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THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF JESUS CHRIST

The concept is a familiar one to people in God's Church. When Jesus Christ returns the first resurrection will take place. All those who will be in that first resurrection will then take part in the Marriage Supper of Jesus Christ, where we will become "the wife" of Jesus Christ. Then Jesus Christ will establish the government of God over this earth and we, all those in the first resurrection, will rule with Jesus Christ for the next 1000 years, the millennium.

But what about that "Marriage Supper"?

Exactly where will that marriage supper take place? And who will be present at that marriage supper? Let's take a closer look at these questions and their answers.

PREJUDICES ARE A BARRIER TO CORRECT UNDERSTANDING

Many of you will recall Mr. Armstrong repeatedly telling us that it is ten times more difficult to unlearn error than it is to learn the truth in the first place. As an illustration of this, some of you may recall the mock-up newspaper that was included in the original edition of Mr. Armstrong's booklet about "The Wonderful World Tomorrow". This mock-up newspaper included on page 1 an article entitled "WORLD-THAT-WAS SCIENCE STUDENTS PROGRESSING IN UNLEARNING COURSES" ... and the article proceeded to explain that before being taught the truth, scientists from "the-world-that-was" first had to undergo a seven-year course to unlearn error.

The article was, of course, totally fictitious; but the point was that in order to really understand the truth we must first clear our minds of all the false ideas we have over time accepted as truth. Of course, we always read this article from the perspective of applying it TO OTHER PEOPLE, people who thought God was a trinity, who thought they had an immortal soul, who believed Christ was crucified on a Friday and resurrected on a Sunday morning, who thought that the righteous go to heaven, as well as people who believed in evolution, etc..

But we didn't apply it to ourselves!

After all, WE had had our eyes opened to the truth; we understood the truth on all these doctrines; we were no longer deceived.

However, in the process we actually developed our own set of erroneous ideas. We didn't really understand "all" the truth. And so the shoe ended up on the other foot ... all of a sudden WE were the ones who were challenged on some of the things we have accepted as truth.

I am here not speaking about the myriad of heretical ideas that were introduced into God's Church after the death of Mr. Armstrong. Those heresies we were supposed to identify and reject ... that is part of our testing before God; we are instructed to "hold fast that which you have" (Revelation 3:11). Rather, I am speaking about our own unsubstantiated prejudices, areas where our understanding of the Scriptures was incomplete or plain wrong, areas where we actually need to be willing to "let go" of errors.

Examples would include things like:

- Our wrong understanding that Mr. Armstrong would be the leader of the two witnesses.
- Our wrong understanding that Mr. Armstrong was the prophesied Elijah to come.
- Our wrong assumption that "the government of God" exists in the Church of God today.
- Our wrong assumption that God gave the Jews the responsibility to preserve "THE" correct calendar for determining the days when God's Holy Days are to be observed ... when all the evidence makes abundantly clear that the Jews haven't done anything of the kind.
- Our wrong understanding about the 144000 and the great multitude.
- Our wrong speculations at various times about the identity of the man who will be "the beast".
- Our wrong understanding about the time of the return of Jesus Christ.

A wrong understanding peculiar to many of those in God's Church in South Africa from the early 1960's to the late 1980's was that God would NEVER allow a Black Government to get into power in South Africa ... somehow God would not allow "the Israelites" in South Africa to be ruled over by some "Gentiles". The facts show that this prejudiced idea was also wrong.

For many it has been difficult to "unlearn" some of the wrong ideas listed above. While some people have come to see that these ideas were indeed wrong and without biblical foundation, there are others who are still locked into wrong perceptions and wrong understanding. In terms of the newspaper article referred to above: they haven't yet completed their seven-year unlearning course.

However we look at it, unlearning error is almost always a difficult and painful process. If we are going to change our wrong views at all, it is almost always only over a period of time that we change. Very few of us indeed are like the Apostle Paul, who threw out the wrong understanding and took up the correct perspective in the space of about 15 minutes ... when at one minute he was riding on his donkey to Damascus, intent on persecuting more Christians, and a few minutes later he was saying: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (see Acts 9:6). Most of us take a lot longer than that before we discard wrong views and wrong understanding.

There is another wrong and unfounded prejudice many of us hold. This one affects our understanding of the marriage supper. Let's take a look at it.

WHAT ABOUT "GOING TO HEAVEN"?

When we came into God's Church, we learned that heaven is NOT "the reward of the saved", that God Himself will in fact come to this earth. We saw that Satan was the one who had wanted to go to heaven, and that he has deceived his churches into looking upon heaven as the ultimate reward for true believers. We learned that when Christ returns to this earth, the resurrected saints are to meet Him in the air. We learned that there is a great difference between "the kingdom OF heaven" (which the Bible repeatedly speaks about) and "a kingdom IN heaven" (which is never mentioned in the Bible).

A result of this understanding is that we are immediately critical of anyone who wants to tell us that Christians will go to heaven, other than referring to meeting the returning Jesus Christ IN THE CLOUDS. Any passage that could perhaps seem to imply or to infer that Christians will indeed go to heaven, beyond the clouds, is interpreted in light of the previous paragraph. The prejudice that the understanding of the previous paragraph has created in our minds BLOCKS OUT any possibility of us accepting that some other Scriptures may indeed refer to Christians going to heaven for some reason.

I know because I am speaking from experience.

We reason:

"SINCE WE KNOW that Christians don't go to heaven, THEREFORE this passage cannot possibly mean that there is an occasion when Christians really will go to heaven. THEREFORE this passage must have some other explanation."

But that reasoning is not sound. Our "since we know" is based on incomplete understanding. I now believe that there will be a time, before Revelation chapter 21, when "the saved" will indeed go to heaven, to the very throne of God. This goes against a prejudice I have held for over three decades. And it has to do with "the marriage supper".

