

God's Plan of the Ages

Volume Five

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God's Plan of the Ages

Volume Five ~ Messiah through the End of Time

A historical fiction epic imagining what it may have been like
to accompany the Creator of the universe
from the beginning to the end of time.

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Maps drawn by Nathaniel Santa Cruz, Graphic Illustrator

Note: This story begins in Volume Two and is continued in Volumes Three and Four, which conclude the Old Testament portion of the story. Volume Five tells the New Testament portion of the story and beyond, to the end of time. About the middle of Volume Five I skip from the book of Acts directly to the book of Revelation.

Be sure to see the back pages for the timeline, diagrams, and index for this volume. Maps of the Holy Land and Jerusalem around the time of Christ are on pages 12 and 13.

“... as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

But each in his own order:

Christ, the firstfruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,
then comes the end, when He delivers up the Kingdom to the God and Father,
when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that will be abolished is death...

And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will be subjected
to the One [the Father] who subjected all things to Him,
that God may be all in all.”

(1 Cor 15:22-26, 28)

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Preface

God's Plan of the Ages Volume Five – Messiah through the End of Time

Though this is the final volume of a five volume set, I have written it to stand on its own for those of my dear Readers who don't want to begin with the Old Testament and its confusing Cataclysmic Era. Thus I added a brief Historical Background introduction to set the stage for the Gospels. Those who have read the previous volumes already know the historical background and can skip right to Chapter 1.

The first half of this volume tells the story of the four Gospels. The little superscript numbers indicate Scripture paragraphs, which I've indexed to the Scriptures at the end. These were originally from *A Harmony of the Gospels*, by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry, Moody Press, Chicago. I owe them a great debt of gratitude for getting me started on my own "harmony." But I had to change their chronology to fit my perspective on the Feasts, so I developed my own paragraphs.

Please keep in mind, dear Reader, that this entire work is historical fiction. Three places in Scripture (Deut 4:2, Prov 30:5, and Rev 22:18) we are warned against adding to God's Word. Telling the story of the Bible is not adding to God's Word! That would be arrogant and presumptuous of me. God's Word is divinely inspired and infallible. All I have added is a fiction story of how it may have occurred and how it may all fit together.

That said, the first half of this volume sticks pretty closely to Scripture, with little added except some of the dialogs and a few fictional characters, such as Yacov Ben Levi the priest. I tried to at least mention every story in the four Gospels, but integrated into one tale. I built my chronology on the knowledge of the Feasts of Israel from Volume One. I expand on those stories that seem to need it, and skim quickly past those stories that are well-detailed in the Gospels. Much of the keeping of the Feasts comes from ancient Hebrew traditions, handed down mouth-to-mouth from long before the time of Christ. Some of my story comes from secular historical records, and some I calculated by knowing lunar cycles and the movements of the planets. I use ancient Hebrew dates, not from their current dates but based on estimations made at the time of Ezra and from calculations done the traditional way – using sightings of the new moon over Jerusalem. I did not subtract any years for the exiles as Jews now like to do. Due to uncertainties introduced by the Catastrophic Era, these Hebrew dates are almost certainly wrong (they are 1104 years lower than my own dates). However, I chose to use them anyway, because they are probably the actual dates used by the Jews living at this time period.

I look at the Gospels from the perspective of the people who lived them. These are Hebrews from the Middle East. Their thinking is quite different from ours who have been raised with a western mindset. To aid in shifting our perspective I have changed a few of the names to their Hebrew equivalents. John is Yochanan the Baptizer; Zechariah and Elizabeth are Zacharias and Elisheva; Mary and Joseph become Mariam and Yoseph; Jesus is Yashua; the angel Gabriel is Gavriel; and so on. But most names I don't change: for example Herod, Pilate, and the apostles stay the same. I'm not trying to confuse you! Also I use Hebrew names for the months and the Feasts of Israel: Shabbat (Sabbath), Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost), Sukkot (Tabernacles), Yom Teruach (Feast of Trumpets), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Simchat Bet haSho'ayva (Water Drawing Ceremony), Tisha B'Av (the fast of the 9th of Av), and so on. (See Volume One, page 85, for a chart of Jewish time vs our own, showing where these Feasts fit in the timeline.)

