

KINGDOM SPIRIT

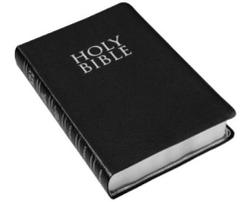
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“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

Matthew 6:33



Issue 1304

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

We had to make a break in our study of Revelation at an inconvenient place in our last issue. To help prevent this in the future we are switching out Revelation study to our first article with this issue.

We were discussing the opening of the fourth seal in Rev. 6 in our last study and were commenting on verse 8.

There are two deaths spoken of in Scripture. The first is mortal death in which we all will participate as a result of Adam's sin as we discussed when we studied Romans 5. The second is called the "second death" and is described in Rev. 20 as being "cast into the lake of fire." Anyone whose name is not in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire. Keep in mind that this is symbolic language and is not a literal lake of fire. We will discuss this at length when we study that chapter. The point that we need to understand now is organized Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, for the most part teach salvation by works. This is a false teaching and one believing this will not have his or her name written in the book of life. We will see as we continue our study that organized Christianity has, through the centuries, been responsible for millions of mortal deaths. Likewise it will be responsible for millions of "second deaths" as well. Keep in mind as we discuss organized Christianity that we are talking about a political and ecclesiastical system, not about individuals themselves. I am convinced

that there are true believers within all denominations and always have been, but the power structure itself is what we are discussing.

The word "Hell" in verse 8 is from the Greek *hades* which simply means "unseen" and usually refers to the place of the dead. It is translated both "hell" and "grave" in the New Testament. By misrepresenting what this word means, the use of the doctrine of Purgatory by the Catholic Church extends the control of the Church over the individual into the grave. The living are enslaved with the promise of mitigating the suffering of loved ones who have passed on before them. So I think we can see why John says that Hell followed this rider named Death.

We will see as we continue our study how the **"power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth"** applies to this political-religious power structure that we are seeing developed during this time period as millions are killed one way or another by this power structure, that because of its power over people beyond the grave became the most powerful governmental structure in history.

Though there is some difference of opinion as to the actual events and/or the exact span of time covered in the opening of the first four seals, there is general agreement among those who hold a historicist view of Revelation that the first four seals covered the time period of Rome being governed by emperors. The fifth seal period takes a different kind of look at what is going on in the Roman Empire and again there is room for differ-

ent opinions as to the actual events symbolized by the text. (Read Rev. 6:9-11)

There were two periods of great persecution and blood shed, particularly of Christians in the Empire. The first was under the emperors which culminated with the edict published by the Emperor Diocletian in 303 A.D. in which everyone who refused to offer pagan sacrifices was to be burnt alive and the churches were to be destroyed and all property of the Church was confiscated. Though Diocletian resigned in 305, this edict remained in effect until Constantine became emperor in 313 A.D. I haven't seen any estimate of the number of Christians killed during this 10 year period, but the killing during this time was horrendous. Even Diocletian's best armies, the famed Gaulish Legions, were ordered to be executed by Maximian, who was co-emperor with Diocletian, because they were Christian. As we have discussed before, this great persecution ended with the Edict of Milan made by Constantine in 313. One view of the time of this fifth seal considers this to be the period of time in which this seal is opened. Based on this, the further killing of Christians mentioned in verse 11 could refer to the second period.

This second period, and the other view as I understand it, was under the Papal control of the Empire which had its beginning in 536 A.D. when a Church council, assembled at Constantinople, issued an edict and forced the emperor to enforce it. This united the church with the state and began a 1260 year period of brutal persecution of anyone not agreeing with the creeds and doctrines of the Church. This takes us back to Daniel 7 where Daniel is describing four great beasts which we determined in our study referred to the leadership of the four great world empires that were to rule the world. In verse 8, after describing the fourth great beast and telling us that it had ten horns, he says, **"I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things."** When Daniel questioned an angel what this meant, referring to

the ten horns and this little horn, the angel told Daniel in verses 24 and 25, **"And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."** A time is considered to be 360 days, weeks, or years, depending on the context. Times is 2×360 and a half time is $360 \div 2$ or 180. Adding $360 + 720 + 180 = 1260$. We will discuss this in more detail later, but I think we can consider this little horn to represent the Roman Catholic Church. 1260 years from 536 takes us to 1796 when Napoleon took command of the French armed forces operating against Italy. This was the beginning of the Church losing its temporal power on the world stage. During this 1260 years, it is estimated that just under 100 million people died violent deaths due to the persecution of the Church.

