

The Place of Safety?

[Note: the Hebrew name for Jesus, Yeshua, is used throughout this document.]

Few necessities occupy a higher priority among human beings than that of security and safety. It is almost as much a *feeling* or *sense*, as it is a practical reality. The most daring, brash, even the most reckless of people still deep-down desire some kind of stable security in this life.

And *this life* is really what it's all about for most people. This human experience, while certainly interesting and intriguing, is strewn with every kind of danger, pitfall, difficulty, and deception. In fact, human life can often be downright frightening. Insecurity, therefore, becomes a major factor. The desire to hold on to and save one's life, one's family, one's position, one's reputation, one's possessions, is absolutely paramount with almost every human being on earth.

We like it that way so much that we will do virtually anything to maintain even a semblance of security. We will work hard all our lives to ensure it; if necessary, we will pull up stakes and move to what we perceive is a safer place, even if it means going across national borders or changing citizenship; we will join churches and other organizations to make ourselves feel surrounded with safe people, safe ideas, safe situations; we will insulate ourselves as much as possible; if we have to, we will beg, borrow, or steal to obtain the sense of security we desire. In fact, we will even allow ourselves to become literal slaves to anyone who can promise us the coziness of a safe haven.

Saving our own lives and what we have gained during our lives is *the* number one concern for most human beings throughout the world in every civilization, whether our lives have been worth anything or not, whether we have acquired much or are dirt poor! After all, this is the only life we know, and losing it or being in danger or fear of losing it is anathema to the human mind.

Should this attitude change once one becomes a true believer and follower of Christ, and, perhaps even more significantly, does it? The answers, generally speaking, are *yes* and *no*! *Yes*, it should change, and *no* it usually does not. And, frankly, most of us know deep down that this is absolutely correct. It seems that no matter how religious one is, how long one has been a professing Christian, how many churches of which one has been a member, or even how much of the Bible one knows, when it comes to the issue of experiencing insecurity and risk and instability and danger, we will tend to flee from it just like anyone else anywhere in the world! And, while a certain amount of such a reaction might be considered normal and balanced and prudent, it can, and in fact almost always does, lead to major problems in one's spiritual life.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

Even though the Bible has much to say about the value of human life and what our attitude toward it ought to be, when we get in trouble, when our wall of security feels threatened, when we are afraid, no matter what the cause of the fear or whether our actual lives are in danger at all, getting to a **PLACE OF SAFETY** is objective *numero uno*! The survival instinct is absolutely overwhelming and overpowering. By our very nature, we immediately seek shelter whenever a storm of life approaches.

In saying this, there is of course no intent to denigrate human life itself. After all, the Almighty designed and created it, so it is obviously a good thing. Believing in and caring for the sanctity of human life is altogether the right thing to do. Clearly, God shares the same feeling, since He has made so many provisions in that regard.

So, life itself is not the crux issue of the discussion, but rather our approach to life and to the things of this life, as well as the importance we personally place on our lives in comparison to what God actually says and desires.

Even though we love our lives, and the things pertaining to our lives, when you consider it all from a strictly scientific and pragmatic perspective, there really isn't all that much value to this human existence, and the Scriptures say the exact same thing.

Speaking with respect to the transitory nature of man, James asks and answers the very question posed in the sub-heading of this section:

“Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a city and spend a year there and carry on our business and make money. Yet you do not know the least thing about what will happen tomorrow. What is the nature of your life? You are really but a WISP OF VAPOR—a puff of smoke, a mist that is visible for a little while and then disappears into thin air” (Jas. 4:13-14).

Most people, I suspect, would consider James just a little extreme in making such a statement. What he describes, however, is so very typical of most human beings that it could be said to be utterly *normal*. In fact, unless a person is brought to a point where he is compelled to really evaluate his life, hardly anyone, converted or otherwise, would tend to think of themselves as nothing more than a puff of steam, visible one moment and so completely gone the next that it is as though it never even existed. And how many would give as much as a second thought to going here or doing that? Quite obviously, the Bible takes a somewhat different view of human beings than they naturally tend to do themselves.

In spite of James' rather blunt way of looking at human beings, he's by no means alone. The Bible is replete with many such references. For instance, Job was finally reduced to declaring:

“My flesh is clothed with worms and clouds of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that MY LIFE IS WIND” (Job 7:5-7).

King David, a man well acquainted with the brevity and the fragility of human life, writes in Psalms 78:

“For He (Yahweh) established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children...that they might set their hope in God...and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation...But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up His wrath. For He remembered that they were but flesh; a WIND that passes away, and comes not again” (Psa. 78:5, 7-8, 38-39).

And again, in Psalms 103, he expresses the same idea, saying:

“Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are AS GRASS; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and IT IS GONE; and the place thereof shall know it no more” (Psa. 103:13-16).

Even Moses understood the frailty of man’s life, for he writes:

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man to destruction; and say, Return, you children of men...You carry them away as with a flood; they are AS A SLEEP: in the morning they are like grass which grows up. In the morning it flourishes, and grows up; in the evening it is CUT DOWN and WITHERS...For all our days are passed away in Your wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told...for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psa. 90:2-3, 5-6, 9-10).

We could go on and on in this way, but these passages serve to teach us that, from God’s elevated and long-range perspective, even though He indeed created human beings, man of himself is a mere breath away from death and utter

extinction. There is nothing within him that can stop the degeneration of his flesh, for in a moment he is passed away and gone forever.

And yet, in spite of such realities, we humans love our lives and seek to hold on to them and maintain them no matter what it takes, for survival is more important to us than any other single issue, including in many, many cases, God Himself!

DOES GOD PROMISE TO PROTECT?

When you or I are in danger, usually the first thing we desire is some sort of protection. Safety and security are as natural to us as breathing. Although the Bible teaches us to not think too highly of ourselves, it does offer definite promises of protection for believers in time of trouble.

We are given numerous examples of God's watchfulness and care when His people have found themselves in difficult situations. Enoch, for instance, was translated, apparently at a rather critical, threatening moment, by which his life was spared. And, of course, Noah and his family were saved from the widespread destruction of the great Flood.

Some of the instances of divine protection are quite well known, especially in the case of king David. As a shepherd boy, he encountered the danger of wild animals, and tells the familiar story of how God watched over and kept him in safety. And, perhaps in the most famous example of divine protection, David bravely went into a horribly one-sided battle against Goliath of Gath, emerging the victor in spite of the odds.

We also know that for many years, possibly 10 or more, David was forced to flee from the sword of his father-in-law Saul, king of Israel. Time and again, we find the young David on the run, literally for his life, feigning insanity before Achish king of Gath, or hiding himself among the craggy rocks of the Ziph wilderness or

the ancient caves and strongholds of En-gedi. Some of his most moving psalms were composed either during this time or were later written about the experiences of this period.

The most beloved of the Davidic passages of Scripture, the 23rd Psalm, was likely written when he was fleeing from Saul. Only 6 short verses in length, it reveals the heart of a man clearly without a great deal of worldly comfort and security at the moment. David's untoward circumstances frequently compelled him to cry out to God for divine protection, particularly with regard to his many enemies. His famous statement in Psalms 23:6 tells us that Yahweh indeed answered David's prayers, for he says:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.”

David had walked through that dark valley of the shadow of death, and some of us have as well. I know that is true in my own personal life. At first, I could not say with David that I feared no evil, because fear and dread overwhelmed me. In time, however, that condition has changed. Although I have been at death's door on several subsequent occasions, and indeed these situations have produced some fear in me, I have noticed that in each case, I was able to come more and more in line with the way David expressed his feelings. And, though these circumstances have been far from ideal, and I would not wish them on any human being, I am thankful to have been able to find appreciation in the fact that there is growth and good that can come from even the most undesirable and difficult of plights.

I suppose that no one in the Scriptures has more to say about God's protection and safety than David. Time and time again, we find him in desperate need of divine intervention. Undoubtedly it could be rightly said that trial and tribulation, from a number of varied sources, were the prime factors in forming and shaping the person David eventually became.

In the 143rd Psalm, the king is in especially severe circumstances. He cries out to God, saying:

“Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications: in Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness...For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has smitten my life down to the ground; he has made me dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead...Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit fails...Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies: I flee unto You to HIDE ME” (Psa. 143).

David's enemies were usually evil human beings bent on doing him harm, but the preceding passage could conceivably have other applications as well. It would not be inappropriate, in fact, to substitute any number of *enemies* you and I face in the psalm above, especially when we are told in Ephesians 6 that our greatest enemies are not flesh and blood at all.

The fact is that Yahweh has been in the protection and safety business for a long, long time. It could be said, I suppose, that even Cain himself was granted a kind of divine protection. When he was driven out from the presence of God to be a wanderer upon the earth, he complained that his punishment was greater than he could bear, and that anyone finding him would surely kill him. So the Eternal responded by saying:

“Therefore, if anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark or sign upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. So Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (Gen. 4:15-16).

In later times, Abraham was protected when, because of a famine in Canaan, he and his wife Sarah journeyed into Egypt. Abraham, however, did not receive God's protection because he was particularly trusting in this situation. In fact, as you will recall, he actually feared for his life, leading him to take matters into his own hands. Concocting a tale that greatly shaded the truth, Abraham

thought he could arrange his own safety among the Egyptians. The consequences, however, almost came to a devastating head when, based upon Abraham's deceitful description of Sarah being, not his wife, but rather his sister the Pharaoh entertained thoughts of taking her into his harem. In other words, Abraham ended up in almost precisely the identical negative circumstances that he was seeking to avoid by lying. God, however, had mercy upon the couple and spared them what would have been a tragedy in their lives.

It is also evident that Abraham's nephew Lot was given divine protection during his stay in the city of Sodom. Surrounded by some of the most corrupt and evil men on earth at the time, Lot remained essentially unscathed, even to the point that Yahweh agreed to deliver him and his family from the utter destruction rained down upon the cities in the vale of Siddim.

It is interesting that, in this particular situation, the angel told Lot:

“Escape for your life; look not behind you, neither stay you in all the plain; ESCAPE TO THE MOUNTAINS, lest you be consumed” (Gen. 19:17).

This is the first, but certainly not the last, instance when God arranged for His people to flee into the mountains for cover. We shall see this pattern repeated on a number of other occasions down through history.

In the next generation, just as Abraham and Sarah were kept safe when they went down into Egypt, so Isaac and Rebekah were protected when, due once again to a famine, they escaped to the Philistine stronghold of Gerar. Incredibly, Isaac reacted to this set of circumstances in the exact fearful manner as did Abraham, devising a false cover story about his wife. And, as in Abraham's case, the ploy backfired, and God mercifully spared all involved.

Later, Isaac's son Jacob incurred the wrath of his brother Esau, when he, like his father and grandfather before him, decided to try and make God's promises come to pass by his own stealth and effort. Abraham had already

committed this sin, not only in the matter of his Egyptian trek, but also when, instead of waiting upon the Lord, he went into Hagar in an attempt to bear the son of promise. As always, such schemes ultimately never work out, and thus God rejected Ishmael, forcing Abraham and Sarah to wait even longer before He miraculously granted them the blessing of Isaac.