Though I do tell the story of that great Day of Pentecost (Acts 1 – 2), I have skipped the rest of the book of Acts and the entire Church Age. Many volumes have already been written to tell the story of the Church Age. They tell it accurately and well. They agree with each other and with history, and I have little to add to their work.

Instead. I skip directly to the book of Revelation. Though many volumes have also been written of this mysterious and wildly prophetic and symbolic book, there is a huge difference. Those volumes do not agree with each other, and they have little history (yet) to pin down the story. Some authors make the story so symbolic that it loses its practical application for us who live in these end times. I object! Of what value is the Bible if it is so esoteric that it has no application to our lives? I believe we are now living in those very end times addressed in the book of Revelation. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. This is an important story which (to my knowledge) has never been adequately told. The angel told Daniel, “Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the time of the end.” (Dan 12:8) The same can be said of the book of Revelation. They have been sealed books – until now! Now it is time. These books are being opened up to those who must live through these perilous days. As the angel told Daniel, “None of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.”

In the last half of this volume I tell the story of the book of Revelation, and beyond. I pull no punches. This story is very unlike the story of the Gospels, which are laid out clearly in Scripture. My story is as wild and woolly as my source and makes no attempt to cover it paragraph by paragraph as in the first half of this volume. All my characters are fictitious. All my settings are hypothetical. I let my imagination run wild – what might it be like to live through the earth’s final judgments and the wrath of God? I must admit, this story is not for the faint of heart. As Jesus said, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” (Matt 11:12) This story is for those violent men (and women), who are not content to sit around and wait for the rapture, but rather are filled with a violence in their spirits to take everything God has to offer and not settle for a penny less. Theirs is a ‘Hebrews 11 faith’ that aggressively reaches up to claim the promises of God (Heb 11:33) even in the midst of the worst catastrophes in history. You thought the Catastrophic Era was bad? You thought I went overboard in my narration of the worldwide cataclysms surrounding the Flood of Noah? Ha. You ‘aint seen nothin’ yet. Wait ‘til you get to the seven seals and the seven trumpets of Revelation 6 through 11! And the ages to come, and into eternity!

If you believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, please, do NOT read my story on the Revelation until you go back and read my discourse on it in Volume One (starting on page 185). You will not understand this volume if your mind is still clouded by the pre-trib rapture heresy, as you will be thinking, “It doesn’t matter. I won’t be there. I’ll be snatched up to heaven before any of this stuff happens.” Remember, the one who comes like a thief to try to snatch away the saints is not the Lord, it is the devil! He comes to snatch them away because they’re sleeping! “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief.” (1 Thess 5:4) Overtake you it will, but you, dear Reader, will not be snatched away by the devil because you will be forewarned.

All who are not prepared will be terrified, dysfunctional with fear. But you, dear Reader, will remember Jesus’ words, “There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the power of the heavens will be shaken [i.e., planets will fall from their orbits]. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, [you, dear Reader, will] straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:25 ff)

Hallelujah! Our eyes may see the cataclysms, but our hearts will see only the glory of the triumphant risen Savior, come to judge the earth in righteousness and to redeem His own back to Himself. We saints will rejoice to see God’s judgments fall on the earth! (Ps 96:11-13; Isa 26:8-9) That has been just a cute theological theory for far too long. Now it is time for it to become reality. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

God's Plan of the Ages – A Historical Fiction Epic

Volume Five – Messiah to the End of Time

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The Millennium Bible, Complete Commentary on all Scripture Passages Related to the Second Coming, © 1924 by William E. Biederwolf, published in 1999 by Global Christian Publishers, including Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To help understand this story of the four Gospels from a Jewish perspective, we need to review a little of the historical and cultural background surrounding the advent of Yashua haMashiach – Hebrew for Jesus Christ.

