

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

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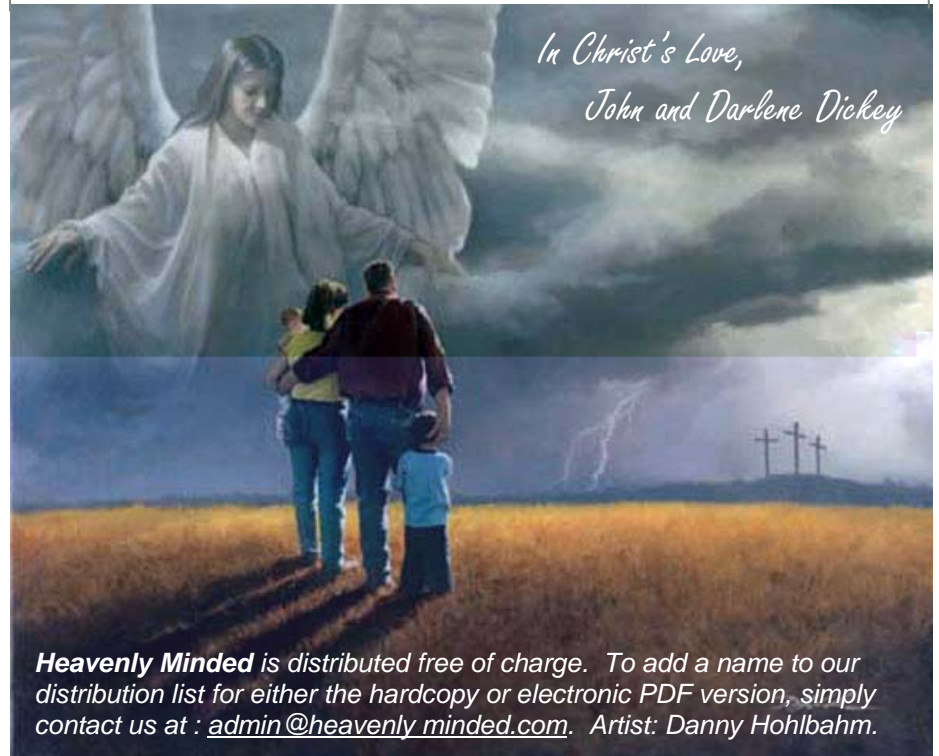
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Dear Friends,

The picture below is called "Coming Storm". I like it because I'm strongly convinced that a storm has begun and is going to get much worse. I hope all of you and those dear to you are prepared – that is, that your lives are honestly and completely surrendered to Christ. As it worsens, it won't do any good to bail water like the disciples did on the sea of Galilee.

The Bible tells us that in the last days "times shall wax worse and worse". As they do, we must remember that it is God who placed us in this time and place. Like Mordecai said to queen Ester, "...who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

As the final pages turn and the covers close on this age, what will the heavenly scribes record concerning you? As much of a sinful slob as I can be, I still hope to hear Him say, "Well done." I hope He'll say that to each of you as well!



*In Christ's Love,
John and Darlene Dickey*

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MUCHNESS

I stopped wrestling the boys when they got strong enough to 'whup' me. Alas, that was a humbling day; but I still have the blessed memories of playing around on the living room floor – Mike and Johnny on my back, Gabe underneath – all three trying to take down the 'man of steel' – ha! Those were the days when they thought no one was as strong as Dad, and Dad kinda liked that you know.

In heaven, gathered around the Lamb, Jesus Christ, we will worship Him, proclaiming His worthiness to receive strength (see Rev 5:12). In an earlier study, we considered His worthiness to receive power. Yet, as similar as they may seem, they are really quite distinct from one another. Power is that which is inherent, like when Jesus spoke to the wind and waves of the sea to be still and they obeyed. Or, when He called out, "Lazarus! Come forth!" and he who had been in the tomb dead for four days arose.

But this strength is different. The words for it in Greek and Hebrew, we can connect by way of Christ's own declaration, "...you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your **strength**. This is the first commandment." (Mark 12:30) You see, this first commandment is found in Deut 6:5 where the word strength is translated in the KJV as "might". Each word has a fascinating contribution to make to our overall understanding of this attribute.