CORRECT BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES A BALANCE

To correctly understand the Bible we have to find the correct balance between two different factors. To begin with, there are two types of biblical references about any subject:

- there are direct, plain and unmistakable statements;
- there are indirect statements which require some foundational knowledge to correctly "interpret" these statements.

Here are two examples to illustrate this:

1) The statement "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4) is a plain and direct statement which requires no prior knowledge or understanding of the subject of sin. While there are certainly many other statements about sin in the Bible, we do not need to know about any of them in order to understand 1 John 3:4. The verse is self-explanatory. [We obviously need to also understand the meaning of the words "the law", which is usually not a difficulty. People may "argue" about what "the law" means, but such arguments don't make the words "the law" difficult to understand.]

2) The statement "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) is an indirect statement about the kingdom of God. It is an indirect statement which requires an understanding of the numerous other statements about the kingdom which are much clearer than this statement. Understanding that the words "within you" should really be translated as "among you" is only the beginning step towards a correct understanding here. Our understanding from other clearer Scriptures is required to help us "interpret" this statement correctly to mean: "I (i.e. Jesus Christ) who am standing among you at this very moment am a representative of the kingdom of God; so you need look no further for the kingdom of God than to listen to what I have to tell you."

To summarize: whereas the first example requires no prior knowledge of other statements about sin for us to correctly understand it, the second example can only be correctly understood by those who ALREADY have a foundational knowledge of what the kingdom of God is all about and what it will entail.

The first example only requires us to actually believe what the Bible plainly states! The second example requires our interpretation, based on what we already know about the subject. And if "what we already know" is indeed correct, THEN there should be no problem with our interpretation. But IF there is an element of error, however slight, in "what we already know", THEN we could in fact end up with incorrectly "interpreting" the statement in question.

Now a common problem that has frequently existed amongst members of God's Church over the past few decades is that we have treated Scriptures that fall into the second category as if they were exactly the same as those Scriptures that fall into the first category. "Interpreting" was considered to be a bad word, something we in God's Church just didn't do! We just made bold assertions like: "Well, that's what the Bible PLAINLY SAYS!", when sometimes it really did NOT "plainly say" what we asserted it said.

Going back to the above example: we would say, "The Bible plainly says 'the kingdom of God is AMONG you' ... just check the marginal comment in the KJV." And we would refuse to acknowledge to ourselves that this statement STILL required us to INTERPRET it to mean that Jesus Christ was speaking about Himself being in their midst at that point in time. We didn't believe that we were doing any interpreting of any kind, even though we obviously had to change the wording from the words Jesus Christ had used, in order to make the statement really clear to our listeners.

Now if we want to correctly understand the Scriptures, then we have to make a distinction between these two categories of statements. We can be much more dogmatic about plain, clear and unambiguous biblical statements like "sin is the transgression of the law". They don't require very much additional knowledge. With indirect statements, on the other hand, we need to very carefully examine our premises, checking that our premises are indeed sound and water-tight. A carelessly assumed premise can become the cause of major errors.

OUR PREMISES ABOUT "NOT GOING TO HEAVEN"

Once we started studying the Bible about this subject, it became very clear that:

- 1) Heaven is never promised as the reward for the saved. That is nothing more than a teaching of the false churches who have been deceived by Satan.
- 2) Jesus Christ will return and then establish the kingdom of God on this earth.
- 3) God the Father Himself will come to the new earth with the New Jerusalem. The new earth will become God's dwelling place.
- 4) Jesus Christ plainly said that no man has ascended up to heaven (John 3:13).
- 5) So the prophet Elijah only went up into the clouds.
- 6) King David has not gone to heaven (Acts 2:34).
- 7) Jesus spoke about the kingdom OF heaven, but never about a kingdom IN heaven.

So we concluded from all these statements that therefore man will NEVER go to heaven (apart from going up into the clouds), at least not before the time of the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem. But that is not what any of the above scriptural references imply. The "NEVER" is something we have read into these references. And any statements that don't seem to fit into the conclusion we have reached require us to nevertheless interpret them within the confines of our conclusion ... that man will NEVER go to heaven. That just happens to be one of our unfounded prejudices.

Let's now take a look at what the Bible tells us about the marriage supper.

THE ORIGIN OF THIS EXPLANATION

At this stage I want to make quite clear that I am not the first one who thought of the things I will now

explain.

When we were in the USA last year, I was asked to conduct the Day of Atonement services for a small group of people in Minneapolis. After services that evening one of the men there questioned me about where the marriage supper of Jesus Christ would take place. He made some incisive statements which challenged my prejudiced ideas. I had to admit that he had a point, and that there were some things for which my ideas had no answers. I told the man that I would try to look into it as time permitted.

When we returned from our trip to the States someone sent me a condensed written-up account of a sermon given by another minister, which also dealt with the subject of the marriage supper. I don't recall whether the man in Minneapolis had gotten his ideas from that sermon, or whether he had come up with those points independently. At any rate, those sermon notes also challenged my until-then-held views about the marriage supper.

So in this explanation I am not concerned with whether or not it is original; I am concerned with whether or not it is true! And I have no problem with acknowledging that the credit for helping me to first understand this subject goes to other people. It took other people to help me face my own prejudices.

WHAT WE ARE TOLD ABOUT "THE MARRIAGE SUPPER"

The expression "the marriage supper" only appears one time in the Bible, in Revelation 19:9.

And he saith to me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb Revelation 19:9

This is the only direct reference to the marriage supper "of the Lamb". Then there is a parable Jesus Christ gave in Matthew chapter 22, which also makes a clear reference to this marriage supper. The parable starts as follows:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son. Matthew 22:2

It is from these two passages primarily (a clear statement in Revelation chapter 19 and a basically clear parable which Jesus Christ presented in Matthew chapter 22) that we understand that at Christ's return there will be a marriage supper, which all those in the first resurrection will attend. Many other Scriptures will help to bring the details surrounding the marriage supper into a clearer focus.

