

What Do You Mean by “IF?”

The English translation of the Hebrew and Greek writings can often be quite misleading. This is because of the subtleties of meanings of many words that fail to come across when translated. Where God’s Word is involved this can be quite serious. If we are believers in His Word, than we ought also to be hungry for His Word, and to seek to know it thoroughly. We know it to be inerrant in the language in which it was originally written. But how faithfully expressive of the true meaning are the English translations on which we rely in order to know God’s truth? They necessarily become mans interpretations of the word-by-word meanings. I prefer the KJV because I believe it to be, for the most part, the most reliable translation. Nevertheless, even there the limitations of the English language necessarily diminish the fullness, clarity and accuracy of what God gave us to know. For instance, as we all know, there are four distinctively separate meanings for what in the English is lumped into the single word love, and for just one of them, “brotherly love”, there are six different words expressing subtle nuances of its meaning. In the Hebrew there are six different words to express love.

Now let us get to the subject. From our English language perspective the word “if” seems very simple to understand and of no need to be studied or even examined in any detail. Yet careful reading and interpretation of Scripture suggests that there are subtleties of meaning in the original Hebrew and Greek, that if not recognized, can lead to misunderstanding or not fully appreciating the meaning of God’s inerrant word. In order to illustrate the point, consider the fact that there are ten different words in the Hebrew and twelve in the Greek that have been translated ‘if.’” God’s word in the original language is perfect and precise. Because He has chosen to convey His message utilizing such great care as to express it using, as applicable, these various nuances, it seems evident that we should at least, strive as best we can to comprehend the subtleties. Furthermore, this tiny word, in its many applications, could be considered one of the most important of all words in that it is so often a precedent to a statement that often imposes a disturbing limitation of the subject message, especially in Scripture.

The word “if” appears nine hundred and twenty-nine times in the Old Testament, and five hundred and eighty-two times in the New Testament. Utilizing what biblical scholars call “the principal of first mention,” I have begun this quest for clarity by examining the verses where its various Hebrew or Greek expressions first occur. After that I intend to cite several verses where its intended meaning is often overlooked, yet is pivotal to understanding what God is telling us.

The very first “if” found in the English translation is in Genesis 4:7 where God spoke to Cain after expressing His displeasure of Cain’s’ sacrificial offering. Abel’s offering had been one of faith, that is taking God at His word, but Cain’s unbloody offering was a refusal of the ordained way. In spite of this, God by His divine grace, made a last appeal to Cain to even yet bring the required offering. God expressed this in Genesis 4:7 where He said *“If thou doest well, (that is come back again with what I require) shall thou not be accepted?” and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over Him.”*

This is a verse rich in meaning. First we have evidence that our God is a God of the “second chances.” Actually, He is the God of the “seventy times seven chances, (Matthew 18:22). Here God offers Cain the opportunity to please Him, and to wipe out the transgression by returning to obedience. We all need to heed this lesson! Second, we see the principal relating to the privilege given to the first-born. Had Cain repented, he would have ruled over Able because he was the eldest son. Third, we find here the first mention of the word sin, which in this instance is the Hebrew word “chattaah” meaning an offence against God, and implying a penalty. The word “if” in the Hebrew as used here is “im”. In the context of the verse in which it’s found twice, it is clearly a conditional expression that could also mean “whether, although, oh that, hence, doubtless, nevertheless, verily, of a truth unless, where as, while, yet,” and similar thoughts. The Hebrew word “im” is used 616 times, or 66% of the time “if” is translated from the Old Testament.

The next prevalent Hebrew word for “if”, occurring 161 times, or over 17% of the times is “kiy” and it occurs the very next time “if” is used, which is in Genesis 4:24. The meaning of “kiy” is more indicative of a casual relationship, rather than a conditional one as expressed by “im”. The word “kiy” can mean, “in as much, although, assuredly,” etc. Here we find La’mech, the fifth generation descendant of Cain speaking to his wives regarding some young man he has just killed. He says to them *“If Cain shall be avenged seven fold, truly La’mech seventy and seven fold.”* This verse is also rich in its implication. This suggests that the descendants of Cain maintained some knowledge of their ancestors, and here in particular a “hand-me-down” understanding of what may have been the last words God spoke to Cain. This would have been as noted in verse 15 when God put his mark on Cain as a badge of godly protection that carried a seven-fold punishment for anyone who would kill him. For some reason, La’mech believed he would be punished seventy times more severely than whom ever might have succeeded in killing Cain. It is interesting, that this is the first mention of the number seventy in Scripture. We cannot know what La’mech knew that would cause him to expect this exact level of punishment, but it may be that there already was some tradition or inspired insight that put it in his head, because the number 70 does seem to have a later association with punishment. Judah was in captivity for seventy years. Tyre was layed low for seventy years. The seventy weeks of years as predicted in Daniel 9:24 have not been a “cakewalk” for God’s chosen people either. But there also seems to be a universality about the number as well, for we find in Genesis 10, that the recorded decedents of Noah’s three sons total seventy. Seventy of Jacobs’ seed came down into Egypt at Joseph’s request. (Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5) Moses chose seventy elders (Numbers 11:16), and Jesus chose seventy disciples (Luke 10) etc.

The next mention of “if” in a translation of a different Hebrew word first occurs in Genesis 43:14 where the great drought had forced Jacob to send his ten oldest sons to Egypt to buy food. Of the twelve, Benjamin, the youngest had remained with his father, and of course Joseph had already been in Egypt for many years, now being second in command under the Pharaoh. They had returned with food, but soon it was used up and they needed to go again. But per Joseph’s demand, they could not come back unless they

brought Benjamin with them. This grieved Jacob greatly, but after understanding the whole situation which his sons had previously withheld until then, he agrees and says, “...*If it must be so now, do this...*” Here the word “if” is translated as the Hebrew word “asher.” The concordance indicates that it is used with “who, which, where, what, when, how,” etc. but is “indeclinable” that is it seems to be what we could call and if “without choice.” This seems to be why the “if” was chosen for this circumstance. Jacob had “no choice” as he used this word. Asher is used only eleven times in the Old Testament, as our word “if.”

In Leviticus 26:41, 42, we find the Hebrew word “ou” translated as if. This is not only the first, but also the only mention of this word in all of Scripture. The concordance defines it “by way of alternative, or, also, otherwise then,” etc. The verse reads “*And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob...*” There seems here to be a subtlety of meaning that renders neither “im,” a conditional “if,” nor “kiy” a casual “if,” appropriate for what God is conveying. This was not the normal “if you do this, then I will do that” kind of condition. This is more in the way of an action-reaction statement. It was automatic predictable and precise; no “ifs” of the usual meaning involved. Thus we have this unique word “ou,” which the translators have done their best to interpret. If we substitute the presumed meaning in place of this “if” the verse might read. *and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; by the way of an alternative, should their uncircumcised hearts. Etc.* It seems that God is not making the repentant posture a condition or a cause of His subsequent restoration of grace, but is reminding them of the fact that they always have this alternative available, and what He will do in response. This seems to be a precision of expressed thought far beyond what we as humans care to apply. But this is God speaking here, and He is always precise and inerrant. If He needed to create a new word for this singular application, because none of the other nine “ifs” would do it, so be it.