Now, if indeed you and I are among those praising and worshipping the Lamb as described in Revelation chapter five (and I do think we will be), we certainly don't want to be worship 'nerds' if you would. That is, if we're saying, "Worthy is the Lamb to

receive...(among other things) strength..." we'll be much more sincere by clearly understanding why, right? So let's consider this attribute, strength.

In the Hebrew, the word for this kind of strength is pronounced "meh-ode'" and is used primarily as an adverb meaning "exceedingly" or "much". Its noun though means "muchness". Its first mention is in the first chapter of the Bible – "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was **very good**." (Gen 1:31) Perhaps a better translation would read, "**exceedingly good**". It is used in both a positive and negative sense though. In Genesis chapter four it says, "*but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was **very angry**, and his countenance fell.*"

In Exodus 19, while the Hebrew people waited at the base of Mount Sinai, the day of God's arrival, the third day, came and, "*Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked **greatly**. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and **louder**, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.*" (Ex 19:18,19) Here, meh-ode' is translated as both greatly and louder but the sense is the same – exceeding much.

In heaven Christ is declared worthy of this 'muchness'. Why? Consider His life, ministry and words: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it dies, it brings forth **much fruit**.*" (John 12:24) Jesus did exactly that – He fell into the ground so to speak and died, but His death and resurrection birthed the church. He brought forth muchness, that is, much fruit. In fact, in Revelation, the number is said to be

more than 100 million souls just around the throne.

Jesus also said, "*Herein is my Father gloried, that you bear **much fruit**...*" (John 15:8) And He practiced what He preached – He bore much fruit to His Father's glory. So indeed, He is worthy of 'muchness' in heaven – indeed, He has inherited ALL THINGS (see Mat 11:27, Luk 10:22, John 3:35, John 13:3, John 16:15) but that's not the whole story.

This strength in the Greek has another 'flavor' so to speak. It is pronounced "ischys" and though it means ability, force, strength or might, it is derived from the word meaning to keep or hold in the hand and is used of those joined to any one by say marriage or friendship. This, of course, fits perfectly with our Savior for this then is **the strength to hold both to the Father (as being perfectly obedient to and indeed one with Him) and to us who are saved (as His friends and bride)**. Recall, He said:

- "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand**. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand**. I and My Father are **one**."* (John 10:27-30) and...
- "*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you **friends**, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*" (John 15:15) and...
- "*I and my Father are **one**.*" (John 10:30) and...
- "*Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, **keep** through Your name those whom*

You have given Me, that they may be **one** as We are. While I was with them in the world, **I kept them** in Your name. Those whom You gave Me **I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.**" (John 17:11,12) and...

- "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be **one**, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be **one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" (John 17:20,21)

And pointing to our bridal relationship with Jesus, the Apostle Paul wrote:

- "*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*" (See Eph 5:23 – 32)

Now, with this all in mind, we can better understand His worthiness and as a consequence worship accordingly, but there is also application for us here and now. You see, as with His power and riches and wisdom, so with His muchness or strength – He desires to share it with us who believe in Him for the scriptures use this same word when they tells us:

- "*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His (ischys) **might**.*" (Eph 6:10) and...
- "*If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the (ischys) **ability** which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ...*" (1 Pet 4:11)

In this life, our strength for holding on and our ministry are only genuine and effective when supplied by God. The same was true for Jesus and the apostles. Let me illustrate that with a story.

Barnabas was such an eloquent speaker and preached with such

passion and convincing doctrine that he was the chosen speaker over Paul on their first missionary journey. However, when God began to bring Paul to the forefront, Barnabas the encourager took the lesser place without complaint. He was not worried about position as much as seeing the call of God fulfilled in Paul's life.

John Mark, Barnabas' nephew, had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey when things looked like they were getting rough, but he repented and asked to go along with them on their second journey to the north. Paul refused to let him come along because of his earlier desertion, but Barnabas stuck with John Mark much as he had stuck with Paul before the brethren in Jerusalem years earlier.

Thus Barnabas and Paul went separate ways. Paul took Silas and headed to Syria and Cilicia, and Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus. Barnabas eventually encouraged John Mark to travel with Peter.

Being originally from Cyprus, Barnabas stayed on there preaching Christ to all who came across his path. Such a following rose up that he fell into contention with a Jewish sorcerer who was losing business because the things Barnabas taught freed the people from their fear of him and what his "magic" could do to them. Because of this, the sorcerer stirred the non-Christians of the city against Barnabas. They soon falsely accused Barnabas of some crime and had him thrown into prison.