In 336 BC Darius III came to power over the mighty Medo-Persian Empire, which ruled much of the world. However, at about the same time, Alexander (the twenty-year-old alleged son of Philip II, who was king of the Greek province of Macedonia) began a campaign of conquest. His military genius enabled him to defeat Darius III at Issus in 333 BC and at Gaugamela in 331 BC. He continued on to conquer the known world from Europe to Egypt, and all the way to the borders of India by the time he was thirty. True to Aristotle his teacher, Alexander the Great unified his empire by spreading Greek knowledge, culture, and religion everywhere he went. Though brief, Hellenism and the Golden Age of Greece had a big impact on little Israel. It became fashionable to take Greek names, adopt Greek dress and customs, enjoy Greek literature, attend Greek games, use Greek inventions, and tolerate Greek gods.

Many from the upper classes, wealthy and influential members of society, began to forsake their ancestral faith and traditions. This obvious paganizing of Jewish culture was a monstrous threat to all who cared about the God of their fathers. They remembered their tragic history – the Diaspora and God's miraculous restoration. They knew why they had been exiled, and didn't want to go through it again! To combat the peril, God-fearing leaders organized into the 'Chasidim', bodies of Protestants and pietists who were willing to pledge their allegiance and even their lives to the 'new covenant' with YHWH, as prophesied by Jeremiah the prophet. (31:31-34)

However, the situation was to get far worse. With the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his empire split up between his generals. So much for unity. They fought each other for power and control. When the dust settled, four remained: Seleucus ruled Syria and eastern Asia Minor; Ptolemy controlled Egypt; Lysimachus ruled Thrace and western Asia Minor (Turkey); and Cassander got Greece and Macedonia. Unfortunately, Israel was strategically located at the land bridge between the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe, between Syria and Egypt. These four generals saw that control of Israel was a key to dominance in the region. For almost two centuries Israel was tossed between the Seleucid (Syrian) and Ptolemaic (Egyptian) dynasties that sought to dominate the Middle East.

In 171 BC the cruel tyrant Antiochus IV came to the Seleucid throne. Incredibly arrogant, he believed himself to be deity in the flesh. He called himself Antiochus Theos Epiphanes – 'God Manifest'. (His detractors called him Epimanes: 'Madman'.) He unified his widespread empire by enforced Hellenization: imposing Greek language, culture, philosophy, and religion upon his subjects.

The Jewish Covenanters, 'Chasidim', had a major problem with this. Their goal was to preserve the faith of their fathers. To oppose the Seleucids, many of them formed into a conservative political force known as the **Orthodox Party**, which sought help from the Ptolemys (who were willing to rule Israel without imposing their culture and religion). However, a large group of the more wealthy in Israel, known as the liberal and progressive **Hellenist Party**, loved Greek ways, and had little concern for real faith. They focused on the economic and social advantages of appearing 'enlightened' and 'civilized'.

In Jerusalem, the high priest Yohanan (Onias III) was vehemently opposed to the Hellenistic forces in Israel. But his brother Joshua joined the Hellenist Party and changed his name to its Greek form, Jason. Supported by many wealthy leaders in Israel, he managed to gain an alliance with the Seleucids. Jason offered Antiochus a huge bribe to obtain the office of high priest, promising to build a temple to the Greek god Phallus and a gymnasium (where men performed naked) in Jerusalem, and to enroll the people in Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch (capital of Syria). Jason arranged for his brother's assassination and took his place, throwing Israel into a cauldron of internal strife.

Three years later (168 BC) Menelaus, another rabid Hellenist not even from a high priestly family, bought the high priest's office with an even larger bribe. But he found that the temple treasury (the people's offerings) could not support payment of his bribe, so he stole golden vessels from the temple (a great abomination to the Chasidim) to pay off Antiochus.