To briefly put this into a broader perspective, the last two chapters of Leviticus are what some call “Israel’s Magna Carta.” They spell out God’s covenant with His people. It details their duties and obligations, all that God has promised in return, and what their fate would be if they failed to keep their part of the covenant. The word “if” is used 31 times in these two chapters with “im” being used all but this once.

We’ve now examined four of ten variations of the word “if.” I’ve briefly examined the remaining six and find it difficult to see the benefit that might be derived from dealing with them here. Surely there are pearls to be discovered, but I fear that I have not yet been given sufficient insight with which to find them. Instead, let us now see what the New Testament “ifs” are all about.

Because Greek is known to be the most precise and comprehensive of all languages, it’s no surprise that there should be so many variations of meaning of “if” as it is with so many other English words.

The first “if” we encounter is the Greek word “ei” which also translates to, “for as much, whether, that.” It is the most common, found 308 times in the New Testament. Its first mention is in Matthew 4:3. This is in the temptation of Jesus, when Satan says to Jesus “*...If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread.*” Here we can see how comparatively limited our English language is compared to the Greek. As translated, we are justified in wondering whether or not Satan is certain as to whom he is talking. We could very well reason that Satan is saying, “this is a test, if you really are the Son of God, you’ll have no problem turning these stones into bread. So now prove yourself!” But by the use of the word “ei” Satan is not expressing any doubt. He knows to whom he is talking. He is saying “in as much as thou be....” In this particular case the context makes it evident that Satan knows to whom he speaks, so we are able to discern the intended meaning of “if.” This however, is not always the case.

The second most common Greek word translated as “if” is “ean” which means, “in case that, provided, whensoever.” It is used with other participles to denote indefiniteness or

uncertainty.” It occurs 258 times and is first used in Matthew 4:9 where we find Satan again tempting Jesus as he says “...*all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*” There is no problem here. This is how we normally use the word “if.”

All of the other ten variations of “ifs” amount to only 3% of the total number of “ifs”. Perhaps their rarity will provide some interesting insights. The next one of first mention is the Greek word “kan” It can mean, “and also, so much as, at the least, though, yet.” It first occurs in Matthew 21:21, where Jesus says, *Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree...*” Why didn’t Jesus choose the more common “if” such as “el” or “ean”? Whenever the word verily begins one of our Lord’s statements, be assured that He is saying something doubly important! By using the word “kan” here, Jesus is not expressing a conditional “if” but instead speaking to them as those who’s who have the faith. Without this clear distinction, recognized only by searching out and finding this specific meaning of what has been translated “if,” we would have to presume that Jesus is speaking to His Apostles in a way where their faith is yet in question. But by the use of “kan” we see that *so much as they do have faith and doubt not...* they can already do these things. The pre-requisite faith has already occurred! The word “kan” is used only three more times in Scripture. In Mark 16:18 Jesus again chooses the word “kan” when after His resurrection He commissions the Apostles to go out into the world to preach the Gospel. Verse 18 records the last words our Savior spoke before His ascension according, to the Gospel of Mark. *“They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”* Here again it’s not a conditional or causative “if.” The preceding verses established the validity of the believer to whom Jesus refers. Therefore He is saying *in so much as they do believe, drinking any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them....*

In Mark 5:28 where we are told of the woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years, who approached Jesus and said *“If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole.”* This was absolute faith! No “if” in the usual sense. All of us who are really His would do well to put “kan” in our thoughts as we consider Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The

last place this word occurs is in Luke 13:9 where Jesus is telling a parable about a fig tree. (This is not the same as Matthew 21:21) In verse 9 Jesus is responding to the keeper who has petitioned that the tree to not be cut down for yet another year. Jesus answered, *“and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shall cut it down.”* This parable is, I believe, likening the unproductive fig tree to the fruitless redeemed believer. God expects fruitfulness from His own. Here it is suggested that He will wait patiently for three years for His own to begin bearing fruit. Then by His grace He will wait another year. But at some point “after that” He will cut him or her down as having been unfruitful, therefore useless to Him here on earth. Such a person, having been saved will go to heaven, but absent any crowns. There will be a very sad feeling of disgrace and regret as he or she face Jesus at the bema seat.

Let’s look at both the “ifs” for there are two in this short sentence. The first is “kan” the last place it appears in Scripture. The other is “ean”. Thus Jesus is saying *so much as it bear fruit, well: and in case that it not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.* See how carefully the Holy Spirit has authored this Holy Book! Even the “ifs” are most thoughtfully sculptured to a supernatural precision.

In 2Timothy 2:25 we find “if” a translation of the Greek word “melpote”(may-pot-el) which means, as closely as the English can express it: “not ever, also lest ever (or perhaps), not at all, whether or not.” In verse 25 we have the Holy Spirit through Paul, near the end of his detailed instruction to the young Timothy telling him how to be strong in the faith when he is preaching to his congregation. *“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth”* Because this word only occurs but once, we must interpret it as having a unique connotation here. Therefore it seems to be appropriate in the context of the chapter to say *whether or not God peradventure will give them repentance to acknowledging of the truth.* The next verse seems to require such an interpretations of “if” as it continues the argument thusly:

“...and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. Saying, “that they may” rather than shall, precludes the “if”

from being necessarily causative. In other words, it seems that the Holy Spirit is telling Timothy to preach the Word to everyone, not only if God gives them repentance, but whether or not He does so! This becomes quite a different message when we understand what this “if” really means.

Once again we have only looked at four of what are twelve variations of what has been translated from the Greek as “if.” Also as I have examined the remaining eight, I find that it is beyond my present level of discernment to contribute meaningful value to any further discussion of the matter.

