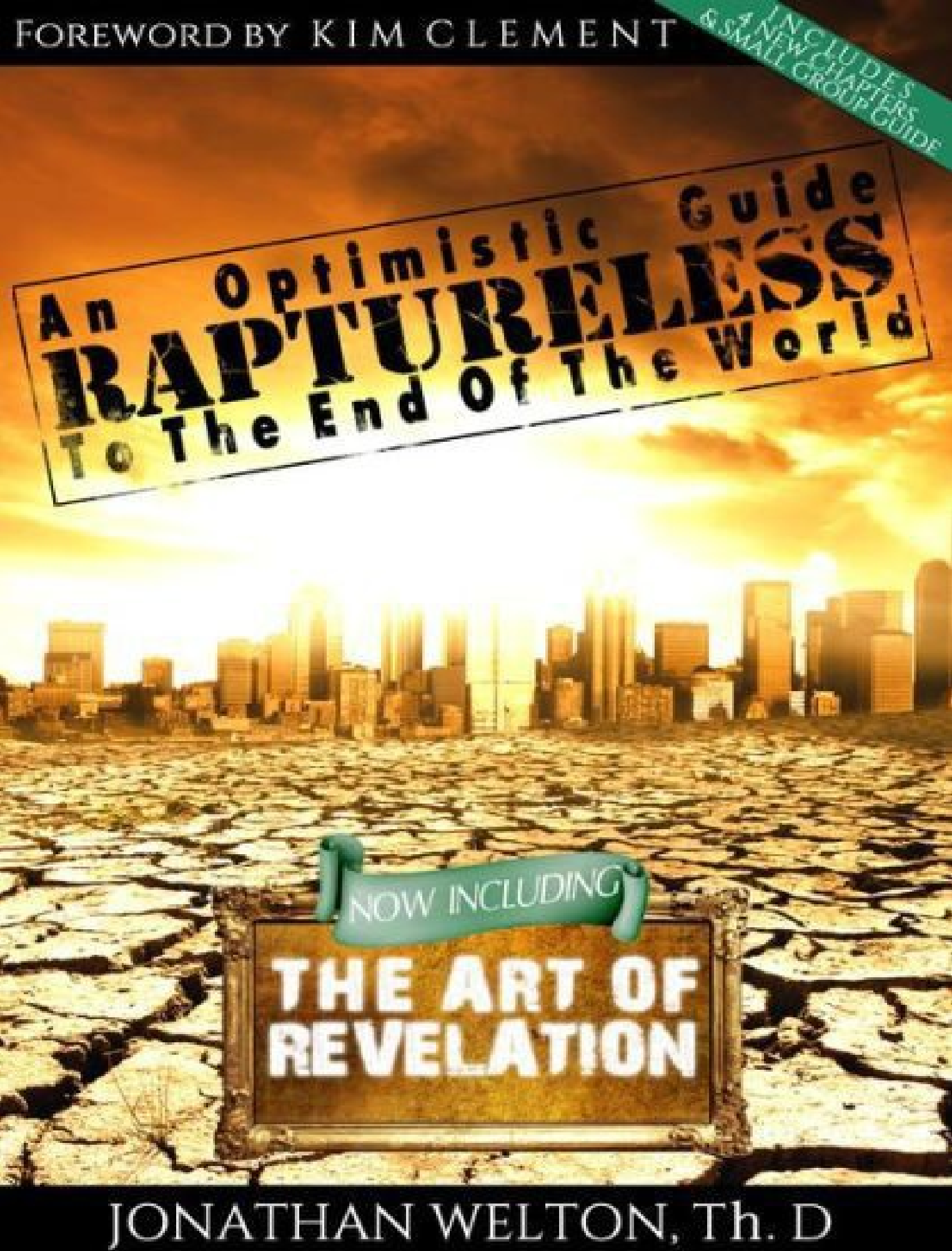
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THE ART OF REVELATION

JONATHAN WELTON, Th. D



JONATHAN WELTON

RAPTURELESS

AN OPTIMISTIC GUIDE TO THE END OF THE WOLRD

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INTRODUCTION

My parents both graduated from a Pentecostal Bible College in

the early 1970s. They attended classes during the era of the Jesus People Movement, the Vietnam War, and the epically bestselling *Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. During those turbulent times, my parents met and married. After they had my two older siblings, I was born into their family in 1983. This was an era of much speculation and fear regarding the endtimes, which many believed had already begun. My parents had heard all the confusing and conflicting points of view regarding the endtimes, and instead of becoming obsessed with figuring it all out, they made a choice.

They determined to raise godly children who would raise godly

grandchildren. They chose to think long-term and invest in their future and the future of their children. They didn't have all the answers regarding a "perfect theology of the endtimes," but they knew better than to buy into the hype. When their friends quit their jobs, bought boats, and racked up credit card debt "because the end of the world is around the corner and we won't have to pay it back," my parents called this irresponsible and unChristlike behavior.

Growing up, I never knew what my parents really thought about the "end of the world". When I pressed them for an answer, they would say, "We are Pan-Millennial," which was a humorous way of saying that it will all "pan out" in the end!

This left me with a lot of questions in my teen years when the *Left Behind* series became a raging bestseller.

5

RAPTURELESS

Since I was not force-fed a particular point of view by either my parents or my church while growing up, I had the full ability to think freely. I began to dig into studying the endtimes and very quickly realized that this study was going to be deep, complex, and scary.

It didn't take long for me to become thoroughly confused. At that point, I felt the Holy Spirit speak to my heart. He said to me, *"Jonathan, please set aside your study of the endtimes. It is not the right season for you to study this. If you will trust Me, I will guide you to a right understanding in the future, but now is not the time. Wait on Me to give you a green light."* So for the next two and half years, I chose to read nothing regarding the endtimes; I didn't watch the Left Behind movies (sorry Kirk Cameron); I didn't even read the Book of Revelation!

One day, as I was browsing a used book sale, I saw a book on the endtimes, and I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, "Buy that book; it is time to begin to reveal the truth to you." It has now been over ten years since that day, and what the Holy Spirit has taught me about the endtimes has been some of the most wonderful revelation that I have received from His Word.

Plenty of books about the endtimes have been written based on personal visions or wild interpretations of Scripture. This is not one of those books.

I have a Masters Degree in Biblical Studies. I am a student of Church history. I am *not* going to fill this book with subjective visions and fantasies regarding private interpretations of the endtimes. Enough of those books already exist, and the Holy Spirit had me avoid them for two and half years so that He could prepare my heart for what He wanted to show me.

Here are my starting points.

•

Every part of the Gospel is simple, including the teaching regarding

the endtimes. If something is too complex for the average person

to grasp, then it is being taught wrongly.

•

Our view of the future should not cause fear. No part of the Gospel

(which literally means “good news”) ever causes fear.

•

Our understanding of the endtimes determines how we live our

lives and whether we plan long-term, build a legacy, prepare our

children for a lifetime of service to the Lord, and so forth. A correct 6

INTRODUCTION

view of the endtimes will set us free from fear. It will cause us to

have a renewed passion for Jesus rather than an obsession with the antichrist.

Since many of you did not grow up in "Pan-Millennial" households, it is possible that you have been force-fed a particular point of view for many years. I would ask you to lay down what you have heard all your life and consider opening your heart to hear a fresh understanding from the Holy Spirit. In trade, I as the author promise to write simply. I will choose not to use large theological terms. I will not waste your time; I will respect your time as my reader. I can promise you that I will not try to coerce you into agreement with me, but I will share with you what the Holy Spirit has shown me, and you can *test all things and hold fast that which is good* (see 1 Thess. 5:21).

Thank you for investing your time in this book; it will be worth it.

chapter one

HOw

did we

get here?

When I was in my early teens, my brother worked at a Christian bookstore. He would often bring home the latest Christian movie releases, and we would enjoy getting to watch them long before others could. I remember when *Veggie Tales* first came out; what an amazing new era that brought. Finally the Battle of Jericho included slushies! This was a huge step forward from the *Superbook* and *McGee and Me* videos I grew up with, but I digress.

I remember when my brother brought home the videocassette of *The Thief in the Night*. That was a bit much for a fourteen-year-old! For many years, I had one clip from the movie stuck in my memory. In this memory clip, a big guy who looked like Santa and was wearing overalls had a giant endtime chart covered with dragons and beasts from Revelation. I recently re-watched the whole *Thief in the Night* movie series on YouTube (Santa, dragons, and all), and my memory wasn't that far off.

Although it isn't as common today, the endtime chart used to be a standard way of communicating about the end of the world. Each pastor and teacher had his or her own views

mapped out on personal charts. Most famous are the antique *Clarence Larkin's Charts* (from the early 1900s).

In retrospect, I am very glad my family didn't celebrate Christmas with the Santa Claus tradition; otherwise, I would have been thinking of the big guy from the endtime movie coming down my chimney with his dragon and beast wall charts.

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RAPTURELESS

Years later, the Holy Spirit began to reveal the truth about the endtimes to me. Considering my weird background of a "Pan-Millenial" family and scary Christian movies, I wonder if He chuckled to Himself, knowing that He really had a piece of work on His hands!

I first began by studying the history of the many endtime views. To understand a belief system, it is very helpful to start by researching the history behind it.

I found that, throughout Church history, the majority of Bible teachers and theologians held to a similar view of the endtimes. Yet, in the last century, the western Church has fractured into teaching many differing views. Simply stated, from AD 30 to the 1500s, the majority of the Church had an optimistic view of the future—that the Kingdom of God was growing in the earth and would continue to do so until the final return of Christ.

The fragmentation of viewpoints began in the reformation of the 1500s.

This eventually led to the modern Church believing in: •

The rapture

•

A one-world “antichrist” ruler

•

A seven-year global tribulation

Before the 1500s, none of these three points were understood the way that they are taught today. I came to understand that the modern understanding is based more on a tradition from the 1800s than from a historical and biblically orthodox view. As I will show, the Church fathers of the first 1500 years had a biblical understanding that is very different than the modern understanding.

So where did the two roads diverge?

The Historical Development

The Reformation of the 1500s changed a lot of things, but unwittingly it eventually affected the endtime beliefs of much of the Church. In the early 1500s, Martin Luther railed against the Roman Catholic Church, and in his passion, he called her

the Whore of Babylon and the Beast. To counter 10

this, in 1585 a Jesuit priest by the name of Francisco Ribera published a 500-page work that placed Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24, and Revelation 4-19 in the distant future. This was the first thought of its kind, and it is the foundation of many modern endtime views.1 The significance of this new interpretation is that, rather than seeing these passages as fulfilled, now Ribera was saying they were still future.

Historically speaking, Ribera's new view did not gain momentum. In fact, his writing was lost until 1826, when Samuel Maitland, librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury, rediscovered Ribera's forgotten manuscript and published it for the sake of public interest and curiosity.

When the book resurfaced, a small group of ultra-conservatives, led by John Darby, began to take Ribera's book seriously and came under the influence of this thinking. John Darby and his contemporary, Edward Irving, became extremely vocal about their new theology of the endtimes and began to attract many followers. Their most important follower was C.I. Scofield, who later published these concepts in his famed Scofield Reference Bible.

The Scofield Bible was the most popular of its time because it was one of the earliest Bibles to contain a full commentary. It quickly became a standard for seminary students of the time.

This continued unchallenged until the 1948 Latter Rain movement, which disagreed with the Scofield Reference Bible's claims that the spiritual gifts had ceased. The Pentecostals pushed back against these portions of the commentary, but still swallowed Ribera's endtime teachings without realizing it.2

Then in 1961, Finis Dake published the Dake's Annotated Reference Bible, which continued to promote the same Darbyism as the Scofield Bible, and the Ryrie and MacArthur Study Bibles have continued this tradition of Darbyism.

Thus we see that Martin Luther railed against the Roman Catholic Church, causing one priest to react by writing a new doctrine. This began the belief that certain prophecies have not yet been fulfilled!

The Timing of the New Doctrine It is important to consider the timing of John Darby's teaching ministry.

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RAPTURELESS

During the 1830s, the Holy Spirit, through the Second Great Awakening, was stirring American churches to life with great fervor. At the same time, Satan was hard at work releasing distortions and false teachings into the earth. From the late 1700s to the late 1800s, a multitude of major false teachings were released into the Church. For example: •

Joseph Smith founded Mormonism in 1830 (in Palmyra, New

York, a suburb of Rochester, New York, where Charles Finney was

having his revival meetings at the same time).

•

Charles Taze Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses in the late 1870s.

•

The Fox Sisters founded Spiritualism in 1848 (which later became

the foundation of the New Age Movement).

•

The first Unitarian church began in Boston in 1785.

•

Mary Baker Eddy founded the cult named Christian Science in

1879 (which was a blending of Swedenborgism, Mesmerism, and Metaphysics).3

During this time period, John Nelson Darby also brought forth

his new endtime teachings. Since C.I. Scofield published Darby's beliefs in his Bible commentary notes, Darbyism has become the mainstream endtime teaching of many modern teachers. Yet many have never even considered where these beliefs have come from.

The Last One Hundred Years

After the Scofield Reference Bible was published in 1909, the earth went through a deeply traumatic season: World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. By the time that this period of forty years was over, pessimistic Scofield-ism had deeply rooted itself in American thinking.

Then in 1948, Israel regained its independent statehood, which caused many to say that Matthew 24:32-33 meant that when Israel became a state again the end was near.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and 12

its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door (Matthew 24:32-33).

In the next verse it says, "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Matt. 24:34). Since the Bible teaches that a generation is forty

years, this led to millions of Christians believing and teaching that the rapture would occur in 1988.

This opened the door for Edgar Whisenant to sell 4.5 million copies of his book, *88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1988*. Whisenant was quoted as saying, "Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong; and I say that to every preacher in town," and "If there were a king in this country and I could gamble with my life, I would stake my life on Rosh Hashanah in 1988."4

Whisenant's predictions were taken seriously in some parts of the evangelical Christian community. As the great day approached, regular programming on the Christian Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN) was interrupted to provide special instructions on preparing for the rapture.5

When the predicted rapture failed to occur, Whisenant followed up with later books with predictions for various dates in 1989, 1993, 1994, and 1997.

At this point, some of the modern teachers have started to redefine what *generation* means. They say that the clock started at 1948, but since a forty-year generation is wrong, they are now saying a generation is seventy or even one hundred years.

In 1970, Hal Lindsey wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth*. He sold approximately 35 million copies and deeply affected a generation of pastors and leaders growing up in the Jesus People Movement of the early 1970s.

The lasting fruit of this book has created a generation that believes more in Lindsey's mythology than understanding what the Bible and history actually teach. In his book, Hal Lindsey concluded that, since the United States was not mentioned in Daniel or Revelation, the U.S. would not be a major player on the world scene when the Great Tribulation happened.

Based on his interpretation of various biblical texts, he also presumed that the European Economic Community (now the European Union) would become what he termed the "United States of Europe." This union would 13

have ten members and would become, according to Lindsey, the revived Roman Empire, ruled by the antichrist, needed to fulfill Bible prophecy.

Currently, the European Union has twenty-seven members.

Later, Hal Lindsey released another book titled *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon,* implying that the battle of Armageddon would happen soon.

He even went so far as to say, "The decade of the 1980s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it," and he suggested that the U.S.

would be destroyed by a surprise Soviet attack. Not

surprisingly, because of Lindsey's adamant insistence that the 1980s would usher in the Great Tribulation, the book was quietly taken out of print in the early 1990s.

Lindsey, however, would not give up. In the early 1990s, he published *Planet Earth—2000 A.D.,* which warned Christians that they should not plan to still be living on earth by the year 2000.

Throughout his several books, Lindsey assumed that the Cold War would continue until the end and, in fact, play a significant part in the unfolding of endtime events. He even named Russia as the famous Gog of Revelation 20:8. Likewise, Lindsey believed the hippie culture of the 1960s and '70s would become the dominate culture in the U.S., ultimately leading to the immorality and false religion "prophesied" to arise in the endtimes by various Bible passages. Clearly, none of these prophecies have come to pass, and many have been proven wrong due to the dates ascribed to them, yet Lindsey is still lauded by many Christians as a great modern prophet.

Then in 1995, the first of the mega-bestselling book series, *Left Behind,* was released. Due to the paranoia and fear regarding Y2K, Christians were primed for rapture fever. When all was said and done, Y2K was all hype, and 60 million copies of *Left Behind* had been sold (as well as three terrible feature-length films that were similar in nature and theology to the *Thief in the Night* movie series of the 1970s).

Now we are in the new millennium, and it is high time that we

begin to deeply question the modern endtime views. If a teacher has been proclaiming that the end of the world is coming soon for over forty years, we should stop paying attention. If a teacher has proclaimed over forty different people to be the antichrist, we should ignore him. The fact that these teachers wear suits and are on TV doesn't make them any less wrong than the crazy guy on the street corner wearing a sandwich board sign 14

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

that reads, "The end is near!" If a teacher was a paranoid alarmist regarding Y2K, we shouldn't be concerned about that teacher's other futuristic proclamations.

In summary, the teaching that Jesus' words in Matthew 24, the prophecies of Daniel, and the Book of Revelation are all referring to future events is a *new concept,* which came as a reaction to the Reformation. It has become deeply imbedded in the American evangelical community, but does not have the support of Church history or Scripture, as we shall see.

Judge Fruit

Jesus told us to judge the messages of various prophets by examining the fruit of their lives and the fruit of their prophetic words (see Matt.

7:15-20). So now that we see that this modern endtime teaching is a new phenomenon, we must also ask ourselves what fruit is

coming from it.

Twelve Fruits That I Have Witnessed: 1. Love usually takes the back seat, while fear is emphasized.

Sometimes the fear is covered over by a rapture escape or by divine

protection from coming wrath.

2. All long-term thinking becomes limited. It becomes impossible to

even prophesy beyond a few decades because of the supposed “any

minute return” of Christ.

3. It creates a fear of technology because that new GPS, computer,

smartphone, laptop, or whatever might be used as the “mark of the beast.”

4. It harbors a fear of politics because the antichrist could be right

around the corner.

5. It breeds an anti-culture view to the point of irrelevancy. Yet, even

the apostle Paul was able to quote from the popular culture of his

own day (see Acts 17:28).

6. It discourages people from pushing forward in health, medicine,

the environment, or technology because they reason, “Why would

one work for the good of a world that is going to burn?”

7. It has created a bizarre form of Christian racism. Many have

become pro-Israel to the point that no political thought is exercised.

For example, if Israel were to mistreat her surrounding nations,

many modern Christians would give them a free-pass because they

are God's "chosen people." Christians have literally accepted a new

form of pro-Israel and anti-Arab racism. Also, it breeds a suspicion

toward other countries, producing anti-Russian and anti-Chinese

attitudes among many Christians. This Christian racism is rooted

in a wrong understanding of the endtimes.

8. Hope is narrowed down to a rapture escape.

9. This endtime view is the seedbed of many cults and militias.

10. Many have turned to extended hours of fasting and prayer, to

quick evangelism, and to looking for the rapture or the "signs of

the times," rather than studying and training for a lifetime of

advancing the Kingdom.

11. This view doesn't take the time texts of Scripture seriously or

literally (for example, Matt. 23:36; 24:34).

12. It has birthed many silly conspiracies; it fits perfectly with those

who believe in the Illuminati, the NWO, and other secret society theories.

Pascal's Wager

The mathematician, physicist, and Catholic philosopher, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), proposed a wager. It has become known as Pascal's Wager or Pascal's Gambit. I will paraphrase: *What if you chose to believe in God and live as if He exists? If you are right, then wonderful! But if you are wrong and you find out that you simply lived a healthy moral life, but were wrong about God, what have you lost?* 6

I would like to propose Welton's Wager based on the same logic. What if you chose to believe optimistically about the endtimes, raise godly kids, plan long-term, reject thoughts of fear, and work as a member of the Bride making herself ready (see Rev. 19:7). Even if you are wrong and suddenly get raptured out, what have you lost? You will have been a good steward of what God put in your hands rather than sitting on your hands, burying 16

your talents, and waiting for a rapture that may not come in

your lifetime!

If you spend your life in fear, trying to figure out dates and guess who the antichrist is, you will be held accountable for all that wasted living.

A final thought. Some say that having a fearful future motivates evangelism. Actually most non-Christians just think we are nuts and don't want to join us. In fact, some famous atheists (for example Christopher Hitchens) are saying that Jesus was a false prophet because His prophecy didn't happen in the first century (see Matt. 24:34.)7 Even when some people do get saved out of fear for the future, this is not the Gospel of the Kingdom; Jesus never said to preach the endtimes. Many have been brought into Christianity through fear of hell, judgment, or rapture; they then have had to untangle their spiritual walk, for years to come, from the fear into which they were birthed.

It is time to change our thinking.

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RAPTURELESS

Chapter Points

•

The belief in a future rapture, antichrist, and Great Tribulation are new ideas that arose from a reaction against the Reformation in the 1500s.

•

John Darby reintroduced this view, and C.I. Scofield popularized it in his Scofield Reference Bible in the early 1900s. Thus it became mainstream belief among evangelical and charismatic Christians.

•

The appearance of many new cults in that same era and the worldwide negative impact of World War I, The Great Depression, and World War II firmly rooted a negative view of the end in much of the Christian community.

•

End-time predictors such as Hal Lindsey and Edgar Whisenant sold millions of copies of predictive books that have been proven to be false prophecy, yet their teachings are still heeded by many Christians.

•

This new end-time view consistently bears bad fruit in its adherents.

•

It would be wiser to live with a long-term, optimistic view (and end up being wrong and suddenly raptured out) than to live with a rapture-focused, short-term view (and end up being wrong and ultimately be held accountable for not working to advance the Kingdom in your lifetime).

chapter two

the

rapture

I used to be a counselor at an all-male Christian summer camp. The greatest prank of all time was the year when we raptured everyone! Well, not really, but that was the goal. As staffers, we had schemed and plotted that if the Camp Director ever left the campground long enough, the counselors would take the campers into the woods and stage an elaborate rapture prank.

When the Director returned to the camp, he would see random clothes littered about the soccer field, swimming trunks floating by themselves in the pool, a random camper sitting in the grass crying about how all his bunkmates had disappeared in the rapture, and so forth. Although this would have been epic, we never managed to pull it off during the six summers I was on staff. Every summer the idea would resurface, but it never came to fruition.

It was about this same time that I began studying the history of the modern view of the endtimes. I learned that the whole concept of the rapture, as it is commonly taught, cannot be found in Church history before the 1800s and that it comes from a few deeply misunderstood Scriptures.

The Rapture

As I discussed in the previous chapter, John Darby and C.I. Scofield spread their teachings through the Scofield Reference Bible. One of the main teachings was that of the rapture.

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RAPTURELESS

The concept of the rapture is that on any day in the future, Jesus will secretly snatch away His followers to Heaven. This will be followed by the antichrist rising and seizing rule of the entire planet. He will rule from a revived Roman Empire and sit on a throne inside a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (some hold the view that the rapture will happen halfway through the antichrist's seven year rule). Then God will pour out His wrath upon the wicked in the earth, finally culminating in what will be called the battle of Armageddon. This is a general summary of what Darby taught.

Essentially, none of these teachings were widely taught before the 1830s.

Rather than belabor my point about the short history of these teachings, in this chapter, I shall examine what the Bible says about the rapture. There are four main passages that are used to teach the rapture concept. I will examine them one at a time.

Passage #1: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed

about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NIV).

The Thessalonian church was a church surviving under tremendous persecution. We see this in Paul's encouragement to them: "Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring" (2 Thess. 1:4). Because of this persecution, many of their members had been put to death. This is the context into which Paul wrote the above passage. Paul did not hint in any way that a coming great tribulation, under the one-world ruler called the antichrist, must be avoided and that God would rapture Christians 2,000

years after he wrote this letter. In fact, he made it clear that he was writing words of clarification and comfort, for his first-century readers, regarding what would happen to those who had died. This is the context of verse 13: "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope."

In the next verses, we see that those who have died will be resurrected as Jesus was resurrected:

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep (1

Thessalonians 4:14-15 NIV).

Paul continued to encourage his listeners not to despair about those who had died, saying that they would actually be resurrected and transformed even before the living are! "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise1 first" (1 Thess. 4:16 NKJV).

Prior to the invention of the rapture doctrine in the 1830s, all published commentators interpreted First Thessalonians 4:13-18 as referring to the resurrection. For example, Matthew

Henry's commentary on this passage, written in 1721, says:

They shall be raised up from the dead, and awakened out of their sleep, for God will bring them with him, v 14. They then are with God, and are better where they are than when they were here; and when God comes he will bring them with him. The doctrine of the resurrection and the second coming of Christ is a great antidote against the fear of death and inordinate sorrow for the death of our Christian friends…2

Matthew Henry, along with nearly all other commentators prior to John Darby, saw the obvious intention of this passage as referring to the resurrection of the dead at the final coming of Christ, not to a secret rapture seven years prior to the resurrection.

This is the same resurrection that Paul spoke of in First Corinthians 15:51-54:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with

immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

First Thessalonians 4:17-18 are the two verses that are most quoted when speaking of the rapture concept:

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (NIV).

Yet, the context in this passage did not change. Paul was still comforting a first century church under persecution. He was still instructing them regarding their dead friends and relatives; he had not begun to explain a secret rapture 2,000 years in the future. It is clear that Paul was talking about the final resurrection and how we will all be caught up together with the Lord, which is followed by the books being opened and the final judgment.

The famous commentator Adam Clarke gives a clear summary to this passage to the Thessalonians:

The Lord himself—That is: Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven; shall descend in like manner as he was seen by his disciples to ascend, *i.e.* in his human form, but now infinitely more glorious; for thousands of thousands shall minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand shall stand before him; for the Son of man shall come on the throne of his glory: but who may abide the day of his coming, or stand when he

appeareth?

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THE RAPTURE

With a shout—Or order, εν κελευσματι· and probably in these words: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment; which order shall be repeated by the archangel, who shall accompany it with the sound of the trump of God, whose great and terrible blasts, like those on mount Sinai, sounding louder and louder, shall shake both the heavens and the earth!

Observe the order of this terribly glorious day:

1. Jesus, in all the dignity and splendor of his eternal majesty,

shall descend from heaven to the mid region, what the apostle

calls the air, somewhere within the earth's atmosphere.

2. Then the κελευσμα, shout or order, shall be given for the dead

to arise.

3. Next the archangel, as the herald of Christ, shall repeat the

order, Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!

4. When all the dead in Christ are raised, then the trumpet shall

sound, as the signal for them all to flock together to the throne of Christ. It was by the sound of the trumpet that the solemn assemblies, under the law, were convoked; and to such convocations there appears to be here an allusion.

5. When the dead in Christ are raised, their vile bodies being made like unto his glorious body, then,

6. Those who are alive shall be changed, and made immortal.

7. These shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord

in the air.

8. We may suppose that the judgment will now be set, and the books opened, and the dead judged out of the things written in those books.

9. The eternal states of quick and dead being thus determined, then all who shall be found to have made a covenant with him

by sacrifice, and to have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, shall be taken to his eternal glory, and be for ever with the Lord. What an inexpressibly terrific glory will then be exhibited! I forbear to call in here the descriptions, which men of a poetic turn have made of this terrible scene, because I cannot trust to their correctness; and it is a subject which we should speak of and contemplate as nearly as possible in the words of Scripture.3

From this examination, we can clearly see that there is no secret pre-tribulation rapture in First Thessalonians 4, but there is a clear presentation of the resurrection of the dead before the final judgment.

Passage #2: Matthew 24:40-41

Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:40-41 NKJV).

This passage refers to the random killings perpetrated by the Romans at their siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. In fact, the entirety of Matthew 24

is about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. First Jesus declared the destruction of the Temple (see Matt. 24:2-3). Then Jesus told them in AD

30 that within a generation (forty years) the destruction would come (see Matt. 24:34). I will address Matthew 24 further in a different chapter, but suffice it to say that this passage does not imply a secret rapture. Jesus was prophesying how the Roman soldiers would arbitrarily kill the Jews.

Passage #3: Revelation 4:1

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this"

(Revelation 4:1 NKJV).

This verse **is not** a metaphor; it is a record. John **was not** telling his readers that they would be sucked up before the throne, but that he was! John was not speaking of the rapture. Many have said that John was speaking of the rapture because the Church is not mentioned anymore between Revelation 4 and 19. Yet this is not true because Christians are mentioned eleven times between Revelation 4 and 19 (see Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18;

13:7,10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8).

Passage #4: Revelation 12:5

She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne (Revelation 12:5 NKJV).

The context of this reference is the ascension of Christ, not the rapture of the Church. The word *Child* is capitalized because it refers to Christ.

Also, He is the one who rules all nations with a rod of iron (see Ps. 110).

He is the one who ascended to God and sits on His throne in Heaven. This is not a reference to a secret rapture of the Church.

Additional Thoughts

Since we have addressed all the passages that have been used to teach the rapture concept, I would like to approach this topic briefly from another angle. Consider this simple question: If we are all going to fly up into the sky to meet Jesus, do we all fly straight up? This would mean that people being raptured in China and people being raptured in the United States would be flying off of the planet in two different directions. That would seem like a problem. (Yes, I am speaking tongue-in-cheek.) First Thessalonians 4:17 says that we will meet the Lord in the air.

Where is the air? According to the Greek root word translated as "air," this is a reference to the air that surrounds us on the earth. Many have taken this to mean that we will meet the Lord in the sky, but actually, there is less and less air the higher one goes. It makes more sense that we would meet Him here, in the atmosphere.

The Thessalonian passage also says that we will *meet* the Lord (see 1

Thess. 4:17), the Greek word translated as "meet" is used several times in the New Testament. It always has the meaning of *welcoming* someone. It never has the meaning of someone coming to snatch people away. We are going to be welcoming Jesus to earth when He returns.

Lastly, this passage speaks of being *caught up* (see 1 Thess. 4:17). The Scripture teaches that Jesus has been resurrected and given His glorious body. This means that if I am "caught up," it would be similar to what would happen if Jesus and I were in a footrace, He had run twenty miles, and I had only run two miles. If Jesus were to stop and wait for me, once I had run an additional eighteen miles, I would be "caught up." Like the apostle John said, "…We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). We have not been resurrected and given our glorious bodies yet; presently, there is a great

disparity between Jesus and us; we must get "caught up!" Christ will be equally yoked to His Bride, the Church (see 2 Cor. 6:14-16.)When He appears, we will instantly be caught up to His likeness in the twinkling of an eye (see 1 Cor. 15:52).

Tying this all together, we see that *when Jesus returns to earth, we shall meet* (welcome) *Him in the air* (atmosphere) *and be caught up* (in His likeness) *together.*

Conclusion

Until Darbyism in the 1830s, the modern concept of the rapture was not taught, believed, or even conceived. Even after its advent, the rapture teaching didn't gain major traction until the Scofield Bible came out in 1909. It then became so ingrained in Western thinking simply because it would be much nicer to be raptured than to live through another World War I, The Great Depression, and World War II. The rapture fever spread, not because it is biblical, but because it is enticing to those who desired an escape from the trauma of the early 1900s.

