

# Understanding Bible Prophecy

**By David Cloud**

*This book is one of the titles in  
Way of Life's Advanced Bible Studies Series*

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## **Ways These Courses Can Be Used**

- *As a private study tool for the individual Christian*
- *As a course of study in Sunday Schools*
- *As a textbook in Bible colleges and institutes*
- *As part of a home schooling curriculum*
- *As study material in jails and prisons*
- *For discipling new Christians*
- *As a refresher study for Bible College graduates*
- *As expository preaching outlines*
- *As commentaries*

## **In What Order Should the Courses Be Studied?**

The best place to start is with the course on “How to Study the Bible.” This course teaches the principles of how to interpret the Bible and how to study it effectively by means of some of the most important Bible study tools. The new edition of this course (September 2012) is enlarged and improved.

The second course that we recommend is “Bible History and Geography,” which gives an overview of the Bible and how each part fits together within the whole. The new edition of this course (September 2012) is enlarged.

After that we suggest studying the courses in whatever order best fits your need and interest or that of your class.

The other course titles are as follows: Acts, Bible Version Issue, Defense of the Faith, 1 Corinthians, Four Gospels, Genesis, Give Attendance to Doctrine, Hebrews, History of the Churches from a Baptist Perspective, James, Job, Major Prophets (estimated date of publication late 2012), Minor Prophets (estimated date of publication 2013), New Testament Church, Pastoral Epistles, Proverbs, Psalms, Revelation, Romans, Understanding Bible Prophecy (new edition, entirely rewritten and improved, August 2012).

## **Tests and Teacher Score Sheets Are Available Separately**

A lot of time and effort has gone into the creation of the review questions and tests, which are carefully designed to draw the student's attention to the most important points and to help him remember these points long after the course is finished. There are no fluff questions and no mere busy work that wastes the student's time with things of no consequence. Each question is important and deals with things that the Bible student needs to keep in mind beyond the life of the course. The SECTIONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS go over all of the important points in the lessons, thus pointing the student's attention to the most significant material and preparing him for the sectional tests. The SECTIONAL TESTS are drawn from the most important of the review questions. And the FINAL TEST draws from the most important of the sectional tests. Thus each test focuses the student's attention in more closely on the things that he should take away from the course and helps him remember these things by repeating them throughout the review and testing process.

If you take the courses by yourself, don't skip over the review questions and tests. Get the test books (and don't cheat by looking at the answers) and find someone who will test you on the material. It is a very important part of the learning process.

(The previous description doesn't apply to some of the earlier courses such as *The Four Gospels*, which were not quite as thorough in the review/testing process.)

# **New Edition of *Understanding Bible Prophecy***

This new edition of *Understanding Bible Prophecy* (August 2012) is a major reconstruction of the course. The first edition was largely written during our first 10 years as missionaries in Nepal in the 1980s. Since then I have done much more extensive research into prophecy, both in the study of the Bible's prophecies and in traveling to locations mentioned in Bible prophecy.

We have added memory verses for most of the sections.

We have added the following new sections: "Prophecies Being Fulfilled Today" and "The Resurrections and the Judgments."

The section on "Interpretation of Prophecy" has been reworked and enlarged. The most important elements of dispensational theology have been added to this section so that the separate section on "Dispensationalism" is now an optional part of the course.

The section on "Messianic Prophecies" has been enlarged.

The old sections on "The Kingdom of God" and "A Prophetic Overview of the Future" have been reworked and greatly expanded under the title of "Great Prophetic Events of the Future." In this section we cover the Apostasy, the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Conversion of Israel, the Battle of Armageddon, Christ's Kingdom, and the New Jerusalem.

The sections on the Prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation are being enlarged and incorporated into a new Advanced Bible Studies Series course on the Major Prophets.

The section on "The Nations in Prophecy" has been reduced in scope to deal exclusively with the Muslim nations surrounding Israel and their future according to prophecy.

The section "Terms in Prophecy" has been removed.

# Introduction

In this section, we deal with various introductory matters pertaining to the study of Bible prophecy.

## Some Important Facts about Bible Prophecy

1. The main theme of Bible prophecy is Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:10; Lk. 24:44-46). If we study prophecy and fail to see Jesus, we have missed the main message. The main purpose of the Bible is to reveal God, and we see God in Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh. The reason God has given His revelation in Scripture to mankind is that fallen men might be brought back into right relationship with God through Christ, that we then might know Him personally and grow in our knowledge of Him forever. John 17:3 says eternal life is to know God in Christ, and this knowledge is revealed in the Bible. Ephesians 1:8-17 says the mystery of God's will, which is contained in Scripture, is to save sinners and ultimately to bring all things together in Christ. This is God's great plan that is revealed in the Bible and it will culminate in the new heaven and new earth.

2. Prophecy in the Bible refers not merely to the foretelling of future events, but to divine revelation in general. The "more sure word of prophecy" refers to the entire New Testament, not merely to future events (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

3. There are two types of prophesying: *forthtelling and foretelling*, or *preaching and prediction*. The prophets of old practiced both aspects. Bible prophecies are composed of a mixture of preaching and prediction, forthtelling and foretelling. You can see this in any of the prophets. Isaiah chapter one, for example, is mostly forthtelling (verses 2-24). Only verses 25-30 are foretelling of future events. New Testament prophecy is also composed both of preaching or forthtelling and of foretelling the future (1 Cor. 14:3). With the completion of the Canon of Scripture, the gift of prophetic foretelling has ceased, but there remains the gift of preaching and proclaiming from the Scripture (2 Timothy 4:2).



## How Bible Prophecies Are Different from Extra-biblical Prophecies

1. *Bible prophecies are detailed rather than ambiguous and vague.*

*Names are given in Bible prophecy.* In Isaiah 44:28 - 45:4, King Cyrus is mentioned by name 150 years before he ascended to the throne.

*Locations are given in Bible prophecy.* For example, Micah 5:2 gives the name of Jesus' birthplace.

*Minute details are given in Bible prophecy.* Psalm 22, for example, describes Christ's crucifixion in amazing detail.

*Dates are given in Bible prophecy.* Daniel 9:24-27 told exactly when Christ would come.

But when it comes to prophecies outside of the Bible, you usually find vagueness and generality.

Consider *Nostradamus* (1503-1566), one of the most famous non-Bible prophets. His messages are described as "obscure" even by those who believe in him. Consider one of his most famous prophecies:

"Beasts ferocious from hunger will swim across rivers:  
The greater part of the region will be against the Hister,  
The great one will cause it to be dragged in an iron cage,  
When the German child will observe nothing" (centuries #2, quatrain #24).

Some have said that this is a prophecy about Hitler and World War II, yet it is so vague and obscure that it could refer to practically anything.

*Astrological prophecies*, too, are usually so vague that they are meaningless. For example, a prophecy for those born under the sign of Aquarius might be as follows:

“Several friends may have the feeling you’ve been ignoring them.” That is so vague that it would be true for most people at any time.

## 2. *Bible prophecies have never failed.*

The surety of Bible prophecy stands in great contrast with the uncertain predictions of astrologers and soothsayers.

***Jeane Dixon*** (1918-1997) was a famed Roman Catholic psychic and astrologer. When she was a child, Dixon’s mother took her to a gypsy fortuneteller, who predicted that she would be a famous seer. She supposedly foretold the assassination of President Kennedy, but she also made many false predictions. She erroneously predicted, for example, that the Soviets would beat the U.S. to the moon, that World War III would begin in 1958, that there would be a cure for cancer in 1967, that labor leader Walter Reuther would run for president in 1964, and that President Bush would win the presidential election in 1992 (actually Bill Clinton did).

***Edgar Cayce*** (1877-1945) was a famous psychic who gave prophecies while in a trance state, but many of his prophecies were false. He said that China would be converted to Christianity by 1968. He predicted the arrival of Armageddon in 1999.

Consider ***astrology***. Those who have depended upon astrological forecasts have frequently been disappointed. Two famous astrologers in Britain said that World War II would not happen. An astrologer named Naylor, whose predictions appeared in the *Sunday Times*, said, “In this column, for years, I have constantly laboured these points: Hitler’s horoscope is not a war-horoscope ... there will be no war” (August 27, 1939). Another British astrologer, Edward Lyndoe, said: “I see absolutely no signs of a Great War during 1939” (*The People*, January 1, 1939, p. 11). Hitler started World War II later that year.

## 3. *Bible prophets agree perfectly.*

That the Bible prophets agreed perfectly in their doctrine and predictions is a most amazing fact and provides irrefutable evidence that the Bible's prophets wrote under divine inspiration. The 40 or more prophets who wrote the Bible lived in different centuries and in different countries, yet they described exactly the same events.

Consider the prophecies of Christ's second coming. Compare, for example, Enoch's prophecy written about 2350 B.C. (Jude 14-15) with that made by Isaiah in about 700 B.C. (Isa. 13:3-5) with that made by Jesus Himself in about 33 A.D. (Mat. 24:30) with that made by Paul writing in a Roman prison in about 50 A.D. (2 Th. 1:7-9) with that made by John in about 90 A.D. on the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 19:11-21). Though separated by centuries, these prophecies agree perfectly.