Before we move on to the main purpose of this essay, it seems that we need a foundation on which to build what follows regarding this pivotal word “if”. That foundation centers on “obedience.” All of Scripture might be expressed primarily as, the history of man’s obedience and disobedience to God’s will. From the beginning of creation God laid out His requirement of obedience. We see this in His instruction to Adam. It didn’t take long for Adam to choose disobedience, and all of creation, from that moment on, has suffered the consequences of that one act. What followed was that God found it necessary to add additional requirements of obedience, to deal with mans now firmly established sin nature. The second man, Cain, chose to disobey at least two of these requirements. And so it continued with obedience being observed less and less until after 1656 years, the whole world was one seething cesspool of disobedience, so wicked that God chose to destroy all of unredeemable humanity, there being only one man and his family worthy of saving. Failure to be obedient ravaged even this second, first-family from whence we are all derived. The proportion of disobedience to obedience has continued to increase in the behavior of all mankind. From that perspective, the whole of history to the present, from a corporate perspective, is recorded as times of modest ascendancy toward obedience being rewarded by God with peace and abundance, followed by even deeper descendancy into disobedience, eventually resulting in punishment. This seemingly never ending cycle continues in the history of nations. However, it will end, and soon, as God has said it would, not by flood as in the time of Noah, (Genesis 9:11) but by fire. (2Peter 3:10, 11), Revelation 20:9, 21:1). Even so,

within that corporate structure, God has always retained a small remnant of obedient souls to carry out His greater purpose. It is on this foundation of God's demand for obedience that we can find other important, or at least interesting "ifs" in Scripture.

The very first "if" in all of Scripture we have already touched on, that is when God, in Genesis 4:7, offers Cain another chance to repent of his disobedience. We can, if we see the full implications of this brief statement, a hugely revealing insight into God's divine character, which He will express repeatedly throughout history. Here our God first reveals most clearly His divine attributes of love, patience, forgiveness and a fatherly willingness to teach His creation about what is right and wrong. We see these attributes of our God manifest love and patience repeatedly expressed throughout all of Scripture to the very end of the Book of Revelation. God's words to Cain ring true and relevant to every human being that ever has or ever will live. *"If thou doest well, shall thou not be accepted?"* It is all about obedience. If we do well, that is obeying God's word; won't we be accepted into God's eternal heavenly realm? Guaranteed! But, first, before we can "do well" we must know what "well" means. Jesus Himself, and then through His Apostles made that very clear for us if we but study, learn and then choose His way. This is in no way suggesting that "works" save. We know that only God's unwarranted grace through faith saves. However, out of a saving faith comes gratitude, and out of gratitude obedience must follow. It is obedience to His Word that is the evidence of gratitude and this also is evidence of a saving faith.

The next "if" of special interest to me is found in Genesis 28:20. Prior to this, in verses 12 – 15, God had spoken to Jacob very clearly in a dream in which He re-affirmed to him the Abrahamic covenant, and a wonderful promise that God would always be with Jacob. The covenant assured him that his seed would spread across the entire earth and be a blessing to all people. Then Jacob vowed saying *"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way...then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and all that thou shall give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."* Many who have read this verse have assumed this to be Jacob's attempt to bargain with God, and for it to be just one more indication of the Jacob's evil, deceiving

and scheming nature. He seems to be among the most vilified of all the major biblical characters. The favorite expression regarding him is that if God could forgive him, He can forgive anyone. I see Jacob quite differently and therefore several years ago I wrote an essay called “In Defense of Jacob” where I explain away, at least to my satisfaction, every negative claim that has been leveled against him.

Here we see a man in the process of coming to the faith, a genuine faith that would guide him the rest of his life. Jacob knew of the Abrahamic covenant because it had to have been a subject of much conversation both in his grandfather’s house and often between his parents, Isaac and Rebekah. He also knew that even though Esau was the oldest, it was he whom God had ordained to be the one who was to be thus blessed. However, there is no indication that prior to this encounter; he had ever had any direct contact with God. He only knew the stories, which he most likely believed as head-knowledge only. Now at age 77 he had this first encounter with our living God, who confirmed what he had heard all his life. What a life altering experience this was for him! Prior to this he had been a docile, obedient son even to the extent of participating in that charade his mother had orchestrated in order to prevent Isaac from confirming his blessing on Esau, because she knew from God’s own decree to her that Jacob was the “chosen” one. Surely God would have used some more righteous way to affect His will, but nevertheless, by His permissive will, He allowed Rebekah to “do it her way,” a way, by the way, that was not without punishment.

So now we see Jacob expressing this big “if” after hearing what God had said. This “if” is the Hebrew “im” a conditional “if” for which such words as “since” or “whereas” are equally applicable depending on context. The “since” or “whereas” interpretation of what Scripture actually says, is to me, the more accurate. There was no bargaining in Jacob’s heart. What could he possibly be bargaining for? God had long ago made this covenant of which Jacob knew he would possess. Here God is merely confirming it to Jacob, in Person. There was nothing Jacob could ever do that could nullify it. He had it. It was already a done deal years earlier. Jacob’s response was simply an expression of gratitude. He believed God, and in loving gratitude offered what he had, what God wants

most, the willingness to be obedient to His will. (John 14:21) This situation is a prototype of what happens to every born-again Christian when he or she first comes to that saving faith. It is a deep heart-felt gratitude that wants to honor the Father and His Son our Savior with a life of obedience, this being the strongest possible expression of love. If you read carefully the available evidence of Jacob's life henceforth, you can see a strong faith, closeness to God, and a commendable on-going obedience for which he was richly rewarded.

They say that there is no greater gift a man can give than that he willingly sacrifices his life for his country. That may be the greatest sacrifice that one can actually give, but there is an infinitely greater sacrifice that one may be willing to offer, and that is the forfeiture of the salvation of ones soul. Of course the eternal security of all souls redeemed by faith precludes that possibility, yet the heart of the offerer may be completely sincere. This would seem to be the ultimate expression of man's God-given love for another. That is what we see in Exodus 32:32 where Moses says "*Yet now if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee out of thy book which thou had written.*" The significance of this is almost beyond comprehension. What Moses is saying is that if God is going to condemn these people, the entire Hebrew race, to eternal damnation, then he implores God to do so also to him! This occurs very early after their exodus from Egypt. The occasion is after Moses came down Mt. Sinai and saw the people worshipping a golden calf, and when he broke the stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. While Moses was on the mountain God told him what was going on and told him to get down there. Then God told him, in Exodus 32:10, "*Now therefore let me alone that my wrath may work hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation.*" However Moses delayed his departure long enough to point out to God that if he did this God would be defamed for having failed to do with "His" people what he had promised. To get the whole thrust of this, one should read Exodus 32:11-13. Because of this argument, and Moses' profound willingness to sacrifice his own salvation for the people, our Lord "repented." This repentance must not be considered a change of mind by God, or it would suggest that His omniscience is limited. Instead, this is in a sense, a sort of charade where our all-

knowing God provides a test for Moses own benefit, of his faith in God and his commitment to the people for whom God has made him responsible.

