicked. This verse is the earliest indicator that at the end of the age, there will be a great feast, in which the birds and animals will feast upon the corpses of those who invade Jerusalem. Later, Ezekiel would expand dramatically upon this theme (Ez 39:17–20). This imagery is then carried into the New Testament, where an angel calls out to the birds and the beasts to gather in Jerusalem to feast on the flesh of the armies of the Antichrist (Rv 19:17–19).

THE PROCESSION OF GOD: REPRISE

What comes next, in my opinion, is the magnificent heart of Psalm 68:

They have seen Your procession, O God,
The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.
The singers went on, the musicians after them,
In the midst of the maidens beating tambourines.
Bless God in the congregations, (vv. 24–26)
Even the LORD, you who are of the fountain of Israel. (Psalm
68:24–26)

Here we have, directly from the inspired lips of King David, an actual description of his descendant, Jesus the Messiah, victoriously marching into Jerusalem. While He is YHVH, the thundering God of Sinai, He is also the fully human “Son of David.” The entrance of Jesus into the city is here referred to as “the procession of God.” It is difficult to grasp the fullness of all that is being described here. If this were a film, there would be something here for everyone. For those drawn to such, there is war and gore. For those whose hearts are moved by such, *it is also a musical*. For now, we see that like King David so many generations earlier, the singers and worship leaders are leading the way! Behind the procession there are more women playing instruments and celebrating. The humble triumphal entry of the king described in the Gospels has now been superseded by the ultimate triumphal entry of the King of Glory. David described a victory procession more glorious than any mighty victorious army has ever enjoyed, more spectacular than even our greatest cinematic masters have ever captured on film. The Radiant One whose coming was like the sunrise from Mount Sinai is shining still, with myriads of angels and saints, riding in chariots, along with a multitude of freed prisoners, all rejoicing, singing, and worshipping their God and King. For those who love Jesus and yearn for His coming, there

may not be anything more perfect to meditate upon.

Verse 27 lists four representatives from the twelve tribes of Israel who will all be present on that day:

There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead,
 the princes of Judah in their throng,
 the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali. (Psalm 68:27
 ESV)

Whereas Benjamin and Judah represent the southern kingdom of Judah, Zebulun, and Naphtali represent the northern ten tribes that formed the kingdom of Israel. The mention of tribes representing both kingdoms speaks of the restoration of all Israel at that time. This end-time restoration of the whole house of Israel is also specifically prophesied by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel (cf. Jer 31:31–33; 33:14; Ez 37:15–28). This verse also refutes the view, so common among Christians, that God has no future special plans for national Israel. Here we see that the whole house of Israel will be restored and present when Jesus returns. There is nothing that conveys the notion of national Israel more clearly than referring to her twelve tribes. This eschatological restoration of the whole house of Israel is also validated in the New Testament, when Jesus told His disciples, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28).

WHEN JESUS IS KING IN JERUSALEM

Verse 29 speaks of the actual period of restoration, when Jesus is present as King in Jerusalem:

Because of your temple at Jerusalem
 kings shall bring gifts to you. (Psalm 68:29)

Many Christians hold that after Jesus returns, the temple will never be rebuilt. The Scriptures are clear, however, that after Jesus returns, He will personally oversee the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (e.g., Is 60:10–13; Ez 40–48; Zec 6:12–13). This description of kings bringing gifts to assist in rebuilding to assist in its rebuilding during the messianic age is also spoken of by the prophet Isaiah (60:1–15).

THE CRUSHING ONE: REPRISE

The motif of crushing God's enemies is reiterated one last time. Here, the war-mongering, spoil-seeking character of God's enemies is highlighted:

Rebuke the beasts that dwell among the reeds,
the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples.
Trample underfoot those who lust after tribute;
scatter the peoples who delight in war.
Nobles shall come from Egypt;
Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God.
(Psalm 68:30–31 ESV)

The reference to the beasts that live among the reeds is to crocodiles, which, as they are found in abundance in the Nile River, symbolically refer to Egypt. Thus, David calls for the hostile rulers of Egypt to be rebuked. Then David prays that when the Crushing One comes, He will crush the war-mongering enemies of Israel who lust after the spoils of war. Later, various prophets would describe the invading armies of the Antichrist using precisely the same terms (Is 10:6; Dn 11:24; Ez 38:13; Zec 14:1). As a result of the Lord's judgments against those hostile to His people, Egypt and Cush (modern day Sudan) will repent, reach out to God, and send emissaries to Jerusalem (cf. Is 19). Similarly, Isaiah also speaks of a series of redemptive judgments that will take place in Egypt in the last days, leading to many there turning to the Lord (cf. Is 19; Ez 30:4-6).

PRAISE FOR THE CLOUD RIDER: REPRISE

Far beyond just Egypt and Cush, the psalm concludes with a grand call to all the nations of the earth to sing praises to the glorious Cloud Rider:

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth,
 Sing praises to the Lord
 To Him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from
 ancient times;
 Behold, He speaks forth with His voice, a mighty voice.
 Ascribe strength to God;
 His majesty is over Israel
 And His strength is in the skies.
 O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary.
 The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the
 people.
 Blessed be God! (Psalm 68:32–35)

Whereas the opening of the psalm (vv. 1–6) calls upon Israel to enthusiastically sing praises to God, now the call to praise is universal, extending to all nations. Yet despite the fact that He is the God of all nations, He continues to identify as “the God of Israel” whose majesty is over Israel.

CONCLUSION

The contents of this great psalm of David provide us with what is unarguably some of the most majestic and moving prophetic imagery in the whole Bible. By drawing from the Lord’s historical march from Sinai to Zion, this psalm provides us with a glorious sneak peak of the most anticipated and long-awaited event of all time. Here we are shown a glimpse of the return of Jesus, the details of which are greatly expanded beyond what we previously saw in either the Blessing of Moses or the Song of Deborah. Along with David, we can also now say that “we have seen your procession, O God,” the procession of Jesus, our God and King, into the sanctuary.

It is no surprise then that the tone of the psalm is one of uncontainable enthusiasm and celebration. Even as this psalm was used by the ancient Israelites to commemorate God's mighty acts in the past and to anticipate His coming great acts, so may it be used again to remind God's people of what is soon to come. May the people of God today rediscover this multifaceted, priceless diamond, and may we all recover the enthusiasm and anticipation that gripped King David when he danced wildly before the mere representation of the One whom we will personally witness when He comes back in blazing fire and great glory.

A HIGHWAY THROUGH THE DESERT

Our survey of the Desert Prophecies began at the end of Israel's wilderness wanderings with the Blessing of Moses. From there, we moved to the period of the judges with Deborah's victory hymn. Then we proceeded to the time of the kings with David's great processional psalm. Together these extraordinary prophecies laid the foundation for Israel's expectation that once again, YHVH will come from Sinai, march through the desert of Edom, and save His people. It was during the time of the prophets that these expectations were cemented within the Jewish mind. Isaiah the prophet, in particular, would contribute greatly to the tradition.

A HIGHWAY THROUGH THE DESERT

In Part 2, we discussed the many references throughout the prophecy of Isaiah to the cycle of covenantal chastisements. According to this cycle, first, many of the inhabitants of Israel will be taken captive to the surrounding nations or will flee into the desert. Then, in the midst of this dark hour, the Lord will appear and save His people. Whereas David described this great deliverance as a holy procession, Isaiah went on to describe a massive highway through the desert upon which God and His people will travel as they make the procession to Jerusalem. As the Lord and His people march along this highway, the dry and barren desert will become like a lush garden

(Is 35:1–10; 40:1–11; 41:18; 43:19–20; 51:3). We will look at the two primary passages below.

ISAIAH 35

Together, Isaiah chapters 34 and 35 form a single prophecy. In chapter 34, the Lord declares His intentions to judge the nations hostile to Israel, represented by Edom. They will become a desolate wasteland and smoking heap of ashes. In chapter 35, however, the imagery is reversed. The people of Israel are described as being exiled in Edom, in what is described as a barren, dry desert. Despite their hopeless state, the Lord promises that the wilderness will become a place of new life, fruitfulness, and tremendous joy:

The wilderness and the desert will be glad,
And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom;
Like the crocus
It will blossom profusely
And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
The majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They will see the glory of the LORD,
The majesty of our God. (Isaiah 35:1–2)

The parched Arabah desert, to the south and east of Israel, will see a complete transformation. Webb beautifully describes this divine transfiguration: “In chapter 35 it is as though a brilliant shaft of light breaks through the clouds and all is bathed in splendor again. Arid wastes burst into bloom as the glory of the Lord comes down like refreshing showers, and the whole earth shouts for joy.”¹ We see here a direct expansion of David’s Processional Psalm, which had previously announced that when God comes, the desert will see “a plentiful rain” that would refresh and revive His people who were languishing there (Ps 68:9–10). Isaiah now expands David’s thoughts and describes the desert blooming with life to the point of

shouting for joy. The shouts and celebration, of course, come from the exiles and prisoners of Israel, who are now freely returning to Zion. This is also an expansion of Psalm 68, where the former prisoners are led forth with singing. The last-days context of this vision is undeniable. As Web comments, “Clearly, a situation of exile and return is in view here. . . . But just as clearly, this chapter reaches beyond that to something else.”² That something else, of course, can only be the final redemption when Messiah arrives in all His glory. Thus, Isaiah says that Israel will “see” the glory and majesty of YHVH. As Gary Smith says, the prophecy is yet another promise of “God’s appearance on earth.”³

POETRY OR REALITY?

Many commentators attempt to interpret these passages as purely poetic and figurative. For them, the desert merely represents Israel’s long history of suffering and isolation from God, or something along these lines. The greening of the desert simply represents the reversal of Israel’s sorrow and conditions. While it is true that the vision is filled with symbolic and figurative language, the vision should be interpreted holistically, which is to say it conveys figurative realities but also a very real, definitive, and literal future reality. The emphasis throughout the various Desert Prophecies on very specific geographic locations such as Sinai, Seir, Paran, Edom, and Jerusalem make it clear that these are not simply abstract or universal metaphors. In the same way that the various covenant chastisements were literally fulfilled in history, so will Israel’s final deliverance be fulfilled literally. When the Babylonians came, Israel was not metaphorically invaded and destroyed. Its people were not figuratively deported among the nations. As this vision of God’s coming develops, and particularly by the time that we reach the New Testament period, it is very clear that these expectations were intended by God to be understood as referring to very real future realities. We must avoid allowing Isaiah’s masterful use of poetry to

woo us into assuming that these passages are mere metaphors. They are more than that. As the angels said to those present on the Mount of Olives, in the same way that Jesus had just literally gone up before their eyes and disappeared into the clouds, so will He return in the clouds (Acts 1:9–11). Throughout Scripture, God promises that Jesus will return, march through the desert, and deliver His people from exile. These promises are real. This is how they were understood throughout Israel’s history, and this is how Christians should understand them today.

GOD WILL COME WITH VENGEANCE

As Isaiah 35 continues, we see that God will come specifically with vengeance toward His enemies and salvation for His people:

Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble.

Say to those with anxious heart,

“Take courage, fear not.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance;

The recompense of God will come,

But He will save you.” (Isaiah 35:3–4)

The good news of God’s coming is compared to the refreshing rains that fall from the sky onto the desert. For His coming, like the rain, will specifically bring relief for those who are exhausted, gripped with anxiety, or fearful. They are all to take courage, for the long awaited Messiah will “come with vengeance.” As we’ve discussed in previous chapters, the idea that the Messiah will come with wrath and judgment to crush His enemies is a prominent and repeated theme throughout the Scriptures (Gn 3:15; Nm 24:17; Dt 32:35; 33:21; 1 Sm 2:10; Jgs 5:26–27; Ps 58:10; 68:21; 110:5; Jl 3:13; Is 63:3; Hab 3:13; Mal 4:3; Rm 16:20; Rev 14:20; 19:15). Parallel to His coming with vengeance for His enemies are promises concerning what He will do for His people: “He will save you.”

RECOMPENSE FOR THE POOR

What does this salvation look like? What will happen when Jesus comes back? Isaiah says that the blind, deaf, mute, and lame will receive complete healing:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
 And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
 Then the lame will leap like a deer,
 And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.
 For waters will break forth in the wilderness
 And streams in the Arabah.
 The scorched land will become a pool
 And the thirsty ground springs of water;
 In the haunt of jackals, its resting place,
 Grass becomes reeds and rushes. (Isaiah 35:5–7)

The day of the Lord, the great day of justice, will transform everything. The desert will become a well-watered garden, those who previously couldn't walk will jump like deer, and the tongue that couldn't speak will shout for joy. This renewal will impact both the earth itself and the very bodies of the Lord's people. When the glory of God comes, the renewal of all things will be underway. While the immediate context of this chapter is indeed the actual return of Jesus, it also points more broadly to the millennial reign of Messiah, or what Peter referred to as "the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (Acts 3:21). In his letter to the Romans, Paul the apostle also likely refers back to this prophecy when he says, "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (cf. Rm 8:18–25).

COMING HOME TO ZION

Now Isaiah introduces the theme of a road through the desert. This will be a highway created entirely for the redeemed:

A highway will be there, a roadway,
And it will be called the Highway of Holiness.
The unclean will not travel on it,
But it will be for him who walks that way,
And fools will not wander on it.
No lion will be there,
Nor will any vicious beast go up on it;
These will not be found there.
But the redeemed will walk there,
And the ransomed of the LORD will return
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
With everlasting joy upon their heads.
They will find gladness and joy,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 35:8–10)

Whereas the previous Desert Prophecies conveyed the vision of YHVH marching upon a fairly well-delineated route from Sinai to Zion, Isaiah has expanded upon that vision. Now, the prophet speaks of an actual highway. When God marches forth, a massive highway will be made through the desert. The unrighteous will not walk on this roadway, only those who are “redeemed.” Here we see another direct allusion back to David’s Processional Psalm. There, David spoke of the Messiah leading forth prisoners with singing (Ps 68:6). Now Isaiah references the ransomed of the Lord shouting for joy. As they enter the land, their former sorrows and groaning are replaced with celebration and a joy that will never fade away.

Who exactly are the redeemed who will be part of this glorious procession? While the context of the prophecy applies first to exiles of Israel, by no means will they be the only group present. We know who will not be included: the text says that fools, the unclean, and the violent (lions), will not walk upon this road. Yes, the surviving remnant of Jews who Jesus sets free will follow Him to Zion, the capital of the restored kingdom of Israel. As we have also seen, however, the procession will include myriads of chariots being driven by angels. Paul the apostle, however, adds that those of us who are

redeemed will also be present: “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col 3:4). Surely, this adds to the wonder of these prophecies. Rather than some fantastical vision of a distant future for others, for those who are “in Messiah,” this is our future. This holy procession led by Jesus, in the fullness of His radiant glory, is something that we will see, and hear, and taste, and smell, and wholeheartedly participate in. When the former prisoners of Israel sing and shout, we who are His will be singing and shouting along with them!

Before we move from Isaiah 35, we note that like all of the previous Desert Prophecies, Isaiah draws various motifs from the Exodus and applies it to the future coming of the Messiah. Motyer states, “The Exodus background to these verses is plain.”⁴ Isaiah’s prophecy here is yet one more important deposit among the growing tradition of the Desert Prophecies.

ISAIAH 40

Just a few chapters later, Isaiah returns to the theme of the highway through the desert. The prophecy begins with a call to comfort Israel because her tribulations have come to an end and her redemption has finally come:

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.
 “Speak kindly to Jerusalem;
 And call out to her, that her warfare has ended,
 That her iniquity has been removed.” (Isaiah 40:1–2)

Israel’s final redemption was provided for through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. The “comfort” will not actually take place on a national level until He returns (Is 12:1–2). Next, a voice is heard calling out to make a highway through the desert for God:

A voice is calling,
“Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.
Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley.” (Isaiah 40:3–4)

The imagery here is of a herald, going before the king and announcing his coming. Later, Malachi, the last of the biblical prophets, would repeat this theme: “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts (Mal 3:1). Most Christians are familiar with these passages because they are quoted in all four gospels and applied to John the Baptist (Mt 3:3; 11:10; Mk 1:2–3; Lk 3:4–5; 7:27; Jn 1:23). Indeed, John identified himself as the heralding voice in the desert (Jn 1:23). Having lived in the Judean desert and in calling Israel to repentance in order to prepare them to receive Jesus as Messiah, he certainly met the criteria. It’s important to recognize, however, that the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy remains yet in the future with the return of Jesus. The following two verses make this clear:

Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all flesh will see it together. . . .
Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before
Him. (Isaiah 40:5, 10)

Within these two verses are five important themes, all of which describe Jesus’ second coming:

1. The glory of the Lord will be revealed.

2. The glory of the Lord will be visibly seen by all people.
3. God will come.
4. He will come with both reward and recompense.
5. His arm will rule.
 - First, the reference to the glory of God being revealed is consistently used to refer to Jesus and to His return (Mt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27; 1 Cor 2:8; 2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:3; Ti 2:13).
 - Second, the concept of the return of Jesus being a visible event, “seen” by all the world is a theme repeated throughout both the Old and the New Testaments (Is 33:17; 35:2; 52:8,10; 66:14,18; Zec 12:10; Mt 24:30; 26:64; 1 Thes 1:7–8; 2 Thes 2:8; Col 3:4; Rv 1:7).
 - Third, the concept of God “coming” at the end of the age is used in both the Desert Prophecies and many other messianic prophecies (Dt 33; Jgs 5; cf. Dn 7:13; Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27; 2 Pt 3:4; Heb 10:37).
 - Fourth, the theme of the Messiah coming with punishment for the wicked and rewards for the righteous is a theme integrally connected to His return (Gn 3:15; Nm 24:17; Dt 32:35; 33:21; 1 Sm 2:10; Jgs 5:26–27; Ps 58:10; 68:21; 110:5; Jl 3:13; Is 63:3; Hab 3:13; Mt 25:23; 31–46; Jude 14; Rv 14:20; 19:15).
 - Fifth, the reference to the Lord’s “arm ruling for him” is a clear reference to the mighty acts of God during the Exodus (Ex 3:19; 6:6; 13:3; 15:16; Dt 4:34; 5:15; 7:8,19; 26:8). Later, the prophets would apply it to future redemption of the Messiah (Is 52:10; 53:1; Jer 32:21; Ez 20:33–34), and the New Testament writers apply it to Jesus (Lk 1:51; Jn 12:38).

THE SHEPHERD

In the next verse, we see another familiar theme repeated:

Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes. (Isaiah 40:11)

As in David's Processional Psalm (v. 13), the Lord is again portrayed as a shepherd leading His sheep home (cf. Mi 2:12–13; 1 Pt 5:4). Most assuredly, Isaiah 40 is a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah from heaven to bring deliverance and redemption. The call to make a smooth highway through the desert is about much more than preparing hearts, as John the Baptist did. It is ultimately about preparing for Jesus' actual triumphant procession through the desert. The reference to leveling mountains and raising valleys is an expression that pertains to "the practice of constructing processional ways for visiting dignitaries."⁵ It's essentially the same as our modern expression "roll out the red carpet." As Webb says, "His royal way will be across the desert, and it is imperative that appropriate preparations be made."⁶ Dutch theologian Jan Ridderbos says plainly, "The central fulfillment lies in the coming of Christ, the effulgence of the glory of God."⁷ Similarly, Peters says that the prophecy

is only to be fulfilled in the future. At least such a fulfillment accords with the glory of the Lord, and His work as connected with the Second Advent, and we can see no valid reason to reject its identification, in some way, with the wilderness, as the place from whence this King of kings comes, and before whom "a highway," like that of a mighty conqueror, shall be opened.⁸

Like the preceding Desert Prophecies, Isaiah 40 utilizes Exodus language but applies it to the coming of the Messiah. Again, the return of Jesus is cast as a kind of second or ultimate Exodus, out of

the desert, into Zion. Jesus, who will personally lead Israel through the desert, is both the greater Moses and the glory of YHVH God Almighty in the flesh.

ISAIAH 42: WHEN JESUS GOES FORTH AS A WARRIOR

Isaiah 42 continues the same theme. After highlighting the many great things that will be accomplished by the coming Messiah, a cry rings out: “Sing to the LORD a new song, sing His praise from the end of the earth!” (v. 10). The call to praise God is extended to the sea coasts, to the islands, and finally, to the desert-wilderness:

Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voices,
The settlements where Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing aloud. (Isaiah 42:11)

The parallelisms here identify the desert as the region of Sela and Kedar. Martin notes, “Kedar . . . is an area in Northern Arabia, and Sela was a city in Edom.”⁹ Whereas chapters 35 and 40 both speak of the Lord personally leading His people on a highway through the desert, chapter 42 identifies the specific location of this highway; it is the same desert through which Israel already passed. The prophecy continues with a graphic and glorious description of the return of Jesus:

The LORD will go forth like a warrior,
He will arouse His zeal like a man of war.
He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry.
He will prevail against His enemies. (Isaiah 42:13)

I love this verse. In all of the previous Desert Prophecies, God has been portrayed as a warrior. Here He is also called “man of war.” This language is drawn directly from *The Victory Hymn of Moses* that was sung by the Israelites as they stood safely on the shores of the Red Sea, having just seen the defeat of Pharaoh and his armies. Together they sang out:

The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is His name.
Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea;
And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
(Exodus 15:3–4)

Isaiah's song began with a call to “[sing] to the LORD a new song” (v. 10). In order for there to be a new song, however, there must have first been an old song. Whereas the first Exodus was accompanied by the magnificent *Victory Hymn of Moses*, the second Exodus will be occasioned by a new victory hymn, immeasurably more glorious.

ISAIAH 63

In Isaiah 63, the prophet gives us the single most graphic description of Jesus as the Divine Warrior in all of Scripture. This prophecy begins with Isaiah, like a watchman on the walls of Zion, looking southward toward Edom, and asking the question:

Who is this who comes from Edom,
With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah,
This One who is majestic in His apparel,
Marching in the greatness of His strength? (Isaiah 63:1a)

Immediately, we recognize motifs and themes common to the Desert Prophecies. Here is the warrior yet again, marching forth from Edom (cf. Dt 33:1-2; Jgs 5:4–5; Ps 68:13). The NASB describes His garments as “glowing,” and the NIV has Him “robed in splendor.” Various other translations, however, describe His clothes as vividly red. While the Lord was previously described as shining forth from Sinai and Edom, the notion of His clothes being red is a new concept.

TREADING THE WINEPRESS

In chapter 59, Isaiah spoke of “the arm of the LORD” putting on

“garments of vengeance” and “zeal as a mantle” (v. 17). Now, in chapter 63, the zealous and vengeful One comes into full view and answers Isaiah’s question: “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save” (v. 1b ESV). Isaiah understands that this is the Lord who is speaking, but He remains curious regarding His clothing: “Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?” (v. 2 ESV). Why does He look like He has been stomping grapes all day? The Lord responds:

“I have trodden the winepress alone,
 and from the peoples no one was with me;
 I trod them in my anger
 and trampled them in my wrath;
 their lifeblood spattered on my garments,
 and stained all my apparel. (Isaiah 63:3 ESV)

In ancient times, grapes would be placed in a large stone basin and crushed by foot. By the end of a long day, the clothing of the grape-stompers would be thoroughly stained with the grape juice. Here, however, the Warrior has stained His clothing with the blood of His enemies.