Let's now examine these Scriptures more closely. Let's look at the parable, which lays the foundation for understanding the statement in Revelation chapter 19.

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Here is verse 2 again:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son. Matthew 22:2

"The King" is a reference to God the Father. "His Son" is a reference to Jesus Christ. In this context there is no reference at all as to who "the Bride" is supposed to be. Instead, there is a reference to those

who are "THE INVITED GUESTS" to attend the festivities surrounding the marriage. And the whole parable is focused on these guests ... showing that those who were initially invited were in fact "not worthy" (Matthew 22:8) and that therefore "others" had to be invited in their stead. "The guests" at this marriage are those who will be in the first resurrection, the same people who in Revelation 19:7 are referred to as "his wife" (i.e. the wife of the Lamb). [Thus we can see that there is a slight change in symbolism between Matthew 22 and Revelation 19.]

The concluding statement to this parable also shows this focus on the guests, when Jesus Christ said:

For many are called, but few are chosen. (Matthew 22:14)

What this shows is that "being called to the marriage feast" is not enough. Of those who hear the initial "call" it is only the smaller, more select group who are also "CHOSEN", that actually get to attend the marriage and all that entails. It is important for us in God's Church, who commonly refer to "when we were called into God's Church", to understand that being called is really not enough! We have to get one stage further, from being "called" we have to proceed to ALSO being "chosen".

[Comment: Jesus Christ used this parable to expound another lesson at the same time, one that involves the man without "a wedding garment". This aspect of the parable need not concern us in this present discussion.]

Chronologically this is the first reference in the New Testament to the "marriage" of Christ to the Church. As such we should expect this reference to provide us with some basic understanding. So let's ask some key questions.

- 1) Who is the One that oversees all the arrangements for the marriage ... God the Father or Jesus Christ? It is God the Father!
- 2) Is God the Father pictured as being PRESENT at the marriage or is He pictured as missing out on the actual marriage supper? God the Father is here very clearly pictured as being PRESENT at the marriage, and as personally seeing all the guests.
- 3) Is it in fact conceivable that God the Father would somehow "NOT BE PRESENT" at the marriage supper of Jesus Christ? No, such a scenario is simply not conceivable! WHY would God the Father possibly miss out on witnessing that event? At that specific point in time, WHAT in the whole universe could possibly be more important to require the personal presence of God the Father, to cause Him to miss out on the marriage supper of His Son Jesus Christ? There is NOTHING that will be more important for the Father at that point in time!
- 4) Consider three different localities:
 - A) God the Father is on His throne in heaven.
 - B) We will meet the returning Jesus Christ somewhere in the air above this earth, in the clouds.
 - C) Then here on earth there is Jerusalem, which will be in a state of chaos at Christ's return. Specific localities at Jerusalem include the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion.

So the question is:

WHERE will the marriage supper take place? Will it be in one of these three locations (i.e. at God's

throne, in the air or on earth somewhere in Jerusalem)? Or is there another location we have not considered?

With those possible (or theoretically potential) locations for the marriage supper to take place, WHICH OF THOSE LOCATIONS would make provision for God the Father to attend the celebrations?

The answers to this question are:

A) God the Father will certainly NOT attend any function or event here on this earth prior to the time of the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem. So since God the Father is clearly shown to be present at "the marriage" of Jesus Christ, this means that this marriage supper CANNOT take place at Jerusalem or anywhere else on this earth.

B) Similarly, God the Father will also NOT attend any event or function in the clouds above this earth (i.e. in our atmosphere), since that is really a part of this earth. It would also imply that when Jesus Christ returns to this earth, that the Father would actually accompany Him, in order to attend the marriage supper somewhere in the clouds.

C) The only possibility for conducting any function at which God the Father will be present is AT THE VERY THRONE OF GOD, in "the third heaven" as the Apostle Paul referred to it in 2 Corinthians 12:2.

Next, in this same context, Matthew 22:4 shows that God has MADE PREPARATIONS for "my dinner" at the marriage. Again, with the potential locations listed above in mind, WHERE will God the Father actually be making those preparations ... somewhere here on earth or in the clouds or in the third heaven? This earth will be involved in the greatest warfare of human history and there will be no preparations taking place at Jerusalem or anywhere else for "THE" marriage celebration of all time! Likewise, God will not be preparing the greatest feast of all time somewhere in the sky above Jerusalem. Those preparations will be made in the third heaven, in God's presence. And the guests are to come to Him; He does not go to the guests!

So once we understand from the parable in Matthew chapter 22 that God the Father will most certainly attend the marriage supper of His Son Jesus Christ, THEN it becomes clear that "the third heaven" is the only possible location where that marriage supper can take place.

This understanding is also in agreement with specific instructions God gave for the annual Holy Days. Let's notice something in Leviticus chapter 23.

TWO SIMILAR CEREMONIES

On the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread the Israelites were to bring "a wavesheaf" of the firstfruits of the harvest. Notice:

... When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring A SHEAF of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And HE SHALL WAVE THE SHEAF before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. Leviticus 23:10-11

The KJV translation here is basically sound, though I have heard of some people wanting to modify it slightly. To clarify this, here are the key Hebrew words:

1) The word "sheaf" is translated from the Hebrew noun "omer". This noun is based on the verb "amar",

which has both a positive and a negative meaning. The positive meaning of "amar" is: to bind sheaves, to gather. The negative meaning of "amar" is: to manipulate, to treat as a slave.