If you could get together 40 different non-Bible prophets or fortune tellers or astrologers and have them describe the future in detail, especially if they lived in different centuries and in different times, you would have 40 conflicting messages!

4. *Bible prophets did not prophesy for money* (2 Kings 5:15-16).

It is a powerful fact that the prophets who wrote the Bible did not labor for money. In fact, they were often persecuted and impoverished because of their prophecies. Their motive was never for personal gain. On the other hand, most of the worldly prophets have used their prophecies to enrich themselves.

### **Why Are the Prophecies Not Even More Explicit?**

Bible prophecy, especially to the eye of the unbeliever, may appear somewhat obscure. There is symbolism in Bible prophecy that must be interpreted by its context and by comparing Scripture with Scripture. The prophecies are not always given in an exact order, but in some cases are scattered within a text of Scripture. Near events are given together with far events. We don't pretend to know all of the reasons for this, but there is one reason that is given in the Word of God itself.

As with the parables, some things in Scripture are given both to reveal truth and to hide truth (Mat. 13:10-17). The truth of Scripture is plain to those who believe, but it is obscure to those who disbelieve. In other words, God gives willful unbelievers enough rope to hang themselves! This is true of the Bible as a whole and of the prophecies in particular. For the believer, there is ample evidence that the Bible's prophecies have been fulfilled; but the skeptic, looking at the same prophecies, doesn't understand (and doesn't want to understand) and is thus confirmed in his unbelief.

Consider the prophecies pertaining to the destruction of Tyre in Ezekiel 26. The believer sees their exact fulfillment in the events of history; but many unbelievers mock those same prophecies and say they were off the mark. For example, they point out that Tyre still exists even though the prophecy says, "thou shalt be built no more" (Ezek. 26:14). The believer sees that old Tyre was completely destroyed as the prophecy predicts and that the city has never been rebuilt in that place. The ruins of the old city of Tyre, in fact, still exist today. The modern city of Tyre is in a different location and is no longer a city of any consequence. Thus the believer rejoices in the accuracy of God's Word, while the unbeliever mocks such reasoning and says the prophecy of Scripture failed. The believer sees that the complete destruction of Tyre took centuries and was accomplished by many subsequent nations and understands that this is what the prophecy foretold (Ezek. 26:3), but the unbeliever sees the continued existence of Tyre for many centuries after its destruction began by the armies of Babylon as evidence that the prophecy failed. Thus, the same prophecy is viewed differently by people depending on their spiritual condition and their relationship with God.

Daniel was told that his prophecies were sealed unto the end and that the wicked would not understand (Dan. 12:9-10).

1 Corinthians 2:14 says the things of God in Scripture are foolishness to the unbeliever and that he cannot understand them because he has no spiritual discernment. 2 Corinthians 3:14-17 says there is a veil over the unbeliever's mind and heart, but when he turns to the Lord in repentance and faith the veil is removed by the Spirit of God.

## Why Every Christian Should Study Prophecy

The following are some of the reasons why it should be studied:

1. *Prophecy is a blessing* (Rev. 1:3). God has promised a special blessing to the individual who reads Bible prophecy.

2. *Prophecy is necessary for spiritual perfecting* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We are told that ALL Scripture is given by God and is profitable and necessary for the building of the mature Christian, and prophecy forms a large part of Scripture (about 30%). The study of, understanding of, and obedience to prophecy is therefore essential for a strong Christian life.

3. *Prophecy is light* in a dark world (2 Pet. 1:19-21). According to the apostle Peter, in the first chapter of his second epistle, the written Word of prophecy is more dependable than visions (v. 16), than voices (v. 17), and than great spiritual mountaintop spiritual experiences (v. 18). Through Bible prophecy we see the future and prepare for it.

4. *It is our responsibility to study prophecy* (Lk. 24:25-27). The Lord Jesus Christ rebuked the disciples for not believing prophecy. At the judgment seat of Christ every Christian will be held accountable for whether or not he believed the prophecies of the Bible. In light of this warning, we must reject the tendency by many to treat prophecy lightly. The interpretation of prophecy is not a “non-essential” matter.

Not only will the Christian be held accountable for his attitude toward prophecy, but the unbeliever will be, as well. In Luke 16:29-31, Abraham told the rich man in hell that his unsaved brothers on earth would be accountable for whether or not they believed the prophets.

5. *Bible prophecy has power to sanctify the Christian life*. A literal interpretation of Bible prophecy makes the student aware that the coming of Christ is imminent and that he must therefore be ready to meet Him (Mat. 24:42, 44; 25:13; Rev. 22:7). *It*

*gives hope* in a hopeless world (Rom. 15:4). *It gives joy* (Jn. 8:56). *It gives comfort* in trials (1 Th. 4:18; Isa. 40:1-2). *It gives understanding* in the midst of confusion (Dan. 9:1-2). *It produces diligence and moral purity* (Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Jn. 3:1-3). *It produces patience and endurance* in the midst of troubles (2 Co. 4:16-18). *It stimulates zealous Christian service* (1 Cor. 15:51-58). *It brings this life into proper perspective* with eternity (Psa. 73:1-3, 12-17; Isa. 26:20; 29:17; 54:7-8). *It encourages Christians to abide in Christ* (1 Jn. 2:28).

6. *Prophecy is powerful evidence that the Bible is true* (Isa. 41:22-23; 44:7; 45:21; 46:9-10). Bible prophecy is intended to be an apologetic to prove the divine inspiration of Scripture. Fulfilled prophecy proves the divine origin of the Bible to unbelievers and increases the faith of believers. We must note that to be effective as evidence, prophecy must be fulfilled and interpreted literally.

Professor Peter Stoner, Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, examined the probabilities of just eight of the 456 prophecies concerning Jesus Christ being fulfilled. He said the probability would be one in 10 to the 17th power. That would be like putting a mark on a coin, then putting that coin in with enough coins to cover the state of Texas or the country of India two feet thick in coins, then having a blind man wander all over the country and pick out a coin at random. The chance that he would find that marked coin is equal to the chance of only eight of the Messianic prophecies coming to pass! There are not merely eight prophecies about Christ in the Bible, though. There are 456!

“If that doesn’t boggle your mind enough, Stoner also computed that the probability of 48 prophecies being fulfilled in one person is 10 to the 157th power. How large is 10 to the 157th power? Ten to the 157th power contains 157 zeros! He said to take, not a silver dollar, or even an atom, but an electron for an illustration—that little tiny thing that spins around the nucleus of the atom. Electrons are so small, by the way, that if you had a line of electrons laid side by side to make one inch, and you were counting four electrons every second and you counted twenty-four hours a day, it would take you 19 million years just to count that one-inch line of electrons. But how many electrons would it take if we were dealing with 10 to the 157th power of electrons? Imagine that we packed the whole earth with electrons,

and we piled them up until they reached out a mile, ten miles, a thousand miles, a million miles from the earth! Let's make it more than that--let's make it thirty-eight trillion miles in radius on either side--nothing but packed electrons. Well, that's not enough, either. Now let's multiply that number by a billion--a billion times thirty-eight trillion miles in both directions, and you have a solid ball of electrons. Imagine marking just one of those electrons. Then put a man in a space ship, let him fly around as long as he wants to, and finally he stops, gets out a microscope, and points to one of the electrons. The probability of him selecting the right one is the same as just 48 Bible prophecies being fulfilled in one person's life" (*The Case for Jesus the Messiah*, Ankerberg, Weldon and Kaiser).

There are not merely 48 prophecies about Christ in the Bible, though. There are 456 specific prophecies.

*7. Prophecy describes the believer's future.* Christians have a portion in the things promised in Bible prophecy! The New Testament believer will enjoy the blessings spoken of in Old Testament prophecy, including the millennial reign of Christ (Col. 3:4; Rev. 2:26-27), the renewed creation (Rom. 8:18-25), and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). There are hundreds of prophecies directly related to the Christian's future.

*8. Prophecy challenges believers to preach the gospel to unbelievers before it is too late.* Prophecy teaches us that Christ could come at any time, so there is no promise of tomorrow for the unbeliever. It reminds us that "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

## **Unfulfilled Bible Prophecies**

In my personal study Bible I have marked the unfulfilled prophecies by bracketing them with a red pencil. I have also marked various major events with colored pencils. I use brown for verses pertaining to the day of the Lord, light blue for the Messianic passages, green for passages referring to the remnant, orange for the New Covenant, dark blue for the regathering of Israel, yellow for passages describing the millennial kingdom, and red for the second coming.

As a study project, the student can go through the book of Zechariah and mark the unfulfilled prophecies without looking at the following list.