ALL ALONE?

As we discussed above, when the Messiah marches through Edom, He will be accompanied by a mighty throng and myriads of angels. What then does this verse mean when it speaks of Him treading the wine press alone? This is merely a reiteration of what was already spoken in chapter 59:

And He saw that there was no man,
 And was astonished that there was no one to intercede;
 Then His own arm brought salvation to Him,
 And His righteousness upheld Him. (Isaiah 59:15–16)

The point is not to say that Jesus is unaccompanied by anyone, rather only He is responsible for bringing salvation and crushing His enemies. He is the arm of the Lord, and the suffering servant who alone brought atonement and salvation as described in Isaiah 53: “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (v. 1). As biblical commentator Brevard S. Childs says, “[N]o one from Israel stood on his side for justice . . . there were also none from the nations who sided with God’s righteous cause.”¹⁰ Likewise, Motyer adds: “The whole work of judgment, like the whole work of salvation, is exclusively, uniquely, individually his.”¹¹ Salvation is not according to God’s grace *and* man’s good works, and neither will Jesus’ coming salvation be accomplished by Jesus’ armies and some international coalition of the armies of man. It will not be Jesus and the Israel Defense Forces. No armies from the nations will assist Him. This passage does not envision Jesus *and* the United States military. In the same way that Jesus alone has provided the atoning sacrifice for our sins, so will Jesus alone tread the wine press of God’s wrath and crush His enemies. In no way, however, does this perspective contradict the fact that He will be accompanied by His heavenly armies when He carries all of this out.

FOR THE RECOMPENSE OF ZION

Previously, in chapter 34, Isaiah had already spoken of the eschatological slaughter in the land of Edom: “[T]heir land will be soaked with blood,” (v. 7) we are told. The reason for this massacre is clear: “For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (v. 8). Here, in nearly identical form, the Divine Warrior explains exactly why He soaked His clothes with the blood of His enemies:

“For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
And My year of redemption has come.
I looked, and there was no one to help,
And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold;

So My own arm brought salvation to Me,
 And My wrath upheld Me.
 I trod down the peoples in My anger
 And made them drunk in My wrath,
 And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.” (Isaiah 63:4–6)

No doubt, there will be many who will read these prophecies for the first time and be disturbed by the portrayal of Jesus as a vengeful blood-soaked executioner. We must understand, however, the nature of this final judgment. I often like to remind modern, comfortable, Western Christians that today there are more slaves in the earth than at any time in human history. The vast majority are young girls, some of them literally kept in cages, used by those who feel no remorse exploiting another human for their own perverse and momentary pleasure. The numbers are in the millions. When we imagine the cries that rise to God’s ears every moment of every day for the torment to end, for a redeemer to come, then we may begin to understand the reason for the day of the Lord. The Lord will come back not only to end the suffering of His people Israel, but also to answer the cries for justice that rise from the hearts and lips of the righteous and innocent throughout the whole earth. With this larger context in mind, it is much easier not only to understand the brutal nature of this passage but to actually feel the sense of burning expectancy that no doubt rages within God’s heart: *Finally*, His day of vengeance and justice has come. May that day come quickly!

JESUS, THE BLOOD-SOAKED WARRIOR

In summary, the Oracle of Isaiah 63 is packed with terms that clearly establish that this majestic figure is none other than Jesus the Messiah.

- The marching one is “the arm of the Lord.” As we saw above, this term, drawn from the Lord’s mighty acts during the Exodus (Ex 3:19; 6:6; 13:3; Dt 4:34; 5:15; 7:8,19; 26:8), is later applied to the Messiah (Is 52:10; 53:1; Jer

32:21; Ez 20:33-34) and in the New Testament is specifically applied to Jesus (Lk 1:51; Jn 12:38).

- His robes are soaked in blood. Revelation 19, unarguably the most widely recognized passage in the Bible about the return of Jesus, draws directly from this imagery and applies it to Jesus. There, He comes forth from heaven with His robes soaked in blood (v. 13).
- He brings salvation for the righteous and the wrath of God for the wicked. To cite every passage that speaks of Jesus bringing judgment for the wicked and salvation for the righteous would be too extensive. As we discussed above, however, the motif of the Messiah coming with both rewards and vengeance is a consistent theme throughout both the Old and New Testaments. It is not only repeated throughout many of the more commonly recognized messianic prophecies, but also throughout the various Desert Prophecies. For example, as we just saw above: “[Y]our God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you” (Is 35:4).

Peters summarizes his reasons as to why he believes Isaiah 63 speaks of Jesus’ second coming:

[A]t His Second Advent numerous passages expressly mention wrath, vengeance on enemies, and a fearful slaughter and supper. It is therefore a description only applicable to the Second Advent, as the early Church taught. But the prophet in vision sees Him Coming from the direction of Mt. Sinai, asking: “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?” Indeed, when we come to compare Scripture with Scripture, we have the route taken by the mighty King from Mt. Sinai until He arrives at Jerusalem clearly pointed out. Prophecy distinctly mentions Mt. Sinai, Paran, the Wilderness, Mt. Seir, Edom, Teman or the South, Bozrah, giving us a direct route from Sinai northward to Palestine. This does not occur by chance, but is descriptive of what shall truly take place.¹²

ISAIAH 66: THE LORD WILL COME IN FIRE

The final passage that we will look at in Isaiah is found in chapter 66. Although this text does not specifically speak of the Lord marching through the desert, it clearly speaks of God's coming and draws themes from previous Desert Prophecies.

For behold, the LORD will come in fire
 And His chariots like the whirlwind,
 To render His anger with fury,
 And His rebuke with flames of fire.
 For the LORD will execute judgment by fire
 And by His sword on all flesh,
 And those slain by the LORD will be many. (Isaiah 66:15–16)

This prophecy introduces a new description of YHVH coming in both fire and whirlwind. Fire is stressed three times. The idea of God coming down in fire is intended to reflect His coming down on Mount Sinai, “because the LORD descended upon it in fire” (Ex 19:18). Further, “to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top” (Ex 24:17). The word “whirlwind” speaks of thick clouds, heavy winds, and other phenomena associated with a powerful storm. This imagery is also intended to stir memories of when God came down upon Mount Sinai, during which time it was said: “on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain” (Ex 19:16). Storms also feature prominently in the Song of Deborah (Jgs 5:4), and David's Great Procession Psalm (Ps 68:8–9). When God comes down from heaven, these are some of the phenomena that accompany His appearance. Finally, Isaiah describes God coming to execute judgment by His sword. Rather than generically speaking of the Lord's judgment, however, the prophet actually says that when God comes, He will execute a multitude of His enemies. This theme, as we have discussed several times now, is perhaps the most consistent theme associated with the coming of the Messiah throughout Scripture.¹³

CONCLUSION

Like David, Deborah, and Moses, Isaiah also envisions the Messiah as YHVH in bodily form, marching forth from Sinai to Zion. As Risa Levitt Kohn summarizes, according to Isaiah, the Messiah

would repeat many of the miracles of the first Exodus, including the provision of food and water (Is 41:17–18; 43:19, 20; 48:21; 49:10) and personally shepherding the people through the desert. The journey is to end in a march to Zion, where the prophet envisions a lavish rebuilding of the city. (Is 44:28; 54:11–12)¹⁴

Building upon the previous Desert Prophecies, Isaiah envisions a massive highway being made through the desert. The road will be large enough to accommodate such a vast throng and majestic enough to accommodate such a glorious king. When the promised King of Israel comes, consistent with the prophecies made of the Messiah from the beginning, He will slaughter His enemies and crush them like grapes. This glorious One will continue His procession forward until He reaches Jerusalem to finally slaughter the leader of His enemies, the man the New Testament refers to as the Antichrist. Isaiah takes the imagery of these things from the previous prophecies and gives us the most graphic, vivid, and gruesome description of the victorious Divine Warrior in the whole Bible. While most modern Christians view Jesus almost exclusively as the mild and gentle shepherd figure rendered by numerous artists, in truth, when the Bridegroom returns, He will arrive to His wedding soaked in the blood of His enemies *and the enemies of His bride*.

THE PRAYER OF HABAKKUK

It is no overstatement to say that the Prayer of Habakkuk, similar to David's Great Processional Psalm—at once a prayer, a prophetic vision, and a victory hymn—is one of the most awe-inspiring passages in the whole Bible. Here is yet another description of YHVH's coming, marching forth through the desert. It is clear that Habakkuk's vision draws heavily from all of the previous Desert Prophecies, while again expanding upon them all, adding a tremendous amount of new information. In fact, Habakkuk 3 is arguably the longest and most detailed theophany (visible appearing of God) in the whole Old Testament. Old Testament scholar George Adam Smith called it "the Great Theophany."¹

INTRODUCTION

Habakkuk lived and ministered roughly one hundred years after Isaiah in the southern kingdom of Judah, during a time when the nation had greatly backslidden away from the Lord. In his grief over the spiritual condition of his people, Habakkuk lifted up a lament to the Lord:

How long, O LORD, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, "Violence!"
Yet You do not save.

Why do You make me see iniquity,
And cause me to look on wickedness?
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;
Strife exists and contention arises.
Therefore the law is ignored
And justice is never upheld.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore justice comes out perverted. (Habakkuk 1:2–4)

No doubt, many modern Christians identify with Habakkuk's tremendous sense of sorrow at the condition of his own nation. How long would he have to endure living among such a wicked people? We're reminded of the prophet Ezekiel, who spoke of the righteous men and woman in Jerusalem "who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst" (Ez 9:4). God's answer to Judah's rebellion, however, was not at all what Habakkuk had hoped to hear. The Lord declared that He was about to bring upon Judah the covenant chastisements. He was going to send the fearsome and cruel Babylonians. They would invade the land, kill the people, and destroy the nation (Hab 1:5–6). Fresh from the shock of such a horrific revelation, Habakkuk lifted up an intercessory cry (3:2). Like Moses before him, Habakkuk appealed to YHVH to relent (Dt 9:13–14; Ex 32:12–14). He asked God to do what He had done in the past: to send a national revival and to show mercy to His covenant people. The Lord, however, would not relent. The Babylonians were coming. The chastisements of the covenant were unavoidable. Instead of being shown that the Lord would forestall His painful corrections, Habakkuk was shown a profound vision. The vision revealed the Lord's ultimate, long-term solution to the tragedies that were about to befall Judah. In the same way that the Lord had "come down" on Mount Sinai so many hundreds of years before (Ex 19:18), a day was coming in the distant future when YHVH would come again to save His people.

THE RETURN OF JESUS

The vision Habakkuk was shown bears a striking resemblance to both the Blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah. Interestingly, however, while few commentators recognize either of those passages as having anything to do with the return of Jesus, a wide range of commentators acknowledge this to be the case with the Prayer of Habakkuk. Peters confidently expresses that Habakkuk's vision "most certainly . . . pertains to the future Advent." Likewise, Fruchtenbaum states, "This prayer of Habakkuk . . . records in vision what can only be the Second Coming."² Old Testament scholar O. Palmer Robertson interprets the prophecy as "the great final epiphany of the glory of God, when the Son of Man shall come in the clouds. . . . Then every eye shall see him, and the vision of Habakkuk shall receive its finalized fulfillment."³ Richard D. Patterson and Andrew E. Hill note the direct link between the Exodus and the revelation of Jesus: "God's past victory is a harbinger of a yet future day when the Lord shall intervene once again on behalf of his own in awesome power (Rv 19:11–21)."⁴ Finally, David Prior in *The Bible Speaks Today* commentary notes:

There is, once again, an eschatological motif in the prophet's words. God has come to the aid of his people in the past; God certainly will come again to their rescue; and at the end of time God will come once and for all to vindicate those who belong to him and to exercise judgment on those opposed to him.⁵

Thus, the Prayer of Habakkuk is not only the most detailed theophany in all of the Old Testament, it is the most detailed description of the return of Jesus in the Old Testament. I've personally completely fallen in love with this passage, and I hope that you do as well. The time is long past due for the people of God to be reminded afresh of this often neglected passage and reclaim it as a source of tremendous inspiration and hope.

GOD WILL COME AGAIN

As the vision begins, its connection to both the Blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah is immediately apparent:

God comes from Teman,
And the Holy One from Mount Paran.
Selah. (Habakkuk 3:3a)

Once more God is envisioned as coming from Sinai, marching up from Teman and Mount Paran. Teman means “south” and refers to the region of Edom, while Paran is a mountain in between Mount Sinai and Edom. Despite the obvious similarities between this passage and the older Desert Prophecies, the first significant difference is that this vision is written in the future tense. Keil and Delitzsch note that it “describe[s] not a past, but a future revelation of the glory of the Lord.”⁶ As such, the Good News Translation reads: “God is coming again from Edom.” (Hab 3:3 GNT). The use of such future tense verbs lends itself heavily to the view that its ultimate meaning is the return of Jesus. Habakkuk draws from God’s historical coming from Mount Sinai as his source of inspiration and information for Jesus’ future coming to save His people.

FROM EDM

It is important to note that once more, the Scriptures do not speak in abstract or vague terms to describe the coming of the Messiah. Like so many passages that came before this, here the Coming One is envisioned as marching forth from the land of Edom. Robertson comments, “Habakkuk depicts God in movement from Sinai through Edom on the way to the possession of the land for His people. Habakkuk recalls Israel’s past experience as a means of anticipating the intervention of the Lord in the future.”⁷ As God marched from Sinai through Edom during the Exodus, Jesus will repeat the march when He returns.

SPLENDOR LIKE THE SUNRISE

The description that follows—that of the Messiah’s actual coming—is unparalleled in its majesty:

His splendor covers the heavens,
 And the earth is full of His praise.
 His radiance is like the sunlight. (Habakkuk 3:3b–4a)

Like Deuteronomy 33, the Lord is described as shining forth like the sun. The NIV may better capture the nuance of the rays of the morning sun shining forth over the horizon: “His splendor was like the sunrise” (v. 4). There is a certain irony here. For as everyone knows, the sun always rises from the east. Here, however, the radiance of the Lord, like the morning sun, is coming from the south.

We note how similar Habakkuk’s vision is to Jesus’ own description of His return: “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt 24:27). The point is to convey how obvious it will be to all. The sun does not rise secretly but is seen by everyone. So will the return of Jesus be apparent to all the world. The eschatological context is also made clear in another statement made by Habakkuk only several verses earlier:

For the earth will be filled
 With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
 As the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)

Such conditions will be fulfilled only when Jesus is present on the earth during His millennial reign. The theme of God’s eschatological coming like the sunrise or dawn is repeated in several passages throughout the Old Testament and came to be applied to the return of Jesus in the New Testament. In a beautiful passage, Psalm 19:5 describes the morning sun as “a bridegroom coming out of his chamber (chuppah).” In Hosea, we read: “He will come to us

as surely as the day dawns” (Hos 6:3 GNT). The NIV renders this verse: “As surely as the sun rises, he will appear.” In issuing Israel the comforting assurance that the Lord and His kingdom will indeed come, Isaiah the prophet cries out:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness will cover the earth
And deep darkness the peoples;
But the LORD will rise upon you
And His glory will appear upon you. (Isaiah 60:1–2)

At the close of the Old Testament canon, the prophet Malachi refers to the Lord as the “sun of righteousness who will rise with healing in His wings” (Mal 4:2). In the New Testament, such terms are consistently applied to Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, says,

“The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light,
And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death,
Upon them a Light dawned.” (Matthew 4:16)

Similarly, in the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist’s father, Zacharias, referred to the coming of the Messiah as the “Sunrise from on high who will visit us” (Lk 1:78). Thus, whether we are speaking of the rising of the sun or the brightness of the noon sun shining forth, such motifs, which began with passages like the Blessing of Moses or the Prayer of Habakkuk, came to be used in the New Testament for the coming of Jesus.

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Much more than any normal sunrise, however, the language of the passage conveys that it is actually God’s glory shining forth. As the NIV says, “His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the

earth” (Hab 3:3). As Old Testament scholar Carl E. Armerding expresses: “[T]he Lord is perceived as illuminating the world . . . with the awe-inspiring radiance that characterized his descent on Mount Sinai—a light as brilliant as the lightning that accompanied that event, incandescent with his glory.”⁸ Again, such descriptions align perfectly with the New Testament vision of Jesus and His return. There, Jesus is called “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8), who is the manifest glory of God (2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:3), who will come back surrounded by a visible, radiant glory for the whole world to witness (Mt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Mk 8:38; 13:26; Lk 9:26; 21:27; Ti 2:13).

PLAGUES AND PESTILENCE

Understanding that this is depicting Jesus after His return, we are absolutely captivated by the grandeur of what is described:

He has rays flashing from His hand,
 And there is the hiding of His power.
 Before Him goes pestilence,
 And plague comes after Him. (Habakkuk 3:4a–5)

Whereas Moses described the Lord as having lightning or fire flashing forth from His hands, here they are described as flashing “rays.” While Jesus is not Iron Man or some other comic book superhero shooting lasers or gamma rays out of His hands, such a comparison is actually not tremendously far off. Something like rays of light are in fact emanating from His hands. Despite such fearful imagery, the prophet notes that the Lord’s power is actually hidden or veiled. There is a profound point being made here. Jesus of Nazareth is nothing less than the glory of God in veiled form. In fact, the Scriptures are clear that if the Lord didn’t veil His glory, the fiery radiance of His mere presence would consume everything before it. “God is light” (1 Jn 1:5) who “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tm 6:16) and is also “a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). In this vision of Habakkuk, it is as if the fiery glory of God is breaking

forth from behind the veil of the Messiah's flesh.

Beyond power emanating from His hands, so also does plague and pestilence go before and after Him. While the plagues of the Exodus are clearly in mind, we reiterate that this is the future. These plagues should be seen as the final installments of God's wrath directed against the wicked: the Antichrist, his armies, and Babylon, as spoken of in the book of Revelation: "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (Rv 15:1). It is no coincidence that in the verses that immediately follow, the saints are pictured singing two songs: the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. As Messianic Jewish scholar Daniel Juster comments, "The verses connect the Exodus, where God's People watch unscathed as pharaoh's army is engulfed by the waves of the Red Sea, to the vision that includes the victory of martyrs over the beast."⁹

THE NATIONS TREMBLE AND COLLAPSE

The next verses are very similar to Psalm 110, where the Warrior-Messiah, after filling the earth with the slain bodies of His enemies, stops and calmly drinks from the brook (vv. 6–7). So here, as the tumultuous march of the Divine Warrior continues, He seems to pause and calmly survey the earth:

He stood and surveyed the earth;
He looked and startled the nations.
Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,
The ancient hills collapsed.
His ways are everlasting.
I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,
The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.
(Habakkuk 3:6–7)

As Jesus strides forth, pouring out the plagues of God, the rebellious Gentile nations are likened to collapsing mountains. Specifi-

cally, we're told that Cushan and Midian are in a state of panic. Both tribal names were associated with the region of Arabia and were close to Mount Sinai on the eastern side of the Red Sea.¹⁰ Thus, as Jesus proceeds forward out of Arabia, northward toward Jerusalem, the peoples from those regions are trembling in terror.

THE DIVINE WARRIOR

When the Lord split the Red Sea during the Exodus, He displayed His sovereignty and power over Pharaoh and His armies, but also over the sea itself, as well as the powers that it represented. The ancient Hebrews associated the sea with the powers of chaos, evil, and even the devil (Rv 12:9, 20:2). (We will discuss this concept in much more detail in the Appendix A). For now, we note the emphasis on the Lord's power over the rivers and the sea:

Did the LORD rage against the rivers,
 Or was Your anger against the rivers,
 Or was Your wrath against the sea,
 That You rode on Your horses,
 On Your chariots of salvation?
 Your bow was made bare,
 The rods of chastisement were sworn.
 Selah.
 You cleaved the earth with rivers.
 The mountains saw You and quaked;
 The downpour of waters swept by.
 The deep uttered forth its voice,
 It lifted high its hands.
 Sun and moon stood in their places;
 They went away at the light of Your arrows,
 At the radiance of Your gleaming spear. (Habakkuk 3:8–11)

Whereas the rivers and seas represent the powers of chaos and the enemies of the Lord, as the Divine Warrior, Jesus will come to defeat them all. In verse 8, He is first described as riding on horses.

Throughout the whole Old Testament, this is the only verse where God is specifically described as riding on a horse—and specifically in the context of coming for the salvation of His people. No doubt this verse is alluded to in the book of Revelation, where Jesus is described as coming from heaven on a white horse: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True” (Rv 19:11). Further, God is described as riding upon “chariots of salvation” (v. 8). As we saw in the Song of Moses, God was described as riding through the heavens to help and save His people. Similarly, in Psalm 68 God was described as coming from Mount Sinai with a multitude of chariots. Then, in Isaiah 66, God was described as coming at the end of the age upon chariots to save His people (v. 15). Also in keeping with the theme of the Divine Warrior, Habakkuk describes God as having a bow, arrows, and a spear, all of them glowing with radiant light.

THE CRUSHING ONE

The wrathful march of YHVH, the warrior from heaven, continues:

In indignation You marched through the earth;
In anger You trampled the nations.
You went forth for the salvation of Your people,
For the salvation of Your anointed. (Habakkuk 3:12–13a)

The language of trampling the nations is such an important theme. This motif leads directly back to the first messianic prophecy in the Bible, Genesis 3:15. A careful exegesis of that passage reveals that when the seed of the woman (the Messiah) comes, He will not only crush the head of the serpent but also His followers. As we’ve previously discussed, the theme of the Davidic King Messiah crushing His enemies is reiterated numerous times throughout the Scriptures (Nm 24:17–20; Dt 33:28–29; Jgs 5:26–27; Ps 58:10; 68:21; 110:5–6; Jl 3:13; Is 63:1–6; Mal 4:3; Lk 10:17; Rv 19:13,15). Once more, beyond slaying His enemies, the ultimate purpose for His march is reiterated:

He has come to save His people. Israel, and all who join themselves to the God of Israel, are described as His “anointed.”

THE ARMIES OF THE ANTICHRIST

There are some passages in Scripture that simply overwhelm us. The Prayer of Habakkuk is one of them. Verse after verse, it contains so many glorious and stirring elements. Next, the general theme of God crushing His enemies turns specifically to their leader.