It is time to re-think and re-examine some of these long-held beliefs.

Rejecting the rapture is a first step in the right direction.

Chapter Points

- The rapture doctrine is a new teaching that was popularized in the early 1900s.
- First Thessalonians 4:13-18 was written to a church in persecution, comforting them regarding what had happened to their martyred friends after death and telling them of the future resurrection of the dead at the final coming of Christ.
- Matthew 24:40-41 speaks of the random killings that happened at the hands of the Roman soldiers during their attack on Jerusalem leading up to its destruction in AD 70.
- Revelation 4:1 is a record of John's actual experience, not a prophecy of coming events.

- Revelation 12:5 speaks of the ascension of Christ, not a rapture of the Church.

- The meaning of the original language in First Thessalonians 4:17 clearly shows that *when Jesus returns to earth, we shall meet* (welcome) *Him in the air* (atmosphere) *and be caught up* (in His likeness) *together.*

chapter three

the

GREAT

TRIBULATION

Over the last few years of traveling and teaching in many churches, I

have heard some amazing stories. I remember one lady telling me

that she was not able to shower without wearing a towel because she didn't

want to be raptured while naked. Another told me that she wouldn't travel

on airplanes for missions and such because, if the antichrist suddenly arose, she might not be able to get back home to her husband.

Then there's my friend who told me that she had nightmares for years

about the scene in the *Thief in the Night* when the red balloon floats into the sky while people below are being beheaded by

guillotines. Perhaps you have heard similar stories or experienced fears like these yourself. Clearly, the idea of a future seven-year, hell-on-earth type of Great Tribulation has created terror in the imaginations of Christians for the last two centuries.

The main passage that is used to paint this picture comes from the

prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24. Most scholars agree that the Book of

Revelation is a parallel to the words of Jesus in Matthew 24, but because

I am writing a simple introduction and because of lack of space, I will not be addressing Revelation in this book (I hope to have a further work in the future to specifically address the Book of Revelation). Matthew 24 is

the passage that predicts earthquakes, famines, plagues, false teachers, and Jesus' coming on the clouds.

However, as I studied Matthew 24, I discovered that, throughout Church

history, most Christians believed that the whole chapter of Matthew 24

occurred at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. In fact, many of the

well-known Church leaders have taught this. Here are quotations from a

few:

All this occurred in this manner in the second year of the reign of

Vespasian [AD 70], according to the predictions of our Lord and

Saviour Jesus Christ. —Eusebius1

Thousands and thousands of men of every age who together with

women and children perished by the sword, by starvation, and by

countless other forms of death…all this anyone who wishes can

gather in precise detail from the pages of Josephus's history. I must

draw particular attention to his statement that the people who

flocked together from all Judaea at the time of the Passover Feast

and—to use his own words—were shut up in Jerusalem as if in a

prison, totaled nearly three million. — Eusebius2

This was most punctually fulfilled: for after the temple was burned,

Titus the Roman general, ordered the very foundations of it to be

dug up; after which the ground on which it stood was ploughed by

Turnus Rufus…this generation of men living shall not pass till all

these things be done—The expression implies that a great part of

that generation would be passed away, but not the whole. Just so it

was; for the city and temple were destroyed thirty-nine or forty years

after. —John Wesley3

You will preach everywhere …. Then he added, “This gospel of

the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a

testimony to all nations; and the end will come.” The sign of this final

end time will be the downfall of Jerusalem. —John Chrysostom4

There was a sufficient interval for the full proclamation of the gospel

by the apostles and evangelists of the early Christian Church, and for

the gathering of those who recognized the crucified Christ as the

true Messiah. Then came the awful end which the Saviour foresaw

and foretold, and the prospect of which wrung from His lips and

heart the sorrowful lament that followed his prophecy of the doom

awaiting his guilty capital.

The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that

the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. Even Titus

seemed to see in his cruel work the hand of an avenging God. Truly,

the blood of the martyrs slain in Jerusalem was amply avenged when

the whole city became a veritable Aceldama, or field of blood.

—Charles Spurgeon5

Hence it appears plain enough that the foregoing verses [Matt. 24:1—

34] are not to be understood of the last judgment, but, as we said, of

the destruction of Jerusalem. There were some among the disciples

(particularly John), who lived to see these things come to pass.

—John Lightfoot6

And Verily I say unto you; and urge you to observe it, as

absolutely

necessary in order to understand what I have been saying, That this

generation of men now living shall not pass away until all these things

be fulfilled, for what I have foretold concerning the destruction of

the Jewish state is so near at hand, that some of you shall live to see it

accomplished with a dreadful exactness. —Phillip Doddridge7

It is to me a wonder how any man can refer part of the foregoing

discourse [Matt. 24] to the destruction of Jerusalem, and part to

the end of the world, or any other distant event, when it is said so

positively here in the conclusion, All these things shall be fulfilled in

this generation.—Thomas Newton8

Christ informs them, that before a single generation shall have

been

completed, they will learn by experience the truth of what he has

said. For within fifty years the city was destroyed and the temple was

razed, the whole country was reduced to a hideous desert. — John

Calvin9

31

RAPTURELESS

The Fulfillment of Matthew 24

As an author, this is my fourth book. In all of my writing, I have never

written anything like what I have in this chapter. I feel the need to literally warn you.

In this chapter, I will share with you the historical account of the

fulfillment of Matthew 24 in the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. George

Peter Holford wrote a small booklet in 1805 about the AD 70 destruction.

It is incredibly graphic and heart-wrenching, but it is accurate to what

actually took place. The first time I read Holford's work, I publically had tears streaming down my face as I flew on an airplane.

While many fictional authors speculate at what the Great Tribulation

is going to be like in the future, the truth is that the events of the AD 70

destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled the prophecy of the Great Tribulation

and *fortunately* shall never be repeated. There is *no* future Great Tribulation.

Yes, there will continue to be trials, tribulations, and persecutions, but the Great Tribulation or "the Time of Jacob's Trouble," as prophesied by Jesus, has already happened just as He said it would and within the generational time frame that He declared (see Matt. 24:34).

Before you read this chapter, please stop reading and pray. Ask the

Holy Spirit if you are ready to read the contents of this chapter. I also

recommend not reading this chapter before you go to bed at night. If

you are *not* ready to read to this chapter, please skip to the next chapter and know that the great church leaders, such as Charles Spurgeon, John Calvin, John Wesley, John Chrysostom, and Eusebius taught that there is no

further, future Great Tribulation. This is the necessary presupposition for reading the remainder of the book.

The Context

In Matthew 23, Jesus unleashed the harshest of His recorded sayings. He

declared a whole chapter's worth of woes upon the religious leaders and

denounced them publically. He ended by saying,

And so upon you *will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the*

blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. **Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.** *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate* (Matthew 23:35-38).

This was clearly stunning to Jesus' disciples, who followed Him away

from the Temple to ask Him follow-up questions.

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:1-3) Jesus declared that the Temple and its buildings would be destroyed, and

the disciples, no doubt enthralled, asked Him to tell them *"when will this happen?"* Jesus replied with eight signs of the coming destruction: 1. False messiahs and false prophets (see Matt. 14:4-5,11,23-26) 2. Wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation (see Matt.

24:6-7)

3. Famines (see Matt. 24:7)

4. Earthquakes (see Matt. 24:7)

5. Persecution of believers (see Matt. 24:9)

6. Falling away from the faith (see Matt. 24:10)

7. Love growing cold (see Matt. 24:12)

8. Gospel preached in the whole world (see Matt. 24:14)

We will examine each of these signs in depth in this chapter. In order

to do that, I will share with you George Peter Holford's booklet, *The Destruction of Jerusalem*. His work is drawn mostly from the earlier works of Josephus. I will supplement Holford's writing with my own notes, set apart as: Author's notes:

Last chance to skip this chapter….

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Such were the questions of the disciples, in answer to which our Lord

gave them a particular account of the several important events that would

precede, as well as of the prognostics that would announce the approaching

desolations, including suitable directions for their conduct under the

various trials to which they were to be exposed. He commences with a

caution: *"Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many"* (Matt. 24:4-5).

The necessity for this friendly warning soon appeared. Within one year

after our Lord's ascension, Dositheus the Samaritan arose, who had the

boldness to assert that he was the Messiah of whom Moses prophesied,

while his disciple Simon Magus deluded multitudes into a

belief that he,

himself, was the *"great power of God."*

About three years afterward, another Samaritan impostor appeared and

declared that he would show the people the sacred utensils, said to have

been deposited by Moses, in Mount Gerizim. Induced by an idea that the

Messiah, their great deliverer, had now come, an armed multitude assembled

under him, but Pilate speedily defeated them and slew their chief.

While Cuspius Fadus was procurator in Judea, another deceiver arose,

whose name was Theudas. This man actually succeeded so far as to persuade

a very great multitude to take their belongings and follow him to Jordan,

assuring them that the river would divide at his command. Fadus, however,

pursued them with a troop of horses and slay many of them, including the

impostor himself, whose head was cut off and carried to Jerusalem.

Under the government of Felix, deceivers rose up daily in Judea and

persuaded the people to follow them into the wilderness, assuring them

that they should there behold conspicuous signs and wonders performed

by the Almighty. Of these, Felix, from time to time, apprehended many and

put them to death. About this period (AD 55), Felix the celebrated Egyptian impostor arose, who collected thirty thousand followers and persuaded them to accompany him to the Mount of Olives, telling them that from

thence they should see the walls of Jerusalem fall down at his command—

as a prelude to the capture of the Roman garrison and to their

obtaining

the sovereignty of the city. The Roman governor, however, apprehending

this to be the beginning of revolt, immediately attacked them, slew four

hundred of them, and dispersed the rest, but the Egyptian escaped.

In the time of Porcius Festus (AD 60), another distinguished impostor

seduced the people by promising them deliverance from the Roman yoke

if they would follow him into the wilderness. But Festus sent out an armed

force, which speedily destroyed both the deceiver and his followers. In

short, impostors to a divine commission continually and fatally deceived

the people, at once both justifying the caution and fulfilling the prediction of our Lord.

If it be objected that none of these impostors, except Dositheus,

assumed the name of Messiah, we reply, that the groveling expectations of

the Jews was directed to a Messiah who should merely deliver them from

the Roman yoke and *"restore the kingdom to Jerusalem,"* and such were the pretensions of these deceivers. This expectation, indeed, is the only true solution of these strange and reputed insurrections, which will naturally

remind the reader of the following prophetic expressions of our Lord:

"I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive." "If they shall say unto you, 'Behold he is in the desert!' go not forth. They will show (or pretend to show) great signs and wonders." (See Matthew 24:23-26.)

Wars and Rumors of Wars

Our Savior thus proceeded:

And ye shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for 35

all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet, for nation shall rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences: all these are the beginnings of sorrows (Matthew 24:6-8; Luke 21:11).

"Wars and rumors of wars," These commotions, like distant thunder, that forebodes the approaching storm, *"At first heard solemn o'er the verge of heaven,"* were so frequent from the death of our Lord until the destruction of Jerusalem that whole interval might, with propriety, be appealed to in illustration of this prophecy. One hundred and fifty of the copious pages of Josephus, which contain the history of this period, are everywhere stained with blood. To particularize a few instances: About three years after the

death of Christ, a war broke out between Herod and Aretas, king of Arabia

Petraea, in which the army of the former was cut off. This was *"kingdom rising against kingdom."*

Wars are usually preceded by rumors. It may, therefore, appear absurd to

attempt a distinct elucidation of this part of the prophecy; nevertheless, it ought not to be omitted that, about that time, the emperor Caligula, having ordered his statue to be placed in the Temple of Jerusalem, and the Jews having persisted to refuse him, the whole nation was so much alarmed by

the mere apprehension of war that they neglected even to till their lands!

The storm, however, blew over.

About this period, a great number of Jews, on account of a pestilence

that raged at Babylon, removed from that city to Seleucia, where the Greeks and Syrians rose against them and destroyed of this devoted people more than five myriads! "The extent of this slaughter," says Josephus, "had no

parallel in any former period of their history." Again, about five years after this dreadful massacre, there happened a severe contest between the Jews at Perea and the Philadelphians, regarding the limits of a city called Mia, and many of the Jews were slain. This was *"nation rising up against nation."*

Four years afterward, under Cumanus, a Roman soldier offered an

indignity to the Jews within the precincts of the Temple. This they violently resented, but upon the approach of the Romans in great force, their terror was so excessive and their flight so disorderly that not less than ten thousand Jews were trodden to death in the streets. This, again, was *"nation rising up against nation."* Four years more had not elapsed before the Jews made war 36

against the Samaritans and ravaged their country. The people of Samaria

had murdered a Galilean, who was going up to Jerusalem to keep the

Passover, and the Jews thus revenged it.

At Caesarea, the Jews had a sharp contention with the Syrians for the

government of the city, and an appeal was made to who decreed it to the

Syrians. This event laid the foundation of a most cruel and sanguinary

contest between the two nations. The Jews, mortified by disappointment

and inflamed by jealousy, rose against the Syrians, who successfully repelled them. In the city of Caesarea alone, upwards of twenty thousand Jews were slain. The flame, however, was not now quenched; it spread its destructive

rage wherever the Jews and Syrians dwelt together in the same place:

throughout every city, town, and village, mutual animosity and

slaughter

prevailed. At Damascus, Tyre, Ascalon, Gadara, and Scythopolis, the carnage was dreadful. At the first of these cities, ten thousand Jews were slain in one hour, and at Scythopolis, thirteen thousand treacherously in one night.

At Alexandria, the Jews, aggrieved by the oppressions of the Romans,

rose against them. But the Romans, gaining the ascendancy, slew of that

nation fifty thousand persons, sparing neither infants nor the aged. And

after this, at the siege of Jopata, not less than forty thousand Jews perished.

While these destructive contests prevailed in the East, the western

parts of the Roman Empire were rent by the fierce contentious of Galba,

Otho, and Vertellis. Of which three emperors, it is remarkable that they

all, together with Nero, their immediate predecessor, died a violent death

within the short space of eighteen months. Finally, the whole nation of the Jews took up arms against the Romans, King Agrippa, *etc*. and provoked that dreadful war which, in a few years, deluged Judea in blood and laid its capital in ruins.

If it be here objected, that, because wars are events of frequent

occurrence, it would be improper to refer to supernatural foresight in a

successful prediction respecting them, I would here reply that much of

this objection will be removed by considering the incompetency of even

statesmen themselves in foretelling the condition, only for a few years, of the very nation whose affairs they administer. It is a well-known fact that the present minister of Great Britain, [at the time of authorship, 1805, the Prime Minister was William Pitt] on the very eve of the late long

and destructive war with the French Republic, held out to this country a

picture of fifteen successive years of peace. Indeed, the points on which

peace and war often depend baffle all calculations from present aspects,

and a rumor of war that is so loud and so alarming as even to suspend the

operations of farming may terminate, as we have just seen, into nothing

but rumor.

Further, let it be considered that the wars to which this part of our

Lord's prophecy referred were to be of two kinds and that the events

corresponded accordingly. They occurred within the period to which he

had assigned them, and they fell with the most destructive severity on

the Jews, to whom the prophecy at large chiefly related. Further, that the

person who predicted them was not a statesman, but a carpenter's son! On

this subject, more in another place.

Author's note: Jesus declared *"wars and rumors of wars"* during the *Pax Romana,* the "Roman Peace," which was the only time in history when war had essentially ceased because the empire had conquered

all of its enemies. At any other time in history, wars would have been

a poor "sign of the times" because wars are always happening.

Earthquakes

"And great earthquakes shall be in divers places." Of these significant emblems of political commotion, there occurred several within the scene of this prophecy, and as our Savior predicted, they happened in divers places.

In the reign of Claudius, there was one at Rome and another at Apamea in

Syria, where many of the Jews resided. The earthquake at the latter place

was so destructive that the emperor, in order to relieve the distresses of the inhabitants, remitted its tribute for five years. Both these earthquakes are recorded by Tacitus. There was one also, during the same reign, in Crete.

This is mentioned by Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonius,*

who also says that there were others “at Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, and Samos; in all which places Jews had settled.”

In the reign of Nero, there was an earthquake at Laodicea. Tacitus records

this also. It is likewise mentioned by Eusebius and Orosius, who add that

Hieropolis and Colose, as well as Laodicea, were overthrown by earthquakes.

There was also one in Campania during this reign (of this both Tacitus and

Seneca speak) and another at Rome in the reign of Galba, recorded by

Suetonius. To all those may be added the earthquakes that happened on the

dreadful night when the Idumeans were excluded from Jerusalem, a short

time before the siege commenced. Josephus says, “A heavy storm burst on

them during the night; violent winds arose, accompanied with the most

excessive rains, with constant lightnings, most tremendous thunderings,

and with dreadful roarings of earthquakes. It seemed as if the system of

the world had been confounded for the destruction of mankind; and one

might well conjecture that these were signs of no common events!"

Author's note: There are many records regarding this time period having an incredible amount of earthquakes in the localized region.

Theologian and author, J. Marcellus Kik wrote,

And as to earthquakes, many are mentioned by writers during a

period just previous to 70 AD. There were earthquakes in Crete,

Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse,

Campina, Rome, and Judea. It is interesting to note that the city

of Pompeii was much damaged by an earthquake occurring on

February 5, 63AD.11

Another Bible scholar, Henry Alford, wrote about the earthquakes

of this period:

The principle earthquakes occurring between this prophecy and the

destruction of Jerusalem [in 70AD] were, (1) a great earthquake in

Crete, A.D. 46 or 47; (2) one at Rome on the day when Nero assumed

manly toga, A.D. 51; (3) one at Apamea in Phrygia, mentioned by

Tacitus, A.D. 53; (4) one at Laodicea in Phrygia, A.D. 60; (5) one in

Capania.12

Commentator Edward Hayes Plumptre writes:

Perhaps no period in the world's history has ever been so marked by

these convulsions as that which intervenes between the Crucifixion

and the destruction of Jerusalem.13

The famed philosopher Seneca also wrote of this phenomenon:

How often have cities in Asia, how often in Achaia, been laid

low by a single shock of earthquake! How many towns in Syria,

how many in Macedonia, have been swallowed up! How often

has this kind of devastation laid Cyprus in ruins! How often has

Paphos collapsed! Not infrequently are tidings brought to us of

utter destruction of entire cities.14

Many earthquakes are mentioned in the New Testament, including

at Jesus death (see Matt. 27:51-52) and again at His resurrection

(see Matt. 28:2). Earthquakes also happened when the building was

shaken in Acts 4:31 and when Paul and Silas were freed from prison

in Philippi (see Acts 16:26).

Famines

Our Lord predicted *"famines"* also. Of these, the principal one was that which Agabus foretold would happen in the days of Claudius, as related in the Acts of the Apostles. It begun in the fourth year of his reign and was

of long continuance. It extended through Greece and even into Italy, but

was felt most severely in Judea and especially at Jerusalem, where many

perished for want of bread. This famine is recorded by Josephus also, who

relates that "an assaron of corn was sold for five drachmae" [about a week's wages]. It is likewise noticed by Eusebius and Orosius. To alleviate this terrible calamity, Helena, queen of Adiabena, who was at that time in

Jerusalem, ordered large supplies of grain to be sent from Alexandria, and

Izates, her son, consigned vast sums to the governors of Jerusalem to be

applied to the relief of the more indigent sufferers. The Gentile Christian converts residing in foreign countries also sent, at the instance of Saint Paul, liberal contributions to relieve the distresses of their Jewish brethren (see 1 Cor. 16:3).

Dion Cassius relates that there was likewise a famine in the first year

of Claudius that prevailed at Rome and in other parts of Italy. And in the

eleventh year of the same emperor, there was another famine mentioned by

Eusebius. To these may be added the famines that afflicted the inhabitants

of several of the cities of Galilee and Judea, which were besieged and taken previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, where the climax of national misery, arising from famine and every other cause, was so awfully completed.

Author's note: The famine predicted by Agabus and discussed above is mentioned in the Book of Acts 11:28-30 and in First

Corinthians 16:1-3.

Pestilences

Our Savior adds *"pestilences"* (see Luke 21:11), likewise. Pestilence treads upon the heels of famine; it may, therefore, reasonably be presumed that this terrible scourge accompanied the famines, which have just been

recounted above. History, however, particularly distinguishes two instances of this calamity that occurred before the commencement of the Jewish war.

The first took place at Babylon about AD 40, and it raged so alarmingly

that great multitudes of Jews fled from that city to Seleucia for safety, as has been hinted at already. The other happened at Rome in AD 65, and it carried off prodigious multitudes. Both Tacitus and Suetonius also record

that similar calamities prevailed during this period in various parts of the Roman Empire.

After Jerusalem was surrounded by the army of Titus, pestilential diseases

soon made their appearance there to aggravate the miseries and deepen

the horrors of the siege. They were partly occasioned by the immense

multitudes that were crowded together in the city, partly by the putrid

emanations that arose from the unburied dead, and partly from the spread

of famine.

Heavenly Signs

Our Lord proceeded, *"And fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven"* (Luke 21:11). Josephus has collected the chief of these portents together and introduces his account by a reflection on the strangeness of that infatuation that could induce his countrymen to give credit to

impostors and unfounded reports, while they disregarded the divine

admonitions that were confirmed, as he [Josephus] asserts they were, by

the following extraordinary signs:

1. “A meteor, resembling a sword, hung over Jerusalem during one

whole year.” This could not be a comet, for it was stationary, and

was visible for twelve successive months. A sword too, though a fit

emblem for destruction, but ill represents a comet.”

2. “On the eighth of the month Zanthicus, (before the feast of

unleavened bread) at the ninth hour of the night, there shone

round about the altar, and the circumjacent buildings of the

temple, a light equal to the brightness of the day, which continued

for the space of half an hour." This could not be the effect of

lightning, nor of a vivid aurora borealis, for it was confined to a

particular spot, and the light shone uninterrupted for thirty

minutes.

3. "As the High Priest were leading a heifer to the altar to be

sacrificed, she brought forth a lamb, in the midst of the temple."

Such is the strange account given by Josephus. Some may regard it

as a "Grecian fable," while others may discern in this prodigy a

miraculous rebuke of Jewish infidelity and impiety, for rejecting

the antitypical Lamb, who had offered Himself as an atonement

“once for all” and who, by thus completely fulfilling their design,

had virtually abrogated the Levitical sacrifices. However this may

be, the circumstances of the prodigy are remarkable. It did not

occur in an obscure part of the city, but in the Temple; it did

not at an ordinary time, but at the Passover—the season of our

Lord’s crucifixion—in the presence, not of the vulgar merely, but

of the High Priests and their attendants, and when they were

leading the sacrifice to the altar.

4. “About the sixth hour of the night, the eastern gate of the temple

was seen to open without human assistance.” When the guards

informed the Curator of this event, he sent men to assist them in

shutting it, and with great difficulty they succeeded. This gate, as

has been observed already, was of solid brass and required twenty

men to close it every evening. It could not have been opened by a

"strong gust of wind," or a "slight earthquake" for, as Josephus

says, "It was secured by iron bolts and bars that were let down into

a large threshold, consisting of one entire stone."

5. "Soon after the feast of the Passover, in various parts of the country, before the setting of the sun, chariots and armed men were seen

in the air, passing round about Jerusalem." Neither could this

portentous spectacle be occasioned by the aurora borealis, for it

occurred before the setting of the sun; nor could it have been

merely the fancy of a few villagers, gazing at the heavens, for it was

seen in various parts of the country.

6. “At the subsequent feast of Pentecost, while the priests were going,

by night, into the inner temple to perform their customary

ministrations, they first felt, as they said, a shaking, accompanied

by an indistinct murmuring, and afterwards voices as of a multitude,

saying, in a distinct and earnest manner, ‘let us depart hence’.” This

gradation will remind the reader of that awful transaction that the

feast of Pentecost was principally instituted to commemorate.

First, a shaking was heard; this would naturally induce the priests

to listen, An unintelligible murmur succeeds it; this would more

powerfully arrest their attention, and while it was thus awakened,

they heard, says Josephus, the voices, as of a multitude, distinctly

pronouncing the words, “let us depart hence.” And accordingly,

before the period for celebrating this feast returned, the Jewish war

had commenced, and in the space of three years afterward, Jerusalem

was surrounded by the Roman army, the temple converted into a

citadel, and its sacred courts streaming with the blood of human

victims.

7. As the last and most fearful omen, Josephus relates that one Jesus,

the son of Ananus, a rustic of the lower class, during the Feast of

Tabernacles, suddenly exclaimed in the temple, “A voice from the

east a voice from the west—a voice from the four winds—a voice

against Jerusalem and the temple—a voice against bridegrooms

and brides—a voice against the whole people!” These words he

incessantly proclaimed aloud, both day and night, through all the

streets of Jerusalem for seven years and five months together.

He

began at a time (AD 62) when the city was in a state of peace and

was overflowing with prosperity, and he ceased amidst the

horrors of the siege.

This disturber, having excited the attention of the magistracy,

was brought before Albinus the Roman governor, who

commanded that he should be scourged. But the severest stripes

drew from him neither tears nor supplications. As he never thanked

those who relieved him, so neither did he complain of the

injustice

of those who struck him. And no other answer could the governor

obtain to his interrogatories, but his usual denunciation of "Woe,

woe to Jerusalem!" which he still continued to proclaim through

the city, but especially during the festivals, when his manner

became more earnest and the tone of his voice louder. At length,

on the commencement of the siege, he ascended the walls and, in

a more powerful voice than ever, exclaimed, "Woe, woe to this city,

this temple, and this people!" And then, with a presentment of his

own death, added, "Woe, woe to myself!" He had scarcely uttered

these words when a stone from one of the Roman engines killed

him on the spot.

Such are the prodigies related by Josephus, and excepting the first, he

places them in the year immediately preceding the Jewish war. Several of

them are recorded also by Tacitus. Nevertheless, it ought to be observed that they are received by Christian writers cautiously and with various degrees of credit. Those, however, who are most skeptical and who resolve them into natural causes, allow the "superintendence of God to awaken his people by some of these means." Whatever the fact, in this respect, it is clear that they correspond to our Lord's prediction of "fearful sights and great signs from heaven" and ought to be deemed a sufficient answer to the objector who demands whether any such appearances are respectably recorded.

Great Persecution

The next prediction of our Lord related to the persecution of His

disciples: *"They shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake;"* (Luke 21:12)— *"and they shall deliver you up to councils, and in*

the synagogues ye shall be beaten;" (Mark 13:9)— *"and some of You shall they cause to be put to death"* (Luke 21:16). In the very infancy of the Christian Church, these unmerited and unprovoked cruelties began to be inflicted.

Our Lord and his forerunner, John the Baptist, had already been put

to death. The apostles Peter and John were first imprisoned, and then,

together with the other apostles, were scourged before the Jewish council.

Stephen, after confounding the Sanhedrim with his irresistible eloquence,

was stoned to death. Herod Agrippa *"stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church,"* beheaded James the brother of John, and again imprisoned Peter, designing to put him to death also.

Saint Paul pleaded before the Jewish council at Jerusalem and before

Felix the Roman governor, who trembled on the judgment-seat, while the

intrepid prisoner *"reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and*

judgment to come!"

Two years afterward, he was brought before the tribunal of Festus (who

had succeeded Felix in the government). King Agrippa the younger was

present and, while the governor scoffed, ingenuously acknowledged the

force of the apostle's eloquence and, half-convinced, exclaimed, *"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."* Lastly, he pleaded before the emperor Nero at Rome. He was also brought with Silas before the rulers at Philippi, where both of them were scourged and imprisoned. Paul was likewise imprisoned two years in Judea and afterward twice at Rome, each time

for the space of two years. He was scourged by the Jews five times, thrice

beaten with rods, and once stoned.

Paul himself, before his conversion, was also an instrument of fulfilling

the predictions. Saint Luke relates of him that *"he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hating men and women, committed them to prison; when they were put to*

death he gave his voice against them; he punished them oft in every synagogue, and, persecuted them even into strange cities"; and to this agree his own declarations (Acts 26:10-11; see Gal. 1:23).

At length, about two years before the Jewish war, the first general

persecution commenced at the instigation of the emperor Nero, "who," says

Tacitus, "inflicted upon the Christians punishments exquisitely painful."

Multitudes suffered a cruel martyrdom amidst derision and insults, and

among the rest, were the venerable apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

Our Lord continues— *"And ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's* 45

sake" (Matt. 24:9). The hatred from which the above-recited persecutions sprang was not provoked on the part of the Christians by a resistance to established authority or by any violations of law, but was the unavoidable

consequence of their sustaining the name and imitating the

character of

their master. “It was a war,” says Tertullian, “against the very name; to be a Christian was of itself crime enough.” And to the same effect is that expression of Pliny in his letter to Trajan: “I asked them whether they

were Christians; if they confessed it, I asked them a second and a third

time, threatening them with punishment, and those who persevered I

commanded to be led away to death.” It is added, *“Of all nations.”* Whatever animosity or dissensions might subsist between the Gentiles and the Jews on other points, they were at all times ready to unite and co-operate in the persecution of the humble followers of Him who came to be a light to the former and the glory of the latter.

Cold Love

“And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another” (Matt.

24:10). Concerning this fact, the following decisive testimony of Tacitus

may suffice. Speaking of the persecutions of the Christians

under Nero, to

which we have just alluded, he adds, “Several were seized, who confessed,

and by their discovery a great multitude of others were convicted and

barbarously executed.”

Author’s note: Matthew 24:10-12 may also be in reference to the many false teachings of the first century Church, which caused many

believers to step away from love of Christ into aberrant forms of the

faith, such as the Gnostics, Judaizers, and Nicolatians.

As the scholar David Chilton wrote:

We generally think of the apostolic period as a time of

tremendously explosive evangelism and Church growth, a

“golden age” when astounding miracles took place every day.

This common image is substantially correct, but it is flawed by

one glaring omission. We tend to neglect the fact that the early

Church was the scene of *the most dramatic out-break of heresy in world history.*

But the problem of heresy was not limited to any geographical or cultural area. It was widespread and became an increasing subject of apostolic counsel and pastoral oversight as the age progressed. Some heretics taught that the final Resurrection had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:18), while others claimed that resurrection was impossible (1 Cor. 15:12); some taught strange doctrines of asceticism and angel-worship (Col. 28, 18-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-3), while others advocated all kinds of immorality and rebellion in the name of "liberty" (2 Peter 2:1-3, 10-22; Jude 4, 8, 10-13, 16). Again and again the apostles found themselves issuing stern warnings against tolerating false teachers and "false apostles" (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 12-15; Phil. 3:18-19; 1

Tim. 1:3-7; 2 Tim. 4:2-5), for these had been the cause

of massive departures from the faith, and the extent of apostasy

was increasing as the era progressed (1 Tim. 1:19-20, 6:20-21;

2 Tim. 2:16-18, 3:1-9, 13, 4:10, 14-16). One of the last letters

of the New Testament, the Book of Hebrews, was written to

an entire Christian community on the very brink of wholesale

abandonment of Christianity. The Christian Church of the first

generation was not only characterized faith and miracles; it was

also characterized by increasing lawlessness, rebellion, and heresy

from within the Christian community itself-just as Jesus had

foretold in Matthew 24.15

Gospel Preached in the Whole World

"And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end (i.e. of the Jewish dispensation) *come"*

(Matt. 24:14). Of the fulfillment of this prediction of the epistles

of Saint Paul—addressed to the Christians at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica—and those of Peter—to such as resided

in Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia—are monuments now standing. For

neither of these apostles were living when the Jewish war commenced.