**Genesis** 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:17-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18; 26:2-5; 28:12-15; 35:9-13

**Deuteronomy** 30:1-10

**2 Samuel** 7:13-16

**Psalms** 1:5-6; 2:1-12; 9:1-20; 10:12-18; 14:7; 18:4-19, 43-50; 21:4-13; 22:22-31; 23:6; 24:7-10; 25:13; 37:17-18, 20, 22, 28-29, 34, 38; 45:3-17; 46:2-11; 47:1-9; 48:1-14; 50:1-6; 51:19; 53:6; 58:9-11; 60:2-3, 6-12; 65:1-5; 66:1-4; 67:1-7; 68:20-35; 69:32-36; 71:20-24; 72:1-19; 73:27; 75:8-10; 76:1-12; 79:13; 86:9; 94:23; 96:11-13; 97:1-12; 98:1-9; 99:1-5; 100:1-5; 101:1-8; 102:12-22, 26-28; 107:40-43; 108:1-13; 110:1-7; 112:10; 121:1-7; 125:1-5; 126:1-6; 128:1-6; 129:4; 130:8; 132:13-18; 138:4-5; 145:1-13, 19-21; 146:7-10; 147:2-3, 12-15; 148:14; 149:1-9

**Isaiah** 1:25-31; 2:1-5, 10-22; 4:1-6; 5:26-30; 6:11-13; 8:14-22; 9:7; 10:20-27; 11:4-16; 12:1-6; 13:1-16; 14:1-27; 16:1-5; 17:6-8, 12-14; 18:7; 19:1-25; 22:20-25; 23:18; 24:1-23; 25:1-12; 26:1-21; 27:1-13; 28:1-6, 14-22; 29:5-8, 17-24; 30:18-33; 31:2-9; 32:1-8, 15-19; 33:2-24; 34:1-17; 35:1-10; 40:1-11; 41:10-20; 42:1-17; 43:1-21, 25-26; 44:1-8, 21-27; 45:14-25; 46:12-13; 48:20; 49:5-26; 51:3-11, 22-23; 52:1-15; 53:12; 54:1-17; 55:5, 12-13; 56:1-8; 57:13-19; 59:16-21; 60:1-22; 61:1-11; 62:1-12; 63:1-6; 65:8-25; 66:5-24

**Jeremiah** 3:14-19; 4:19-31; 10:10-11; 16:14-21; 23:3-8; 24:4-7; 25:26-38; 30:3-11, 16-24; 31:1-14, 16-40; 32:37-44; 33:6-26; 46:27-28; 50:1-5, 17-20; 51:19-24

**Ezekiel** 11:17-21; 14:22-23; 16:53-55, 59-63; 20:33-38, 40-44; 28:25-26; 30:1-5; 34:11-16, 22-31; 35:14-15; 36:8-15, 23-38; Ezek. 38-48

**Daniel** 2:33-35, 43-45; 7:7-14, 20-27; 8:9-14, 23-25; 9:27; 11:36-45; 12:1-4, 9-13

**Hosea** 1:10-11; 2:14-23; 3:5; 5:15; 6:1-3; 14:1-9

**Joel** 1:14-20; 2:1-11, 15-32; 3:1-21

**Amos** 5:18-20; 9:11-15

**Obadiah** 1:15-21

**Micah** 1:3-4; 4:1-13; 5:3-15; 7:1-20

**Nahum** 1:13-15

**Habakkuk** 2:14

**Zephaniah** 1:2-18; 3:8-20



**Haggai** 2:6-9, 21-23  
**Zechariah** 1:16-21; 2:1-12; 3:8-10; 6:12-13; 8:3-8, 11-15, 18-23; 9:1-17; 10:1-12; 11:15-17; 12:1-13; 13:1-9; 14:1-21  
**Malachi** 1:5, 11; 3:1-5, 17-18; 4:1-6  
**Matthew** 19:28-30; 24:4-51; 25:1-46; 26:29, 64  
**Mark** 13:5-37  
**Luke** 1:32-33, 67-75; 3:17; 17:24-37; 19:11-27; 21:7-36; 22:69  
**John** 17:24  
**Acts** 3:19-21  
**Romans** 11:25-27; 14:10-12  
**1 Corinthians** 1:7; 3:13-15; 4:5; 6:2-3; 15:20-58  
**2 Corinthians** 5:1-10  
**Ephesians** 2:19-22  
**Philippians** 3:20-21  
**Colossians** 3:1-4  
**1 Thessalonians** 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-3  
**2 Thessalonians** 1:7-10; 2:7-12  
**1 Timothy** 6:14  
**2 Timothy** 3:1-13; 4:1, 3-4, 8  
**Hebrews** 1:11-12; 10:13; 11:16  
**1 Peter** 1:3-5, 11  
**2 Peter** 2:17; 3:3-13  
**1 John** 2:18; 3:2  
**Jude** 13-15, 24-25  
**Revelation** 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 10-11, 21; chapters 4-22

## Review Questions on the Introduction

1. What is the main theme of Bible prophecy?
2. In what passage did Jesus say that the Old Testament speaks of Him?
3. What verse says “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”?
4. What book and chapter says that God’s mystery as revealed in the Bible is to save sinners and to bring everything together in Him in the new creation?
5. What are the two types of prophecy in the Bible?
6. What verse says that prophesying is speaking to men to edification, exhortation, and comfort?
7. What are three ways that Bible prophecy is different from other kinds of prophecy in the world?
8. The name of Cyrus was mentioned in prophecy how many years before he was born?
9. What prophecy gives the name of Jesus’ birthplace?
10. What Psalm gives the details of Christ’s crucifixion?
11. Nostradamus’ prophecies are described as \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Are astrology prophecies always correct?
13. What are four reasons why believers should study prophecy?
14. In what book and chapter did Jesus rebuke the disciples for not believing the prophecies?
15. In what book and chapter does Abraham tell the lost man in hell that his brothers must believe Moses and the prophets?
16. What are three things that Bible prophecy can produce in the Christian life?
17. How is fulfilled prophecy an evidence that the Bible is true?
18. How does Bible prophecy describe the believer’s future?
19. How does Bible prophecy challenge the believer to preach the gospel?

# The Interpretation of Prophecy

*MEMORY VERSES:* Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 45:21; Acts 15:14-15; Romans 11:25-29; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 10:32; Ephesians 3:4-6; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 1:19-21

In this section we deal with the most important rules for interpreting Bible prophecy.

1. Interpret Bible prophecy with a spiritual mind
2. Interpret Bible prophecy by using a Bible dictionary.
3. Interpret Bible prophecy by knowing Old Testament history.
4. Interpret Bible prophecy by the literal method.
5. Interpret Bible prophecy by its context.
6. Interpret Bible prophecy by comparing Scripture with Scripture.
7. Interpret Bible prophecy by understanding Old Testament parallelism.
8. Interpret Bible prophecy by understanding the perspective of prophecy.
9. Interpret Bible prophecy by distinguishing Israel from the church.

## **1. Interpret Bible prophecy WITH A SPIRITUAL MIND.**

The first and foremost requirement for effective Bible study is to be saved and to walk according to the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14 - 3:3). There are three types of people described in 1 Corinthians chapters two and three: the natural man, the spiritual man, and the carnal man.

- a. *The natural man* is the unsaved person who is spiritually dead and blind (Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:4). He cannot understand the things of God. “The deepest biblical scholar, if he fails to find Christ, knows less of the real meaning of the gospel than the humblest Christian who is living in the faith of the Son of God” (*Pulpit Commentary*). When the heart turns to the Lord, though, and receives Jesus Christ, the blindness is lifted (2 Cor. 3:14-17). When I was growing up in a Baptist church, I had a Bible and I studied the

Bible in Sunday School and knew it well enough to win Sword Drills and memory verse contests, but the Bible didn't become a living Book for me until I was converted at age 23.

b. *The spiritual man* (1 Cor. 2:15-16) and *the carnal man* (1 Cor. 3:1-4) refer to believers.

(1) The believer is either spiritual or carnal depending on his walk with Christ, depending on whether he is walking in the flesh or the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). The carnal or worldly believer, because he is not walking in the Spirit, cannot understand the deeper things of Scripture. He can take milk but not meat.

(2) See also Hebrews 5:12-14.

(3) In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warned that the Word of God can be “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). In Mark 4:19 He said the Word can be choked by “the lusts of other things entering in.”

(4) In Bible study spiritual life is more important than technical skills. R.A. Torrey said, “A person who understands the language of the Holy Spirit, but who does not understand a word of Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic, will get more out of the Bible than one who knows all about Greek and Hebrew but is not born again. It is a well-demonstrated fact that many plain men and women who possess no knowledge of the original languages in which the Bible was written have knowledge of the real contents of the Bible. Their understanding of its actual teaching and its depth, fullness, and beauty far surpasses that of many learned professors in theological faculties.”