You struck the head of the house of the evil
 To lay him open from thigh to neck.
 Selah.
 You pierced with his own spears
 The head of his throngs.
 They stormed in to scatter us;
 Their exultation was like those
 Who devour the oppressed in secret.
 You trampled on the sea with Your horses,
 On the surge of many waters. (Habakkuk 3:13a–15)

This is now speaking of the Antichrist and His followers and, arguably, even Satan himself. The ESV reads: “You crushed the head of the house of the wicked.” Here, the Divine Warrior is said to crush the head or chief (Hebrew: *rosh*) of the house of the enemies of God. This is nearly identical to Psalm 110:5–6, where the messianic Son of David is described as shattering the “chief men” from among His enemies. Pulling all these various themes together, the New Testament describes Jesus at His return, killing the Antichrist and his armies:

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet . . . these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. (Revelation 19:19–21; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:8)

Habakkuk 3 is thus one of the earliest and clearest passages in the Old Testament that speaks of the Messiah slaying the Antichrist.¹¹ It graphically states that Jesus will lay open this evil one from thigh to neck. Smith renders it: “from tail to neck” and comments that this “appears to be a reference to the enemy in the form of a dragon.”¹² This would point more so to the devil than to the Antichrist. Of course, the two are a symbiotic couple—puppet and puppet-master—and both will eventually be thrown into the lake of fire (Rv 19:20; 20:10). There is no question, however, that the text is speaking of the Antichrist and his armies, as it goes on to specifically speak of the destruction of the people who invade the land of Judah. Some commentators say this points to the Babylonians, who did indeed invade Judah. It must be acknowledged, however, that the Babylonians were never destroyed by the Lord as this passage portrays. Again, as we have seen, the New Testament interprets these things as having their ultimate fulfillment at the end of the age.

AWAITING HIS COMING

Finally, the prophet’s lament reaches its crescendo. Earlier, in chapter 2, Habakkuk was told that

the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay. (Habakkuk 2:3)

Although he had been assured that this magnificent vision of God’s coming will indeed come to pass, it still caused him tremendous pain. For although he knew that it would eventually come, it remained far off in the distant future. And so

I heard and my inward parts trembled,
At the sound my lips quivered.

Decay enters my bones,
 And in my place I tremble.
 Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
 For the people to arise who will invade us.
 Though the fig tree should not blossom
 And there be no fruit on the vines,
 Though the yield of the olive should fail
 And the fields produce no food,
 Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
 And there be no cattle in the stalls,
 Yet I will exult in the LORD,
 I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
 The Lord GOD is my strength,
 And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
 And makes me walk on my high places. (Habakkuk 3:16–19a)

Awaiting the fulfillment of the vision caused Habakkuk tremendous anguish. His body trembled and his bones felt as though they were crumbling within him. As extreme as this may sound, in truth, every Christian should be able to identify with Habakkuk here. Paul the apostle said that all of creation groans and suffers as it waits for Messiah's return (Rm 8:18–25). Being that we are included in God's creation (and are also His expectant bride), so should we too experience a painful longing for the fulfillment of Habakkuk's vision. Though it carries long, we patiently wait for it. For this reason, the author of the letter to the Hebrews refers directly back to this passage and calls on Christians to cling fast to their hope in Jesus' return (Heb 10:37–39). As Robertson concludes:

The emphasis on the coming of God himself as the source of hope for the Lord's people appropriately finds its consummate expression in the new covenant Scriptures. Suffering believers are encouraged to hold fast their profession, since he who is coming will come, and will not delay (Heb. 10:37). Through all the ages

only the coming of the Lord himself can provide genuine hope for his people.

THE PRAYER OF HABAKKUK AS A CONGREGATIONAL PSALM

Throughout the Prayer of Habakkuk there are three occurrences of the Hebrew word *selah*. This word appears seventy-four times throughout the psalms. It signifies a pause or interlude and may have been used to inform musicians to change instruments or to call for musicians, singers, and listeners to pause for the purpose of pondering the truths that were being sung.¹³ Then, at the end of the prayer, we read, “For the choir director, on my stringed instruments” (v. 19b). Scholars believe that Habakkuk’s vision was specifically written as a psalm, “to be rehearsed in the congregation of Israel throughout the dark years which Israel must soon begin to experience.”¹⁴ In other words, during the seventy years of their pain-wracked exile, faithful Jews likely gathered weekly at the edge of the rivers of Babylon and sang Habakkuk’s vision together. How gripping it is to envision Daniel, Ezekiel, and the other faithful Jewish exiles singing the Prayer of Habakkuk aloud, reminding themselves of God’s future salvation from the land of their enemies. Yes, YHVH had come, *but He is also coming again. Selah.*

CONCLUSION

The Prayer of Habakkuk is one of the most detailed, beautiful, and magnificent descriptions of the return of Jesus in the whole Bible. Habakkuk draws from the Blessing of Moses, the Song of Deborah, Psalm 68, Isaiah 63, and several other texts to paint a picture of the return of Jesus that is gripping and glorious. The passage also contains timeless lessons that continue to be eminently applicable to modern Christians who live in cultures that are increasingly hostile to those who hold to biblical faith. It is a particularly relevant text for the end-time Church. In the same way that faithful Jewish exiles

would have regularly sung this glorious hymn together, so too should Christians today continue to regularly gather together to encourage one another concerning God's faithfulness and our mutual hope. As it says in the letter to the Hebrews, "and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:25).

THE PROPHECY OF ZECHARIAH

Roughly seventy-five years after Habakkuk's prophecy, the remnant of Judah returned from exile in Babylon. It was during this period that Zechariah the prophet ministered, giving us one of the final prophecies in the Old Testament. By Zechariah's day, Israel's vision of the coming of the Messiah was quite a detailed and well-developed tradition. Because he was one of the last of the Old Testament prophets, as he spoke of the Messiah, he was able to draw from the many prophecies and revelations that had come before him, including the Desert Prophecies.

ZECHARIAH'S BATTLE HYMN

In the latter part of Zechariah's prophecy are two very important oracles. The first is found in chapters 9–11 and the second in 12–14. Both prophecies speak much of the coming of the Messiah. The first comes in the form of a battle hymn. It begins with the prophetic phrase, "The burden of the word of the LORD" (Zec 12:1). After describing the Lord's judgments on various peoples who surround Israel, the oracle turns to describe the coming of the Messiah. Verse 9 is likely the most widely known verse in all of Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your king is coming to you;
 righteous and having salvation is he,
 humble and mounted on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9 ESV)

This is a clear reference to the future Davidic King. Shouts of joy await His victorious entry into Jerusalem. Here Zechariah doesn't describe the King-Messiah as the glorious, blood-soaked Divine Warrior, however. Yes, He is victorious, coming with salvation from Israel's enemies. But He is also described as humble, not riding on a horse, but a donkey. Where did such an idea come from? It seems to present a triumphal entry that is quite different from other previous prophetic descriptions of the Messiah's victorious and glorious procession into Jerusalem. The answer is four songs in the prophecy of Isaiah (42:1–6; 49:7–13; 50:6–8; 52:13–53:12). There, the Messiah is repeatedly referred to as “the Servant.” The songs describe a profoundly different vision of the Messiah than what is normally envisioned. Not only would the Messiah come in blazing glory, with all of His angels, Isaiah also describes the Messiah as a servant of Israel who would come and suffer, to be crushed for the sins of His people. It was during this period that a previously hidden mystery began to be revealed: the Messiah would actually come twice—the first in humility and suffering, and the second in glory and power. Thus, Zechariah describes the Messiah's first triumphal entry into Jerusalem that took place during Jesus' earthly ministry (Mt 21:1–11; Mk 11:1–11; Lk 19:28–44; Jn 12:12–19). The second triumphal entry, however—that which the prophets most often emphasize, that which we have seen throughout the Desert Prophecies—remains in the future.

THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF JESUS

Zechariah then shifts his focus from the first triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, to the time when He will rule as King, not just over Israel, but over the whole world:

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
And the horse from Jerusalem;
And the bow of war will be cut off.
And He will speak peace to the nations;
And His dominion will be from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:10)

When Jesus is King in Israel, chariots and warhorses will no longer be seen throughout the land. The “bow of war” will forever be a thing of the past. Similar language is used throughout the prophets. Isaiah describes the people of Israel recycling instruments of war into tools for gardening: “And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Is 2:4; cf. Mi 4:3; Jl 3:2). Ezekiel describes Israel collecting the abandoned weapons of their enemies and using them as firewood for several years: “They will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons” (Ez 39:9–10). Instead of war, the King will see to it that the Gentile nations walk peacefully with Israel, for His rule will extend from Jerusalem to the very ends of the earth (cf. Ps 72:8).

ZACHARIAH’S DESERT PROPHECY

Zechariah makes another abrupt shift. Now, he speaks of the triumphant return of Jesus. Here, themes common to the Desert Prophecies clearly emerge. Because of His covenant promises to Israel, the day is coming when the Lord will set the Jewish prisoners of the Antichrist and his armies free:

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.
(Zechariah 9:11–12 ESV)

The prisoners are described as having been held in a desert prison—a dry and “waterless pit.” This is consistent with the imagery of David and Isaiah’s references to the prisoners languishing in the desert but being greatly refreshed by the rains that will accompany His coming to save them (35:1–7; cf. Ps 68:9–10). Because of the Lord’s covenant promises (Gn 15:8–21; Ex 24:3–8), they will be set free. The final restorative phases of the covenant cycle are being enacted. The prisoners will be returned to their “stronghold” of Jerusalem. Despite their many losses, their full restoration will come.

ISRAEL’S LAST DAYS CLASH WITH THE ANTICHRIST

Next, Zechariah sings of the final battles that will take place just prior to Jesus’ return:

For I will bend Judah as My bow,
 I will fill the bow with Ephraim.
 And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons,
 O Greece;
 And I will make you like a warrior’s sword. (Zechariah 9:13)

As George L. Klein in *The New American Commentary* states, this verse “plainly declares that in the future day of divine victory, God will use Judah as an instrument to defeat Greece.”¹ Will Israel and Greece really clash in the last days? There are problems, actually, with this view. First, it is important to note that the Hebrew word translated as Greece is actually *Yavan*. In Zechariah’s day, in the sixth century BC, “Greece” wasn’t a regional power and wouldn’t become so for another two centuries.² To Zechariah’s audience, *Yavan* simply referred to the coastlands of modern day Greece and southwestern Turkey. Second, the context of the prophecy is not any historical conflict such as that which took place between the Maccabees and Antiochus Epiphanes. This is an end-time prophecy, describing a battle that will unfold in the last days and ultimately be resolved when Jesus returns. As Klein notes: “The events foretold in v. 13

would only see their culmination when the Lord ultimately establishes his kingdom on earth.”³ Although the exact meaning of this verse is widely debated among scholars, I would suggest the best explanation is that Zechariah is simply describing the same conflict that the prophet Ezekiel had previously described (Ez 38–39). The great battle of Gog and Magog is a last-days war between Israel and a coalition of nations led by modern day Turkey. As such, Zechariah’s prophecy should simply be understood as a reference to Israel fighting against the Antichrist and the nations aligned with him.⁴

MARCHING IN THE WHIRLWINDS OF THE SOUTH

Next comes a vivid description of what can only be understood as the glorious return of Jesus from heaven:

Then the LORD will appear over them,
And His arrow will go forth like lightning;
And the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet,
And will march in the storm winds of the south.
(Zechariah 9:14)

Here we see a theophany rich with themes consistent throughout the previous Desert Prophecies. First, the Lord “appears” from heaven. Second, as Barker notes, “The language is also anthropomorphic.”⁵ He comes marching forth, in the form of a man. Third, His arrows are like lightning. This calls to mind the descriptions of lightning or fire coming from the Lord’s hands in the Blessing of Moses (Dt 33:2). Fourth, we see references to the trumpet (*shofar*) being blown. Again, this calls to mind the fall festival of *Yom Teruah* or the Day of the Blasting of Trumpets. The combination of lightning and trumpets reminds us of the day God came down on Mount Sinai when “there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound” (Ex 19:16). Fifth, He marches forth from the midst of storms and whirlwind. This imagery comes directly from the previous descrip-

tions of the Lord's coming by Deborah, David, and Isaiah (Jgs 5:4; Ps 68:8–9; Is 66:15). Sixth, and last, as all of the Desert Prophecies reiterate, He is coming from the south—from Sinai, Teman, Seir, Paran, Edom—toward Jerusalem. As Laney categorically states, this prophetic hymn “describes the march of a Divine Warrior.”⁶

THE GREAT FEAST

Verses 15–17 describe the onset of the millennial reign of the King-Messiah: After Israel is firmly planted back in their land, then the great celebrations will truly begin:

The LORD of hosts will protect them,
 and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones,
 and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine,
 and be full like a bowl,
 drenched like the corners of the altar.

On that day the LORD their God will save them,
 as the flock of his people;
 for like the jewels of a crown
 they shall shine on his land.

For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!
 Grain shall make the young men flourish,
 and new wine the young women. (Zechariah 9:15–17)

After the Lord defends Israel and saves them, Israel will become dominant over their enemies. Whereas the prophecy began with Israel enslaved in a desert pit, it concludes with them in their own land, enjoying a great feast with ample food to “devour.” The reference to grain and new wine again points to the time of the autumn harvest and accompanying holy festivals. Webb summarizes these three verses: “God will be with them and fight for them, as he did for Israel at the time of the Exodus. And the fighting will not last forever. One day it will be over; the time of grain and new wine will have come.”⁷ From that time forward, Israel will be a like a glittering and shining jewel in the Lord's crown.

Thus, the prophecy of Zechariah 9 is indeed yet another important passage to be added to the list of Desert Prophecies. From the storms of the south, the Divine Warrior will march, setting Israel's prisoners free from their place of bondage in a desert pit. After bringing His people home to the promised land, the King will restore the kingdom to Israel and cause peace to reign throughout the world.

ZACHARIAH 12–14

While the battle hymn of Zechariah 9 is a critical messianic prophecy, chapters 12–14 also contain profound details concerning the final period of redemption. We will only highlight the most relevant portions here. Like chapter 9, chapter 12 also begins with: “The burden of the word of the LORD concerning Israel” (v. 1). The prophet goes on to describe the invasion and “siege” of Jerusalem and Judah (vv. 2–8). Rather than being defeated, however, Israel is given total victory. This has confused some. Is Israel defeated in the last days or are they victorious? The answer is simple. Before Jesus returns, Israel will be defeated. After He returns, they will be victorious. Others have suggested that this may refer to past conflicts such as the Six Day or the Yom Kippur wars. The context, however, is when Israel is fully victorious over all of her enemies. This will only happen when the Messiah is present. It is then that the enemy nations that surround Israel will be consumed like kindling wood before a fire (vv. 5–6). The Jewish nation will be so empowered, that they are described as being “like God” (vv. 7–8). During this time, the Lord declares that He “will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness” (v. 4). This is intended to reflect God's victory during the Exodus. As Webb comments, “That is the kind of thing that happened when the Lord overthrew the army of Pharaoh at the Red Sea.”⁸

THE ONE THEY HAVE PIERCED

Verses 9–10 describe one of the single most pivotal and momentous events in the Bible. Zechariah captures the moment when the Messiah is fully revealed to His people:

And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zechariah 12:9–10)

The One who is “pierced” here is a certain reference to Isaiah’s Suffering Servant, the Messiah. Yet, God identifies Himself as the pierced One: “They will look on *Me* whom they have pierced.” Webb captures the intensity of the Lord’s affliction: “It is not a mere wounding, but a death blow; a piercing to the heart. But even that is not the worst of it. The deepest pain is caused by the knowledge of who has done it. It is not the enemy . . . but his own people.”⁹ Having finally and truly “seen” the Messiah who was pierced through and crushed for their sins, all the tribes of Israel will weep and repent for what they have done. As we discussed in chapter 13, this will result in the Lord pouring out His Holy Spirit upon the whole nation and the consummation of the new covenant (Dt 32:36–39; Is 59:19–21; Jer 31:27–34; Ez 34:25–27; 36:23–31). Verses 11–14 describe the tribes of Israel allowing this newfound revelation and repentance to sink deep into their hearts. Chapter 13 describes the results of this great internal spiritual work:

In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. It will come about in that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. (Zechariah 13:1–2)

Israel will forever turn away from their rebellion against the Lord. Idolatry, bad counselors, and false prophets will forever be a thing of the past. The people and the land together will be fully renewed.

THE COVENANT CHASTISEMENTS

Zechariah then returns to the theme of the covenant chastisements:

“It will come about in all the land,”
Declares the LORD,
“That two parts in it will be cut off and perish;
But the third will be left in it.
And I will bring the third part through the fire,
Refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.
They will call on My name,
And I will answer them;
I will say, ‘They are My people,’
And they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’” (Zechariah 13:8–9)

The vision is shocking in its specificity and devastatingly painful. We already discussed this passage and its meaning in detail in chapter 16. What is clear is that the Lord will take Israel through the refining and cleansing punishments of the covenant. The theme continues into chapter 14:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. (Zechariah 14:1–2)

The prophetic warnings found in Leviticus 23:14–33 and Deuteronomy 4:26–28, 32:23–27 now find their ultimate fulfillment. Providentially, as I write this chapter, I’m actually sitting in East

Jerusalem. The accuracy of Zechariah's prophecy cannot be ignored. Here the prophet described Jerusalem being divided, specifically in the last days. Half of the inhabitants of the city will be taken away as prisoners of war. Yet, for reasons that Zechariah does not explain, half will remain in the city. Here I sit in this same city, divided, some two thousand-plus years later, just as the prophet foretold.

THEN, THE LORD MY GOD WILL COME

Now comes the most glorious portion of the oracle. Following immediately on the heels of the final chastisements, Israel's Savior comes:

Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. (Zechariah 14:1–5a)

This portion of Zechariah's prophecy has led to a lot of confusion regarding the actual location of Jesus' return. Whereas the passage says that the Lord's feet will actually stand on the Mount of Olives, many believe the passage to teach that Jesus will descend from heaven and *land* on the Mount of Olives. We will discuss the location of His return in much more detail in chapter 27. But for now, let us simply note that the passage doesn't actually state where the Lord will specifically descend when He comes back. As we've seen, however, throughout the Desert Prophecies, the Lord is consistently described as coming from the south, toward Jerusalem, with His heavenly armies. Zechariah himself already described this very thing in the previous prophecy (9:14). The prophet does not

contradict himself here. The statement concerning the Lord's feet standing on the Mount of Olives "in that day" should be understood as referring to the general period of His rule. If the text were stating that Jesus will land on the Mount of Olives, then why are His people all fleeing? It would make no sense for the people to run away from the arrival of their Savior. I would suggest that the best solution to this is in recognizing that this portion of Zechariah is not a series of clearly chronologically sequenced events but rather a series of general statements concerning this broader period. When this portion of Zechariah's prophecy is considered, together with his previous prophecy of chapter 9, then we understand that the order of events will unfold as follows: some time prior to Jesus' actual return, during the great tribulation, there will be a massive earthquake. This will result in the Mount of Olives being split in two. When this occurs, many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will flee from the city. *Then*, some time thereafter, the Lord, along with myriads of His holy ones, will "come" to Jerusalem and bring His people back to the city. This triumphal entry into Jerusalem will only take place after the great procession from the south. Thus, it is *after* the inhabitants of Jerusalem flee that the Lord will come and bring them back to Jerusalem. Thus Zechariah reiterates:

Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. (Zechariah 14:5b-9)

Here we see the language of God 'coming' and specifically with His holy ones. As we arrive at the close of the Old Testament, this imagery, which first appeared in the Blessing of Moses, has now

become a very well developed story of divine deliverance. As we will see, the New Testament writers clearly looked to this text, and other similar passages, as a messianic prophecy speaking of the return of Jesus.

THE RESTORED KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

The description of a river flowing out of Jerusalem is both symbolic and literal. While it symbolically speaks of the life that will flow forth from Jerusalem when Jesus is King, it is also quite literal. During the millennial kingdom, there will be an actual river that flows south out of Jerusalem. Zechariah draws this imagery directly from Joel 3:18 and Ezekiel 47:1-12, and later, Revelation 22:1 would describe exactly the same thing. What follows is undeniably a description of the millennial reign of Jesus:

And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one . . . and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security. (Zechariah 14:9,11)

The universal nature of YHVH's rule is reaffirmed. The statement that there will no longer be "a curse" is a reference to the curses of the covenant. Whereas Israel's disobedience will be a thing of the past, so will the covenant curses for disobedience be a thing of the past.

PLAGUE OF DEATH

Verse 12 has been the source of much popular speculation. The armies of the Antichrist who resist the power of the Messiah will experience a death that many have likened to the effects of being struck by a nuclear blast:

Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their

flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth. (Zechariah 14:12)

Those who dare to stand against the power of the radiant and blood-soaked Divine Warrior will be devoured where they stand as if by an all-consuming fire. Before weak human flesh, the absolute, unstoppable power of God is no match. Later, Paul the apostle would say that when Jesus comes, He will slay the Antichrist “by the breath of his mouth and . . . by the splendor of his coming” (2 Thes 2:8 NIV). Throughout the remaining portion of the prophecy, during the millennial reign of Jesus, the Gentile nations are portrayed as being entirely subjugated by the people of Israel and their King. They are not merely defeated foes, however, they will actually participate in Israel’s holy days. As Boda describes it, “The defeat of the nations leads to their submission to this cosmic king, demonstrated in their yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Zechariah, being one of the last of the prophets, masterfully presents a vision of the return of the Messiah that combines ideas and themes from various other prophecies. Combining prophecies of the invasion and occupation of the city of Jerusalem spoken of by previous prophets (Jl 3:1–3; Dn 11:31–45; Ez 38–39) with the Desert Prophecies of God coming, he paints the first a clear and more comprehensive picture of Jesus’ ultimate triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Not only does the Lord come back with His holy ones from heaven, but also with those who had fled during the final hours when the forces of the Antichrist will have taken control of the city. He comes back then, not just as a king returning from war, but as a liberator of the city itself.

As we conclude our discussion of the Old Testament Desert Prophecies, we note something rather amazing. One need not even

turn to the New Testament to understand the beautiful and glorious biblical vision for the return of the Messiah. Although many Christians wrongly assume that the conception of Jesus' return is purely a New Testament doctrine, the truth is the rich tradition of the Old Testament Desert Prophecies, alongside many of the other classically recognized messianic prophecies, provides us with a vibrant, detailed, and glorious technicolor vision of the return of Jesus. The Bible actually painted this picture long before the New Testament was ever written. When Jesus and the apostles come along, this vision would have already been widely known and understood by the people of God.