The words **"wear out"**, speaking of wearing out the saints, mean to wear down or diminish. This is certainly what happened during this period. Anyone who dared to defy the Church was persecuted and often killed so the saints, those who tried to learn the real truth of the Scriptures, were certainly diminished.

Which ever view one accepts as the time of the opening of the fifth seal, the number of Christian people killed would have been a very great number. Some people take these verses as indicating the state of the dead. Keep in mind that this is symbolic language. It is not talking about the state of the dead, but rather what was going on in the Roman Empire.

(Read Rev. 6:12-17) As you may have guessed in our discussion thus far concerning the opening of the seals, one of the views that we have looked at stays within the bounds of Imperial Rome while the other takes the view that the period of the opening of the seals includes both Imperial Rome and Papal Rome. In my mind both views could be legitimate though I have in most

of my previous studies looked at both Imperial and Papal Rome as the subject of this series of events. If we continue to limit the time period to that of Imperial Rome, then the time of the opening of the sixth seal would probably have been approximately 310-395.

The earth quake would have been the major shake up of the government of the Roman Empire by Constantine. The Empire had become quite divided and there seemed to be continual war between rival divisions for more power and authority. Constantine was a great and able military commander and over a period of relatively few years, he defeated all of his rival Caesars and consolidated all of the Empire under his own leadership, stopped the Christian persecutions and returned their property to them that had been confiscated. His rise to emperor of the whole Empire could easily be likened to a great earthquake.

Symbolically, the sun, moon, and stars represent degrees of power or authority with the sun being the greatest. Knowing specifically who to liken the sun, moon and stars to is dependent on the context. In Constantine's time, I think he and the rulers of Rome that preceded him could be considered the sun. The Church would probably be the next highest authority and while Christians might be considered the stars, it may be even more specific than that in that the real Christians, the overcomers, might be likened to the stars. The sun god was the primary god for the Romans. Constantine, until he had a dream of Christ, considered himself under the protection of the sun god. But once he had the dream and consolidated his power, the pagan rulers fell from their positions of authority and were replaced by Christians. Constantine threw out the pagan standards of the Roman army and substituted the Cross for them. Pagan temples were closed and heathen sacrifices were banned. The great shaking of the Empire and the fall of paganism could well be likened to a great earthquake and the darkening of the sun.

In 325 A.D. the Church, at the direction of Constantine to try to establish unity within the Church, held its first Church Council at Nicea. From this was born the creeds and doctrines that

eventually led to the great blood bath brought on by persecution by the Church against anyone who would not subscribe to the creeds and doctrines of the Church Councils. Just to get an idea of how insane, for lack of a better word, these Councils were, some men believed that Jesus Christ was of the same essence to the Father while some said He was of like essence. Not agreeing over which word to use caused the spilling of blood. The more they argued over this kind of thing the more splintered they became. Why men think that with their finite minds they can define the infinite God, I don't know. But in thinking of the moon representing the soon to be blood thirsty Church, I think we can see how it turned red.

It was the overcomers who were the primary targets of Church in its effort to stamp out heretics as these people would not accept creeds made by men in opposition to the true Word of God. As a result many of them died an untimely death, or at an "unripe" age, or as verse 13 says, **"even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs."** Isaiah prophesied of this in Isa. 34:4, **"And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine and as a falling fig from the fig tree."** The **"heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together"** In Rev. 6:14 and **"the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll"** in Isa. 34:4 can be likened to the closing of a book. Before 360 A.D. everything was written on scrolls, so the rolling together of the scroll would be the same as closing a book, in this case it was closing up of God's Word as men came to rely more and more on their own creeds and doctrines than on true Scripture. In 663-4, Pope Vitalian of Rome mandated that the Church liturgy itself be spoken only in Latin, which deprived more and more people of any real understanding other than that they remain subservient to the Church leaders. It wasn't until 1452 when Gutenberg invented and used the printing press to print the Bible as his first project that this began to change.