The Hebrew noun "omer" has two meanings: first of all it means: a sheaf of grain; secondly it means: a dry measure of grain, amounting to about two litres by volume. In the KJV it is translated 8 times as "sheaf" and 6 times as "omer", the dry measure of grain.

So in plain English: In Leviticus 23:10 the Hebrew word "omer" can potentially mean either a sheaf of grain or a small volume of dry grain. Either way, it is quite clear that this sheaf (or omer of grain) represented the resurrected Jesus Christ. I see no reason why the translation "omer of grain" should be preferable to the translation "a sheaf", since that is what both, the Hebrew word "omer" and its root word "amar" primarily refer to ... sheaves.

So let's look at the next Hebrew word.

2) The words "he shall wave" in Leviticus 23:11 are a translation of the Hebrew verb "nuwph", which is here used with the hiphil stem. In the Hebrew language the stems with which the verbs are used have a major influence on the meaning the verbs take on. When you check the meaning of a Hebrew verb in your lexicon, you may find a number of different meanings listed under the word. Often in the past people have then simply selected the particular meaning that suited their own purposes best. That isn't really the way we should go about it. In many cases the stem with which the verb is used in a particular passage actually sets the parameters for the meaning the verb is supposed to have in that particular case.

To come back to our verb "nuwph" in Leviticus 23:11: the hiphil stem usually expresses causative action; and "nuwph" with the hiphil stem means: to swing to and fro, to wield, to shake, to wave, as the wave of a hand.

To illustrate that with this stem it commonly refers to "waving the hand", here are two other verses where "nuwph" is also used with the hiphil stem and with the Hebrew word for "hand". I'll render the appropriate words in capital letters for easier identification:

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, AND STRIKE HIS HAND over the place, and recover the leper. 2 Kings 5:11

[Comment: Naaman expected Elisha to wave his hand over the leprous part of his (Naaman's) body.]

And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind SHALL HE SHAKE HIS HAND over the river and shall smite it in seven streams ... Isaiah 11:15

The use of "nuwph" with the hiphil stem in these two passages should suffice to show that the KJV translation of "he shall WAVE the sheaf" is perfectly acceptable and correct. It is a better translation than to say that it means "he shall elevate", or "he shall lift up and bring down".

This is not really a major point. I simply mention it to show that the KJV translation is in fact perfectly acceptable in this case. Yes, it could perhaps be rendered differently, but that doesn't change the overall symbolism God is revealing to us.

So to get back to the Scripture: on the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread the priest was to

WAVE A SHEAF OF THE FIRSTFRUITS BEFORE GOD!

This pictured the resurrected Jesus Christ rising up to God the Father in the third heaven, being accepted by the Father, and then returning to this earth and staying here until a few days before Pentecost.

Now let's look at the second ceremony.

On the Sunday EXACTLY SEVEN WEEKS LATER, on the Feast of Pentecost, the people of Israel were to bring two "WAVE LOAVES", baked with leaven, to the priest. They were to be "the firstfruits" to God. Notice:

Ye shall bring out of your habitations TWO WAVE LOAVES ... they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD. Leviticus 23:17

As far as the Hebrew used here is concerned, the word here translated as "wave" is the Hebrew noun "tenuwphah", which is also derived from the verb "nuwph" we saw above. There is also a word for "loaves" used here; and so the Hebrew literally means "a wave or shaking offering of two loaves".

[Comment: There is a different Hebrew word for "heave offering". That word is "teruwmah", which is derived from the primitive root verb "ruwm", which verb means "to lift", "be high", "be lofty", etc.. I mention this to make quite clear that wave offerings were in fact differentiated from heave offerings.]

After stating that there were also some animal sacrifices involved, verse 20 then states that the priest was to "wave" these things. Notice:

And the priest SHALL WAVE THEM with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD ... Leviticus 23:20

As in verse 11, the Hebrew for "shall wave them" here is the verb "nuwph" used with the hiphil stem. Whatever the priest was to do with the wavesheaf in verse 11, he was to do EXACTLY THE SAME THING with the two wave loaves mentioned in verse 17. It follows that whatever meaning we attach to the waving in verse 11, we should attach the same meaning to the waving of the two loaves mentioned in verse 17; the same ritual is performed in both cases.

Now the two wave loaves of verse 17 represent all those who will be in the first resurrection. This we have known for a long time.

So here we have two identical ceremonies performed exactly seven weeks apart. The first ceremony is about the resurrected Jesus Christ. The second ceremony is about all those who will be in the first resurrection. And we understand that the first ceremony pictures the resurrected Jesus Christ ascending to God the Father in the third heaven ... and then returning to this earth. It follows that logically the second ceremony pictures all those in the first resurrection also ascending to God the Father ... and then also returning to this earth.

To say that the first ceremony pictures Christ ascending to God the Father, but the second ceremony only pictures those in the first resurrection rising into the clouds to meet the returning Jesus Christ means that we have to change the meaning of the symbolism within the space of less than ten verses ... somehow the second waving is then supposedly not waved before God the Father, but only before the returning Jesus Christ, who is waiting in the clouds.

That line of reasoning does not really make sense. It requires some ingenious "interpreting". It is much more logical to accept that the identical waving in both ceremonies has an identical meaning.

So "since we know" that Jesus Christ returned to the Father to be accepted by Him and then to return to this earth, and assuming for the moment that we had no particular bias about ever going or not going to heaven, then it follows that this ceremony with the two wave loaves on the Day of Pentecost indicates that those in the first resurrection will likewise go to God the Father in heaven and then return to this earth. Our bias against going to heaven may make this difficult to accept, but there is NOTHING in the instructions for the Holy Days in Leviticus chapter 23 that would contradict this explanation.

This is not to say that those in the first resurrection will spend a long time in heaven. Not at all! Let's look at the timing involved in Jesus Christ's case.

THE TIME JESUS CHRIST SPENT IN HEAVEN

This is something most of us are also very familiar with.