In Jacob's case, he conspired with his own mother to steal the blessing of the firstborn from Esau, and having succeeded, was then forced to flee from the face of his brother. Fearing for his life, Jacob took Rebekah's advice and escaped to the protection of her brother Laban. In doing this, God did keep Jacob safe from Esau's pledge to kill him, but the decision not to fully trust Yahweh in the whole matter resulted in Jacob's having to spend fourteen long years in conscripted service to his uncle.

With Joseph, the initial son of Jacob and Rachel, and thus a type of firstborn, we observe a somewhat different situation with regard to divine protection. Joseph, though a favorite of and therefore blessed by his father, was nevertheless despised by his older brothers.

Joseph is one of those Biblical characters of whom nothing evil is ever spoken, which is a quite a rarity with respect to the Scriptures. Undoubtedly he was not perfect, but just as assuredly he must have been a young man of character and integrity, obedient and faithful to Yahweh.

Joseph's brothers planned on murdering this young man whose dreams portraying them as falling down before him infuriated the elder siblings. Their conspiracy was thwarted at the last moment first by Reuben's suggestion that they not bloody their hands committing such an act, but rather abandon him in a wilderness pit, from which Reuben planned to secretly retrieve Joseph and return him to Jacob; and secondly by Judah, who advised that they sell their brother to an approaching company of Ishmaelites bound for Egypt. This action, of course, resulted in Joseph's becoming first a slave to Potiphar, and then, framed by Potiphar's wife, a prisoner as well.

What can we say about Joseph's case? Indeed he was protected by God, but such sparing of life did not preclude his suffering, and indeed there is in this story a significant lesson for all of us. Protection does not always include or automatically result in immediate or short-term deliverance. In this instance, it is estimated that Joseph may have spent as long as 15-17 years in various Egyptian prisons before finally gaining his freedom and ultimate victory over the evil forces gathered against him. We, therefore, need to realize that a Joseph-type situation could come upon any of us in this life and calling; and if this were to occur, that we should be prepared not to blame God for unfairness or for violating His promise to protect us.

Joseph *was* protected, even if his preservation transpired under very difficult circumstances and in ways that he might not ever have anticipated or desired. We cannot possibly know precisely what experiences this life holds for any of us, and, as the Scriptures readily testify, the unexpected can and will happen. The crux of the issue is that we must trust Yahweh implicitly with our lives, no matter who or what we encounter along the way. This does not mean that we should doubt God's promises of protection and safety, but realize that His plan for His children supercedes all things that He has undertaken to accomplish. At first, that statement might not sound right, but give it just a moment of thought.

All things being even, we should be able to expect the fulfillment of God's promises, but that, of course, is based upon having an accurate understanding of exactly what those promises are and how they are to be applied under various conditions. We have the Biblical examples of how God has worked with His people over the course of many, many years, and all the contingencies are covered. In some cases, immediate miraculous protection was granted. In other instances, that protection was given, as in Jacob's and Joseph's situations, through less than ideal circumstances and was carried out over an extended period of time. And finally, there are other examples which we have yet to cover that are in an entirely different category when it comes to the issue of divine safety.

DOES GOD ALWAYS PROTECT?

This question, of course, is the difficult part of the discussion, because there are examples of God's reacting in a seemingly different manner than we have previously seen. Is it a fact that God has always divinely or miraculously protected His people in every situation, and always will?

If we are to understand how God operates, we cannot exclude those portions of the Bible we would rather not consider, because there are very well-known and well-documented instances of righteous people not being sheltered, hidden, or protected in the manner of a Noah, a David, or a Daniel in the lions' den. For example, take the case of Abel.

Abel was not just the first truly righteous man on earth, he was also the first martyr in the history of the human race. The story is almost too familiar. Abel proved himself to be a person of faith, and offered a firstling of the flock as a sacrifice to the Almighty. Cain took of that which he had produced by the sweat of his own brow, and gave to God in a manner and attitude which caused his sacrifice to be rejected.

When Yahweh confronted Cain and his sinfulness, He told him that a proper sacrifice for sin lay at the door, but that he must come into agreement and willingly offer it in faith, something Cain was totally unprepared and unwilling to do. This ancient encounter can be seen as one of the earliest types of the coming Messiah as Savior, for He Himself would become the true appropriate sin offering, and the proposition is being stated all the way back in the very beginning that if man desires to establish a right relationship with the Eternal, he must accept the right sacrifice for his sins, which then will give him access to the door that leads into God's presence. This Cain refused to do, and the results were disastrous.

Abel had little reason to anticipate any real danger to his life, and every reason to expect that were he to somehow be threatened, God would indeed protect him. The facts, however, are clear—The *King James Version* of the Bible

states in Genesis 4:8: **“And Cain talked with Abel his brother.”** The *Septuagint*, the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, and the *Syriac Version*, however, add the following: **“Let us go out to the field.”** Cain, in other words, lured his younger brother into a certain field one day. It was not simply a chance meeting and thus perhaps a crime of passion that resulted. No, not at all. This thing was intended and thought out by Cain. He wanted to get Abel alone, out of the view of any potential eyewitnesses. And, once his brother stepped into the trap that had been set, Cain, giving Abel no chance of escape, rose up suddenly and murdered him.

The difficult part is that we must agree that this horrendous act was clearly known to God beforehand and was performed right before the open eyes of the Creator! He could have easily intervened and protected Abel, which is the very thing that we would hope for and believe for, but the fact is He did not, and we must accept it and seek to understand it.

Abel was completely taken by surprise. He had little or no opportunity to adequately defend himself, or to cry out to God for protection. Quite obviously, Yahweh could have forewarned Abel, advising him of his brother's evil plan, and thus tipping him off as to Cain's real intent in enticing him into the field that day. Just as clearly, God could have stepped in once the altercation had commenced and either simply prohibited it from ever transpiring, or He could have just as easily destroyed Cain on the spot. In fact, we could probably put our minds to it and come up with any number of possible kinds of protection God could have granted Abel. But He did not do it. He let him go into that field of death knowing what was about to happen, never uttered a word of caution to Abel, and permitted Cain to kill his brother in cold blood.

While you are considering the implications of Cain and Abel, there are other similar Scriptural examples that can and should be included. For instance, what about John the Baptist, the man of whom Christ said no greater had ever been born? He is another of the Biblical characters about whom nothing negative or sinful is reported. He gave his all for Yeshua (Jesus), putting even his own life on the line in openly opposing the religious and civil powers in Jerusalem.

Not only was he given what can only be described as an exceedingly difficult assignment, one that most believers would never desire, and many might not even accept; but he was put into prison, and ultimately beheaded by king Herod. There was no divine intervention of which we are aware. This man had his earthly safety and security and freedom taken from him, and without just cause, and he got no reprieve whatsoever while he was incarcerated, only the sentence of death.

Of course, no discussion of this subject could possibly omit the case of Stephen, one of the seven who were chosen by the believers in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 6. The Bible describes him in the following manner:

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8).

Here we have the kind of man God really appreciates—someone who was able and willing to give himself totally to the Spirit and purpose of Yahweh. And he was used mightily, not only in performing the miraculous, but also in his public speaking of the gospel. It is said of the religious and political leaders:

“Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. And set up false witnesses” (Acts 6:9-13).

The rest of the story is familiar enough. Almost before Stephen's career in God's service could get off the ground, he found himself arrested, hauled before the Sanhedrin, and falsely accused. Had that been the end of it all, perhaps this

episode would not even be under discussion, but such was not to be the case. Stephen, under the greatest of pressure, gave his now famous apology before the power elite of first-century Judaism—a testimony so powerful that it has no equal in all the Scriptures, and one that inexorably led to the unexpected, sudden, and terrible end of this inspired man of God.

His witness against the people who had rejected and crucified the Messiah was so powerful and so cutting, that:

“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus (Yeshua) standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, who, calling upon God, said, Lord Jesus (Yeshua), receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:54-60).

What are we to make of Stephen’s situation? Although we certainly do not wish to say or imply that God abandoned him, since it is clear that was given a heavenly vision in the midst of his trial, still we know that he was a truly inspired righteous servant of Yahweh, he was in a very difficult set of circumstances through no fault of his own, and most, if not all of us, would expect that he would be protected and somehow divinely spared such a horror as being stoned to death. After all, even though Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had to experience the horror of being literally cast alive into the fiery furnace, they were, nevertheless, miraculously saved at the last moment. Why then would not righteous Stephen have received the same blessing?

During the ministry of Yeshua, He once gave a scathing rebuke to the

Jewish religious authorities that speaks to the issue we are discussing. Matthew records the discourse as follows:

“You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them you shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you slew between the temple and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that killed the prophets, and stoned them which are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:33-38).

When the Messiah mentions the two righteous men, Abel and Zechariah, He is meaning to encompass the entirety of the Old Testament record from Genesis to Chronicles (the last of the scrolls in the proper order of the Hebrew Scriptures). This statement doesn't necessarily mean that this man Zechariah was the last of the martyrs. On the basis of Christ's statement here, consider the fact that apparently many individuals who were commissioned by God to serve His purposes, either as prophets, or scribes, or sages, were not ultimately protected and given a place of safety, but rather were allowed to be beaten, imprisoned, and murdered.

We know about the circumstances of Abel's martyrdom; the situation with Zechariah son of Berechiah is, however, much less known. Zechariah was a priest and the son of a priest. According to Matthew, his father was named Berechiah, but the Old Testament records call him Jehoiada. Whether he was known by both names cannot be determined with absolute specificity, the assumption being that he was, but he most likely should not be confused with the prophet Zechariah, whose writings are preserved in the Scriptures. This is true, in spite of the fact that the father of this later Zechariah was also Berechiah. In

addition to the conjecture that Jehoiada the high priest was also known as Berechiah, there are several other explanations that have been put forth to resolve this anomaly, none of which is completely satisfactory. From the description, however, it appears virtually certain that Yeshua (Jesus) was referring to the episode in the following account of II Chronicles 24, beginning in verse 17:

“Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance unto the king (Joash). Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the Lord; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear. And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (Berechiah) the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus says God, Why transgress you the commandments of the Lord, that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord” (II Chron. 24:17-21).

Taking this account, along with Christ's statement that many others who had been sent to the Jews as witnesses against them were greatly mistreated and murdered, it is not difficult to conclude that there have been numerous instances when the divine protection afforded a Daniel or a David simply was not granted, and the results ranged from highly unpleasant to outright destruction.

WHY ARE SOME PROTECTED & SOME NOT?

This question speaks to one of the hard issues of the Scriptures, but one that every believer must effectively resolve in his mind. If this is not done, then either unwarranted and harmful doubt will enter in, or the person may simply rule the whole subject out, proceed as though he really didn't even know about this seeming disparity in the Bible, and thus his spiritual growth is stunted.

If God granted special protection to David when he was fleeing for his life before Saul, does that automatically mean that you and I can absolutely expect that He will do precisely the same thing when we are in some dire situation? If your answer is *yes*, then you must deal with a second question—If God did **NOT** give protection to Abel or Isaiah or Zechariah or John the Baptist in their hour of seemingly greatest need, what reason do you have to say that He will indeed protect you in an equally difficult situation?