Saint Paul, too, in his epistle to the Romans, informs them that *"their faith was spoken of throughout the world;"* [Rom. 1:8] and in that to the Colossians he observes that the *"Gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven."*

(Col. 1:23) Clement, who was a fellow-laborer with the apostle, relates of

him that "he taught the whole world righteousness, travelling from the

East westward to the borders of the ocean." Eusebius says that "the Apostles preached the Gospel in all the world, and that some of them passed beyond the bounds of the ocean, and visited the Britannic isles"; so says Theodoret also.

"It appears," says Bishop Newton, "from the writers of the

history of

the church, that before the destruction of Jerusalem, the Gospel was not

only preached in the Lesser Asia, and Greece, and Italy, the great theatres of action then in the world, but was likewise propagated as far northward as Scythia, as far southward as Ethiopia, as far eastward as Parthia and India, as far westward as Spain and Britain." And Tacitus asserts that "the Christian religion, which arose in Judea, spread over many parts of the world, and extended to Rome itself, where the professors of it, as early as the time of Nero, amounted to a vast multitude," insomuch that their numbers excited the jealousy of the government.

Thus completely was fulfilled a prediction contrary to every

conclusion that could have been grounded on moral probability and to

the accomplishment of which every kind of impediment was incessantly

opposed. The reputed son of a carpenter instructs a few simple fishermen

in a new dispensation destitute of worldly incentives, but full of self-denials, sacrifices, and sufferings, and he tells them that in about forty years it should spread over the entire world. It

spreads accordingly, and in defiance of the bigotry of the Jews and the authority, power, and active opposition of the Gentiles, it is established, within that period, in all the countries into which it penetrates. Can anyone doubt that the prediction and its fulfillment were equally divine?

Author's note: The root word *Oikoumene,* used for "world" in this passage, actually means "inhabited or civilized world," not world as in global planet earth. This is the same Greek word used in Luke 2:1:

"Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a

census be taken of all *the inhabited earth."*

The apostle Paul used this same word later to confirm four times that

the Gospel had reached the whole civilized world as Jesus predicted

(see Rom. 1:8; 10:18; Col 1:5-6,23). Jesus was saying that the gospel

would be preached throughout the Roman Empire before He would

come in judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple. This has been

fulfilled, and it has no further fulfillment in our future. We *are not* waiting for every person to hear the Gospel so that the rapture can

suddenly take place. 16

The Beginning of the War

Such, briefly, is the account that history gives of the several events

and signs that our Lord said would precede the destruction of the Holy

City. No sooner were his predictions regarding the spread of the Gospel

accomplished than a most unaccountable infatuation seized upon the

whole Jewish nation so that they not only provoked, but seemed even to

rush into the midst of those unparalleled calamities that, at length, totally overwhelmed them. In an essay of this sort, it is impossible to enter into a minute detail of the origin and

progress of these evils, but such particulars as illustrate the fulfillment of the remaining part of the prophecy and justify the strong language used shall be presented to the reader.

From the conquest of their country by Pompey, about 60 BC, the Jews

had, on several occasions, manifested a refractory spirit. But after Judas

the Gaulonite and Sadduc the Pharisee taught them that submission to

the Romans would pave the way to a state of abject slavery, this temper

displayed itself with increasing malignity and violence. Rebellious tumults and insurrections became more frequent and alarming, and to these, the mercenary Florus, the Roman governor, contributed a great deal. At

length, Eleazer, son of the High Priest, persuaded those who officiated in

the temple to reject the sacrifices of foreigners and to no longer offer up prayers for them. Thus an insult was thrown upon Caesar, his sacrifice was rejected, and the foundation of the Roman war was laid.

The disturbances among the Jews still continuing, Cestius

Gallus,

president of Syria, marched an army into Judea in order to quell them,

and his career was everywhere marked with blood and desolation. As he

proceeded, he plundered and burned the beautiful city of Zabulon, Joppa,

and all the villages that lay in his way. At Joppa, he killed 8,400 of the

inhabitants. He laid waste the district of Narbatene and, sending an army

into Galilee, killed there 2,000 of the seditious Jews. He then burned the

city of Lydda, and after repulsing the Jews, who made a desperate attempt

against him, he encamped at the distance of about one mile from Jerusalem.

On the fourth day, he entered its gate and burned three

divisions of the

city. He may have, by its capture at that time, put an end to the war, but

instead of pursuing his advantages, through the treacherous persuasions of

his officers, he most unaccountably raised the siege and fled from the city with great haste.

The Jews, however, pursued him as far as Antipatris and, with little loss to themselves, slew nearly 6,000 men of his army. After this disaster had befallen Cestius, the wealthier Jews (says Josephus) forsook Jerusalem as men do a sinking ship. And it is with reason supposed that, on this occasion, many

of the Christians, or converted Jews, who dwelled there—remembering

the warnings or their divine Master, retired to Pella, a place beyond Jordan situated in a mountainous country (Matt. 16:22). There (according to Eusebius, who resided near the spot) they came from Jerusalem and settled

before the war (under Vespasian) began. Other providential opportunities

for escaping afterward occurred, of which, it is probable, those who were

now left behind availed themselves. It is a striking act, one that cannot be contemplated by the pious mind without devout admiration, that history does not record that even one Christian perished in the siege of Jerusalem.

Enduring to the end and faithful to their blessed master, they gave credit to his predictions and escaped the calamity. Thus were fulfilled the words of our Lord, *"He that shall endure unto the end* (i. e. of the scene of this prophecy) *shall be saved"* (Matt. 24:13) from the calamities that would overtake all those who continued obstinate in unbelief.

Time to Flee (Matt. 24:15,21)

Nero, having been informed of the defeat of Cestius, immediately

appointed Vespasian, a man of tried valor, to lead the war against the

Jews. He, assisted by his son, Titus, soon collected at Ptolemais an army

of 60,000 men. From there, in the spring of AD 67, he marched into

Judea, everywhere spreading the most cruel havoc and devastation—the

Roman soldiers, on various occasions, sparing neither infants nor the aged.

For fifteen months, Vespasian proceeded in this sanguinary career, during

which period he reduced all the strong towns of Galilee and the chief of

those in Judea, destroying at least 150,000 of the inhabitants.

Among the terrible calamities, which at this time happened to the Jews,

those that befell them at Joppa, which had been rebuilt, deserve particular notice. Their frequent piracies had provoked the vengeance of Vespasian.

The Jews fled before his army to their ships, but a tempest immediately

arose and pursued those who had set out to sea, and it capsized them. The

rest were dashed, vessel against vessel and against the rocks, in the most

tremendous manner. In this way, many were drowned, some were crushed

by the broken ships, others killed themselves, and those who reached the

shore were slain by the merciless Romans. The sea for a long space was

stained with blood; 4,200 dead bodies were strewn along the coast, and

(dreadful to relate) not an individual survived to report this great calamity at Jerusalem. Such events were foretold by our Lord, when he said, *"There shall be distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring"* (Luke 21:25).

Vespasian, after proceeding as far as Jericho, returned to Caesarea in

order to make preparation for his grand attempt against Jerusalem. While

he was thus employed, he received intelligence of the death of Nero. Not

knowing what the will of the future emperor might be, he prudently

resolved to suspend, for the present, the execution of his design. Thus,

the Almighty gave the Jews a second respite, which continued nearly two

years. But they did not repent of their crimes; neither were they in the least degree repentant, but rather proceeded to acts of still greater enormity. The flame of civil dissension again burst out and with more dreadful fury.

In the heart of Jerusalem, two factions contended for the sovereignty and

raged against each other with ruthless and destructive animosity. A division of one of these factions, having been excluded from the city (*vide* page 26), forcibly entered it during the night. Athirst for blood and inflamed by revenge, they spared neither age, sex, nor infancy, and the morning beheld 8,500 dead bodies lying in the streets of the holy city. They plundered

every house, and having found the chief priests, Anaius and Jesus, they

not only killed them, but also insulted their bodies by casting them forth

unburied. They slaughtered the common people as unfeelingly as if they

had been a herd of the vilest beasts. The nobles they first

imprisoned and

scourged, and when they could not by these means convince them to

join their party, they bestowed death upon them as a favor. Of the higher

classes, 12,000 perished in this manner. And no one dared to shed a tear or utter a groan openly through fear of a similar fate. Death, indeed, was the penalty of the lightest and heaviest accusations, and none escaped through the lowness of their rank or their poverty. Those who fled were intercepted and slain, and their carcasses lay in heaps on all the public roads. Every symptom of pity seemed utterly extinguished and, with it, all respect for authority, both human and divine.

While Jerusalem was a prey to these ferocious and devouring factions,

every part of Judea was scourged and laid waste by bands of robbers and

murderers, who plundered the towns. In the case of resistance, they killed

the inhabitants, not sparing either women or children. Simon, son of Gioras, the commander of one of these bands of 40,000, with some difficulty entered Jerusalem and gave birth to a third faction. Thus the flame of civil discord blazed out again, with

still more destructive fury. The three factions, rendered frantic by drunkenness, rage, and desperation, trampling on heaps of slain people and fought against each other with brutal savageness and

madness. Even those who brought sacrifices to the temple were murdered.

The dead bodies of priests and worshippers, both natives and foreigners,

were heaped together, and a lake of blood stagnated in the sacred courts.

John Levi of Gischala, (For easy reference, his name, **John Levi**, has been put in bold in The Great Tribulation chapter) who headed one of the factions, burnt storehouses full of provisions, and Simon, his great antagonist, who headed another of them, soon afterward followed his example. Thus they cut the very sinews of their own strength. At this critical and alarming conjuncture, intelligence arrived that the Roman army was approaching the city. The Jews were petrified with astonishment and fear; there was

no time for counsel, no hope of pacification, no means of flight: all was

wild disorder and perplexity. Nothing was to be heard but *"the confused noise of the warrior,"* —nothing to be seen but *"garments rolled in blood,"* — nothing to be expected from

the Romans but signal and exemplary

vengeance. A ceaseless cry of combatants was heard day and night, and yet

the lamentations of mourners were still more dreadful. The consternation

and terror that now prevailed induced many inhabitants to desire that a

foreign foe might come, and effect their deliverance. Such was the horrible condition of the place when Titus and his army presented themselves and encamped before Jerusalem.

But, alas—he came not to deliver it from its miseries, but to fulfill the

prediction and vindicate the benevolent warning of our Lord: “When ye

see (he had said to his disciples) the abomination of desolation, spoken

or by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, and Jerusalem

surrounded by armies (or camps) then let those who are in the midst of

Jerusalem depart, and let not those who are in the country enter into her,"

for "then know that the desolation thereof is nigh" (Matthew 24:15-16;

Luke 21:20,1-11). These armies, we do not hesitate to affirm, were those

of the Romans, who now filled the city.

From the time of the Babylonian captivity, idolatry had been held as

an abomination by the Jews. This national aversion was manifested even

against the images of the Roman gods and emperors, which the Roman

armies carried in their standards. We see this, in an earlier time of peace, when Pilate, and afterward Vitellius, at the request of some eminent Jews, avoided marching their forces through Judea because of this very reason.

The desolating disposition that now governed the Roman army, the history

of the Jewish war, and especially the final demolition of the holy city

presents an awful and signal example. Jerusalem was not captured merely,

but with its celebrated temple laid in ruins.

Author's note: By comparing Matthew 24:15-16 with Luke 21:20, we can understand that the abomination that caused the desolation

of Jerusalem was the 20,000 Roman soldiers that lay siege to the city.

Fortunately, Jesus told His followers that when they saw this, they

should flee for the mountains. They did this because they understood

what Jesus had said.

Lest, however, the army of Titus should not be sufficiently designated by

this expression, our Lord adds, *"Wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together"* (Matt. 24:28 ASV). The Jewish state, indeed, at this time, was fitly compared to a carcass. The scepter of Judah—its civil and political authority, the life of its religion, and the glory of its temple—were

departed.

It was, in short, morally and judicially dead. The eagle whose ruling instinct is rapine and murder, fitly represented the fierce and sanguinary temper of 53

the Romans, and perhaps, it might be intended to refer also to the principal image on their ensigns, which, however obnoxious to the Jews, were at length planted in the midst of the holy city and finally on the temple itself.

Author's note: In other words, the emblem of the eagle was upon the Roman shields and banners; also, Jerusalem was pictured as a dead

carcass. As the commentator Barnes wrote:

The words in this verse are proverbial. Vultures and eagles easily

ascertain where dead bodies are, and hasten to devour them. So

with the Roman army. Jerusalem is like a dead and putrid corpse.

Its life is gone, and it is ready to be devoured. The Roman armies

will find it out, as the vultures do a dead carcass, and will come

around it to devour it.17

The day on which Titus encompassed Jerusalem was the feast of the

Passover, and it is worth noting that this was the anniversary of that

memorable period in which the Jews crucified their Messiah! At this

season, multitudes came up from all the surrounding country, and from

distant parts, to keep the festival. How suitable and how kind, then, was the prophetic admonition of our Lord when he said, *"Let not them that are in the countries enter into Jerusalem"* (Luke 21:21).

Author's note: George Peter Holford's book does not address Matthew 24:15-18,20: *"Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath."* I am not sure why he skipped this section, but Jesus was giving very practical advice to His followers about how to stay alive during the AD 70 destruction. We

can tell from this passage that Jesus was speaking of a local destruction

(flee Judea) and a historical setting (not on a Sabbath). The natural

tendency, upon seeing an approaching army, would have been to flee

into Jerusalem for safety. Jesus told them to fight their natural instinct and flee the city.

Because of Jesus' command to flee, His followers were protected. In fact,

as George Peter Holford said six paragraphs previously, "… history does

not record that even one Christian perished in the siege of Jerusalem."

This is confirmed by other well-known commentaries. For example:

It is said that **there is reason to believe that not one Christian perished in the destruction of that city**, God having in various ways secured their escape, so that they fled to Pella, where

they

dwelt when the city was destroyed. —Albert Barnes18

...it is remarked by several interpreters, and which Josephus takes

notice of with surprise, that Cestius Gallus having advanced with

his army to Jerusalem, and besieged it, on a sudden without any

cause, raised the siege, and withdrew his army, when the city might

have been easily taken; by which means a signal was made, and an

opportunity given to the Christians, to make their escape: which

they accordingly did, and went over to Jordan, as Eusebius says,

to a place called Pella; so that when Titus came a few months

after, **there was not a Christian in the city**…—John Gill19

(emphasis added)

I find this historical fact alone to be incredible proof that the first

century believers knew that Jesus was speaking to them about AD 70.

Like Lightening (Matt. 24:27)

Nevertheless, the city was at this time crowded with Jewish strangers

and foreigners from all parts so that the whole nation may be considered

as having been shut up in one prison prior to the execution of the Divine

vengeance. According to Josephus, this event took place suddenly, thus,

not only fulfilling the predictions of our Lord that these calamities should come like the swift-darting lightning *"that cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the West," and "as a snare on all of them (the Jews) who dwelt upon the face of the whole earth"* (Matt. 24:27; Luke 21:35), but justifying, also, his friendly direction that those who fled from the place should use the utmost possible expedition.

Woe to the Pregnant (Matt. 24:19)

On the appearance of the Roman army, the factious Jews united and,

rushing furiously out of the city, repulsed the tenth legion, which was with difficulty preserved. This event caused a short suspension of hostilities and, by opening the gates, gave an opportunity to those who were so disposed to make their escape. Before this they could not have attempted an escape

without interruption because it would have caused suspicion that they

wished to join the Romans.

This success inspired the Jews with confidence, and they resolved to

defend their city to the very uttermost, but it did not prevent the renewal of their civil broils. The faction under Eleazer had dispersed and arranged themselves under the two other leaders, **John Levi** and Simon, and afterward ensued a scene of the most dreadful contention, plunder, and

conflagration. The middle space of the city was burnt, and the wretched

inhabitants were made the prize of the contending parties.

The Romans, at length, gained possession of two of the three

walls

that defended the city, and fear once more united the factions. This

pause to their fury had, however, scarcely begun when famine made its

ghastly appearance in the Jewish army. It had for some time been silently

approaching, and many of the peaceful and the poor had already perished

for want of necessaries. With this new calamity, strange to relate, the madness of the factions again returned, and the city presented a new picture of wretchedness. Impelled by the cravings of hunger, they snatched food out

of each other's hands, and many devoured grain unprepared.

Tortures were inflicted for the discovery of a handful of meal; women

forced food from their husbands and children from their fathers and even

mothers from their infants; while sucking children were wasting away in

their arms, they scrupled not to take away the vital drops that

sustained

them! So justly did our Lord pronounce a woe on *"them that should give suck in those days"* (Matt. 24:19). This dreadful scourge at length drove multitudes of the Jews out of the city into the enemy's camp, where the Romans crucified them in such numbers that, as Josephus relates, space was

wanted for the crosses, and crosses for the captives. When it was discovered that some of them had swallowed gold, the Arabs and Syrians, who were incorporated into the Roman army, impelled by avarice, with unexampled

cruelty, ripped open two thousand of the deserters in one night.

Titus, touched by these calamities, in person entreated the Jews to

surrender, but they answered him with reviling. Exasperated by their

obstinacy and insolence, he resolved to surround the city by a circumvallation (a trench of 39 furlongs in circuit and strengthened with 13 towers), which with astonishing activity was effected by the soldiers in three days. Thus was fulfilled

another of our Lord's predictions, for he had said, while addressing this devoted city, *"Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round about, and keep thee in on every side"* (Luke 19:43).

As no supplies whatever could now enter the walls, the famine rapidly

extended itself and, increasing in horror, devoured whole families. The tops of houses and the recesses of the city were covered with the carcasses of women, children, and aged men. The young men appeared like specters

in the places of public resort and fell down lifeless in the streets. The dead were too numerous to be interred, and many died while burying others.

The public calamity was too great for lamentation. Silence and, as it were, a black and deadly night overspread the city.

But even such a scene could not awe the robbers; they spoiled the tombs

and stripped the dead of their grave clothes with an unfeeling and wild

laughter. They tried the edges of their swords on the carcasses and even

on some that were yet breathing. Simon Goras chose this

melancholy and

awful period to manifest the deep malignity and cruelty of his nature in

the execution of the Priest, Matthias, and his three sons, whom he caused

to be condemned as favorers of the Romans. The father, in consideration

of his having opened the city gates to Simon, begged that he might be

executed previously to his children, but the unfeeling tyrant gave orders

that he should be dispatched in the last place, and in his expiring moments, Simon insultingly asked him whether the Romans could then relieve him.

While the city was in this dismal situation, a Jew named Mannæus fled

to Titus and informed him that from the beginning of the siege (the 14th of April) to the first of July following, 115,880 dead bodies had been carried through one gate only, which he had guarded. This man had been appointed to pay the public allowance for carrying the bodies out, and was, therefore, obliged to register them. Soon after, several respectable

individuals deserted to the Romans and assured Titus that the whole number of the poor who had been cast out at the different gates was not less than 600,000. The

report of these calamities excited pity in the Romans and in a particular

manner affected Titus, who, while surveying the immense number of dead

bodies that were piled raised his hands toward Heaven and, appealing to

the Almighty, solemnly protested that he had not been the cause of these

deplorable calamities. Indeed, the Jews, by their unexampled wickedness,

rebellion, and obstinacy, had brought it down upon their own heads.

After this, Josephus, in the name of Titus, earnestly exhorted **John Levi** and his adherents to surrender, but the insolent rebel returned nothing but reproaches and imprecations, declaring his firm persuasion that Jerusalem, as it was God's own city, could never be taken. Thus he literally fulfilled the declaration

of Micah that the Jews, in their extremity, notwithstanding their crimes, would presumptuously *"lean upon the Lord, and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us"* (Micah 3:11).

Meanwhile the horrors of famine grew still more melancholy and

afflictive. The Jews, for want of food, were at length compelled to eat

their belts, their sandals, the skins of their shields, dried grass, and even the manure of oxen. In the depth or this horrible extremity, a Jewess of noble family, urged by the intolerable cravings of hunger, slew her infant child

and prepared him for a meal. She had actually eaten one half thereof when

the soldiers, allured by the smell of food, threatened her with instant death if she refused to reveal it. Intimidated by this menace, she immediately produced the remains of her son, which petrified them with horror. At the

recital of this melancholy and affecting occurrence, the whole city stood

aghast and poured forth their congratulations on those whom death had

hurried away from such heartrending scenes.

Indeed, humanity at once shudders and sickens at the narration. Nor

can any one of the least sensibility reflect upon the pitiable condition to which the female inhabitants of Jerusalem must have been reduced without experiencing the tenderest emotions of sympathy. Nor can he refrain

from tears while he reads our Savior's pathetic address to the women who

"bewailed him" as he was led to Calvary, wherein he evidently refers to these very calamities: *"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children; for, behold, the days are coming in which they shall say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the breasts that never gave suck"* (Luke 23:29).

Author's note: Jesus' death was horrible, but He wept for the women and children of Jerusalem. In comparison, He was saying

that their deaths would be far worse!

The above melancholy fact was also literally foretold by

Moses: *"The tender and delicate women among barbarian, (said he, addressing Israel) who would not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil....toward her young one....which she shall bear,"*

and "eat for want of all things, secretly, in the siege and straitness wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates" (Deut. 28:56-57). This prediction was partially fulfilled, when Samaria, the capital of the revolted tribes, was besieged by Benhadad, and afterward at Jerusalem, previous to its capture

by Nebuchadnezzar. But its exact and literal fulfillment, in relation to a

lady of rank, who was delicately and voluptuously educated, was reserved

for the period of which we are now speaking.

And it is important to note—as a circumstance that very greatly

enhances the importance of this prophecy—that the history of the world

does not record a parallel instance of unnatural barbarity ever occurring

during the siege of any other place in any other age or nation whatsoever.

Indeed, Josephus himself declared that, if there had not been many credible witnesses of the fact, he would not have recorded it, “because,” as he remarks, “such a shocking violation of nature never having been perpetuated by

any Greek or barbarian,” the insertion of it might have diminished the

credibility of his history.

While famine continued thus to spread its destructive rage through the

city, the Romans, after many ineffectual attempts, at length succeeded in

demolishing part of the inner wall, possessed themselves of the great tower of Antonia, and advanced toward the Temple, which Titus, in a council of war, had determined to preserve as an ornament to the empire and as a

monument of his success. But the Almighty had determined otherwise.

Now, in the revolution of ages, had arrived that fatal day (the 10th of

August) emphatically called *“a day of vengeance”* (Luke

21:21), on which the Temple had formerly been destroyed by the king of Babylon.

Author's note: In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus read a prophecy from Isaiah 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor **and the day of vengeance of our God.…**

This is the passage as it appears in Isaiah, but when Jesus quoted

it, He did not finish the passage. Jesus stopped mid-sentence. The

portion in bold, Jesus excluded. Yet in Luke 21:21, Jesus declared *the day of vengeance*. Jesus started His ministry to the Jews in the favor of the Lord, but then after three and a half years, Jesus finished the prophecy by declaring that *the day of vengeance* was now coming.

A Roman soldier, urged, as he declared, by a divine impulse,

regardless

of the command of Titus, climbed on the shoulders of another and threw

a flaming brand into the golden window of the Temple, which instantly

set the building on fire. The Jews, anxious above all things to save that

sacred edifice in which they superstitiously trusted for security, with a

dreadful outcry, rushed in to extinguish the flames. Titus also, hoping to

extinguish the conflagration, hastened to the spot in his chariot, attended by his principal officers and legions. But in vain he waved his hand and raised his voice, commanding his soldiers to extinguish the fire; so great

was the uproar and confusion that no attention was paid even to him. The

Romans, willfully deaf, instead of extinguishing the flames spread them

wider and wider.

Compelled by the fiercest impulses of rancor and revenge

against the

Jews, they rushed furiously upon them, slaying some with the sword,

trampling others under their feet, or crushing them to death against the

walls. Many, falling amongst the smoking ruins of the porches and galleries, were suffocated. The unarmed poor and even sick people were slaughtered without mercy. Of these unhappy people, numbers were left weltering in

their gore. Multitudes of the dead and dying were heaped round about the

altar, to which they had formerly fled for protection, while the steps that led from it into the outer court were literally deluged with their blood.

Finding it impossible to restrain the impetuosity and cruelty of his

soldiers, the commander-in-chief proceeded, with some of his superior

officers, to take a survey of those parts of the edifice that were

still uninjured by the conflagration. It had not, at that time, reached the inner Temple, which Titus entered and viewed with silent admiration. Struck with the

magnificence of its architecture and the beauty of its decorations, which

even surpassed the report of fame concerning them, and perceiving that

the sanctuary had not yet caught fire, he redoubled his efforts to stop the progress of the flames. He condescended even to entreat his soldiers to exert all their strength and activity for this purpose, and he appointed a

centurion of the guards to punish them if they again disregarded him. But

all was in vain.

The delirious rage of the soldiery knew no bounds. Eager for plunder

and for slaughter, they alike ignored the solicitations and menaces of

their general. Even while he was thus intent upon the preservation of the

sanctuary, one of the soldiers was actually employed in setting fire to the doorposts, which caused the conflagration to

become general. Titus and his officers were now compelled to retire, and none remained to check

the fury of the soldiers or the flames. The Romans, exasperated to the

highest pitch against the Jews, seized every person whom they could find

and, without the least regard to sex, age, or quality, first plundered and then slew them. The old and the young, the common people and the priests, those who surrendered and those who resisted, were equally involved in

this horrible and indiscriminate carnage.

Meanwhile, the Temple continued burning, until at length, vast as was

its size, the flames completely enveloped the whole building. Thus the

extent of the fire impressed the distant spectator with an idea that the

whole city was now on fire. The tumult and disorder that ensued upon this

event, it is impossible (says Josephus) for language to describe. The Roman legions made the most horrid outcries; the rebels, finding themselves exposed to the fury of both fire

and sword, screamed dreadfully; while the

unhappy people, who were pent up between the enemy and the flames,

deplored their situation in the most pitiable complaints. Those on the

hill and those in the city seemed mutually to return the groans of each

other. Such as were expiring through famine, were revived by this hideous

scene and seemed to acquire new spirits to deplore their misfortunes. The

lamentations from the city were re-echoed from the adjacent mountains

and places beyond Jordan. The flames, which enveloped the Temple, were

so violent and impetuous that the lofty hill on which it stood appeared,

even from its deep foundations, as one large body of fire.

Author's note: The incineration of Jerusalem is the blazing furnace referenced in Matthew 13:42 about the wheat and tares (more about

this in the next chapter). For now, it will suffice to notice the amount

of consuming flames in Jerusalem during the destruction.

The blood of the sufferers flowed in proportion to the rage of this

destructive element, and the number of the slain exceeded all calculation.

The ground could not be seen for the dead bodies, over which the

Romans trampled in pursuit of the fugitives, while the crackling noise

of the devouring flames mingled with the clamor of arms, the groans of

the dying, and the shrieks of despair increased the tremendous horror of a

scene to which the pages of history can furnish no parallel.

Among the tragic events that at this time occurred, the following is

more particularly deserving of notice: A false prophet, pretending to be

a divine commission, said that if the people would flee to the Temple,

they should behold signs of their speedy deliverance. Accordingly, about

six thousand people, chiefly women and children, assembled in a gallery

that was yet standing, on the outside of the building. While they waited in anxious expectation of the promised miracle, the Romans, with the most wanton barbarity, set fire to the gallery. Multitudes, rendered frantic by

their horrible situation, threw themselves from the gallery onto the ruins

below and were killed by the fall. Meanwhile, awful to relate, the rest,

without a single exception, perished in the flames. So necessary was our

Lord's second premonition not to give credit to *"false prophets"* who should pretend *"to show great signs and wonders."*

The Temple now presented little more than a heap of ruins. The

Roman

army, as in triumph on the event, came and reared their ensigns against

a fragment of the eastern gate, and with sacrifices of thanksgiving, they

proclaimed the imperial majesty of Titus with every possible demonstration

of joy.

Thus ended the glory and existence of the sacred and venerable Temple,

which from its stupendous size, its massy solidity, and its astonishing

strength, seemed formed to resist the most violent operations of human

force and to stand, like the pyramids, amid the shocks of successive ages

until the final dissolution of the globe.

For five days after the destruction of the Temple, the priests who had

escaped sat, pining with hunger, on the top of one of its broken walls; at

length they came down and humbly asked the pardon of Titus, which,

however, he refused to grant them, saying that, “as the Temple, for the sake of which he would have spared them, was destroyed, it was but fit that its priests should perish also”—whereupon he commanded that they should

be put to death.

The leaders of the factions, who were now pressed on all sides, begged

a conference with Titus, who offered to spare their lives if they would

lay down their arms. To this reasonable condition, however, they refused

to comply. In response, Titus, exasperated by their obstinacy, resolved

that he would hereafter grant no pardon to the insurgents and ordered a

proclamation to be made to this effect. The Romans had now full license

to ravage and destroy. Early the following morning, they set fire to the

castle, the register office, the council chamber, and the palace of the queen Helena, and then they spread themselves throughout the city, slaughtering wherever they came *and burning the dead bodies that were scattered over every street and on the floors of almost every house.*

In the royal palace, where immense treasures were deposited, the seditious

Jews murdered 8,400 of their own people and afterward plundered their

property. Prodigious numbers of deserters, also, who had escaped from the

tyrants and fled into the enemy's camp, were slain.

The soldiers, however, at length, weary of killing and satiated with the

blood that they had spilt, laid down their swords and sought to gratify

avarice. For this purpose, they took the Jews, together with their wives and families, and publicly sold them, like cattle in a

market. A very multitude were exposed to sale, while the purchasers were few in number. And now were fulfilled the words of Moses: *"And ye shall be sold for bond-men and bond-women, and no man shall buy you"* (Deut. 28:68).

The Romans, having become masters of the lower city, set it on fire. The

Jews now fled to the higher, from whence, their pride and insolence yet

unabated, they continued to exasperate their enemies and even appeared

to view the burning of the town below them with tokens of pleasure. In

a short time, however, the walls of the higher city were demolished by

the Roman engines, and the Jews, lately so haughty and presumptuous,

were now trembling and panic-struck, and they fell on their faces and

deplored their own arrogance. Those who were in the towers,

which

were deemed impregnable to human force, were beyond measure afraid,

and they strangely forsook the towers and sought refuge in caverns and

subterraneous passages. In these dismal retreats, no less than 2,000 dead

bodies were afterward found. Thus, as our Lord had predicted, did these

miserable creatures, in effect, say *"to the mountains, 'Fall on us;' and to the rocks, 'Cover us'"* (Luke 23:20).