In John chapter 20 we have the account of Jesus Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene early on the Sunday morning after His resurrection. Verse 17 states:

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; FOR I AM NOT YET ASCENDED TO MY FATHER: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God. John 20:17

Some time after this event, but still on the same day, we have the following statement recorded in the gospel of Matthew:

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them saying, All hail. AND THEY CAME AND HELD HIM BY THE FEET, AND WORSHIPPED HIM. Matthew 28:9

Still later on that same day two disciples were walking to a nearby village called Emmaus. Luke tells us:

And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. Luke 24:15

The account shows that Christ walked with these two to that village, to the point of entering a place where they could spend the night and then even sat down to a meal with them. These two men here clearly were in close physical contact with the resurrected Jesus Christ for perhaps several hours. Then Christ vanished out of their sight.

So the point of all these references is this: within the same day Jesus Christ went to God the Father in the third heaven, and then returned to this earth to first have contact with those who held Him by the feet, worshipping Him, and later to walk a long distance with two other men and to sit down to a meal with them.

Now we should not think of Christ going to God the Father as merely fulfilling some ritualistic requirement that the Father had instituted. That meeting with the Father was A REUNION after more than 33 years of separation. Yes, Jesus Christ during His time as a human being had always had direct access to God the Father, but NOT on the level of spirit being to spirit being. That relationship is

something that Jesus Christ LONGED to have restored! As He prayed shortly before His crucifixion:

And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory WHICH I HAD WITH YOU BEFORE THE WORLD WAS. John 17:5

Christ's return to the Father was not just a brief "courtesy call". It was a reunion, at which the Father formally accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ having given His own life for the sins of all mankind.

A key to help us understand this better is to realize that God deals with time differently from the way we do. For God to experience and to do a great many things does not require a large block of time, as it would for us. As the Apostle Peter explained:

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, THAT ONE DAY IS WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND YEARS, and a thousand years as one day. 2 Peter 3:8

This is not just intended as a statement to help us understand prophecies. It is also intended to help us understand how time affects God. Thus: God can experience in one day things that we might feel should require a thousand years to experience. So when Jesus Christ returned to God the Father for a part of one day after His resurrection, that was sufficient time for God to celebrate and to rejoice at what Jesus Christ had accomplished.

Likewise, the yet future marriage supper in the presence of God the Father could allow for ample time to experience everything God wants for that momentous occasion ... and yet be completed from a human perspective within one day, IF that should be necessary.

So when those in the first resurrection go into the third heaven to attend the marriage supper in the presence of God the Father, this need not necessarily require a long period of time. From a human perception of time it could very easily be accomplished within part of a 24-hour day.

Let's now take a closer look at the sequence of events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ and the timing that is or may be involved.

THE SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS

The Book of Revelation gives us an overview of events at the end of this present age. In general terms this is shown by:

- 7 Seals that are opened consecutively.
- When the 7th Seal is opened, then 7 Trumpets are blown consecutively.
- When the 7th Trumpet is blown, then the 7 Last Plagues are poured out consecutively.
- After the 7th of the Last Plagues has been poured out, Jesus Christ will set up the Government of God at Mount Zion, which Government will set about restoring this earth and teaching and instructing those who have survived in the ways of God. The millennial rule of Jesus Christ will start and those in the first resurrection will live and reign with Jesus Christ for 1000 years.

Within this general framework can be accommodated additional events and details. Thus, it seems that the blowing of all 7 Trumpets may cover a 1-year period. Trumpet number 5 by itself is indicated as

covering a 5-months period, a period of warfare. The first 4 Trumpets, which all entail physical destruction of this earth in some form, may require a shorter part of that one year than the last 3 Trumpets, which all involve warfare of some kind.

Now here are two specific details that we also need to slot into this general framework of end time events:

- 1) Jesus Christ returns and the first resurrection takes place when the 7th Trumpet begins to sound.
- 2) But Jesus Christ will not stand on the Mount of Olives until the Battle of Armageddon has been completed (or at the very least is in progress).

There is a time-gap between these two events and we have in the past generally assumed them to take place at the same time; i.e. we have assumed that Jesus Christ will stand on the Mount of Olives on the day of His return. But that is not so. Let's notice the Scriptures on these points.

THE BLOWING OF THE 7TH TRUMPET

Let's note the following Scriptures:

And then shall appear THE SIGN of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels WITH A GREAT SOUND OF A TRUMPET, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31)

These verses show that Jesus Christ will return into the atmosphere of this earth as the Trumpet sounds. It is exactly the same time as when the first resurrection takes place.

Behold, I shew 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 TRUMP: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

This Scripture shows that the first resurrection takes place at the last Trump, obviously the last of the 7 Trumpets referred to in the Book of Revelation.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, AND WITH THE TRUMP OF GOD: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Again we see that at the sound of the Trumpet Jesus Christ returns to the atmosphere of this earth, where all those in the first resurrection will meet Him.

And they (i.e. the two witnesses who had been killed) heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended UP TO HEAVEN IN A CLOUD; and their enemies beheld them. (Revelation 11:12)

At that exact same time the two witnesses, who had been killed exactly 84 hours earlier (i.e. three and one half days), are resurrected and they also rise into the air to meet the returning Jesus Christ.

But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, WHEN HE SHALL BEGIN TO SOUND, the mystery of God should be finished, as he has declared to his servants the prophets. (Revelation 10:7)

The "mystery of God" is that God is building a Family, and those in the first resurrection will be God's spirit-born children.

All of these Scriptures refer to the same point in time: the time when the 7th Trumpet is blown, when Jesus Christ returns from the third heaven to the atmosphere surrounding this planet earth, when the first resurrection takes place, and the people in that resurrection are gathered together to meet Christ in the air.