When a time was set for Barnabas to come before a judge in Salamina, fearing the judge would discover his innocence and release him, a mob led by the sorcerer raided the jail, put a rope around Barnabas' neck, dragged him outside the city, and burned him.

Barnabas was not swayed by the views of the mainstream. (He had ischys!) When everyone else flowed idly with the currents of fear or popular opinion, he took his paddle in hand and fought hard to get their boat back into God's flow of love and acceptance, even if he was the only one paddling. He judged people by the confessions of their hearts and how they lined up with the Word of God, not by their pasts or what they looked like. Where others saw a lost cause or an enemy, Barnabas (because of God's ischys!) saw great potential and a brother or sister in the Lord that needed the support of an encourager. He stood by those others rejected, and by doing so he helped them to realize greater things in their own lives than he did in his own.

In a world where self-promotion seems to be a key to success, there are not too many like Barnabas. (Jesus Freaks Vol II by DC Talk - parentheses mine)

Most people aren't strengthened with this "ischys" and don't realize this "meh-ode". That's because it's not the strength of the world and its muchness may only be seen in heaven.

Nevertheless, it's available to you as a believer; just ask for it in faith. It's God's good pleasure to give it to you.

Finally, as a believer God's got you in His hands, and He knows how to hold on to you. Paul put it this way – "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:38,39)

So now you know what this strength is all about, why Jesus is perfectly worthy of it and what He has chosen to do with it.

Priceless Love

How much is your life worth? Now, before you can answer that, you must consider 'your market'. By that, I mean your life is worth only as much as someone else is willing to pay for it. You may think you're a worthless bum or that you're worth the world, but that's irrelevant. Why, even Satan told God in the book of Job, "...all that a man has he will give for his life." (Job 2:4) What really matters is what someone else thinks you're worth.

So what do you think? \$10? \$100? \$100,000? How about a whopping \$1,000,000? What would someone else pay for your life? In Africa today, you can buy a goat for \$50 and a slave for just \$35. If we consider only the raw materials, you'd be worth between \$5 and \$10. And that's only if we could find someone who needs the chemicals. "Wait a minute!" you say. "I'm not just a bunch of chemicals. I'm me! I'm a person!"

And you're right; but, the value of a person is what? – Depends on who's doing the valuing, the price fixing so to speak. In the Bible, Judah sold Joseph for the price of a child slave – 20 pieces of silver. Judas sold Jesus for the price of an adult slave – 30 pieces of silver.

It would seem that Judah didn't value his little brother very highly. His brothers with him had plotted to kill Joseph anyway. And Judas? Well, who knows what was going on in that guy's head. Clearly, he didn't value the Son of God very much.

So you see, your value -- the price for your life -- is related to how the one valuing you perceives you and/or feels toward you.

May 10, 1748 was a day in which one man began to perceive, and thus value, many things quite differently. On a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, John Newton experienced what he would later refer to as his "great deliverance." When all seemed lost and he knew the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, "Lord, have mercy upon us." Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had spoke to him through the storm and that grace had begun its work in him.

Over the course of time, John came to value the lives of the slaves he was transporting entirely differently. These were men and women and children and no longer cargo. He treated them much more humanely; meanwhile, his perception of the slaves continued to be radically changed. Seven years later, he gave up seafaring forever and pursued with increasing enthusiasm a life of humble ministry under the mentoring of George Whitefield and John Wesley. A few years afterward, he wrote this song:

*Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That sav'd a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev'd;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believ'd!*

Salvation by grace taught John to see others more as God sees them

– to perceive them as eternal beings.

And then there's love. Do you love anyone? What does that love do to your sense of their value? The more you love, the more you value someone. Unfortunately, human love is often short lived. It can be changed by mood, circumstance and the sense of reciprocity.

Before Calvary, buoyed by his loving devotion to Jesus, Peter vowed that he would never deny Christ, yet you all know he did so three times. After the resurrection, on the shores of Galilee, he was ministered to by Jesus. Twice, our Savior asked Peter if he loved Him using the word for godly love (agape). Peter responded each time yes, that he loved Him but answered with the word for human relational love (phileo). Finally, Jesus asked him a third time the same question but used Peter's own word. *Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love (phileo) Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."* (John 21:17) Peter knew he had phileo love for Jesus but such love is what left him in the crisis of Gethsemane.