We all know that God has made certain promises, and that His Word is His bond. He will perform those things that He has promised. No one, however, has the right or the ability to tell the Almighty when, where, and how He will fulfil His pledges. If we cannot accept the fact that, of all beings in the universe, He is utterly and absolutely sovereign, then we are fighting a battle that we cannot and will not win.

The promises which Yahweh has made must always be considered by human beings within the greater context of His avowed long-term goal and purpose. If we make the mistake of not doing this, of taking the words of a particular verse verbatim and simply assuming that we can apply it as we see fit, without gaining an understanding of precisely how God views such a passage of Scripture, we open ourselves up to countless forms of error, disappointment, sorrow, and confusion. We may be able to literally quote the particular promise or prophecy or other Biblical statement, and yet really have no idea of how God perceives it, what His real intent actually is with regard to the passage or promise, and how, or even if, it is to be applied to each individual situation in life. Such failure puts us in an untenable position with the Eternal and His Word.

The fact is that many of the promises of God are not necessarily intended to apply *across the board*, as it were. Not grasping this truth is a common mistake made by many readers of the Bible. We tend to believe that if it's in the Scriptures, then it must be true in my personal life, which, quite frankly, can only lead to utter frustration, because when the particular promise does not come to pass, we are

left bereft, feeling as though God has either lied to or forsaken us.

Just as an experiment, let us picture ourselves living in the time of Saul and David. Saul is still king, and has turned on the young man who served him so faithfully and well. David is running for his life. We know already that this future king of Israel was protected and delivered time and time again during this particularly trying time in his life. So we are not going to imagine that we are David, but rather that we are the priests of God who served under Ahimelech at Nob, and who befriended David when he was hungry and needed special protection.

Now a priest in Israel was a high calling. Although the Levites were certainly not always faithful and obedient, there is no question that at this particular time period, they were righteous and in good standing with Yahweh. They were also favorably disposed toward David in his struggle against king Saul, which gave them even more credibility in the eyes of God.

Saul is tipped off as to David's whereabouts by an otherwise unknown and contemptible Edomite recruit named Doeg, who was the chief herdsman of the king. It so happened that Doeg was present the day David first escaped to Nob and met with Ahimelech the high priest. And so rather than keeping his mouth shut and doing the honorable thing, this Doeg dutifully reports to Saul that he knows where David is hiding.

In the meantime, David is given the shewbread out of the tabernacle to eat, along with the sword of Goliath, the Philistine giant whom he had earlier slain in combat. And by the time Saul and his troops reach Nob, David has already fled the scene, having escaped to Achish, king of Gath.

Acting on the intelligence provided by Doeg, Saul and his entourage come to Nob, and the king summons Ahimelech and all the priests to appear before him. He interrogates Ahimelech, accusing him of conspiracy against the throne for harboring such a fugitive as David, but the high priest's simple response is: "**Who**

is so faithful among all your servants as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house?" (I Sam. 22:14).

Utterly enraged by the priest's perceived impertinence, Saul forthwith orders the royal garrison to: **"Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not show it to me" (I Sam. 22:17).** But in a somewhat startling development, the soldiers openly refuse to obey the king in this matter. And so, once again, Doeg the Edomite bootlicker predictably comes through for his liege Saul, the account of his heinous atrocity duly recorded in I Samuel 22:18-19:

"And the king said to Doeg, Turn you, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day eighty-five persons that did where a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword."

If there is any record of a more sickening, brutal crime committed by a more wretched, miserable, worthless man than one Doeg the Edomite, we might be hard pressed to find it! And the words of David upon hearing the tragic news are so telling in this particular episode:

"And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David. And Abiathar showed David that Saul had slain the Lord's priests. And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house. Abide you with me, fear not: for he that seeks my life seeks your life: but with me you shall be in safeguard" (I Sam. 22:20-23).

Now, let us remember that we are putting ourselves into this ancient Biblical story, assuming the role of the Lord's priests serving the tabernacle at Nob in the days of king Saul's pursuit of David. We, like the young son of Jesse, are righteous

and in favor with Yahweh. In addition, we are also on David's side in this relentless attempt by Saul to dispense with this perceived enemy to the throne. Indeed, we join together with the high priest and literally risk our lives to aid David in a time of critical need in his life, granting him sanctuary, food, and a mighty weapon of war in the great sword of Goliath.

And yet, for all our pains, David escapes unharmed, and proceeds to become the most celebrated king in Israel's history, whereas every single one of us, including Ahimelech the high priest, is murdered in cold blood on the command of the evil king Saul and at the hand of this Edomite mongrel named Doeg! David is miraculously spared by our very sacrificial efforts, and we, down to the very last one, are slain by the sword, our innocent blood spilled on the sacred ground at Nob.

We know from the many psalms composed by David that he was in trouble often, and just as often called upon Yahweh for protection, safety, and deliverance. Can we not also safely assume that the Lord's priests at Nob prayed for protection, even as you and I do, certainly more than just occasionally, and probably on a daily basis? Here then is a question—in the routine of your life, who do you most identify yourself with in terms of Godly protection—David and his many escapes and dashes to safety, or the priests at Nob who awake one day just like every other day, busy themselves with their divinely ordained duties, help out a brother who is in distress, and then are murdered by the king?

Now, before anyone gets upset, please be certain that my point is emphatically not to incite doubt in anyone's mind with regard to God's faithfulness or ability in keeping His promises. What I am seeking to accomplish, however, is to openly face the challenge of the Scriptures when they present to us such contrasting pictures as are present in the preceding story of David and the priests of Nob. Both of these parties are unquestionably in the Bible, unquestionably were in God's good graces, and yet one is spared, and the other destroyed. Did the priests at Nob have the right to believe that they indeed were under divine protection? David certainly felt that he was, as is strongly indicated by his

statement in I Samuel 22:23, that if Abiathar remains with him he will be kept safe.

Every day that we live on this earth, we arise from sleep even as did David and the priests. We, like they, seek to obey and serve the Almighty, and though imperfect as any of us are, we nevertheless believe in the divine love, mercy, promises, and closeness of God to save us from the truly critical circumstances of this life. If these things be so, then how are we to understand that it is entirely possible that we will indeed be spared from danger and destruction as was David, or that our lives may be brutally snuffed out through no fault of our own?

Even a perfunctory study of the Scriptures reveals that all the righteous by no means have been divinely protected and delivered in every situation they faced. In some instances, unspeakable miracles were performed on behalf of specific individuals, saving them from difficult circumstances and in a number of cases, from certain death; whereas in other situations, good men and women of God met entirely different fates, including being beaten, imprisoned, and horribly murdered. We believers, therefore, must come to a correct and workable understanding of what we ought to be praying for and anticipating to receive from our Father in heaven with regard to this very crucial issue. The achieving of this objective becomes increasingly more imperative as we look forward to and approach the ever-growing danger that we will encounter in this calling.

COMING TO A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING

Since the Eternal has presented us with unmistakably clear examples of both sides of the protection and safety issue, that is to say, situations where righteous believers received divine intervention in time of danger and trouble, and instances when no such remedy was made available, we are compelled to rightly divide the word of truth in this matter. The issue, of course, has nothing to do with opting for one side of this question as opposed to the other. It does, however, have everything to do with properly integrating both of the realities we have been discussing into an understandable, acceptable, and workable approach, one that

we can confidently take with us wherever we go and whatever the circumstances we might ever be called on to face.

One of the great overriding principles that must be taken into consideration, and indeed that must be a present guiding force in the resolution of this whole question can perhaps be stated as follows:

God's promises should be viewed and understood within the context of His purposes.

That means it is incumbent upon each of us to learn and discern both the long-range *ultimate objective* which the Almighty has in mind, as well as the specific *intent* of any given promise that is made in the Bible. It should be obvious by now that every single promise or example of a particular blessing of divine intervention cannot always be correctly applied across the board to every person in every possible situation. That is not conjecture at all, but a simple fact borne out by the various experiences of the righteous throughout the Scriptures.

There are many promises in the Bible, but every single one of them are not necessarily applicable to all people at all times. Why should this be? Simply because God's promises must be in agreement with His purposes, and obviously, as we have seen, providing total protection and deliverance and sparing in every circumstance to every person does **NOT** always fall within His overall scheme of things. All other things being equal, Yahweh will always perform that which He has promised, but what He has promised will always be within the confines of His plan, as well as contributory to the achievement of that plan. Therefore we can be safely assured that if we come to a place in life, facing a certain dangerous or threatening situation, while we should and will undoubtedly ask for deliverance, it certainly could be that not sparing us under such circumstances will work in favor of Yahweh's overall ultimate aim.

We know for an absolute fact that this must be the case, because the Scriptures plainly convey this principle to us. If such is not true, then it is

impossible for us to understand and explain why, for instance, righteous and innocent Abel was allowed to be murdered by the evil Cain. Abel's death was not the result of his sin, nor was it caused by God's lack of care or faithfulness. It could have easily been prevented by divine intervention, but all things must be done in accordance with what makes the plan of God work as it should.

Abel was intended by the Almighty to represent an aspect of the coming Messiah. In that respect, he was ordained to play a certain typical role in the long-range plan of salvation. This is precisely why the book of Hebrews declares:

“But you are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels...And to Jesus (Yeshua) the mediator of the new testament, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of ABEL. See that you refuse not Him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from Him that speaks from heaven” (Heb. 12:22, 24-25).

The death of Abel was a type of the death of Yeshua—the innocent Lamb of God slaughtered by the forces of evil. Because of what happened to Abel, we are given to better understand both Christ's greater sacrifice, as well as the fact that martyrdom itself is at times a part of how God furthers His objective among human beings upon the earth.

The death of Abel, while from a human perspective would be considered a tragedy, was in God's eyes precious, a type of His very own Son. After all, surely none of us would seriously question the Father on why He didn't intervene and spare Yeshua (Jesus) from having to suffer the shame and pain of the crucifixion. The Scriptures teach that those who give up all, even their own lives, in service to Yahweh will be specially blessed, and there have been numerous believers over the long span of time that have sacrificed themselves in this powerful manner.