Since the walls of the city were now completely in the possession of

the Romans, they hoisted their colors upon the towers and burst forth into

the most triumphant acclamations. After this, all annoyance from the Jews

being at an end, the soldiers gave an unbridled license to their fury against the inhabitants. They first plundered and then set fire to the houses. They ranged through the streets with drawn swords in their hands, murdering every Jew whom they met, without distinction, till at length, the bodies

of the dead choked up all the alleys and narrow passes while their blood

literally flowed down the channels of the city in streams. As it drew toward evening, the soldiers exchanged the sword for the torch, and amidst the darkness of this awful night, they set fire to the remaining divisions of the place.

The vial of divine wrath, which had been so long pouring out upon

this devoted city, was now emptying, and Jerusalem, once “a praise in all

the earth” and the subject of a thousand prophecies, which was deprived

of the staff of life, wrapped in flames, and bleeding on every side, finally sunk into utter ruin and desolation. (This memorable siege terminated on the 8th day of September, AD 70. Its duration was nearly five months, the

Romans having invested the city on the 14th day of the preceding April.)

Before their final demolition, however, Titus took a survey of the city

and its fortifications, and while contemplating their impregnable strength, he could not help ascribing his success

to the Almighty himself. “Had not God himself (exclaimed he) aided out operations, and driven the Jews from

their fortresses, it would have been absolutely impossible to have taken

them; for what could men, and the force of engines, have done against such

towers as these?” After this he commanded that the city should be razed to

its foundations, excepting only the three lofty towers Hippocos, Phasael,

and Mariamne, which he suffered to remain as evidences of its strength and

as trophies of his victory. There was left standing, also, a small part of the western wall, as a rampart for a garrison, to keep the surrounding country in subjection.

Titus now gave orders that only those Jews who resisted should be

slain, but the soldiers, equally void of pity and remorse, slew even the sick and the aged. The robbers and seditious were all

punished with death. The tallest and most beautiful youths, together with several of the Jewish nobles, were reserved by Titus to grace his triumphal entry into Rome. After this selection, all above the age of seventeen were sent in chains into Egypt to be employed there as slaves or distributed throughout the empire to be sacrificed as gladiators in the amphitheaters; those who were under this age were exposed to sale.

During the time that these things were transacted, 11,000 Jews, guarded

by one of the generals, named Fronto, were literally starved to death. This melancholy occurrence happened partly through the scarcity of provisions and partly through their own obstinacy and the negligence of the Romans.

Of the Jews destroyed during the siege, Josephus reckons not less than

one million and one hundred thousand, to which must be added above

237,000 who perished in other places and innumerable multitudes who

were swept away by famine and pestilence and of which no calculation

could be made. Not less than 2,000 laid violent hands upon

themselves.

Of the captives, the whole was about 97,000. Of the two great leaders of

the Jews, who had both been made prisoners, **John Levi** was doomed to a dungeon for life, while Simon, together with **John Levi**, in triumph at Rome was scourged, and Simon was put to death as a malefactor.

Author's note: "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened"

(Matt. 24:22). We can see from the number above that if the slaughter

had not been cut short, the Jews could have been completely

annihilated.

In executing the command of Titus regarding the demolition of

Jerusalem, the Roman soldiers not only threw down the buildings, but

even dug up their foundations. They so completely leveled the whole

circuit of the city that a stranger would scarcely have known that it had

ever been inhabited by human beings. Thus was this great city, which only

five months before had been crowded with nearly two million people,

who gloried in its impregnable strength, entirely depopulated and leveled

to the ground. Thus also was our Lord's prediction that her enemies should

"lay her even with the ground," and "should not leave in her one stone upon another" (Luke 19:44) most strikingly and fully accomplished!

This fact is confirmed by Eusebius, who asserts that he himself saw the

city lying in ruins, and Josephus introduces Eleazer as exclaiming, "Where

is our great city, which, it was believed, GOD inhabited? It is altogether

rooted and torn up from its foundations, and the only monument of it that

remains, is the camp of its destroyers pitched amidst its relics!"

Concerning the Temple, our Lord foretold particularly that,

notwithstanding their wonderful dimensions, there should *"not be left one stone upon another that should not be thrown down;"* (Matt. 24:2). Accordingly, it is recorded, in the Talmud and by Maimonides that Terentius Rufus, captain of the army of Titus, absolutely ploughed up the foundations of the Temple with a ploughshare. Now, also, was literally fulfilled that prophecy of Micah— *"Therefore shall Zion, for your sakes (i. e. for your wickedness,) be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the Lord's house as the high places of the forest"* (Micah 3:12).

Author's note: "Today's Western Wall (also called the Wailing Wall) in Jerusalem was never a part of the Temple that existed in Jesus'

day. It was a part of the parapet (protective fort-like wall) that King

Herod had built around the Temple."20

Thus awfully complete and beyond example were the calamities which

befell the Jewish nation and especially the city of Jerusalem. With what

truth, then, did our Lord declare that there should *"be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be!"* (Matt. 24:21).

Author's note: There is no such thing as two fulfillments to a given prophecy. That idea, although popular, is not biblical or sensible. If a prophecy is given, it has one fulfillment. To say it has two fulfillments

just means that one interpretation was incorrect. Not only is double

fulfillment not sensible, but also Jesus went out of His way to declare

that Matthew 24 would only be fulfilled once (see Matt. 24:21). This

removes the possibility of double fulfillment.

Jesus pointed out that this tribulation would be the worst that had

ever happened and the worst that ever would happen, implying that

time would continue after this event, not that this event would

be at

the end of time. Many have taught that this prophecy of Jesus would

happen at the end of time, but that is inconsistent with Jesus saying

that it this event would occur in the middle of the timeline, not at

the end of human history!

Such was the prediction, and the language in which Josephus declares

its fulfillment is an exact counterpart to it: “If the misfortunes,” says he, “of all nations, from the beginning of the world, were compared with those which befell the Jews, they would appear far less in comparison.” And again he says, “No other city ever suffered such things, as no other generation, from the beginning of the world, was ever more fruitful in wickedness.”

These were, indeed, *“the days of vengeance,”* that all things that are written (especially by Moses, Joel, and Daniel) might be fulfilled (Luke 21:2).

Nor were the calamities of this illfated nation even now ended.

There were still other places to subdue, and our Lord had thus predicted,

"wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matt.

24:28). After the destruction of Jerusalem, 1,700 Jews who surrendered

at Macherus were slain, and of fugitives, not less than 3,000 were killed

in the wood of Jardes. Titus, having marched his army to Caesarea, there

with great splendor celebrated the birthday of his brother, Domitian. And

according to the barbarous manner of those times, he punished many Jews

in honor of it. The number who were burned and who fell by fighting

with wild beasts and in mutual combats exceeded 2,500.

At the siege of Massada, Eleazer, the Jewish commander, instigated

the garrison to burn their stores and to destroy first the women and

children and then themselves. Dreadful as it is to relate, this horrid design was executed. They were in number 960. Ten

were chosen to perform the bloody work: The rest sat on the ground and, embracing their wives

and children, stretched out their necks to the sword. One was afterward

appointed to destroy the remaining nine and then himself. The survivor,

when he had looked round to see that all were slain, set fire to the place

and plugged his sword into his own bosom. Nevertheless, two women and

five children successfully concealed themselves and witnessed the whole

transaction. When the Romans advanced to the attack in the morning,

one of the women gave them a distinct account of this melancholy affair

and struck them with amazement at the contempt of death that had been

displayed by the Jews.

After this event, if we exclude the transitory insurrection of the Sicarii

under Jonathan, all opposition on the part of the Jews everywhere ceased.

It was the submission of impotence and despair. The peace that ensued was

the effect of the direst necessity. The rich territory of Judea was converted into a desolate waste. Everywhere ruin and desolation presented itself to the solitary passenger, and a melancholy and death-like silence reigned

over the whole region. The mournful and desolate condition of Judea, at

this time, is exactly described by the prophet Isaiah, in the following of his prophecies: *"The cities were without inhabitant, and the houses without a man, and the land was utterly desolate, and the LORD had removed men far away, and there was a great forsaking in the midst of the land"* (Isa. 6:11-12).

The catastrophe which has now been reviewed cannot but be deemed

one of the most extraordinary that has happened since the

foundation of the world. As it has pleased the Almighty to make it the subject of a very large proportion of the prophecies, both of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, so he has ordained that the particular events which accomplished them

should be recorded with very remarkable precision and by a man most

singularly preserved, qualified, and circumstanced for this purpose.

But with respect to this latter point, he shall speak for himself: “At first,”

says Josephus, “I fought against the Romans, but was afterwards forced

to be present in the Roman camp. At the time I surrendered, Vespasian

and Titus kept me in bonds, but obliged me to attend them continually.

Afterwards I was set at liberty, and accompanied Titus when he came from

Alexandria to the siege of Jerusalem. During this time nothing was done

that escaped my knowledge. What happened in the Roman camp I saw,

and wrote down carefully. As to the information the deserters brought

out of the city, I was the only man that understood it. Afterwards I got

leisure at Rome; and when all my materials were prepared, I procured the

help of one to assist me in writing Greek. Thus I composed the history of

those transactions, and I appealed both to Titus and Vespasian for the truth of it; to which also Julius Archelaus, Herod, and king Agrippa, bore their testimony."

All remark here is needless, but it should not be forgotten that Josephus

was a Jew, obstinately attached to his religion, and that, although he has

circumstantially related every remarkable event of that period, he seems

studiously to have avoided such as had any reference to Jesus Christ,

whose history he sums up in about twelve written lines. No one, therefore,

can reasonably entertain a suspicion that the service he has rendered to

Christianity, by his narrative of the transactions of the Jewish war, was at all the effect of design. The fidelity of Josephus as an historian is, indeed, universally admitted, and Scaliger even affirms that, not only in the affairs of the Jews, but in those of foreign nations also, he deserves more credit than all the Greek and Roman writers put together.

Nor is the peculiar character of Titus, the chief commander in this war,

unworthy of our particular regard. Vespasian, his father, had risen out of

obscurity and was elected emperor, contrary to his avowed inclination,

about the commencement of the conflict. Thus the chief command

devolved upon Titus, the most unlikely man throughout the Roman

armies to become a scourge to Jerusalem. He was eminently distinguished

for his great tenderness and humanity, which he displayed in a variety of

instances during the siege. He repeatedly made pacific overtures to the

Jews and deeply lamented the infatuation that rejected them. In short, he

did everything that a military commander could do to spare them and to

preserve their city and temple, but without effect. Thus was the will of God accomplished by Titus, although contrary to the wish of Titus, and God's predicted interposition to punish his rebellious and apostate people, in this way, was rendered more conspicuously evident.

The history of the Jews, subsequently to the time of Josephus, still

further corroborates the truth of our Savior's prophecies concerning that

oppressed and persecuted people. Into this inquiry, however, the limits of

the present essay will not allow us to enter particularly. Our Lord foretold, generally, that they should *"fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations; and that*

Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24), and these predictions may be regarded as a faithful epitome of the circumstances of the Jews and also of their city, from the period in which it was delivered down even to

our own times.

The Remainder of Matthew 24

For whatever reason, George Peter Holford's book does not address

the rest of Matthew 24 (verses 29-51). I will finish out this chapter by

addressing the remaining verses.

Signs in the Sky

Immediately after the distress of those days: "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

To the first century Jewish listeners, this was a figure of speech from

the Old Testament. This apocalyptic language meant the destruction of a

government or a city. Consider how Joseph dreamed of government as a

sun, moon, and stars (see Gen. 37:9). There are multiple times in the Old

Testament where cities received prophecies of their destruction that were

described in the same terms, such as:

Egypt: *When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light.*

All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD (Ezekiel 32:7-8).

Edom: *All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally*

destroyed (Isaiah 34:4-5).

Babylon: *The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light* (Isaiah 13:10).

The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet (Nahum 1:3).

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"In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight (Amos 8:9).

Also, Habakkuk chapter 3, which is about Babylon coming to destroy

Israel, has much of the same sort of imagery.

So in Matthew 24:29, Jesus' hearers would have known that He was

speaking in Old Testament pictorial language about the destruction of

Jerusalem, not the end of the world.

Coming on the Clouds

Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth [the tribes of the land] *will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory* (Matthew 24:30).

First, we must recognize that this passage does not refer to a global

event. Where it says "earth," the root word is *ge*, which means "land," as in the land of Israel.21 This passage does not use the word *kosmos,* which would refer to the whole planet earth. That is why many translations use the phrase *"tribes of the land"* (inserted above) or, at the very least, include it in the footnotes.

Second, the phrase *"coming on clouds of heaven,"* would have triggered in the first century Jewish listener the Old Testament "cloud-comings"

of God in judgment upon ancient historical people and nations (see Ps.

18:7-15; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Joel 2:1-2; Zeph. 1:4,15). I will discuss the "cloud comings" more in the next chapter, but for now it is simply important to realize that when Jesus talks about the coming of the Son of Man, He is

referring to a coming of judgment, not to His Final Return.

Third, the "sign of the son of man in heaven" is likely a reference to the

sign we read about earlier from Josephus—the sword that hung in the sky

for a year over Jerusalem before AD 70.

Gathering the Elect

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Matthew 24:31).

David Chilton writes of this passage:

Finally, Jesus announced, the result of Jerusalem's destruction will be

Christ's sending forth of His "angels" to gather the elect. Isn't this the

rapture? No. The word angels simply means messengers (cf. James

2:25), regardless of whether their origin is heavenly or earthly; it is

the context which determines whether these are heavenly creatures

being spoken of. The word often means preachers of the Gospel (see

Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; Revelation 1-3). In context, there

is every reason to assume that Jesus is speaking of the worldwide

evangelism and conversion of the nations, which will follow upon

the destruction of Israel.22

After the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish religious system,

God began to gather people into His Kingdom from the four corners of

the earth. A great explanation of this is found in *Victorious Eschatology*.

To many people, this can speak only of the second coming of

Christ at the end of history. But that is not what Jesus said it meant. Only three verses after this, He states, “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” Jesus said that this verse was descriptive of one of the things that would happen within the span of one generation.

How can we understand this? As Jesus sat down on His throne, all authority was given to Him in heaven and earth. Everything changed the moment Jesus came into His kingdom. The blowing of a trumpet meant to the Jews that a royal decree was going out. And what was that decree? It was time to release angels of God to go and gather His people from every nation. At the same time, the disciples of Jesus were commissioned to go and preach the gospel, making disciples of every nation. No longer was the Jewish nation the only people allowed within a covenant relationship with God [this occurred in Acts 10].

Jesus

had become the Good Shepherd who was gathering His sheep

from across the world.23

The Fig Tree

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door (Matthew 24:32-33).

This is a simple parable; in the same way that there are signs that summer

is near, there would be obvious signs that the destruction of Jerusalem was upon them. The most obvious are the first eight signs. There is no deeper meaning about Israel being restored as a nation in this verse. Because Adam covered himself with fig leaves, the fig is typically a negative symbol. Jesus also had previously cursed the fig tree (see Mark 11:12-14).

Also, we can see from the parallel passage in Luke that Jesus' point was

not about the type of tree being a representation, but that trees blossoming in the springtime are parabolic of how obvious these signs of the destruction would be. Notice the generalization of trees. “He told them this parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of God is near’” (Luke

21:29-31).

This Generation

Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:34-35).

To the Jewish people, a generation is forty years. This is visible in

the fact that a “generation” died in the wilderness during the forty-year

journey (see Deut. 29:5). Therefore, Jesus was saying that this prophecy

would happen before forty years had gone by. Jesus said this in AD 30, and

the entirety of His Matthew 24 prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70.

No One Knows the Hour

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the 73

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coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:36-39).

There was no clearer picture of utter destruction than Noah's flood

to the Jewish mind. In the days of the flood, Noah declared a coming

destruction, yet people carried on with normal life and ignored his

warnings. They ignored him right to the last moment, when they were

then destroyed. So it was in AD 70, when Jesus in His *coming* destroyed Jerusalem like the flood. As we discussed earlier, *coming,* as used throughout Matthew 24, indicates God coming in judgment, not the Final Return of Christ (more on this in the next chapter).

One Taken, One Left

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:40-41).

As I discussed in the previous chapter on the rapture, these verses are in

reference to the arbitrary way in which the Romans would seize upon and

kill the Jews in AD 70.

Keep Watch

Therefore **keep watch** *, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must* **be ready** *, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when* **you do not expect him** .

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

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Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, **"My master is staying away a long time,"** *and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he* **does not expect him** *and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 24:42-51).

Verses 42-51 are a connected admonition to keep watch, be ready,

and be expectant. It would have been a temptation for the Christians,

over the course of forty years of waiting, to become complacent and even

unbelieving that Jesus would be coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. In

fact, we find in Second Peter 3:4 that there were even people mocking

Jesus' prophecy saying, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since

our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of

creation." Notice even in this remark that coming is in quotations because

this was not in reference to Jesus' final return, but was the Hebrew figure of speech regarding the judgment of God upon a city.

The servant in the story thought that the master (Jesus) was going to

be gone a long time, but he was totally wrong and was caught by surprise.

The fact is that Jesus has been gone a long time, but this parable illustrates how people during the period of time between AD 30 and AD 70 thought that Jesus' coming to bring judgment was a long way off, and they were

caught by surprise.

In Summary

I know that, for many of you, this has probably been completely new

information. If you need to confirm the accuracy of what you just read,

it is a matter of public record. By reading the works of the historians—

Josephus, Eusebius, and Tacitus—as well as looking up a few Greek root

words in *Vine's Expository Dictionary,* you can confirm everything contained in this chapter.

Also, I recognize that what you just read was incredibly graphic and

heart-wrenching. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the first time I read Holford's work, I had tears streaming down my face while 75

on an airplane. Although graphic, this portion of history is important to

understand as a Christian.

David Chilton has written an excellent summary of this period:

Josephus has left us an eyewitness record of much of the horror of

those years, and especially of the final days in Jerusalem. It was a time

when “the day-time was spent in the shedding of blood, and the night

in fear”; when it was “common to see cities filled with dead bodies”;

when Jews panicked and began indiscriminately killing each other;

when fathers tearfully slaughtered their entire families, in order to

prevent them from receiving worse treatment from the Romans;

when, in the midst of terrible famine, mothers killed, roasted, and

ate their own children (cf. Deuteronomy 28:53); when the whole

land “was all over filled with fire and blood”; when the lakes and

seas turned red, dead bodies floating everywhere, littering the shores,

bloating in the sun, rotting and splitting apart; when the Roman

soldiers captured people attempting to escape and then crucified

them—at the rate of 500 per day.24

Chapter Points

•

In Matthew 24, Jesus prophesied the Great Tribulation, which happened in AD 70 during the destruction of Jerusalem.

•

The events of AD 70 happened within the timeframe that Jesus gave—a generation, or forty years.

• Jesus gave eight signs that would precede the Great Tribulation, and all were fulfilled prior to AD 70.

•

There is no future Great Tribulation. Jesus said that nothing so terrible had ever happened before or would ever happen again.

chapter four

the

end of

the world

In Matthew 24, we found that the disciples asked Jesus three questions: "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3).

As we saw in the previous chapter, in Matthew 24 Jesus prophesied

exactly what would take place in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. But did Jesus answer the other two questions: "What is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Before we can understand the answers Jesus gave, we have to be sure that we understand all three questions.

Question #1: "When will this happen?"

This question is clearly in reference to what Jesus had *just* been saying about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem being left desolate.

Since we have already focused on this in the previous chapter, I will focus more on the second and third questions.

Question #2: "What is the sign of your coming?"

The automatic, almost knee-jerk reaction is to think that the disciples were asking about Jesus' Second Coming. But if we step back and think for a moment, we will remember that the disciples had no idea that Jesus was about to die and be resurrected. It is unrealistic to think that they were 79

asking Jesus about His Second Coming, which would be thousands of

years away. They were still in shock about Jesus chewing out the Pharisees; they weren't suddenly asking Jesus about His Second Coming, but about something else very similar and closely related to the first question.

After Jesus answered their first question in great detail, He responded about the sign of His "coming":

And then the sign of the son of man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth [literally, "tribes of the land"] *will mourn, and they will see* **the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky** *with power and great glory* (Matthew 24:30 NASB).

Keeping in mind that the disciples were not asking about Jesus'

Second Coming, thousands of years later, here is a much more sensible understanding of what they were truly asking. The Bible scholar David Chilton says regarding this passage:

In order to understand the meaning of Jesus' expressions in this

passage, we need to understand the Old Testament much more than

most people do today. Jesus was speaking to an audience that was

intimately familiar with the most obscure details of Old Testament

literature. They had heard the Old Testament read and expounded

countless time throughout their lives, and had memorized lengthy

passages. Biblical imagery and forms of expression had formed their

culture, environment, and vocabulary from earliest infancy, and this had been true for generations. The fact is that when Jesus spoke to His disciples about the fall of Jerusalem, He used prophetic vocabulary.

There was a "language" of prophecy, instantly recognizable to

those

familiar with the Old Testament.1

Knowing the Jewish culture, Jesus answered that they would see "the

SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with

power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). Throughout the Old Testament,

when God was going to bring destruction upon a city or a nation, it was said that He would "come on clouds in the sky." In the Jewish culture, the phrase *"sign of your coming"* had little to do with location and arrival. It was 80

understood to mean, "to come in judgment upon a city or nation," as we will see in the following verses.

Each of the following passages was fulfilled by the destruction of an Old Testament city or nation:

He parted the heavens and came down; **dark clouds** *were under his feet.*

He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.

He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—**the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,** *with hailstones and bolts of lightning* (Psalm 18:9-12).

The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.

He makes the clouds his chariot *and rides on the wings of the wind* (Psalm 104:2-3).

A prophecy against Egypt: See, the LORD rides **on a swift cloud and is coming** *to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear* (Isaiah 19:1).

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, **a day of clouds** *and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come* (Joel 2:1-2).

The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, **a day of clouds** *and blackness* (Zephaniah 1:14-15).

The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and **clouds are the dust of his feet** (Nahum 1:3).

Now that we have some of the Hebraic cultural context, we can

understand that: 1) the disciples were asking about when Jesus would "come" in judgment upon Jerusalem, and 2) Jesus responded with many

signs that would lead up to verse 30, where He would finally "come on clouds" and bring judgment.

Question #3: "What about the end of the age?"

As a modern reader, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that the

disciples were now asking about the end of the world. Yet, there is no sensible explanation for why they would suddenly be over the shock of Jesus rebuking the Pharisees and declaring the destruction of the Temple.

It just doesn't make logical sense, in context, that they would be suddenly switching topics mid-sentence to ask about something completely unrelated. Therefore, it only fits that the disciples were still asking questions about their immediate

thoughts. When they asked about the "end of the age," they were not asking about the *end of the world*.

This is easily confirmed by looking at the original languages. In Greek, the word for "world" is *kosmos*, whereas the word for "age" is *aion*. The disciples asked Jesus about the end of the *aion*. They did not ask about the end of the *kosmos*.

So if they were not asking about the end of the world, what were

they asking Jesus about? It is clear from the context that Jesus was going to come and bring destruction to Jerusalem and the Temple; therefore, if the Temple was destroyed, it would mean the end of sacrifice. No temple would mean no more sacrifice, which would mean no more priesthood

and rituals. This would be the end of an age or, as we might say it, *the end of an era*. The disciples were asking when *the end of the Age of Moses,* which Jesus had just prophesied, would happen.

Throughout the New Testament, there is much written about the Age

of Moses, which was about to come to an end, but there is very little said about the end of the whole world. Realizing that the Israelites had lived as the chosen people with exclusive access to God for approximately 4,000

years, we can understand that this was to be the single largest event to ever occur in national history. Also, it is interesting to note that Jesus was 82

the only prophet prophesying that He was going to come on the clouds to destroy Jerusalem and that the Age of Moses was about to end. By

comparison, all the false prophets were declaring that they had come to save Israel from the Roman rule.

Because many have taught that Jesus was talking about the end of the world, the understanding of many other verses has also been distorted. By realizing that the disciples were asking about the end of the Age of Moses, we can clearly understand many verses that are scattered throughout the New Testament. These verses are about the end of the Age of Moses and the destruction in AD 70; they are not about the end of the world. For example:

...You [the twelve] *will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes* (Matthew 10:23).

...You [the high priest] *will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven* (Matthew 26:64).

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep... the night is far spent, the day is at hand... (Romans 13:11-12).

…The form of this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:31 NASB).

On [us] *… the ends of the ages have come* (1 Corinthians 10:11 NASB).

…The Lord is at hand (Philippians 4:5 NKJV).

…The coming of the Lord is at hand….Behold, the Judge is standing at the door (James 5:8-9 NKJV).

The end of all things is at hand… (1 Peter 4:7 NKJV).

…It is the last hour… we know that it is the last hour (1 John 2:18 NKJV).

It is true that Jesus will return in bodily form to resurrect the dead and bring final judgment. Yet, most of the "end of the age" language used in 83

the New Testament was in reference to the biggest thing ever in Jewish history—which was about to happen. The first century Jews were not

focused on the end of the planet; that is a modern obsession that had almost no relevance to them.

The End of the Age

To prove this, let's look at more passages that discuss the end of the age and, from them, glean the truth of what this phrase meant to first century Christians.

Jesus' famous words in Matthew 28 are one of the most well-known

passages about the end of the age: "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20 NKJV). In this reference to the "end of the age," Jesus was *not saying* that He would only be with them until AD 70.

He specified that He would be with them *always*. But the disciples of the first century wouldn't have been focused on whether Jesus would be with His followers 2,000 years later. They would have been more focused on whether He would be *with them* when the end of the age came because Jesus' description in Matthew 24 of the way in which the end of the age would come was quite terrifying.

Another interesting and relevant quote from Jesus is found in Matthew 12.

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come (Matthew 12:32).

This verse is fascinating because Jesus was speaking during

the Age of Moses, saying that blaspheming the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven in the Age of Moses or in the coming age—the Kingdom Age in which we are currently living.

Jesus also told a parable about the end of the age that many have wrongly interpreted to be about the end of the world.

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted 84

and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 'An enemy did this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn" (Matthew 13:24-30).

After Jesus shared this parable, His disciples were confused and asked Him to explain it to them. Now that we have the context, let's examine Jesus' explanation of the parable.

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples

came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. **The harvest is the end of the age,** *and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at* **the end of the age.**

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into **the blazing furnace,** *where there will be* **weeping and gnashing of teeth"** (Matthew 13:36-42).

It is clear from the original manuscripts that the end of the age (*aion*) is in reference to the end of the Age of Moses, not the end of the planet Earth. Yet, with a surface reading of this passage, it is easy to come to the conclusion that it is about the Final Judgment.

If we look closer, though, we can see that the phrase **blazing furnace** is not a reference to any of the normal terms which refer to eternal punishment, such as:

• Gehenna

• Sheol

• Hades

• The Lake of Fire

None of the Greek wording in this passage points to the Final Judgment.

This is not about Hell and the Final Judgment.

Jesus describes the blazing furnace as a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. If this parable were about Hell and the Final Judgment, Jesus would have used His more normal descriptions, which include everlasting punishment (such as in Matt. 18:8; 25:46; Jude 7; 2 Thess. 1:9). Rather, here Jesus simply describes the emotional pain involved. This creates a clear demarcation between the blazing furnace and the places of eternal punishment mentioned above. They are not the same.

It is more sensible to understand this passage in its historical context. During the AD 70 destruction, Jerusalem literally became as a great “blazing furnace”

that incinerated the bodies of thousands upon thousands of both the living and the dead. Jerusalem was consumed with the sounds of weeping and the painful gnashing of teeth in anguish—as Holford’s book, quoted in the last chapter, so vividly described.

Clearly, if you were to put yourself in the mind of a first century Christian living in Israel, you would understand that you only have forty years to spread the Gospel before Jesus comes on clouds to destroy Jerusalem and you would have to flee to the mountains. You would use language in your letters speaking of it being *the last hour* and the *latter times,* and you would say things like, *He is standing at the door, and the Lord is at hand and the day is about to come.* We must choose to consciously stop taking what the New Testament authors meant for those living between AD 30 and AD 70 and applying it to our future.

Many false doctrines have been created by not reading the Bible according to its historical and cultural context. Two clear examples that we will look at next are the wrong expectations of an apostasy of the Church and coming false teachers.

Apostasy

One major false teaching that currently exists is the concept of a future "fallen apostate Church." Some have even tried to force Church history into seven time periods and line them up with the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. These individuals say that the modern Church is the church of 86

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Laodicea, which Jesus threatened to vomit out of His mouth. Not only is this concept deeply incorrect, but it also contradicts everything Jesus said about His Kingdom growing (see Matt. 13:31-33).

Here is one of the verses that is used to substantiate this teaching.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come **a falling away first,** *and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition* (2 Thessalonians 2:3 KJV).

This verse has been used extensively in the last fifty years to claim that the majority of the Church is not actually walking with God. Those who teach this say that the true Church is merely a remnant of those who claim to be the Church. But it is an error to drag the Old Testament remnant idea into the New Testament, where it does not belong (I will discuss this more in a later chapter). So this verse should not be used to substantiate that false doctrine. Also, it is important to note that this verse is about a rebellious person called the man of sin, not about the Church falling apart. This verse is better understood in the NIV translation: *Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until* **the rebellion occurs** *and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction* (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The rebellion occurred in the first century under John Levi, as we saw in the previous chapter. We are not looking for a future "falling away" to fulfill this passage.

False Teachers

Similar to the idea of the apostate Church is the belief that there will be many false teachers before the return of Christ. This has

created a great excuse for finger-pointing in the Body of Christ and empowers a suspicious and fearful attitude toward others. As you may guess, however, the verses that are used to support this teaching were, in fact, referring to the time leading up to AD 70, not to our own day. For example: *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.*

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

The "sound doctrine" would have been that judgment was coming

to Jerusalem, but the "itching ears" wanted to hear from false prophets and teachers that declared God's protection from destruction. This provided a stage for a major rise in false prophets and teachers between AD 30 and AD 70.

Now look at this verse:

Now the Spirit expressly says that **in latter times** *some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons* (1 Timothy 4:1 NKJV).

These latter times referred to by Paul were not 2,000 years later. This was in reference to the false teachers and false prophets of the first century (the same is true of Second Timothy 3). We must choose to interpret Scripture correctly and not pull verses out of their intended context to fit our personal agenda.

Here is another passage that many have misunderstood:

"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11).

This is not a New Testament prophecy. This was fulfilled by the 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the start of the New Testament, where there is no recorded spoken word from God.

Now look at these two passages, the first from the apostle Paul and the second from Jesus:

I know that **after I leave,** [not 2,000 years later] *savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears* (Act 20:29-31).

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? **Will he keep putting them off?** *I tell you,* **he will see that they get justice, and quickly.** *However, when the Son of Man* **comes** *, will he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:7-8) Will He keep putting them off? No, Jesus will not. He will see that they get justice quickly. Remember that the word *comes* is a reference to the first century destruction of Jerusalem, not to events 2,000 years later. This was perfectly fulfilled; they got justice and quickly!