Upon his return to the camp and surveying the situation, Moses acted immediately putting to death three thousand of the instigators. God's response to Moses' "if" of verse 32 was to tell Moses that only those who sinned would be "blot out" of His book. But there is much more here well worth understanding, symbolically at least. God keeps books! The book first mentioned is the Book of Generations in Genesis 5:1. Then in Exodus 17:14 God tells Moses to "*write this for a memorial in a book...*" This had to do with the defeat of the Amalekites who plagued them when they first entered the wilderness area after leaving Mt. Sinai in Arabia. Perhaps this "book" is a reference, to the Book of Exodus the second of the five books that Moses wrote. In Exodus 24:7 we read of the "book of covenant" wherein Moses had recorded what God had promised, and the manner of obedience with which the people had agreed to respond.

Again referring to Exodus 32:32 it is revealed that God keeps a book recording the names of all the people who are born. This may be the same book referred to in Revelation 3:5 where Jesus says, "*...I will not blot out his name from the book of life.*" Then in Revelation 21:27 we find that there is a "Lamb's Book of Life". The book of life seems to be the record of all who ever lived, and seems to be like a ledger where the names of the unredeemed sinners are erased, or blotted out as they die. The Lamb's Book of life however, I believe lists only the redeemed in Christ, those who will partake in the rapture and are His "Body of Christ". If this be true, then in the end, God's Book of life will contain the names of everyone who makes it to heaven, including, not only the Body of Christ, but also all of the Old Testament saints, the tribulation saints, and those saved during the millennium.

In Numbers 14:15 we have another big "if" spoken by Moses after they had marched from Mt. Sinai and to the border of Canaan, the Promised Land. There they sent out twelve spies who came back telling of the wonderful land God had chosen for them, but also that it was inhabited by giants. Ten of the twelve expressed fear and spoke ill of proceeding and only two, Joshua and Caleb had faith, and urged the invasion to proceed

as God had directed. For this, the people tried to stone the two of them. I believe this spying excursion and its results was God's way, of demonstrating to them that their faith was only in their mouths, not their hearts. For two years, at and around Sinai, God, through Moses had sought to prepare them for this moment. They received all the laws, all the manner and means by which they were to worship, and how they were to live their lives as God's special people. They now had the Arc of the Covenant and the Tabernacle, which was God's physical living place among them from which He would be their Guide and Protector. Faith and obedience were all they needed to receive in this Promised Land all of the good that life in that rich land would provide. They were well versed in the covenants, that is, what God would do in exchange for their obedience, and what He would do when they disobeyed, because Moses had read it to them over and over and they had agreed to it. They were "head wise" all in agreement, but now, they failed the first real test!

Numbers 14:11-14 tells us how angry God was at this demonstration of disobedience and lack of faith. Again God threatened to exterminate them and use Moses as the "seed" of another new nation, but again Moses appealed to God's Holy name with that "if" in Numbers 14:15. Again in deference to Moses' plea, God "repented." However this time He said that they would wander the wilderness for thirty-eight more years until the very last of all of the men were dead who were over 20 years old when they crossed out of Egypt. Thus only their next generation would receive that blessing. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones of that older generation to finally go and lead them into the Promised Land. Parenthetically, we have here an indication of age 20 as being the age of accountability at least at that time. It took only about 40 days to get the Israel out of Egypt but it took 40 years and an entire lost generation to get Egypt out of Israel. Even then, subsequent history seems to say that it has never really left them, nor is it out of us, in its symbolic meaning.

There is another lesson for us in this last episode, one that we should recognize as very applicable today. It is how God makes His case for the punishment of that generation. God cites how ten times during those first two years after leaving Egypt they had tempted

Him through their disobedience, to render severe punishment. Next, He speaks of the continual murmuring against Him, which shows how little, or no faith they had. Then the final straw, the worst of their expressions of murmuring, when they said that they would have preferred to have died in Egypt or even in the wilderness rather than face the giants of Canaan. With this wish, they sealed their own fate, for that is what God gave them, death in the wilderness. Our God today is the same God as the one who was there in the wilderness. Murmurings, disobedience lack of faith today are as bad or worse than they were then. This, our country, has been the most blessed nation in history, yet it has forsaken that blessing by treating it as an entitlement as did ancient Israel. Given that at the time of the gathering at the boarder of Canaan, they had had a close association with God, and His agent Moses for only two years after centuries of life under pagan rule, one can at least understand the difficulty of such a transition, but what is our excuse? If our God of the seventy times seven forgivenesses has been counting, and we can be sure He has, how many more slaps-in-the-face has He yet to forgive before we get what we deserve?

In the same vane as in the previous discussion, we find another most beautiful offer of corporate forgiveness, conditional on an "if." It's a well-known, but painfully ignored standing offer to His people. We find it in the 2Chronicles 7:14 where it says, *If my people who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land.*" The purpose and application of this conditional promise is clear. God wants, and rewards obedience! But notice, He expects it here from His people! He was speaking to His people Israel at the time, but God's Word is recorded and passed on as a truth for all times. Today there is another selected group who are also His people that is the invisible church, the true Body of Christ. I believe that God, with these words, is crying out to all of His people, Jew and Christian, to accept His offer. However, it seems that the pre-requisites of obedience, as was imposed then, and is today, is just too much for sinful man to embrace, and so the offer remains unclaimed today as it has been throughout the centuries.

It is of interest to note that these words were spoken to Solomon at the very zenith of Israel's history when wealth, prosperity, and even godly worship were at their best. The Temple had just been dedicated and a seven-day period of feasting and worship had ended. God's earthly home had been finished and He had moved in! Why this "if" at this seemingly inappropriate time? It is because God knew that this moment of worship and obedience wouldn't last, and that all forms of idol worship and disobedience would again reign, even during Solomon's remaining tenure. Notice the subtle prophetic way in which God alludes to that eventuality. He says, "...*I will hear from heaven...*" At the time God spoke these words, the Shekina (God) had taken up residency in the Holy of Holies of the Temple, but as evil again began to prevail, He would leave His place and return to heaven, so it is from there that He predicts that He will then listen for their cries.

Next let us look briefly into the book of Ezekiel. But first it should be noted that there were three sieges of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The first took Daniel and his friends to Babylon. The second took Ezekiel and a few others while the third took the remainder into the seventy years of captivity. Here Ezekiel is ministering to Jews already in Babylon, but yet sometime before the final deportation. There is a series of four "ifs" in Ezekiel chapter, 14 that in combination provide a message of what I believe to be of great significance to us today, if we are willing to fully apprehend it, and apply it to help explain many of the confusing physical and spiritual issues that confound us in these end times.

In order to appreciate the context and even approach understanding the message of the "ifs" the whole chapter is here provided from the King James Version.