Now, all of this pertains to our studies on Revelation 5:11,12 which say,

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain

*To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"*

We've looked at power, riches, wisdom and strength in previous essays. Herein, we're considering honor.

This word in the Greek means:

1) a valuing by which the price is fixed

and comes from the word meaning

1) to pay, to recompense

2) to pay penalty, suffer punishment

In comparing this word "honor" in Mat 15:4 and its reference to Ex 20:12, we see that the Hebrew word for the honor Jesus is worth of means essentially to be 'heavy or weighty'. In other words, it is very substantial.

Surrounding the throne, this heavenly throng will proclaim that Jesus is worthy of supremely heavy or weighty value – that's what this "honor" means. But why?

The apostle John wrote, "...we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1Jn 3:2) So, how did John see Him? There at the throne John saw Him – "I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a **Lamb as though it had been slain**..." (Rev 5:6) Now, we will also see Him in His splendor and glory, but this scene is pertinent to our study. This is the scene in which Jesus is proclaimed worthy of honor.

There was a price to be paid. What for and how much? To answer that, we'll look at something Jesus taught his disciples concerning value or honor. He said,...

*the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and **sells all that he has and buys that field**.* Mat 13:44

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of **great price**, went and **sold all that he had and bought it**.* Mat 13:45,46

That field, that dirt, is planet earth. That pearl, that piece of dirt covered by countless layers of beautiful grace, is you. Those that have taught that it's you that goes and sells everything to buy God have got it all backwards. God's not dirty and He's no piece of grit in need of a covering of grace. And you simply don't have enough to purchase Him anyway.

But note that in each case the One doing the buying sold all that He had to obtain His desire. This speaks to how Father God values you. Not \$10. Not \$100. Not \$1000. Not even a whopping \$1,000,000. He could have given the whole cosmos but no, he sold ALL that He had – Himself, His Beloved Son. He gave what was more valuable than all the created order – more than the entire spiritual and physical universes put together.

What's your life worth? In God's eyes, all that He had, for it is Christ who is "all in all" and "in Whom all things consist". The Bible says, "You are bought with a price." (1 Cor 6:20) What's your life worth? There's simply no value, no honor in this cosmos that can compare to the value God has placed on you.

Now, because of what happened in Eden, the price was set – a sinless man for a sinless man (see

1 Jn 2:2, 1 Cor 15:2). And there was only one way for a sinless man to do the job. God's Son became a man. There simply was no other way, and Jesus submitted to that in the garden of Gethsemane. Father God values you and I, all of us, so highly! That's because He sees us through the lens of His infinite love. Greater love – greater value.

Thus, He sacrificed His Son, His Lamb, a Lamb who was above creation for that which was mortal. He paid a price that can never be measured. It can never be valued enough. It can never be honored enough.

In contrast, the enemy of our souls, Satan, despises our very existence for we are made in the image of God. Satan thinks we're worthless hunks of dirt.

But we already know that, don't we. We know that it's only because of God's measureless love and unfathomable grace that we're saved. We know it's Jesus who is so worthy of our acclamation. He is the value, the honor, the heavy, weighty price of our salvation.

Unto you therefore which believe He is precious. (1 Pet 2:7) *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* (1 Tim 1:17)

Forever, worthy is the Lamb!

HOW A NATION DIES

by Ray C. Stedman

It was the summer of 1787. The heat in Philadelphia was oppressive and the delegates to the Constitutional Convention fanned themselves languidly and longed for adjournment. Debate had dragged on for days over the issue of how the States would be represented in Congress. Luther Martin of Maryland had held the floor for the best part of two days in a long-winded speech on States Rights that left everyone weary and querulous. The Convention faced an impasse. At this point aged Dr. Benjamin Franklin rose and addressed himself to General Washington in the Chair.

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understandings?

He went onto remind the Convention that at the beginning of the war with England the Continental Congress had, in that very room, prayed for divine protection, and their prayers were answered. He continued:

I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground unseen by him, is it possible that an empire could arise without his aid?