Is this not why we read in the famous *faith* chapter of Hebrews 11:

“Aroused by faith Moses, when he had grown to maturity, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, because he PREFERRED rather to share the oppression, SUFFER the hardships, and bear the shame of the people of God than to have the fleeting enjoyment of a sinful life. He considered the contempt and abuse and shame borne for the Messiah Who was to come, to be greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt, for he looked forward to the reward...And what shall I say further? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith subdued kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promised blessings, closed the mouth of lions (*Daniel*), extinguished the power of raging fire, escaped the devourings of the sword, out of frailty and weakness won strength and became stalwart, even mighty in battle, routing alien hosts. Some women received again their dead by a resurrection. BUT others were tortured to death with clubs (*Abel*), refusing to accept release [offered on the terms of denying their faith], that they might be resurrected to a better life. Others had to suffer the trial of mocking and scourging (*Yeshua the Messiah, the twelve apostles [Acts 5:40], Paul [II Cor. 11:24-25]*), and even chains and imprisonment (*Joseph, Hanani the prophet, Micaiah the prophet, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Peter, John, Paul*). They were stoned to death (*Naboth, Zechariah & Stephen*); they were lured with tempting offers to renounce their faith (*Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech, & Abed-nego*); they were sawn asunder (*Isaiah*); they were slaughtered by the sword (*John the Baptist, James the brother of John, Ahimelech & the priests of Nob, Gedaliah [Jer. 41:1-3], the apostle Paul*); others had to go about wrapped in the skins of sheep and goats, utterly destitute (*the poor saints in Jerusalem [Acts 11:29, I Cor. 16:1, Rom. 15:26, and Smyrna [Rev. 2:9]*), oppressed, cruelly treated, men of whom the world was not worthy, roaming over the desolate places, and the mountains, and living in caves and caverns of the earth (*David, Elijah, the 7000 righteous who had not bowed the knee to Baal*)” (Heb. 11:24-26, 32-38).

This portion of Scripture has to be one of the most magnificent in all the Bible, and it shows us so clearly that, over the long sweep of history, the people of

God have by faith made themselves open to His hand and His Spirit in their lives, so that whatever they faced, whether good or bad, was according to the divine will of the Almighty. And down through the ages, many righteous men and women have been miraculously protected, spared, delivered, and empowered to do great things in God's service; while many others suffered in every conceivable way, up to and including horrendous death by stoning, crucifixion, the sword, and the saw.

Did Abel choose to be killed by Cain, or did David choose to be spared from Saul? The answer is *no* on both counts. These things happened to the righteous men and women of the Scriptures according to the will and purposes of Yahweh in heaven. There is no other answer, and no reason to look for one. Those who were miraculously delivered, or who rose up as mighty in battle, did so by the power and determination of God, and to His glory. Those who suffered greatly at the hands of the wicked did so in faith and in yieldedness to the higher plan of the Almighty, and also brought great honor to the God of their fathers.

This is the way it has been, the way it still is, and the way it will be, until all wickedness has been rooted out from within human beings, and the Holy Spirit poured out upon the inhabitants of the earth. Let us not be sad or angry over the unspeakable sufferings of so many of the righteous, nor allow ourselves to think of those who were divinely delivered as being somehow more special. They all willingly gave themselves unto the God who created them, and submitted to His perfect will in their lives. There is no higher calling and no greater service than to let go of all that is of this human life, and permit the Eternal to do with each of us as He, and He alone, sees fit. He will never make a mistake, and if we are truly yielded into His hands, we will be used to show forth the goodness and glory of our God and our Savior, so that as the apostle Paul so aptly put it:

“For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:7-9).

THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND THE PLACE OF SAFETY

The subtitle above undoubtedly has a special meaning to a certain number of people, probably many who will read this paper. Before discussing the specific subject of the so-called *place of safety*, it would seem most appropriate to first expound on the general topic of the *place of safety*.

Those who are familiar with this particular term almost always have in mind a very distinct physical locale where end-time believers will be divinely protected from the horrors of the Great Tribulation. Some church groups, undoubtedly well-meaning, have strongly emphasized this idea virtually to the point of making it a doctrine. In the past, the assumption that they were living in the latter-days and would be taken to a divinely determined place of safety, has led some believers to sell all their possessions and make plans to literally flee to some remote spot in the world. In other instances, this sort of teaching has been and still is being used to control members of various church groups, the people coming to believe that their hope of being physically preserved lies only with their particular religious organization. Of course, none of these notions have ever come to anything whatsoever, except deception, doubt, and disappointment.

The only place that one can go to find out the truth on this issue is, of course, the Bible. And just going to the Scriptures is not sufficient either, for they must be carefully scrutinized and thoroughly understood, else we will make the classic mistake of assuming the Bible says one thing, when, in fact, it really doesn't. How easy it is for many sincere people to erroneously believe that the Word of God surely must corroborate this particular doctrine or that absolute teaching or make a certain statement, when it really does nothing of the sort.

There are a couple of Scriptural passages that are fundamental to the concept of an end-time *place of safety* for the true Church of God. One of them is certainly a statement made by the risen Messiah to the church at Philadelphia as recorded by John in Revelation 3. Beginning in verse 7, we read:

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says He that

is holy, He that is true, He that has the key of David, He that opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens...Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will KEEP you from the HOUR of TEMPTATION, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown” (Rev. 3:7, 10-11).

I have underlined several words in this passage just so the full potential meaning of these verses come under scrutiny. The first one is the word translated as *keep*. While this term, as it is used in these verses, is usually understood to mean *especially protected*, particularly with regard to a specific place of safety, the better understanding from the Greek would be *to emerge or come out of safely*, with the emphasis not necessarily on all involved being gathered into one physical locale. The Greek word in this case is the preposition *ek*, and within the context of Revelation 3:10, it appears that Christ is saying to the church at Philadelphia that a great trial is coming upon the world, but that, because of their faithfulness, they will come through it safely, which puts a somewhat different slant on what the Scripture is really seeking to convey, compared to what some believers assume they are saying. In other words, there is really nothing in this passage that indicates the entire congregation of saints in the whole world is to be suddenly and miraculously swept away from tribulation and hidden in a remote part of the earth. Much rather, it is showing us that the believers to whom verse 10 is referring will go through the coming trial, will experience some of the challenges and difficulties, but will be saved out of it, in contrast, quite obviously, to that category of believers who will be forced to **“make their robes white” (Rev. 7:14)** by actually suffering the pains of the great tribulational period. They are those spoken of by the prophet Daniel, chapter 11. Speaking of end-time events, we read:

“And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he (*king of the north*) corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil many

days. Now when they shall fall, they shall be helped with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. And some of them of understanding SHALL FALL, to TRY THEM, and to PURGE THEM, and to MAKE THEM WHITE, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed” (Dan. 11:32-35).

Another of the underlined words above is *hour*. In the Greek, this term is *hora*, and can indeed mean literally an *hour* or 60 minutes of time. It can also be translated as *time, day, instant, season, or short*. The significance in the choice of this word is the relative *shortness* of the time period being discussed. If we are talking in terms of the so-called Great Tribulation, it may be that Revelation 3:10-11 are indicating that protection is to be afforded these believers for a very short span of time, perhaps not even covering the entire Tribulation period, for we must recall that the book of Revelation breaks this final end-time stretch down into at least three divisions, and we need to determine if the promise quoted earlier applies to the entire Tribulation time or only a portion thereof.

It may be informative to note that in Revelation 8:1, we read:

“And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of HALF AN HOUR.”

If this usage of the word *hour*, in this case half an *hour*, can be taken as indicative of how we are to understand this term, it might be reasonable and prudent to re-think the possible time period that may be involved. This is just something to keep in mind as the discussion progresses.

No matter how Revelation 3:10 is dissected, studied, and discussed, there is nothing inherent within the language of that passage to indicate that all true believers in the world are to be removed from harm and taken to a single place of refuge on the earth. Will some find a place of safety in a specific locale? Yes, of course they will, but so will others in a different specific area.

A second Biblical passage that is often understood to refer to the so-called *place of safety* is found in Revelation 12. In verse 6, there is a reference to a *woman* who flees to a particular, though unidentified, place in a wilderness area that has been prepared for her. The assumption in this instance is that the *woman* in question is representative of the end-time Church, or at least the segment that is most faithful and obedient, and that this episode is symbolic of special protection during the Great Tribulation period. The question remains, however, as to whether or not such an interpretation is scripturally sound.

First of all, the *woman* is never called the Church. She is, on the other hand, described in such a way that it may be possible to identify her. In Revelation 12:1, this woman is introduced in the following manner:

“And there appeared a great wonder (sign) in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”

There has been much speculation as to what this event actually pictures. First of all, it is described as being a sign in heaven, or perhaps a sign in the heavens. It is possibly, though not necessarily provable, that this statement could be a reference to something visible in the skies. The most likely explanation along these lines is that a celestial formation of some sort is being spoken of in this passage. This is especially so since the sun, moon, and stars are directly involved.

It is of more than merely passing interest that there is a specific constellation called *Virgo*, which has always been understood to be a *woman*. *Virgo* is part of the 12-sign Zodiac, which, in spite of its perverted misuse by pagan astrologers, is actually a divinely designed and created set of constellations that lie within a belt of space encircling the earth, marking out the apparent pathway of the sun in its perceived journey through the sky. In most instances, *Virgo* is considered the starting point of the Zodiac, which then follows the prescribed course through the

heavens until the circle is completed with the constellation *Leo* the lion, telling the great story of salvation from the virgin birth of the baby Yeshua to the triumphant Lion of the tribe of Judah with His foot on the head of the serpent!

The story of the Zodiac and its significance is most interesting and informative, but certainly outside the scope of this study. Suffice it to say, however, that it is feasible for the sun to be in *Virgo*, since its apparent movement takes it through the various Zodiac constellations, and, at the same time, for the moon to also be in *Virgo*; and, under rare, but very possible, conditions, for a total of 12 stars to be situated above the head of the woman or *Virgo*. This celestial formation has occurred before, and could well occur again. Remember that it is, after all, a heavenly *sign*.

The next issue to consider with regard to Revelation 12 is who or what constitutes the woman in verse 1. Rather than jumping to the popular conclusion that the woman must represent the Church, let us consider the question further.

It is true that there are occasions when a woman is used as a symbol of the New Testament Church. One can easily see this connection when Paul, for instance, writes in Ephesians 5 about believers constituting the Bride of Christ and being married to the Messiah. But that is not the only symbolic usage of a woman in Scripture.

The great heavenly sign spoken of by John harkens back to an ancient event in the early life of Joseph. In Genesis 37, it is said that Joseph was despised by his brothers, but especially loved by his father Jacob. Joseph is one of those rare Biblical characters of whom no evil is reported. While this doesn't mean he was utterly perfect, it does say something about the young man.

When he was 17 years of age, we read that Joseph had a dream, one that would indeed change his life. In the vision, he saw the sun, the moon, and eleven stars all bowing down and doing obeisance to him. When he revealed this dream to his family, even Jacob was taken aback by what was perceived as impertinence

on the part of Joseph. But, as we know, the dream proved to be true, for when Joseph, after suffering much evil for many years, finally became a reigning power in Egypt, his family did indeed bow before him. In that regard, we see Joseph as an ancient type of the Messiah.

The pertinent issue, however, is that the symbols in Joseph's dream are so very similar to the description of the heavenly sign reported in Revelation 12:1. In fact, when rightly considered, the symbols in both instances are actually identical. In both, there is the sun, the moon, and a certain number of stars. In Joseph's case, he saw 11 stars. In John's case, he saw 12.

In Joseph's dream, who or what was being represented? The sun would have pictured his father Jacob, the moon, his mother, Rachel, and the eleven stars, his brothers. In the overall portrait, what we see is Jacob and his family or, in other words, Israel.

In John's vision, the components are the sun, the moon, and, in this instance, 12 stars. Given the circumstances of Joseph's dream, he could hardly have had 12 stars, since the description was intended to cover all the brothers except himself. John's revelation, however, would include Joseph, and therefore it is only appropriate that he see 12 stars. The combination of sun, moon, and the 12 stars constitute the woman that is characterized as a heavenly sign.