Ezekiel 14:1-23

" then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me, and the word of the Lord came unto me saying, son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face; should I be inquired of at all be them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them. Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth

the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet: I the Lord will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols: That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore I say unto the house of Israel thus saith the Lord God; Repent and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourned in Israel, which separateth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me: I the Lord will answer him by myself. And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people, and ye shall know that I am the Lord. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I Lord have deceived that prophet and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him. That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord God. The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously; then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and best from it. Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness saith the Lord God. If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts: Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate. Or if I bring a sword upon the land, and say, Sword go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it. Through these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters but they only shall be delivered themselves. Or if I send pestilence into the land, and pour out my fury upon it I blood, to cut off from it man and beast. Through Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. For thus saith the Lord God; how much

more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast? Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters; behold they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings; and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem even concerning all that I have brought upon it. And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God.”

If, as we proceed with this commentary, the thrust of the message remains unclear, try reading the previous chapter, because it does add some additional groundwork to help explain just where our Lord is coming from here. Basically, through Ezekiel, God is stating that Jerusalem is not going to be spared. Here, as with the other prophets, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea, etc. God explains from several perspectives the how and why of His action.

The first “if” occurs in verse 9 where God accepts the responsibility for having deceived the deceiving prophet and then He says, He will “destroy him” from the midst of the people. What goes here? God will put a lie in his mouth, and then destroying him for being a false prophet? Is that any different then using Babylon to punish Judah and then punish Babylon for their actions against Judah? If you wish to understand this beyond what is written here, please study 2Kings 22:13-23 and 2Thessalonians 2:8-11. But why punish those persons who did what the false prophet told him to do? If we look carefully at these situations we see that God lets false prophets deal with those people who like them, are already in deep and prolonged irreversible disobedience. Perhaps the most relevant verses in all of Scripture for us today which depict this seemingly discordant view of our ever forgiving and merciful God who nevertheless must remain just, can be found in Romans 1:21-32.

Three times God gives the evildoers over to their own evil ways (verses 24, 26 and 28). In reading the listings of abominations to which their perpetrators are given over, one cannot help but shockingly realize that it is our nation, our own country being described!

Even more disturbing however, is to realize that these verses also speak too much of what is today called Christianity and the Christian church! While the door to salvation always remain open to all who repent, in His foreknowledge God knows who have sunk into sin so deeply that they will never choose to extricate themselves no matter how persuasively they are righteously ministered to.

Righteous ministry has become a rare thing in the modern “Christian” church. As Jesus and the apostles predicted, false teachers have entered the church leading people away from the truth through half-truths, clever twistings of truth, and outright lies. Today we see the world tolerating, and even glorifying evil, while condemning biblical truth. That the “world” has entered, and is flourishing in the so-called Christian church, influencing a great many into false beliefs and eternal damnation, is becoming evident almost everywhere. However, truth is in the Scripture, and is available to everyone. Therefore, for those who claim to want it, there is no excuse for remaining ignorant of the truth that can save the soul. But man prefers the lie, and ignorance of truth, because it condones his lifestyle. God’s inerrant vision of the future tells Him that certain people, and nations, will not repent, no matter how persuasive the truth may be presented to them. In these cases, God simply gives them over to their sinful nature and thus to Satan and eternal damnation. How painful this is for those who have learned the truth of Scripture and see this travesty thriving within their church, within their own families, and throughout their nation.

The other three “ifs” of Ezekiel 14 are found in verse 15, 17 and 19. They all express the same message that is that God is sovereign and will not be dissuaded from His righteous judgment. In order to make the point He uses the names of three of the most righteous man of all Scripture as examples of how even with their honorable presence and persuasive abilities being applied, His judgment cannot be changed. These men were saved, each from overwhelming earthly calamities and spiritual damnation because of their great faith. However, the intercession of even these holiest of men, had they been present, could not have averted God’s judgment. This teaches us that no one can save anyone but himself, and then only by the grace of God. All of this is a way of expressing

the fact that nothing could have saved Jerusalem. Just as the message of Romans Chapter one is the message for nations such as ours, that God at some point will give them over to their sinful ways and extract His judgment, so here God has pronounced that unrepentant judgment on Jerusalem. Nothing can now save them. Notice they will not be saved from famine (verse 13), nor from the wild beasts (verse 15) nor from the sword (verse 17) nor from pestilence (verse 19). Again, even if Noah Daniel and Job were in the midst of all of this, God would not save Jerusalem, although they, the righteous souls would be saved. This is a strong referring to the fact that the ever-existing remnant the “invisible church” will always escape spiritual destruction.

Note the four “sore” judgments referenced here, famine, wild beasts, sword, and pestilence. They also appear in Revelation 6 and are what the present world has to look forward to in this rapidly approaching end period of the end times as described by Jesus and by the prophets. The condition of this country and of the world are well set for the implementation of these judgments as the world prepares to welcome in the reign of Antichrist.

Let’s now pop over to the New Testament and to 1Timothy 5:8 for a very sobering “if” message.

“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house. He hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

How in the world do we deal with this? Well, first off, “in the world” is not the place in which this needs to be dealt with. It is in the heart and mind of the redeemed soul where such matters are to be examined. Paul’s two letters to Timothy contain among the most troublesome verse in all of Scripture in the context of current times. In these letters Paul outlines a number of today’s difficult, and highly controversial precepts regarding the roles of women in the church, the essential qualifications for pastors, deacons, and other church officials, and numerous requirements for good Christian behavior, such as those regarding widows and other needy persons. We must however, remember that all

Scripture is for our learning, and that it was all God-breathed, that is authored by God, not man. This verse as with all of Scripture, even the controversial ones, are inspired by God and were given to various men to record. Therefore we must take this one as seriously as we must all other verse in the Holy Bible.

The “if” here in the Greek is the word “ei” equivalently expressed as “for as much” or “whether”. The word “denied” is “arneomai” in the Greek, and can also mean, “disavowed, rejected, contradict, abnegate, and refuse.” The word “infidel” in the Greek is “apisttos” and can also mean “unbelieving, untrustworthy, and incredible.” The meaning of this verse is quite evident. It is a despicable thing to not respond meaningfully to the needs of the needy, and especially the needs of one’s own family. At first reading one might conclude that this behavior necessarily characterizes an unsaved soul. But the phrase, “worse than the infidel” or “unawares” seems to make it clear that it is believers about whom Paul is speaking. But are all of these really born-again believers, or are some only those professing to be believers, who have crept into the body of the church unaware? The presumption is that they are saved but who can be sure? Even Paul couldn’t see into the hearts of those who claimed faith. The callused characteristics of a soul who would evade such responsibilities might well be considered evidence of an unsaved soul. I believe that a case can be made that Paul may have known that not all, if any of those he chastised were true believers. That he called them as worse than “unbelievers does not necessarily mean that he saw them as born-again believers, but perhaps believers in profession only. This point is strengthened, but not necessarily nailed down, by Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:4 where he speaks of “...*false brethren unaware (secretly) brought in...*” We normally conclude that whenever an Apostle speaks of brethren it is a certainty that he speaks of redeemed Christians, but it seems likely that here he speaks of pretenders, professors, but not possessors of a saving faith. The Greek word meaning “false” as expressed in Galatians 2:4 is “pseudadelphos” which is translated as “a spurious brother, pretended associate, false brethren.” It occurs only twice in Scripture. The other place is in 2Corinthians 11:13, where Paul says “...*for there are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*” Verse 14 and 15, of 2Corinthians 11 are also important if we are to get the full