Mountains and islands refer to kingdoms and lesser governments in Scripture. Up to Constantine's time, the Roman Empire had become

quite fractured with different men setting up their own kingdom, so to speak, within the Empire and then fighting each other to either hold on to what they had or to try to expand it. With Constantine's effort of unify the Empire, these all fell by the wayside, usually with the defeat of the armies of these different men.

The wealthy and powerful pagans began to fear for their wealth and their lives, their future. These individuals and the pagan politicians began to convert to the religion of the Emperor even though it was still legal to worship pagan gods. However, in 395 Theodosius banned all pagan animal sacrifices, closed the pagan temples, and prohibited pagan rites.

Another major change that was the result of this political earthquake was the transfer of the Empire's capital from Rome to Constantinople, a new city that Constantine built on the Black Sea at the border of Europe and Asia. Finally, in 395 Theodosius died and the Empire was split between his two sons, Honorius and Arcadius and the division of the Empire became permanent.

Looking at the events and timing of the opening of the sixth seal from another view, we said that the opening of the fifth seal concluded with Napoleon being put in charge of the French army as they invaded Italy in 1796. In the opening of the sixth seal, we have six physical disturbances listed that were to happen in conjunction with this opening. They are, 1. A great earthquake, 2. The Sun darkened, 3. The Moon in color as blood, 4. Star showers, 5. Disturbances in the heavens, and 6. Great seismic upheavals. There were literal fulfillments as well as symbolic fulfillments of these. There was an earth quake that historians refer to as "the great earthquake" on November 1, 1755. Its center was at Lisbon, Portugal, but its effect was felt in entire territory of the ancient Roman Empire. It has been estimated that 4,000,000 square miles were disturbed.

On May 19, 1780 A.D., occurred the memorable dark day when the sun did not shine and the moon became the color of blood. The people were terrified and many thought the day of Judgment had come.

There was a spectacular meteoric shower

on November 12 and 13, 1833. It is said that the stars fell like flakes of snow. It is estimated that there were 240,000 meteoric flashes in the space of nine hours. Apparently they all appeared to come from the same quarter of the heavens, from the vicinity of one of the stars in the constellation of Leo.

It is believed that there will be another great world shaking earthquake and manifestation of heavenly upheaval at the close of the sixth seal and beginning of the seventh seal which will be at the time of the first resurrection.

The French Revolution is often referred to as a great political earthquake. Though it was centered in Europe, the whole world became involved in some way. Napoleon invaded Italy in 1796 defeating the Papal troops. On Feb. 13, 1798, a French army entered Rome and the Pope was ordered to dismiss his Swiss guards and to dispossess himself of his temporal authority. He refused to do so. He was dragged from the altar of his Palace, his vaults were plundered and even the rings were torn from his fingers and he was taken a prisoner to Tuscany.

What the unexplained darkness was to the physical world on May 19, 1780, the French Revolution was to the religious world. Though primarily the atheistical France made war against the Roman Catholic Church, most other faiths felt the effect upon them as well. The enthronement of atheism, irreligion and infidelity brought complete darkness spiritually to the nation of France. The darkness was like that which covered ancient Egypt; for reason alone, void of wisdom and understanding, reigned supreme in France.

We are going to discuss the Roman Catholic Church in considerable detail later but there are a couple of things we need to note here, particularly as to its input into the Roman Empire, which is the primary player in the opening of the seals period. From the death of Pope Agapetus in 536 A.D. to 601 A.D. there were nine popes that succeeded him as the head of the Church and each were supported by the respective emperors in their order. The last of the nine popes was Boniface III and to him was given the power to exercise authority over both the Church and the State.