Chapter Points

- There is no separation in the three questions that the disciples asked Jesus.
- There is no separation in the answers that Jesus gave His disciples.
- When the New Testament mentions the end of the age, it is referring to the end of the Age of Moses, not the end of the world.
- The idea of the seven churches of Revelation corresponding with seven periods in Church history has no foundation.
- The Kingdom of God is growing, and we are not looking for a future “falling away” of the Church.

•

The passages that speak of false teachers, teachings, and prophets were all fulfilled in the first century. These have no *prophetic* significance for the modern day, although they have *practical* significance. We still need to use discernment regarding teaching and judge the fruit, but we are not looking for a future apostasy.

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chapter five

melting

elements

For almost two decades, I believed that one day in the future the whole

earth would be consumed by fire when Jesus returned. Considering

that God had promised Noah that He wouldn't use water to destroy the

earth (see Gen. 9:11), I figured He would be able to destroy the earth with fire and still keep His promise to Noah. This was my understanding of

Second Peter 3:5-7:

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth [Ge] *are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

Like many others, I had never looked very closely at the context of this

passage and had simply arrived at my conclusion: Peter was describing God's crafty way around His promise to Noah by destroying earth without using

water. Now that I have studied this passage, it is humorous to look back at what I used to think. It makes me wonder sometimes how wrong I might still be in other areas I haven't studied yet.

Awaiting His Coming

Here I would like to show you the context of Second Peter 3, starting with

verse one.

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles (2 Peter 3:1-2).

In this letter, Peter is going to remind his readers about some specific words and commands given from (1) the Old Testament, (2) Jesus, and (3) the apostles.

He hasn't told us yet what He is referring to, but he will in the

next verses.

*Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "***Where is this 'coming'**

he promised? *Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation"* (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Peter has now clarified that he is referring to Jesus' promise that He would

"come," which as we learned previously, is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. The historical context of Peter's writing is between AD 30 and AD

70. At that time, the Jews were bringing tremendous persecution upon the

Christians. The Christians were clinging to the hope of Jesus' words in Matthew 24 that judgment was about to come upon Jerusalem and the religious system.

As we see in the above passage, the Christians were being mocked for believing that Jesus was actually coming to bring judgment upon the Temple.

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that

time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth [Ge] *are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly* (2 Peter 3:5-7).

Peter is now responding to the mocker's statements by showing how God

has judged before and affirming that God will judge again.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day (2 Peter 3:8).

If there is one passage that is abused more than almost any other, it is 2 Peter 92

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3:8. Countless people have used this passage to make prophetic mathematics

work in their wild end-time theories. Yet Peter is simply quoting from Psalm 90:4; he was not proposing a formula by which to figure out the end of the

world. "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4).

Peter is *not* saying that to God time is nebulous or relative. Peter is quoting from a Psalm, which speaks of how time is of little value or importance to an infinite, eternal God. Time is real

to God, but not in the same way as it is for us.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish,

but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

In Matthew 24:34, Jesus said His words would come to pass within a

generation. Here is a simple equation for the timeframe of his prophecy: AD

30 + forty-year generation = AD 70. Jesus could have come back in AD 50,

midway through the prophesied generation, but He chose to wait until the last moment of His forty-year prophecy so that people would have more time to

repent.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; **the elements will be destroyed** *by fire… (* 2 Peter 3:10).

The phrase *the elements will be destroyed* is tremendously significant in understanding this whole chapter. Since it appears again in the passage, I will address this phrase further

in a moment.

...and the **earth** ... (2 Peter 3:10).

The word for "earth" used here in the Greek is *ge*, not *kosmos*. Ge is the word for "land," whereas *kosmos* is the word for "the whole world." This is not about the destruction of the planet earth (*kosmos*), but it is about the destruction of the land of Israel (*ge*).

...and **everything done in it** *will be laid bare* (2 Peter 3:10).

Since the root-word *ge* is used, this verse is clearly saying, "everything done in it [in the land] will be laid bare." This is exactly what took place at the AD 70 destruction. The sacrifices were stopped, the priesthood was killed, the Temple was destroyed, and the buildings were leveled to the ground. Jerusalem was laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, *what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming*... (2 Peter 3:11-12).

The question Peter poses to his readers is: "Considering that this great

wrath is about to be poured out upon the religious system, how should one

live?" Peter encourages his readers to live godly lives as they await and hasten the arrival of the Day of the Lord. This is not an isolated reference; throughout the New Testament, we read that the first-century believers were eagerly

awaiting the *coming* of the Lord (see 1 Cor. 1:6-8; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:9-10).

One element of waiting for Jesus' coming was *hastening it*, and Jesus instructed His disciples concerning how they were to hasten His arrival. He told them that if they petitioned God for justice, God would certainly hear their prayers and avenge them quickly by means of the coming of the Son of

Man.

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8)

The first century Church under persecution cried out to God *day and*

night. This was a part of the hastening process.

The Elements

Peter continued his letter, saying:

...That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and **the elements** *will melt in the heat* (2 Peter 3:12).

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The Greek word Peter uses for "elements" is *stoicheion*. This word appears only five other times in the New Testament (see Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20; Heb.

5:12), and in each occurrence, it refers to the basic principles of the Mosaic Law.

In Galatians, Paul referred twice to these elements. First, he stated that the Jews had been under the elements of the world until the fullness of time had come; then, he asked his readers why they would want to return to these

elements.

So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental

spiritual forces of the world (Galatians 4:3).

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by

God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly **elements,** *to which you desire again to be in bondage?* (Galatians 4:9 NKJV)

In context, these elements concerned rituals and observances of feast days

(see Gal. 4:9-10). Thus, Paul was trying to keep his readers from coming under the principles of the Law again (see Gal. 5:1).

In Colossians, Paul also referred twice to these elements, warning his

readers not to let anyone hold them captive to the elements of the world, for by accepting Christ, they had died to these elements; therefore, they did not need to submit to such things (see Col. 2:8,20-22).

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the **elemental** *spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ* (Colossians 2:8).

Since you died with Christ to the **elemental** *spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?* **These rules** *, which have to do with things that are* **all destined to perish** *with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings* (Colossians 2:20-22).

As the context of this letter makes clear, Paul was encouraging his readers not to let anyone judge them for failing to observe feast days, festivals, and 95

Sabbaths because those things merely foreshadowed the person and work

of Christ (see Col. 2:16). So again, we find that the elements of the world referred to the principles of Judaism—and Paul went on to remind his readers that these rules were destined to perish!

The writer of Hebrews also commented on these elements saying,

By this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the **elementary** [stoicheion] **truths** [logion] *of God's word all over again.*

You need milk, not solid food (Hebrews 5:12).

The Greek word the writer used for "truths" is *logion*, a word used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the Old Covenant (see Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2).

In context, the author was expressing regret that he had to teach his Jewish readers how the basics of the Law foreshadowed the work of Christ in order

to implore them to leave those principles for the sake of a new and better

covenant (see Heb. 5:12-14; 6:1; 7:22; 10:1). The Apostle Peter was not talking about the destruction of the elements as in the elements of the periodic table.

He was writing of the destruction of the elements of Judaism.

New Heaven and New Earth

In the next verse of Second Peter 3, Peter makes an important shift:

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

As you will remember, Peter started this chapter by saying, "I want you to

recall the words spoken in the past by *the holy prophets* and the command given by our *Lord and Savior* through your *apostles*" (2 Pet. 3:2). This is important because, in verses 3-12, Peter has been speaking of the prophecy from Jesus in Matthew 24.

Up until this point, Peter has not yet quoted from the *holy prophets* of old.

In verse 13, Peter makes a departure from the words of the

apostles (Paul and the destruction of the Jewish elements) and from the words of Jesus (about

the destruction of the land). And Peter begins to quote from the *holy prophets* of old:

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For, behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Isaiah 65:17 NASB).

"For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD... (Isaiah 66:22 NKJV).

Like Peter and the holy prophets, we also are looking forward to the new

heavens and the new earth (just as John also saw it in Revelation 21:1).

Peter then continues,

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, **just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you** *with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way* **in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters.** *His letters*

contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:14-16).

As Peter concluded his prophecy concerning the burning of the elements

of the world, he declared that he was writing of the same things of which Paul wrote. As we have seen, when Paul wrote concerning the elements of the

world, he was referring to the basic principles of the Old Covenant. Thus, our understanding that Peter was speaking of the passing of *the elements of Judaism* is further confirmed.

In Conclusion

We can learn two important points from this passage in Second Peter. First, we see that Peter was not speaking about the whole world being destroyed by fire. The word *elements* was, rather, a reference to the Mosaic Law. The Law was passing away. Second, by doing our research, we discover that not one

verse in the New Testament predicts the destruction of the *kosmos*, of planet earth. When the New Testament speaks of the destruction of the world, it uses the root word *ge*, which means "land," not globe. There is not one verse that predicts the destruction of the globe.

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Chapter Points

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In Second Peter 3, Peter reminds his readers of the words of Jesus

in Matthew, Paul's teachings, and Old Testament prophecy—

specifically in relation to the promised destruction of Jerusalem.

•

Jesus came in judgment on Jerusalem at the end of the prophesied

generation (forty years) to give people as much time as possible

to repent.

•

The word translated "earth" here is *ge*, meaning "land," not the

planet Earth. This prophecy is about the destruction of the land

of Israel, not the whole world.

•

Jesus said the early believers could “hasten” His coming by petitioning Him for justice.

•

The phrase “the elements” refers to the Jewish Law, not to the periodic table elements, which is confirmed by many other New Testament passages.

•

At the end of this passage, Peter refers to the prophets’ words about the new Heaven and new earth—something that we are yet looking forward to.

chapter six

the

antichrist

In my life, I have watched the meteoric rise of credit cards, cell phones, and the Internet. I have heard the preachers, authors, and bomb shelter builders tell me that modern technology is paving the way for the antichrist to rule the world with his "mark of the beast" like in no other age. From radio frequency chips implanted under the skin to national identification numbers, there are a lot of concerns in the air.

In fact, I have heard these concerns for a long, long time. For a few years leading up to Y2K, I listened to my local Calvary Chapel radio station every day. Many of my friend's parents stocked their basements with food and other supplies in preparation for the "grid" going down. I always thought that the best currency to stock up on for the coming apocalypse would be toilet paper, but nobody took my theory seriously. Now, over a decade later, my friend's parents still have 55-gallon drums of wheat in their basement, which are finally expiring.

The idea that society is heading toward complete corruption and a one-world leader has been around a long time, and many dictators have tried to make this a reality. Yet it begs the question, what does the Bible say about this "antichrist"?

The idea of the antichrist, as it is commonly taught, comes primarily from a compilation of four different passages of Scripture. Therefore, in this chapter, I will examine these four passages of Scripture, and my intention is to show you that there is no future *one-world ruler* prophesied in the Bible.

Passage #1: 1 and 2 John

To begin, we must realize that the term *antichrist* does not appear in the Book of Revelation at all. A simple search of a *Strong's Concordance* will reveal that the term *antichrist* is only used in four passages in the Bible, three times in First John and once in Second John.

To understand the term *antichrist*, we must first understand the context of John's writings.1 During the time of the first century Church, there was a cult system called Gnosticism. They taught that the spirit was good and the physical/emotional realms were evil; therefore, Jesus could not have come to earth in an actual physical body.2 They taught that Jesus came to earth only as an ethereal spirit being. This teaching is heretical because it negates the truth of Jesus shedding His human blood for the remission of sin. The Gnostics gained so many followers in the early Church (about a third of the first century Church) that John wrote his first epistle in response to their heresy.

That which was from the beginning, **which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched***—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we* **have seen and heard***, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ* (1 John 1:1-3).

John was writing to prove, as an eyewitness, that Jesus was not an ethereal ghost, but a real physical person. John was the disciple who leaned his head upon Jesus' chest, and he knew that Jesus was not merely a spirit. He even remarked in John 1:14, "The Word *became flesh* and made his dwelling among us. *We have seen* his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." The apostle's writings were very focused on those who had fallen into the first century Gnostic thinking. John went on, in his epistle, to say that those who claimed Jesus didn't have a physical body were actually *antichrist.*

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Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that **acknowledges that Jesus**

Christ has come in the flesh *is from God,* **but every spirit that does not acknowledge** *Jesus is not from God*. **This is the spirit of the antichrist,** *which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world* (1 John 4:1-3).

Many deceivers, **who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh,** *have gone out into the world*. **Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist** (2 John 1:7).

Any person who denies that Jesus came in the flesh, which is what the Gnostics of the first century were doing, is operating in the spirit of antichrist.

The antichrist isn't a person; it is a belief system, specifically, Gnosticism.

John further mentions the antichrist spirit as something that the early believers had already heard of:

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming… (1 John 2:18 NASB).

First, it is important to note that certain Bible translations have inserted a word that is not in the Greek manuscripts; this has led to much confusion.

These translations capitalize the word *antichrist* in First John 2:18. The reason for the capitalization is because the translators inserted the word *the* before the word *antichrist,* thus making *antichrist* into a proper noun, which requires capitalization.

The early Church had heard that antichrist (false teaching) was coming, but they had not heard that the Antichrist (a one-world ruler) was coming. The insertion of *the* and the capitalization of *Antichrist* was added 1500 years later by the translators. As I noted in Chapter 1, Martin Luther and the Protestants wanted to be able to point the condemning finger at the Catholic church, and by making antichrist into a proper noun, they could easily identify her as being such.

With that understanding, we can discern the true meaning of John's letter.

John said that "as you have heard that antichrist is coming…." The important 101

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question is, when had the readers of John's letter heard this message of an impending antichrist? Considering that the term *antichrist* refers to Gnosticism (false teachers), it makes sense that John would be referencing what Jesus warned in Matthew 24—the coming of false teachers. The Gnosticism that John addressed in First and Second John was the false teaching that Jesus predicted.

The verse continues, "…even now many antichrists have come…" (1 John

2:18). In other words, many false teachings had already come: Gnosticism, the Nicolatian heresy, and the Judiazers' heresy

(see Rev. 2:6,9,15; 3:9). John finishes this verse with, "This is how we know it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).

This again shows that John was referring to Jesus' prediction in Matthew 24

that one sign of the coming destruction of Jerusalem would be false teachers.

So the appearance of Gnostic heresy was a sign of it being *the last hour* before the destruction of Jerusalem.

John continued,

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (1 John 2:19).

The apostle John, writing before the AD 70 destruction, pointed to the fact that many had left the true Church and that this was proof that they were in the last hours of Jesus' prophecy from Matthew 24 being fulfilled.

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is **whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist** *—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the*

Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also (1 John 2:20-23).

John writes that those *who deny that Jesus is the Christ* are antichrist, which is a much broader definition than one individual being a future one-world ruler. Clearly, we can see that John was writing about Gnosticism in the first 102

century Church. He never refers to a future one-world ruler possessed by satan himself. *Antichrist* does not refer to a one-world government ruler, but to ancient Gnosticism.

Let's look at our next passage.

Passage #2: Daniel 9:24-27

Many modern end-time teachers use Daniel 9 to glean much of their

information about the evil one-world government ruler that they believe is in our future. Yet there is *no mention* of an antichrist figure in Daniel 9. The commentaries written before the 1830s agree that this passage is about Jesus, not the antichrist. As the famous commentator Matthew Henry says of Daniel 9, "We have here the answer that was immediately sent to Daniel's prayer, and it is a very memorable one, as it contains **the most illustrious prediction of Christ and gospel-grace that is extant in all the Old Testament**."3

But for the sake of conjecture, supposing that we believe that Daniel 9

is about a satan-possessed antichrist figure, let's look at what would need to happen in the future, according to Daniel 9. The requirements involved for this system to work are as follows: •

The Temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt on the same exact spot as the

current Dome of the Rock, which is currently a Muslim mosque.

•

A functional priesthood must be reinstated.

•

Animal sacrifice must be reinstituted in this rebuilt Temple.

•

The prophecies regarding the "Anointed one" in Daniel 9 have to be

drastically changed in order to fit the antichrist (instead of Christ).

•

The antichrist must make a covenant with the whole world for three

and a half years.

•

The antichrist will enter the temple and sit down as God and end

animal sacrifice.

It is clear from a simple reading of Daniel 9:24-27 and a basic understanding of history that this passage has been fulfilled by Christ. There is no antichrist in Daniel 9. I will address this passage in greater detail in a coming chapter.

Passage #3: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Concerning **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him,** *we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by*

letter—**asserting that the day of the Lord has already come** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).

In an earlier chapter, we have seen that the phrase, *"the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* is in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. Also, we saw that the *"gathering"* mentioned here is a reference to the Christians fleeing Judea to the mountains and being gathered and protected by the Lord during the destruction of Jerusalem. From these starting points, next we will see that the Thessalonians apparently thought that the *coming* had already happened.

The fact that the Thessalonians could think such a thing proves that

they were expecting a local event to occur in Jerusalem, not a global apocalypse. This letter to the Thessalonians was written in approximately AD 50, and Thessalonica is hundreds of miles from Jerusalem. We can see from this letter that they were under the impression that the *coming* of Christ had already happened, which means they thought Jerusalem had been destroyed. In response to this, Paul writes this:

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until **the rebellion occurs** *and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction* (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians that the destruction of Jerusalem would not come until the rebellion had occurred and

the leader of the rebellion, the "man of lawlessness," was revealed. He then told them what types of things this rebel leader would do.

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

This is a clear indicator of who could and could not be the "man of sin."

For example, this would have to be a person who would have physically been able to stand in the Temple and proclaim himself God. This would require a person who was living before AD 70, when the Temple was

destroyed, because at no time since AD 70 has there been a Temple for the man of sin to stand in. Also, there is no New Testament verse, *not even one,* that predicts a rebuilt Jewish Temple. So the Temple had to be standing for the man of lawlessness to stand in it.

When we read in Chapter 3 about the destruction of Jerusalem, we

met a few characters involved in that story. The main rebel *who*

caused the destruction of Jerusalem was John Levi of Gischala. I believe that he clearly fits the description of the man of lawlessness in this passage.

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote of how John Levi was a selfish,

unscrupulous man with persuasive powers who convinced many that he

was sent by God to liberate them. Further, John Levi took over the Temple, set himself up in the Temple as the Jewish savior (as God), looted the vessels of the Temple for their gold, and caused the daily animal sacrifices to cease.

He also plundered the people, even burning their storehouses of food and causing the great famine that starved tens of thousands to death, and he enlisted aid from the Idumeans, who killed 8,500 of the Jews, including the priests. (Second Thessalonians 2:9 speaks of counterfeit signs, the main one being that John Levi declared that he was God and would deliver the people from the Romans. He commanded the storehouses of food to

be burned in faith that He would miraculously deliver them from their enemies. Instead they starved to death.)

Even when the Roman General Titus pleaded that John Levi leave the

Temple, so that it wouldn't be destroyed in battle, John flatly refused. John Levi caused the Temple to be destroyed; without him, the Temple might have been spared, considering that it was one of the wonders of the ancient world.4

Paul goes on to explain more about the man of lawlessness:

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

And now you know what is holding him back [Ananus]*, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is* 105

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already at work; but **the one who now holds it back** [Ananus] *will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way* (2 Thessalonians 2:5-7).

John was not only a rebel leader, but also a false messiah. He claimed godhood by taking over the temple, and the only person who stood in his way was the Jewish Chief Priest, Ananus. Ananus had tremendous diplomatic skills and had been able to negotiate peace treaties with Rome many times before.

Ananus was literally able to *restrain* the full-scale rebellion that John Levi was aiming to accomplish.5 That is why Paul referred to the one who restrained, who must be taken out of the way.

Even Josephus noted that once Ananus (*the one who restrains*) was killed, then the destruction of Jerusalem began: I should not mistake if I said that the death of Ananus was *the beginning of the destruction of the city,* and that from this very day may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs.6

As Josephus recorded, this happened exactly as the apostle Paul laid out for the Thessalonians: *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and* **destroy by the splendor of his coming** (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

When the "coming of the Lord" occurred with the destruction of Jerusalem, John Levi was finally dealt with. He was the cause of the rebellion, which led to the attack by the Romans, which led to John burning all the storehouses of food and declaring that they didn't need the food because he was God and would provide for them! Then he set up his militia in the Temple, murdered all the priests, and caused not only all of Jerusalem to be destroyed, but even the temple, which the Romans didn't want to harm. John Levi was so evil it boggles the mind!

A Final Thought

When we think about this passage from the perspective of its original recipients, it does not make sense that Paul would have written a mysterious 106

passage that would be of no value to his original readers and would have no value until 2,000 years in the future.

The "secret power of iniquity" was already in operation in the first century; this culminated in the AD 70 judgment of iniquity (see 2 Thess. 2:7). The "secret power of iniquity" hasn't been in operation for 2,000 years waiting for *our* future. Instead, Paul was clearly talking about an evil person in the first century and another person who was restraining this evil. John Levi and Ananus fulfill this passage.

Passage #4: The Beast of Revelation 13 and 17

Revelation 13 speaks of the Beast, which the majority of Church history has taught represents the Roman Empire of the first century. Revelation 17

speaks of another beast, which Church history has taught represents the Roman Emperor Nero. I agree that these are both excellent and sensible explanations.

Revelation 17:10—The Emperor Nero

They are also seven kings. **Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come;** *but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while* (Revelation 17:10).

This passage, which is speaking of the line of rulers in Rome,

tells us exactly how many rulers had already come, which one was currently in power, and that the next one would only last a short while. Take a look at how that perfectly fits with Nero and the Roman Empire of the first century. The rule of the first seven Roman Emperor's are as follows: 1. Julius Caesar (49–44 BC)

2. Augustus (27 BC–AD 14)

3. Tiberius (AD 14–37)

4. Caligula (AD 37–41)

5. Claudius (AD 41–54)

"Five have fallen…"

6. Nero (AD 54–68)

"One is…"

7. Galba (June AD 68–January AD 69, a six month ruler-ship)

"the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only

a little while."

Of the first seven kings of the Roman Empire, five had come (Julius

Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius), one was now in power (Nero), and one had not yet come (Galba), but would only remain a little time (six months). The vast majority throughout Church history have

understood that the beast in Revelation 17 is a reference to Nero.

Revelation 13:1-4—The Roman Empire

…And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had…seven heads….One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast?

Who can wage war against it?" (Revelation 13:1-4).

We have just seen from Revelation 17 that Nero fits the timeline

as

the sixth of the seven heads and that Galba is *the one to come that shall only remain a little while*. I would propose that Rome was metaphorically wounded and faltering as an empire because of Nero. Nero was not only a psychopath who burned down one third of Rome and pinned the blame

on the Christians and persecuted them brutally, but also, when Nero killed himself (in AD 68), the political climate of Rome changed dramatically.

One of the major changes was that Nero was officially the last of the Julio-Claudian line of emperors; thus the line ended, and it would have seemed, symbolically, as if the head of the empire had been wounded to death.

Nero's sudden death caused an event that has been historically called the *"Year of the Four Emperors."* Because of tumult caused by his suicide, three short-lived emperors followed Nero. Many thought that the Roman Empire was about to die.7

Here is the timeline of AD 69, the *"Year of the Four Emperors"*:
Nero (AD 54–68)

Galba (AD 68–69)

Otho (AD 69)

Vitellius (AD 69)

Vespasian (AD 69–80)

Can you imagine if the United States had four presidents in office

in a one-year period? This was a very painful year for Rome, and many thought that the beast of the Roman Empire had been wounded unto

death. In fact, this was the most tumultuous time in Roman history since Mark Antony's death in 30 BC, nearly 100 years earlier.

Yet, by what appeared to be a miraculous turn around, the Empire

was revived under Vespasian and Titus. When they came into power, they established the Flavian dynasty of Caesars. Instead of the beast dying, it resurrected under Vespasian, and he ruled for a solid ten years.

Often this subject of the beast is connected in people's minds with the infamous "mark of the beast" found in Revelation 13:16-17. This "mark of the beast" has been the cause of much fear, so I will address it here, even though I am not covering the

entire Book of Revelation (for more on Revelation, see the recommended reading list in Appendix 1). Regarding the "mark of the beast," it is important to note that in the ancient cultures of Rome, the public market was the main source of trade and retail. For people to enter the public market, they had to pass through the main gate.

It was required of all who entered the main gate to pay homage to the idol of the Emperor. Once homage was paid, ashes were placed on the hand

or on the forehead of the individual, and then they were allowed to pass through the gates and buy and sell merchandise.8 This was taking the mark.

The parallels between this and the "mark of the beast" are stunning, and they further confirm the reality that the beast was Nero and the Roman Empire.

Many ancient sources spoke of Nero as a beast, as R.C. Sproul shows in his book, *The Last Days According to Jesus*.

[Kenneth] Gentry gives a synopsis of Nero's violence-studded life,

including the murders of his own family members, the castration of

a boy Nero "married," and the brutal murder of his pregnant wife

by kicking her to death. Bizarre behavior was noted by the historian

Suetonius, who wrote that Nero even “devised a kind of game, in

which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were

bound to stakes.”

Nero began his reign as emperor in A.D. 54. His imperial persecution

of the Christian community was launched in A.D. 64, the same year as

the famous fire (which burned 1/3 of Rome) that many believe was set

by Nero himself. It is often assumed that the persecution of Christians, whom Nero blamed for the fire, was a diversionary tactic to shift blame for his own actions to others. Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68, when he was but 31 years of age.

Since the beast’s appearance is one of the “things, which must

shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1), Nero is at least a *prima facie* candidate for the role of the beast. As described by ancient historians, Nero is a singularly cruel and unrestrained man of evil. Many ancient writers cite the bestial character of Nero, and Gentry summarizes these references:

Tacitus…spoke of Nero's "cruel nature" that "put to death so many innocent men." Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder… described Nero as "the destroyer of the human race" and "the poison of the world." Roman satirist Juvenal…

speaks of "Nero's cruel and bloody tyranny." …Apollonius of Tyana…

specifically mentions that Nero was called a "beast" : "In my travels, which have been wider than ever man yet accomplished, I have seen many many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs…And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mother, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet."9

The beast is not a coming antichrist or the man of lawlessness. The beast was Nero and the Roman Empire. It is amazing how perfectly the visions of John fit with what has taken place in the past!

THE ANTICHRIST

Chapter Points

- The antichrist is not and never was a person; it is a spiritual system of false teaching, specifically Gnosticism.
- Jesus is the perfect and sensible fulfillment of Daniel 9; there is no antichrist in this passage.
- The man of lawlessness was a first century individual; the restrainer was another first century individual—specifically John Levi and the High Priest Ananus.
- The Beast of Revelation is the Roman Empire, especially under Nero Caesar.
-

There is nothing in the Bible that points to a future one-world government ruler such as been popularized in the last century.

111

chapter seven

the

ISRAEL

OF GOD

During the Presidential race between George W. Bush and Al Gore, I

realized something interesting. Although I could have based my vote

on a variety of issues, I had decided to vote for Bush because he seemed

more pro-Israel. This was more of an unconscious decision until a friend

challenged me as to why I was voting for Bush. I happened to blurt out,

"Because God blesses those that bless Israel" (see Gen. 12:3). My older and wiser friend asked if I understood that verse in its proper context. I thought I did (being young and arrogant), so I said yes, but his query left a question mark in my mind for years to come. The echo of that question has helped me look beyond the hype and return to examine the Word.

Christians agree that the Bible reveals who God is and what He is like. In

the New Testament, we can see that the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus

Christ. The whole point of the Old Testament is to direct us to the person of Jesus Christ. Yet even Jesus' own disciples didn't understand this truth until He explained it to them. On the road to Emmaus, after His resurrection, we find Jesus revealing this to them.

As the two disciples walked, they encountered Jesus, but they did not know

it was Him. They were discussing the events surrounding His death, and when He asked them about their conversation, they said they were talking about what had happened to Jesus, who "was a prophet powerful in word and deed

before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19). They went on to explain the

events of Jesus' crucifixion, the encounter with angels who said He was alive, 113

and the discovery of the empty tomb. However, they clearly were missing the revelation inherent in these events. After

listening to their report, Jesus actually rebuked them: *Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people!* **You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted** *that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?"* **Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself** (Luke 24:25-27

NLT.)

The Old Testament was intended to point humankind to God, specifically

the person of Jesus. The apostles understood this better as time went by. When we read the letters of the New Testament, we observe the writers referring to the Old Testament as foreshadowing Christ.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. **These are a shadow** *of the things that were to come; the* **reality, however, is found in Christ** (Colossians 2:16-17).

Just as *Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up* (John 3:14).

They serve at a sanctuary that is **a copy and shadow** *of what is in heaven.*

This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Hebrews 8:5).

It was necessary, then, for the **copies** *of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only* **a copy of the true one;** *he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence* (Hebrews 9:23-24).

Examples of Shadows

The story of Israel in the Old Testament and in the New Testament begins

with a Jacob who has a son named Joseph

Old Testement

New Testement

Jacob

Genesis 32:27-28

Matthew 1:16

Joseph

Genesis 37:3

Matthew 1:16

In both Testaments, Joseph has a dream, which leads him down into Egypt.

Old Testement

New Testement

Joseph's Dream

Genesis 37:6

Matthew 1:20

Into Egypt

Genesis 37:28

Matthew 2:13-14

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is called God's son; then in the New Testament, Jesus is called God's Son. From here forward, we will begin to see that everything done in the Old Testament was merely the shadow of Jesus.

"Israel is my firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22).

"This [Jesus] *is my Son, whom I love"* (Matthew 3:17) God called the Old Testament shadow out of Egypt, and He called the

reality, Jesus, out of Egypt.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1).

...And so was fulfilled what the Lord said through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matthew 2:15).

Israel, as the shadow, was baptized.

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

Then Jesus was baptized.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all

righteousness." Then John consented (Matthew 3:13-15).

Jesus made a strange comment here about fulfilling all righteousness.

However, if we see this in the light of the Old Testament shadow, we realize that He understood that He needed to be baptized in order to fulfill everything that was in His shadow. Israel, in the Old Testament, had gone through the Jordan and been baptized; therefore, Jesus would also have to do this.

Then Israel had to wander in the desert for forty years, so Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness to fulfill the shadow.

The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan (Exodus 16:35).

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry (Matthew 4:1-2).

Even in the wilderness temptation, we see that Jesus refuted the devil using only quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy—the book that chronicles the time when Israel walked in the wilderness for forty years (see Matt. 4:4,7,10).

In Matthew 5–7, Jesus took the Law and interpreted it properly

to the

people in the Sermon on the Mount. In Exodus 24, Moses gave the Law the

first time from Mount Sinai.

In Exodus, Moses said to the twelve tribes, “This is the blood of the

covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these

words” (Exod. 24:8). In Matthew, Jesus said to the twelve apostles, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

Israel was God’s Vine: “You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out

the nations and planted it” (Ps. 80:8). Then Jesus became God’s Vine: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener” (John 15:1).

Israel was considered the seed of Abraham “But you, Israel, my servant,

Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend" (Isa.

41:8). In the New Testament, the Seed of Abraham is Jesus:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but **"and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ"** (Galatians 3:16).