THE PROPHECY OF ENOCH

Before we complete our survey of the Desert Prophecies, we also need to look at the prophecy of 1 Enoch.¹ Although 1 Enoch is not part of the biblical canon, it was nevertheless a very well-known and influential book both before and during the life of Jesus. Interestingly, part of Enoch's prophecy actually did make its way into the New Testament in the book of Jude. The prophecy begins:

The words of the blessing with which Enoch blessed the righteous chosen who will be present on the day of tribulation, to remove all the enemies and the righteous will be saved. And he took up his discourse and said, "Enoch, a righteous man whose eyes were opened by God, who had the vision of the Holy One and of heaven, which he showed me. From the words of the watchers and holy ones I heard everything; and as I heard everything from them, I also understood what I saw. Not for this generation do I expound, but concerning one that is distant I speak. And concerning the chosen I speak now, and concerning them I take up my discourse. (1 Enoch 1:1–3)

The oracle begins in very similar fashion to the Blessing of Moses. Rather than "the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel" (Dt 33:1), we have here "the blessing with which Enoch blessed the righteous chosen who will be present on the day

of tribulation” (1:1). The vision, according to the author, was given during a visit to heaven, and also imparted through hearing the words of the “watchers” and “holy ones” while there. Enoch makes the context of His prophecy clear. It is for a distant generation, specifically those who will be alive during the great tribulation to witness the coming of God from heaven. Then the prophecy begins:

The Great Holy One will come forth from his dwelling and the eternal God will tread from thence upon Mount Sinai. He will appear with his army, he will appear with his mighty host from the heaven of heavens. All the watchers will fear and quake, and those who are hiding in all the ends of the earth will sing; All the ends of the earth will be shaken, and trembling and great fear will seize them (the watchers) unto the ends of the earth. The high mountains will be shaken and fall and break apart, and the high hills will be made low and melt like wax before the fire; The earth will be wholly rent asunder, and everything on the earth will perish, and there will be judgment on all. With the righteous he will make peace, and over the chosen there will be protection, and upon them will be mercy. They will all be God’s, and he will grant them his good pleasure. He will bless (them) all, and he will help (them) all. Light will shine upon them, and he will make peace with them. Behold, he comes with the myriads of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to destroy all the wicked, and to convict all flesh for all the wicked deeds that they have done, and the proud and hard words that wicked sinners spoke against him. (1 Enoch 1:1–9)²

The initial comments concerning God coming from His place of dwelling in heaven and landing on Mount Sinai are fascinating as they relate to our study. Whereas Deuteronomy 33, Judges 5, and Habakkuk 3 all envision God coming from Sinai and marching toward Jerusalem, some translations of Enoch’s prophecy seem to portray Him overtly landing directly on Mount Sinai. The underlying Greek of Enoch includes the words “upon the earth” which make Enoch’s exact meaning difficult to ascertain. Does the

prophecy indicate that God will come directly from heaven to Sinai or that He will descend from heaven to the earth, eventually coming to Sinai? While the translations of Charlesworth and Nickelsburg point to the former, the translations of Charles and Evans point to the latter. This immediately stirs up questions regarding Zechariah 14, which many wrongly remember as stating that He will “land” on the Mount of Olives. As we discussed in the last chapter, however, the actual statement there is simply that “in that day,” meaning within the larger time period being referenced, His feet will “stand” on the Mount of Olives. This will not happen, of course, until after He comes to Jerusalem with myriads of His holy ones, as the consensus of other texts indicates. We will discuss this matter in more detail as we move forward.

The emphasis of Enoch’s prophecy concerns judgment against the wicked. As Nickelsburg comments:

This initial section of Enoch’s oracle describes the coming of the transcendent God, the divine Warrior, who will appear on earth to execute universal judgment on humanity and the rebel watchers.³

The prophecy seems to conflate Deuteronomy 33 with Micah 1:3–4. Whereas the Blessing of Moses envisions God coming from Sinai, Micah envisions God coming down from heaven:

For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place.
He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth.
The mountains will melt under Him
And the valleys will be split,
Like wax before the fire,
Like water poured down a steep place. (Micah 1:3–4)

Enoch employs language similar to Micah of the mountains melting like wax. This also calls to mind the words of David at the

outset of Psalm 68, which calls on God to arise and judge His enemies, who will melt like wax. The poetry here is intended to convey God's judgment against the nations and the wicked throughout the earth. In the face of His presence and judgments, they will dissipate like wax before a raging fire. James H. Charlesworth summarizes the prophecy this way:

Israel shall be saved from among the gentiles and the Messiah shall appear to them and bring them up to Jerusalem with great joy. Moreover, the kingdom of Israel, gathered from the four quarters of the world, shall eat with the Messiah, and the gentiles shall eat with them.⁴

What is so fascinating about this prophecy is the fact that the final portion (v 9) is cited verbatim by Jude in the New Testament (Jude 14). Jude and others in the early church interpreted this prophecy as referring to the return of Jesus. So Jude cites the prophecy of Enoch, which describes God descending from heaven to Mount Sinai and applies it to the return of Jesus. Enoch, however, is relying on the Blessing of Moses, the first of the Desert Prophecies.

THE SECOND EXODUS IN THE FIRST CENTURY JEWISH MIND

While the concept of Jesus marching through the desert when He returns is, no doubt, a foreign concept to most Christians today, G. K. Beale, argues it actually would have been widely known during the first century. During this period, according to Beale, besides Enoch, various other "Jewish writings developed the belief that the Messiah would gather his people in the wilderness at the end time."⁵ Further, "This view of the future is reflected in the writings of Josephus, who explicitly identifies first-century messianic movements with desert and Exodus themes."⁶ For example, Josephus makes mention of various false messiah figures who led groups out into the desert "pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty."⁷ One such false prophet, we're told,

got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place; and if he could but once conquer the Roman garrison and the people, he intended to domineer over them by the assistance of those guards of his that were to break into the city with him.⁸

As N. T. Wright correctly comments, “Anyone collecting people in the Jordan wilderness was symbolically saying: this is the new Exodus.”⁹ Beale adds, “The association with the wilderness of the Zealots and similar movements is probably part of this larger messianic expectation.”¹⁰ According to Beale, the Qumran community specifically moved out into the desert, believing that they were beginning to fulfill these prophecies of restoration there.¹¹ While the author of 1 Enoch and those from the Qumran community, various Jewish zealots, and John the Baptist likely had drastically different beliefs, they shared the common view that the messianic restoration would take place out in the desert. Based on all of the various prophecies that we have studied, the general storyline of the Desert Prophecies had obviously become a widely held view. This is likely why Jesus actually warned His followers not to go out into the desert seeking every new messianic figure who came along (Mt 24:24–26). Jesus made it clear that when the real Messiah comes, as He is described in passages such as Deuteronomy 33 or Habakkuk 3, He will come shining forth like the radiance of the sun. His coming will be glaringly and unavoidably obvious: “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt 24:27).

In conclusion, the narrative that we’ve examined throughout the various Desert Prophecies was widely known and believed by the Jews of the first century. Jesus, John the Baptist, and the apostles all would have been very familiar, in varying degrees, with this beautiful story of restoration. As we will see in the next chapter, this expectation is also clearly reflected throughout the New Testament writings.

THE RETURN OF JESUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Finally, we come to the testimony of the New Testament. When Christians wish to understand the return of Jesus, most often this is the only portion of the Bible they will turn to. Many never even consider whether the Old Testament has anything to say about this subject. The biblical vision of the coming of the Messiah from heaven, however, is much older than the New Testament. As we have shown, by the time of Jesus and the apostles, the storyline of the Messiah's glorious coming and victorious march through the desert was widely known and understood by the people of God. The authors of the New Testament rarely elaborated on the story in great detail, because their Bibles already did that. There are exceptions, where mysteries that had been largely hidden were expanded upon. The fact that there would be two comings of the Messiah, for example, may be the most significant of these exceptions. The New Testament authors clearly understood that the first coming of Messiah was for the atonement of sins, while the second coming is for judgments and rewards. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews states, Jesus came "once to bear the sins of many" and "will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Heb 9:28).

In this chapter, we will show that the New Testament vision for the return of Jesus is entirely derived from, and built upon, the Old Testament foundational texts that we have examined. Virtually every

passage in the New Testament that speaks of the return of Jesus looks back to the Desert Prophecies.

THE RETURN OF JESUS ACCORDING TO JESUS

The very first reference in the New Testament to the blessed hope comes from none other than Jesus Himself. He describes His return this way: “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds” (Mt 16:27; cf. Lk 9:26). Later, in His Olivet Discourse, Jesus refers to His return twice. First He says, “[T]hey will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Mt 24:30–31; cf. Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27). Still later, He says: “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne” (Mt 25:31).¹

Within Jesus’ own descriptions of His coming, we note the following themes:

1. Jesus calls Himself “the Son of Man.”
2. He will “come”
3. in great glory,
4. in the clouds,
5. with His angels,
6. and the blasting of a trumpet.
7. All of this will be accompanied by the gathering together of His elect.

Where do these seven concepts originate? Four of them are first found in the Blessing of Moses. There God is envisioned as (1) “coming” from heaven (2) in radiant glory, (3) riding upon the clouds, (4) with myriads of His holy angels. Later the same themes are repeated in the Desert Prophecies of Judges 5, Psalm 68, Isaiah 35 and 40, and Zechariah 14. Further, Jesus associates His return with the blasting of a great trumpet and the gathering of His elect. This motif first points directly back to the Exodus, when on the day that the Lord came down, there was “a very loud trumpet sound” (Ex 19:16). The two themes of the trumpet blast and the gathering of His elect are found together in Isaiah 27: “It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem” (v. 13). The context of this is obviously the great eschatological regathering of God’s elect to the land and seems to be Jesus’ primary point of reference. Zechariah’s Desert Prophecy also describes the blasting of trumpets in association with the coming of the Divine Warrior:

Then the LORD will appear over them,
 And His arrow will go forth like lightning;
 And the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet,
 And will march in the storm winds of the south. (Zechariah
 9:14)

What about the term the Son of Man? Where does this come from? It is found in Daniel’s vision of four beasts and the courtroom of heaven. There we are shown a figure who, although He has the form of a human, is also riding on the clouds (Dn 7:13). Again, the One who appears or rides upon the clouds is none other than YHVH (Ex 13:21; 16:10; 24:16; 20:21; 33:9,10; 34: 5; 40:34, 38; Dt 33:26; Ps 18:9–11; 68:4, 32–33; Ps 104:3; Is 19:1). Further, this figure will be given an “everlasting kingdom” in order that “all the peoples, nations and men of every language” will serve Him

(Dn 7:14). Needless to say, the figure Daniel sees is none other than YHVH in human form. He is also the victorious Cloud Rider of the Desert Prophecies who will come back to establish “His kingdom” (Dn 7:14). It’s absolutely amazing that this is who Jesus identifies Himself as. He essentially said to His disciples, “You’ve read the prophecies about YHVH coming back from heaven in glory, marching up to Jerusalem to establish His kingdom. They were talking about me. I am the One who Moses saw coming in radiant glory from Mount Sinai. I am the One who Deborah sang of, marching in the storm clouds up through Edom. I am the One who David envisioned leading a great procession up to Jerusalem. I am the One who Daniel saw—fully God, yet fully man. You will see me coming back on the clouds, in glory, shining like the sun. Everything that the prophets have said is true.” Jesus’ own descriptions of His second coming are almost entirely rooted in the imagery of the theophany at Mount Sinai, as well as the later visions of the prophets, particularly Daniel 7. All seven of the primary themes and motifs that Jesus uses to describe His own return either tie back to Mount Sinai or the prophetic storyline of the Desert Prophecies.

THE RETURN OF JESUS ACCORDING TO PAUL

What about the apostles? How do they describe the return of Jesus? Paul’s first direct reference to the return of Jesus is found in 1 Thessalonians, where he mentions “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (3:13). He uses the two themes of “the coming of our Lord” and “with His holy ones.” Where do we find these two motifs together? They first appear together in the Blessing of Moses, the mother of all the other Desert Prophecies. In the next chapter, Paul begins by stating, “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord” (4:15), inferring that he is about to cite Old Testament texts. He then says, “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thes 4:16). Again, the concept of God descending or coming

from heaven points first to the time when: “The LORD *came down* on Mount Sinai” (Ex 19:20). The concept of the Lord descending from heaven, or coming on the clouds of heaven, as we’ve repeatedly discussed, is perhaps the single most consistent theme throughout all of the Desert Prophecies. The specific term “descend from heaven,” however, may also be a more direct reference to either Micah 1: “For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth” (v. 3), or 1 Enoch, which states: “The God of the universe, the Holy Great One, will come forth from his dwelling. And from there he will march upon Mount Sinai” (1:3–4).² The concept of “the shout of God” seems to point to Isaiah’s description of the Lord going forth as the Divine Warrior, letting out a shout and raising “a war cry” (Is 42:13). Jeremiah also says, “The LORD will roar from on high and utter His voice from His holy habitation” (Jer 25:30). Similarly, both Hosea and Joel speak of the Lord roaring and shouting aloud from Zion in the context of eschatological salvation (Jl 3:16; Hos 11:10). The concept of the voice of an archangel is a bit of a mystery, as it seems to be without clear Old Testament precedent. Perhaps it is Michael? (Jude 9). The trumpet blast of God, on the other hand, as we discussed above, is not only rooted in the story of the theophany at Sinai but is alluded to by Isaiah and Zechariah in association with the coming of God at the end of the age.

In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul says “the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thes 1:7–8). Rather than referring to Jesus “coming,” Paul speaks here of Jesus being “revealed” from heaven. The Greek word for “revealed” is *apokalypsei*, from which comes the English “apocalypse.” Thus, the book of Revelation is also called the “Apocalypse” or the “Revelation of Jesus Christ,” and the primary subject of the book is the revealing or the coming of Jesus from heaven. The text being alluded to is the highway in the Desert Prophecy of Isaiah 40:

Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 40:5)

Further, we note that Paul uses the other following motifs: (1) Jesus will be revealed “from heaven” (2) with His angels (3) in flaming fire (4) to deal out punishment to His enemies. Again, all of these themes are found consistently throughout the Desert Prophecies. The concept of Him coming in flaming fire to judge His enemies, while originating with the theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18; 24:17), seems to be a direct reference back to the closing chapter in the prophecy of Isaiah:

For behold, the LORD will come in fire
And His chariots like the whirlwind,
To render His anger with fury,
And His rebuke with flames of fire.
For the LORD will execute judgment by fire
And by His sword on all flesh,
And those slain by the LORD will be many. (Isaiah 66:15–16)

Later, Paul speaks of “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Ti 2:13). We simply note that Paul refers to Jesus as both God and Savior. Again, the New Testament looks back to the many passages that speak of God coming to save His people and sees the return of Jesus.

Beyond the apostle Paul, Peter also refers to “the promise of His coming” (2 Pt 3:4), as does the author of the letter to the Hebrews, who assures us: “He who is coming will come” (Heb 10:37). This is actually a direct quote of Habakkuk’s Desert Prophecy (2:3–4). James speaks of the Lord’s coming (5:7,8). Again, the general motif of the “coming” of God originates in the Blessings of Moses. Finally, Jude, the brother of Jesus, refers to Jesus who will come from heaven “with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all” (Jude 14–15). As we’ve discussed, this is a direct quote from 1

Enoch, the only text that may explicitly states that Jesus will come from heaven and land upon Mount Sinai.

THE RETURN OF JESUS ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Finally, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John first states, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen” (Rv 1:7). Here is a passage that mixes imagery from Zechariah 12 with the Cloud Rider prophecies. The next verse reads, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rv 1:8), an unequivocal affirmation that Jesus is both YHVH God Almighty and the Coming One.

Then in Revelation 12, Israel is described as a woman who flees “into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (v. 6). Here we have a clear example of the New Testament mirroring the Old Testament narrative of Israel fleeing into the desert to await YHVH, the Divine Warrior and savior. Just a few verses later, we’re told:

[T]he two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. (Revelation 12:14)

The reference to the woman given wings of an eagle reflects the intentional “second Exodus” theme as it points directly back to the first Exodus when the Lord declared to Israel, “I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself” (Ex 19:4). Then, toward the end of the prophecy, John describes Jesus’ return in far greater detail than any other New Testament passage:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ ” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” . . . And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.” And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:7–21)

To all of the previously noted themes and motifs, John now adds that when Jesus returns:

1. He will celebrate His marriage supper.
2. He will come back as a warrior.
3. Heaven will be opened.
4. He will come riding a horse.
5. His robes will be soaked in blood.
6. His armies will also be riding horses.
7. He will come to crush His enemies like grapes.
8. He will kill the Antichrist and his hordes.
9. The animals will eat the flesh of His enemies.
10. He will come to rule the nations.

Every one of these motifs and themes is drawn directly from the Desert Prophecies. Of course, anyone who understands the nature of the covenant at Sinai as a betrothal ceremony, followed by the many references throughout the prophets to God as Israel's husband, will recognize the importance of the reference to "the marriage of the Lamb." Then, throughout the Gospels, when Jesus refers to Himself as the Bridegroom, this is a direct declaration that He is YHVH God Almighty who will come back to restore His bride. The reference here to the marriage supper casts the return of Jesus as the culmination of the marriage covenant initiated at Sinai, in the most explicit manner possible. As we have discussed multiple times now, the concept of Him coming from heaven permeates the Desert Prophecies. The imagery of Jesus and His armies riding horses comes directly from Habakkuk 3:8,15 where YHVH and His armies are described as riding on horses and "chariots of salvation" at the great eschatological defeat of God's enemies. The imagery of

Jesus treading the winepress of God's wrath, soaking His robes in the blood of His enemies comes directly from Isaiah's vision of YHVH marching forth from the land of Edom (Is 63). In fact, it is here that the Genesis 3:15 prophecy of the Crushing One has come full circle (cf. Nm 24:17; Dt 32:35; 33:21; 1 Sm 2:10; Jgs 5:26–27; Ps 58:10; 68:21; 110:5; Joel 3:13; Is 63:3; Hab 3:13; Mt 25:23,31–46; Jude 14; Rev 14:20). The feast of the animals goes back to Psalm 68 where Israel is assured that the day will come when “God will shatter the head of His enemies. . . . That your foot may shatter them in blood, the tongue of your dogs may have its portion from your enemies” (v. 23). Later Ezekiel greatly expanded upon this theme (39:17–20), and here John paraphrased his descriptions. The specific reference to slaying the beast and the false prophet finds its clearest genesis in Habakkuk's reference to YHVH crushing “the head of the house of the evil, to lay him open from thigh to neck” (3:13). In summary, the book of Revelation begins by describing Israel fleeing into the desert and culminates with Jesus coming back with all of His holy ones to save His people. The tradition of the Desert Prophecies, with its rich vision of the Divine Warrior coming back in glory, thus finds its final iteration in the book of Revelation.

CONCLUSION

Virtually every New Testament reference to the return of Jesus is rooted in the Old Testament Desert Prophecies. While many scholars and commentators have largely looked to the more classic messianic prophecies, another whole tradition, a wide collection of texts, has been widely ignored. These tremendously detailed, graphic, beautiful passages are actually the greatest sources of knowledge concerning the return of Jesus in the whole Bible. As new as the concept of the great march through the desert may be to many students of Scripture, it is a concept thoroughly attested to throughout the Word of God. Recognizing this is the key that unlocks the full biblical version of the triumphant return of Jesus the Messiah, we

now are able to fully appreciate His passion to complete the work He began at the time of the original Exodus. As we said at the outset of this section, the picture painted by these texts is a vision of such majesty that it absolutely cannot remain veiled any longer.

WHERE DOES JESUS RETURN?

Having presented the case that after Jesus returns, He will literally march through the desert to Jerusalem—a view that few Christians have ever considered—it’s important that we also discuss *where* the Bible specifically says He will return. Muslims believe that Jesus will return to Damascus, and Mormons believe that He will return to Independence, Missouri. But where does the Bible say He will return? The answer is going to surprise a lot of people.

Sadly, if we were to ask a wide range of Christians where Jesus will return, the majority would probably say they have no idea. Of those who did offer their opinions, however, nearly all would say that He will first return to Jerusalem. For many years, I would have agreed. A few others might suggest that He will first return to Petra in southern Jordan. An even smaller number might suggest that He will return first to Mount Sinai or Egypt. Surprisingly, these are actually very legitimate, biblically supportable positions. In this chapter, we will consider each of these views and the supporting biblical arguments for each.

JERUSALEM

The most popular view, that Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, primarily revolves around two passages: Zechariah 14 and Acts 1. We’ve already discussed Zechariah a bit in chapter 24

but will revisit it here. The most relevant portion of the text begins: “Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east” (vv. 3–4a). Interestingly, whereas the passage states that the Lord will “stand” on the Mount of Olives, many remember it to say that He will actually “land” there. In fact, it says no such thing. As we pointed out previously, if this verse were describing Jesus’ actual glorious return, it would be extremely strange. For immediately after this, the inhabitants of Jerusalem are described as fleeing toward the deserts east of Jerusalem (vv. 4b–5a). Why would the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem flee from their God who has come back specifically to save them? Just previously, in Zechariah 12, it says that when He returns, they will “look upon” or recognize Him, resulting in national repentance. It doesn’t say that they will flee from Him when He comes. Further, in Zechariah 9, the prophet had already described the Lord as “coming” to Jerusalem in the whirlwinds and storms from the south. My point is that there is no reason to believe that Zechariah is contradicting his own previous statements, or any of the Desert Prophecies, for that matter. It is important to recognize that this portion of Zechariah’s prophecy is not outlining a series of clearly sequenced events but a series of general statements concerning this broader period of the end. In fact, it is not until after he describes the inhabitants of Jerusalem fleeing that he actually describes the Lord’s coming: “Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!” (v. 5b). In an effort to reconcile all of these passages, some have suggested that Jesus will first land on the Mount of Olives and then essentially bounce to another location, like some kind of Superman figure. While I understand the motivation behind such a solution, it is very odd. We must remember that from the moment He splits the sky and descends from heaven, He will be accompanied by myriads of His holy ones, all of whom will be visible to those on the earth below. The notion of such a massive throng landing in Jerusalem, only to

bounce to another location, feels very forced and awkward and is without any other scriptural support. I would suggest a much better solution is that the actual order of events described by Zechariah will unfold as follows: First, before Jesus returns, there will be a great earthquake, resulting in the Mount of Olives splitting in half and many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem fleeing into the desert to the east of Jerusalem. This could very well be the earthquake described in Revelation 11:13, which takes place after the Two Witnesses are killed and taken up to heaven: “And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” After this time, perhaps months later, the Lord will come to Jerusalem with all of His holy ones, including those who had previously fled, having now been saved. Thus, it will be after He arrives in Jerusalem that He will actually stand on the Mount of Olives. For in that day, the Lord will truly “dwell in Zion” (Jl 3:17–21). Then, as the Lord declared through Isaiah, “I shall make the place of My feet glorious” (60:13). This position, I would argue, brings reconciliation between all of the relevant texts; it is not forced and not awkward, with Jesus and His armies, bounding from one location to another.

What of Acts 1? Many also point to this passage as support for the view that Jesus will return and land on the Mount of Olives. After His resurrection, the Bible says that Jesus appeared to many of the disciples and essentially gave them a private Bible study over a period of forty days (Acts 1:1–3). Then, He gathered them together and commanded them to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (vv. 4–5). Then, after giving them some final instructions, the Bible gives the following account:

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9–11)

After Jesus was taken up, the disciples walked back to Jerusalem, which, we are told, was “a sabbath’s walk” away (v. 12). The conclusion of The Gospel of Luke gives us a parallel account and adds some additional details concerning where this all happened:

And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God. (Luke 24:50–53)

The village of Bethany, today called *al-Eizariya* in Arabic, was a small village on the southeastern side of the Mount of Olives, about three kilometers from the Temple Mount. The reason this is important is because many Christians visit Jerusalem and stand on the western overlook gazing down at the Temple Mount, imagining that this is where Jesus ascended into heaven. In fact, it was a couple miles to the east. The Mount of Olives is actually much larger than many realize. That said, as it pertains to where Jesus will return, many read the angel’s comments in Acts 1 and reason that since He went up on that spot, He will return at there as well. A careful reading of the angel’s words, however, finds no such thing. The text states that Jesus was taken up into the clouds and will come back “in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (v. 11). In other words, He will visibly return in the clouds from heaven. Nothing more is said or even inferred. Thus, despite the widely held view that Jesus will return from heaven specifically to the Mount of Olives, the biblical evidence for this is fairly problematic. This view is largely based upon assumptions and inferences. To be very clear, Jesus will most assuredly make His way to Jerusalem soon

after His return, and there is abundant Scripture that speaks of this. But there are no specific, clear texts that say this is where He will first descend. As we've seen, the consensus of imagery throughout the Bible portrays Jesus entering the city in a similar, but far more glorious manner, as the first triumphal entry (Mt 21:1–11, Mk 11:1–11, Lk 19:28–44, and Jn 12:12–19).