## **2. Interpret Bible prophecy BY USING A BIBLE DICTIONARY.**

The most basic thing necessary for understanding the Bible is to know the definition of its individual words. The effective Bible student will have a good Bible dictionary at hand (either in print or as part of a computer Bible software package) so that he can look up every word that he doesn't understand. This is one of the ways that I gained a good foundation in Bible knowledge as a young Christian. I nearly wore out a *Strong's Concordance* just the first year I was saved. We recommend the *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity*. Many preachers have written to us through the years to testify that this is their most useful Bible study book. One preacher said that if he was shipwrecked on an island and could only have three books, he would want the Bible, *Strong's Concordance*, and the *Way of Life Encyclopedia*.

In the next section of the course we deal with many of the important terms that must be understood when interpreting Bible prophecy.

### **3. Interpret Bible prophecy by KNOWING OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY.**

It is impossible to understand the Bible's prophecies without a good knowledge of Old Testament history. The prophets continually refer to historical events in Israel's history. Consider Isaiah 6:1, which occurred the year that king Uzziah died. When we understand that Uzziah was a godly king and that his son who took his place was wicked, we can better understand the prophecy. Surely the prophet Isaiah and other godly Jews were discouraged at that time. Through the prophecy in Isaiah 6 God was showing them that He ever lives and His Word is true and that we must look to Him and trust Him rather than man.

Two things are necessary to obtain this type of historical knowledge. First, the student must read the whole Bible repeatedly so that he grows in his understanding of it. This is one reason why we recommend that the Christian read the Bible through every year. Second, the student needs to take a Bible survey course so that he can understand the major sections of the Bible and how they all fit together. The course *Bible History and Geography*, which is one of Way of Life's Advanced Bible Studies Series, can provide this education. The July 2012 edition has a greatly enlarged study on the period of the kings (covering 1 Samuel to 2 Chronicles).

*The major events of Israel's history are as follows:*

Abraham was called out of Ur and given God's covenant (Gen. 12:1-3). The covenant was inherited by Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5; 23-25) and then Jacob (Gen. 28:13-14). Jacob's name was changed to *Israel* (Gen. 32:28). He bore 12 sons who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel: Reuben (Gen. 29:32), Simeon (Gen. 29:33), Levi (Gen. 29:34), Judah (Gen. 29:35), Dan (Gen. 30:6), Naphtali (Gen. 30:8), Gad (Gen. 30:11), Asher (Gen. 30:13), Issachar (Gen. 30:18), Zebulun (Gen. 30:20), Joseph (Gen. 30:24), Benjamin (Gen. 35:18).

Israel moved to Egypt during the famine of Joseph's day and lived in Egypt for 430 years (Ex. 12:40).

Moses led Israel out of Egypt through mighty miracles (Exodus 1-18).

While they were encamped at Mt. Sinai God gave Israel His law (Exodus 19-40; Leviticus).

Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because of unbelief (Numbers 13-26; Deuteronomy).

Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, defeated the pagan nations, and divided the land among the tribes (Joshua).

Israel was ruled by judges for 450 years until the time of Samuel (Acts 13:20; Judges, 1 Samuel 1-8).

Israel was ruled by kings for about 500 years (1 Samuel - 2 Kings). Saul was the first king, followed by David, then Solomon. During the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the kingdom was divided into north and south. The southern kingdom was usually called Judah and the northern kingdom was called Israel or Ephraim.

The northern kingdom set up idols in its capital city of Samaria and was ruled by wicked kings. During the reign of Hoshea, the king of Assyria conquered Samaria and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, taking many of the Jewish people captive (2 Ki. 17:1-23; 18:9-12). The forceful repopulation of Samaria at the hand of the king of Assyria was the origin of the Samaritans who are mentioned in the New Testament. They are a mixed race and a mixed religion, part Jewish and part pagan (2 Ki. 17:24-41).

The southern kingdom of Judah had 20 kings, eight of them godly. Its capital was Jerusalem. During the reign of Zedekiah the king of Babylon conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the southern kingdom.

Israel was taken captive to Babylon for 70 years.

During the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews returned to Israel and rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied at this time.

Between Malachi and Matthew there were 400 years.

#### **4. Interpret prophecy by the “LITERAL” METHOD.**

The “literal” method of Bible interpretation refers to the manner in which human language is ordinarily interpreted. God has revealed His truth through normal human language. Dr. David L. Cooper wisely observes: “When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.”

##### **a. Contrast the allegorical method of interpretation**

- (1) The allegorical method interprets the prophetic portions of Scripture in a symbolic manner rather than a literal one. By this method, the Old Testament prophecies of a glorious earthly kingdom for the nation Israel

are interpreted as descriptions of the existing church age. For example, “Zion” is understood to mean the church instead of the city Jerusalem. The desert blossoming as a rose (Isaiah 35) is interpreted as spiritual fruit that comes by the preaching of the gospel instead of a literal future condition on earth. The temple in Ezekiel 40-48 is interpreted as a representation of the church rather than a literal future temple. The events recorded in Revelation—the wars, the Two Witnesses in Jerusalem, the sealing of the 144,000 Israelites, the binding of Satan, the 1,000-year earthly rule—are interpreted symbolically instead of literally.

## (2) The history of allegoricalism

First century believers did not interpret the prophecies allegorically. The allegorical interpretation was invented by false teachers after the time of the apostles.

- (a) A school was established at **Alexandria, Egypt**, which became the headquarters for the allegorical method of interpretation. Egypt was a place where false teaching proliferated in the first few centuries after Christ. Clement headed the school from 190 to 202. He corrupted the Christian faith by mixing it with the worldly philosophy of Plato. He taught many false doctrines, including purgatory, and believed that most men would eventually be saved even though Jesus said only a few would be (Mat. 7:14).
- (b) **Origen** (A.D. 185-254) was one of the chief fathers of allegoricalism. He led the school at Alexandria from 202 to 232. Though he endured persecution and torture for the cause of Christ under the emperor Decius in 250, Origen held many false teachings. Like Clement, he mixed the truth of the Bible with pagan philosophy. Following are some of his heresies: He taught that celibacy was a holy state above marriage contrary to the example of the apostles. He taught baptismal regeneration, purgatory, and the pre-existence of the human soul. He taught that all men and even Satan and demons would eventually be



saved. He taught that the Holy Spirit was the first creature made by God, and denied that Jesus is fully God. He did not believe that the Scriptures are wholly inspired by God.

- (c) Another father of allegoricalism was **Augustine** (A.D. 354-430), also one of the fathers of the Roman Catholic Church. Augustine invented the unbiblical doctrine of the inquisition that was used by the Catholic Church against Bible believers for more than 1,000 years. The historian Neander observed that Augustine's teaching "contains the germ of the whole system of spiritual despotism, intolerance, and persecution, even to the court of the Inquisition." Augustine instigated fierce persecutions against the Bible-believing Donatists who were striving to maintain pure biblical churches. He taught that "the sacraments," such as baptism, were the means of salvation. He taught that Mary did not commit sin. He taught the heresy of purgatory. He was one of the fathers of infant baptism, claiming that unbaptized infants are lost and calling all who rejected infant baptism "infidels" and "cursed." He exalted the authority of "the church" over that of the Bible.
- (d) The Roman Catholic Church has interpreted biblical prophecy allegorically throughout its history.
- (e) The Protestant denominations (e.g., Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist) have also interpreted prophecy allegorically, with few exceptions. This is one of the errors they brought with them when they left Rome.

#### b. Why we interpret the prophecies literally

- (1) *God gave the Scriptures to REVEAL truth to man, not to hide it.* See Deuteronomy 29:29; Amos 3:7; Matthew 13:10-12; Revelation 1:1; 22:6. According to these and many other passages, prophecy is given to reveal

secrets, not hide them. Prophecy is light, not darkness. It is therefore to be understood in the normal way that human language is understood.

- (2) *The early Christians interpreted prophecy literally* (Acts 3:19-21; Rom. 11:25-27; 1 Thes. 1:9-10). This is admitted by most church historians. William Newell says: “The early Church for 300 years looked for the imminent return of our Lord to reign, and they were right” (Newell, *Revelation*).

The testimony of Augustine, “the father of amillennialism.” He admitted that there were many in his day [fifth century BC] who believed in a literal fulfillment of Revelation 20. He said, “I myself, too, once held this opinion. ... They who do believe them are called by the spiritual, Chiliasts, which we may literally reproduce by the name Millenarians” (Augustine, *City of God*, book 20, chapter 7).

The church at Antioch interpreted Bible prophecy literally. Antioch was an important church founded by Barnabas and Paul and it is from this church that the first foreign missionaries were ordained and sent out (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-4). It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians. Some of the preachers associated with Antioch were Lucian (died 312), Theodore (A.D. 350-428), Chrysostom (A.D. 354-407), Theodoret (A.D. 386-458), and Diodorus of Tarsus. These men interpreted Bible prophecy literally. Farrar says, “Diodorus of Tarsus’ books were devoted to an exposition of Scripture in its literal sense, and he wrote a treatise, now unhappily lost, ‘on the difference between allegory and spiritual insight’” (F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 213-15).