About this time Antiochus, desirous of unifying the Grecian empire as in the days of Alexander, led a huge Seleucid army against the Ptolemys of Egypt. Victory seemed certain, except the Roman Senate heard of it and sent Popilius Laenas to stop it. By then the Roman Armies were feared the world over for their ruthlessness. Laenas asked Antiochus if he wanted peace or war with Rome. Then Laenas drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus, and stated that he must decide which he wanted before leaving the circle. Antiochus didn't dare face the Roman legions. He withdrew from Egypt in humiliation and rage.

On his return to Syria, Antiochus stopped in Jerusalem. There he discovered that Jason had believed a false rumor of his death in Egypt, and had rebelled against Menelaus.

Still in great rage, Antiochus ordered the destruction of Jerusalem and the desecration of the temple on Mount Moriah. The walls of the city were broken down, houses were burned, tens of thousands were sold into slavery, the temple was stripped of its treasures, its porches and gates were hacked and smashed, an idol to Zeus (bearing the face of Antiochus) was erected above the holy altar in the temple courtyard, and finally on December 25, Antiochus sacrificed a pig on the altar in celebration of the birthday of the Greek god Zeus (Tammuz).

That pig was the ultimate abomination to the Jewish mind. Antiochus sprinkled its blood on the Holy of Holies and poured its broth over the holy scrolls before cutting them up with a sword and burning them. The unthinkable had happened. The tiny, defenseless nation of Israel reeled with shock and horror.

The temple was converted to a shrine to Zeus. Only swine were permitted for sacrifice. A fortress (called the Acra) was erected next to it, so that a Syrian garrison could protect the shrine. Antiochus issued an edict forbidding the practice of Judaism, on pain of death, enforced by house searches. If the Sabbath was observed, or Jewish dietary laws kept, or circumcision performed, or scrolls of the Jewish law found, the entire family was put to death.

A time of terrible persecution followed. Faithful Jews fled to the wilderness or the Judean hills to live in caves. They were hunted like animals, and many thousands had to give their lives to remain true to God. Detachments of Syrian soldiers were dispatched throughout the nation to enforce the diabolical edict of Antiochus. They built a pagan altar to Zeus at the tiny village of Modein (about 17 miles NW of Jerusalem). Then they assembled the townspeople and chose an aged priest named Mattathias to offer a sacrificial pig to the Greek gods in honor of Antiochus.

Grey-haired old Mattathias was a well-respected and God-fearing leader. He was a great-grandson of **Hasmon**, a descendant of Jehoiarib of the first division of priests. He had five sons: John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan, who also were well-respected among the people. Knowing he faced death, Mattathias refused to sacrifice the pig. But at that moment, an apostate priest approached the altar and requested permission to perform the swine offering. Enraged, old Mattathias ripped a sword from the hand of a Syrian soldier, slew him, then turned and ran the sword through the body of the apostate Jew, right there on the pagan altar. In the commotion, his five sons attacked and slew the remaining soldiers. Quickly they pulled down the altar. Then, knowing swift and severe retribution would be taken, the faithful of the town fled to the hills of Judea.

Each day the zealous band grew as word of the rebellion spread. They first engaged in guerrilla warfare, attacking Syrian outposts, destroying pagan altars and statues, and chastising apostate brethren. But within a year, honored old Mattathias grew sick. On his deathbed, he passed the leadership to his son Judas—a wise choice, as Judas turned out to be a military genius. He was called “the Maccabee” (the hammer), speaking of his military might. Thus the Hasmonean revolution took the name of the **Maccabees**.

For two years the revolt raged. Hiding in caves and lying in ambush, the Maccabees gradually wore down the Syrian occupation. Finally the freedom fighters met the enemy in open battle at Beth-horon, and again at Emmaus, winning stunning victories and finally reopening the way to return to Jerusalem in 165 BC.