Based upon this Scriptural information, who or what would the woman in Revelation 12:1 symbolize? It would, at least initially, seem to be depicting Israel. Now Israel is referred to by Stephan in his apology before the Sanhedrin as the *church in the wilderness*. The word *church* is always a poor choice of terms, since it does not really convey the best intended meaning, and it is derived from a clearly pagan source, with an entirely different connotation to it. The Greek in this case is *ekklesia*, and one of its meanings is a *religious congregation or assembly*. So Israel is called the *assembly in the wilderness*, certainly a not inappropriate description.

As we continue reading in Revelation 12, notice the part played by the woman in question:

“And she being WITH CHILD cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered” (Rev. 12:2).

This woman, clearly picturing Israel, at least initially, is shown being great with child, about to be delivered. This verse reminds us of Sarah giving birth to Isaac, the son of promise, and to Rachel, the wife of Jacob. It also points forward in time to the ultimate child that would be born of Israel, namely Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah.

This last reference is soon confirmed as we continue reading the passage from Revelation 12. Beginning in verse 3, we read:

“And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Rev. 12:3-4).

These verses take us back to the time of Moses, when Satan, in the guise of the Egyptian Pharaoh, sought the lives of all Hebrew male children. Moses, of course, as his name indicates, was *drawn out* of the water to safety by the Pharaoh’s daughter, and in his latter years was subsequently used by the Eternal to *draw out* or lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and into safety and liberty.

Nearly 1500 years after the time of Moses, yet another ruler came to power whose royal decree affected God’s people in a very similar manner as did that of the ancient Pharaoh. That ruler was Herod the Great.

The grandson of Antipater I, first of the Herodian rulers, Herod the Great came to power as governor of Galilee in 47 B.C., and was proclaimed by Octavius

Caesar as King of Judea precisely 10 years later. His reign was marked with much violence, and divisive family troubles. In the end, Herod even had one of his own sons executed, as well as several of his ten wives.

He is, however, known best for two events that transpired under his rulership. First was the extensive renovation and enlargement of the temple in Jerusalem. Begun in 20 B.C., it was one of the architectural jewels of the time. It even became known as the *Herodian Temple*. Finally completed in 63 A.D., long after Herod the Great's death, it was destroyed by the Romans only seven years later in 70 A.D., in accordance with the Messiah's famous Olivet prophecy, the best known record of which is found in Matthew 24.

The second major event for which Herod the Great is remembered happened late in his life, perhaps just months prior to his death. It is this particular occurrence that most concerns our present subject of discussion. The advent of a divinely-commissioned deliverer was well-known among the Jewish rabbis, for there were numerous such predictions in the Hebrew Scriptures. During the very latter portion of Herod's reign, an air of Messianic expectancy was rife, and when certain eastern sages journeyed to Jerusalem inquiring of the whereabouts of the prophesied King of the Jews, Herod became alarmed.

In an attempt to extract pertinent information from the magi, Herod feigned great interest in this prophesied Jewish deliverer. First he inquired of the chief priests and scribes as to where the Scriptures stated the coming Messiah would be born. They reported that, according to the prophet Micah:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall he come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in the land of Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Upon hearing the words of this prophecy, Herod immediately instructed the visiting magi to go to Bethlehem, find the child, and inform him so that he too might come and worship this king. The wise men, however, were warned by God

in a dream, and after discovering the young child Yeshua (Jesus), they disregarded Herod's command and returned to their homeland by a different route. At about the same time, an angel appeared to Joseph, the father of Yeshua, and told him to take his family into Egypt that they might escape the wrath of the king.

When Herod realized that the magi had disobeyed and deceived him, he ordered that every child from two years of age and under be slain throughout Judea, thus fulfilling an ancient prophecy uttered by Jeremiah which said:

“In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not” (Matt. 2:18).

Now, returning to Revelation 12, we read in verse 5:

“And she (the woman of v. 1) brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne.”

The description given in Revelation 12:1-5 could not possibly be more clear or certain. The woman is, with respect to a people, unquestionably Israel, and with regard to an individual, the virgin Mary, the literal mother of Yeshua (Jesus). The dragon is the adversary Satan, and the man child is the Messiah Himself, who, as the book of Revelation goes on to state, is destined to rule the world with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15), and in fact, was also caught up to heaven and the throne of the Father at the time of His ascension.

If the woman of Revelation 12:1-5 is assumed to be the New Testament Church, in what respect could it be said that she gave birth to the Savior? Although probably capable of being better stated, it would, nevertheless, be far more accurate to say just the opposite—that it was Yeshua (Jesus) who gave birth to the Church! It appears to be just patently wrong to characterize this woman as being representative of what we generally refer to as the Church, notwithstanding

the fact that there are admittedly certain symbolic correlations between Israel and the assembly of believers who follow Yeshua as Savior.

Resuming our reading of Revelation 12, we are told something quite significant about this same identical woman who has been discussed in verses 1-5. Note the following:

“And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there thousand two hundred and threescore days” (Rev. 12:6).

There is absolutely no change of subject as we move from verse 5 to verse 6. The passage is still referring to the woman who gave birth to the man child or, as we have determined, the Messiah, and that woman has to be considered as either Israel in general, or Judah in particular, or perhaps even Mary and her family.

To contend that the woman in this passage is the entire New Testament Church requires a huge leap in logic, and perhaps even outright manipulation of the Scriptures. The woman is clearly the one who gave birth to the Messiah. Yes, I realize it is possible to postulate that these verses are a reference, not to the literal physical birth of Christ, but to His being shown forth to the world, and in this way bring the New Testament Church into the picture. That, however, constitutes simply too great a reach, and I feel will only lead to a misinterpretation of the prophecy.

There is, however, no question that some kind of divine protection is indeed being prophesied in Revelation 12:6. Whether the time period involved is to be understood as 1260 literal days, which would constitute approximately 3 ½ years, or 1260 years (based on the year-for-a-day premise, as expressed in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6) is perhaps debatable. It is feasible that this period of time could be interpreted both ways and still be correct, due to the verse being applied to more than one historical era and people.

The first 5 verses of Revelation 12 seem to take us back to the first century and the time of the Messiah's initial advent upon the earth, both in that they deal with His birth and His ascension to heaven. If the reference to protection in verse 6 is intended to be applied to that time in history, there could be several possible ways of understanding this passage.

First of all, in the first century itself, there was a very critical span of time of which we might tend not to take note. The famous Jewish historian and general, Flavius Josephus, tells us that in 66 A.D., with the Roman armies surrounding the area of Jerusalem, a voice, apparently of supernatural origin, was heard in the Temple issuing a stark warning to flee the city immediately. It is known that certain of the priests, and a number of Jews, both true believers and otherwise, did in fact escape and find protection in the region of Pella, some 65-70 miles slightly northeast of Jerusalem. This event transpired at the time of Pentecost in 66 A.D., approximately 3 ½ years prior to the fall of the Temple in 70 A.D. This remarkable situation certainly has the potential of fulfilling the prophecy of Revelation 12:6, or, if there is a dual fulfillment involved, at least doing so on an early and typical basis.

Beyond this special occurrence, it is difficult to extract a precise 3 ½ year period during the first century that would be a likely fulfillment of the prophecy. Were we, however, to look at Revelation 12:6 from the perspective of the time period involved covering 1260 years, rather than merely days, then we are looking at a lengthy time span that would cover a great portion of history. Is it possible that this verse might be referring to the dispersion of the Jews into the various areas of Europe and perhaps other locales, where they were able to escape the horrible conditions extant in Judea, and especially Jerusalem, over a very extended period of time? Certainly such a possibility does exist.

Of course, we know that many European Jews have suffered greatly during more recent times, particularly during World War II, but if we consider the general time-frame from the Imperial Restoration under the emperor Justinian until the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon, we actually have about a 1260 year period, depending upon the exact year such a count would commence. During

this time, many Jews literally did find refuge in Europe, and even respect, prosperity, and power. It is possible, in fact, that much Jewish blood is to be found flowing through the veins of a number of European royal families. Even the current House of Windsor in Great Britain, by its own records and admission, traces its ancestry back to King David of Israel.

As we move forward in the prophecy of Revelation 12, we are told of a rebellion occurring in heaven, whereby the dragon, in a losing angelic battle, is cast down to the earth. The question immediately arises as to when this event either occurred or is still to transpire. The Scriptures either state or at least imply that a Satanic rebellion has taken place in the past. References to this episode are to be found in several locations throughout the Bible. For example, in Luke 10, we read the Messiah's words in the following passage:

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through Your name. And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Lk. 10:17-18).

In the Old Testament, we find veiled references and allusions to what could have been such a rebellion. This is particularly true in the famous passage of Ezekiel 28. This chapter begins with a divine tirade against the so-called *prince of Tyre*, apparently a literal human being. In verse 12, however, the subject clearly changes, as Yahweh tells Ezekiel the following:

“Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the KING OF TYRE, and say unto him, Thus says the Lord God; You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering...the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created. You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you

with violence, and you have sinned: therefore I WILL CAST YOU as profane OUT of the mountain of God: and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I will CAST YOU TO THE GROUND, I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you. You have defiled your sanctuary by the multitude of your iniquities...therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of you, it shall devour you, and I will you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you. All they that know you among the people shall be astonished at you: you shall be a terror, and never shall you be any more” (Ezek. 28:12-19).

This was written some 600 or so years B.C., and would seem to be referring to a future, rather than a past event. God says that, because of the evil committed by this great covering cherub, He WILL (future) cast him out of heaven and destroy him by fire. This fits well with the description found in Revelation 20, where Satan the devil is shown being cast into the lake of fire at the end of the Millennium. In the past, there has been an assumption on the part of many religious leaders and teachers that Satan cannot be destroyed, since he is a spirit being. This, of course, is in error, as there are numerous proofs from the Scriptures that death and destruction constitute the ultimate fate of the devil (If this particular subject is of special interest to you, we have both a tape and an study paper that you may request—*The Destiny of Satan*).

The question of the Adversary's ancient past has been debated for centuries. Out of the intense study that this issue has produced, something called the *gap theory* has gained a certain amount of popular acceptance. The definitive question, however, is does the Bible really establish that before man was created, Lucifer ruled the earth, and when he sinned, he was removed from his position in a great cosmic battle that left the earth in a state of utter disarray (the *without form and void* of Genesis 1:2), thus making the creation story of the Bible into the *re-creation* story? Although there are some interesting and attractive features to this theory, it probably must remain in the category of the *possible*, rather than the *probable*. Even if the details of the so-called *gap theory* are in question, however,

we do know for a fact that the enemy was present in the Garden of Eden in the form of a serpent (Heb. *nachash*, the root of which means *to hiss, i.e. whisper a magic spell; to prognosticate, divine, or enchant; an incantation or augury*), and that he was in his adversarial role as opposing Yahweh.