meaning of the message. There Paul continues, *“And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing of his ministers also to be transformed as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”* Dear God, how profoundly accurate are these words You so lovingly past through Paul’s heart and into this epistle! We only need to see what, for the most part, is coming out of the seminaries, and hear what is being spewed out of many of the pulpits today to recognize the accuracy and significance of these verses. Nothing more than biblical illiteracy and the preaching of only the comfortable non-challenging verses are required to fill the pews where Satan’s shepherds preach, and to thereby lead their unsuspecting flocks into eternal hell.

Let’s look at just one more reference regarding this issue found in 1Timothy 5:8. We find it in Matthew 15:4-6. *“For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and he that cureth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.”* We hear this from the lips of Christ Jesus, as the Son of man condemning the ways of the Pharisees who also chose to avoid such family responsibilities. What is referred to here is the tradition involving what is called “corban” which deals with a gift or vow. This seems to have been a Pharasitical contrivance that allowed them to set aside their goods and wealth for either of two purposes: as dedication to the Temple, or in reserve for the performance of some other vow. If their wealth was in either category, they could claim corban, thereby evading accountability whenever any undesired obligations may have laid claim on them. From this came the practice where even when the caring for needy relatives was required, a Pharisee could declare exemptions under corban and therefore not be obligated to care for them because all of his assets were “tied up” and not available. This was the often-used excuse for not obeying the commandment to care for parents. That is what Jesus is condemning in these verses. How many today find similar or other excuses to shirk this responsibility, and who could if they would do the “right thing.” Does this type of avoidance of difficult responsibilities happen among genuine born-again Christians?

Probably, but who can know, because who can say who is a true “brethren?” Perhaps if we could only change our “knee-jerk philosophy” from “why should I,” to “why shouldn’t I,” and then seek an honest answer from within, many such issues would depart from our society.

This essay could go on and on and become as lengthy as the Scripture itself if I were to touch on the many other significant “ifs” to be found in God’s Word. Instead we’ll end this part of those musings with just one more “if” message and that is to be found Romans 8:17 where the Holy Spirit prompts Paul to say in verse 16 and 17:

“The Spirit itself beareth witness, with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

The first “if” is a translation of the Greek word “ei” which can mean “as much as.” The second “if” is a translation of “ei per” which can mean “if perhaps, if so be that, seeing though” The subtle difference between these two “ifs” is difficult to discern for us not schooled in Greek, but we know that it must be meaningful or it would not have been chosen. The word “heir” is translated from the Greek word “kleronomia” which means a “sharer by lot, getting an apportionment, an inheritor, heir possessor.” From these, the translators chose “heir.” But in this context it seems that the word “sharer” which is also the first of the listed choices, is a more appropriate translation here. That means that the saved soul is a sharer who receives something, some share of something, as a son or daughter of God. Surely it’s eternal life, a heavenly home, an eternal career of some kind, and perhaps other blessings we cannot even imagine.

That second “if”: “..if so that we suffer with Him...” adds a new dimension to heir or sharer. There is something here very subtle yet I believe, very profound and essential to understand. Speaking of redeemed souls, Paul says in verse 16 that they are all children of God. With this fact in mind, Paul continues at the beginning of verse 17, to say that they are heirs (sharers) of God. But now there seems to be another category of the

redeemed, and that is the “joint-heirs” (joint-sharers) with Christ! These are set aside under a different category, if they suffer with Christ! All Christians who take their faith seriously (can there be any who are really saved who don’t?) will necessarily suffer for it. This is because the world hates Jesus and also all who genuinely believe in Him and live by His ways. Here however, we have another, and it seems unique category of suffering that qualifies one to a special relationship, as “joint-heir” with Christ. There is a very careful sculpturing of this verse. The Greek word “sumpascho,” translated as “suffer.” means “experience pain jointly or of the same kind-suffer with.” The word suffer or suffering occurs 167 times in the New Testament, and there are 16 different Greek words for “suffer.” This one is used only here and in 1Corinthians 12:26b, which is regarding the joint sufferings of the members of the Body of Christ. This meaning must be considered to be a special form of suffering closely related to what Jesus suffered. We may conclude with some apparent justification that these “joint heirs” with Christ include the martyrs who died because of their faith, and perhaps those who spent long years of suffering in prison for the same reason. However, Jesus suffered in many ways from His early childhood to the final and ultimate suffering on the cross. At what point is ones suffering here on earth because of their faith, of a quantity or a quality sufficient to meet this particular criterion? Only God knows. But this verse seems to make it evident that such a criterion does exist, and will effect one’s position in the eternal realm. If this be so, what might we conclude about the nature of the other heavenly assignments that will be given to those who will populate the millennium as well as the rest of God’s eternal kingdom? We already know that by means of the good-works-crowns that the redeemed will have earned here on earth, and taken to heaven, they will be given various assignments within some form of heavenly social structure. As “heirs with Christ” it seems likely that those so rewarded will occupy more elevated or separate places in this hierarchy. This last “if” gives me the “excuse” of basis for delivery in to what follows.

In 1Corinthians 12:27 Paul, speaking to redeemed believers, is saying, “now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.” In Romans 8:14 Paul again speaks of those who are led by the Spirit of God, as being the sons and daughters of God. Then, as we have seen in Romans 8:17, these are also heirs, or some kind of “sharers” with God.

Scripture speaks of heirs of salvation, heirs of the promise and heirs of the kingdom! Perhaps that is all that it means to be heirs of God, or maybe there is more. Again, it may depend on what crowns one brings to heaven.

Now let us bring into focus, several allusions to the categories of persons that will reside with the Lord in the heavenly places, keeping in mind the “if” of Romans 8:17 where appropriate. Scripture speaks of:

1. The church (Matthew 16:18)
2. The body of Christ (1Corinthians 12:27)
3. The sons (and daughters) of God (Romans 8:14)
4. The heavenly positions of priests and kings (Revelation 1:6, and 5:10)
5. The heirs of God (Romans 8:17a)
6. The joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17b)
7. The bride, the lamb’s wife (Revelation 20:9)

After considerable study of the relevant portions of Scripture, it is my belief that all seven of these listed descriptions of redeemed souls relate to but are not all limited to the present dispensation, that is to the church age which began at Pentecost and will end with the rapture.