- (3) *Bible prophecies have always been fulfilled literally.*

*The Prophecies about Israel*

Israel's entire history was given in the great prophecy of Deuteronomy 28 (see particularly verses 25, 29, 32, 36-37, 63-67). These prophecies describe Israel's defeat at the hands of foreign powers and her dispersion to the ends of the earth, and they have been fulfilled exactly over the past 2,000 years.

(In *Israel: Past, Present and Future* we give the archaeological evidence of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy pertaining to Israel. This is a package consisting of a 234-page illustrated book, a video series, and a series of PowerPoint/Keynote presentations for teachers. The package covers all of the major facets pertaining to Israel in a technologically cutting-edge way: geography, culture, archaeology, history, current events, and future prophetic events. The series begins with an amazing aerial flyover to highlight major sites in the land of Israel. It is available from Way of Life Literature.)

### *The Prophecies of the Nations*

#### TYRE

Ezekiel 26:3-16 predicts the following things:

Nebuchadnezzar will besiege and sack Tyre (vv. 7-11).

Many nations will participate in destroying Tyre (v. 3).

The city will be made flat like the top of a rock and even the dust will be scraped (v. 4).

Its stones and timbers will be laid in the sea (v. 12).

It will become a place for the spreading of nets, referring to fishing (v. 5).

The old city of Tyre will never be rebuilt (v. 14).



“This prophecy against Tyre was partly fulfilled in 586 B.C. when King Nebuchadnezzar took the mainland city of Tyre after a siege of thirteen years but was unable to take its nearby island to which most of the people had fled. In 322 B.C., Alexander the Great, by scraping up the stones and timber of the mainland city as building material, built a great causeway to the heavily-defended island, and so completed the conquest of Tyre. Today, the site of ancient Tyre has fresh water supply enough for a large modern city, but it has not been occupied for 2,300 years. However it is very popular with fishermen!” (Paul Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 65).

### *The Prophecies of Christ's First Coming*

In the section on Messianic Prophecy we deal more extensively with the prophecies pertaining to Christ's first coming. For our purposes here, consider Psalm 22. In this amazing prophecy we find the details of Jesus'

crucifixion written 1,000 years before His birth. The prophet describes the words that Jesus spoke from the cross (Psa. 22:1; Mat. 27:46), the mocking (Psa. 22:6-8; Mat. 27:39, 41-43), the piercing of His hands and feet (Psa. 22:16; Lk. 24:39), the thirst from blood loss (Psa. 22:14-15; Jn. 19:28), the decision by the soldiers not to break His bones (Psa. 22:17; 34:20; Ex. 12:46; Nu. 9:12; Jn. 19:33-36), the staring of the people (Psa. 22:17; Mat. 27:36), the gambling for His garments (Psa. 22:18; Mat. 27:35).

Since Bible prophecy has always been fulfilled literally, there is no reason to believe that future prophecies will be fulfilled any differently.

- (4) *Jesus said the major prophetic events are yet future.* In His prophecy in Matthew 24 He described the Great Tribulation and the rule of the antichrist and said that these events will occur in the future just prior to His literal return (Mat. 24:15-29). It is obvious, then, that the Great Tribulation is not something that has already been fulfilled in history and it is obvious that the antichrist is a literal man who will desecrate a literal Third Temple.
- (5) *Jesus rebuked His disciples for not believing the prophecies in their literal interpretation* (Lk. 24:25-27).
- (6) *The stage is set today for the literal fulfillment of the prophecies.* The machinery for a one-world government and a one-world religion as described in Revelation 13 and 17 is being set up before our very eyes. The technology is in place to control the world's commerce as described in Revelation 13:16-17 and for the people of the world to observe the events described in Revelation 11:8-10. Most importantly, the nation Israel is back in her land in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:1-14 (Ezekiel said she would return first in a spiritually-dead condition, verse 8) and in preparation for the literal fulfillment of all her prophecies. This supports the doctrine that God has not rejected the nation Israel in a permanent sense or replaced Israel with the Church, but has only temporarily set

Israel aside until He is ready to fulfill His covenants with her (Rom. 11:25-29).

(7) *Practical necessity demands the literal interpretation of prophecy.* To interpret Bible prophecy allegorically destroys the absolute sense of God's Word. If prophecy does not mean what it says, there is no way to know what it does mean. Consider Revelation 20:1-3. If this passage does not mean that a literal angel binds a literal devil in a literal bottomless pit for a literal thousand years, we have no means of knowing what it does mean. If it does not mean what it says, it could mean anything that any interpreter says it means.

(a) Consider this important statement by Paul Lee Tan: "Whether it is the interpretation of prophecy or non-prophecy, once literality is sacrificed, it is like starting down an incline. Momentum speedily gathers as one succumbs to the temptation to spiritualize one passage after another. ... Moreover, under the method of spiritualization, there is no way for an interpreter to test the validity of his conclusions, except to compare his works with that of a colleague. Instead of 'a more sure word of prophecy' (2 Pet. 1:19), interpreters end up with an 'unsure' word and chaos in the ranks" (Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, pp. 73, 74).

(b) J. Vernon McGee was trained in the allegorical method of interpretation, but he realized as a young man that it resulted in foolishness: "I went to a seminary that was amillennial, where they attempted to fit the rest of Revelation into the historical, or the amillennial, viewpoint. It became ridiculous and even comical at times. For example, when we reached the place where Scripture says that Satan was put into the bottomless pit, we were taught that that has already taken place. I asked the professor, 'How do you explain the satanic activity that is taking place today?' He replied, 'Satan is chained, but he has a long chain on him. It is like when you take a cow out into a vacant lot and tether her out on a long rope and let her

graze.’ That was his explanation! And my comment was, ‘Doctor, I think Satan’s got a pretty long chain on him then, because he is able to graze all over the world today!’ It really makes some Scriptures seem rather ridiculous when you follow the allegorical viewpoint” (*Thru the Bible* with J. Vernon McGee).

- (c) It is for failure to apply the literal method that the book of Revelation has been so puzzling to Catholic and Protestant commentators. “On the whole no one in the later Middle Ages did more than think of it as a puzzling moral allegory. Luther at first dismissed it; Calvin declined to comment on it. Erasmus’s position was of doubting its authenticity. Acts and Revelation are the only books in Tyndale’s 1534 New Testament without prologues ... his marginal notes to Revelation are so minimal as effectively not to exist” (David Daniell, *The Bible in English*, p. 348).

c. What about the allegory in Galatians 4:21-31?

Those who interpret prophecy allegorically claim that Paul’s interpretation of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4 supports the allegorical approach. The following facts disprove this:

- (1) This is the only case of an Old Testament event spoken of in the New Testament as an allegory.
- (2) This method is entirely different from the allegorical method of prophetic interpretation, because in Galatians 4, Paul assumes the literal existence of Hagar, Sarah, Mount Sinai, Jerusalem, etc. He cites them as allegories only for the purpose of illustration. The prophetic allegorists, though, say that Zion is not Zion and that the 144,000 in Revelation 7 is not 144,000 and the tribes of Israel mentioned in Revelation 7 are not the tribes of Israel and that the 1,000 years in Revelation 20 are not 1,000 years. Paul gives no support for this type of thing.

(3) When it comes to Bible prophecy, Paul himself interpreted it literally: a literal tribulation (1 Th. 5:1-3), a literal antichrist (2 Th. 2:8-12), a literal resurrection (1 Cor. 15), a literal return of Christ with his saints (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:14), a literal kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1), a literal fulfillment of Israel's promises (Rom. 11:25-27).

d. What about application of prophecy?

“The literal method of interpretation is concerned with interpretation, not with application. Applications are proper when they are based on that which has been literally interpreted, but to base interpretations of the Bible on applications is erroneous and will end in chaos. ... The literal interpreter, by insisting on the literal sense of Scripture, does not imply that the Bible has no depth or latent riches. God's Word contains truths, principles, and applications which every interpreter must fathom. Some of these are latent, inward, and hidden; others are patent, outward, and obvious. ... The correlation of both the simple and the profound in God's Word is wonderful to behold. But this licenses neither a mystical approach nor a forced search for some superadded 'spiritual' sense. There is nothing clandestine about Christianity. The proper approach to God's Word is the reverent one of accepting what it says and then making applications to life” (Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, p. 31).

For example, we interpret the prophecies about the return of Christ literally as belonging to the future and the prophecies of the Lord's blessing upon Israel as literal events of the future, but we also get spiritual application from those prophecies for our Christian lives today. An example is Isaiah 59:18-21. This passage describes the coming of the Lord and the establishment of His kingdom. Verse 18 refers to His judgments during the Great Tribulation; verse 19 refers to the worldwide kingdom; verses 20-21 refer to the restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of the New Covenant. This is the interpretation, but there are many applications for church-age believers. Some of these are as follows: God judges sin. The Lord is to be feared. God is the God of the whole earth. The Lord protects His people



against the enemy's most fierce attacks. The Lord is the Redeemer, the Saviour. God demands turning or repentance. God offers a covenant of salvation today through Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God opens men's hearts and minds to the truth. Salvation is eternal. Thus, we see that there is a literal interpretation and then there is an application.