It would appear that the casting down of the dragon in Revelation 12 must be related to an end-time event, or at least to a later occurrence, rather than one in the primordial past, simply because it is dealt with after the description of the woman, the birth of the man-child, his ascension into heaven, and the fleeing of the woman; not to mention the fact that it is said of the dragon in verse 12:

“Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has but a SHORT TIME” (Rev. 12:12).

That Satan is described as knowing he has but a short time remaining certainly is an indicator that the reference is to a later, rather to an earlier, event. It could be that Revelation 12 is presenting an chronological overview from about the time of the Messiah’s birth until the intense period known as the Great Tribulation. If this is correct, then the scenario would something like this:

- V. 1 - Israel is introduced
- V. 2 - She (Israel/Judah) is travailing in birth
- V. 3 - Dragon is introduced
- V. 4 - Dragon seeks to kill the Messiah
- V. 5 - Messiah born/ascends to heaven
- V. 6 - Woman flees - 1260 days/years
- V. 7 - Dragon rebels
- V. 8-9 - Dragon & his angels cast out of heaven
- V. 10 - Kingdom of God is coming
- V. 11 - Saints overcome dragon by blood of Messiah and by their testimony
- V. 12 - Woe to the earth. Dragon is angry–has only a short time left

V. 13 - Dragon again persecutes the woman

V. 14 - Woman protected time, times, & half a time (3 ½ years)

V. 15 - Dragon sends army after woman

V. 16 - Woman helped

V. 17 - Dragon more angry-Seeks to destroy the remnant of the woman's seed
who are true believers

Using this outline, Revelation 12 then flows perfectly into chapter 13, where the great beast power is introduced (v. 1-4), the time span of his power is noted as 42 months or 3 ½ years or 1260 days (v. 5 - same period as Rev. 12:14 when the woman is protected), and, just like the dragon in Revelation 12:17, the beast makes war with the saints and overcomes them (v. 7).

If Revelation 12 does follow this proposed scenario, then how do the various references to the woman apply? In verse 1, the symbolism identifies all of Israel. In verse 2, Judah, an integral part of Israel, is more specifically revealed, as Yeshua the Messiah was indeed a Jew of the royal Davidic line. The first fleeing of the woman would then refer to a time subsequent to the time of Messiah, a period of some 1260 years, during which many Jews found a safe haven primarily in Europe. In verse 13, the dragon again persecutes the woman who gave birth to the man-child or Yeshua (Jesus), but this is well after the 1260 years has expired. And again the woman is sheltered, possibly indicating a future time of protection nearer the end of the age, for Satan has already been cast down, and his wrath is intensified because he knows he has only a short time remaining. And finally, in verse 17, the woman having escaped to safety, the dragon goes off to make war with a righteous remnant of her seed, which would pertain to Jewish believers in the very latter days.

If this scenario is followed, it definitely speaks of certain times and places of safety for some of God's people, but says nothing to indicate that ALL saints on earth are taken to the same location where they are protected together. The reference is still connected with the woman who gave birth to the Messiah.

THE OLIVET PROPHECY

This takes us to the famous Olivet prophecy uttered by Christ just before His death, and recorded in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. In Matthew's gospel account, Yeshua (Jesus) sets forth a broad, wide-ranging prophecy of the end-time, but in chapter 24, verse 15, He gets more specific by saying:

“When you shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader take notice, consider, and heed this), then let those who are in JUDEA FLEE TO THE MOUNTAINS; let him who is on the housetop not come down and go into the house to take anything; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his overcoat. And alas for the women who are pregnant and for those who have nursing babies in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in the winter or on a Sabbath, for then there will be GREAT TRIBULATION such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now; no, and never will be again” (Matt. 24:15-21).

Although I am sure that everyone reading this paper is quite aware that the instruction to flee at this critical moment in time is directed specifically to those that are in JUDEA, please allow me to refresh your recollection. This command cannot be made to say what it does not. Now it is altogether possible to use these words of Christ as a general guideline that when times are especially dangerous, it is wise to hide from the threat. Other Scriptures bear out the prudence of such actions, as in the proverb that says:

“A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished” (Prov. 27:12).

The Word does not recommend that when believers see the train coming that they simply remain on the track and get smashed to smithereens! Matthew 24:16, however, refers specifically to those who are in Judea, but why just Judea? The parallel account the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21 gives us the answer. Note the following:

“And when you shall see JERUSALEM SURROUNDED BY ARMIES, then know that the desolation thereof is near. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that with child, and to that are nursing in those days! For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people” (Lk. 21:20-23).

The reason Judah is mentioned in this prophecy and other related prophecies is simply because the time in the future to which these instructions are referring will be those when the entire world is focused on Judea/modern Israel, and the city of Jerusalem in particular. The Scriptures show clearly that it is in the very plan of the Eternal to bring the final holocaust at the end of this age upon this area of the world. There are numerous such references in the Bible, several of which are quoted below:

“Blow you the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord comes, for it is nigh at hand” (Joel 2:1).

“Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of His glory” (Isa. 3:8).

“O you children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tokoa...for evil appears out of the north, and great destruction...Prepare you war against her: arise, and let us go up at noon...For thus has the Lord of hosts said, Hew you down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her” (Jer. 6:1, 4, 6).

“Thus says the Lord God unto Jerusalem...They shall also bring up a company against you, and they shall stone you with stones, and thrust you through with

their swords. And they shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgment upon you in the sight of many...and I will cause you to cease playing the harlot, and you also shall give no hire any more” (Ezek. 16:1, 40-41).

“The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah...I will utterly consume all things from off the land...I will also stretch out My hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Bal from this place...The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hastes greatly...the mighty men shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Zeph. 1:1-2, 4, 14-15).

“Behold, the day of the Lord comes, and Your spoil shall be divided in the midst of you. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle” (Zech. 14:1-3).

“For behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead for them there for My people...Proclaim you this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come, all you heathen, and gather yourselves round about...Let the heathen be awakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (Kidron Valley between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives): for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put you in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:1-2, 9-14).

No wonder the Messiah issued such a stern warning to those who would be in Jerusalem and Judea in those coming days of trouble. We know that the Olivet prophecy of Yeshua (Jesus) was fulfilled to an initial extent during the time of the Romano-Jewish war, culminating in 70 A.D. with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. The final and complete fulfillment is still future.

Therefore, it is most likely that the 12th chapter of Revelation is promising a place of safety in the very end-time to some who are in the area of modern-day Israel, and especially the city of Jerusalem, but nothing in the prophecy speaks to the entirety of all believers on the face of the earth being somehow transported to a single geographic locale of refuge. Such reasoning is way off-base, and has misled many into assuming something that simply will not transpire. This kind of thinking is most dangerous, because it forces believers to put their trust in the fallible human leaders that teach this falsehood, and the religious institutions that these leaders have created.

FLEE TO WHERE?

Although there are multiple possibilities as to the location of a place of safety for those in Judea at the end-time, there are certain passages of Scripture that seem to indicate a particular locale. What we already know is that the command to flee includes the instruction for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea to get up into the mountains. An additional fact that we have come across is that this place of safety is in the *wilderness*. Wilderness in this instance is not what might immediately come to the modern mind, which usually would be a heavily forested area, such as an African jungle, or somewhere in Alaska. Most often when the Bible speaks of the wilderness, it means a rocky desert location, devoid of much life, and usually filled with great challenge and difficulty.

Perhaps the best known Biblical passage with respect to the actual location of a place of safety is found in Isaiah 16, where we read:

“Send you the lamb to the ruler of the land from SELA to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. For it shall be, that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of the Arnon. Take counsel, execute judgment; make your shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; HIDE THE OUTCASTS, betray not him that wanders. Let My outcasts dwell with you, Moab; be you a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness” (Isa. 16:1-5).

Let us dispense, first of all, with the word *Sela* in verse 1. There is virtual universal agreement that this is a specific place name, and a direct reference to the famous ancient city of Petra, the capital of the old Nabatean kingdom. Although officially uninhabited, it does still exist, and is a popular tourist spot for visitors to Israel and other Middle Eastern countries.

The real question with regard to this passage of Scripture is what precisely is it actually saying. The King James Version, which was just quoted seems to be saying that Moab should extend protection to the outcasts of God, and it is assumed that this protection will be in Sela or Petra. But is this really what these verses are relating?

One gets an entirely different perspective when reading this passage from *The Tanakh*. Notice the key difference:

“Dispatch as messenger the ruler of the land, from Sela in the wilderness to the mount of Fair Zion: like fugitive birds, like nestlings driven away, Moab’s villagers linger by the fords of the Arnon. Give advice, offer counsel. At high noon make your shadow like night: conceal the outcasts, betray not the fugitives. Let MOAB’S OUTCASTS find asylum in you; be a shelter for them against the despoiler. For violence is vanished, rapine is ended, and

marauders have perished from this land. And a throne shall be established in goodness in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler devoted to justice and zealous for equity” (Isa. 16:1-5).

In this translation, we get a completely different picture. It is the outcasts of Moab that are being dealt with in this passage of Scripture. Let us therefore consult another version, and see how the Hebrew of these verses is interpreted. The following is from the *NIV*:

“MOAB’S REFUGEES at Sela send lambs to Jerusalem as a token of alliance with the king of Judah. The women of Moab are left like homeless birds at the shallow crossings of the Arnon River. Help us, they cry. Defend us against our enemies. Protect us from their relentless attack. Do not betray us. Let OUR OUTCASTS stay among you. Hide them from our enemies until the terror is past. When oppression and destruction have ceased and enemy raiders have disappeared, then David’s throne will be established in love. From that throne a faithful king will reign, one who always does what is just and right” (Isa. 16:1-5).

The *NIV* interprets this passage in a manner much more similar to Hebrew Scriptures than to the *KJV*. Here again we see that the outcasts in question belong to Moab and that they are apparently in Sela or Petra at this time.

A quote from one final version should confirm an interpretation that will suffice. In this case, we will consult *The Amplified Bible*, as follows:

“You [Moabites, now fugitives in Edom, which is ruled by the king of Judah, win the king’s favor and protection by diverting your tribute to him, as an acknowledgment of subjection], send lambs to the ruler of the land from Selah or Petra through the desert to the mountain of the daughter of Zion - Jerusalem. For as wandering birds, as a brood cast out and a scattered nest, so shall the daughters of Moab be at the fords of the River Arnon. [Say to the ruler] Give counsel, execute justice [for Moab, O king of Judah]; make your

shade over us as the night in the midst of noonday; hide the outcasts; betray not the fugitives to his pursuer. Let our OUTCASTS OF MOAB dwell among you; be a sheltered hiding place to them from the destroyer. When the extortion and the extortioner have been brought to nought, and destruction has ceased, and the oppressors and they who trample men down are consumed and have vanished out of the land, then in mercy and loving-kindness shall a throne be established, and One shall sit upon it in truth and faithfulness in the tent of David, judging and seeking justice and being swift to do righteousness” (Isa. 16:1-5).

We could consult other sources, but the basic results would be the same. From the evidence available, the prophecy of Isaiah 16 is dealing with Moabite outcasts and fugitives, not Israelites, Jews, or other Gentiles, whether believers or not.