NOTE: These Scriptures make clear that those in the first resurrection are destined to meet Jesus Christ BEFORE He sets a foot on this earth! We meet Him in the air!

Now let's look at the timing of when Jesus Christ will stand on the Mount of Olives.

STANDING ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

Most of us probably already understand that the 7 Last Plagues will be poured out after the return of Jesus Christ, and thus also after the first resurrection has taken place. But exactly where will Christ be when those 7 Last Plagues are poured out ... still in the air or standing somewhere here on earth?

Let's briefly review those 7 Last Plagues; they are all listed in Revelation chapter 16. The first 5 of those plagues are:

- a "grievous sore" that is poured out upon rebellious man;
- the remainder of the sea is turned to blood;
- the remaining fresh-water supplies are turned to blood;
- scorching heat from the sun;
- painful darkness is poured upon the kingdom of the beast.

These 5 plagues will require a number of days (perhaps weeks?) to pour out, in order for their effects to be felt by rebellious mankind. Then comes plague number 6, which isn't really a plague as such.

Plague number 6 involves three demons being sent out in order to round up the army that will fight against Jesus Christ. As Revelation 16:14 states:

... they GATHER THEM TO THE BATTLE OF THAT GREAT DAY OF GOD ALMIGHTY.
(Revelation 16:14)

Then plague number 7 is the actual battle, when rebellious mankind will attempt to fight against Jesus Christ and His armies. Plague number 7 is what is commonly referred to as "The Battle of Armageddon"!

Very likely a number of weeks will have passed from the time the first plague was poured out until the 7th plague finally takes place. But Christ's return was BEFORE the first plague was even poured out.

Now let's look at Zechariah chapter 14.

Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.
(Zechariah 14:1)

In this context the expression "the day of the LORD" is used to specifically refer to THE BATTLE that will take place.

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. (Zechariah 14:2)

God's statement "I WILL GATHER ALL NATIONS AGAINST JERUSALEM TO BATTLE" is a clear reference to plague number 6 of the 7 Last Plagues. This verse gives us a clear timing reference.

THEN shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. (Zechariah 14:3)

This verse is a reference to plague number 7 of the 7 Last Plagues! The expression "as when he fought in the day of battle" is a reference to Joshua 10:14, which plainly states: "... for the LORD FOUGHT FOR ISRAEL". The way God "fought" for Israel in Joshua chapter 10 was by throwing "great stones from heaven" upon the enemies of Israel. In the same way Revelation 16:21 shows that in that battle of the 7th plague God also throws "great hail out of heaven".

Anyway, Zechariah 14:3 is a reference to the 7th plague. Then only comes verse 4.

AND HIS FEET SHALL STAND IN THAT DAY upon the mount of Olives ... and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof towards the east and towards the west ... (Zechariah 14:4)

What "day" is this speaking about ... the day of Christ's return and the time of the first resurrection?

NO!

The context shows that verse 4 refers to "the day" when this battle of the 7th plague takes place.

Like the commander of a powerful army, Jesus Christ will survey all the actions from a vantage point in the sky (or in the clouds). It is only when the enemy has been defeated that Jesus Christ will "land" on the mount of Olives ... and the mount of Olives will never again be the same!

So understand this!

There is a time-gap of perhaps several weeks between the time when Jesus Christ returns at the start of the 7th Trumpet and when the first resurrection takes place ... and the time when His feet shall stand on the mount of Olives after the battle of Armageddon has been won by Jesus Christ.

Acts chapter 1 shows that Jesus Christ departed this earth nearly 2000 years ago from the mount of Olives; and that is the same location to which He will return (see Acts 1:9-12). This means that Jesus Christ will NOT stand on any location on this earth prior to Zechariah 14:4, when He stands on the mount of Olives.

The statement that the mount of Olives will split in two when Jesus Christ stands on it makes clear that Christ could not possibly have landed at a time prior to the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon ... or the mount of Olives would have split already at an earlier time. But the mount of Olives stays intact until that battle has taken place. And Christ will not land anywhere else on earth first ... Acts chapter 1 makes this quite clear.

So this means that there will be possibly SEVERAL WEEKS before He will actually stand on this earth. WHERE will Jesus Christ be for those days and possibly even several weeks? Will He spend the entire time up in the clouds? WHY would Jesus Christ possibly hover in the air for several weeks, together with all of those who will be in the first resurrection? Will Jesus Christ USE those few weeks for anything specific?

I now believe that Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection will spend SOME OF THAT TIME in the presence of God the Father, participating in the marriage supper!

Let's now look at Revelation chapter 19.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Notice verse 1:

And after these things I heard a great voice of MUCH PEOPLE IN HEAVEN, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: (Revelation 19:1)

The expression "MUCH PEOPLE" is the Greek expression "ochlou pollou", from "ochlos", meaning: people, multitude, crowd, etc., and "polus" meaning: much, many. The word "ochlos" by itself already denotes a crowd or a multitude. By adding the adjective "polus" to this noun, the Apostle John is saying "A GREAT MULTITUDE".

The expression "in heaven" is translated from the Greek "en to ourano", with "ouranos" being the word for: heaven, sky, air. It is precisely because the Greek word "ouranos" refers to both, the sky as well as heaven that the Apostle Paul used the expression "the THIRD heaven" (or "the third sky", for that matter) to signify the heaven of God's throne. In biblical Greek there was no word to differentiate between the sky and God's dwelling place.