The **church** is first mentioned in Matthew 16:18 where Jesus says “... *on this rock will I build My church...*”. The Greek word for church is “ekklesia” and means a calling out, a religious congregation, an assembly. Therefore, the “church” is an assembly, a calling out of Jesus’ own. What is called the Church today however, is not entirely Jesus’ “called out assembly.” Today we have the “visible church” consisting of all who call themselves Christians. The word Christian is greatly misused today. It is applied to nearly anyone who is favorably impressed with Jesus’ earthly ministry. It is personalized by those who say the “magic words” of the sinner’s prayer, then continue on with their lives as if nothing else was required. The label “Christian” is also claimed by those with no greater affinity to Jesus than to have been born into a family, the parents of which call

themselves Christian. Within this “visible church” there is what is called the “invisible church.” This is what Scripture usually calls the “remnant,” that is the small segment of the visible church that the genuine “called out” assembly of Jesus’ own. They are called invisible because salvation is of the soul and cannot always be discerned from outward appearances. There are also many who clearly do not belong to Jesus, but whose good works and lifestyles are more Christ-like than are those of genuine Christians. Only God, and those who are really His, know who are really His.

Only what is called the “invisible church” is what makes up the **Body of Christ**. It is well known by most within the “body” that each member has received a spiritual gift that he or she is expected to use with devotion befitting a true servant of our Lord. A spiritual gift is a special power given for the utilization of some attributes and talents which are to be used to advance our Lords purpose while we are yet here on earth, and to earn rewards that will effect our position in the eternal real preaching, teaching, serving, giving, organizing, writing, etc. are examples of talents with such spiritual empowerment will place one appropriately within that living functioning organism called “Body of Christ,” the body of which Christ Jesus is the head.

The **sons and daughters, or children of God** are all who come to Christ Jesus in faith during this dispensation only. They are the same people that make up the body of Christ, and the invisible church. There appears to be but one mention of the children of God in the Old Testament and that is in Deuteronomy 14:1 where God through Moses is instructing the people as to all of the “dos and don’ts” of His law. A quick reading of this verse might cause one to think that here also is a segment of people included in this category. However, the Hebrew word for “children” is “ben” and is defined as “son (a builder of the family name) in the widest sense. (of literal and figurative relationship),” can refer to “subject, nation, quality or condition,” etc. Thus we cannot conclude that the phrase means saved souls but instead is speaking of those people as His nation, His special people. We know in the context of this verse that of these, surely not all, if even a few, were saved soul to whom God is speaking. Therefore, I believe that is reasonable to conclude that all “sons and daughters” or “children” of God are of the present

dispensation. Of course there were, and will be others saved, but they do not fall under this classification of saved souls.

The reference to “sons” to “sons and daughters” and to “children” can be a bit confusing until one examines other English translations. Then it gets even more confusing because there is no consistency of use where these terms occur. The five translations of the many relevant verses that I have examined seem to be everywhere but in agreement. This is probably because of the latitude allowed in the Greek words being translated. Therefore, I believe it’s safe to conclude that either “sons and daughters” or “children” is appropriate and “sons” alone should not be considered applicable in the subject context. Where spiritual issues are concerned, Christianity uniquely considers men and women equal before God, so this I believe is a very safe assumption.

The position of **kings and priests** in the eternal kingdom, and from whence they will come, seems less than absolutely clear, at least to me. Revelation 1:6 says “*and hath made us kings and priests unto God...*” This portion of Revelation I believe can be clearly seen as addressing the church. The “us” is the “church” who are made kings and priests. In Revelation 5:10 it seems to be the 24 elders who speak of having been made kings and priests who will reign on earth, presumably at least during the millennium and perhaps even later.

From studying Revelation, I believe that the 24 elders are of the “body of Christ,” that is of the current dispensation. This is because they have “crowns of gold” (Revelation 4:4), and they “...*cast their crowns before the throne.*” (Revelation 4:10) These are of course spiritual crowns. I find no mention of crown in this context in the Old Testament. Scripture seems to limit such crowns to the “children of God” who earn them through good works in loving gratitude after they have been justified. Some Bible scholars maintain that these all, or at least half, are Old Testament saints. One conjecture is that they are the twelve Apostles and the twelve sons of Israel. Another is that they are the twelve sons of Jacob along with other Old Testament “elders” such as Moses, Noah, Samuel, etc. Lacking any Scriptural evidence to substantiate this, it seems to me fair to

conclude that these are some very special people chosen for this honor out of the “Body of Christ.” Indeed the twelve disciples may very well be among them, but not the sons of Israel.

Now let us see what else is revealed about the kings and priests in the eternal kingdom. Revelation 20:6 tells us something quite significant.

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

From this it seems evident that all redeemed souls will be priests of God, because the first resurrection, (there are only two) includes everyone who is saved to eternal life. This first resurrection includes all of the Old Testament saints, the raptured saints, and those saints who die during the tribulation, right up to the beginning of the millennium. The second resurrection consists of all the unsaved who ever lived and died by the end of the millennium at which time they too shall be raised, judged and each assigned to a God-chosen place in the lake of fire. Notice that the quoted verse says that they shall be priests but doesn't speak of kings. However, it says they “shall reign” with Him during the millennium. Effectually they will be kings because the word reign in the Greek is “basileno” which means to rule or reign in the sense of a king. Until studying this more carefully I believed as many Christians do, that only those of the Body of Christ would be kings and priests. However, from this we must conclude that all saved souls will be kings and priests during the millennium. That begs two questions; over whom will they be kings and priests, during the millennium, and what happens after the millennium? It must be those who survive the tribulation, along with their subsequent generations during the millennium. The sheep and goat judgment that Jesus tells us about in Matthew 25:31-46 shall occur sometime within the 75 days between the end of the great tribulation and the beginning of the millennium kingdom. (Daniel 12:11, 12) He speaks of gathering “all nations” and separating “them” into two groups, the “sheep and the goats.” As one reads these verses, the “them” seems to indicate all the people from all the nations. However,

in subsequent verses where Jesus describes the tribulation period behavior of the two groups, He is clearly referring to those who had opportunities to help or withhold help from His “brethren,” that is those believers who were in danger of being caught by Antichrist’s forces during the tribulation. It seems safe to assume that there will be many people, those in remote isolated regions throughout the world, who will have had no part of this scene, and that therefore they will not be participants of the “sheep and goat” judgment. They will obviously be among those who will continue to live and procreate during the millennium.