This is much more easily understood when the context of the Isaiah 16 passage is viewed in its Biblical context. Note that the very subject of the previous chapter is a prophecy against Moab. Now, if Yahweh is predicting destruction for Moab in chapter 15, why would He be requesting protection for His own people from Moab in chapter 16? Doesn't make sense, does it?

Notice in Isaiah 15, the following statements, and consider them as the prelude to the information in the beginning of chapter 16 which we have just read:

“The burden of Moab. Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; he is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off. In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly. And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh: their voice shall be heard even unto Jahaz: therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out; his life shall be grievous unto him. My heart shall cry out for Moab; HIS

FUGITIVES SHALL FLEE unto Zoar...for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction and desolations. For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass fails, there is no green thing...For the waters of Dimon shall be full of blood: for I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him that escapes of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land” (Isa. 15).

It should not be too difficult for anyone to perceive that the instruction given in Isaiah 16:1-5 with regard to protecting the fugitives unquestionably pertains to those of Moab, the very nation that God in chapter 15 fulminates against. When viewed from the correct Scriptural perspective, Isaiah 16:1-5 is far more likely to be referring to Petra as a possible place of safety for Moabite refugees during the time of great tribulation.

WAS ISRAEL EVER PROTECTED IN PETRA?

There are some, determined in their relentless effort to give substance to Petra as *the* place of safety, who contend that ancient Israel was at one time divinely protected, or at least sojourned, in this precise area. The evidence is sparse, however, and the concept poorly conceived.

Certain *Petra* proponents assert that the Biblical *Sela* is to be identified with Kadesh-barnea, an Old Testament place name of some significance. Mentioned on a number of occasions in the Scriptures, Kadesh-barnea was unquestionably a stopping place for the Israelites during their wilderness trek.

Proving, however, that this area is synonymous with the rock city of Petra is difficult at best, and at the worst, absolutely impossible. When one puts together the available evidence, it becomes clear that Kadesh-barnea was not then, and never has been, a part of Edom, as was Sela or Petra. Rather, it was located in Amorite territory. “The following emerges...The Arnon (River) is not near Petra. And Kadesh-barnea is approximately 100 kilometers from Petra. They are not the same

place. In fact, from the texts, we see that Petra is not visited by Israel in their wanderings, and they are specifically excluded from the area by the Edomites themselves” (quoted from the web site: www.logon.org).

It is important with regard to this discussion that it be clearly understood that ancient Israel cannot be intimately associated with the rock city of Petra. We know this to be a fact, because we read in Numbers 20:

“And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh (of the Amorites) unto the king of Edom (location of Petra), Thus says your brother Israel...Let us pass, I pray you, through your country...And Edom said unto him, You shall NOT PASS by me, lest I come out against you with the sword...And Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him” (Num. 20:14, 17-18, 21).

In addition to the above, it is also instructive to note that Kadesh-barnea, though of much importance in Israelite history, was *not* a place of safety for the people at all, but rather just the opposite. It was from this place that spies were sent into the land of Canaan, and where the subsequent rebellion in the wilderness occurred, resulting in punishment and scattering. Any attempt to connect Petra as a place of safety for Israel is totally dishonest scholarship, and should be resisted by those who know better.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROCK?

The word *Sela* in Hebrew or *Petra* in Greek, as you know, means *rock*, usually a large rock. This is precisely why the ancient red-rock city in Edom gained the name *Sela*, or later *Petra*, as it is known today, because it is literally carved out of the rugged mountainous terrain in that remote area of present-day Jordan.

The term *sela* is, in fact, found in many locations throughout the Hebrew

Scriptures, but hardly ever as an actual place name or specific physical locale. For instance, David writes in Psalms 40:

“I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a ROCK (Heb. *se/a*), and established my goings” (Psa. 40:1-2).

Or, there is the following passage from the book of Isaiah, chapter 42, where we read:

“Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth, you that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar does inhabit: let the inhabitants of the ROCK (Heb. *se/a*) sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the Lord, and declare His praise in the islands” (Isa. 42:10-12).

Believe it or not, the preceding verses are actually cited by some defenders of the *Petra-as- the-only-place-of-safety* theory as evidence of their contention. All it takes to refute such a position, however, is to simply read the passage carefully, noting that Yahweh is calling peoples from every locale on the earth to sound His praise, be they on top of the mountains, in the cities of the wilderness, in the villages of Kedar, in the far-flung islands of the world, in ships upon the sea, indeed, from the ends of the earth, including even the inhabitants of the rock! Obviously, Isaiah is not intending to say that all righteous believers are secreted away in Petra at the end-time. In fact, this prophecy demonstrates very nearly the opposite—that, in those days, God’s true people will be found having been preserved in multiple places throughout the world.

In addition to the use of *se/a* to describe literal physical rocks or rocky territory, it is also utilized as a symbol, and not just any symbol either, but a powerful divine one. In Hannah’s moving prayer of thankfulness and joy when her son Samuel is accepted by Eli the priest, she says:

“My heart rejoices in the Lord (*YHWH*), my horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over my enemies; because I rejoice in Your salvation. There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside You: neither is there any ROCK (Heb. *se/a*) like our God” (I Sam. 2:1-2).

A rock today is given scant consideration as an object of significance, simply because we have become a mechanized, computerized, digitized society. Three thousand years ago, rocks were far more important. They were utilized in instruments of war, in cooking utensils, as building material, to mark the graves of the dead, to serve as monuments, to record historical events on, and even, in some instances, as actual shelters or homes.

Three thousand years ago, a large rock or boulder was a byword for something with strength, something dependable, something solid and unmovable. It was viewed as standing for that which was substantial in life, that which provided a refuge. And so it comes as no surprise to read in the pages of the Bible that the Almighty was considered by the ancients as the greatest Rock of them all!

When David had finally been delivered out of the hands of all his enemies, he sang the following song of praise:

“The Lord is my ROCK (Heb. *se/a*), and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my savior; You save me from violence. I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from my enemies” (II Sam. 22:2-4).

Notice that in this passage David’s rock was Yahweh, David’s fortress was Yahweh, David’s refuge or PLACE OF SAFETY was Yahweh! This, in fact, comprises the real crux of the issue at hand. Therefore, are some ancient caves in *Petra* in remotest Jordan your place of safety or is **PETRA**, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth? This is a question we all must seriously answer!

When Israel was making their winding way from Egypt to the land of promise, there came a time when there was no water. Moses was led to a particular rock, and this given divine instruction:

“Take the rod, and gather you the assembly together, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak you unto the ROCK (Heb. *se/a*) before their eyes; and it shall give forth water, and you shall bring forth to them water out of the ROCK: so you shall give the congregation and their beasts drink” (Num. 20:8).

As you will recall, this was the episode when Moses and Aaron grievously sinned, for instead of obeying Yahweh and speaking to the rock, Moses, in his anger, shouted to the Israelites:

“Hear now, you rebels; must we fetch water out of this rock? (Num. 20:10).

And, as if this act of disobedience wasn't enough, Moses then proceeded to take the rod and strike the rock twice. Indeed, God sent the water, but neither Moses nor Aaron was permitted to enter into the Promised Land.

There were several sins committed in this instance. First of all, Moses was told simply to speak to the rock. This he refused to do. Next, he complicated matters by not only speaking in anger to the people, but in asking the impertinent question, **“Must WE fetch you water out of this rock?”** In other words, Moses completely left the Eternal out of the picture, the *we*, of course, referring to himself and Aaron. And finally, Moses had the audacity to actually strike the rock, and not once, but two times!

So what?, someone might say, it was only a rock. After all, everyone gets a little ticked off once in a while, and if anyone had a good reason to be upset, surely it was Moses, having to put up with those carnal Israelites for 40 years!

That sounds fairly logical and sane and practical, but it's utterly and totally

wrong, because what Moses did was a whole lot more than striking a mere rock in the desert. That rock was no ordinary rock! It was a rock out of which flowed water! That life-giving rock saved 3 million people from certain death!

The apostle Paul, writing over 1500 years later, states, with respect to ancient Israel, in I Corinthians 10:4:

“And they all did drink of that same spiritual drink: for they drank of that SPIRITUAL ROCK that followed them: and THAT ROCK WAS CHRIST!”

That **ROCK** was the real **PETRA!** And when Moses struck that rock two times, he was striking the Messiah Himself! God the Father only allowed Yeshua to be struck once, resulting in His physical death. That strike relates to the ancient prophecy of Genesis 3:15, “**you (Satan) shall wound His heel.**” Moses act of disobedience was to symbolically put Christ to death twice, and from the second death there is no reprieve or recovery!! It was a sin of such gravity and import that it could not go unpunished. And the punishment Moses suffered was to be refused entrance into the Promised Land, the very hope and objective of his 40 years of laborious service in the wilderness. I will leave it to you to seriously ponder what that particular punishment actually signifies in its spiritual fulfillment.

If you will recall, the Greek New Testament account of the Savior’s statement to Peter in Matthew 16:18 utilizes the exact word which we are discussing, for we read:

“And I say unto you, That you are Peter (Gk. *Petros - pebble*), and upon this rock (*Petra - large crag or rock*) I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Once the actual Greek words are uncovered, what Yeshua (Jesus) is actually saying is quite the opposite of what the King James language appears to convey. For centuries, most scholars and theologians have merely assumed that the use of the word *petra* or *rock* was an obvious reference to Peter, leading some

religious institutions to teach that the Church was built upon the apostle Peter, but this emphatically not what is being said in this verse. It is Messiah Himself who is the **PETRA** or **ROCK**, and upon Him and Him alone that the true Church is constructed.

Is it correct to think of the Father or of Yeshua (Jesus) as a *place of safety*? I mean, after all, we're talking practical, pragmatic reality, aren't we? Well, let me put it this way—I would rather trust in and lean upon and hide in the **PETRA** who created the Petra, if you take my meaning! A cave somewhere in the wilderness of Jordan may provide temporary shelter and refuge for someone at some time, but there is no cave or rock upon this earth that can hold the least candle to the **ROCK OF OUR SALVATION!!**

The Scriptures speak of a hiding place, a very special hiding place, and it is no cave in ancient Edom! Rather, it is to be found in quite a different place, for we read in Colossians 3:

“If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead, and YOUR LIFE IS HID WITH CHRIST IN GOD” (Col. 3:1-3).

Should it be considered a strange thing that the Scriptures should claim that those who truly belong to the Eternal have their lives actually hidden with Messiah? Does this kind of language really compute in today's modern, brass-tacks kind of world?

The answer to the question is absolutely **NO!** While it may sound strange to human ears, and may be perceived by many as mere spiritual-sounding phraseology, for those who are truly *in the know*, the promise of Colossians 3:3 has great meaning and substance.

Am I saying that being hidden in Christ is the same as being hidden in a

cave in Petra or, the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, or deep within the Carlsbad Caverns? No, I most certainly am not! I am saying that to be hidden with Christ is to be **FAR, FAR MORE PROTECTED AND SAFE** than any mere hole in the ground!!