## **What about the FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE in Bible prophecy?**

The Bible contains symbolism, figures of speech, and poetry, but, as in normal language, these are readily identifiable and can be interpreted (1) by the language itself, such as the use of words such as "like" and "as," (2) by the immediate context, and (3) by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

### **Types of Symbolism**

*Simile*: Comparing two things using adverbs such as "like" and "as"  
"The moon became as blood" (Rev 6:12)

*Metaphor*: A comparison without the use of the adverbs  
"Jehovah is my rock and fortress" (Psa. 18:2)  
"the windows of heaven" (Mal. 3:10)

*Personification*: Speaking of inanimate objects as if they were animate  
"The trees shall clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12)

*Hyperbole*: An exaggeration used for emphasis  
"Oh that mine head were waters!" (Jer. 9:1)

*Parable*: An extended simile  
The king of Babylon is likened to a great eagle (Ezek. 17:2-3)

## **How the Bible Interprets Its Own Symbolic Language**

- a. Symbolic language is defined by its context.

- (1) Consider the book of Revelation. Chapter one uses some figurative language, which is clearly identified. In Revelation 1:12 and 16, we see “seven golden candlesticks” and “seven stars,” but those are explained in verse 20. In verses 12-16 we have a description of Christ, and some of it is symbolic, as we see by the use of adverbs -- “like wool” (v. 14), “white as snow” (v. 14), “as a flame of fire” (v. 14), “like unto fine brass” (v. 15), “as the sound of many waters” (v. 15), “as the sun shineth in his strength” (v. 16).
- (2) Consider Daniel 8, where the vision of verses 2-8 is interpreted in verses 19-25. Consider the vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-2. This is explained in verse 11.
- (3) Consider Isaiah chapter 2. In verses 1-5 we have a prophecy of the exaltation of Israel during the Millennium. The symbolic language is in verse 2--“the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains.” This is explained in the context. The “mountain of the Lord’s house” refers to Jerusalem (v. 1) and the “mountains” and “hills” refer to other nations (vv. 2b, 3, 4). Isaiah 2:10-22 is a prophecy of the Great Tribulation, and the symbolic language in verses 13-16 is explained in verses 11, 12 and 17. The cedars and oaks, towers, fenced walls, ships, and pictures refer to man’s idolatrous pride and glory. It refers to everything that man trusts in and loves apart from God: his wealth and possessions, his military might, the objects that he builds, his inventions. Everything in this present world system is designed for man’s pleasure and glory while the Creator God is despised and His laws broken. In the day of the Lord, this idolatrous world system will be judged and overthrown in preparation for the coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.

b. Symbolic language is defined by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Sometimes the Bible student has to go to another passage to explain figurative language. Consider Revelation 4:5. The same description is used

in Revelation 5:6 and Isaiah 11:2. By comparing these three passages we learn that the figurative description of the Holy Spirit refers to the following: First, the seven spirits describes the all-knowing intelligence of the Holy Spirit. This is what we see in Revelation 4:5, where the seven Spirits are likened to lamps, which signify spiritual light. In the Bible, seven is the number of perfection. Thus, it speaks of the Holy Spirit's perfect intelligence and the fact that He imparts wisdom and understanding to all of the creation. Second, the seven spirits describes the everywhere presence of the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 5:6 the seven Spirits are "sent forth into all the earth." Third, the seven spirits also refers to the seven characteristics or works of the Holy Spirit, as described in Isaiah 11:2.

## **5. Interpret Bible prophecy by its CONTEXT.**

Context is the most important rule of Bible interpretation.

The Bible is a self-interpreting book if we interpret its words according to context.

For this purpose, it is necessary to know the subject of the particular book you are studying.

For example, each of the four Gospels has a different purpose. Jesus is presented four different ways, according to the purpose of the individual Gospel. Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews. Mark presents Jesus as God's Servant. Luke presents Jesus as the perfect Man. John presents Jesus as the eternal Son of God.

To understand the purpose of the Bible's individual books helps us interpret their contents properly. In Matthew, for example, we find many things that are purely Jewish in nature and that pertain to Israel rather than to the churches. The Sermon on the Mount is an example. This sermon was not delivered to the churches but to the Jews, and it will not be fulfilled until Israel comes into her promised kingdom and Jesus rules as the Messianic king. See, for instance, Matthew 5:21-26. Consider three things in this passage that pertain to Israel. First, Jesus speaks of the danger of

hell fire, but the church-age believer is forgiven of his sins and justified and has eternal life and is already seated in the heavenlies with Christ positionally (Ephesians 2:4-9), so he cannot be in danger of hell fire. Jesus' warning about hell fire is directed to the unsaved people who will be born during the millennial kingdom and will live under the rule of the rod of iron. Second, Jesus speaks of bringing one's gift to the altar. Christians don't have an altar on earth. This refers to when the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt as described in Ezekiel 40-48 and the Jews will bring their sacrifices to the Temple to offer to God. Third, Jesus speaks of being cast into prison, but the churches don't operate prisons. We can discipline church members, but we can't imprison them. Thus we see how that the meaning of Scripture becomes clear when we interpret the Bible according to its own context.

Context is why it is so important to read and re-read passages, to study them very carefully. If you don't understand a Bible verse, stop and read the whole chapter repeatedly until you understand the context.

False teachers, on the other hand, twist verses out of their context and force their pre-determined meanings upon them. For example, there are Korean false teachers in Nepal who are aggressive in having home Bible studies with people, but they don't let the people write down the verses they use to support their teachings and they don't let the people look at the verses that are before and after the ones they are discussing. That is a sure recipe for spiritual disaster!

Consider Ezekiel 13:18. To rightly understand the "pillows" and "kerchiefs" we simply consider the context. Ezekiel is prophesying about the women in Israel who were practicing witchcraft. See verses 17-23. The expression "to hunt the souls to make them fly" could refer to the attempt to control men's souls through occultic ceremonies. A popular use of occultism is to attempt to control other people for one's own selfish purposes--to gain romantic affection from a potential lover, to punish an enemy, to seek advancement on the job, to motivate someone to give me something, etc.

For more on this, see the Way of Life Advanced Bible course "How to Study the Bible."

## **6. Interpret Bible prophecy by COMPARING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE.**

Another important way to interpret the Bible is to compare Scripture with Scripture. This is why it is good to have a Bible with cross-references. The most helpful study book for comparing Scripture with Scripture is *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, which has hundreds of thousands of cross-references. It is available for most computerized Bible study packages. Our favorite is *SwordSearcher* for Windows. On the Mac we use OliveTree.

Not only does the meaning of a verse or passage become clear by comparing it with other Scriptures, but also Bible difficulties often disappear through this means.

Revelation 19:11-13 says that Jesus is “clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.” This does not refer to the blood that He shed on the cross. It is explained in Isaiah 63:1-4. The blood is that of Jesus’ enemies.

Isaiah 16:1 says, “Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion.” This is explained in 2 Kings 3:4. The king of Moab in former times paid tribute to Israel in lambs. The prophet is advising Moab to do this again and thus submit to Israel instead of being judged by God. In verses 3-4, the prophet continues this thought by beseeching Moab to rescue the Israelites instead of hating them. God judges the pagan nations based on their treatment of Israel.

Isaiah 28:11 says, “For with stammering lips and another tongue will be speak to this people.” This prophecy becomes clear when we compare it with 1 Corinthians 14:21. Isaiah prophesied that God would speak to Israel through the sign of tongues speaking.

Isaiah 53:5 says, “with his stripes we are healed,” and this is often used by Pentecostals to prove that physical healing is promised today. But if we compare 1 Peter 2:24, we see that the healing that is promised in this present time is spiritual healing and forgiveness of sin.

## **7. Interpret Bible prophecy by UNDERSTANDING OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELISM.**

One of the important features of Old Testament prophecies is Hebrew poetic parallelism, wherein one part of a verse explains, amplifies, completes, or contrasts the other part.

There are SEVERAL TYPES OF PARALLELISM in Bible prophecy. Following are two of these:

**CONTRASTIVE PARALLELISM:** In this type of parallel, one part of the parallel is contrasted with the other part, which is an important means of instruction.

Isaiah 1:18 contains a simple contrastive parallel -- “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” Here the ugliness of sin is contrasted with the perfection of salvation in Christ. The meaning is that though our sins are horrible, God’s grace in Christ provides complete forgiveness.

In Isaiah 5:15, we are told that “the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled...” The “mean man” is not a hateful and hurtful man, but is a lowly man. The term “mean” here refers to the opposite of the “mighty.”

Isaiah 8:14 has a contrastive parallel: “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel....” The first thought is contrasted with the second. The Messiah will be a sanctuary to those who believe, but He will be a stone of stumbling to those who do not believe.