He stated that it was his firm belief that without divine aid the Convention would succeed in their political building no better than the builders of

Babel, but would find themselves so divided and split by local interests that they would become a reproach to future ages. Franklin had soundly made his point. Nations do not rise or continue at the whim and desire of men. A higher Power must be reckoned with, for the ultimate destiny of nations lies in His hands.

An unknown writer has said: *If a man does not believe in God, his own ego becomes the ruler of his life. Since there are no standards of right and wrong existing apart from himself, right becomes that which pleases him, and wrong that which does not minister to his own ego. Since he himself is the supreme consideration, life is restrained by nothing but his own wishes and easily reaches the conclusion that the best possible world is one in which his will is supreme. He therefore enforces it upon others to the limit of his ability. The denial of God thus becomes the seed from which totalitarianism develops.*

Freedom is possible only if men believe in God and seek to do his will. William Penn was right when he said that if men will not be governed by God, they must be governed by tyrants.

In the face of history, it is hard to argue with that. One must not, of course, make the mistake of equating the widespread practice of religion with being truly governed by God." Religious totalitarianism is perhaps the worst kind of all; certainly it is the most deeply hated. But the religious tyrant is no more being governed by God than the iron-fisted atheist is. Pirate ships often flew the flags of lawful nations to deceive and disarm their intended victims, and even modern dictators are not averse to flying the flag of the church. Senator Daniel Webster caught the essence of true government by God, in a speech made in 1847.

If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and his Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will; if the power of the Gospel is not felt through the length and breadth of the land, anarchy and misrule, degradation and misery, corruption and darkness will reign without mitigation or end.

A widespread myth exists in our day that the foundation of our freedoms lies in the great documents that launched our national history: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But important as these may be as instruments of freedom, they are not the foundation of it. Freedom rests on the moral righteousness of each individual member of the nation. When individual righteousness fails on a large scale, laws lose their force, judges fail in their powers, enforcement becomes impracticable, and the Constitution itself is soon changed to reflect the currently acceptable level of morality.

The Bible's view of nations seems to group them in two major classifications: Those who are moving toward darkness, or those who are moving toward increasing light. A nation moving toward light is growing in two essential areas: truth and love. Its knowledge of reality is increasing, manifesting itself in growth in literacy, education, science, medicine, and above all (since God is the greatest Reality), theology. But light also means that along with increasing truth there is increasing love, manifesting itself as legal and social justice, public and private courtesy, care for the aged and infirm, help to the poor, the safeguarding of personal liberty, and, of course, cleanliness and conservation of resources.

A nation moving toward darkness experiences the reverse. Truth declines so that, though surrounded by books and knowledge, the general populace learns less and less, illiteracy increases, personal liberties diminish, violence and crime mount, pollution and corruption abound, and the courts find it hard to administer justice.

Nations live by pursuing truth and love; they die by self-deceit, by bigotry and injustice, and especially by ungodliness, pride, and self-sufficiency. It would be a serious mistake to blame governmental agents as having ultimate responsibility for a nation's destiny. It has been said that every nation gets the government it deserves. Final responsibility, therefore, rests with the individuals that make up a nation. "No man is an island," and every one of us is responsible for the influence we exert upon our neighbors, our community, our city, county, state, and national governments.

The ultimate issue is our own personal godliness. Do we, "Fear God, and honor the king?" Do we, in the great words of Micah, "Do justice,... love kindness, and... walk humbly with [our] God?" (Mic. 6:8, RSV). The hand of doom rests upon any people who deliberately refuse to hear and heed the Word of God. Ultimately, judgment will come. No political manipulation can avert it. No partial compromise will delay it, no defiance will evade it. There will come at last, as to ancient Judah, some eleventh year, ninth month, and fourth day, when a breach shall be made in the walls of the city, and the inhabitants shall be led forth into captivity and death.

(Editor – these are excerpts from Ray Stedman's full article which can be viewed at his website: www.raystedman.org.)

The Feasts and the Future

By Tom McCall and Zola Levitt

Because the Rapture concerns only the New Testament church, Bible students have generally assumed that information about it is found only in the New Testament.

But, in a wonderful way, God wove the principle of this mighty culmination of the church age throughout the Old Testament as well. An imaginative Bible scholar of the first century, having only the Old Testament to study, might well have arrived at this principle by thinking about trumpets.