In the Old Testament, we find that God took one man (Jacob) and brought

a nation out of him (Israel). In the New Testament, God takes Jesus and brings a *holy* nation out of him (see 1 Pet. 2:9).

In Hebrews we learn that the Old Testament places of worship were a

shadow modeled after Heaven (see Heb. 8:5; 9:23-24).

Jesus fulfilled all the things written about His life. As Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30) so "that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22). He accomplished much more than I have written here; this is just a sampling of all the shadows that led to Him.

God's Promises

In the Old Testament, God made three big promises, and each of them He

has fulfilled. There exists a lot of confusion around these promises, so let's look closer.

1. The Promises to Abraham—God promised four things to Abraham:

Promise #1: He would make Abraham's name great

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing (Genesis 12:2).

Fulfillment: God has made Abraham's name great. Christianity,

Judaism, and Islam all honor and value Abraham.

Promise #2: Abraham would have numerous physical

descendants.

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted (Genesis 13:16).

Fulfillment: The Old Testament tells us of this promise being fulfilled

in First Kings:

Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number (1 Kings 3:8).

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy (1 Kings 4:20).

Promise #3: All the families of the world would be blessed

through Abraham.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:3).

And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me (Genesis 22:18).

Fulfillment: Through Christ, the Seed of Abraham, all the families of

the earth have been blessed.

Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and

announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be

blessed through you." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with

Abraham, the man of faith (see Gal 3:8-9).

Promise #4: Abraham would be the father of a multitude of

nations.

As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations (Genesis 17:4-5).

Fulfillment: Also through Christ, Abraham has become the father of

a multitude of nations. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's

seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

2. The Covenant with Moses

The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant that either

brought God's

direct blessing for obedience or God's direct cursing for disobedience upon the nation of Israel. Part of the Mosaic Covenant was the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20, but it also included the rest of the Law, which contained 613 commands. A good overview of how God related this conditional covenant is found in Deuteronomy chapter 11, specifically verses 26-28:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

After Deuteronomy, where the Law is given, the history books of the

Old Testament (Joshua through Esther) detail how Israel rarely succeeded at obeying the Law and mostly how Israel failed miserably at obeying the Law.

Hebrews 7–10 speaks in great detail about how the entire covenant with

Moses was insufficient and merely a physical shadow of the spiritual fulfillment in Christ. Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant as our "great high priest" (see Heb.

2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 10:21). He instituted what the writer of Hebrews consistently calls the "better covenant" (see Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 12:24).

3. The Promise to David

In Second Samuel 7, we find that God promised King David a lasting

kingdom because he would have a descendant who would sit upon his throne

and rule forever. In Luke 1:32-33, an angel declared to Mary that Jesus was the one to fulfill God's promise to David.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God 119

RAPTURELESS

will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end (Luke 1:32-33).

Then on Pentecost, Peter pointed to the fact that Jesus had fulfilled this

promise to David and now sits on the promised eternal throne.

Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.

But he was a prophet *and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come,* **he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah,** *that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified,* **both Lord and Messiah** (Acts 2:29-36).

The Land Promises

God also made promises regarding a nation that would come from

Abraham's lineage and specific boundaries of land they would inhabit. The

geographical boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant are laid out on more

than one occasion in the Book of Genesis.

The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him (Genesis 12:7).

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I have given this land, **from the river of Egypt [the Nile]**

to the great river, the River Euphrates *"* (Genesis 15:18 NASB).

There are many confused teachers who claim that Israel never received the

fulfillment of the land promise, yet the Bible says they did. God completely and fully fulfilled the land promises.

So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give the

ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. *The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors.*

Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands. **Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled** (Joshua 21:43-45).

And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's

subjects all his life (1 Kings 4:21).

He ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt (2 Chronicles 9:26).

Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. **Not one word has failed of all the good promises** *[land included] he gave through his servant Moses* (1 Kings 8:56).

You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and **you made a covenant** *with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites.* **You have kept your promise** *because you are righteous….Their children went in* **and took possession of the land.** *You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you gave the Canaanites into their hands, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased* (Nehemiah 9:7-8,24).

Jerusalem has had powerful kings **ruling over the whole of Trans-Euphrates,** *and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them* (Ezra 4:20).

From these passages, we clearly see that Israel did, in fact, receive the full land inheritance that was promised to them and that, for a period of time, they possessed it completely.

A Conditional Promise

However, it is important to note that the land was not given to them

unconditionally: The fact that God's promise of the land to Israel was not

unconditional is clearly demonstrated in God's words to Solomon in the

following passage:

As for you, **if you** *walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, "You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel."* **But if you** *turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them,* **then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have**

consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an

object of ridicule among all peoples (2 Chronicles 7:17-20).

The land was never promised to Abraham and his descendants for an

everlasting possession *apart from their obedience*. God is not under any obligation to keep Israel in the land, nor to bring them back to the land at any time in the future, apart from their willingness to abide by His commandments and follow Him.

It's also significant to note the conditional aspects of even the Abrahamic covenant: **But if** *they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors—their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land* (Leviticus 26:40-42).

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors (Deuteronomy 7:12).

Although Genesis 17:8 says the land was given as an everlasting possession, yet we must read it in the context of a verse that comes only five verses later, where God says that circumcision is also an everlasting covenant (see Gen.

17:13). We know from the New Testament that circumcision has been changed

from physical circumcision to circumcision of the heart (see 1 Cor. 7:19). So it is imperative that we leave room for God to correct our understanding.

God even went so far as to say that He would vomit them from out of the

land for their disobedience:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.

But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the foreigners residing among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. **And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you** (Leviticus 18:24-28).

Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out (Leviticus 20:22).

In the Old Testament, God gave Israel all the land He had

promised them.

This has been fulfilled; we are not waiting for a future fulfillment. He also put conditions on their ability to retain the land, and they failed to keep those conditions. God didn't abandon or break the covenant; they did.

In the Old Testament, God made covenant with sinful humanity, and

they constantly failed to hold up their end of the deal. Knowing humanity's frailty and inability, God created a new plan. He put on flesh and became a man. This enabled God the Father to make a New Covenant with Jesus as a man; therefore, God would be on both sides of this deal, and it would be

perfectly upheld. Being inside Jesus, we get to rest in all the benefits of His perfect righteousness.

The New Covenant and the Israel of God

God made the New Covenant with the same people whom He made the

Old Covenant with— *those who would walk with God by faith*. All who have faith in Christ are the children of Abraham. As Paul wrote, "So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was

credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that *those who have faith are children of Abraham"* (Gal. 3:6-7).

We can see from this verse that, although many Jews would claim to be

children of Abraham because of bloodline, God only regards those with faith as the children of Abraham. The apostle Paul wrote about this at length. Let's back up and see where this idea began in the New Testament: *In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ...But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And* **do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father** *.'I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.* **The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire**

(Matthew 3:1-2,7-10).

John the Baptist declared that they should not trust in their lineage for safety.

Even at the beginning of the New Testament, John was already prophesying

the threat of coming destruction. Later, Jesus also echoed this declaration:

"Abraham is our father," they answered.

*"**If you were*** **Abraham's children,** *" said Jesus,* **"then you would do what Abraham did** [walk by faith] . *As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father.""We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself. "Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.*

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry

out your father's desires. *He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that* **you do not belong to God "**

(John 8:39-47).

Jesus went even farther than John. Rather than just telling the Jews that

their lineage doesn't matter, Jesus went so far as to say that their father is the devil! Jesus said that they don't even belong to God. According to the Word, being a Jew is not simply a racial reality. It is not a matter of simply obeying the Law, either. It is a state of the heart, a heart of faith that is walking with God.

We know from Genesis 17:3 that circumcision was the sign that set apart

those in covenant with God. In Romans 2 and in Philippians 3, Paul showed

that in the New Testament God only honors His covenant with those who

have been circumcised in their hearts, not merely in the flesh.

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God….

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though

they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A person **is not a Jew who is one only outwardly,** *nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No,* **a person is a Jew who is one inwardly;** *and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God* (Romans 2:17,25-29).

For ***it is we*** **who are the circumcision** *, we who serve God* **by his Spirit ,** *who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put* **no confidence in the flesh** *—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church;* 125

as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake **I have lost all things. I consider them garbage** *, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but* **that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on**

the basis of faith. *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead* (Philippians 3:3-11).

I don't know if you realize the importance of what you just read, but

according to Paul, God does not honor covenant with those who follow the

Law, *but don't walk by faith*. God only honors covenant with those who are walking with Him by faith. Only circumcision of the heart matters to God.

In fact, Paul continues in Romans and states that even the idea of *Israel* being God's people is faith-based.

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, **the people of Israel** [Israel of the flesh] . *Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. It is not as though God's word had failed.* **For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor** *because they* **are his descendants** *are they* **all Abraham's children .** *On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In*

other words, **it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as**

Abraham's offspring (Romans 9:2-8).

Verse six refers to the promises of God and says that God's promises did not fail. Even though the nation of Israel failed to walk with God, His promises did not fail because He only made those promises to those who walk by faith.

God never broke His covenant nor did He transfer it.

God has only made covenant with those who choose to walk with Him

by faith. That is why, in the Old Testament, people of other countries could become a part of Israel if they would be circumcised, which was to take on covenant with God.

It is unbiblical to think that God is in covenant with unbelievers, whether Jew or Gentile. God only makes covenant on the condition that the other party is walking in faith. He will not be unequally yoked. *God is only in covenant with those of faith—whether Jew or Gentile—both in the Old and New Testaments.*

One last passage that reiterates what I am sharing is in Galatians 4. Here

Paul uses the two sons of Abraham to draw a contrast between those who

receive Jesus by faith and those who trust in the Law and works.

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born **according to the flesh,** *but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a* **divine promise.** *These things are being taken figuratively:* **The women represent two covenants.** *One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son* **born according to the flesh** *persecuted the son* **born by the power of the Spirit.** *It is the same now. But what does Scripture say?* **"Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's**

son." *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman* (Galatians 4:22-31).

Paul says to get rid of the slave woman and her son. God is only honoring

those born by the power of the Spirit (by faith). There is no sharing of

inheritance; only those born of the Spirit, by faith, will receive an inheritance.

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them,

and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16 NASB). Paul wraps up his letter by

declaring peace and mercy upon those who walk in faith, and he gives them a new name. Rather than calling them the Israel of the flesh, he refers to those who walk by faith as *the Israel of God*.

All Israel Will Be Saved

There is a lot of confusion surrounding the verse that says, "… all Israel

will be saved…" (Rom. 11:26). Because of this verse, many people think we

are waiting for a coming Jewish revival. That is not what this verse is saying.

Typically this verse is quoted alone and without an understanding of the

context. In fact, even the first half of the verse is rarely quoted. Here is the first half: "*and in this way,* all Israel will be saved…." This is a concluding statement.

In other words, it comes at the end of a long series of thoughts and is meant to wrap up those thoughts with, *"and in this way,* all Israel will be saved…."

For this reason, we must back up to the beginning of this series of thoughts to grasp the context of this concluding statement.

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by

grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace (Romans 11:1-6).

In the Old Testament and in the New Testament, there has always been a

remnant of the Jews who have followed God, even when the vast majority has

turned away; God has always had a remnant of faithful ones (the *ekklesia* or *called out ones*).

What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain.

The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day." And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, 128

a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever" (Romans 11:7-10).

In response to those who didn't pursue God by faith, He blinded their eyes

and hardened them into their decision.

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!

Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either (Romans 11:11-21).

The Jews are the natural branch, and the Gentiles are the wild branch. As

we saw earlier, being of Jewish lineage, yet not walking in faith,

amounts to nothing before God. As seen in Romans 11:20, "they were broken off because of unbelief, but you stand by faith." We have been grafted into the Israel of God, the true Israel, the Israel that knows God by faith, the Israel that God has always made and kept His covenants with. This is what we are grafted into by grace through faith.

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be 129

grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree (Romans 11:22-24).

God is stern toward those walking in unbelief, whereas He is kind to those

walking in faith. If Jews will turn from trusting in dead works and will, instead, walk with God by faith in the Messiah, then they will be grafted back into the Israel of God and be His people again. Jews may be of national Israel, but if they are not of faith, then they are under the sternness of God. If an individual Jew or Gentile is walking in faith, then that person is pleasing to God and walks under His kindness.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and **in this way all Israel will be saved**. *As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob"* (Romans 11:25-26).

As we saw earlier, God has taken those who rejected Him and hardened

them into their decision. This allows for the Gentiles to come in and join the Israel of God by walking in faith. The remnant portion of Jews who follow God by faith and the Gentiles who are following by faith together make up

what is called the Israel of God (see Gal 6:16). God has always made His

covenants and related with His true Israel, those who walk with Him by faith.

Who Is Israel?

In the past, there remained a majority of Jews who bore the name Israel

while not walking with God. For example, "…Not all who are descended

from Israel are Israel" (Rom. 9:6). True Israel has always been

defined as those who are walking by faith, while at the same time there have been many others under the name Israel, who shared the bloodline, but weren't really Israel according to God.

Now that God has given His Son, He clearly delineates that only those

who put their faith in Jesus are a part of the Israel of God. Therefore it says,

"And in this way, all Israel will be saved…" (Rom. 11:26). In what way? What 130

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

Paul is saying is that all Israel—the true Israel of God—the Israel that currently exists in God's mind is made up of Jews and Gentiles who have put faith in Jesus. Therefore, in that way, everyone who is a part of Israel will be saved.

This is the new line of demarcation, rather than the Old Testament division between the unbelieving Jews and the remnant of faith. From now forward, "all Israel" is made up of those who are saved through faith in Jesus!

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Did the Church replace Israel?

A: No. I am not saying that God has replaced Israel with the

Church. I am showing that the Bible teaches that God has always only made covenant with those who follow Him by faith. In the Old Testament, this was always a smaller portion of the larger whole of Israel. The remnant that followed God by faith was called the *ekklesia,* which means *called out ones*.

In the New Testament, the Greek root word for "Church" is *ekklesia*. There is actually no distinction between Israel and the Church. The *ekklesia* under the Old Covenant is added to by the *ekklesia* in the New Covenant. The *ekklesia* of the Old Covenant are joined by the grafting in of the Gentile *ekklesia* of the New Covenant. There is a perfect continuation. There is no replacement.

Q: Can we be sure that "all Israel" isn't simply referring to all of the natural Jews eventually getting saved?

A: The apostle Paul is very clear that the entire nation of Israel is not the same as "all Israel" in Romans 11:26 (see Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-8). Here are four additional points that support this: •

In Romans 10:1, it was Paul's longing that his brethren would be

saved, not a guarantee.

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Paul said that, though the Jews were as sand on the seashore, only a

remnant would be saved (see Rom. 9:27).

•

Paul used "if" statements regarding Israelites being re-grafted (see

Rom.

11:23); he was not expressing a guarantee of re-grafting.

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According to God, there is neither Jew nor Gentile; we are all the

same (see Gal 3:26-29).

Q: Isn't there an end-time promise that the Jewish people will

declare: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord?"

Are

we waiting for this to be fulfilled?

A: Yes, Jesus prophesied that Jerusalem wouldn't see Him again until they declared, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"** (Luke 13:34-35).

But in Luke 13, Jesus was not prophesying a Jewish revival 2,000 years in

the future. Jesus was actually declaring that Jerusalem would not see Him again until Palm Sunday, which was fulfilled in Luke 19.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: **"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"** *"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet,*

the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:37-40).

Q: Has God rejected Israel?

A: No, God has not rejected Israel, as Romans 11:1,11 clearly states. What God extends, He never takes back (see Rom. 11:29). But Israel chose to reject God (see Rom. 9:30-32; 11:15).

Q: Is Israel to be restored as a nation?

A: There is not even one New Testament promise or prophecy regarding Israel being restored as a nation. Every promise and prophecy of the New Testament speaks of judgment and condemnation for the nation of Israel.

Every time a preacher tries to claim the restoration of Israel, the preacher has to pull verses from the Old Testament out of context. In the Old Testament, there were promises to restore Israel after their exile to Babylon. Yet every one of these Old Testament prophecies has been fulfilled. Many have twisted Scripture out of context to create this teaching.

Q: Is the Temple to be rebuilt?

A: There is *not even one* New Testament promise or prophecy regarding a rebuilt Temple. Every promise and prophecy of the New Testament speaks of judgment and the destruction of the

Temple. Again, every time preachers

try to claim the restoration of the Temple, they have to pull verses from the Old Testament out of context. In the Old Testament, there were promises to rebuild the Temple, such as were fulfilled in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Yet every one of these prophecies has been fulfilled.1

Q: Doesn't He have an everlasting covenant?

A: God has always and only made His covenants with those who will walk with Him by faith. Therefore, He is continuing to keep all of His covenants to the Israel of faith, which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Only those who have accepted Jesus as the Messiah are a part of the Israel of faith.

Q: Aren't the Israelites God's chosen people?

A: Chosen for what? In the Bible, we find that a few have been chosen to carry Christ.

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Abraham's family line was *chosen to carry the seed* (Christ) and bring Him into the earth (see Gal. 3:16) •

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was *chosen to carry the seed* and bring Him into the earth directly (see Luke 1:26-38).

•

The Church has been *chosen to carry the seed of God* (Christ) and bring Him into the earth (see 1 Pet. 2:9).

Abraham was *chosen* and fulfilled his assignment; Mary was *chosen* and fulfilled her assignment; now the Church is currently *the chosen* and is fulfilling her assignment.

Q: Do I need to pray for Israel?

A: Psalm 2:8 says, "Ask of me and I will give you the nations as an inheritance." I believe that we should pray for all the nations of the world, as well as our families, spiritual leaders, and government leaders. Since the true Israel of God is those who walk by faith, there is no reason to pray for the nation of Israel more than any other nation. I believe that many Christians'

racism is visible in the way that they favor Israel in prayer over and against the Muslims of the same region. Those Muslims desperately need prayer, too.

Q: I have heard that lots of Jews are moving to Israel and that this is a prophetic sign; what do you think?

A: *Victorious Eschatology* says:

It is true that approximately 800,000 Jews have emigrated from

Russia to Israel in recent years; however, a large percentage of them

have used Israel as a transfer station to gain entrance into the USA.

Jews have been migrating in from other locations as well, but the

Israeli Daily, Yediot Ahronot, reported on April 4, 2007 that there is

actually a net exodus of people from the country. The truth is that

there are more Jews in the USA today than in Israel, and the largest

population gathered in any one location is in New York City. The

idea that Jews are now returning en masse to Israel is simply a myth.2

Q: When will Zechariah 12:10 be fulfilled?

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. **They will look on me, the one they have pierced,** *and they will mourn for him*

as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

A: The Bible tells us it was fulfilled in John 19:36-37:

These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled:

"Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, **"They will look on the one they have pierced."**

And also Acts 2:36-37 says:

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When the people heard this, they were **cut to the heart** [grieved] *and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

In Summary

I am aware that, for many Christians, I have just written a chapter on the

king of the sacred cows. The shift in thinking that this chapter presents will be very large for some, but I would ask you to simply ponder and review what I have presented here. A hurried judgment is not necessary.

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Chapter Points

- The Old Testament is a shadow pointing to Christ.
- The Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled.
- The Mosaic Covenant is fulfilled.
- The Davidic Covenant is fulfilled.
- The Land Promise was fulfilled within the Old Testament.
- God only has covenant with the Israel of Faith.
- We are not waiting for Israel to say “Blessed is He who comes in

the Name of the Lord.”

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There is no promise to restore Israel as a nation.

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There is no promise to rebuild the Jewish Temple.

chapter eight

the

KINGDOM

TRANSITION

As a husband, the idea of my wife committing adultery is one of the most hurtful thoughts I can imagine. But what if she were to commit adultery a dozen times? What about a few dozen times? This would be a completely devastating and heart-rending experience. Yet, this is exactly what happened to God. In Jeremiah 31:31-33, we see the heartbreak that God experienced:

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when **I will make a new covenant** *with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.* **It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors** *when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because* **they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,** *" declares the LORD*

(Jeremiah 31:31-32).

All throughout their history, the Israelites failed to keep their covenant with God, and they played the whore with idols and false gods. As God saw that they were completely unable to keep up their side of the covenant, He determined that He

would make a new covenant. Since humanity couldn't hold up their side of the covenant, this new covenant would be made between God the Father and Jesus. This transition is predicted throughout the Old Testament.

For example:

The scepter **will not depart** *from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,* **until he whom it belongs shall come** *and the obedience of the nations shall be his* (Genesis 49:10).

Daniel's Prophecy

In Daniel chapter 9, there is a prophecy that declares five specific things: the timing of the Messiah's arrival, His death, the end of the Old Covenant, the confirming of the New Covenant, and the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to: finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place (Daniel 9:24).

God spoke to Israel and gave them 490 years of grace for them to straighten up and change their ways. Scholars typically

agree that prophetic numerology shows that the "seventy sevens" of this page equals 490 years (see Gen. 29:27; Lev. 25:8; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:4-6).

Daniel has a dream of 490 years

0 years

490 years

In the next verse, God also stated that He would not start the clock right away, but that the 490 years would start when the king said to rebuild Jerusalem.

He also announced in this passage exactly when His Son, the Messiah, would come to Israel.

Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens," and sixty-two "sevens" [483 years] . *It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble* (Daniel 9:25).

The edict to restore Jerusalem was declared in 457 BC under Artaxerxes, the king of Persia (see Ezra 7:12-26).

Edict to restore Jerusalem

457BC

›

Beginning of 490 years

From the time when Artaxerxes declared this, in 457 BC, until AD 27

was 483 years. In AD 27, Jesus came onto the scene, exactly as this prophecy indicates. In fact the renowned commentator Matthew Henry, wrote of this prophecy that: “We have [in Daniel 9:24-27] the most illustrious prediction of Christ and gospel-grace that is extant in all the Old Testament.”1

457 BC - AD 27 equals 483

457BC

27AD

The prophecy continues, even telling of the Messiah’s death, “After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ [including the previous seven sevens, thus 69 weeks or 483

years] the Anointed One [Jesus] will be put to death and will have nothing…”

(Dan. 9:26).

After the prophecy finishes speaking about the 490 years of

mercy being extended to Israel, telling the exact date of the Messiah's coming and prophesying His death, it then declares the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

...The people [the Roman armies] *of the ruler* [Titus] *who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end* [of Jerusalem], *and desolations have been decreed* (Daniel 9:26).

After this, God backs up for a moment to bring clarity to the last seven years of the 490 years of mercy. He states that halfway through the last seven years, the Messiah will confirm a new covenant (see Matt. 26:28) and put an end to the Old Covenant and its sacrificial system.

He [Jesus] *will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven." In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering...* (Daniel 9:27).

This prophecy tells exactly when the Messiah will show up (AD 27), that the Messiah will die, and that He will end the sacrificial system halfway through the last seven years of the 490 years. Jesus did this by His death on the cross exactly three and a half years after AD 27.

The last seven years and Jesus' death

483 years

3.5 years 3.5 years

457BC

27AD

30AD

33AD

This brings us to a fascinating point from the Gospels. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive his brother, suggesting that seven times might be forgiving enough, Jesus replied that he should forgive seventy times seven, which is 490 times. Jesus was alluding to this prophecy from Daniel, and He was telling Peter to be as forgiving as God had been toward His wicked people (see Matt. 18:21).

Let's recap: Daniel heard the prophecy of 490 years of mercy being extended.

He heard that the 490 years would start when the edict to rebuild Jerusalem went forth. After the edict was released and the clock started ticking, 483 years would go by, and then the Messiah would appear, which happened in AD 27, when Jesus began His ministry. Then during the last seven years of the 490

years of mercy, the Messiah would end animal sacrifice, and He would also be put to death. This happened in AD 30. Out of

the 490 years, this timeline still leaves us with three and a half years left on the clock.

Approximately, three and a half years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Stephen was stoned to death, which was approved of by the chief ruler of the synagogue (see Acts 7:1,54-60). This was the end of God's mercy clock for Jerusalem. Not long after, God gave Peter the vision of the unclean animals and sent him to evangelize Cornelius' house (see Acts 10), as well as converting Paul and sending Him to the Gentiles (see Acts 9:1-5). This completed the 490

years of mercy that God extended to His people.

The Abomination of Desolation

In Matthew 23, we read of Jesus in the Temple declaring woes and judgments against the wicked Israelites of His day. He declares destruction upon them and upon Jerusalem. Then in Matthew 24:15 Jesus referred to the last verse in this passage from Daniel 9.

So when you see standing in the holy place "the abomination that causes desolation," **spoken of through the prophet Daniel** *—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains* (Matthew 24:15).

The last half of Daniel 9:27, which Jesus was referring to, says "And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." (Dan. 9:27 ESV).

We see from what Jesus is saying in Matthew 24:15 that when His listeners in the first century saw the "abomination that causes desolation," they should flee Judea to the mountains. Fortunately for us, Jesus told us exactly what the abomination was in the parallel Gospel of Luke: "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20). The Roman army, which surrounded Jerusalem and brought utter desolation in AD 70, was the great abomination.

The prophecy from Daniel 9 is, as Matthew Henry wrote, *most remarkable*.

It contains amazing predictions of Jesus' arrival, death, the end of sacrifice and the confirming of the New Covenant. Yet it also contains the predicted destruction of Jerusalem. It is imperative that the modern Church teaches believers about the AD 70 destruction, as it is literally a predicted part of the Messianic Gospel of Jesus Christ. Although it is unpleasant, this is not a good reason to avoid teaching it: obviously the Cross of Christ was an unpleasant scene, yet all good preachers keep it central to their message.

The destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple and the priesthood is a major part of understanding the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To

not understand the significance of the AD 70 destruction is to miss a major component of the redemption story. The destruction of Jerusalem is akin to the virgin birth, the cross, or the resurrection. I know that is a huge statement, and even though many Christians have not been taught about this event, it is still an essential component.

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RAPTURELESS

The Gospel of Doom?

The redemption message prophesied from the Old Testament (see Dan.

9:24-27) included:

- The Messiah's arrival
- The Messiah's death
- The end of the Old Covenant
-

The confirming of a New Covenant

•

The coming destruction of Jerusalem

The fifth point, the destruction of Jerusalem, was the final removal of the Old Covenant and the confirmation of the New Covenant having fully arrived. Most Christians have never heard about the AD 70 destruction and, thus, are literally missing a major piece of the redemption message. This is quite shocking to most people because it is similar to being a Christian for fifty years and then hearing for the first time that Jesus was born of a virgin!

Throughout Jesus' ministry, we can observe the emphasis that He put on the coming destruction. In fact, one of the few and definitely the longest recorded prophetic word from Jesus is the Olivet Discourse (see Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). As we have seen, this passage is Jesus decreeing the destruction of Jerusalem.

As we saw earlier, when Jesus was anointed for ministry, He quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19, leaving off the final phrase "and the day of vengeance of our God." Later, He finished quoting the Isaiah passage in Luke 21:21, foretelling the coming destruction. For three years, He focused on the first part of His mission; then in Luke 21:21, He declared the last part of His mission, the day of vengeance upon Jerusalem.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor [this is the quote from Luke 4:18-19, then He finishes quoting the passage in Luke 21:21] **and the day of vengeance of our God…** (Isaiah 61:1-2).

Jesus also spoke of this in several of His parables. In Matthew 22:5-7, Jesus told a parable to the Pharisees, saying that when the king returns to deal with 142

those who killed his son, he would set their city on fire, which is a clear reference of the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. Earlier in Matthew 21:33-46, Jesus gave another parable in which God "destroy[ed] those wicked men miserably" (NKJV).

When John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus was coming, he said that Jesus would baptize (immerse) with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11).

It is reasonable to understand the immersion with the Holy Spirit as the day of Pentecost, whereas the immersion with fire

happened when Jerusalem was burned to the ground. As we will see in a moment, even Peter confirmed this in Acts 2.

In Matthew 24, Jesus' disciples asked Him about the End of the Age (of Moses), and Jesus responded about the coming destruction. For three years, Jesus had reached out to His people, and they received Him not. Near the end of His ministry, He specifically focused on the destruction of the old system.

In Matthew 22, He spoke of coming to set their city on fire. In Matthew 23, He gave a whole chapter of rebukes against the religious leaders, which ended with a statement of how He longed to gather them under His wings, but they would not let Him (see Matt. 23:37). Then He declared that all the blood of the Old Testament would come in judgment upon that generation's head (see Matt. 23:31-36). Then in Matthew 24, Jesus gave very precise, detailed answers to the disciples regarding the coming judgment. As we can see, the coming destruction is a very large part of the Gospel story.

Likewise, at the end of the Book of Hebrews, we find a contrast between the physical worship in earthly Jerusalem and the spiritual worship in the Heavenly Jerusalem. At the end of the contrast, the writer says that everything that can be shaken will be shaken (a clear reference to the AD 70 destruction) and that only the spiritual worship will remain.

…"Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also heaven." [Quoting from Haggai 2:6] *Now this, "Yet once*

more," **indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made,** 143

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that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. *Therefore, since we are receiving* **a kingdom, which cannot be shaken,** *let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our* **God is a consuming fire** *"* (Hebrews 12:26-29 NKJV).

Notice again the reference to fire and specifically the statement that God is a consuming fire. This passage is foreshadowing the fact that God was about to come upon Jerusalem and the earthly worship system as a consuming fire!

All throughout the New Testament, we find that the early Church was focused on the coming destruction of Jerusalem. It was an integral part of the Good News that Jesus brought. That judgment would begin first at the house of God (see 1 Pet. 4:17). God was going to clean out His house and fully establish His spiritual Kingdom upon the removal of the previous establishment. The early Church referred to this coming (AD 70) event as the "last days," the "end of the age" and the "Day of Judgment." This is a major part of understanding Jesus' message and the mindset of the early Church.

The End of the Age

Matthew 13:39

The harvest is the end of the age.

Matthew 13:40

So it will be at the end of this age.

Matthew 13:49

So it will be at the end of the age.

Matthew 24:3

What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?

Hebrews 9:26

But now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared.

The End

Matthew 10:22

He who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 24:6

But the end is not yet.

Matthew 24:13

He who endures to the end shall be saved.

Matthew 24:14

The the end will come.

1 Corinthians 1:8

Who will also confirm you to the end.

1 Corinthians 10:11 On whom the ends of the ages have come.

Hebrews 3:6

Firm to the end.

Hebrews 3:14

Hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

Hebrews 6:11

Show the same difigence...until the end.

1 Peter 4:7

The end of all things is at hand.

The Last Times, Days, *etc.*

1 Timothy 4:1

In latter times some will depart from the faith.

2 Timothy 3:1

In the last days perilous times will come.

Hebrews 1:2

[God] has in these last days spoken to us.

James 5:3

You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

1 Peter 1:5

Salvation ready to be revealed in the last times.

1 Peter 1:20

[Who] was made manifest in these last days.

2 Peter 3:3

Scoffers will come in the last days.

1 John 2:18

It is the last hour.

Jude 18

That there would be mockers in the last time.

The Day of the Lord, God, *etc.*

2 Peter 3:12

Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.