PETRA

Some others who have taken note of the many Desert Prophecies throughout Scripture have suggested that Jesus will return to the region of Petra in the modern day Hashemite kingdom of Jordan. This position is argued for by Arnold Fruchtenbaum in his impressive volume *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, as well as by Noah W. Hutchings in his book *Petra in History and Prophecy*,¹ and Robert Van Kampen in his monumental work *The Sign of Christ's Coming and the End of the Age*.² According to Van Kampen, “Immediately after the close of the seventieth week, Christ will physically come back to the earth—specifically to Edom.”³ Similarly, Fruchtenbaum states, “Four key passages pinpoint the place of the Second Coming at Bozrah.”⁴ The passages Fruchtenbaum cites are Isaiah 34 and 63, as well as Habakkuk 3:3 and Micah 2:12–13. The first two texts speak of the Lord executing a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Habakkuk and Micah both speak of the Lord marching through this region. Obviously, I wholeheartedly agree that Jesus will march through this region and slaughter many of His enemies in the course of doing so. Much of this book has argued for this. That said, none of these passages actually state or even strongly imply that this is where Jesus necessarily begins His journey. Fruchtenbaum wisely concludes his survey with a note of caution:

It is not really certain that these verses are speaking of the Second Coming, but if so (and the author leans toward this position with caution), God is seen as coming from Mount Seir and from the

land of Edom. Mount Seir is the mountain range of southern Jordan in which the city of Bozrah is located.⁵

As we've demonstrated, the consensus of Scripture points to Jesus beginning His journey, not in Edom, but further south, at Mount Sinai, or perhaps even all the way back in Egypt. Let's examine the biblical evidence for these two views.

MOUNT SINAI

One of the primary themes of this book has been to highlight the repeated emphasis throughout the prophetic Scriptures on the narrative of Jesus' great march from the south when He returns. Peters argues that while the return of Jesus unfolds in phases, He first comes visibly with His saints to Mount Sinai:

A comparison of Scripture shows, that when the saints are removed by the power of resurrection and translation, they do not remain in "the air," but are conveyed to Mt. Sinai, where, as at the establishment of the Theocracy, positions are assigned, the kingship and priesthood inaugurated, the instructions given preparatory to the ushering in of "the dispensation of the fulness of times."⁶

We have examined, somewhat exhaustively, several texts that speak of God coming from Sinai and will not repeat that discussion here. That said, none of the Desert Prophecies, (barring 1 Enoch), state explicitly that Jesus will actually return first to Mount Sinai. It is most certainly implied, however, that He does come to Edom from Sinai. So at the very least, we must acknowledge that He certainly passes through the region of Sinai. We know this, first, because all of the Desert Prophecies look back to Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to the promised land as a foreshadow of the Lord's coming. Even as the ark of the covenant, representing YHVH's presence, began at Sinai and finally arrived in Jerusalem, so do the

Scriptures cast Jesus' victory march. Second, we know this because the Blessing of Moses states outright that God comes "from Sinai." Likewise, David associates Sinai with Jesus' Great Procession in Psalm 68. Habakkuk also refers to the regions of Midian and Cushan (both closely associated with the region of Sinai) trembling when Jesus returns. So it is fair to say that Jesus doesn't begin in Edom but comes first from even further south at Mount Sinai. Again, though, is this where He actually descends, as Peters argues and as 1 Enoch seems to state outright? If we are to be consistent, we must acknowledge that the Scriptures never actually say this. Adding further doubt to this position, in fact, are several passages, almost always overlooked, that seem to point to Jesus' victorious march beginning all the way back in Egypt. Let's look at those.

EGYPT

A final view holds that when Jesus returns, He will not simply trace the route made by the ark of the covenant from Sinai to Jerusalem but will essentially retrace the whole Exodus, specifically beginning in Egypt. As the greater Moses, Jesus will literally lead many of His people out of Egypt and continue to free His people as He retraces much of the route of the first Exodus. While this concept is, no doubt, entirely new to most, rest assured there is actually some very solid scriptural support for this view. In a book that I highly recommend, *The Passover King*, author Travis Snow presents an excellent case in favor of this view.⁷ The arguments for Jesus' return to Egypt are as follows: First, there is evidence that during the great tribulation, many of those in Israel who flee will go to Egypt. Moses references this when he described the various calamities that Israel will face for disobedience to the covenant: "The LORD will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the way about which I spoke to you, 'You will never see it again!' And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer" (Dt 28:68). Again, the context of this are the last-days

chastisement that will befall Israel just before Jesus returns. Second, there is Scripture that states outright that Jesus will actually return to Egypt. Using the motif of God coming on the clouds, Isaiah declares: “Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt” (19:1a). While some might be tempted to disregard such a passage as mere poetry describing God’s judgments, the second part of the verse states that He will literally and physically be present in Egypt: “The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them” (v. 1b). In Numbers 24, the prophecy of Balaam seems to indicate that the “seed” and “king” of Israel, (two of the most common motifs for the Messiah), will come out of Egypt, specifically to devour and crush those nations adversarial to Him, His kingdom, and His people:

How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
 Your dwellings, O Israel!
 Like valleys that stretch out,
 Like gardens beside the river,
 Like aloes planted by the LORD,
 Like cedars beside the waters.
 Water will flow from his buckets,
And his seed will be by many waters,
 And his king shall be higher than Agag (“Gog” in the LXX)
And his kingdom shall be exalted.
God brings him out of Egypt,
 He is for him like the horns of the wild ox.
 He will devour the nations who are his adversaries,
 And will crush their bones in pieces,
 And shatter them with his arrows. (Nm 24:7–8, italics mine)

In the Septuagint, verse 7 actually reads: “A man will come forth from his seed and prevail over many peoples, and he will be raised up higher than the kingdom of Gog, and his kingdom will increase.”⁸ That this king is the one who defeats Gog would certainly identify Him as the Messiah. As we’ve discussed numerous times, the theme

of the Messiah crushing His enemies when He returns is perhaps one of the most consistently used prophetic motifs associated with the Messiah throughout the Scriptures. Here, the Crushing One comes from out of Egypt. As Snow states, “[W]hen Jesus proceeds out of Egypt, He will in effect retrace the path of Israel’s original Exodus, and fight a series of battles against the Middle Eastern nations that are situated en route to Israel.”⁹ Finally, and on a truly fascinating note, there are actually some passages that seem to indicate that when Jesus returns, He will actually part the Red Sea, *again*. This would, of course, require Him to begin in Egypt and proceed onward toward Mount Sinai. In Isaiah 10, the prophet speaks of the Lord’s judgment against the Assyrian. The larger context of the passage is the final chastisement and redemption of Israel. The “Assyrian” here is therefore a reference to the Antichrist.

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, “O My people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian who strikes you with the rod and lifts up his staff against you, the way Egypt did. For in a very little while My indignation against you will be spent and My anger will be directed to their destruction.” The LORD of hosts will arouse a scourge against him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb. (Isaiah 10:24–25)

Hippolytus of Rome, one of the most important theologians of the early church, in his second century treatise, *On Christ and the Antichrist*, interpreted this passage as referring to “no one else but that tyrant, and shameless one, and adversary of God.”¹⁰ Yet what does Isaiah say of the Lord at that time? “His staff will be over the sea and He will lift it up the way He did in Egypt” (v. 26). *This is fascinating!* In the same way that Moses extended his staff and the Red Sea was split, so does it state here that Jesus, the prophet greater than Moses (Dt 18), will similarly lift His staff over the sea. In the next chapter, the same theme is reiterated. The chapter begins by describing the second, greater Exodus: “[I]t will happen on that day

that the LORD will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea” (11:11). The “dispersed of Judah” will be regathered “from the four corners of the earth” (v. 12). All of this will take place when Jesus returns. The chapter concludes, however, with a very shocking statement. During the final period of redemption,

the LORD will utterly destroy
 The tongue of the Sea of Egypt;
 And He will wave His hand over the River
 With His scorching wind;
 And He will strike it into seven streams
 And make men walk over dry-shod. (Isaiah 11:15)

The tongue of the sea of Egypt is a reference to the Red Sea, through which the Israelites passed so long ago. Once more, it will be struck and split. The Israelites are described as walking over the sea as on dry land! Similarly, the prophet Habakkuk, in his great Desert Prophecy, describes Jesus during the great march through the desert, and says this: “You trampled on the sea with Your horses, on the surge of many waters” (Hab 3:15). The language of trampling the seas with His horses would seem to speak of Him splitting the sea yet again. Finally, the prophet Zechariah adds his voice. Once again, the context of the prophecy is the Lord bringing His people back from all over the world: “I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria” (10:10). Then He declares:

And they will pass through the sea of distress
 And He will strike the waves in the sea,
 So that all the depths of the Nile will dry up;
 And the pride of Assyria will be brought down
 And the scepter of Egypt will depart. (Zechariah 10:10–11)

Thus, the concept of the Lord splitting the Red Sea yet again, specifically in the context of the final redemption of Israel, is actually a theme that pops up multiple times throughout the prophets. All things considered, the view that Jesus will return to Egypt and retrace the entirety of the Exodus route enjoys some very significant scriptural support. Of the various positions, this view, although almost never considered by students of Scripture, seems to be the most biblical view. Jesus, as the greater Moses, and the Glory of God in the flesh, will execute the greater Exodus march from Egypt, through the Red Sea, to Mount Sinai, and proceed all the way to Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION

We conclude by emphasizing that we most certainly need not be overly dogmatic on this matter. Our purpose here is not to get too caught up in what might easily become eschatological trivia. Our purpose instead should be to peer into the mystery of what the Scriptures have to say about this great event and simply revel in the beauty of the story of Jesus' triumphant return. It is most certainly not an issue to argue over. Rather, it is an issue to get thrilled about. It is for this reason that the final chapter will walk through the great march in chronological order, hoping to capture, in story form, the glorious, majestic, triumphant return of Jesus the Messiah.

THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF JESUS

Having presented the biblical case for the Messiah's victorious procession when He returns, we'll now attempt to synthesize the Scriptures and detail a loose chronological overview of events. Our method will be to simply highlight many of the primary motifs, terms, and themes that the Scriptures repeatedly use to describe His victorious return. Passages or verses that feature the same motifs and themes will be grouped together. To be very clear, we are sure to miss many passages, and by no means is this intended to be exhaustive. When any particular text features more than one motif or theme, it may be cited more than once. The purpose of these next three chapters is, thus, to serve both as an inspiration and as a resource for further study. It is not a comprehensive chronology of every detail associated with His return. We are not, for example, seeking to synthesize this view with a highly detailed or overly dogmatic chronology of the seals, trumpets, and bowls of Revelation. Nor is this an effort to coordinate the events of His return with the various biblical holy days, feasts, fasts, and festivals. Again, our purpose is to give a broad overview of the primary phases of Jesus' glorious procession to Jerusalem.

THE LAST TRUMPET

The pattern that was first established during the great theophany at Mount Sinai is that God appears amidst the sounding of a great

trumpet (*italics mine* in the following Scripture passages):

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and *a very loud trumpet sound*, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. . . . Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. *When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder*, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. (Exodus 19:16, 18–20)

It will come about also in that day that *a great trumpet will be blown*, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Isaiah 27:13)

Then the LORD will appear over them,
And His arrow will go forth like lightning;
And the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet,
And will march in the storm winds of the south. (Zechariah 9:14)

And He will send forth His angels *with a great trumpet* and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

[I]n a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound*, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:52)

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel *and with the trumpet of God*, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

[B]ut that in *the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel*, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. (Revelation 10:7 ESV)

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15 ESV)

COMING ON THE CLOUDS

When Jesus returns, He will come riding on the clouds. Once more, the pattern for this began during the Exodus:

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and *a thick cloud upon the mountain* and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (Exodus 19:16–17)

With the theophany at Sinai serving as a powerful foreshadowing, Moses and the prophets then began to envision God coming on the clouds in the future, to save His people:

There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,
who rides across the heavens to help you
and on the clouds in his majesty. (Deuteronomy 33:26)

LORD, when You went out from Seir,
When You marched from the field of Edom,
The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,
Even the clouds dripped water.
The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD,
This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.
(Judges 5:4-5)

He bowed the heavens also, and came down
 With thick darkness under His feet.
And He rode on a cherub and flew;
 And He appeared on the wings of the wind.
And He made darkness canopies around Him,
 A mass of waters, *thick clouds of the sky*. (2 Samuel 22:10–12;
 Ps 18:9)

Sing to God! Sing praises to his name!
Exalt the one who rides on the clouds!
For the LORD is his name!
Rejoice before him! (Psalm 68:4 NET)

Blow a trumpet in Zion,
 And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 For the day of the LORD is coming;
Surely it is near,
 A day of darkness and gloom,
 A day of clouds and thick darkness. (Joel 2:1–2)

Near is the great day of the LORD,
 Near and coming very quickly;
Listen, the day of the LORD!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly.
 A day of wrath is that day,
 A day of trouble and distress,
 A day of destruction and desolation,
 A day of darkness and gloom,
 A day of clouds and thick darkness. (Zephaniah 1:14–15)

I saw in the night visions,
 and behold, with the clouds of heaven
 there came one like a son of man,
 and he came to the Ancient of Days
 and was presented before him. (Daniel 7:13)

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man *coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory*. (Matthew 24:30)

Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, *and coming on the clouds of heaven*.” (Matthew 26:64)

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and *a cloud received Him out of their sight*. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven*.” (Acts 1:9–11)

Behold, *He is coming with the clouds*, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. (Revelation 1:7)

Then I looked, and behold, *a white cloud*, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. (Revelation 14:14)

WITH MYRIADS OF HIS HOLY ONES

The armies of heaven, comprised of myriads of angels, together with the resurrected believers, will be with Him:

The LORD came from Sinai,
 And dawned on them from Seir;
 He shone forth from Mount Paran,
 And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones (Deuteronomy 33:1–2)

The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands;
The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness. (Psalm 68:17)

Then the LORD, my God, will come, *and all the holy ones with Him!* (Zechariah 14:5)

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father *with His angels*, and will then repay every man according to his deeds. (Matthew 16:27)

And *he will send his angels* with a loud trumpet call, *and they will gather his elect* from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, *and all the angels with Him*, then He will sit on His glorious throne. (Matthew 25:31)

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father *with the holy angels*. (Mark 8:38)

[I]n a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, *the dead will be raised imperishable*, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:52)

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, *then you also will be revealed with Him in glory*. (Colossians 3:4)

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, *and the dead in Christ will rise first*. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when *the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.* (2 Thessalonians 1:6–7)

It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came *with many thousands of His holy ones.* (Jude 14)

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness *He judges and wages war.* His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. *And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.* . . . And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against *His army.* (Revelation 19:11–14,19)

THE LORD COMES TO EGYPT

As we discussed in chapter 27, it seems quite likely that Jesus will first return to Egypt:

Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt;
The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence,
And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them. (Isaiah 19:1)

Jesus will then lead a victorious procession of His people, out of Egypt, and actually split the Red Sea once again:

How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel! . . .
Water will flow from his buckets,
And his seed will be by many waters,
And his king shall be higher than Agag (“Gog” in the LXX)
And his kingdom shall be exalted.
God brings him out of Egypt,
He is for him like the horns of the wild ox.
He will devour the nations who are his adversaries,
And will crush their bones in pieces,
And shatter them with his arrows. (Numbers 24:5, 7–8)

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, “O My people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian who strikes you with the rod and lifts up his staff against you, the way Egypt did. For in a very little while My indignation against you will be spent and My anger will be directed to their destruction.” The LORD of hosts will arouse a scourge against him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and His staff will be over the sea and He will lift it up the way He did in Egypt. (Isaiah 10:24–26)

And the LORD will utterly destroy
The tongue of the Sea of Egypt;
And He will wave His hand over the River
With His scorching wind;
And He will strike it into seven streams
And make men walk over dry-shod. (Isaiah 11:15)

You trampled on the sea with Your horses, on the surge of many waters. (Habakkuk 3:15).

I will bring them back from the land of Egypt,
And gather them from Assyria,
And they will pass through the sea of distress

*And He will strike the waves in the sea,
 So that all the depths of the Nile will dry up;
 And the pride of Assyria will be brought down
 And the scepter of Egypt will depart. (Zechariah 10:10–11)*

THE LORD COMES FROM SINAI

The great victory procession will then proceed onward to Mount Sinai, up through Arabia and Edom, toward Jerusalem:

The LORD came from Sinai,
*And dawned on them from Seir;
 He shone forth from Mount Paran,*
 And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones;
 At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.
 Indeed, He loves the people;
 All Your holy ones are in Your hand,
 And they followed in Your steps;
 Everyone receives of Your words. (Deuteronomy 33:2–3)

LORD, when You went out from Seir,
When You marched from the field of Edom,
 The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,
 Even the clouds dripped water.
 The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD,
 This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.
 (Judges 5:4–5)

*Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered,
 And let those who hate Him flee before Him. . . .
 Sing to God, sing praises to His name;
 Lift up a song for Him who rides through the deserts,
 Whose name is the LORD, and exult before Him. . . .
 He leads out the prisoners into prosperity,
 Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.
 O God, when You went forth before Your people,
 When You marched through the wilderness,
 Selah.*

The earth quaked;
The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God;
Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
You shed abroad a plentiful rain, O God;
You confirmed Your inheritance when it was parched.
Your creatures settled in it;
You provided in Your goodness for the poor, O God.
The Lord gives the command;
The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host:
 “Kings of armies flee, they flee,
And she who remains at home will divide the spoil!” . . .
*The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands;
The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.
You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives;
You have received gifts among men,*
 Even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell
 there.
Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden,
 The God who is our salvation.
Selah.
God is to us a God of deliverances;
And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death.
Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies,
 The hairy crown of him who goes on in his guilty deeds.
The Lord said, “I will bring them back from Bashan.
I will bring them back from the depths of the sea;
That your foot may shatter them in blood,
 The tongue of your dogs may have its portion from your
 enemies.”
*They have seen Your procession, O God,
The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.*
The singers went on, the musicians after them,
 In the midst of the maidens beating tambourines.
Bless God in the congregations,
 Even the LORD, you who are of the fountain of Israel.
There is Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them,
 The princes of Judah in their throng,
 The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.
Your God has commanded your strength;

Show Yourself strong, O God, who have acted on our behalf.

Because of Your temple at Jerusalem

Kings will bring gifts to You.

Rebuke the beasts in the reeds,

The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,

Trampling under foot the pieces of silver;

He has scattered the peoples who delight in war.

Envoys will come out of Egypt;

Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth,

Sing praises to the Lord,

Selah.

To Him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times;

Behold, He speaks forth with His voice, a mighty voice.

Ascribe strength to God;

His majesty is over Israel

And His strength is in the skies.

O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary.

The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people.

Blessed be God! (Psalm 68:1,4, 6-12, 17-35)

God comes from Teman,

And the Holy One from Mount Paran.

Selah.

His splendor covers the heavens,

And the earth is full of His praise.

His radiance is like the sunlight;

He has rays flashing from His hand,

And there is the hiding of His power.

Before Him goes pestilence,

And plague comes after Him.

He stood and surveyed the earth;

He looked and startled the nations.

Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,

The ancient hills collapsed.

His ways are everlasting.

I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,

The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.
(Habakkuk 3:3–7)

The LORD will go forth like a warrior,
He will arouse His zeal like a man of war.
He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry.
He will prevail against His enemies. (Isaiah 42:13).

Who is this who comes from Edom,
With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah,
This One who is majestic in His apparel,
Marching in the greatness of His strength?
“It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”
Why is Your apparel red,
And Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press?
“I have trodden the wine trough alone,
And from the peoples there was no man with Me.
I also trod them in My anger
And trampled them in My wrath;
And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments,
And I stained all My raiment.
For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
And My year of redemption has come.
I looked, and there was no one to help,
And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold;
So My own arm brought salvation to Me,
And My wrath upheld Me.
I trod down the peoples in My anger
And made them drunk in My wrath,
And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.” (Isaiah 63:1–6)

For behold, the LORD will come in fire
And His chariots like the whirlwind,
To render His anger with fury,
And His rebuke with flames of fire.
For the LORD will execute judgment by fire
And by His sword on all flesh,
And those slain by the LORD will be many. (Isaiah 66:15–16)

Then the LORD will appear over them,
 And His arrow will go forth like lightning;
 And the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet,
 And will march in the storm winds of the south.
 (Zechariah 9:14)

Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. (Jude 14–15)

THE ONE THEY HAVE PIERCED

As Jesus is actively engaged in literally saving His people, Israel will corporately “look upon” Him, acknowledging His true identity as YHVH, the promised deliverer. All Israel will thus repent of their former unbelief and trust in YHVH forever:

Zion will be redeemed with justice and her repentant ones with righteousness. (Isaiah 1:27)

And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, every family by itself. (Zechariah 12:9–12)

As Jesus Himself declared, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. . . . Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed” (Matthew 21:42a, 44 ESV).

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel *until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,*

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,

He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.”

“*This is My covenant with them,*

When I take away their sins.” (Romans 11:25–27)

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. (Revelation 1:7)

THE REMNANT

Throughout the various prophetic texts that describe God coming to save His people, the language used consistently refers to the surviving remnant:

The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem will go forth *a remnant, and out of Mount Zion survivors*. The zeal of the LORD will perform this. (2 Kings 19:30–31)

In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of *the survivors of Israel*. It will come about that *he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem* will be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. (Isaiah 4:2–3)

Now in that day *the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped*, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.
 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea,
Only a remnant within them will return;
 A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness.
 (Isaiah 10:20–22)

And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the
 LORD
 Will be delivered;
 For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
There will be those who escape,
 As the LORD has said,
 Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:32)

But I will leave among you
 A humble and lowly people,
 And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.
 The remnant of Israel will do no wrong
 And tell no lies,
 Nor will a deceitful tongue
 Be found in their mouths;
 For they will feed and lie down
 With no one to make them tremble. (Zephaniah 3:12–13)

“At that time,” declares the LORD, “I will be the God of all the
 families of Israel, and they shall be My people.”
 Thus says the LORD,
 “The people who survived the sword
 Found grace in the wilderness—
 Israel, when it went to find its rest.” (Jeremiah 31:1–2)

But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape,
 And it will be holy.
 And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions. (Obadiah
 17)

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, *it is the remnant that will be saved.*” (Romans 9:27)

In similar fashion, the New Testament says that Jesus will come back to deliver and save His all of His people from their enemies and persecutors. He will reward the righteous, while executing judgment against the wicked. Within the New Testament context, the righteous includes all faithful believers, whether Jew or Gentile:

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and *will then repay every man according to his deeds.* (Matthew 16:27)

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8)

He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, *waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.* (Hebrews 10:12–13)

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O LORD, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Revelation 6:9–11)

And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, *and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.*” (Revelation 11:16–18)

“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.” (Revelation 19:1–2)

A PROCESSION OF SINGING

Perhaps one of the most moving and thrilling features of the victory march are the repeated descriptions of actual musicians and a mighty host of singers going before and following after the vast procession. They are consistently described as singing, rejoicing, and shouting aloud, as they cannot contain their joy. There are several reasons to believe that among the songs sung will be “the Psalms of Ascent” normally sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the three annual pilgrimage festivals.