Consider the contrastive parallelism in Isaiah 45:7, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.” The parallelism explains the meaning. “I form the light, and create darkness” is the first half of the parallel. This clause contains a contrast between light and darkness. “I make peace, and create evil” is the second part of the parallel. This clause, too, contains a contrast—between peace and evil. The evil refers to the lack of peace, referring to trouble of various sorts. The verse is not speaking of moral evil, but

times of evil. Daniel tells us that God is in control of the times: “he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Dan. 2:21). See also Job 12:6-25 and Romans 8:28. Some have tried to use Isaiah 45:7 to teach that God is the author of moral evil, that even the original sin was God’s design. That is not true. James 1:13 says that “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” God knew that man would sin, but He was not the author of that sin.

**COMPLETIVE PARALLELISM:** In this type of parallel, the second part of the parallel explains or adds more information to the first part, thus completing the thought.

Consider Isaiah 2:3 -- “for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” “Zion” in the first part is completed by “Jerusalem” in the second part. The combined parallel teaches us that Zion is Jerusalem. “The law” in the first part is completed by “the word of the Lord” in the second part. Thus, the second part of the parallel explains what “the law” will be in the kingdom. It will be the Word of God.

Consider Isaiah 9:6 -- “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...” Jesus is described both as a child that was born and a son that was given. As a child He was born in the manger 2,000 years ago, but as the Son of God, He was given and not born, because as a Son He is eternal and had no beginning. This exposes Rome’s error of calling Mary the “mother of God.” While it is true that Jesus is God and it is true that Mary is Jesus’ mother, it is not true that she is the mother of God because as God, Jesus has no mother! It is only as a man that He had a mother.

## **8. Interpret Bible prophecy by understanding the “PERSPECTIVE OF PROPHECY.”**

The “perspective of prophecy” refers to the fact that the time element in prophecy is often jumbled, because God’s chief purpose is not always to give a prophetic time line but to give a prophetic message.

This is also called “double perspective.”

Many times prophecies about the distant future are given together with near prophecies. Thus, prophecies separated by great periods of time can appear within the same passage or even the same verse. The view of Bible prophecy is like that of a mountain range. When we look out over a vast mountain range, we might see some smaller mountains in the foreground and some taller mountains in the distance, but we cannot see the mountains and valleys in between. The view of prophecy is also like looking at the stars from the perspective of the earth. From this perspective, it is impossible to discern the great distances that lie between the stars. The moon looks larger than the stars, but the stars are actually much larger.

- a. Many of the Messianic prophecies describe both the first and second coming of Christ in the same passage, even though these two events are separated by thousands of years.

See Luke 4:16-21, where Christ read from Isaiah 61:1-3 and stopped halfway through Isaiah 61:2. Then He said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4:21). Isaiah 61:1-2a was fulfilled in Christ's first coming to die for man's sins so the gospel of salvation could be preached throughout the earth. The rest of Isaiah 62:2-3, the part about the vengeance of God and the comforting of Zion, will be fulfilled at Christ's Second Coming to judge the world and bless Israel and set up His kingdom. Thus, in this one verse you have prophetic events that are separated by at least 2,000 years.

See Isaiah 9:6-7. Verse 6 refers to Christ's first coming, but verse 7 refers to His second coming to establish His kingdom.

See Malachi 3:1-4, where the first coming of Christ is described in verse 1 and the second coming is described in verses 2-4.

- b. God's promises to David concerning his son apply both to Solomon, David's immediate son, and to Jesus Christ, David's greater Son. See 2 Samuel 7:12-16.



- c. The prophecies of judgments upon Gentile nations often have in view judgments that are now past as well as judgments that are yet future and that will occur in the day of the Lord (e.g., Isa. 17:1-8; 19:1-25).
- d. The prophecies pertaining to Babylon have an application to ancient Babylon as well as to the end-time Babylonian system. For example, the prophecy of Jeremiah 50:1-2 describes the judgment of Babylon of old, but verses 3-5 look ahead to the judgment and the restoration of Israel in the end time. The prophet is looking beyond Babylon of old to the events of Revelation 17-18.
- e. Daniel 12:2 is a description of the resurrection of the just and the unjust, but we know from other Scriptures that these resurrections are divided by a thousand years. Compare Revelation 20:4-5.

## **9. Interpret Bible prophecy by DISTINGUISHING ISRAEL FROM THE CHURCH.**

(Some of the following is repeated in the chapter on Dispensationalism, but for those who might not go through the entire course I want to include this important aspect of rightly understanding Bible prophecy in this section on Bible Interpretation.)

1 Corinthians 10:32 states that there are three categories of people in the world today -- the JEWS, the GENTILES, and the CHURCH. Obviously, then, Israel is not the same as the church, and this is a very, very important matter for the Bible student to understand.

Some of the most common errors in theology have occurred through confusing the church with Israel. This is called "Replacement Theology."

This is one of the errors of ROMAN CATHOLICISM. Rome claims to be the new Israel and has adopted many things from the Old Testament dispensation, such as priests, temples, candles, incense, and sprinkling of water. Its false doctrine of baptizing infants was derived from Israel's practice of circumcising babies.

Believing that she is the new Israel, Rome attempted to take over the Holy Land during the crusades of the Middle Ages, but the Holy Land belongs to Israel, not the Church.

This is also one of the errors of PROTESTANTISM. By this, I am referring especially to Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, and Methodist denominations. When the Protestant denominations left Rome, they kept some of Rome's errors. One of these was the heresy of Replacement Theology, which says Israel has been replaced by the Church. They do not believe that the Old Testament covenants and prophecies pertaining to Israel will be literally fulfilled. They interpret these "allegorically" and apply them to the Church. They have also adopted certain rituals from the Old Testament dispensation, such as priests, elaborate ceremonies or "liturgy," infant baptism (which they claim is the spiritualizing of circumcision), candles, incense, etc.

Most of the CULTS also claim to be a continuation of Israel in one form or the other. For example, the Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, claimed that 10 of the tribes of Israel had been lost and had re-surfaced today in England and America and had been restored in his "church." This is called British-Israelism, and it is based on the heresy of Replacement Theology.

God's promises to Israel have not failed and His covenants with Israel have not been broken (except for the Mosaic covenant, which was temporary). From the very beginning of Israel's history, before she even entered the Promised Land, God warned that if she rejected His Law she would be judged and evicted from her land and scattered among the nations (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 37, 64-67), BUT GOD ALSO PROMISED TO RESTORE ISRAEL (Deut. 30:1-9).

God's covenants with Israel (other than the Mosaic covenant) are unconditional, eternal, and unchangeable. We will see this in the chapter on the Covenants.

The Bible emphasizes that all of God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament will be literally fulfilled. Consider, for example, the great prophecy of Zechariah 10-14.

1. Israel will be restored to the land (Zech. 10:6-12).
2. Israel will be brought through severe judgment during the Tribulation and one third of the Jews will call upon God's name (Zech. 13:8-9).
3. Israel will repent and be converted (Zech. 12:10 - 13:1).
4. The Messiah will return and defeat Israel's enemies and rule from Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-21).

In contrast to Israel's covenants and prophecies, the Church is a mystery that was not revealed in Old Testament prophecies. See Ephesians 3:4-6.

Romans 11:25-29 tells us more about the mystery of the church. Christ came to Israel but was rejected (John 1:11). Christ was crucified and raised from the dead and ascended back to heaven. A few years later the armies of Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the Jews were scattered among the nations and for nearly 2,000 years she did not have a home of her own. Israel has been blinded because of her rebellion against God. During this age, God is calling out people from among all nations to form the Church. See Acts 15:13-18. When God is finished with this work, the Church-age believers will be Raptured out of the world and God will fulfill His covenants with Israel.

With the return of Israel to her land and the formation of the modern state of Israel we are doubtless very near the end of the Church age. The great prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37 describes the return of Israel in two stages: first she will return to the land in a spiritually-dead condition, then she will be spiritually revived. God tells Ezekiel that the valley of dry bones represents Israel scattered among the nations (Ezek. 37:11-12). This reminds us that the prophecies are usually interpreted clearly in context. The prophecy says that Israel will return to the land and be spiritually blessed, and according to verses 7-10 this will occur in two stages. First the bones come together and are covered with flesh, but "there was no breath in them." Then the Spirit of God will breathe upon them and they will live. The first part of this prophecy has been fulfilled since 1948 with the restoration of Israel to her land and the creation of the modern state, but Israel is still spiritually dead and blind. She still rejects her Messiah. She does not understand her own Scriptures, thinking that the law of Moses is the way of righteousness. Compare

Romans 10:1-3. She continues in her self-righteousness, not acknowledging that her trouble over the past 2,000 years was a punishment for her great sin against God. She doesn't honor Jehovah God according to His law. She doesn't even have a temple or a priesthood and sacrifices. Her "passover" is bloodless, even though her own law says that "it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). Though back in the land, Israel is still under the power of the Gentile nations, because "the times of the Gentiles" has not come to an end. This is why she is so weak, though she has a powerful military. She has to worry about what America and Europe and the United Nations think and often she has had to sacrifice her own best interest to their interests. When Israel turns back to God in true repentance and receives her Messiah, she will again have God's fullest blessing and she will never again have to worry about her enemies. Christ will establish the headquarters of His kingdom in Jerusalem and the whole world will bow before Him and honor Israel as His people.