1 Thessalonians 5:2

The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

1 Corinthians 1:8

That you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 5:5

That his spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:14

You also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 2:20

The great and notable day of the Lord.

Jude 6

The judgment of the great day.

Romans 2:5

Treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath.

The "end of the age," "the end," "the last times," "the last days," and "the day of the lord" are very specific references to the days between Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24 and its fulfillment in AD 70. These were the "last days" of Judaism and Jerusalem. (Whereas references to "the day of judgment," "the day of redemption" or "the last day" are references to the final judgment. This will be addressed in detail in the chapter entitled: "The Big Three.") There are many who don't understand that the Old Covenant age ended with the AD 70

destruction and that the whole New Testament speaks of that end. We are now living in the Kingdom Age, which grows without end (more on that later).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, which John the Baptist prophesied, occurred on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. At that event, Peter spoke specifically about the yet-to-come baptism of fire, the destruction of Jerusalem.

No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel [see Joel 2:28-

32] *: "***In the last days,** *God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.* **I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.** [The coming destruction upon Jerusalem] *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* [The rest of Joel 2:32 finishes with: "for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls."] (Acts 2:17-21).

In this message, Peter was clearly referring to the same destructive event that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24:29-30. (I discussed this in detail in Chapter 3.) Peter said that the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of this prophecy from Joel, and in the next breath, he referenced the coming destruction. By this, Peter was saying that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was confirmation that they were in the last days and that the next thing to take place would be the destruction of Jerusalem. Then He said that all who called upon the Lord would be saved, referring not only to salvation in Jesus, but also to protection from the destruction of Jerusalem for the first century Christians.

This brings up an amazing point about speaking in tongues.

Speaking in tongues was a prophetic sign that pointed to the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

Speaking in Tongues

The idea that speaking in tongues was confirmation of the coming destruction of Jerusalem might be a new concept for some readers. Yet we find that the apostle Paul also confirmed this idea in First Corinthians 14:21-22: *In the Law it is written: "***With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.** *"* [Quoting from Isaiah 28:11]

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers (1 Corinthians 14:21-22).

Here Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11, showing that Isaiah had prophesied the coming gift of tongues. When we read the rest of Isaiah's prophecy, we can see that he foretold not only speaking in tongues, but also apostasy, Jesus' coming, and God's judgment upon Israel. Here are the three passages from Isaiah 28

that speak about these three events:

Apostasy

So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do this, do that, a rule for this, a rule for that; a little here, a little there—so that as they go **they will fall backward; they will be injured and snared and captured.**

Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. You boast, "We have entered into a covenant with death, with the realm of the dead we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for **we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place"** (Isaiah 28:13-15).

Jesus, the Chief Cornerstone

So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation [see Matthew 21:42]; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line…" (Isaiah 28:16-17).

God's Judgment

"…Hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place. Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it. As often as it comes it will carry you away;

morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through." **The understanding of this message will bring sheer terror** (Isaiah 28:17-19).

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By reading this extended passage from Isaiah 28, we can clearly see that the advent of the gift of speaking in tongues was a sign of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Along these lines, regarding the gift of speaking in tongues, the scholar David Chilton writes: The miracle of Pentecost was a shocking message to Israel. They knew what this meant. It was the sign from God that the Chief Cornerstone had come, and that Israel had rejected Him to its own damnation (Matthew 21:42-44; 1 Peter 2:6-8). It was *the sign of judgment and reprobation*, the signal that the apostates of Jerusalem were about to "stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive." [See Isa. 28:13.] The Last Days of Israel had come: the old age was at an end, and Jerusalem would be swept away in a new flood to make way for God's New Creation. As St. Paul said, the gift of tongues was "for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers" (1 Corinthians 14:22) —*a sign to the unbelieving Jews of their approaching doom.*

The early Church looked forward to the coming of the new [Kingdom] age. They knew that, with the visible end of the Old Covenant system, the Church would be revealed as the new, true Temple; and the work Christ came to perform would be

accomplished. This was an important aspect of redemption, and the first-generation Christians looked forward to this event *in their own lifetime*. During this period of waiting and severe trial, the apostle Peter assured them that they were "protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"

(1 Peter 1:5). They were on the very threshold of the new world.2

This quote sums up the major shift between the Old and New Covenants that happened, beginning with Jesus' death and resurrection and culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem. In this way, the early believers received the Kingdom in their day, and the Church has been advancing the Kingdom ever since, as we will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Points

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Daniel 9 prophesies the exact date of:

- The Messiah's arrival

- The Messiah's death

- The end of the Old Covenant

- The confirming of a New Covenant

- The coming destruction of Jerusalem •

The destruction of Jerusalem is part of Messianic prophecy.

•

Jesus' coming immersed Jerusalem in a baptism of fire.

•

Jesus shook the old system and left only the unshakeable Kingdom.

•

To the early Church, the “last days” meant the time before AD

70 occurred.

•

The advent of the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost was a

confirmation of the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

chapter nine

the

KINGDOM

now

At 4 in the morning, King Nebuchadnezzar awoke from a deep sleep.

He was drenched in sweat and visibly shaken—speaking rapidly and incoherently about a dream he had just had. Clearly this was no ordinary dream. He demanded that all the magicians and wizards be brought to the palace so that they might help him understand the dream. He made an unusual request of them, however. The king told them that he'd had a troubling dream, and he demanded the interpretation. But when the magicians asked the king to tell them the dream so they could interpret it for him, he refused. Instead, he promised that he would kill all of them and destroy their households unless they both told him his dream and then interpreted it. The magicians, not surprisingly, were astounded that the king would ask such a thing. "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks!" they said. "No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician…" (Dan. 2:10). In response to this, the king became so angry that he ordered the execution of all of Babylon's magicians.

Fortunately, Daniel, one of the Hebrew captives in Babylon, who had also been trained as a magician, had tremendous wisdom and insight. He was able to accurately tell the king his dream and its interpretation. King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed about a large and dazzling statue. The head was made of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. As the king looked upon this statue, a large rock, "not [cut out] by human hands" rolled into the statue, smashing its 151

feet of iron and clay. Successively, the iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold all broke into pieces and blew away, leaving no trace. However, the rock grew into an enormous mountain that filled the entire earth.

As the king and his court listened, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the various metals represented various earthly kingdoms. The Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar was the pinnacle of splendor and power, the head of gold. After him would come another inferior kingdom, the silver chest and arms. A third kingdom, symbolized by the bronze belly and thighs, would then rule.

Lastly, a fourth kingdom would rise, depicted as iron because iron breaks and smashes everything, which is what this kingdom will do to all the others.

The fact that the feet and toes were partly clay and partly iron indicated that the final kingdom would become a divided kingdom; it would have some of the strength of iron, but also be brittle as clay. Just as iron and clay cannot be mixed, so the people of this kingdom would not be unified.

During that final, divided kingdom, God would establish a Kingdom— symbolized by the rock not cut by human hands— that would never be destroyed or left to another people. It would crush all the previous kingdoms, bringing them to an end, but it would endure forever (see Dan. 2:31-45).

In this prophetic dream, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar *what would take place in the future*. However, it is important for us to remember that, though this reveals events "in the future" to the original listeners, this passage doesn't necessarily speak about *our* future. In fact, this dream clearly has been fulfilled in *our past*.

Five eras make up the statue from the dream:

- The Babylonian
- The Medeo-Persian
-

The Greek

•

The Roman

•

The Divided Roman Empire (represented by ten toes)

King Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the Babylonian kingdom. After him, Daniel served under King Darius the Mede (see Dan. 6) and King Cyrus the Persian (see Dan. 10). After the Medeo-Persian kingdom came the Greek kingdom and then finally the Roman Empire, which fiercely took control of the civilized world of that day.

THE KINGDOM NOW

The fifth kingdom, which was represented by clay and iron toes in the dream, occurred when the Roman Kingdom was divided into ten provinces under Augustus Caesar, who ruled from 27 BC to AD 14. During Augustus'

rule, the ten toes were established, and then Jesus came as the Rock and crashed into the toes in 3 BC.

As prophesied by this dream, during the divided Roman Empire, Jesus came and setup His Kingdom as the rock that

would fill the whole earth. This is consistent with other passages of Scripture where Jesus is referred to as the chief cornerstone and the rock that the builders rejected (see Luke 20:17), as well as the rock that followed the Hebrews in the wilderness (see 1 Cor. 10:4).

Jesus also told Peter that on this rock (the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah) He would build His Church (see Matt. 16:18). Clearly we can see that the rock in this dream speaks of Jesus.

His First Coming

The future return of Jesus is popularly referred to as the "Second Coming."

Although it is a minor detail, I refer to that event as the Final Return of Jesus. I believe that the popular phrase of Second Coming has the numbering wrong.

Jesus' First Coming was the manger in the stable at Bethlehem. His Second Coming was when He came back from the dead at His Resurrection. His Third Coming was when He came in judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70.

That is why I refer to His future coming as the Final Return. We have already examined how Daniel 2 prophesies of Jesus coming into the earth as the rock that crushed the divided Roman Empire and that Jesus' Kingdom began to grow and is

continuing to grow even to this very day. This naturally leads to the question: When did Jesus' Kingdom arrive? Was it at the manger? Was it when Jesus began His ministry at thirty years of age? Was it when He died on the cross? Was it at the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem? Just as knowing which "Coming" we are looking forward to is an important detail, understanding the arrival of the Kingdom is also important.

We have seen that Caesar Augustus (27 BC-AD 14) divided Rome into ten provinces that are represented in Daniel 2 as the ten toes of the statue. Daniel 2:44 says "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

Thus we know that the rock, which represents Jesus and His Kingdom, arrived during the 27 BC-AD 14 rule of Augustus in 3 BC. (Author's note: Jesus was technically born at 3 BC, not AD 0; our calendars are slightly off.) Jesus the King came in the manger at Bethlehem and brought His Kingdom with Him. Then thirty years later, John the Baptist began to proclaim that King Jesus was about to be revealed. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 3:2.)

As Jesus ministered for three and a half years, His constant

theme was teaching and demonstrating what it looks like to be in His Kingdom.

During the last supper, Jesus stood and said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matt.

26:28). This was a confirmation of His Kingdom being transferred to His followers as they transitioned from the Old Covenant into the New Covenant.

At His death on the cross, He declared, “It is finished!” (John. 19:30). In the eyes of God, this was the end of the Age of Moses and the inauguration of the Kingdom of Jesus by removing the need for Old Covenant animal sacrifice. Though the Jews continued the temple practices after the death of Jesus, there was no value to this in the eyes of God.

Even after His resurrection, Jesus used His precious time to continue training His ambassadors about the Kingdom they had just inherited. “After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3.)

Jesus’ birth, ministry, last supper, death, resurrection, and ascension message all centered on the removal of the Old Covenant and the inauguration of the New Covenant. Jesus is the rock of Daniel 2 and has established His Kingdom in the earth. This Kingdom is founded on the New Covenant of

forgiveness (see Matt. 26:28; Heb. 8:8-12), rather than the Old Covenant of blessings and cursings (see Deut. 28.) Jesus declared that His Kingdom had come as the smallest seed and would grow to be the largest tree in the garden, that it came as a measure of yeast and would work its way through the whole loaf (Matt. 13:31-33).

There are some who have taught that Jesus' Kingdom will someday arrive in the future and be established all at once with complete dominion, yet Jesus taught that His Kingdom would be established gradually.

According to God, what Jesus accomplished on the cross removed the need for the old sacrificial system. The Father went so far as to rip the veil in the Temple, revealing that the Ark of the Covenant was no longer there and that the old system had been superseded. Yet between AD 30 and AD

70, the Jewish non-Christians carried on with the Old Covenant ways in the Temple. To the Father God, who had just laid down His only Son as the perfect lamb sacrifice, this was an obstinate abomination. The apostle John even refers to those Jews as the synagogue of Satan (see Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

The author of Hebrews refers to the Old Covenant system as "obsolete and outdated [because of the cross]," and said it

“will soon disappear [because the AD 70 destruction which would completely destroy Jerusalem, the Temple, the Jews as a nation and the priesthood]” (Heb. 8:13).

The Kingdom came in the manger, was proclaimed by John the Baptist, was explained and demonstrated by Jesus, was confirmed in the covenant of forgiveness at the last supper, was established more fully by the finishing of the Old Covenant on the cross, was passed to the apostolic ambassadors before His ascension, and grew throughout the Book of Acts to reaching the entire inhabited, civilized world before the AD 70 destruction removed the Old Covenant ways entirely.

At this point the Kingdom is here and now; it has been here for 2000

years, and it is growing and will continue to do so.

Chapter Points

- Jesus is the Rock that crashed into the Roman Empire in the first century.
- His Kingdom was established at His first coming, not at a future coming.
- His Kingdom will continue to grow without end (see Isa. 9:7).
- We don't need a revived Roman Empire to fulfill Daniel 2.

chapter ten

the

KINGDOM

ADVANCING

As I wrote in the last chapter, there are those who believe that the

Kingdom will arrive all at once in the future. They say that God's

Kingdom will instantly triumph over all the powers of the devil when it finally appears. This idea comes from thinking that we are currently in the "Church Age." I have already shown that the Kingdom arrived with the

King in 3 BC. In this chapter we will look at the nature of this gradually advancing and ever-increasing Kingdom.

The Ever-Increasing Kingdom

Jesus came to set up His Kingdom, and He said that it would continually grow. He used these two analogies to describe this aspect of the Kingdom: *The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches* (see Matt.

13:31-32).

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman uses in making bread.

Even though she puts only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeates every part of the dough (see Matt. 13:33).

As Daniel 2:44 says:

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

This verse is reminiscent of Isaiah 9:7, which says, "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end…" (Isa. 9:7 NKJV). The nature of the Kingdom of God is ever progressing—always expanding, never retreating, and continually growing. Take, for example, the following five progressive statements from Scripture. The Word says that we move from:

1. Brighter to Brighter

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day (Proverbs 4:18

NIV).

2. Grace to Grace

And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace (John 1:16 NKJV).

3. Strength to Strength

They go from strength to strength… (Psalm 84:7 NKJV).

4. Faith to Faith

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17 NKJV).

5. Glory to Glory

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18 NKJV).

According to these verses, we can accurately say that the Church is currently walking in the greatest brightness, grace, strength, faith, and glory that it ever has. This is very hard for some to accept, but it is true. Jesus set in motion a Kingdom that is still progressing and being established more and more each 158

day. “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end…”

(Isa. 9:7 NKJV). It will continue to progress until it has fulfilled the following verses: ...*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea* (Isaiah 11:9 NKJV).

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14 NKJV).

But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD

(Numbers 14:21 NKJV).

It is important to understand that Jesus set up His Kingdom upon His

first visit. Many have been taught that Jesus set up the “Church Age” and that we are not currently living in the “Kingdom Age,” but that the Church Age continues until Jesus’ return, at which point He will initiate the Kingdom Age. Scripture does not support this point of view in any way; Jesus clearly brought His Kingdom (see Matt. 4:17) and sent His disciples to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom (see Matt. 10:7), not the Gospel of the Church Age.

The whole concept of a "Church Age" cannot be found in Scripture. The Kingdom arrived in the first century when *the rock cut without hands*, Jesus, crashed into the Roman Empire, and it has been growing ever since.

Many who don't understand that Jesus and His Kingdom (as established

during the first century) are *"the rock cut without hands"* from Nebuchadnezzar's dream also believe the Roman Empire has to be rebuilt so that Jesus can crash into it *in the future* in order to set up His Kingdom. Fortunately, this has already been accomplished. Jesus completely fulfilled Daniel 2 in the first century, and there is no reason to revive the Roman Empire so that Jesus can fulfill this prophecy twice!

What of the "Remnant"?

We have established that the Kingdom that Jesus set up is progressing and advancing all the time. The next question that typically arises is about remnant 159

theology. In the Old Testament, we observe a pattern of the "faithful remnant."

In other words, often only a minority of a group of people was actually faithful to God. For example, out of all the people on the face of the earth, only eight survived the flood on Noah's

ark (see Gen. 8). Out of all of Gideon's men, only 300 fought in the battle (see Judg. 7). Out of all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, only Lot and his daughters survived (see Gen. 19). This is a common pattern in the Old Testament.

Many people have carried the idea of the remnant over from the Old

Testament into the New Testament, yet this is not the nature of the Kingdom that Jesus established in the New Testament. Rather, the remnant concept is reversed in the Kingdom of God. Under Jesus, out of twelve disciples, He only lost one, Judas (see John 17:12). The Kingdom starts as a seed and grows to the biggest tree; it starts as a little leaven and works through the whole loaf (see Matt. 13:31-33); it starts as a stone cut without hands and grows into a mountain that fills the whole earth (see Dan. 2:35).

The New Testament holds no room for remnant thinking. This type of

defeatist thinking, which sees only a portion of the whole Church as good, needs to be set aside with animal sacrifice and certain other Old Testament realities that are no longer valid.

Historical Perspective

Many Christians have a hard time viewing the future optimistically because they have a lack of perspective regarding the past. When they look back, they think that they

are seeing “the good ol’ days.” However, with a better grasp on history, we will see that God’s Kingdom has, in fact, been steadily progressing forward. To see this improvement, we must lift ourselves to a higher perspective, from which we can look over the course of history. We know what life is like today; let’s compare it to the conditions of society in the past.

The Early 1800s1

First, let’s look at what life was like in the United States 200 years ago—in the early 1800s. At that time, the population was slightly over 5 million, but 20

percent of those people were slaves (that’s more than 1 million slaves). Abortion 160

was legal during most of the nineteenth century, and according to the records, one fifth of all pregnancies were aborted (Michigan had the highest rate at 34

percent). Also, in many states, the age of sexual consent was as low as nine or ten years old, and prostitution was commonplace. New York City estimated having a ratio of one prostitute to every 64 men, and Savannah estimated a ratio of 1 to 39.

This was also the time of the pioneers and covered wagon trains heading westward. Thousands relocated to the “wild

west," looking for gold and a fresh start. When gold was discovered, the gold rushes created the most despicable and dangerous of communities. In fact, throughout the West, murder was so common that most people carried a gun for protection. Even in safer frontier communities, no organized churches were formed until years after settlements had been established. At the same time, tens of thousands of American Indians were murdered or forced from their lands, and thousands of Chinese people were imported on the western coast as slaves.

During that time period, women had virtually no rights. Not only were women not allowed to vote, but their husbands were legally allowed to beat them as long as they avoided maiming or killing them. Also, alcoholism occurred at a much higher rate than it does today.

Although some godly people were laying the foundations for the U.S.

government and other good things were happening, from these simple statistics, we can plainly see that morally, ethically, and spiritually the climate of the U.S.

was far worse than it is today.

The Time of Jesus' Childhood

Looking even farther back in time, let's examine the climate of the whole world approximately 2,000 years ago—the time when

Jesus was a child. As we know, the Roman Empire ruled the world, with its primary cultural centers being in Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. Throughout the empire, slavery was commonplace—to the point that in Italy, the hub of the empire, about 40 percent of the population was slaves. Homosexuality was also the norm, especially between masters and slaves. Many babies were killed after birth because of being deformed or sickly or even simply female.

Obviously, at that time, since Jesus was still a child, the Gospel had not 161

yet arrived on the scene. The Jews had a revelation of God, yet they lived in disobedience, and it had been 400 years since a prophet had spoken on God's behalf. Rather, most people worshipped a multitude of cruel and capricious gods, including Jupiter, Juno, and Neptune. Temple prostitution and ritual child sacrifice were a regular part of this religious system. This was also the era of the gladiators, and in the Roman arenas, people were regularly tortured to death or mauled by wild animals. Later, under Nero, this fate befell many of the early Christians. It is hard for us to understand, but the philosophers that Western society so praises—Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates—saw nothing wrong with these practices.

Ernest Hampden Cook, in his book *The Christ Has Come*, wrote: The fact is that bad as the world still is, yet morally it is vastly better than it was when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of

Judea…. Few people in these days have an adequate conception of the misery and

degradation which were then the common lot of almost all mankind,

owing the monstrous wickedness of the times, to continual wars, to

the cruelties of political despotism, and of everywhere-prevailing

slavery.2

Outside of the Roman Empire, things were no better. In Africa, Asia, and Australia, people worshipped nature, demons, and their deceased ancestors.

In North America, the American Indians had many forms of worship, and in South America, tens of thousands of people were regularly sacrificed to a bloodthirsty god. Yet throughout the whole world, no one knew the Messiah.

Truly, as we can see from this brief overview, the world was lost in darkness beyond what most of us can even imagine. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, "…formerly you, the Gentiles…were at that time separated from Christ…having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:11-12).

Today

By comparison, let's examine the world today. The Gospel is reaching even the remotest places in the world, and Christianity is experiencing phenomenal growth globally. In fact, worldwide, more than 200,000 people are being born 162

again daily. In China, it's 20,000 a day, and in South America, 35,000 a day.

That adds up to more than 1 million people who are becoming Christians every work week. The tiny seed that came into the earth in that little nation of Israel has grown to permeate the earth. Christianity is, in fact, the largest, most influential force of humanity in the world today.

Certainly, I am not saying our world is perfect or that global peace and utopia are just around the corner. Until Jesus' return, the struggle between light and dark will continue. Difficult times of war, famine, disease, and poverty may yet happen in the future, and during such times, people are often capable of the most inhumane acts. I am not denying the reality that life is sometimes tragic and excruciatingly painful. But I also want to highlight the definite reality that, though it is not anywhere near perfect living here on earth, it is consistently becoming morally, ethically, and spiritually better. We must be watchful and hard at work, for we still have much to accomplish before Christ's return, but we must do this with the understanding that we are gaining ground, not losing it. The increase of God's government and peace is truly without end.

Many of you may have been stretched by the historical facts that you just read. You may need to read it a few more times to grasp the shift in thinking required of you. But when you are ready to be stretched some more, the following material from author James Rutz will take you even farther.

Status Update3

Rutz states that the growing core of Christianity crosses theological lines and includes 707 million born-again people, a number that is increasing by 8

percent each year. (This number excludes those groups that have essentially stopped growing because they are "so liberal in theology, so isolated in structure, or so rooted in… tradition.") This growing core of Christianity is comprised primarily of charismatics, Pentecostals, and evangelicals—their main characteristic being that they are part of "expanding, connected, and easily countable networks."

Though straight projections never work, it is interesting to note, as Rutz does, that the current growth rate would create a world composed entirely of what he calls "apostolic Christians" by 2032. In fact, tongue-in-cheek, Rutz tells us that, according to statistics, by the fall of 2032, there will be more Christians than people on the earth.

The new realities Rutz is pointing at are clear. As he says, “The future of your world is being written at this very hour.” For example, Rutz points out: •

Until 1960, Western evangelicals outnumbered non-Western (Latino,

black, and Asian) evangelicals two to one.

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In 2000, non-Western evangelicals had surpassed Westerners four to

one.

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In Latin America, traditionally a Catholic region, now has more

evangelicals attending church on a Sunday morning than Catholics.

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In India, “as soon as we produce some church models that are culturally

acceptable to Hindus," we may see between 70 and 100 million secret

Indian Christians come forth.

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More missionaries are now sent from non-Western nations than from

Western nations

These facts about the new realities of Christianity are somewhat

mindboggling. As Rutz says, "God writes history, but human eyes have trouble reading his handwriting. It's not that he writes too small, but too big."

Every 25 Minutes4

When the Spirit was first poured out on the early Church, 3,000 people were saved in one day. That was amazing. Back then, it was a huge number.

However, today approximately 3,000 people get saved, somewhere in the world, every 25 minutes! The math is almost

overwhelming.

According to Rutz, often these numbers happen though large events, such as the crusade that Reinhard Bonnke held in Lagos, Nigeria, in November 2000. During those six days and nights, almost 6 million people attended, and 3.4 million registered decisions to follow Christ, over 1 million of them being on the final night. One important element of such events is the widespread healing of all kinds of physical deformities, diseases, and illnesses through the power of the Holy Spirit. At Bonnke's Nigeria event, over 1,000 physicians were present to examine people and confirm healings. Bonnke also had 30,000

ushers and spent the six months prior training 200,000 counselors to assist the many converts.

Such massive influxes of new believers are not isolated events, but are increasingly becoming common occurrences. Some have even estimated the advent of a billion new converts within ten years. "From our vantage point in North America and Europe, where church membership is going nowhere, this sounds like a cooked-up fantasy," Rutz says. "But it is true. This is the biggest megashift in history. Can you think of any time when over a billion people eagerly changed their lives and loyalties in one generation?" Looking at the statistics, we can clearly see that, if growth continues at this rate, whole nations

will experience transformation on all levels. In fact, as Rutz predicts, "We are in the early stages of a total transformation of our planet."

The point of these statistics is clear. The "good ol' days" were not as good as many of us have assumed they were. When we remove our romanticized lenses in order to see what really was, as well as what really is happening now, we can clearly see that God's Kingdom is markedly advancing.

What's Left?

After reading the contents of this book thus far, many will likely make the exclamation, "Then what's left!" That is the natural response when a person finds out that the Great Tribulation has already happened, there is no one-world ruler coming to take over, we aren't waiting for a Jewish revival as the sign of the end, and there is no secret rapture. For some who have made the endtimes the major focus of their Christian walk, if they have come to agree with the content of this book, it is likely that their theology has been shaken as if by an earthquake.

Many may feel like they are losing a major portion of the New Testament that they thought related to them personally when they find out that it had a historical and prophetic fulfillment. This would be the wrong assessment.

We don't lose any of the 360 Old Testament messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled; in fact, these fulfillments build our faith and knowledge of the Word.

To realize that Matthew 24 has occurred does not mean that we lose Scripture; it means that we can affirm how amazing of a prophet Jesus is! Everything that He said would happen within a generation (forty years) did happen within that generation (forty years). Once people finds out that there is no future Tribulation or antichrist, they shouldn't feel loss; they should be rejoicing because of what they lost!

Discovering the optimistic view of the endtimes is one of the most exciting and wonderful bits of news that the modern Christian can hear. Receiving this good news as negative typically comes from an unhealthy place in the hearts of individuals, especially the ones who want to see God rain down judgment upon their surroundings. Many will not receive this book as good news because they, like James and John, want to see the destruction of sinners, yet Jesus would say, "You know not what spirit you are of" (Luke 9:55).

The Kingdom and the Church

Although a lot of the passages that are taught as future are actually past, I do also believe there are many passages of

Scripture that remain to be fulfilled.

These passages mainly fall into two categories: The Kingdom of God and the Church.

I define the Kingdom of God as His ruler-ship, in other words, the King's Domain (i.e. KingDom). Therefore, the Kingdom is God's sphere of ruler-ship. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was growing and expanding (see Matt. 13:31-33; Isa. 9:7), that God's ruler-ship is ever increasing from glory to glory.

The primary way that the Kingdom grows is through God's representatives in the earth, His Church. Jesus placed the keys of the Kingdom into the hands of Peter as the representative of the Church (see Matt. 16:18-19). Therefore, the Church in the earth is working as God's representatives to expand and grow the Kingdom and see the increase of His government grow without

end—the ultimate end being that it would be on earth as it is in Heaven (see Matt. 6:10).

With this understanding, let's examine a few passages about the Kingdom that I believe are yet to be fulfilled, then a few regarding the Church that remain to be fulfilled.

The Kingdom

In Luke 19, Jesus told a parable:

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for 166

THE KINGDOM ADVANCING

himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, **Occupy till I come** (Luke 19:12-13 KJV).

Jesus is the one who went to a far country (Heaven) to receive for Himself a Kingdom, and He will someday return. When Jesus left, He put stewardship into the hands of His servants (the Church). To *occupy* is to aggressively expand.

The servants took the finances they were given and multiplied them. We are called to occupy the Kingdom, to advance it in the earth, to be a part of its growth from glory to glory. *We are to occupy until He comes, not be pre-occupied with His coming*. As the prophet Isaiah wrote: **Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,** *upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this* (Isaiah 9:7 KJV).

The Kingdom of God started growing at Jesus' first coming and will

continue to grow until it culminates in His final return. As Jesus put it in another parable: *Another parable put he forth*

unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: **but when it is grown,** *it is the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spoke he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal,* **till the whole was leavened** (Matthew 13:31-33 KJV).

The Kingdom will continue to grow until His glory and knowledge fill

the whole earth.

...For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of The Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

Currently Jesus is sitting on the throne, waiting until all His enemies are made into His footstool.

When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven **and sat down** *at God's right hand* (Mark

16:19 TLB).

But when this Priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God. **Since that time He waits** *for His enemies to be made His footstool* (Hebrews 10:12-13).

Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until He has **put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death** (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Jesus has been sitting at the right hand of God for 2,000 years waiting while His Church builds Him a divine ottoman of sorts. The assignment of the Church for the last 2,000 years has been to crush satan under our feet—"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20a)—and thus put Jesus' enemies under His feet. As delegated authorities, by crushing satan under our feet, we are placing him under Jesus' feet. We are part of a progressive destruction of the demonic kingdom, which will continue until death, the final enemy, is destroyed.

The ultimate goal is that His "Kingdom would come" and His "will be

done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The "signs of the times" that Jesus listed in Matthew 24 were only in reference to AD 70; *therefore, the true "signs" that we can be looking for*

in these days are the evidence of the growth of His Kingdom within the earth.

The Church

1. The Church in Unity

Jesus' famous prayer for unity in the Church is recorded in John 17:

That they all may be one, *as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be* **one in Us** *, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one** *just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me;* **that they may be made perfect in one** *, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me* (John 17:21-23 NASB).

The apostle Paul echoed Jesus' call for unity in his description of the fivefold ministry:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **until we all** *reach* **unity in the faith** *and in the knowledge of*

the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

According to David B. Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*,there are 33,830 Christian denominations in the world today.1 I would say that we have not reached *"unity in the faith."*

One of the largest hindrances to arriving at the "unity of the faith" is an expectancy of the "last days apostasy." If a church believes that there must be a massive falling away from the faith, then that church avoids partnering with other ministries for fear of contamination. Also, if a church believes that the one-world ruler will come and take over a one-world government and a one-world religion, then all progress toward unity is seen as a supposed "sign of the end." Yet, here we have two very clear passages regarding the Church walking in unity. I am not sure what this will look like, but I believe it still is in our future.

2. The Church Grows to Carry the Head

Connected to the mandate of unity is the promise that the Church will mature into a fitting "body" for Christ as the "head":

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of 169

the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: **Till** *we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a* **perfect** [complete] **man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ** (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Throughout the New Testament, the physical body is used as a metaphor to explain the relationship between Christ and His Church. The writers refer to Christ as the head and the Church as His body. The above passage from Ephesians is making reference to this metaphor and declaring that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are working toward the goal that the Body of Christ would be "perfect" and the "measure of the stature of Christ."

Essentially, this is saying that Jesus' body will someday match His head.

Jesus is not going to come back for a weak and sickly body to attach

to His head. The Body of Christ will continue to grow and mature, to

become healthy and strong, and then Jesus will have a body that is capable of carrying His head.

3. The Church Brings Forth the Sons of God

The "sons of God" is a term that applies to all who are His children, both male and female. We are the sons of God, and we have a crucial role to fulfill in relation to creation.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The **creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.** *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it,* **in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God** (Romans 8:18-21).