God has ascended with a shout,
 The LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises;
Sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the King of all the earth;
Sing praises with a skillful psalm.
 God reigns over the nations,
 God sits on His holy throne. (Psalm 47:5–8)

God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. (Psalm 68:6
NIV)

They have seen Your procession, O God,
The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.
The singers went on, the musicians after them,
In the midst of the maidens beating tambourines. (Psalm
68:24–25)

And the ransomed of the LORD will return
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
With everlasting joy upon their heads.
They will find gladness and joy,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 35:10)

Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away His judgments against you,
He has cleared away your enemies. (Zephaniah 3:14–15a)

THE WRATH OF GOD

As Jesus marches forward, the wrath of God—great storms, heavy rain, hail, earthquakes, as well as pestilence and fire—will be poured out upon the enemies of God. The wrath of God is poured out from heaven but also by Jesus personally:

At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.
(Deuteronomy 33:2)

Upon the wicked He will rain snares;
 Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their
 cup. (Psalm 11:6)

The earth quaked;
The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God;
 Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
 (Psalm 68:8)

His radiance is like the sunlight;
He has rays flashing from His hand,
And there is the hiding of His power.
Before Him goes pestilence,
And plague comes after Him.
 He stood and surveyed the earth;
 He looked and startled the nations.
Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,
The ancient hills collapsed.
 His ways are everlasting.
 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,
 The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.
 Did the LORD rage against the rivers,
 Or was Your anger against the rivers,
 Or was Your wrath against the sea,
 That You rode on Your horses,
 On Your chariots of salvation?
Your bow was made bare,
The rods of chastisement were sworn.
 Selah.
You cleaved the earth with rivers.
The mountains saw You and quaked;
The downpour of waters swept by.
The deep uttered forth its voice,
It lifted high its hands.
Sun and moon stood in their places;
They went away at the light of Your arrows,
At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.
In indignation You marched through the earth;
 In anger You trampled the nations. (Habakkuk 3:4–12)

“In My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse and every wall will fall to the ground. I will call for a sword against him on all My mountains,” declares the Lord GOD. “Every man’s sword will be against his brother. With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire and brimstone.” (Ezekiel 38:19–22)

And I will send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 39:6)

Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth. (Zechariah 14:12)

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.” *And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.* The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, *to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.* And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. *And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.* (Revelation 16:17–21)

JESUS THE WARRIOR

Throughout His victory march, Jesus will slay His enemies as He encounters them. This will continue throughout the procession but will culminate in Jerusalem, where the Antichrist, the False Prophet, and the bulk of their armies will be destroyed. Again, the theme of the Lord as warrior began during the Exodus:

Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD,
and said,

“I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;
The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.

The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
This is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father’s God, and I will extol Him.

The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is His name.” (Exodus 15:1–3)

After the Exodus, this theme would feature prominently through many of the Lord’s own descriptions of Himself, as well as the prophecies concerning His future salvation:

Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you,
a people saved by the LORD, *the shield of your help,*
and the sword of your triumph!

Your enemies shall come fawning to you,
and you shall tread upon their backs.

(Deuteronomy 33:29 ESV)

Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate Him flee before Him.

As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;

As wax melts before the fire,

So let the wicked perish before God. . . .

God is to us a God of deliverances;

And to God the Lord belong escapes from death.

Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies,

The hairy crown of him who goes on in his guilty deeds.

The Lord said, "I will bring them back from Bashan.

I will bring them back from the depths of the sea;

That your foot may shatter them in blood,

The tongue of your dogs may have its portion from your enemies.

Rebuke the beasts in the reeds,

The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,

Trampling under foot the pieces of silver;

He has scattered the peoples who delight in war. (Psalm 68:1–2,

20–23, 30)

He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.

He will judge among the nations,

He will fill them with corpses,

He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

(Psalm 110:5–6)

In indignation You marched through the earth;

In anger You trampled the nations.

You went forth for the salvation of Your people,

For the salvation of Your anointed.

You struck the head of the house of the evil

To lay him open from thigh to neck.

Selah.

You pierced with his own spears

The head of his throngs.

They stormed in to scatter us;

Their exultation was like those

Who devour the oppressed in secret. (Habakkuk 3:12–14)

Say to those with anxious heart,

"Take courage, fear not.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance;

The recompense of God will come,

But He will save you." (Isaiah 35:4)

Who is this who comes from Edom,
 With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah,
 This One who is majestic in His apparel,
 Marching in the greatness of His strength?
"It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save."
 Why is Your apparel red,
 And Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press?
*"I have trodden the wine trough alone,
 And from the peoples there was no man with Me.
 I also trod them in My anger
 And trampled them in My wrath;
 And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments,
 And I stained all My raiment.
 For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
 And My year of redemption has come.*
 I looked, and there was no one to help,
 And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold;
 So My own arm brought salvation to Me,
 And My wrath upheld Me.
*I trod down the peoples in My anger
 And made them drunk in My wrath,
 And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."* (Isaiah 63:1–6)

In that day it will be said to Jerusalem:
 "Do not be afraid, O Zion;
 Do not let your hands fall limp.
 The LORD your God is in your midst,
 A victorious warrior." (Zephaniah 3:16-17)

On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack
 Jerusalem. (Zechariah 12:9)

Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as
 He fights in the day of battle. (Zechariah 14:3)

And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:20–21)

MY PEOPLE ISRAEL

It is interesting to note that one of the most repeated reasons given as to why Jesus will judge the nations is specifically because of their mistreatment of His people, Israel:

*Because of violence to your brother Jacob,
You will be covered with shame,
And you will be cut off forever.*

On the day that you stood aloof,
On the day that strangers carried off his wealth,
And foreigners entered his gate
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
You too were as one of them. . . .

For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations.

As you have done, it will be done to you.

Your dealings will return on your own head.

Because just as you drank on My holy mountain,

All the nations will drink continually.

They will drink and swallow

And become as if they had never existed.

(Obadiah 10–11, 15–16)

“For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head. (Obadiah 15)

I will gather all the nations

And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.

Then I will enter into judgment with them there

On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel,

Whom they have scattered among the nations;
And they have divided up My land. (Joel 3:2)

For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance,
The year of recompense for the cause of Zion. (Isaiah 34:8)

*For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish,
And the nations will be utterly ruined.*

The glory of Lebanon will come to you,
The juniper, the box tree and the cypress together,
To beautify the place of My sanctuary;

And I shall make the place of My feet glorious.

*The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you,
And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of
your feet;*

And they will call you the city of the LORD,
The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 60:12–14)

HE SETS THE PRISONERS FREE

As Jesus and His armies march toward Israel, they will also free a mighty host of those from among Israel who had been prisoners of war:

You will arise and have compassion on Zion;
For it is time to be gracious to her,
For the appointed time has come . . .
For He looked down from His holy height;
From heaven the LORD gazed upon the earth,
*To hear the groaning of the prisoner,
To set free those who were doomed to death,*
That men may tell of the name of the LORD in Zion
And His praise in Jerusalem,
When the peoples are gathered together,
And the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. (Psalm 102:13, 19–22)

How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
Whose hope is in the LORD his God,

Who made heaven and earth,
The sea and all that is in them;
Who keeps faith forever;
Who executes justice for the oppressed;
Who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets the prisoners free. (Psalm 146:5–7)

For behold, in those days and at that time,
When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem . . .
(Joel 3:1 NKJV)

For the LORD their God will intervene for them,
And return their captives. (Zephaniah 2:7 NKJV)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;
To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn . . . (Isaiah 61:1–2)

“For behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah,” says the LORD. “And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.” (Jeremiah 30:3 NKJV)

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey... He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. (Zechariah 9:9-11)

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “*Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name—after they have borne their shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, when they dwelt safely in their own land and no one made them afraid. When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer.*” (Ezekiel 39:25–28 NKJV)

[A]nd they will fall by the edge of the sword, *and will be led captive into all the nations;* and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)

THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

As Jesus reaches Jerusalem, “the ultimate triumphal entry” into the city will ensue. In similar fashion to the first triumphal entry, the singing, worship, and jubilant celebration will reach a glorious crescendo as the mighty procession enters Zion. The gates of Jerusalem will open for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah:

Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! (Zechariah 14:5b)

Lift up your heads, O gates,
 And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
 That the King of glory may come in!
 Who is the King of glory?
 The LORD strong and mighty,
 The LORD mighty in battle.
 Lift up your heads, O gates,
 And lift them up, O ancient doors,
 That the King of glory may come in!

Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
He is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:7–10)

Open to me the gates of righteousness;
I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD.
This is the gate of the LORD;
The righteous will enter through it.
I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me,
And You have become my salvation. (Psalm 118:19–21)

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
“We have a strong city;
He sets up walls and ramparts for security.
Open the gates, that the righteous nation may enter,
The one that remains faithful.” (Isaiah 26:1–2)

“For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you
say, ‘*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!*’ ”
(Matthew 23:39)

ENTHRONEMENT OF THE DAVIDIC KING

After arriving in Jerusalem, the glorious ceremonies fulfilling thousands of years of ancient prophecies, will begin. Jesus will take His place as the rightful King Messiah on the throne of His father David (italics mine):

The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, *I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. . . . Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.* (2 Samuel 7:12–16)

Why are the nations in an uproar
 And the peoples devising a vain thing?
 The kings of the earth take their stand
 And the rulers take counsel together
 Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
 “Let us tear their fetters apart
 And cast away their cords from us!”
 He who sits in the heavens laughs,
 The LORD scoffs at them.
 Then He will speak to them in His anger
 And terrify them in His fury, saying,
 “But as for Me, I have installed My King
 Upon Zion, My holy mountain.” (Psalm 2:1–6)

“Sit at My right hand
 Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”
 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion,
 saying,
 “Rule in the midst of Your enemies.” (Psalm 110:1b–2)

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
 And the government will rest on His shoulders;
 And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of
 peace,
*On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
 From then on and forevermore.*
 The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6–7)

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.*” (Luke 1:30–33)

And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, *in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne*, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28)

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, *then He will sit on His glorious throne*. (Matthew 25:31)

But of the Son He says,
“*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,*
And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.”
(Hebrews 1:8)

THE LORD DWELLS IN ZION

Finally, after Jesus has been enthroned as King in Jerusalem, then it will be said that the Lord dwells in Zion. The “tabernacle” or dwelling place of God will now be with men. The righteous will have finally inherited for which they had long awaited:

Now it will come about that
In the last days
The mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,
And will be raised above the hills;
And all the nations will stream to it.
And many peoples will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2–3)

Then you will know that I am the LORD your God,
Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain.
So Jerusalem will be holy,

And strangers will pass through it no more. . . .
 But Judah will be inhabited forever
 And Jerusalem for all generations.
 And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged,
 For the LORD dwells in Zion. (Joel 3:17, 20–21)

The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
 You will fear disaster no more. (Zephaniah 3:15)

Thus says the LORD, “*I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.* Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.” (Zechariah 8:3)

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that *they are seeking a country of their own.* (Hebrews 11:13–14)

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and *He will dwell among them,* and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.” (Revelation 21:3)

THE GENTILES REPENT

During this time, the children and surviving remnant of the Gentile nations will come to repent and serve Israel and Jesus her king:

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David,
 And wall up its breaches;
 I will also raise up its ruins
 And rebuild it as in the days of old;
That they may possess the remnant of Edom
 And all the nations who are called by My name,”
 Declares the LORD who does this. (Amos 9:11–12)

The remnant of My people will plunder them
And the remainder of My nation will inherit them.
(Zephaniah 2:9)

Nations will come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.
Lift up your eyes round about and see;
They all gather together, they come to you.
Your sons will come from afar,
And your daughters will be carried in the arms.
Then you will see and be radiant,
And your heart will thrill and rejoice;
Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you,
The wealth of the nations will come to you. . . .
Foreigners will build up your walls,
And their kings will minister to you;
For in My wrath I struck you,
And in My favor I have had compassion on you.
Your gates will be open continually;
They will not be closed day or night,
So that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations,
With their kings led in procession.
For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will
perish,
And the nations will be utterly ruined.
The glory of Lebanon will come to you,
The juniper, the box tree and the cypress together,
To beautify the place of My sanctuary;
And I shall make the place of My feet glorious.
The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you,
And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the
soles of your feet;
And they will call you the city of the LORD,
The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 60:3–5,10–14)

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations
that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to wor-
ship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of
Booths. (Zechariah 14:16)

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. (Revelation 21:24)

THE GLOBAL REGATHERING

Whereas Jesus will have saved many Jews during His victorious march, after He arrives in Jerusalem, the global regathering will continue. The remnant of His people, who had been scattered all over the world, will be brought back to the land:

They will walk after the LORD,
 He will roar like a lion;
 Indeed He will roar
 And His sons will come trembling from the west.
*They will come trembling like birds from Egypt
 And like doves from the land of Assyria;*
 And I will settle them in their houses, declares the LORD. (Hosea 11:10–11)

*Then it will happen on that day that the Lord
 Will again recover the second time with His hand
 The remnant of His people, who will remain,
 From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath,
 And from the islands of the sea.
 And He will lift up a standard for the nations
 And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
 And will gather the dispersed of Judah
 From the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah 11:11–12)*

In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Isaiah 27:12–13)

Do not fear, for I am with you;
*I will bring your offspring from the east,
And gather you from the west.
I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'*
*Bring My sons from afar
And My daughters from the ends of the earth,
Everyone who is called by My name,
And whom I have created for My glory,
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.*" (Isaiah
43:5–7)

I will make all My mountains a road,
And My highways will be raised up.
*Behold, these will come from afar;
And lo, these will come from the north and from the west,
And these from the land of Sinim.* (Isaiah 49:11–12)

Lift up your eyes round about and see;
They all gather together, they come to you.
*Your sons will come from afar,
And your daughters will be carried in the arms.* (Isaiah 60:4)

In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance. (Jeremiah 3:18)

“Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘*As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.*’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.” (Jeremiah 16:14–15; cf. 23:7–8)

*Behold, I am bringing them from the north country,
 And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth,
 Among them the blind and the lame,
 The woman with child and she who is in labor with child,
 together;
 A great company, they will return here.
 With weeping they will come,
 And by supplication I will lead them;
 I will make them walk by streams of waters. (Jeremiah 31:8–9)*

*I will strengthen the house of Judah,
 And I will save the house of Joseph,
 And I will bring them back. . . .
 I will whistle for them to gather them together,
 For I have redeemed them;
 And they will be as numerous as they were before.
 When I scatter them among the peoples,
 They will remember Me in far countries,
 And they with their children will live and come back.
 I will bring them back from the land of Egypt
 And gather them from Assyria;
 And I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon
 Until no room can be found for them. (Zechariah 10:6, 8–10)*

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

Then, with His people having been regathered back to the holy city, the great wedding feast will commence:

In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, *then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke,*

and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy (chuppah). There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain. (Isaiah 4:2–6)

The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;

A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,

And refined, aged wine.

And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,

Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.

He will swallow up death for all time,

And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,

And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;

For the LORD has spoken.

And it will be said in that day,

“Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us.

This is the LORD for whom we have waited;

Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.” (Isaiah 25:6–9)

“For your husband is your Maker,

Whose name is the LORD of hosts;

And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,

Who is called the God of all the earth.

For the LORD has called you,

Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,

Even like a wife of one’s youth when she is rejected,”

Says your God.

“For a brief moment I forsook you,

But with great compassion I will gather you.

In an outburst of anger

I hid My face from you for a moment,

But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,”

Says the LORD your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:5–8)

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
 And for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet,
 Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness,
 And her salvation like a torch that is burning.
 The nations will see your righteousness,
 And all kings your glory;
 And you will be called by a new name
 Which the mouth of the LORD will designate.
 You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
 And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
 It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken,"
 Nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate";
 But you will be called, "My delight is in her,"
 And your land, "Married";
 For the LORD delights in you,
 And to Him your land will be married.
 For as a young man marries a virgin,
 So your sons will marry you;
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
 So your God will rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:1–5)

"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 8:11, cf. Luke 13:29)

"For the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." (Revelation 19:7–9)

In such a stunning description, Jesus actually told His disciples, that at the wedding feast, He will personally serve those who eagerly and faithfully awaited His return:

Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. *Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast*, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, *that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them.* (Luke 12:35–37).

THE BRIDEGROOM REJOICES

As beautiful as it is to see the abundance of singing, as the mighty throng enters Jerusalem, Jesus Himself will also sing and rejoice over His people. This is such a wonderful thing to ponder. For those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, we will actually hear, with our ears, in our glorified resurrected bodies, the sound of Jesus singing joyfully over us, His people (*italics mine*):

The nations will see your righteousness,
And all kings your glory;
And you will be called by a new name
Which the mouth of the LORD will designate.
You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken,"
Nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate";
But you will be called, "My delight is in her,"
And your land, "Married";
For the LORD delights in you,
And to Him your land will be married.
For as a young man marries a virgin,
So your sons will marry you;
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So your God will rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:2–5)

The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17 NIV)

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
 For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing
 And her people for gladness.
I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people;
 And there will no longer be heard in her
 The voice of weeping and the sound of crying. (Isaiah 65:18–19)

I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully
 plant them in this land with all my heart and with all My soul.
 (Jeremiah 32:41)

THE KINGDOM OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

The essence of the kingdom that will be established is justice and righteousness. The kingdom will be a time of reward for the faithful and righteous meek, victimized, downtrodden, poor, needy, afflicted, outcast, lame, sick, etc. They will be healed, restored, honored, exalted, and rewarded. Alternately, the proud and self-exalting will be brought low, humbled, humiliated, or actually cast into the lake of fire:

He will have compassion on the poor and needy,
 And the lives of the needy he will save. (Psalm 72:13)

The proud look of man will be abased
And the loftiness of man will be humbled,
 And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. (Isaiah 2:11)

But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
 And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth.
 (Isaiah 11:4)

The afflicted also will increase their gladness in the LORD,
 And *the needy of mankind will rejoice* in the Holy One of Israel.
 (Isaiah 29:19)

*Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
Then the lame will leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. (Isaiah 35:5–6)*

*Whereas you have been forsaken and hated
With no one passing through,
I will make you an everlasting pride,
A joy from generation to generation. (Isaiah 60:15)*

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
*To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;*
To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
*To comfort all who mourn,
To grant those who mourn in Zion,
Giving them a garland instead of ashes,
The oil of gladness instead of mourning,
The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting.*
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.
(Isaiah 61:1–3)

“In that day,” declares the LORD,
*“I will assemble the lame
And gather the outcasts,
Even those whom I have afflicted.” (Micah 4:6)*

Behold, I am going to deal at that time
With all your oppressors,
*I will save the lame
And gather the outcast,
And I will turn their shame into praise and renown
In all the earth. (Zephaniah 3:19)*

I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment. (Ezekiel 34:16)

These events, which will begin during the outset of the millennial reign of Christ, will reach their final and ultimate goal after the conclusion of this period, during what is called “the new heavens and the new earth.” It is then that God’s unfolding plan of redemption will have reached its glorious culmination:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” (Revelation 21:3–5)

Maranatha and Amen

APPENDIX A

THE DEFEAT OF LEVIATHAN

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:1–2)

Thus the divine epic begins. To most modern readers, the first few verses of the Bible are a very straightforward creation account. All of the essential building blocks of the universe were present, but they were a wild and disordered mess. Then, the Spirit of God Almighty spoke and brought everything into its proper place. Through the process of separation, the Lord began to bring order to the chaos. He separated the light from the darkness, the day from the night, and the waters below from the waters above (Gn 1:3–7). What was previously pure chaos was now tamed to become a world of tremendous order and beauty. Looking at what He had just made, “God saw that it was good” (1:10). Any surface reading of the text will see a very straightforward creation account. When many of the ancient Hebrews read this passage, however, they would have seen something more. They would have also seen a foreshadowing of the Lord’s future and final victory over chaos and the powers of darkness. The first chapter of Genesis actually contains a powerful hint of the Lord’s ultimate plan to destroy evil

and restore the world to a place of perfect order and beauty. In a sense, the first chapter of Genesis contains a foreshadowing of the very gospel itself.

THE ABYSS

To understand how the ancient Hebrews would have seen this, we must begin with understanding what the world was before it was tamed. First, the earth was “formless and void.” The Hebrew words, *tohu wavohu*, are translated elsewhere as “wild and waste.”¹ In a single word, it was chaos. Second, the Hebrew word for “the deep” is *tehom*. It is often translated as “ocean,” “sea,” or “the abyss.”² The word conveyed the idea of “a dark, inaccessible, inexhaustible, and mysterious place.”³ In the ancient Hebrew mind, the entirety of the sea itself was viewed as an untamable, terrifying, and bottomless place. We shouldn’t be surprised that they viewed it this way. Even today, having sent men to the moon (yes, that did happen) and numerous scientists into the earth’s orbit on the International Space Station, we’ve not yet fully explored the deepest parts of the ocean.