So we have here "much people in heaven". The context will have to show us whether this "heaven" refers to the sky above this earth or whether it refers to God's throne. As far as the "much people" are concerned, our previous bias would force us to INTERPRET this to refer to "angels". While this is perhaps a possibility, it is nevertheless equally much a possibility that this is a reference to HUMAN BEINGS WHO HAVE BEEN MADE IMMORTAL; that would in fact be the natural first choice understanding of this expression used by the Apostle John. When angels are involved in the accounts in this book of Revelation, they are generally clearly identified as angels. For example, Revelation 5:11 states:

And I beheld, and heard THE VOICE OF MANY ANGELS round about the throne and the beasts

and the elders ... (Revelation 5:11)

Comparing Revelation 19:1 with Revelation 5:11 gives me the distinct impression that the voice John heard in Revelation 19:1 was not the voice of angels (at least not exclusively of angels ... I see no problem with perhaps saying that great multitude in Revelation 19:1 represented the combined voices of resurrected human beings and all the angels ... though I think this is rather unlikely, once we have examined verse 6).

Let's now see the context of this verse. Notice verse 4:

And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. (Revelation 19:4)

This verse makes quite clear that "the heaven" we are talking about is AT THE VERY THRONE OF GOD THE FATHER! That is where the 24 elders and the four living creatures are!

So we have here painted for us a scene where there are "much people" in the presence of God the Father. Let's continue with the account.

And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. (Revelation 19:5)

Firstly, this is at the very throne of God the Father. Next, TO WHOM is this instruction addressed ... to the angels? ... to people still on earth who are getting ready to fight against Jesus Christ? ... or to HUMAN BEINGS MADE IMMORTAL who are at that moment in the very presence of God the Father?

It is addressed to "his servants", to those who "fear him". It is addressed to those who will be in the first resurrection. It is addressed to the "much people in heaven" mentioned in verse 1.

Let's move on to the next verse.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. (Revelation 19:6)

The Greek here translated as "A GREAT MULTITUDE" is "ochlou pollou", exactly the same phrase as used in verse 1, where it is translated as "much people". It refers to THE SAME GROUP as in verse 1. Notice the difference between verses 1 and 6.

In verse 1 the Apostle John refers to hearing the voice of ONE specific group. In verse 6 John specifically mentions THREE different groups whose voices he heard. Those three different groups in verse 6 are:

- a great multitude (same group as in verse 1)
- the voice of many waters
- the voice of mighty thunderings.

So putting verses 1 and 6 together we get the following situation:

- in verse 1 it indeed refers to "much people" in heaven, those in the first resurrection
- in verse 6 it adds the voices of two groups of other spirit beings.

So here is the setting we find presented to us in Revelation chapter 19:

The setting is the very throne of God the Father. The time is immediately after the first resurrection has taken place. At that point in time the first of the 7 Last Plagues is about to be poured out on the earth. All those in the first resurrection are appearing before God the Father for the very first time. God the Father is about to acknowledge that His goal of building a Family has indeed been achieved! In addition to Jesus Christ and all those in the first resurrection being there before the Father, there is also a huge host of angelic beings present.

In verses 1 to 3 we find those in the first resurrection, the people who have just barely been given immortality, praising God the Father for His plan and for His judgments on Satan's churches and on Satan's system. It will be the first time any human beings made immortal will ever address God the Father face-to-face.

In response to this worshipping of the Father by those just made immortal, verse 4 shows all the spirit beings that are normally in the presence of God the Father (i.e. the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures) joining in with this worshipping of the Father.

In verse 5 we have a response from God the Father to all those brand-new, spirit-born members of His Family. This establishes the relationship we will have with the Father for all eternity.

In verse 6 we have a response from those in the first resurrection, joined by all of the righteous angels and other spirit beings, to God the Father, acknowledging the relationship the Father has laid out for us. The Father will ALWAYS be supreme.

With these ground-rules established and the introductions taken care of, events now move towards the actual "marriage of the Lamb". So in verse 7 this collective group is recorded as saying:

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS COME, and his wife hath made herself ready. (Revelation 19:7)

The marriage is about to take place RIGHT THEN, AT THAT VERY POINT IN TIME! Again, this setting is in the very presence of God the Father! The marriage can only take place somewhere where God the Father will also be present. And this in Revelation 19 is it!

It will be the marriage feast. There will be both, gladness and rejoicing at what God has achieved, and also the giving of honour to God the Father.

Yes, the wife has certainly "made herself ready". There is God the Father, and at His right hand is His Son, Jesus Christ; and at the Father's left hand (this location is my speculation) is the bride ... all those in the first resurrection. Picture this setting: one individual (Jesus Christ) on the Father's right hand and 144000 individuals on the Father's left hand ... and the entire ceremony being witnessed by the angelic host!

Continuing with the setting in Revelation chapter 19: the wife has made herself ready, and so THE

FATHER is about to give her a beautiful wedding-dress, as mentioned in the next verse. [The Father of the bridegroom also happens to be the Father of the bride.]

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. (Revelation 19:8)

It is God the Father who gives this "wedding-dress" to those in the first resurrection. Now the bride is properly dressed for the occasion. Now the mutual commitments between the bridegroom and the bride can be formalized. And then the Father GIVES the bride to Jesus Christ. And when that has been taken care of, THEN finally we get to the time of "THE MARRIAGE SUPPER".

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. (Revelation 19:9)

And after that marriage supper, THEN Jesus Christ is ready to return to this earth to witness the final battle of Armageddon, after which He will, with His "wife", establish the government of God on this earth, ruling over those people who have survived all those horrendous end time events.

Let's now examine another section of Scripture, which further adds to this picture.

THE TIME WHEN THE 7 LAST PLAGUES ARE Poured OUT

In Revelation chapter 4 we have a description of God's throne in heaven. As verse 2 states:

And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. (Revelation 4:2)

Part of the description of this setting is mentioned in verse 6:

And before the throne there was A SEA OF GLASS like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts {living creatures} full of eyes before and behind. (Revelation 4:6)

Now let's move on to the time of the 7 Last Plagues. Revelation chapter 15 describes the setting and the preparations for these 7 Last Plagues, and Revelation chapter 16 describes the actual plagues themselves. Let's notice the preparations in chapter 15.