At the end of our Lord’s revelation concerning this judgment (verse 46), He says, “*and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into eternal life.*” What can we glean from this beyond the obvious? First, He tells us that those who didn’t assist the brethren during the tribulation “*shall go away to eternal punishment.*” The “shall go” does not necessarily mean instantly. Those “goats,” as well as the sheep, may continue to live out their natural lives before their respective punishments or rewards begin. Hasn’t this always been the situation of both the saved and the unsaved? God knows all hearts and therefore knows from the beginning who will and who will not repent, yet He allows them all to live out their lives. Why wouldn’t this be the case after the tribulation as well? Also it should be noted that the world population will greatly increase during that thousand years, until as we learn in Revelation 20:8 Satan will recruit an army as numerous as “the sand of the sea” to war against Jesus. Just imagine how many more souls loyal to Jesus there will be at that time. Souls that have been successfully guided by the “kings” and ministered to by the “priests” we are here discussing. How very strange and disturbing it is to realize that even with God Himself, that is, Christ Jesus physically, and of course spiritually, reigning here on earth, that the naturally wicked heart of man will continue to direct his choices even as it does today. This must be so, or else from whence would Satan draw his immense army? From this it seems evident that there will be many “troubled” mortals on earth during the millennium who will provide considerable “work” for the “kings and priests.”

On page 21 we have already identified the **Heirs of God** as mentioned in Romans 8:17a. As the children of God, these are also heirs or sharers of God. The sons and daughters of God become sharers of what He has chosen to offer from among His heavenly possessions as already described earlier.

Now we come to the sixth item on our list, the **Joint Heirs with Christ**. This too has already been discussed herein on pages 21 and 22. The word heir, or sharer, here is the same as that of Romans 8:17a. The question begging an answer not offered in this earlier discussion is, what will be this unique or separate place in the heavenly hierarchy? I don't believe, as yet anyway, that Scripture gives us an answer, at least not directly, or with any assurance that we perceive correctly. However, there may be pieces to the puzzle that, if positioned properly, may take form as to provide some portion of an answer. We will deal with this later. Whatever it means to be "joint sharers" with Christ, it seems clear that it applies to a group selected from within what are called the children of God.

Now finally we come to category seven **The Bride, the Lamb's Wife**. This of course is the Bride of Christ alluded to many times throughout the New Testament. Many conclude that the "bride of Christ" and the "body of Christ" are one and the same. However, there may be, and I believe that there is, a difference. Before attempting to identify what this difference may be, we need to recall the importance of the earthly works of the redeemed souls, because these are what seem to provide heavenly rewards which one might consider being the basis on which heavenly positions are assigned. Notice what Jesus tells us in Revelation 22:12 *"And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."* Elsewhere Scripture indicates that these "works" rewards are represented by "crowns" which may be considered "coins of the heavenly realm," that in a sense accompany one to heaven. There are crowns of rejoicing (1Thessolians 2:10); crowns of righteousness (2Timothy 4:8); the crowns of life (James 1:12); the crowns of glory (1Peter 5:4); the crown of glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9), and at least seven others woven in to the Scriptural fabric. While there is no evidence, or even a thought that God discriminates in anyway regarding

who He “draws” to Him and through faith justifies, and finally glorifies (Romans 8:30), Scripture makes it very clear that these crowns are rewards that have something important to do with what happens to those who manage to hold on to and bring their crowns to heaven. With this in mind we should be prepared to accept the idea that there will not be a universal sameness or functional equality within the eternal society. The mention of the twenty-four elders alone, I believe is evidence of this.

It seems clear that we can say with considerable certainty that the bride of Christ is drawn from, and only from, the body of Christ. While as yet I have found no concrete evidence that the bride is not the entire Body of Christ, there are enough clues to lead me to believe that the bride consists of only a select portion of the Body. Does it make any sense that the highest possible honor within the eternal spiritual realm would belong to that entire body? If so then, what is the benefit of any extraordinary dedication, obedience, service, and suffering? Also, what then are the purpose of crowns and rewards, and that particular “suffering with Christ?” Are they not the means and evidences of a hierarchy of elevated positions to be had in God’s eternal service? Would it not be fitting that the most elevated position for man to attain in heaven, would be filled by those who most fully demonstrated their faith and fruitfulness, by those who “suffer with Him” in some specific way?

Revelation 19 tells us that the marriage of the Lamb takes place in heaven right after Babylon the great has fallen that is near the very end of the tribulation. It seems to be before Jesus destroys the antichrist and rescues the Jewish remnant at Bozarth. Verse 9 says, *“Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.”* Are these wedding guests all the saved souls, other than the bride, or only some portion of them? I don’t believe Scripture tells us, but it seems likely that it is all who have been redeemed up to that moment, that is both the Old and New Testament saints, and those saved during the tribulation. I don’t believe it includes the remnant at Bozarth nor any other souls yet living “the first life”. These are only the souls resurrected to eternal life and at the time are in their incorruptible bodies.

Revelation Chapter 21 tells of a totally new heaven and earth. It also speaks of the New Jerusalem that will be the dwelling place of the Triune God and the bride of the Lamb. Chapter 22, verse 3 says the “...*but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.*” Verse 5 speaks of these servants who will reign with Him forever, and ever. That ends the prophecy as it was given to John. It is revealed here that on this new earth, there will be a huge 1600-mile wide cube called the New Jerusalem in which God and the bride will dwell. Therein will also be servants who will rule with God forever. But do they live there? We don’t know. The City has twelve gates that are always open, and presumably are there for some purpose consistent of that which gates are used, to allow travel in and out. Does everyone live in the New Jerusalem? I think not. It is my belief, lacking any evidence to the contrary that the major portion of saved souls will live outside of the city on this perfect new earth, and they are the ones over whom these servants of the Lord will reign forever and ever. This suggests some kind of worldwide social structure, and I believe that structure is in some way related to the fruitful works each redeemed soul performed while on this old earth. These translate into a certain number and type of crowns they “take” to heaven. All are pure and sinless, so all are eligible to pass in and out of the gates by means of some ordained order. It appears that the New Jerusalem will be the eternal home of God, the bride, and perhaps some of the other specially crowned people. Perhaps the angels who are now God servants will dwell there and also outside as they continue to serve Him, the bride and all other saved mankind who then dwell outside the walls. Of course these last thoughts are all conjecture, because Scripture does not appear to elaborate on these matters. Yet who cannot help but wonder and try to better understand the circumstances under which one will spend eternity? The clues are there but how to interpret them remains a mystery. This ends this mini-marathon about “if.” As is evident, I let that little word serve as a catalyst and excuse to both wander through, and delve into, a few of the many wonders of Scripture. I pray that it is informative and instructive as well as provocative, what ever it takes to grow in God’s knowledge and into a greater love for Him and His Word.