He was crowned as Universal Bishop. From this time until 1870, the popes alone ruled both the Church and the State and were ultimately crowned Universal Monarch. Thinking back to Daniel's prophecy concerning the "little horn", 1260 years from 536 A.D. Napoleon defeated the Papal troops in 1796 A.D. 1260 from 610 A.D. Pope Pius IX was declared infallible by the Ecumenical Council on July 16, 1870, but in September of that same year, Italian troops entered Rome for the purpose of making that long coveted city the capital of Italy, independent of Papal rule. In November, the Italian government passed a decree abolishing the political authority of the Holy See. Then to top it off, the first Protestant Church was opened in Rome on Jan. 12, 1871.

World War I then followed in 1914-18 and of course World War II followed just over 20 years later. All of this brought great social upheavals that follow as a result of military and economic changes. As the old order passed away there was a tremendous shaking of kingdoms and nations of men. I don't think it would take a great deal of imagination to see all of the events symbolically represented in the opening of this sixth seal. JRL

**THE BOOK OF
HOSEA**

In the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, we find a list of blessings God would bring upon Israel if they continued to worship Him and keep His commandments and then beginning in verse 15 we find a list of curses that He would bring upon them if they forgot His commandments and went to worshipping idols. In verse 48 God says that **"he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee."** As we study further in the book of Jeremiah, chapters 27 and 28, we find that there were yokes of wood and yokes of iron. The yokes of wood, as applied in these chapters referred to a nation being in captivity to another nation, but allowed to remain in their own land. A yoke of iron referred to being in captivity

to another nation and being removed from their own land. As we have studied the history of Israel, we have now seen that God had placed a yoke of iron on them by putting them into captivity to the Assyrians who had removed them from their own land and placed them in another land south of and between the Black and Caspian Seas.

However, both the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah also referred to this captivity as being divorced from God. Isaiah 50:1 says, **"Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, (referring to Israel) whom I have put away?"** Jeremiah 3:8 says, **"And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also."** In God's law, we're told in Deuteronomy 24:1 **"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house."** This is the law of divorce and as we see, it requires two elements, a written bill of divorcement and the casting of the wife out of the husband's house. We have seen in our studies that Israel was cast out of God's house, the land that God had given Israel in the land of Canaan. We now want to look at the written bill of divorcement, or disownership. In spite of the objection of many of our modern women to the idea of the husband owning his wife, this is as God intends it. It is a mutual arrangement as both husbands and wives refer to each other as MY husband or MY wife. But, it is the responsibility of the husband to give the written bill of divorcement.

God gave the responsibility of delivering His bill of divorcement to Israel to the prophet Hosea. In a sense, He did so in a strange way, but I don't think we will have any trouble understanding just what He did. (Read Hosea 1:1) Like most of the prophets, Hosea identifies the time when he was commissioned to prophesy by referring to the kings of Judah during whose lifetime the prophet lived and prophesied and also the king

of Israel. In naming the kings of both kingdoms, Hosea acknowledges that at that time Israel and Judah were separate and distinct kingdoms. We see that Hosea then was a prophet during a time coinciding with that of the prophet Isaiah. It was during the time of these kings that Israel refused to repent and turn back to their God and ultimately was taken into captivity by the Assyrians.

(Read Hosea 1:2-5) God has to have a sense of humor. He first tells Hosea to go and marry a harlot because Israel had in effect played the part of harlot by going to the other gods instead of her true husband, the true God. Hosea did as he was instructed and married a woman by the name of Gomer, a somewhat symbolic name as this became one of the names of the various groups of Israel as they later escaped the land of their captivity. It came from the name of King Omri, an earlier king of Israel. The Assyrians referred to Israel as Beth-Ghomri or Bit-Khumri which translates to “house of Omri.”

We’re told that she conceived and bare a son. God begins His “bill of divorcement” in the names He tells Hosea to give to the children that Gomer was to bare him. This first child, a son, was to be named Jezreel. The word “Jezreel” has two meanings, “God Scatters” and “God Sows.” We’ll come back to this in a moment. There are two cities that are named Jezreel in Scripture. One was a city in the hill country of Judah and the other a city in the tribe of Issachar, but belonged to Manasseh. Little is said about the former, but much is said about the latter. King Ahab lived in Jezreel of Manasseh and the vineyard of Naboth, which wicked Jezebel appropriated for her husband, Ahab, after having Naboth killed, was located there. It was here that Jezebel was killed and eaten by the dogs. It was also here that Jehu slew all the remaining descendents of King Ahab.