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. (Revelation 15:1)

Time-wise this must be after the 7th Trumpet was blown and after the first resurrection has taken place. But it is before the final battle takes place ... that final battle being the 7th plague to be poured out by the 7th of these 7 angels mentioned in verse 1.

Now notice verse 2:

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: AND THEM THAT HAD GOTTEN THE VICTORY OVER THE BEAST, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, STAND ON THE SEA OF GLASS, having the harps of God. (Revelation 15:2)

The reference here to the "sea of glass" is a reference to the area immediately before the very throne of Almighty God. Those who had obtained "the victory over the beast" are the people who are in the first resurrection.

The next few verses show that this is a ceremony (these individuals are singing a song with a clear message before God the Father) which precedes the 7 angels coming out of the temple with the 7 Last Plagues.

So we have here a picture of HUMAN BEINGS MADE IMMORTAL STANDING BEFORE THE VERY THRONE OF GOD in heaven, participating in a ceremony which precedes God sending the 7 angels to this earth with the 7 Last Plagues.

So after Jesus Christ has "married" those in the first resurrection, and after they have all participated in a marriage supper presided over by God the Father Himself, THEN another ceremony takes place in heaven ... this one recorded here in Revelation chapter 15. It is only after taking part in this ceremony, which shows agreement with and approval for the punishment God has decreed for rebellious mankind, that Jesus Christ and His "wife" return to this earth. And after the 7th plague has been poured out, then Jesus Christ will stand on the Mount of Olives, which will divide into two. And then the millennial rule of Jesus Christ will begin.

And that basically gives a picture of sorts of what lies ahead.

If we can only overcome our prejudice against the concept that God will let people come up to heaven to His throne for a short period of time, then it is amazing how many Scriptures in the book of Revelation become clear and easy to understand. We no longer have to explain away references to heaven; much can be understood at face value. The book of Revelation has so many obvious references to events in heaven, but it takes an open mind to see them.

IN SUMMARY:

It is quite clear that God has planned for the new earth to become His very dwelling place, and that we will dwell on the new earth with God the Father and with Jesus Christ. Heaven is certainly NOT "the reward of the saved".

There are no human beings, who have died, in heaven at this point in time. And God has not planned for human beings to be in heaven on anything like a permanent basis.

But already as far back as the time of Moses, in Leviticus chapter 23, God revealed through two separate ceremonies (the wavesheaf during Unleavened Bread and the two wave loaves on the Day of Pentecost) that resurrected human beings would VERY BRIEFLY go to heaven to be accepted by God the Father as His sons and daughters.

When we really understand it correctly, THERE IS NO OTHER WAY POSSIBLE! It is impossible to become a born member of the Family of Almighty God without that new status of immortality being ratified in the very presence of God. No individual can ever become immortal without also coming face-to-face with the very Being (i.e. God the Father) in whose power it is to grant such immortality. Can you imagine an immortal spirit being (i.e. someone like you in the future) saying: "I have now been an immortal spirit being for the past 800 years in human terms ... and there are STILL other immortal spirit

beings out there, like God the Father and the living creatures at His throne, which I have never yet seen.

So let's go back to the time of the first resurrection:

As soon as the first resurrection has taken place, we meet Jesus Christ in the clouds above this earth. AT THAT POINT IN TIME Jesus Christ has NOT come back as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! He is not yet ready to start ruling! He will only start ruling after His "marriage" to those in the first resurrection.

So when Jesus Christ meets us in the air, He does so in His capacity AS OUR HIGH PRIEST!

Think about this for a while!

The office of a priest is to intercede between the Eternal God and mortal man. But the office of a priest is also MORE than that. The office of a priest also involves BRINGING MAN TO GOD!

So Jesus Christ will meet us in the air for the explicit purpose of taking us to God the Father! At the time of the resurrection we don't just all whiz off to God the Father on our own. No, we first gather into one group at a collection point (i.e. in the clouds) and then A LEADER leads us to God the Father. That leader will introduce us to God whom we have until then never seen.

And with that action Jesus Christ's role as OUR High Priest will come to an end. Once we have met God the Father, there will be no more need for a priest for us. That frees Him for the role of Bridegroom. From then on we'll have a different relationship to Christ ... no longer will we approach God the Father in Christ's name. FROM THEN ONWARDS we will be the "younger brothers and sisters" of Jesus Christ.

When we look at the timing of end time events, then it becomes quite clear that there will be a time-gap of perhaps a few weeks between the time when Jesus Christ first returns to meet with us in the clouds ... and the time when His feet shall stand on the mount of Olives after the battle of Armageddon. Once we understand this time-gap, then it becomes easier to understand the many references to "heaven" in the book of Revelation. It becomes clear that the marriage supper must take place in the presence of God the Father in the third heaven. That "time-gap" makes allowance for those in the first resurrection going to the third heaven for the marriage supper, and that could take anywhere from a few hours to perhaps a few weeks? I really don't know how long the marriage supper will take, but I believe that it is likely to fall into these parameters.

Do you grasp what this all means to you?

Within a few short years from now not only could we be resurrected spirit-born sons of God, but we could actually EXPERIENCE some of the power that goes along with being a member of God's Family ... travelling through space at an unbelievable speed to the very throne of God, possibly thousands or even millions of light years away from our own galaxy!? And after a short stay in the presence of God we'll come back to this earth at exactly the same speed ... to live and reign with Jesus Christ for 1000 years.

That short visit with God the Father in HIS environment will completely overshadow anything and everything we will ever have experienced before that point in time.

And YOU and I have been invited by God personally to be there at that marriage supper. Will we hold fast to the hope that has been set before us?

God is watching our response!