SEA MONSTERS

I grew up the son of a fisherman. Fishing for Atlantic bluefin tuna, my dad and I would launch the boat hours before daybreak and then he would pilot as far as fifty miles out to what is called Stellwagen Bank, off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The ocean floor there is as deep as three hundred feet. It’s a favorite place for whale watchers to see massive humpbacks frolicking about. I’ll never forget the first time I went out to Stellwagen with my dad. I was only five years old, but as far back as I can remember, my dad taught me to scan the surface of the ocean for signs of activity underneath. Small bait fish breaking water, overly active birds circling and diving, oil slicks; these were all things that I had become accustomed to notice. As we were making our way out, I spotted something on the water’s surface just ahead to our starboard side. At first, it looked to me

like a tarp floating on the surface of the water with a huge, trapped air-bubble. If we were close to shore, this might have made sense, as it's not unusual to occasionally happen upon random items floating in the water. But we were more than twenty miles offshore. As our little boat came up beside this curiosity, it suddenly occurred to me that it wasn't a tarp but the back of a whale. It was the first one I had ever seen. At the moment I realized this, my father also noticed the whale and turned the boat abruptly to avoid running right over it. As we grazed by, I leaned over the side of the boat and looked into the water to see this giant creature submerge into the darkness. "Dad, we almost just ran over that whale!" I yelled up to him. "Don't tell your mother," he responded, and we continued on. Since then, I've seen hundreds of whales out there, mostly humpbacks, but they were always some ways off in the distance. A dark wave-like form would roll out of the water, and a misty rocket of water would burst into the air as the whale cleared its blowhole. Then it would roll back under the water. Other times, a massive tail would rise from the sea and slap the water before disappearing again. On rare occasions, the whole whale would playfully lunge into the air in an awesome display. Those were not the only times that I caught glimpses of the monsters that live under the waves. On another occasion, we accidentally hooked a mako shark. Makos are very fast and aggressive sharks that average about ten feet long. I remember seeing the shadowy figure of one several feet under us. It sent a shiver through me. The trepidation I felt was not entirely irrational. Even my father, the quintessential fisherman, decided to cut the line. Whatever gear he lost was not worth fighting over with a razor-toothed monster. The reason I've shared these stories is because, together, they burned a certain fear of the ocean into me. It probably didn't help that my family took me to see the movie *Jaws* at the drive-in theatre when I was only three years old. Even now as an adult, I occasionally have dreams of swimming in the ocean and catching a glimpse of some colossal creature in the dark depths beneath me. Such visions always bring a feeling of tremendous vulnerability. Whatever is down there

in the darkness is vast and uncontrollable. The ancient Hebrews seem to have held a very similar perception of the deep. The fact is, humans are not in their natural habitat in the ocean. Yes, we've learned how to create sturdy sea-crafts that can float on the water's surface. Once we are outside of the boat, however, we're at the mercy of something far more vast, powerful, and untamable than we can fathom. Not only are the waves, currents, and the sheer mass of the ocean far beyond our control, there is a whole world of creatures under there—and some of them are giants. It used to be much worse. I love visiting the Harvard Museum of Natural History in Boston. One of the most terrifying skeletons housed there once belonged to a creature called the Kronosaurus. This was a forty-two-foot long marine reptile that looked something like a giant crocodile with fins. It could have easily eaten a human in one bite and thought nothing of it. The very idea that these things once freely roamed the ocean is absolutely terrifying. What other giant monsters once hunted their next meals under the surface? Today we have a fairly good idea, but in ancient times, it was a complete mystery. For all of these reasons, the ancient Hebrews viewed the ocean as the uncontrollable, endless, and terrifying *abyss*.

Taking all of this one step further, however, the ancient Hebrews viewed the ocean as more than just a place where fish live. In their minds, something even more terrifying than sharks and sea creatures lived under the waves. To the ancient Hebrews, the *tehom* was also the realm of evil.

ALTERNATIVE CREATION STORIES

To understand how or why the Hebrews would have seen this, it is helpful to familiarize ourselves with some very different creation accounts that were also well known in the ancient biblical world. One particularly influential creation story was called the Enuma Elish. Although this alternative Babylonian account is clearly mythical in nature, filled with monsters and god-beasts,⁴ it actually

contains some concepts that scholars agree are alluded to in the Bible. The Enuma Elish tells the story of the storm god Marduk, who wages a cosmic war against Tiamat, who was both the ocean goddess and the source of all life.⁵ After Marduk defeated Tiamat, he cut her up and created heaven and earth out of the pieces of her body.⁶ A similar mythical Canaanite god-myth was called “The Baal Cycle,” which tells of an ancient battle between the storm god Baal and the sea goddess Yam.⁷ Within this account, Baal defeated Yam and ascended to the role of chief god of the Canaanite pantheon. There are some notable similarities between Genesis and these other traditions. Whereas the Enuma Elish portrays a battle between Marduk and the ocean goddess, Genesis describes God Almighty subduing the wild ocean. While Marduk slays Tiamat and divides her body to create heaven and earth,⁸ God Almighty creates the world by dividing the great watery abyss into light and dark, day and night, and the waters above from the waters below. Scholars refer to this ancient battle between some particular god and chaos as the *chaoskampf* (German for “the chaos struggle”).⁹ The obvious difference between these heathen accounts and the Bible is that while the Enuma Elish and the Baal Cycle personify the ocean as a goddess, the Genesis account does no such thing. It treats the chaotic depths as nothing more than the impersonal materials of creation.¹⁰ Whereas the heathen traditions each portray a powerful god engaged in a cosmic struggle against another powerful deity, Genesis is clear that the ocean is entirely subordinate to YHWH, who is the all-powerful creator and ruler of everything. There is a catch, however. Although the Genesis creation account doesn’t portray an ancient struggle between God and some god or goddess of the ocean, there are several passages in the Bible that do connect the Devil with both chaos and the seas.

THE SEA-DRAGON IN THE BIBLE

Both Psalm 89:8-10 and Isaiah 51:9-10 refer to a monster who lives

in the sea called “Rahab.” Similarly, Job 7:12 and Psalm 74:13 both make references to “the sea-monster.” In Job 3, the monster is called “Leviathan.” Finally, as we will see, the book of Revelation refers to this creature twice, calling it both the Devil and Satan (12:9, 20:2). In all of these passages, the sea-dragon is either subdued by God or slain entirely. So although the Bible doesn’t teach that Satan was actually there in the primordial chaos before creation, in several passages it echoes elements of the ancient heathen myth, casting the Devil as a sea-monster or dragon who is ever seeking to stir up chaos afresh, to pull the world back into a disordered “wild and waste” state.¹¹ Again, the Bible does not agree with or validate the ancient heathen myths, rather it uses imagery that was common among the ancients as a polemic against them, to proclaim God’s absolute superiority, and more importantly, His future and ultimate victory over Satan, the dragon who lives in the sea.

LEVIATHAN IN THE INTERTESTAMENTAL LITERATURE

Outside of the Bible, Leviathan also appears in some ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings that were widely known and read in Jesus’ day.¹² Each of these works relays the Jewish tradition that some time after God divided the land from the sea, He banished Leviathan deep into the sea, whereas another monster called “Behemoth” was cast away into the desert. At the end of the age, both monsters will re-emerge, only to be killed and left as food for the animals and perhaps even the righteous inhabitants of the messianic age. It seems very unlikely that the early Christians would have understood this whole scenario to be literal. These apocalyptic texts do convey very real spiritual realities. They also serve to further demonstrate the widespread view among the Jews from the period of the second temple that in the last days, the chaos monster, Satan himself, will be completely defeated and destroyed, once and for all.

Thus, in the very first verses of the Bible, when God brought order to the chaos, it was not only a powerful demonstration of

God's power over all of creation but also a foreshadowing of the Lord's future and final victory over the Devil, who the Bible paints as the ancient dragon who lives in the sea, always seeking to revive the chaos, to undo God's works, and to sow disorder. Though most are unfamiliar with this backstory, it would have been understood by many of the ancient Jews and is most certainly alluded to in several passages throughout the Scriptures.¹³ Thus, even within the first few verses of the Bible, just under the waves, is hidden a prophetic harbinger of the Lord's coming and ultimate victory over chaos, over evil, and ultimately, over all things. As we move forward, at two very important times within the unfolding story of redemption—the Exodus and the end of the age—we will see this theme of the sea-dragon re-emerge.

THE SEA-DRAGON AND THE EXODUS

Many years after the Lord's mighty victories throughout the Exodus, the psalmists, prophets, and the apostles would all commemorate and celebrate the triumph of those days, often using the language of the Lord conquering Leviathan, the ancient sea-monster:

Yet God is my king from of old,
Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth.
You divided the sea by Your strength;
You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters.
You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.
You broke open springs and torrents;
You dried up ever-flowing streams. (Psalm 74:12–15)

As we just discussed, when the Lord brought order to the chaos at the dawn of creation, it was a prophetic foreshadowing of His future and final victory over chaos, with which the Devil is often associated. In splitting the Red Sea during the Exodus, the Lord once again displayed His superiority over all of creation and

the powers of evil and chaos. Even as He parted the waters at the beginning, so again did He part the waters. Even more amazing, the psalmist actually describes the defeat of Pharaoh, using the language of the Lord crushing the head of the sea-monster Leviathan. As He did at the beginning of creation, God was once again placing His power on display and again prophetically foreshadowing His ultimate victory over Satan and the chaos of this fallen and corrupt world system. The same paradigm is repeated again in Psalm 89:

O LORD God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty LORD?
 Your faithfulness also surrounds You.
 You rule the swelling of the sea;
 When its waves rise, You still them.
 You Yourself crushed Rahab like one who is slain;
 You scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.
 (Psalm 89:8–10)

Here again, the power behind Pharaoh is referred to as “Rahab,” an alternative name for Leviathan, the sea-dragon. The phrase “your mighty arm” is also clear language that points to the Exodus. While God Almighty remained in heaven, enthroned on high, He reached down to accomplish His purposes on the earth below. Like the psalmists before him, Isaiah also looked back to the Exodus, and described it through the language of YHVH slaying the dragon Rahab:

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD;
 Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago.
 Was it not You who cut Rahab in pieces,
 Who pierced the dragon?
 Was it not You who dried up the sea,
 The waters of the great deep;
 Who made the depths of the sea a pathway
 For the redeemed to cross over? (Isaiah 51:9–10)

Isaiah's confidence in the Lord's ultimate future defeat of Satan in the last days was rooted in His historical acts of first subduing the chaotic abyss at creation and then His defeat of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. If the Lord accomplished such wondrous and miraculous deliverances back then, surely He will do it again.

THE PREDICTED DESTRUCTION OF THE SEA MONSTER

In Habakkuk's great Desert Prophecy (see chapter 23), the prophet describes God "coming" to wage war against the rivers and the seas:

Did the LORD rage against the rivers,
Or was Your anger against the rivers,
Or was Your wrath against the sea,
That You rode on Your horses,
On Your chariots of salvation?
Your bow was made bare,
The rods of chastisement were sworn.
Selah.
You cleaved the earth with rivers.
The mountains saw You and quaked;
The downpour of waters swept by.
The deep uttered forth its voice,
It lifted high its hands.
Sun and moon stood in their places;
They went away at the light of Your arrows,
At the radiance of Your gleaming spear. (Habakkuk 3:8–11)

For what purpose is God coming to wage war? As always, it is to defeat the wicked and save His people. Yet, rather than describing Him crushing actual people, Habakkuk describes the Lord warring against the rivers and seas, which represent Satan and the enemies of God. Armerding notes the clear connection here between creation and the return of the Messiah:

In the Exodus, as in the beginning, God destroyed the powers of chaos and anarchy that threaten to engulf his creation; and the cosmic battle portrayed in Habakkuk 3:8–15 draws on this background.¹⁴

When Habakkuk poetically describes the Lord coming to wage war against the rivers and the seas, he is describing the return of Jesus, the God of the Exodus, who will come again to complete all that He began so long ago.

THE FINAL DEFEAT OF THE SEA DRAGON

Finally, in the book of Revelation, the imagery of both creation and the Exodus collide one last time for the grand conclusion of the story. That which Habakkuk envisioned is now described in great detail. First, John clearly identifies Leviathan, the ancient sea-serpent, as none other than Satan: “And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rv 12:9). Next, the language of the Exodus returns. Israel is given wings like an eagle to flee into the desert, where she would be given refuge from the serpent for three and a half years (12:14; cf. Ex 19:4). Determined to kill the woman, Israel, “the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood” (v. 15). Again, the language of waters is used; a surging river and floods. Besides being associated with chaos and Satan, floods are poetically used to describe invading armies (e.g., Is 28:18–19; Dn 9:26). Despite Satan’s best efforts, however, “the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth” (v. 16). And so, “the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (v. 17). These other children who hold to the testimony of Jesus would have to be Gentile Christians

who are also children of God by faith. Satan's great, last ditch effort to wage war against God's people is primarily employed through human armies. Revelation 13 begins by describing Satan, the sea-dragon, having crawled out of the sea and sitting on the shore, conjuring up his armies from the depths:

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. (Revelation 13:1)

Beyond all of the apocalyptic imagery, the Bible is simply describing one last, great satanically inspired and animated dictator, who will raise up a mighty coalition of armies to fight against Israel and God's people throughout the earth. Despite all of the hoopla, when Jesus returns, He will make very quick work of them all:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. (Revelation 20:1–3)

According to Revelation, Jesus will rule the earth from Jerusalem for a thousand years. While many Christian theologians have made great efforts to cast this time period as symbolic, being fulfilled as we speak, the prophets also give great attention to this period that, while far better than the world as we know it now, is also less than perfect. As so, at the conclusion of the thousand years, Satan's final judgment will come: "When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations" (v. 7). Despite this one last, very brief effort to stir up

chaos again, the Lord will quickly put an end to the serpent's efforts: "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (v. 10).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Bible consistently refers to these three points within the story of creation and redemption, and highlights them together: (1) Creation, (2) the Exodus, and (3) the coming of God at the end of the age. In the beginning, God tamed the *tehom*, demonstrating His power over the seas and the primal chaos. Then, during the Exodus, the Lord once again displayed His complete sovereignty over the seas as He utterly defeated His enemies. Finally, at the end of this age, Jesus the Messiah will come back to put a complete and final end to the chaos of this age, and all of the powers of evil. By understanding this story, somewhat hidden within the biblical narrative, we may much better understand many portions of the Bible that are often confusing to the average reader who struggles to understand much of the poetic and apocalyptic language. The story of God's sovereignty and His great victory over evil bookends the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, punctuated by the story of the Exodus, as the great deposit and foreshadowing of the ultimate victory that is yet to come when Jesus splits the sky and comes down to save us. At that time, rather than being covered by the chaotic seas, we are told that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hb 2:14 NIV).

APPENDIX B

THE SIGN OF THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

Before I jump into this final appendix, I'd like to briefly share the backstory. Just as the book was ready to go to the printers, a good friend of mine, Stephen Holmes, shared with me a fresh insight into "the sign of the coming of Son of Man" mentioned by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. Stephen is an authentic and ardent student of the Scriptures. Whenever we have conversations about whatever passage or subject that he or I are studying, I always come away edified and challenged. In fact, I actually credit one of those conversations with provoking me to pour much more carefully through the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. I'd long ago noted the importance placed on this foundational prophecy by G. H. Pember in his book *The Great Prophecies Concerning the Gentiles, the Jews and the Church of God* (written in 1885). It was Stephen's prodding, however, that really pushed me to study it more thoroughly and truly grasp its foundational importance within the prophetic biblical narrative. Those who have read this book know how important Moses' prophetic song plays throughout this study. Thus, Stephen's influence in this book extends far beyond this appendix alone. For that, I am grateful. But it was Stephen's insight into "the sign of the coming of the Son of Man" that moved me enough to delay printing and add this final and very important appendix.

YHVH'S COVENANT SIGN IN THE CLOUDS

Our study begins with Noah. We all know the story of how he and his family survived the great storm of the Lord's judgment in the ark. After the purging waters abated and their great vessel settled upon the mountains of Ararat, Noah, his sons, and their families emerged to discover a whole new world. Shortly thereafter, Noah built an altar and offered all manner of animals to the Lord as burnt offerings (Ge 8:20). The Lord was so pleased with Noah's offerings that He made a promise to never again destroy the earth in the same manner:

I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.

While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
And cold and heat,
And summer and winter,
And day and night
Shall not cease. (Gn 8:21–22)

This promise God made is called the Noahic Covenant and is among the first of the biblical covenants. As a specific sign of His covenant, for the first time in history, the Lord placed a rainbow in the clouds:

I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. (Genesis 9:13–16)

The sign (Hebrew: *oth*) of this particular covenant was the rainbow, displayed in the clouds before all mankind. Similarly, Jesus, the Lord's final covenant sign, will also be seen by all of mankind in the clouds. In this sense, one could say that the rainbow in the cloud is a type or picture, and even a promise, of Jesus Himself and the surety of His future coming.

THE PILLAR OF CLOUD AND FIRE

The next major episode when the Lord Himself appeared in a cloud was when He led Israel out of Egypt:

The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. (Exodus 13:21–22)

Throughout Israel's flight from Pharaoh, through the Red Sea, and all the way to Mount Sinai, a massive pillar of cloud and fire led them. This is truly one of the most unique and mysterious phenomena in the entire Bible. Although the pillar was just that—a massive cylindrical column of cloud and fire—it was also the very real personification and presence of the Lord Himself: “Then the angel of God who was going in front of the Israelite forces, moved and went behind them. The pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and stood behind them” (Ex 14:19). In other words, “the angel of God” and “the pillar of cloud” are one and the same, described in two different ways.

Later, the Lord described Himself as being in the cloud itself: “At the morning watch, the LORD looked down at the Egyptian forces through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion” (Ex 14:24). While the pillar most often seems to have maintained this column-like form, there were times when it took a much larger form, morphing into a canopy to give

Israel cover from the heat of the sun. This was also the case when Israel finally reached Mount Sinai.

GOD CAME DOWN

Although the pillar accompanied Israel throughout the entirety of the Exodus, the manifest presence of God among His people reached its greatest zenith at Mount Sinai. There can be no question that the great theophany at Mount Sinai is the single greatest appearing of God in all of human history. Exodus 19 relays some of the terror and majesty of that day when God came down:

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. (Exodus 19:16–20)

At Sinai, beyond the standard pillar of cloud and fire, there was also thunder, lightning, smoke, the sound of the blasting of trumpets, and even an earthquake.

FROM SINAI TO ZION

After the covenant ceremony and as Israel prepared to move onward toward the land of Canaan, the Lord promised that His presence would continue to remain with them and lead them. While His presence would be seen in the form of the pillar, it continued to be referred to as the angel of the Lord's presence:

I am going to send an angel before you to guard you on the way and bring you to the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For my angel will go before you and bring you in to the land. (Exodus 23:20–23)

This episode of the Lord's command to listen to the angel of the Lord was later reflected at the Mount of Transfiguration when "a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!'" (Lk 9:35). Throughout the forty years of wandering through the desert, the pillar of the Lord's presence remained with them, protected them, and led them.

THE TENT OF MEETING

At Mount Sinai, the Lord gave Moses instructions to build the tabernacle, or tent of meeting. Before the tabernacle was actually built however, Moses built a temporary tent that was also called the tent of meeting. There, he literally met with and talked to God. The biblical description of these encounters are beyond gripping:

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. (Exodus 33:7-11)

The mere thought of the pillar of cloud and fire descending from the sky whenever Moses entered the tent absolutely seizes our imaginations. What a wonder to contemplate! All of the people understood well the rare majesty of what they were witnessing. In awe, they would stand and gaze intently at this visible manifestation of YHVH's presence before them. The additional description of Moses standing before the blazing pillar, actually speaking to God "face to face" in such an intimate manner, makes this among the most evocative passages in all of the Bible.

The pattern of the Lord Himself coming down from heaven in the cloud continued. Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory (Ex 33:18). Amazingly, the Lord agreed. And so:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. (Exodus 34:5–8).

During this unparalleled event, YHVH revealed both His name and the essence of His character to Moses. Again, all of this took place from within the pillar of cloud, fire, and glory.

THE CLOUD RIDER

After Moses and the people of Israel had experienced the manifest presence of God in such overt ways, they would speak of Him in sublime poetry such as the Blessing of Moses. It was within Moses' final prophetic declaration, as we've seen, that the Lord was first referred to as the only One "who rides across the heavens . . . and

on the clouds in his majesty (Dt 33:26 NIV). Hundreds of years later, King David would similarly call all of Israel to sing to God and “Exalt the One who rides on the clouds!” (Ps 68:4 NET). Although cloud rider was a title also claimed by the Canaanite god Baal, the people of Israel had a very different experience. For forty years, they personally witnessed their God riding upon the clouds. To the Israelites, this was no mere hyperbolic or flamboyant title.

The importance of *the cloud* within the biblical narrative cannot be overstated. Apart from the incarnation, when God Himself actually took on flesh, the manifestation of YHVH’s presence in the pillar of cloud and fire is the single greatest way in which YHVH has ever revealed Himself. Ask any biblically literate Jew, either in modern times or in the first century, what is the surest sign of God’s presence. The answer, no doubt, would be the visible sign of the pillar of cloud and fire. Throughout the Old Testament period, the pillar was not simply one of many other equal signs, rather it was the single greatest and definitive sign of YHVH’s presence.

THE PILLAR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We should not be surprised then when we read in the New testament that Jude identified the pillar as actually being a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus Himself: “Now I want to remind you . . . that Jesus saved a people out of Egypt” (Jude 5 CSB). While some translations do not include the name of Jesus here but simply say “the Lord,” Thomas R. Shreiner, author of the New American Commentary on Jude, notes that “the external evidence suggests that ‘Jesus’ rather than ‘Lord’ is the correct reading.”¹ Likewise, New Testament professor Jarl E. Fossum argues that Jude understood Jesus to be the Angel of the Lord Who appears throughout the Old Testament, including in the pillar of cloud.² This is consistent with the doctrine of the apostles, as we have previously discussed, who consistently identify Jesus with texts that refer to YHVH in the Old Testament (cf., Is 6, Is 45:23, Jn 12:41, Phil 2:10-11.).

THE RETURN OF JESUS IN POPULAR CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Having briefly surveyed the theme of *the cloud* throughout the Old Testament, let's now shift our attention to how the return of Jesus is popularly imagined. If you ask Christians how they envision the return of Jesus, most would likely describe a man coming to the earth from heaven, surrounded by fluffy white clouds, perhaps in a crisp blue sky. This is certainly how the second coming is most often portrayed in Christian art. To support such a view, people point to the ascension of Jesus into heaven from the Mount of Olives as recorded in the book of Acts. After Jesus told his disciples to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) After that Jesus "was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Two men (angels) who suddenly stood next to them told them that Jesus would return in the same way that He went up into the clouds. Many others would fill in the details with the descriptions of Jesus bursting forth from heaven as described in Revelation 19. There, He is pictured riding a white horse and being followed by the armies of heaven. He will come back in thick storm clouds with all of the great disturbances that were present during the Lord's theophany at Sinai. Jesus, however, seems to give us some solid evidence that there will actually be more taking place than we may have realized. Let's take a closer look at exactly how He described His own return, and carefully consider the specific texts that He cited when doing so.

JESUS' DESCRIPTION OF HIS OWN RETURN

Jesus' Olivet Discourse is worded in slightly different ways in all three synoptic gospels. In Matthew's account, Jesus says that He will return "on the clouds of heaven" (24:30 NIV). In Mark's account, He is said to come back "in clouds" (13:26), whereas Luke's account says that He will come "in a cloud" (21:27). "On the clouds," "in clouds," and "in a cloud." Even as the angel of God was present *in*

the pillar of cloud during the Exodus, so does Jesus describe His own return from heaven *in the cloud*.