When we see earthquakes, tsunamis, tornados, wildfires, floods, and

many other natural disasters, I believe that this is the most important passage to keep in view. Rather than immediately asking, *"What sin is God judging?"* or *"What gave the devil access to bring such destruction?"* or simply 170

concluding (wrongly), *"It must be a sign of the times,"* we can find a better understanding of what is taking place in the earth through this passage. The earth is subjected to frustration. Romans 8:22 says that "the whole earth groans" (NKJV). And it is the children of God who are meant to bring it into glorious freedom.

I believe that the children of God will continue to grow into a greater understanding of their identity, which will result in them living in glorious freedom in a way that has not yet been experienced. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom! (See 2 Corinthians 3:17.) Someday in the future, the heart of the Church will be filled with glorious freedom, and this will impact the entire planet!

The Big Three

I do not believe that Jesus will return to earth during my lifetime. I will choose to work as if He is returning soon, but I believe that the Church and the Kingdom have a lot farther to go. Acknowledging that we have a way to go, I am also convinced by Scripture that Jesus absolutely, without a shadow of a doubt, will return to earth in the future to resurrect the dead and bring the Final Judgment. *The Big Three* is what I call the idea that Jesus will still do three things in the future: return, resurrect, and judge. I will address these in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Points

- Remnant theology is not valid in the New Testament; instead, we have an ever-advancing Kingdom of God.
- The Bible contains some promises regarding the Church and the Kingdom that are yet to be fulfilled.
- We are to occupy until He comes, not be preoccupied with His coming.
- The Kingdom will continue to grow until the knowledge of God and His glory fill the whole earth.
- All of Jesus' enemies will be made His footstool prior to His return. The Church enacts this as His delegated authorities on earth.

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The true “sign of the times” is when we see His Kingdom coming and His will being done on earth as it is in Heaven.

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True unity in the Church is a promise that has not yet been fulfilled, but will be before Christ’s return.

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Before Christ’s return, the Church will mature into a “body”

that is capable of carrying its “head”—Christ.

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The Church will bring forth the “sons of God,” who will help release freedom to the earth prior to Christ’s return.

chapter eleven

the

BIG

THREE

I get asked the same question very often: “If there is no rapture, no future Great Tribulation, and no antichrist, then do you believe in the return of Jesus Christ?”

The answer is, absolutely yes! Jesus will return to earth in the future.

I have come to understand that a lot of verses that speak of Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven are actually about the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem (as we covered in Chapters 2 and 3). Yet there are still a significant number of verses that speak about events in our future.

Although I believe that a majority of Bible prophecy has been fulfilled, I still see three major prophetic events as remaining unfulfilled. I refer to these as The Big Three: the physical return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the Final Judgment.

What you have read in this book stands in total agreement, not only with the Scripture, but also with the historical creeds of the Church. The Early Church leaders gathered in Nicaea in AD

325, and once they reached a consensus, they wrote the Nicene Creed. We see in the creed that they believed in a physical, future return of Jesus to earth.

The Nicene Creed

Here's the creed in full:

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,

begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father. **And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead,** whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeded from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.1

We see three things in this one sentence that I've highlighted: He shall come again, He shall judge, and His judgment will be of the quick (living) and the dead (which refers to resurrection). These are the three things that even those in AD 325 realized were future unfulfilled events.

The Return of Christ

Although Jesus used the Hebrew phrase "coming upon clouds" in reference to the destruction that God brought on Jerusalem in AD 70, Jesus also prophesied that He would physically return one day in the future.

The majority of the New Testament verses about Jesus' "coming" are about the AD 70 destruction. Keep in mind that Jews in AD 30 were much more focused on the immediate destruction of the Temple, the end of sacrifice, and the removal of the Holy City. The idea that Jesus would return physically

someday in the future was not their major focus. The 174

early Church's thoughts were more consumed with surviving the Jewish persecution and looking forward to Christ's "coming" to punish their persecutors.

Yet, there are several passages that do speak of Jesus' future, physical return to earth. Here are the main passages:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).

While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

At His return, the following two events will occur: the resurrection of the dead and the Final Judgment.

The Resurrection of the Dead

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).

A time is coming—it is still in our future—when all graves will be emptied out and the dead will be sorted into two different categories: the good and the evil, those who will live and those who will be condemned.

This is typically called the Final Judgment; I will address that more in the next section. For now, simply notice that the resurrection occurs first, then 175

the sorting. In the next two passages, we can see more detail regarding what happens to the believers when they are resurrected for the sorting.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:13,16).

Believers who have died are currently "asleep," and we can have hope that when the Lord speaks and blows His trumpet, the dead in Christ will rise first. The apostle Paul gives us more details in this next passage: *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body….*

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44,50-55).

Believers will become immortal, and we will have imperishable bodies. This is likely similar to what happened to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration or after His resurrection. The dead in Christ will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (really fast). Death will be swallowed up in victory.

Now we will look at the third event of the Big Three.

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THE BIG THREE

The Final Judgment

Many verses throughout the New Testament clearly teach about the Final Judgment, including these words from Jesus:

And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:27-29).

Here we can clearly see that Jesus has been given the authority to be the judge. Paul confirmed this in his speech to the people of Athens: *"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject"* (Acts 17:31-32).

This is an affirmation that Jesus will be the judge, but it also says that the *proof* that Jesus is God is in the fact that He was raised from the dead.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and **he will separate the people one from another** *as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left….Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life* (Matthew 25:31-33,46).

Jesus "coming in His glory" is different than the Hebrew idiom "coming in clouds," which is a reference to the destruction of a nation or city. When Jesus "comes in His glory," it will be as a judge on the throne, bringing the Final Judgment.

It is important, also, to notice that Jesus is not judging the character 177

of nations in Matthew 25. The phrase "*all nations*" indicates that everyone will be gathered before Him, but the judge clearly separates the people, the individuals. Some have created strange doctrines on the idea that God will separate "sheep and goat nations," but that is not stated in any passage of Scripture. This is about separating individuals. Individuals are personally accountable before God, not nations.

I know that this is stretching for some of you doctrinally, but I would ask you to reread the Matthew 25 passage a few times and notice that the "sheep and goat nations" teaching is not supported by this passage. We can find further confirmation

for individual (not national) judgment in the following passage:

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved— even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

The Final Judgment will divide righteous people from evil people, and the evil will receive their punishment. Yet the righteous will also receive varying rewards. Christians typically don't like to talk about being rewarded, but Jesus and the early Church had no qualms about rewards.

In this passage, Paul spoke of the rewarding of Christians at the Final Judgment. In fact, it seems like, according to Paul, this is something that should be on our minds.

At the Final Judgment, all humankind will be resurrected and appear before the throne of God. Then individuals are sorted out as good or evil, sheep or goats. Then the good, righteous sheep will have a further judgment, which is to examine them for reward. This is pictured as each individual having a large pile of wood, hay, and straw piled in front of them, as well as gold, silver, and jewels mixed into the pile. I picture each believer standing by a pile, which represents their life; then a runner with a torch comes and begins to set fire to each

person's pile. As the pile burns, all the 178

wasted time in one's life burns as the wood, hay, and straw. Then finally the fire burns out, the pile is gone, and all that remains is a smaller pile of ash.

Among the ash is gold, silver, and jewels. These represent the rewards.

There are some who teach that every sinful action in a Christian's life will be projected on a giant screen in Heaven for all to see; then God will forgive that Christian, allowing admission into Heaven. This is an evil and foolish teaching that promotes shame to try to stop Christians from sinning. According to the Bible, God forgives us when we repent, and He chooses to remember our sins no more (see Heb. 8:12; 10:17). This idea of judgment comes from the dark ages, not from the Bible.

There is a judgment for Christians, but not for shame and guilt over sins that God has already forgiven and doesn't even remember. The only reason to judge Christians is to dole out the varying rewards.

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God (1

Corinthians 4:5).

This judgment is not a matter of salvation; it is a matter of how much praise or how little praise one will receive. As Paul wrote in another place, *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat…*

so then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:10,12).

Again, this accounting is about reward, not about shame and punishment.

Although, there won't be much praise for some Christians who stand before His throne, this is not about shame and punishment. Of course, it would be better to live a life that God can praise and reward with gold, silver, and jewels rather than a life that will burn up leaving nothing but a pile of ash.

When most people think of the Final Judgment, this is the passage that comes to mind:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small,

standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

This is a very descriptive passage and gives more detail to the picture of judgment, while basically encapsulating the previously examined passages.

Simply stated, one day Jesus will return in glory with His angels and bring judgment based on whose names are and are not written in the Lamb's book of life. Those who are not in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire. Those who are in the book of life will then have their lives burned down as wood, hay, and straw or silver, gold, and jewels. Then each Christian will receive the due praise from God. This is what shall take place in the future and directs how we choose to live.

Chapter Points

- There are yet three major prophetic events remaining to be fulfilled: the physical return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the Final Judgment.

- In the future, when Christ returns, all of the dead will be resurrected for judgment. After their resurrection, the good and evil people are sorted.

- At the resurrection of the dead, believers will recieve imperishable bodies.

- Jesus will be the judge at the Final Judgment, and He will judge individuals, not nations.

-

At the judgment, evil people (unbelievers) will receive

punishment and righteous people (Christians) will receive rewards.

•

Christians will be rewarded based on how they lived their lives

for the Kingdom. However, God forgives all who repent, even

those whose lives receive little or no reward. His purpose in this

is not humiliation or condemnation, and our sins will not be

projected on a screen for all to see.

APPENDIX ONE

A Word to Charismatics

The Bible is the ultimate test for all teachings and revelations. As I have traveled and taught, I have seen an atrocity committed countless times, mainly by Charismatic Christians, that atrocity being the thought that experience trumps the Bible.

Although it would never be stated in such a way, there is more

value and respect put upon a "spiritual experience" than upon "theological training."

Theology (the study of God) is spoken of in derogatory terms such as "head-knowledge" whereas "spiritual experience" is more highly valued as "heart-knowledge." I believe that all Christians should value experiential knowledge, as no one can even be a Christian without having had the supernatural experience of being born-again. Yet all experiences are subject to being tested and evaluated by the Word of God. That is the challenge that I desire to remind my fellow Charismatics of. We must not believe every prophet, spirit, or prophecy; they must be tested and evaluated.

"Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21).

"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse" (Galatians 1:8).

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1

John 4:1).

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In the field of endtime teachings, our movement has displayed an incredible lack of discernment and deep gullibility. For example, one Charismatic TV

preacher claims that he knows his endtime teachings are right because he prays in tongues while studying. I have heard countless stories of brother so-and-so or sister-whoever who had a vision of the rapture, the antichrist, or a coming great tribulation. While it is possible that they did have a vision, this does not automatically mean it was from the Lord.

One of the biggest disagreements I run into when speaking with Charismatics regarding the endtimes is a prophetic experience that someone had. Whether it is their beloved grandmother, a respected prophet, or an 8-year-old child that had a Near Death Experience; Charismatics are leaning their doctrine on experience rather than the study of the Word. The conflict arises when one 8-year-old child has a vision of the endtimes, which disagrees with another 8-year-old child who had a vision of the endtimes. Then where does the Charismatic turn? Hopefully, they will be like the Bereans and go to study the Word, rather than simply believing the experiences of others (see Acts 17:11). Whichever 8-year-old's experience aligns with the Word and sound doctrine, believe that one!

(The other one may have had a vision from the devil, from the cheese they ate before they slept, or as in the case of many of these stories the vision was merely interpreted wrongly by the adult listeners. For example the child might have seen a great battle and the adult listener said that this was an endtime battle, when perhaps the Lord was simply showing the child the great spiritual conflict that we are currently engaged in as believers.) *It is time for a revival of evaluating prophecy by the infallible truth of the Word.*

Raptureless was written with the deepest respect for the Word of God and a passion for the Holy Spirit. I expect that it will be revised many times in my lifetime as I continue to learn. Yet I believe that the fundamental presuppositions laid out in the Statement of Faith are sound and hold up against the test of Scripture. Let us have the balance of knowing the Scripture and the power of God, that we might not go into error (see Matt. 22:29).

Sincerely,

Jonathan Welton

APPENDIX TWO

Statement of EndTime

Beliefs

I believe in the optimistic view of the Kingdom of God being present and growing as was taught and believed before the "Darbyism" of the 1830s became popular.

I believe that when the New Testament writers spoke of the "last days"

they were referring to the end of the Old Covenant Age, not the end of the world.

I believe that when Jesus spoke of His *coming*. He was using Old Testament Apocalyptic language to describe His *coming* in judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70.

I believe that Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks was referring to Christ and completed by Christ. I do not believe that Daniel 9 teaches a future seven-year Tribulation.

I believe that the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 fulfilled the Great Tribulation, the Day of Vengeance, and the time of Jacob's trouble.

I believe in the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the Final Judgment. I do not believe in a secret rapture of Christians prior to the return of Christ.

I believe that *antichrist* is a first century name for "Gnosticism" and perhaps other false teachings. I do not believe that the Bible prophesies a future one-world ruler.

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I believe that the Book of Revelation was written in approximately the mid-60s AD and contains many predictions regarding the first century destruction of Jerusalem.

I believe that the "Beast" of Revelation is a reference either to the person of Nero or the Roman Empire (depending on the context).

I believe that the Israel of God, the Ekklesia, is and always has been, the true inheritors of His covenant promises. This is not based on race but faith.

I believe that the Kingdom of God arrived with Jesus' first coming and will fill the whole earth in preparation for His final return.

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APPENDIX THREE

Recommended Reading

I have categorized the following books so that you can find more information about any specific endtime topic. I hope that you have enjoyed my book as a clear and concise introduction. I am not endorsing everything in each of the following books, but for the most part, each of them has been of benefit to me in

my journey. Swallow the meat, spit out the bones. God bless!

A Good Overview and Introduction *Victorious Eschatology* by Harold Eberle and Martin Trench *Endtimes Fiction* by Gary DeMar *The Last Days According* to Jesus by R.C. Sproul *Last days Madness* by Gary DeMar **Understanding Matthew 24**

Is Jesus Coming Soon? by Gary DeMar *Victorious Eschatology* by Harold Eberle and Martin Trench *Matthew 24 Fulfilled* by John L. Bray *The Great Tribulation* by David Chilton *The Olivet Discourse Made Easy* by Kenneth Gentry **The History of the Modern View**

Whose Right It Is by Kelley Varner *10 Popular Prophecy Myths Exposed and Answered* by Gary DeMar **Israel's Place in the Endtimes**

Exploding the Israel Deception by Steve Wohlberg, (Jewish Christian author) *Israel and Bible Prophecy* by John L. Bray *10 Popular Prophecy Myths Exposed and Answered* by Gary DeMar *Zion's Christian Soldiers?* by Stephen Sizer 187

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Ezekiel 36–38 (Gog and Magog)

Why the End of the World Is Not in Your Future by Gary DeMar **Zechariah 12 and 14**

One chapter in Last Days Madness by Gary Demar **Dating the**

Writing of the Book of Revelation *Before Jerusalem Fell by* Kenneth Gentry *The Early Church and the End of the World* by Gary DeMar and Francis Gumerlock **The Destruction of Jerusalem**

Josephus: The Complete Works

The Destruction of Jerusalem by George Peter Holford **The Early Church Understanding of the Endtimes** *The Early Church and the End of the World* by Gary DeMar **The Antichrist**

The Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians 2 by John L. Bray *The Beast of Revelation Identified* by Kenneth Gentry **Commentaries on the Book of Revelation** *The Great Tribulation* by David Chilton *Days of Vengeance* by David Chilton *Commentary on Revelation* by Gordon Fee *The Book of Revelation Made Easy* by Kenneth Gentry *Navigating the Book of Revelation* by Kenneth Gentry *Revelation for Everyone* by N.T. Wright 188

APPENDIX FOUR

The Authorship Date of the

Book of Revelation

I have come to understand that the majority of the Book of Revelation was written regarding events that took place at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The scope of the book in your hands is not able to adequately address this topic; however, I do want to briefly discuss the issue of authorship. To believe that Revelation is about the AD 70 destruction, the main issue that must be addressed is the date of authorship. If the book was written in AD 96, as many modern teachers claim, then there is no way that my point of view could be valid. Yet, I believe that the overwhelming body of evidence proves beyond reasonable doubt that Revelation was more likely written before AD

68. Therefore, it is important to take a few minutes to establish the date of its writing.

The primary reason some Bible teachers claim that the Book of Revelation was written around AD 96 is because John noted in Revelation 1:9 that he was on the island of Patmos at the time he received the Revelation. There is some historical evidence that John was exiled to Patmos under the reign of Domitian between AD 81 and AD 96. Therefore, the book might have been written during that time—or so some claim. In reality, there are also historical documents that tell us that John was exiled to Patmos at a much earlier date.

Here I will share ten evidences that Revelation was written

before AD 68.

1. The Syriac

We have the witness of one of the most ancient versions of the New Testament, called *The Syriac*. The second-century Syriac Version, called the *Peshitto*, says the following on the title page of the Book of Revelation: "Again the revelation which was upon the holy John the Evangelist from God when he was on the island of Patmos where he was thrown

by the emperor Nero."1

We know that Nero Caesar ruled over the Roman Empire from AD 54 to AD 68. Therefore, John had to have been on the island of Patmos during this earlier period. One of the oldest versions of the Bible tells us when Revelation was written! That alone is a very compelling argument.

2. Revelation 17:10

When we look at the internal evidence, we find that there is also a very clear indicator regarding the date of authorship, found in Revelation 17:10: "They are also seven kings. *Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come*, he must remain for only a little while" (Rev. 17:10).

This passage, which is speaking of the line of rulers in Rome, tells us exactly how many rulers had already come, which one was currently in power, and that the next one would only last a short while. Take a look at how that perfectly fits with Nero and the Roman Empire of the first century.

The rule of the first seven Roman Emperor's is as follows:

Julius Caesar (49–44 BC)

Augustus (27 BC–AD 14)

Tiberius (AD 14–37)

Caligula (AD 37–41)

Claudius (AD 41–54)

"Five have fallen…"

Nero (AD 54–68)

"One is…"

Galba (June AD 68–January AD 69, a six month ruler-ship)

"the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while."

Of the first seven kings, five had come (Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius), one was now in

power (Nero), and one had not yet come (Galba), but would only remain a little time (six months). The current Caesar at the time of John's writing was the sixth Caesar, Nero.

3. Those Who Pierced Him

Lo, he doth come with the clouds, and see him shall every eye, even **those who** 190

did pierce him, *and wail because of him shall* **all the tribes of the land.** *Yes! Amen* (Revelation 1:7 YLT).

We already examined the Hebrew idiom, "coming on clouds," so we know that this speaks not of the return of Christ for the Final Judgment day, but of God coming to bring judgment on a city or nation (see Chapter 2 for more on this).

The phrase "those who did pierce him" refers to the people of the first century. According to this passage, they were expected to be alive at the time of Revelation's fulfillment. How is that possible if Revelation was not going to come to pass until 2,000 or more years later? Consider also that "those who did pierce him" weren't even alive in AD 96 because they would have been killed in the slaughter of AD 70. This verse is a clear indicator of Revelation being written before AD 70.

4. Jewish Persecution of Christians

The Jewish persecution of Christianity in Revelation 6 and 11 indicates a pre-AD 70 authorship. The Jews were not in a position to persecute the early Church after they were slaughtered in AD 70. In fact, since the AD

70 slaughter, the Jews have *never* been in a position to be able to persecute Christians.

5. Judaizing Heretics in the Church

The activity of the Judaizing heretics in the Church (see Rev. 2:6,9,15; 3:9) would not have been as large of an issue after Paul's epistles had been circulated. Therefore, an early date of authorship allows for the heretics to be a larger problem.

6. Existence of Jerusalem and the Temple

The existence and integrity of Jerusalem and the Temple (see Rev. 11) suggest a date before the destruction of AD 70.

7. Time-related Passages

The internal time-related portions of Revelation indicate that the events it foretells will come to pass shortly (see Rev. 1:1,3; 22:10,20). If this was read with an unbiased perspective, one would conclude that Revelation was not written about events 2,000 years in the future.

8. John's Appearance in AD 96

Another reason to believe that the Book of Revelation was written at the earlier date is because Jerome noted in his writings that John was seen in AD

96 and that he was so old and infirm that "he was with difficulty carried to the church, and could speak only a few words to the people."2 We must put this fact together with what Revelation 10:11 says: that John must "prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." It is difficult to imagine that John would be able to speak to many nations and many kings at any date after AD 96 since he was already elderly and feeble.

9. Timetable Comparison with Daniel

In Daniel, the author was told to "seal up the vision, for it is a long way off"

(Dan. 12:4)—which referred to a 483-year wait until Jesus came to fulfill the prophecy. By contrast, in Revelation, John was told to "not seal up the vision because it concerns things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev 22:10). If 483 years was considered a long way off, meaning that the vision should be sealed, it makes no sense that 2,000 plus years would be considered "shortly to come to pass" and not to be sealed up. Clearly, Revelation shouldn't be sealed because it was about to

come to pass at the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem.

10. Only Seven Churches

The existence of only seven churches in Asia Minor (see Rev. 1) indicates a writing date before the greater expansion of Christianity into that region.

John told his readers that Antipas "was killed among you" (Rev. 2:13), and history records that he died around AD 39.3

The Other Perspective

Those who believe in the later date of authorship for the Book of Revelation are mainly leaning on the fact that Irenaeus the Bishop of Lyons (AD 120-202) claimed that John wrote while on Patmos under Domitian's reign.4 This alone could seem compelling, except that Irenaeus is notorious for being terrible at accurately recording dates and times in his writings. Irenaeus is the same Church father who claimed that Jesus' ministry lasted nearly twenty years, from the age of thirty until the age of fifty.5 There is no internal evidence for a later date of authorship; one must lean only upon external evidence to force this conclusion.

Because of the overwhelming body of evidence, I firmly believe

that Revelation was written during Nero's reign and before his death in AD 68.

I believe that Revelation was written regarding the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. Yet, I also know that, at this time, I personally am not called to add my thoughts to the many great works written regarding the Book of Revelation from this point of view. For more information, I will suggest the writings of the experts in this regard: *The Great Tribulation* by David Chilton

Days of Vengeance by David Chilton

Revelation by Gordon Fee

Revelation for Everyone by N.T. Wright

Conclusion

Considering the evidence used to support both the earlier date and the later date for the writing of the Book of Revelation brings us to a simple conclusion.

The most logical and historically responsible conclusion, based on all the evidence, is that Revelation was, in fact, written prior to AD 68 and many of the events foretold in it may refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

endnotes

Chapter 1: How Did We Get Here?

1. It is important to note that Luther was misusing those titles, which belonged in their first century fulfillment. But also Ribera did not

represent the dominant historical view. Whenever doctrine is not formed

out of deep study, considerable debate, much prayer, and the leading

of the Holy Spirit, it stands suspect. This is especially true when doctrine is thrown together as a reactionary and defensive response. The dominant

end-time view before the 1500s was that the majority of prophecies

in the New Testament had been fulfilled by the AD 70 destruction. Some

modern day teachers try to counter this truth by saying that a Catholic

Priest named Luis Del Alcazar was the first one to create this point of

view as a reaction to Luther. It is true that Luis wrote a book about

AD 70 fulfilling prophecy, but this was simply encapsulating the standard

and dominant view into a solid book. This **was not** written as a new

invention, whereas the book that Ribera wrote actually was a new and

reactionary writing. See Kelley Varner, *Whose Right It Is* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1995) Chapter 7, A Fresh Historical Look at Dispensationalism.

2. Fr. Stephen Lourie, "Origin of Rapture Idea," *Saint George Orthodox Church* (2011) ;http://stgeorgepa.net/2011/05/origin-of-rapture-

idea/ (accessed January 24, 2012). Also see Kelley Varner, *Whose Right It Is* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1995).

3. Kenneth Boa, "Starting Over: Cultic Christianity—Reinventing the Faith,"

Bible.org; http://bible.org/seriespage/starting-over-cultic-christianity-reinventing-faith (accessed December 29, 2011).

4. Pamela Starr Dewey, "Edgar Whisenant's 88 Reasons," *Field Guide to the Wild*

World of Religon (2011); http://www.isitso.org/guide/whise.html (accessed January 24, 2012).

5. Ibid.

6. Alan Hajek, "Pascal's Wager," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008); http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/ (accessed January 24, 2012).

7. Gary DeMary, "I Can Agree With These Atheists (Up to a Point)" *American Vision* (May 2, 2011); http://americanvision.org/4414/i-can-agree-with-these-atheists-upto-a-point/ (accessed January 24, 2012).

Chapter 2: The Rapture

1. In this passage, the word translated as "rise" is the same Greek word that is often translated "be resurrected."

2. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1706), 1

Thessalonians 4;
http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/

matthew-henry-complete/1-thessalonians/4.html?p=4
(accessed January

24, 2012).

3. Adam Clarke, *The Adam Clarke Commentary* (1832), 1 Thessalonians 4; http://

www.studylight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=1th&chapter=004
(accessed

January 24, 2012).

Chapter 3: The Great Tribulation

1. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III:7.

2. Eusebius,

The History of the Church: From Christ to Constantine (1965), 69.

3. Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 2* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985); http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.

php?b=40&c=24&com=wes (accessed February 4, 2012.

4. Manlio Simonetti, ed., *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:*

Matthew 14-28 (IVP Academic, 2002), 191.

5. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Popular Exposition of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1979), 211.

6. John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica,* 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1658-1674] 1859), 2:320.

7. Phillip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor; or, A Paraphrase and Version of the*

New Testament; with Critical Notes, and a Practical Improvement of each Section, 6 vols. (Charlestown, MA: Ethridge and Company, 1807), 1:377.

8. Thomas Newton, *Dissertations on the Prophecies, Which Have Remarkably* 196

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Been Fulfilled, and at This Time Are Fulfilling in the World (London: J. F.

Dove, 1754), 377.

9. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and*

Luke, Volume 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1949), 151.

10. George Peter Holford, *The Destruction of Jerusalem* (1805);

http://www.

bible.ca/pre-destruction70AD-george-holford-1805AD.htm (accessed

December 29, 2011). The Covenant Media Foundation has given the author,

Jonathan Welton, permission to print and use this updated version of George Peter Holford's written work (www.cmfnow.com). For the author's original

footnotes to his booklet, view the online version. I have omitted them here for simplicity and readability.

11. J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four Exposition* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 93.

12. Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, n.d.), 163.

13. Edward Hayes Plumptre, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," *Ellicott's*

Commentary on the Whole Bible, ed. Charles John Ellicott, 8 vols. (London: Cassell and Company, 1897), 6:146.

14. Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, translated by Richard M. Gummere, vol. 2 (London: 1920), 437. Quoted in Jonsson and Herbst, *The "Sign" of the*

Last Days-When? (Atlanta, GA: Commentary Press, 1987), 75.

15. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 29-31.

16. Gary DeMar, *Ten Popular Prophecy Myths Exposed and Answered* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2010) Chapter 8, The Myth that the Gospel

Has Yet to be Preached in the "Whole World".

17. Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (1832), Matthew 24; http://

barnes.biblecommenter.com/matthew/24.htm (accessed January 24, 2012).

18. *Ibid*.

19. John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition on the Entire Bible* (1908), Matthew 24; http://

gill.biblecommenter.com/matthew/24.htm (accessed January 24, 2012).

20. Harold R. Eberle and Martin Trench, *Victorious Eschatology* (Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing, 2006), 15.

21. *Ibid*., 60.

22. Chilton, 25.

23. Eberle and Trench, 61-62.

24. Chilton, 15.

Chapter 4: The End of the World

1. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 17-18.

Chapter 6: The Antichrist

1. "John is…writing shortly before the Roman attack on Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, sometime in the 60s AD." [Peter J. Leithhart, *The*

Epistles of John Through New Eyes: From behind the Veil (Athanasius Press, 2009), 9.]

2. "There were three stages of Gnostic development. The pre-Christian drew its inspiration from Greek, Jewish and eastern sources. In the second stage, a still mainly heathen Gnosticism used Christian ideas to fill up gaps—Jesus, for example, appearing as the agent of man's redemption. The third stage

presented Christianity modified by Gnosticism to make it acceptable to

religiously-minded, intellectual pagans, and in this form was heretical and a real danger to orthodox Christian belief….This version of Gnosticism was

a variety of Docetism (from the Greek *Dokeo* = I seem) which, arising from the Gnostic dislike of matter and suffering as associated with God, taught

that Jesus's body was not a real one." [David Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy* (Oxford University Press, 1976), 22, 25.]

3. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible*

(1706), Daniel 9; http://www.studylight.org/com/mhc-com/view.

cgi?book=da&chapter=009 (accessed January 24, 2012).

4. Information about John Levi in this section is gathered from *The Man of Sin*

of 2 Thessalonians 2 by John L Bray (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, 1997). For easier reference, all instances of John Levi in Holford's *The*

Destruction of Jerusalem have been put in boldface.

5. *Ibid*.

6. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 313.

7. "Emperor Nero," *The Preterist Archive*; http://preteristarchive.com/Rome/

Monarchs/nero.html; accessed January 25, 2012.

8. http://preteristarchive.com/BibleStudies/ApocalypseCommenta

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9. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 186-187.

Chapter 7: The Israel of God

1. Thomas Ice of the Pre-Trib Research Center and Randall Price have said,

"There are no Bible verses that say, 'there is going to be a third temple.'"

Ready to Rebuild: The Imminent Plan to Rebuild the Last Days Temple (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 197-198.

2. Harold R. Eberle and Martin Trench, *Victorious Eschatology* (Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing, 2006), 251.

Chapter 8: The Present Kingdom

1. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1706), Daniel 9; http://www.studylight.org/com/mhc-com/view.

cgi?book=da&chapter=009 (accessed January 25, 2012).

2. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 45-46.

Chapter 9: The Advancing Kingdom

1. Unless otherwise noted, the historical data of this section and the one that follows it is paraphrased from Harold R. Eberle, *Christianity Unshackled, Are*

You a Truth Seeker? (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009), 264-267.

2. Ernest Hampden Cook, *The Christ Has Come* quoted in Eberle.

3. The statistical information in this section is paraphrased from James Rutz, *Mega Shift, Igniting Spiritual Power* (Colorado Springs, Co: Empowerment Press, 2005), 25-27.

4. *Ibid.*

Chapter 10: What's Left?

1. David B. Barrett, et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of*

Churches and Religions in the Modern World, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 236.

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Chapter 11: The Big Three

1. "The Nicene Creed"; http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm (accessed January 11, 2012).

Appendix 4: The Date of Authorship for the Book of Revelation

1. Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Publishers, 2006), 131.

2. Harold R. Eberle and Martin Trench, *Victorious Eschatology* (Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing, 2006), 127.

3. "Herod Antipas," *NNDB Tracker*; http://www.nndb.com/

people/901/000103592/ (accessed January 25, 2012).

4. DeMar and Gumerlock, 132.

5. *Ibid.* , 170.