The trumpet which sounds at the moment of the Rapture is the key to understanding a vast panorama of spiritual depth, beauty, and magnitude. The Person and work of Christ in all ages, and God's very plan for redemption, are fully explained through the complete understanding of this unique symbol.

We have to go all the way back to the Book of Genesis for the first reference to the trumpet and its use in a redemptive way.

Then, too, we all know the story of Joshua, the great Jewish general who frustrated the defense of walled Jericho with trumpets. But how many of us stop to realize that our Saviour's name is really Joshua?

We say His name in Greek today because the original English translators left it the way they found it in the Greek manuscripts--"Jesus." In Hebrew the name was "Yeshua" (Redeemer). Though it is the usual practice to render proper names just as they are found when translating an original, if we pronounce "Yeshua" (Jesus) in English we have "Joshua," and we suddenly see a beautiful Bible analogy (called a "type").

Joshua was the one who delivered

his people to their promised land at the sound of the trumpet. Our Joshua will do the same for us!

The symbol of the trumpet urges us still further back, to the Book of Leviticus, where God established for His people the dramatic Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:42). In Leviticus 23, God gave Moses a quick-reference guide to all the feasts which were to be established as "holy convocations" among the Jews for all time. The proper dates of each observance are given, as well as the important sacrifices and duties connected with each commemoration.

The feasts are described in other places in the Old Testament, but Leviticus 23 serves as a kind of handbook of the most vital elements of each feast. A believer could carry with him this one page of the Bible and he wouldn't miss any of these solemn convocations. God is practical.

The association between the trumpet of the Rapture and the trumpet of the Feast of Trumpets gives us an understanding of prophecy and redemption which are hard to grasp in any other way. In the feasts God made a kind of tapestry of future events, and in later actions He fulfilled these events.

The Rapture is the event which fulfills the Feast of Trumpets, as we shall see, and the position of this feast among the others tells us a great deal about our coming redemption.

The Feast of Trumpets comes fifth in the series of seven feasts, and it occurs on the first day of the seventh month (*Tishrei*), which falls in late August or September on our Julian calendar. The Jews call it *Rosh Hashanah* today--"the Head of the Months"--and they celebrate it as the beginning of the new year. They send new year's greetings on this day, though this tradition disagrees with the Jewish Torah (the first five books of

the Bible). Leviticus 23:5 and Exodus 12 clearly establish Nisan, the month of Passover, as the first month of the year.

Many of the Jewish observances have been altered from their original requirements through the leavening of tradition and through the destruction of the second Temple in 70 A.D. The feasts are primarily oriented around sacrifices, and the Temple of God in Jerusalem was the only appropriate place to offer them (2 Chronicles 7:12). Because the sacrifices have not been possible for some 19 centuries, other kinds of observances have replaced them.

The ancient Jews went to considerable trouble to keep these feasts. A total of three pilgrimages to Jerusalem were required each year during the three festival seasons of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The first and third seasons take in three feasts each, as we will see, but the devout Jew couldn't get by with less than three trips each year to observe all seven feasts at the Temple.

We get a picture of the international atmosphere of the widely traveled Jews at their worship in Acts 2. This electrifying chapter, which describes the coming of the Holy Spirit, lists some 16 nations from which the Jews had come to keep the Feast of Pentecost.

But though the Jews were careful to observe their feasts, they tragically missed the fulfillments of these feasts in Christ. Let's look carefully at the seven feasts and their fulfillments, and we won't miss the Rapture when it comes!

1. THE FEAST OF PASSOVER (Leviticus 23:5)

Passover was established during the tenth plague, in which Pharaoh was finally persuaded to let the

Jewish people leave Egypt. God's avenging angel killed the firstborn in each Egyptian household, but he *passed over* the homes of the Jews. The Jews had been instructed to mark their door-posts with the blood of a lamb ("without blemish, a male..."--Exodus 12:5). The blood of the lamb would deliver them from slavery. It was their mark of redemption.

This principle is also dramatically true in Christianity. The blood of Christ, our Lamb, delivers us from slavery to sin. Paul refers to the Lord as "Christ our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Significantly, the Lord was crucified exactly on Passover day, 14 Nisan. The night before, while Christ was celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples, He lifted the wine and said, "For this is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Those Jews, the Lord's own disciples, surely understood the imagery there, but most Jews today continue to celebrate Passover in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt.

2. THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

(Leviticus 23:6)

The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the day following Passover. Nisan, the first month (which contains the first three feasts), corresponds to late March or early April on our Julian calendar.

God commanded the Jews to eat only pure, unleavened bread during this week, for leaven symbolized sin and evil. As sin corrupts and permeates the human condition, so leaven corrupts and permeates bread dough.

The Jews today conduct a ceremony of ridding their homes of leaven in order to sanctify the

dwellings for Passover. The father of the house hides bread crumbs and cookie particles on bookshelves and window sills, and the children come running to find them. When they discover the hidden leaven they shout for father. He comes with a feather and a wooden spoon, sweeping the crumbs into the spoon with the feather and ceremonially throwing them out the window.

The fulfillment of this Biblical "type" in Christ emphasizes the Lord's body. At His Passover table He took the unleavened bread and called it His body, even as He afterward referred to the wine as His blood. The bread makes an excellent symbol of His body: it is striped, pierced, and pure. Because of the way the unleavened bread is prepared (without fat or any rising agent), it bears stripes from the grill, and it must be pierced to cook through.

During the actual Passover meal, the Jews perform a unique ceremony with the unleavened bread. They place three pieces of it in one little stack. Then they take out the middle piece (the Son in the triune Godhead) and break it. ("This is my body, broken for you"). Next, they wrap the broken piece in white linen and hide it or bury it.

They bring this broken piece out again and eat it while drinking the third cup of wine, the "Cup of Redemption."

Incredibly, most Jews have failed to see the gospel in this ceremony repeated every year on the anniversary of Christ's crucifixion!

God performed the exact fulfillment of this ceremony with the unleavened Bread of Life, giving to all of us the Cup of Redemption.

3. THE FEAST OF FIRST FRUITS (Leviticus 23:10)

The feast of thanksgiving for a

bountiful land occurs on Sunday ("the morrow after the Sabbath") during the Week of Unleavened Bread. The Israeli farmers were to bring the initial yield of their spring barley crop to Jerusalem, where a priest would wave these firstfruits before the House of the Lord.

This was most clearly fulfilled by Jesus, who was resurrected on the Sunday during the week of Unleavened Bread. Paul explains: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive [resurrected]. But every man in his own order: *Christ for the firstfruits*, and afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:22,23).

The Jewish leaders have failed to notice that Jesus was raised on the Sunday following Passover (or they have assumed that this is a fabrication of the New Testament intended to give the story credence to the Jews).

The Jews do not celebrate Firstfruits at all anymore. Passover and Unleavened Bread have become one eight-day holiday, and the Sunday within this time span, despite all its Biblical significance, is not noted in any special way.

4. THE FEAST OF PENTECOST (Leviticus 23:16)

The Spirit came as Christ had promised, at the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost occurred 50 days after Firstfruits on the Jewish calendar (usually in May or June). The disciples anxiously waited for this miracle. Christ had rejoined them for 40 days after His resurrection, but then He ascended to His Father. As He departed He instructed them to go to Jerusalem and await the fulfillment of His promise.

Sure enough, after ten days, when the Day of Pentecost was "fully come," the Holy Spirit came upon the worshippers at the Temple.

The deeper significance of this miracle is that it too fulfilled an Old Testament feast. The Spirit did not come on just any day, but on Pentecost, the beginning of the fullest harvest season. God's great harvest, the church age, was getting underway!

It is fascinating to realize that exactly 3000 people were saved on that remarkable day when the Spirit was given, while exactly 3000 people died on the day the Law was given on Mount Sinai! Truly, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6)! Interestingly, in modern Judaism the Rabbis teach that Pentecost, or *Shevuoth* ("a week of weeks," or seven weeks) marks the day when Moses received the Law on the Mount. The Scriptures do indicate that this occurred in the third month (Exodus 19:1), after the exodus from Egypt (Nisan 14, of course), but the exact date is not given.

In the old observance of the feast, the priest was to wave two leavened loaves (Leviticus 23:17). These symbolize the Jew and Gentile together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).

5. THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS (Leviticus 23:24)

On the first day of the seventh month (late August or September on our calendar) was scheduled the Feast of Trumpets. This harvest-time feast is now clearly seen to represent the Rapture--the culmination of the church age, the final gathering of souls to God.

6. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (Leviticus 23:27)

This feast, following Trumpets by just ten days, represented the most solemn day on the ancient Jewish calendar--and it still does. On this day and this day alone, the High Priest of

Israel, and he alone, would enter the Most Holy place of the sanctuary of the Lord. In this chamber where the Ark of the Covenant was placed, the High Priest would seek atonement (covering) for the sins of all Israel.

He would enter first with the blood of a bull (with which he would atone for his own sin) and then with the blood of a goat (for the national sin of Israel). He would apply the blood to the mercy seat of the Ark.

Today the Jews have no Most Holy Place--in fact, no Temple at all--but they continue the tradition of Atonement with a long day of fasting and prayer. The tragedy is that, having spent the day in confession (*chatanu, chatanu*--"we have sinned, we have sinned"), the Jew gains no assurance of redemption at all.

The fulfillment of this feast for believers obviously lies in the finished work of Christ, through which everyone may claim permanent redemption. The chosen people will not be left out--the Day of Atonement will be fulfilled for "all Israel" on the coming occasion of the national atonement in the promised land.

Paul informs us that when the Deliverer (the Messiah, Christ) returns to Zion, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). Zechariah proclaims a coming day when Israel will mourn in national repentance and will finally accept her Messiah: "They shall look upon Me, whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10). At that time they will realize a true Day of Atonement. Then will be opened a "fountain of cleansing" for the Jews. (Zechariah 13:1).

This will occur, according to the Biblical context, when Jesus returns after the Tribulation period and establishes His kingdom on the earth. This follows the Rapture, of course, and is in keeping with our chronology.

All Jews will then experience the

Christian Day of Atonement--the day on which the believer receives Christ and stands before his Creator as a forgiven man.

7. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (Leviticus 23:34)

We would expect by this time, seeing the logic of the chronological order of the feasts, for the final feast to symbolize the Millennium, that 1000-year rule of Christ on earth which follows the other events we have discussed so far. And it does indeed.

The Feast of Tabernacles takes us back to the times of the Israelites in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:42,43), when they lived in makeshift shelters or "booths." This is the feast of *Succoth* (tabernacles), in which the Almighty wished the Jews to remember how He took care of them in inhospitable surroundings. This feast also looks forward to the coming kingdom as pictured by Zechariah (14:16-19).

The orthodox Jews believe in the Messianic implications of the Feast of Tabernacles. They build little shelters from which hang fruit and nuts, and some actually sleep in the "tabernacles" for the duration of the eight-day feast. They feel that this feast is a harbinger of the peace and rest that will come to Israel and the world in the "days of Messiah," when "every man will dwell under his own vine and fig tree" (Micah 4:4).

This is fulfilled in the Christian believer, of course. This feast will clearly be fulfilled during Christ's coming reign on earth, when everyone "shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16). The prophet adds a bit of admonishment to the nations, noting that those who fail to get to Jerusalem during the Feast of

Tabernacles will have no rain. Egypt is singled out as an example of those who might omit this feast in the coming Kingdom.

That time will see quite a different earthly society from what we see today. The Christian nation of Israel will finally take its place as the "head of the nations," and the church, the Bride of Christ, will reign with the Lord. At that time the meek will truly have "inherited the earth" (Matthew 5:5). In those days "the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

Where are we on this timetable of God?

Obviously, we stand somewhere between the coming of the Spirit and the Rapture, in that long summer between Pentecost and Tabernacles.

Jesus Himself alluded to our position in the sequence of feasts when He admonished us to look to the harvest period: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).

Many Bible students believe that the harvest is almost over. The signs of "the end" as given in various Scriptural teachings, notably those of Jesus in Matthew 24, seem to be upon us today. It is a mistake to try to "schedule" the Rapture, to "pick a day." On the other hand, we would be remiss to fail to notice the signs of our times, or that the fields lie white and ready to harvest.

The Pentecostal harvest goes on, with the laborers working the fields and the unbelievers moving the world toward its ultimate tribulation. As the first four feasts were each fulfilled according to their special symbols, so will be the last three. As suddenly as the Spirit came to the Jews at that dramatic Pentecost after the Lord's ascension, just as suddenly will Jesus return for His own.

At the sound of the trumpet.

(From *Raptured*, by Thomas S. McCall and Zola Levitt)

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