Further, Jesus specifically cited two very important Old Testament texts in connection with His return. The first is Daniel 7, wherein Jesus identifies Himself as the divine “Son of Man” who will come with the clouds. He will come in the same human body that He took on at the incarnation. Also, He will come as the Cloud Rider, as YHVH God almighty. As Moses has said, “there is none like the God of Jeshurun” who rides upon the clouds (Dt 33:26). YHVH alone is the Cloud Rider. That Jesus will return as the divine God-man, however, is certainly nothing new to Christians. This is precisely what they have been awaiting for two thousand years. The importance of the second passage that Jesus cites in describing His return, however, is often missed. In stating that all the tribes of the earth will see Him, He made a clear reference to the prophecy of Zechariah 12. Both texts—Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12—are alluded to in all three synoptic gospel accounts as well as in the book of Revelation. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is quoted as saying, “all the peoples of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 24:30). In the book of Revelation, however, His citation of Zechariah is even more explicit:

Behold, He is coming with the clouds,
 and every eye will see Him,
 even those who pierced Him.
 And all the tribes of the earth,
 will mourn over him.
 So it is to be. Amen. (Revelation 1:7)

Most Christians read “all the tribes of the earth” and immediately assume Jesus was describing a global event. Now, to be clear, I believe His return will be just that. We must note, however, that the original context of Zechariah 12 is actually very specific Israel-centric prophecy. By *tribes* Zechariah is clearly referring to the tribes of Israel, and by

earth he is referring to the land (Hebrew: *eretz*) of Israel. When we read the fuller text of the prophecy, this becomes abundantly clear:

Then I will pour out a spirit, of grace and prayer on the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem, and they will look at me whom they pierced. They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly for him as one weeps for a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great. . . . The land will mourn, every family by itself: the family of David's house by itself and their women by themselves; the family of Nathan's, house by itself and their women by themselves; the family of Levi's house by itself and their women by themselves. (Zechariah 12:10–14 CSB)

Again, the point here is not to argue that the return of Jesus will be an exclusively local event. The point is to note that Jesus' return revolves entirely around Israel. It concerns the tribes of Israel specifically recognizing the One they pierced, and thus repenting, each tribe and clan individually. David's house individually, Nathan's house individually, the house of the Levites individually, and so on. As we've previously discussed in great detail, this passage is describing the culmination of Israel's redemptive history, the actual moment when "all Israel will be saved" (Ro 11:26).

CONCLUSION: THE SIGN OF THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

Here then is the critical point that we must not miss. The sign of the coming of the Son of Man is something that will be specifically recognizable by the Jewish people! Yes, Jesus will return in His immortal, glorified, yet very human form. He will come from heaven in the same body in which He ascended. Here we must ask what is the specific, definitive sign that would be recognized by the Jewish people, that would cause all of their tribes to recognize exactly who it is coming to save them? The answer is not merely that a man will come down to the earth from the sky. Nor will it be Jesus' specific

physical appearance. It is not as though the Jews will say, “Oh look, that’s Jesus. I recognize Him from all of the Christian icons and paintings.” No, the definitive sign that will cause Jesus to be recognized by His own people can be none other than that specific manifestation of the pillar of cloud, fire, and glory. This alone is the sign that would be recognized by His people whose fathers He led out of Egypt. What greater *revealing* can we imagine? As it was at the first Exodus, so will it be during the second. Even as Joseph revealed himself to the sons of Israel, declaring, “I am your brother!” (Gen 45:4), so will Jesus reveal Himself to His people, declaring Himself to be both their YHVH God and their savior. In Israel’s darkness hour, when all hope seems lost, when Israel has come to the end of her strength, having endured the fullness of Jacob’s trouble, the divine pillar of cloud will once again appear and descend from heaven to save them. This is the sign of the coming of the Son of Man.

Just as it did throughout the Exodus, at Mount Sinai, and at the tent of meeting, the pillar will come down. All will stand in awe, gazing at the glory of YHVH’s presence as the penny finally drops, as they come to recognize the One they have pierced. For within the cloud will be the Son of man, Jesus, the radiant One, Israel’s only savior. Truly, King David was right to have cried out: “Sing to God! Sing praises to his name. Exalt him who rides on the clouds—his name is the Lord—and celebrate before him.” (Ps 68:4 CSB). To which, all of God’s people respond, *“Amen and Amen. Come Lord Jesus!”*

ENDNOTES

Introduction: Recovering the Maranatha Cry

1. (1 Cor 16:22, Rv 22:20; cf. Didache 10:6).

Chapter 1: The Exodus Romance

1. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 32.

Chapter 2: YHVH Flexes

1. Louis Ginzberg, Henrietta Szold, and Paul Radin, *Legends of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 550.

Chapter 3: YHVH Kills the Competition

1. Louis Ginzberg, Henrietta Szold, and Paul Radin, *Legends of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 553–554.
2. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, vol. 2, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 346.
3. Louis Ginzberg, Henrietta Szold, and Paul Radin, *Legends of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 563.
4. Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 88.
5. Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 88.

Chapter 4: YHVH the Provider

1. Within the field of Exodus studies, there is a wide range of opinions among scholars regarding how many Israelites were actually present for the Exodus. While the highest number suggested is roughly three million, others believe there were as few as several thousand. While there are a few relevant factors that lead different scholars to arrive at their conclusions, the most significant of these is the proper translation of the Hebrew word *'elep* in Exodus 12:37. The Hebrew of that verse says literally, “The Israelites travelled from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred *'elep* of foot-soldiers, besides woman and children.” Some Bible versions translate *'elep* as “thousands,” whereas other scholars believe the term simply means something akin to “men of fighting age.” The difference then is drastic as it relates to how many Israelites were there for the Exodus. Based on the best scholarship and arguments, it seems likely that the number of Israelites who left Egypt was much less than millions of people. For a much more thorough examination and explanation of this topic, see the excursus by Douglas Stuart in the *New American Commentary, An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 2, Exodus, p. 297-302, and D. M. Fouts, “A Defense of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Large Numbers in the Old Testament,” *JETS* 40: 3 (1997): 377-87.

2. Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 80–81. (Antiquities of the Jews 1:33-38).
3. Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 519.

Chapter 5: The Proposal

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2. Christopher J.H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 39.
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Chapter 6: The Marriage Covenant at Sinai

1. Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009). Betrothal.
2. Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* (KTAV Publishing, New York, 1980), 34 (Ketubot 10a).
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4. Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Pentateuch, vol. 1* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 68.
5. Michael Carasik, ed., *Deuteronomy: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 239.
6. H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Exodus, vol. 2, The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 130.
7. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 391–392.
8. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, vol. 2, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 440.
9. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, vol. 2, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 455–456.

Chapter 7: Till Death Do Us Part

1. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 109.
2. As Sarna comments: "It is likely that the dashing of the blood 'on the people' described in verse 8 was effectuated by sprinkling it over the pillars." Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 151.
3. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, vol. 2, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 552.
4. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, vol. 2, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 552.
5. Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy, vol. 4, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 163.

Chapter 8: The Adulterous Bride

1. Edward Dennett, *Typical Teachings of Exodus: Being a Simple Exposition* (London: W. H. Broom, 1882), 354.
2. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. "Exodus." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 540.

3. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. "Exodus." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 540–541.
4. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, vol. 2, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 668.
5. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 207.
6. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 208.
7. Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, eds. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 292.
8. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 469.
9. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. "Exodus." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 541.
10. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 209.
11. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. "Exodus." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 548.
12. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 217.

Chapter 9: Summary of Marriage Motifs in the Exodus

1. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 570.

Chapter 10: The Curses of the Covenant

1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 128.

Chapter 11: The Time of Jacob's Trouble

1. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 140.
2. Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 451.
3. F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1569.
4. David Baron, *Zechariah: A Commentary on His Visions and Prophecies*, (Grand Rapid, MI, Kregel Publications, 1919), 493.

Chapter 12: Israel's Salvation

1. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 140.
2. Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 270.
3. According to Eitan Bar of One For Israel, there are roughly 20,000 Messianic Jews in Israel, who make up only .03% of the total Jewish population.
4. John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy*, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), 510.
5. John A. Martin, "Isaiah." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1114.
6. John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Jeremiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 257.

Chapter 13: Israel's Final Regathering to the Land

1. F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations, vol. 16, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 212.
2. Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile, and the Torah*, vol. 358, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 87.
3. Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997–), 389. Block cites: (Midrash Rabbah: Gen. Rab. 13.6; 14.5; Deut. Rab. 7.7; Lev. Rab. 14.9.)
4. Tertullian. "On the Resurrection of the Flesh." *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 566.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 392.
7. Charles H. Dyer. "Ezekiel." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1298–1299.
8. John A. Martin. "Micah." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1491.
9. James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 32, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; England: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 45.

Chapter 14: Modern Israel's Rebirth in Prophecy

1. Mark Hitchcock, *The Coming Islamic Invasion of Israel* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2002), 87.

Chapter 15: Grace in the Wilderness

1. John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 332.
2. Timothy LaHaye, Ed Hindson, general editors, *The Popular Prophecy Bible Commentary*, (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2006), 312.
3. Kenneth L. Barker. "Zechariah." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi (Revised Edition)*, eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 821.
4. J. Barton Payne. *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* fourth ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 467.
5. Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, eds. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 168 (see, endnote 202).
6. F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1569.
7. For a more detailed discussion of Paul's journey to Mount Sinai see Joel Richardson, *Mount Sinai in Arabia: The True Location Revealed*, (Leawood, KS: Winepress Media, 2019), 77–84.
8. John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 957.
9. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 643.
10. John F. Walvoord. "Revelation." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 958.

Chapter 16: The Marriage Covenant Renewed

1. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 581.
2. So: "The title My People applies to Israel as a whole, the twelve tribes of the old confederacy and the united kingdom." Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 198.

3. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 209.
4. Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel, vol. 19A, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 73.
5. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 209.
6. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 40–42.
7. J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 446.
8. John A. Martin. "Isaiah." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1116.
9. Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66, vol. 15B, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 649.
10. Later, in chapter 23, Ezekiel continues to develop this metaphor of Israel and Judah as two sisters married to the Lord who became unfaithful harlots.

Chapter 17: The Wedding Feast

1. John A. Martin. "Isaiah." *In The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1041.
2. Interestingly, the word is used only in two other passages in the whole Bible (Psalm 19:5; Joel 2:16).
3. J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 66.
4. J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 209.
5. John A. Martin. "Isaiah." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1073.
6. J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 209.
7. Brian J. Vickers, "God Fearer," eds. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 661.
8. David Turner and Darrell L. Bock, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 125.
9. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 326.
10. As Leon Morris notes, "In Matthew it is usually the kingdom of heaven (32 times), while 'the kingdom of God,' which is the most usual expression in Mark and Luke, occurs but 5 times." Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 53.
11. Louis A. Barbieri, Jr. "Matthew." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 71.
12. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 327.
13. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 372.
14. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 227.
15. David Turner and Darrell L. Bock, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 323.
16. Ibid.
17. Robert H. Stein, *Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 359.

18. David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Luke," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 331.
19. Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 39, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 343.

Chapter 18: The Blessing of Moses

1. Michael Carasik, ed., *Deuteronomy: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 239.
2. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 334.
3. Michael Carasik, ed., *Deuteronomy: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 236.
4. Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 449.
5. See, for example, the Testament of Levi 3:3; The Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah 3:4; 1 Enoch 102:1–3; 2 Enoch 17.
6. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1008.
7. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 403–404.
8. George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ*, vol. 3 (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 20–21.
9. D. A. Carson. "Jude." *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 1078.

Chapter 19: The Song of Deborah

1. Barry G. Webb. "Judges." *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 270.
2. Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 91.
3. Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 211.
4. This should not to be confused with 'Pseudo-Jasher' which, having become quite popular and even widely accepted in recent years, is, in fact, merely a more modern (18th-century) literary forgery and attempt to recreate the ancient lost Book of Jasher, by Jacob Ilive. Nor should it be confused with the 16th-century Jewish midrashic work, *Sefer HaYashar*.
5. Lawson G. Stone. "Judges," *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012), 261.
6. Barry G. Webb. "Judges." *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 270.
7. Mark J. Boda. "Judges." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Numbers–Ruth* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 1124.

Chapter 21: David's Great Processional Psalm

1. Nancy deClaisse-Walford and Beth Tanner. "Book Two of the Psalter: Psalms 42–72." *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 542.
2. Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms: Songs for the People of God*, ed. J. A. Motyer, vol. 1, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 235.

3. "This rushing cataract of a psalm—one of the most boisterous and exhilarating in the Psalter—may have been composed for David's procession with the ark "from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David with rejoicing." Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 256. See also: R. E. O. White, "Psalms," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 384, and Gray, John. "A Cantata of the Autumn Festival: Psalm LXVIII." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 22 (1977): 2–26.
4. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, vol. 20, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 172.
5. Similarly, the Lexham English Bible reads: "God will arise; his enemies will be scattered, and those who hate him will flee from before him." W. Hall Harris III et al., eds., *The Lexham English Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Ps 68:1.
6. The NET, NKJV, NIV, LEB, NRSV, and GNT have Him riding on "the clouds," the KJV has him riding across "the heavens."
7. The NASB and ESV have Him riding through "the deserts."
8. Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms: Songs for the People of God*, ed. J. A. Motyer, vol. 1, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 236.
9. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, vol. 20, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 176.
10. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 56–87*, vol. 3 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 139.
11. "In verses 9 and 10 (Heb. 10, 11) the verbs shed abroad and provide should be present or future; cf. neb." Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973).
12. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, vol. 20, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 178.
13. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 292.
14. This concept of Jesus personally leading Israel through the "sheep-pen" of Edom when He returns may also be behind Jesus' following comments to His disciples: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." (Jn 10:1–5) If so, then the reference to the false shepherd is likely a reference to the Antichrist.
15. Willem A. VanGemeren. "Psalms." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 519.
16. Avraham Negev. "Hermon (Mount)." *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1990).
17. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 260.
18. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 260.
19. For a useful discussion of the relationship of Ephesians 4:8 to Psalm 6:18, see: Frank S. Thielman. "Ephesians." *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 820.

Chapter 21: A Highway Through the Desert

1. Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 144.
2. Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 145.

3. “The eschatological message of divine judgment in the previous chapter is contrasted with new promises about God’s appearance on earth.” Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 577.
4. J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 244.
5. J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 300.
6. Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles’ Wings*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 161.
7. J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah, Bible Student’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 340.
8. George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ*, vol. 3 (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 23.
9. John A. Martin “Isaiah.” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1096.
10. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, ed. William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and Brent A. Strawn, 1st ed., *The Old Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 517.
11. J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 435.
12. George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ*, vol. 3 (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 22.
13. (Gn 3:15; Nm 24:17; Dt 32:35; 33:21; 1 Sm 2:10; Jgs 5:26–27; Ps 58:10; 68:1–2, 21; 110:5; Jl 3:13; Is 63:3; Hb 3:13; Mal 4:3; Lk 1:51–56; 68–75; 2:25; Rom 8:17; 2 Thes 1:5–6; Heb 10:27; 1 Pt 4:12–19; Jude 14; Rv 14:20; Rv 19:1, 15).
14. Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile, and the Torah*, vol. 358, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 107–110.

Chapter 22: The Prayer of Habakkuk

1. George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets, 2 vols.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 2:150.
2. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 349.
3. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 224.
4. Richard D. Patterson and Andrew E. Hill, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 10: Minor Prophets, Hosea–Malachi* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 430.
5. David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah and Habakkuk: Listening to the Voice of God*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 265.
6. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 417. So also does Timothy Shenton state: “Just as he appeared at Mount Sinai, so he will appear again. . . . The statement depicts a future revelation of the glory of the Lord.” Tim Shenton, *Habakkuk: An Expositional Commentary, Exploring the Bible Commentary* (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2007), 71.
7. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 222.
8. Carl E. Armerding. “Habakkuk.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 526.
9. Daniel C. Juster, *Passover: The Key That Unlocks the Book of Revelation* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011), 79.
10. For a detailed examination of the location of Mount Sinai, see: Joel Richardson, *Mount Sinai in Arabia: The True Location Revealed* (Leawood, KS: Winepress Media, 2019).

11. As Robertson points out, "This chief is the prime object of the Lord's offensive. God crushes this principal leader of the throngs of the wicked (v. 14) in the same way in which the star of Jacob was to smite the corners of Moab (Num. 24:17), and Jael smote Sisera (Judg. 5:26), and Messiah would smite through the head of many (Ps. 110:5-6)." O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 239.
12. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah—Malachi, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 116.
13. Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Psalms, Opening Up Commentary* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 11.
14. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 215-216.

Chapter 23: The Prophecy of Zechariah

1. George L. Klein, *Zechariah, vol. 21B, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 279.
2. As Klein asks: "More specifically, was the reference to Greece anachronistic since the Hellenistic nation truly became a world power two centuries later?" George L. Klein, *Zechariah, vol. 21B, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 279.
3. George L. Klein, *Zechariah, vol. 21B, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 280.
4. For a thorough examination of Ezekiel 38-39, the battle of God and Magog, see my book *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist*.
5. Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel—Malachi (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 799.
6. Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel—Malachi (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 792.
7. Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 134-135.
8. Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, eds. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 157-158.
9. Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, eds. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 160.
10. Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 522.

Chapter 24: The Prophecy of Enoch

1. There are two primary English translations of 1 Enoch. Here, we use the translation of George W. E. Nickelsburg.
2. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 142.
3. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 143.
4. James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1* (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 301-302.
5. (E.g., *Tanchuma Jacob* 7b; *Leqach Tob* Nm 24:17; Mt. 24:24-26; Acts 21:38. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 644.
6. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 644.

7. Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 614. (*Wars of the Jews* 2.259–62)
8. Ibid.
9. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996), 160.
10. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 644.
11. 1QM 1.2–3; 1QS 8.12–15; 9.18–21; 4QPsa.

Chapter 25: The Return of Jesus in the New Testament

1. Of these three passages, the first says that Jesus is going to come in the glory of His Father. In the second passage, it simply says in “great glory,” whereas the third passage tells us that He will come in His own glory. How do we reconcile these passages? The answer is simple. As Hebrews 1:3 informs us, Jesus “is the radiance of [the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature.” In other words, Jesus’ glory and the glory of the Father are one and the same. Jesus here does not attempt to veil His very high Christology. Although various pseudo-Christian sects throughout history have claimed that Jesus never proclaimed Himself to be God, examples such as this show this claim to be false. Jesus understood Himself to be YHVH Almighty, and He wanted everyone who listened to Him to understand this.
2. James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 13.

Chapter 26: Where Does Jesus Return?

1. Noah W. Hutchings, *Petra in History and Prophecy* (Oklahoma City: Bible Belt Publishing, 2003).
2. Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign of Christ’s Coming and of the End of the Age*, third edition. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992).
3. Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign of Christ’s Coming and of the End of the Age*, third edition. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992), 380.
4. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 339.
5. Ibid, 342.
6. George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ*, vol. 3 (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 19.
7. Travis Snow, *The Passover King: Exploring the Prophetic Connection Between the Passover, the End Times, and the Return of Jesus* (Dallas: Voice of Messiah, Inc., 2020).
8. Rick Brannan et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).
9. Travis Snow, *The Passover King: Exploring the Prophetic Connection Between the Passover, the End Times, and the Return of Jesus* (Dallas: Voice of Messiah, Inc., 2020), 100.
10. Hippolytus of Rome, “Treatise on Christ and Antichrist,” in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian*, Appendix, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, vol. 5, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 207.

Appendix A: The Defeat of Leviathan

1. Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses, Schocken Bible 1* (Dallas: Word, 1995) Robert Alter’s translation similarly uses “welter and waste.” Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, Volume 1, The Five Books of Moses* (Norton, New York, 2019).
2. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1062.
3. (tehôm): James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
4. For example: “[T]iamat] gave birth to monster snakes, . . . fierce dragons, . . . serpents, dragons, hairy hero-men, lion monsters, lion men, scorpion men, mighty demons, fish men, bull men” (Enuma Elish 1.134–46) as quoted in Gregory Mobley, *The Return of the Chaos Monsters—and Other Backstories of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 18.

5. According to Tzvi Abusch, professor of Assyriology and ancient Near Eastern religion, the Babylonian Tiamat derives her name from the Akkadian word *tamtu*, which simply means “sea.” She is “the watery source of life and Marduk’s defeated opponent.” I. Tzvi Abusch, “Tiamat,” ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Revised and Updated) (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1044.
 6. I. Tzvi Abusch, “Tiamat,” ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Revised and Updated) (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1044. See also John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 145. For a thorough treatment, see Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 46–57; see also Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 301–6.
 7. Amy L. Balogh and Douglas Mangum, “Baal Cycle,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
 8. Similarly, the Canaanite *Baal Cycle* portrays the god Baal’s battle against the god of the sea, Yam (the same Semitic word as the Hebrew for sea, *yam*). With echoes of the biblical story in Genesis, Baal’s victory over Yam symbolizes the triumph of order over chaos.
 9. Andrew Tobolowsky, “Tiamat,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
 10. While the Bible reflects some of the concepts that are found in the Enuma Elish and other ancient Near Eastern myths, this does not mean that Genesis relied on these pagan accounts. As the Lexham Bible Dictionary rightly states, “Whatever elements may have been picked up, adapted, or incorporated into ancient Israel’s view of creation have given them a new meaning.” John E. Anderson, “Creation,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). While the Enuma Elish presents the story of one god fighting and ultimately prevailing over another god, the Genesis account is not at all confused about who is God, the Creator of all things, and who is the subdued one. Genesis does not present Satan and God as being on the same plane. The ocean, as dark, chaotic, and mysterious as it is, is merely the creation. And while other passages clearly associate Satan with the powerful and foreboding ocean, neither is any match for God Almighty. It is also important to note that the Babylonian influence on the biblical account does not mean that Genesis is dependent on this pagan tradition. To the contrary, by transforming commonly understood pagan concepts, Genesis refuted these ideas. Unlike these other heathen stories, Genesis communicates there is only one supreme and all-powerful God and Creator.
 11. Dempsey Rosales Acosta. “Lord of Hosts.” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
 12. “Then you kept in existence two living creatures; the one you called Behemoth and the name of the other Leviathan. And you separated one from the other, for the seventh part where the water had been gathered together could not hold them both. And you gave Behemoth one of the parts that had been dried up on the third day, to live in it, where there are a thousand mountains; but to Leviathan you gave the seventh part, the watery part; and you have kept them to be eaten.” (2 Esdras 6:49–52). *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 2 Esdras 6:49–52.
- “On that day, two monsters will be parted—one monster, a female named Leviathan, in order to dwell in the abyss of the ocean over the fountains of water; and (the other), a male called Behemoth. . . . Then I asked the second angel in order that he may show me (how) strong these monsters are, how they were separated on this day and were cast, the one into the abysses of the ocean, and the other into the dry desert. . . . And the angel of peace who was with me said to me, ‘These two monsters are prepared for the great day of the Lord (when) they shall turn into food.’” (1 Enoch 60:7-10, 24) James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 40–42.
- “And it will happen that when all that which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. And Behemoth will reveal itself from its place, and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left.” (2 Baruch 29:4) James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 630.

- A. Rabbah said R. Yohanan said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to make a banquet for the righteous out of the meat of Leviathan: ‘Companions will make a banquet of it’ (Job 40:30). The meaning of ‘banquet’ derives from the usage of the same word in the verse, ‘And he prepared for them a great banquet and they ate and drank’ (2 Kgs. 6:23).” Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 15 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 223. Baba Batra IV.28.
13. See, for example, the comments of R. Yohanan from the Talmud in the previous footnote.
14. Carl E. Armerding. “Habakkuk.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 521.

Appendix B: The Sign of the Coming of the Son of Man

1. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 444.
2. Fossum, “Angel of the Lord,” 226–43; so also R. Martin, “Jude,” in *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 77–78.

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