Though the prophesies that Hosea gave in the names of his children ultimately meant the apparent end of the Israel, keep in mind that for a seed to reproduce, it has to die first. In effect, the sowing of the kingdom of Israel brought about this “death” of Israel that she might reproduce as part of God’s plan. What happened to Israel was that she was sown and then scattered among the

nations of the world to accomplish God’s purpose for all mankind. Jezreel also became a symbol for Israel.

(Read Hosea 1:6-7) This second child, a daughter, is named Loruhamah which means “not pitied.” God had been merciful to Israel since they were founded as a nation at Mt. Sinai, but now He says that He will no longer have mercy on her, but is going to remove her from the land. So that we know for sure that Hosea knew of the dividing of the kingdom following the reign of King Solomon, he tells us that God would still have mercy on Judah. When God says that He will not save Judah by bow, nor by sword, not by battle or by horsemen or horses, He is foretelling what He was going to do when King Sennacherib of Assyria came against the city of Jerusalem after Assyria had taken all of Israel and the rest of Judah captive. If you recall the story, King Hezekiah had prayed for deliverance from Sennacherib’s army and God killed 185,000 of the Assyrians while they slept after which Sennacherib went home in shame.

(Read Hosea 1:8-9) The name of the third child, another son, Loammi, completed the bill of divorcement. Loammi means “not my people.” God had disowned them, withheld His mercy and was sending them out of the land because they had gone a whoring after other gods. This fulfilled the law of divorce.

The kingdom of Israel had officially lost their name “Israel,” lost their land, and lost their kingdom and worst of all, had lost their God, their Husband. No doubt many lost their lives as well in the process that was to follow. As we have discussed before, the process of removing Israel from the land as well as a part of Judah took place in three successive captivities and we’re told that the people were moved to the land south of and between the Black and Caspian Seas and that they were settled in the cities of the Medes.

But our story doesn’t end there. (Read Hosea 1:10-11) In spite of this divorce, this disownership, God says that the number of the children of Israel would continue to increase and become as the sand of the sea in that their number would be so great that it could not be numbered.

Then He says that it would come to pass that where it was said to them that they **“are not my people,”** it would be said to them, **“Ye are the sons of the living God.”**

The apostle Peter addresses his first epistle to **“the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadoacia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you and peace be multiplied.”** Then in verses 9 and 10 of chapter 2, speaking to these same people, he says, **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”** The word “generation” is from the Greek *genos* which Young’s Analytical Concordance says means “race or kind.” When God made His first covenant with Israel, or His marriage with her, He said in Exodus 19:5, **“then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.”** “Peculiar” here refers to ownership—God is saying that this new nation, Israel, belonged to Him and Him alone. Then He went on in verse 6 to say, **“And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”** The priests in God’s system are rulers under God. Not only did they have ecclesiastical duties, but civil duties as well such as school masters, keepers of the law, medical duties, etc., i.e. they ruled by service, not by oppression. The apostle John tells us in Rev. 20:6, speaking of those who will have part in the first resurrection, **“they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”**

The word “holy” simply means set apart. Israel was set apart from all the other nations to be of service to God. The argument could be made, but they were disobedient and finally God divorced them and sent them into captivity never to be heard of again. This is the point of what we are looking at in the prophecies of Hosea and at

least the partial fulfillment of those prophecies in the Apostle Peter’s time. Again, we have to look at the big picture. Just because God “divorced” Israel and sent her into captivity did not mean His plan failed. On the contrary, the divorce was part of His plan the purpose of which was that these Israel people would be positioned throughout the world to carry forth the gospel to all nations. Hosea and Peter are explaining how this was to come about. They are both writing to the same race or family of people. We know from history that it was the people that Peter was writing to and their descendants that ultimately migrated to western Europe, the British Isles, and the desolate heritages of the earth which included North America, Australia, etc., who have been the primary missionaries of the world and will be even more so in the future.