The triumphant forces of Judas were unprepared for their bittersweet capture of Jerusalem. The gates of the temple had been burned, weeds grew waist-high in the courtyards, and above it all loomed the hideous Zeus-idol with the face of Antiochus. They tore their clothes and threw handfuls of dust on their heads as they wept. But great grief spurred great effort, as they tore down the pagan idol, cleansed the temple, and rebuilt the altar of YHWH. Exactly three years to the day from its defilement, they rededicated the altar to YHWH. This all was in partial fulfillment of the prophecies in Daniel 8. The festival of **Hanukkah** has been observed ever since, in celebration of the restoration and cleansing of the temple.

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days, patterned closely after the Feast of Tabernacles. It even has similar names: The Season of our Joy, the Festival of Lights, and the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple. The Judeans had not been able to celebrate the Feasts for many years. In their joy at recovering control of Jerusalem and cleansing the temple in the month of Kislev, they could not wait ten months for Tishri to celebrate the greatest Feast of all.

On the eve of Hanukkah, marathon runners are sent from the village of Modein, starting site of the revolt led by the Maccabees, up to Jerusalem, with flaming freedom torches to light the special nine-branched Hanukkah menorah there. This is a reminder of the cost of freedom, and the spirit of martyrdom which made it possible. Hanukkah is a time of joyous feasting, of gifts, of games, of singing, and of remembrances. Traditions abound, such as the legend of the single cruse of sacred oil found when the Maccabees cleansed the temple. Though only enough for one day's supply for the golden lampstand, it is said to have burned continuously for eight days, until a new supply could be consecrated. The nine-branched Menorah stems from the tradition of the eight Syrian spears found in the temple, upon which the Maccabees put eight candles and kept them burning throughout the celebration. The taller ninth 'servant' candle was Judas Maccabee himself, who lit the other eight. As a savior, Judas is symbolic of Messiah. He was esteemed as a hero of the Judean people, and every mother wanted to name her next son Judas, after him!

Judas was killed in 160 BC. The Hasmonean dynasty continued through the line of Mattathias' third son, Simon. The Chasidim, though appreciative of their new freedom, could not really support this dynasty because it combined the office of priest with the office of king, which according to Torah must be separate, from the tribes of Levi and of Judah respectively. In addition, some of the Maccabees became corrupt, as warrior kings are apt to be. Many Chasidim separated themselves from Jewish society and became known as **Essenes**. They lived in tight, closed communities, tried to keep themselves pure, and worked to preserve Torah and all the traditions of Judaism. They are responsible for much of the intertestamental writings, the Pseudepigraphic and Apocalyptic literature.

Two other groups of pietists remained within society. They gained influence during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135 – 103 BC), son of Simon. These became the religious rulers of the Jews.

The **Sadducees** were chief priests (ruling priests) who supported the Maccabees. Though sticklers for the letter of the law, they rejected the moral or spiritual traditions behind it, zealous to maintain the status quo. They became known as the political party of the Jewish aristocracy. Many of these were from the liberal Hellenist Party. They had actually supported the efforts of Antiochus Epiphanes to paganize their culture. With the ruling Maccabees, they continued their corrupting influence, caring not for the faith of their fathers. They nurtured no desire for a coming Messiah, did not believe in the resurrection, and denied the existence of angels and spirits. They taught that God did not interfere in the affairs of men, and that man is entirely the master of his own destiny, thus good and evil are left to man's free choice. Focused on 'whatever works', they got theological only when challenged by Pharisees.

The **Pharisees** (ruling elders) were bitter enemies of both the Maccabees and the Sadducees. These were the ones still faithful to God's covenant with their fathers, and zealous for the purity of the faith. They too were sticklers for the law, but out of their zeal for the moral and spiritual traditions behind it. They worked to cleanse Jewish life through laws designed to keep the people pure as required by the Mosaic Code. They hated the Maccabees for their corruption, and the Sadducees for their compromises with paganism. In time, they became known as arrogant haters of anyone who disagreed with their interpretations of the law. They were the writers of the Talmud. A very large and influential group, they came to be known as the party of the common people. They wore a distinctive robe so they could be recognized, and they loved to have people come to them with questions on Jewish law and traditions. Their **scribes** were the lawyers, the 'guardians of the law', who worked for them and supported them.