What can a physical rock do for you that the Almighty cannot accomplish in ways that we might not even even begin to imagine? Is His provision somehow less than what you and I can devise, than what you and I can detect with these five senses? Must we always *see* and *feel* our place of safety? Is it always to be located on a map somewhere?

Where was Enoch's place of safety? It was not in Petra! Noah never went to the caves of Jordan! Neither did Abraham or Jacob. Joseph was protected in an Egyptian prison, and Elijah took a memorable trip in a heavenly chariot. The children of Israel walked across the Red Sea, while the massive Egyptian army stood by in plain sight, yet powerless to alter the salvation of Yahweh! Protection and safety are where the God of heaven and earth is, not where some misguided minister or outright false prophet dictates! This is exactly why David writes:

"I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid...For this shall every one that is godly pray unto you in a time when You may be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. YOU are my HIDING PLACE; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall compass me about with songs of deliverance" (Psa. 32:5-7).

And in Psalms 31, he states:

"In You, O Lord, do I put my trust...Bow down Your ear to me; deliver me speedily: be You my STRONG ROCK, for a house of defense to save me. For You are my Rock and my Fortress...For You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities...You have set my feet in a large room...Oh how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for them that fear You; which You have wrought for them that trust in You rather than the sons of men! You shall HIDE THEM in the secret of Your presence from the pride of

man: You shall keep them secretly in a *pavilion* from the strife of tongues” (Psa. 31:1-3, 7-8, 19-20).

King David was a man well acquainted with fear, threat, and danger. Unlike you and me, he knew what it was really like to desperately need the safety of the Almighty. It was he who said:

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusts in You: yea, in the shadow of Your wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast...He shall send from heaven and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up...My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword...They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst of which they are fallen themselves. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise” (Psa. 57:1, 3-4, 6-7).

YOUR PLACE OF SAFETY IN THE END-TIME

Will Yahweh’s people be spared and hidden in the time of great tribulation? Yes, some will. Where? Wherever and whenever and however God decides to accomplish such deliverance. The prophet Zephaniah, writing of the distressing times of the latter days, says:

“Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord’s anger come upon you. Seek you the Lord, all you meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be you shall be HID in the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zeph. 2:1-3).

Now, I ask you, what is the real message of this Biblical passage? Is it

possibly being hidden in the day of trouble, or is it not rather that we should *gather ourselves together*, that we should *seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and seek meekness?*

Yeshua (Jesus) gave a charge to the saints who will experience great tribulation, but it has been twisted into meaning something that He never intended to convey. In Luke 21:34, we read:

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk. 21:34-36).

I suspect that nearly every person reading this paper is familiar with this passage of Scripture, especially verse 36. Before anything whatsoever is said about a place of safety, the Messiah tells the people where their real focus should be in the time of great trouble—and it is **NOT** in seeking escape, but rather in *taking heed*, in being very careful lest *our hearts be overcome with the things and cares of this life*. And even in verse 36 itself, He does not say what most believers have been taught or merely assumed. He does not say that we ought to be watching and praying for a way of escape, but that we should be watching and praying—**PERIOD!!!**

The rest of that verse is what may come to us as a result of what has been said and followed in the previous verses!! How often have you heard it put precisely the opposite way—that we should be so consumed with saving our own skins (usually left unsaid, but obviously implied), that when the time of trouble approaches, what we should be focused on is desperately praying that we might be given escape and safety?

Is God asking too much of His people to endure the problems of this life, when He has prepared an eternal future of unimaginable and indescribable

greatness and perfection? How many among us even begin to approach the basic characterizations of believers in the Bible when it comes to suffering for the sake of the Father, the Savior, or the truth? The Scriptures teach that those who stand up for what they believe will receive persecution, resistance, rejection, and severe reprisal. Peter tells us to not be surprised at the fiery trials that come upon us because of the faith, yet many modern-day believers would be caught totally in shock if they were to suddenly experience major crises in their lives due to their obedience to the Law, or their following through on what God was leading them to do.

In that same passage of I Peter 4, the apostle not only speaks secure in the certainty that he and his fellow believers would indeed receive much persecution, but also encourages us, under such circumstances, to:

“Rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (I Pet. 4:13-14).

Should we be focused on somehow providing for ourselves a way of escape, or blindly depending upon the Almighty to snatch us away from trouble? That is not what Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego did! Their attitude when commanded to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image (a type of the image of the beast in Revelation 13, and of the end-time conditions) is clearly evident, for in their response, we read:

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. BUT IF NOT, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up” (Dan. 3:16-18).

Yes, we know that these three faithful young men were spared at the last

moment, after having been cast bodily into the jaws of death, but that is not the real point. Unquestionably, the Almighty is able to save, but Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego were emphatically **NOT** obsessed with saving their own skins, were not seeking some way of escape, and were not terribly worried what would come of them should God decide not to spare their lives. Perhaps we ought to consider that these are the kind of people that Yahweh might indeed set His hand to spare—a people consumed with obeying Him, remaining faithful to Him, putting their lives squarely on the line. But they were hiding in no cave in Jordan, rather, they were loyal believers fully engaged in the fulfillment of their divinely ordained purposes, suffering the indignity of Babylonian captivity, and about to have an absolute death sentence carried out on their very persons! If we want to be supernaturally protected, why not set ourselves to adopt this kind of heart for the Eternal and His Son?

Will there be true saints divinely delivered in the end-time? Yes, there undoubtedly will, and in many places and in many ways. It may be if you are in Judea when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies, and you obey the instruction of Yeshua (Jesus), and flee into the mountains that you will indeed be spared. It may be that if you are in southern Jordan and the circumstances are just right, you may even end up in Petra itself! But it is far more likely that if you are protected, it will be wherever on this planet you are or wherever on this planet God wants you to be in His service. He is able to save you wherever you are. He doesn't need mountains or rocky caves to perform that which He has promised or that which He will choose to do.

There is even the possibility that some end-time believers may be removed from the earth itself, for we read in Revelation 7 of an innumerable multitude who have been through at least some of the Great Tribulation, but who are seen in heaven before the throne of Yahweh:

“For this reason they are now before the very throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His Temple; and He who is sitting on the throne will protect and spread His tabernacle over and shelter them with His presence” (Rev. 7:15).

Note that it is said of these saints that God will protect them and spread His tabernacle (Gk. *skene*, Heb. *sukkah*) over them and shelter them with His presence. Now that's the kind of protection and safety that we ought to be hoping for. And there are others, spoken of in Revelation 14, of whom it is said:

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having the Father’s name written in their foreheads...And they sung, as it were, a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders: and no man could learn the song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, which were redeemed FROM the earth...These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes” (Rev. 14:1-4).

This, obviously, is quite another story, and one that is outside the parameters of this particular study. I mention it only in conclusion as a subject some may wish to look into further. If indeed you are so interested, and have not yet listened to the tape entitled, *The Marriage of the Lamb*, please request your free copy, and we will send it out to you right away.

What, therefore, is the real bottom line in all of this? Is it not to be found in the very message of the Messiah, when He says:

“If anyone will come after Me, let him DENY HIMSELF, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life SHALL LOSE IT: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same SHALL SAVE IT...But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God” (Lk. 9:23-27).

Just as in the first century, there were some in the presence of the Savior who did not die before they witnessed the coming of the Kingdom (notably fulfilled eight days later in the persons of Peter, James, and John, who experienced the

transfiguration on the mount), so in the end-time, there will be some saved alive until the Second Coming of Messiah. But just as surely, as in the days of the apostles, there will many who are called upon to sacrifice all for the sake of Yeshua and the purposes of the Eternal. And you may rest assured that none of those who are spared at that time will be seeking to save their own lives, and, whether we ourselves are living in the very end-time or not, neither should we!

The Scriptures reveal that the Father loves and highly esteems those who, in the latter days, will suffer the torment and not love their lives unto death. In fact, it is said in Revelation 14:

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, and the FAITH OF JESUS (YESHUA). And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, BLESSED are the DEAD which die in the Lord from HENCEFORTH: Yea, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:12-13).

You can be a believer, and still not be a fully yielded participant in the work of God. But remember that those who hide themselves, seeking to save their own lives, rather than putting them squarely on the line, may well end up in far worse shape than those who take the risk for the sake of the Savior. It is easy to be what the apostle termed a *forgetful hearer*, but more is required to be a diligent *doer*. Those who expose themselves on the battlefield are bound to end up in the line of fire! But battles cannot and will not be won by hiding in a foxhole, or by thinking that one will just sit out the war in a cave somewhere!

There is a time and a place for all things. That means that there are times for believers to hide or escape or be protected. Even Yeshua (Jesus) took advantage of situations at times to flee from or otherwise thwart those who were plotting His death. On a number of occasions, Paul employed stealth and ingenuity to avoid outright danger during his various missionary journeys (although he suffered in many other instances where there was no escape). David ran for his life and utilized various ploys to gain protection from king Saul, as did

Elijah when Jezebel pronounced a death sentence upon him, and the spies sent to scout out Jericho were let down the side of the city wall by a rope to ensure their safety and escape.

If it is the Almighty's intention for you or me to be spared during a time of great tribulation, then that is what will happen. Is it then prudent for believers today to be prepared for difficult times? Probably so, and in more ways than one. Physical preparation will do us little good compared to spiritual preparation. No one is going to somehow hoard enough food and drink to sustain themselves or anyone else for years, yet to have a few days' or even weeks' worth of supplies in case of trouble is, if feasible, altogether wise and good. Some are able to do this kind of thing more easily than others.

The Scriptures give us hope in many places with regard to divine protection in time of trouble. Remember, however, that this doesn't necessarily mean one will be spared from going through something severe. For instance, Paul's life was spared when the ship he was in on his voyage to Rome wrecked off the coast of Malta. Still, however, he was forced to endure 14 long harrowing days of storm on the Adriatic Sea. In this instance an angel comforted him with the following words:

“Do not be frightened, Paul. It is necessary for you to stand before Caesar; and behold, God has given you all those who are sailing with you” (Acts 27:24).

Paul and those with him were saved primarily because it was the will of Yahweh that Paul appear before Nero Caesar. But there came a second time when the apostle was imprisoned in Rome a few years later, and he ended up being beheaded. Perhaps we might like to think how nice it would have worked out had Paul been miraculously delivered from his deadly fate, but we would be doing so at the expense of the Eternal's will, and that, my friends, is truly *the* bottom line in this entire discussion. Our Father has not left us without wonderful promises of protection upon which we can meditate at will, and one of the best is found in Psalms 91:

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall remain fixed under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, on Him I lean, and in Him I trust! For then He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings shall you find shelter; His truth and His faithfulness are a shield and a buckler” (Psa. 91:1-4).

Fellow saints, let us resolve to live even as our Savior died—willing to pay the price of unrelenting service to the Almighty. This life is short, whether we die young or old, by natural means or by horrific suffering. Let us, therefore, say with those who have gone on before us:

Our God can save us from the fiery trials, but if He chooses not to do so, we will NOT bow down to another, nor do any other thing but that which we are compelled by the Spirit to do! For His Son is the true ROCK of our salvation, and the God of our fathers is the real *place of safety* in time of trouble!

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