If you happened to read the rest of the divorce law from which we quoted a portion earlier as found in Deut. 24, you saw that if the wife married another husband after being divorced, she could not return and remarry the first husband. So the question that we are going to have to deal with as we continue reading Hosea is, how can God lawfully remarry Israel once He had divorced her and she had gone to all of her other gods? The answer is in Romans 7:1-3—Read. Because God, in the personage of Jesus Christ died, the law of divorce in respect to His divorce of Israel became null and void. When Jesus was resurrected and lived again, He was no longer bound by that law.

Also in His death, He paid the highest price any man can pay to redeem, or purchase back that which had been lost. This is the theme of many of the parables in the New Testament. In redeeming Israel, He also redeemed all men from the penalty of their sin, which is death.

Getting back to Hosea 1:11, this is a Messianic prophecy. The one head is Jesus Christ. Judah had the first opportunity to accept (appoint) that one head. Some did—most did not. The apostles and others then went to those of Israel to tell them of their opportunity to accept (appoint) that one head. Again some did, but most did not. But those of both Judah and Israel that did **“appoint themselves one head”** again became

citizens of the Kingdom even while they were scattered throughout the world. Physical location did not matter anymore, for Jesus had died to redeem and was resurrected that others might believe that He was truly the Messiah. The name "Jezreel" here in verse 11 is a name for Israel, so Hosea is saying, "**great shall be the day of Israel,**" as they go from having lost their name, their land, their kingdom and their God, to being the sons of the living God, partakers in and inheritors of His Kingdom, and the position of ruling with Him.

(Read Hosea 2:1-5) Prefixing the names Ammi and Ruhamah with "Lo" makes them negative. "Lo" means "not." Taking the "Lo" off the name reverses the meaning of the name to "My People" and "Mercy" respectfully. Once they had been named in the negative, i.e. Israel been given the divorce, the object then becomes that of seeking them back. In saying to Ammi and Ruhamah to "**plead with your mother**" God is saying to the people of divorced Israel to plead with their nation to repent and turn back to God.

(Read Hosea 2:6-13) God says He is going to take some measures Himself to teach her that it has been He who has provided for her needs and luxuries, not these gods that she has been pursuing. He is going to cause to cease her mirth, her feasts, Sabbaths, etc. This is part of the reason that we see Paul going to Jerusalem to seek guidance from the apostles and elders because Jews were following him around telling the people that Paul was wrong, that they had to be circumcised and that they had to observe certain feasts and rituals to be saved. They had forgotten them because God had caused them to cease among them. The apostles and elders at Jerusalem, after considering the matter, gave a decree in Acts 15:29 that all that they thought the people, to

whom Paul and others were ministering to, needed to be concerned was "**That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.**"

(Read Hosea 2:14-23) God clearly states His intent to remarry Israel. He promises to bless her and take care of her. Hosea is looking ultimately to the time spoken of in Rev. 21 after the Great White Throne of Judgment, but I think we have to understand that there is a process to take us to that time. We have seen this process taking place as we see the Israel nations of today being blessed far more than any of the other nations of the world even though they are yet to be totally obedient to God. In Rev. 21, the bride of Christ is spoken of as "**that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.**" When we understand that this city, the New Jerusalem is the governmental structure of God's Kingdom, then I think we can better understand Hosea's prophecies concerning the bride of Christ. The city has 12 gates upon which are written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and the foundations of the city are also 12 in number and in them are the names of the 12 apostles. If you read of the order of encampment of Israel in the wilderness and the order of the New Jerusalem, one can clearly see the similarities. Though many consider the church to be the bride of Christ because of how they read, or misread, Ephesians 5, the church is the body of Christ; Israel, or the kingdom, is the bride. As individuals, and as Christians, we are a part of both, but we need to make the distinction if we are to understand Scripture. The process includes the sowing of Israel in the world that God may have the increase. JRL We each are where we are as part of this sowing