The Hasmonean dynasty lasted little more than one century. It was brought to an end by an unhappy hostility between two sons of Alexander Jannaeus (102 – 75 BC, son of John Hyrcanus): the weak John Hyrcanus II and the ambitious Aristobulus. Rome had gotten very powerful. Through the Punic Wars (264 – 146 BC) Rome had defeated Macedonia (215 – 197 BC) and the Seleucid king Antiochus III of Syria (192 – 189 BC). By 146 BC Greece (called Achaia) and Macedonia had become provinces of the Roman Empire. Egypt, Syria, and Israel were not yet officially part of the Roman Empire, but they knew that they had best not do anything to upset Rome! However, that's exactly what happened in that all-too-public quarrel between John Hyrcanus II and his brother Aristobulus. The **Roman Republic** sent Pompey and his general Marcus Scaurus to Jerusalem to squelch the conflict, which they did by ruthlessly subjugating Judea to Rome in 63 BC.

The first thing Pompey did as the conquering king was to anger the pious by entering the most holy place in the temple. So right off the bat Jews hated Rome. However, politics is politics. Antipater the Idumean, close friend of John Hyrcanus II, managed to get on the good side of Julius Caesar (who had taken control of the Roman Republic in 49 BC) and was made the procurator of Judea in 47 BC.

Julius Caesar spent much of his time chasing down and exterminating the armies of ambitious Pompey. In the process he destroyed the Republican Senate (by filling it with his own cronies) and effectively installed himself as a dictator. Thus the Roman Republic became the **Roman Empire**. Some members of the Senate conspired against him and murdered him, hoping to reestablish the old Republic, but then had to flee for their lives.

Antipater made his son Herod the governor of Galilee. Within the next ten years Herod had won the favor of both Octavian and Marc Antony, two rivals fighting to be the next Caesar after Julius Caesar's murder in the Senate. **Octavian** made himself the emperor by defeating Marc Antony in 31 BC (taking advantage of his sordid affair with Cleopatra). Herod quickly gave Octavian full allegiance, and was confirmed as the king of Judea.

The next year, Octavian captured Egypt, ending the Ptolemaic dynasty and incorporating Egypt as a province in the Roman Empire. He returned to Rome as a hero, absolute ruler of a vast and undisputed empire.

The legendary 200-year **Pax Romana** had finally begun. As Octavian expanded and strengthened the empire, he established a professional bureaucracy, built well-paved roads throughout the empire, ridding them of robbers, reorganized his army more as a police force to keep peace in all his far-flung provinces, and established a fair system of taxation through a periodic census. Business flourished. Prosperity as well as peace filled the empire. Octavian, now known as **Caesar Augustus**, became accepted by many as the 'savior of the world', and even revered as a god.

But Herod's reign in Judea was not one of peace. He had to suppress the uprisings of those who favored Antigonus, the last of the Hasmonean line. He was also hated by the Galileans for attacking their bands of zealots, whose love of freedom and longing for Messiah quickly turned to hate of the oppressive yoke of Rome. Herod went even further to alienate his people by paganizing and Romanizing Judea. Everywhere he honored Caesar by plaques, statues, trophies, and idols. Whole new towns adorned with heathen statuary rose at his command, each testifying to his Roman loyalty. Sebaste (Augustus) replaced ancient Samaria. Strato's Tower became the port of Caesarea. He built theaters and staged costly games. Herod's lavish building schemes were halted only by several prolonged droughts, which forced him to purchase grain for his starving people. Even fruitful Galilee became barren and dry, and thousands perished in famine and pestilence.