It is important to differentiate between Israel and the Church when interpreting Bible prophecy.

## **10. Interpret Bible prophecy ACCORDING TO THE DISPENSATIONS.**

For this edition of *Understanding Bible Prophecy* (August 2012), we have folded the most important and practical points of Dispensationalism into this section on interpreting Bible prophecy. For those who want a more extensive study, this can still be found in the chapter on Dispensationalism later in the course.

### a. What is dispensationalism?

Dispensationalism refers to the fact that Bible history can be divided into distinct periods of time during which God works out His purposes. Dispensationalism is based on a literal interpretation of the Bible and a clear distinction between Israel and the Church.

(1) The Bible uses the word "**DISPENSATION**" in Ephesians 1:10. "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one

all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” This refers to a period of time during which God is doing some particular work.

- (2) Another Bible word for this is “**TIME**.” We see this word in Ephesians 1:10—“the fulness of times.” Though the word “time” means different things in the Bible, one of its meanings is a period of time during which God is working out His purposes. In Acts 1:7 we find the phrase “the times,” referring to God’s plan. These are also called “the seasons.” It refers to the time on God’s great calendar. The Bible speaks of the “times of the Gentiles” (Lk. 21:24), the “times of the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), and “this present time” (Rom. 11:5).
- (3) Another Bible word for this is “**AGE**.” The Bible refers to “ages past” (Eph. 3:5), “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7), and “all ages” (Eph. 3:21).

Thus, the Bible teaches that there are great periods of time during which God works out His eternal plan. These periods are called “dispensations,” “ages,” and “times.”

b. What are the dispensations?

The Bible does not specifically tell us how many ages there have been since God made man or how many there will be in the future. C.I. Scofield, author of the famous Scofield Bible, and many other well-known teachers, have taught that there are seven dispensations. Scofield said, “Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment, marking his utter failure in every dispensation.”

The seven Scofield dispensations are as follows:

1. Man innocent (Genesis 2-3)
2. Man under conscience (Genesis 3-8)
3. Man in authority over the earth (Genesis 9-11)

4. Man under promise (from Abraham to Moses)
5. Man under law (from Moses to the first coming of Christ)
6. Man under grace (from the first coming of Christ until the second coming)
7. Man under the personal reign of Christ (the millennial kingdom and new heaven and new earth)

That is one way that the ages can be explained and divided; but there are other ways to look at them, and the number seven is not necessary. It depends on how you define an age. The important point is that there have been various periods during which God has worked out His purposes, and during these periods God has related to men in different ways and has required different things of him. The knowledge of this is necessary for a right interpretation of the Bible.

I am not satisfied with the Scofield dispensational system for several reasons. For example, to call the time from Adam's Fall to the Flood "man under conscience" is misleading and arbitrary, it seems to me, because there is no significant difference in God's dealings with man before the Flood or after the Flood. To call the age from the Flood to Abraham "man in authority over the earth" is also misleading, since man was actually in authority over the earth from the time of Adam's creation. To call the age from Moses to Christ the age of "man under law" is misleading, since the law of Moses was given to Israel, not to mankind in general. Further, to call the church age "man under grace" is misleading, since salvation has always been by grace and always will be (Romans 4:1-8).

I believe it is more profitable to divide the ages into the following categories:

- (1) *The Age of Testing*. This refers to the time when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden before the Fall (Genesis 1-3). The first man and woman were created sinless and were given only one commandment, which was not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they were tempted by Satan and sinned, the age of testing ended. We do not know how long Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of

Eden before they sinned, but we do know that they didn't have any children until after they were put out of the Garden.

- (2) *The Age of Lawlessness.* This age lasted from Adam's Fall to Abraham (Genesis 4-9). During this period, rebels such as Cain built godless cities and societies. The world became so corrupt that God destroyed it with a global Flood and only Noah and his three sons and their wives survived. This period lasted roughly 1,600 years.
- (3) *The Age of Babel.* After the Flood Nimrod and his associates built the godless empire of Babel (Genesis 10:8-12; 11:1-9). Idolatry was invented at Babel and spread throughout the world (Romans 1:21-23). This resulted in great moral perversion (Rom. 1:24-28). The age of Babel has continued through the millennia and will not end until God destroys the Babylon world system during the Great Tribulation (Revelation 17).
- (4) *The Age of Israel's Beginning.* During this period, God built the foundation of the nation of Israel (Genesis 12-50). God called Abraham out of Ur and gave him the covenant; the covenant passed to Isaac, then to Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel), then to the 12 sons of Jacob who were the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. During the days of Joseph, Israel moved to Egypt and dwelt there until the time of Moses. This period lasted about 630 years.
- (5) *The Age of the Law of Moses.* This age lasted from Moses to the coming of Christ (Exodus to the end of the Old Testament). During this period, God put Israel under the Mosaic law to prepare for the coming of Christ. The law did this in two ways: First, it shows God's holiness and man's sinful condition and condemnation before God and his need of salvation. Second, it points to Christ by many types, such as the Passover lamb and the Tabernacle. It is important to understand that men were never saved by keeping the law of Moses. Salvation has always been by God's grace through faith in His Word (Romans 4:1-8). The law was given as a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The Jews erred in

trying to find righteousness in the law (Romans 10:1-4). This period lasted roughly 1,500 years.

- (6) *The Church Age*. This age lasted from the Cross to the Rapture. During this age, God is calling out a special body of people from among all nations to be Christ's Bride (Acts 1:8; 15:14-17; Romans 11:25-26). So far this period has lasted almost 2,000 years.
- (7) *The Age of Daniel's 70th Week*. This seven-year period lasts from the Rapture until the return of Christ in glory. It is the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks (Dan. 9:24-27). It is called the Day of Lord (Isaiah 2:12) and the day of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). It is described in Matthew 24:3-31 and Revelation 6-19. During this period, God will prepare Israel and the world for the return of Christ. He will judge the nations for their sin and rebellion and idolatry. He will complete His judgments upon Israel and convert her according to the New Covenant. The antichrist and his armies will be overthrown at Armageddon, and Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit.
- (8) *The Age of the Millennial Kingdom*. This age lasts from Christ's second coming to the end of millennial reign (Revelation 19-20). During this period, God will establish the Messianic kingdom on earth, with its headquarters in Jerusalem, and the nations will be ruled with a rod of iron. This period will last 1,000 years.
- (9) *The Ages of the New Heaven and New Earth* (Revelation 21-22). From this point on, God will continue to work out His plans from age to age throughout eternity, but the Bible does not reveal any further details. We call this the "ageS" plural rather than "age" singular, because the Bible indicates that there will be endless ages during which God will work out His eternal purposes. The Greek phrase translated "forever and ever" is *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, which means "into the ages of the ages" (1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 11:15; 20:10; 22:5).



c. What are the benefits of interpreting the Bible according to dispensations?

- (1) Dispensational theology helps us to study the Bible within its proper context.

Paul instructed Timothy to rightly divide God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). The Greek word *orthotomeo*, which is translated "rightly divide," means "to make a straight cut, to dissect correctly." The Bible is one Book, but it is also divided into individual books and major divisions (e.g., law, prophecy, Gospels, Acts, Epistles), and each segment must be rightly interpreted within its proper context. Dispensational theology enables the student to accomplish this.

Consider Genesis 1:29-30, which says that man may eat only vegetables. This is no longer in effect, though, since after the Flood God told Noah that he could eat meat (Gen. 9:30).

Consider Leviticus 11:7-8, which forbids the eating of pork. These dietary restrictions were required of the Jews living under the law of Moses, but Paul taught that the New Testament believer is not under dietary restrictions (1 Tim. 4:3-5).

Consider Deuteronomy 13:6-10 and Exodus 22:19, which command that idolators and witches be stoned to death. That was true in Israel under the law of Moses, and it will be true in Christ's kingdom, but in the church age Christians don't put idolators and witches to death. Paul didn't call for the death of the witch in Acts 16:16-18. When he visited the idolatrous city of Athens, Paul didn't try to seek to have idolators put to death; instead, he preached the gospel to them (Acts 17:22-34). We aren't living in the age of the law of Moses; we are living in the age of the Great Commission.

Consider 2 Kings 23:14-15, where King Josiah destroyed the idols. As a king of Israel operating under the law of Moses, he had God's authority

to do this. But we never see the apostles and early churches breaking up idols, except for their own personal idols after they were saved. When Christ returns, He will destroy all idols from the earth, but today is the Great Commission age. It is not time to destroy idolators and break down their idols; it is time to preach the gospel to every person to give sinners an opportunity to be saved. This is what we see in the book of Acts. A believer can and should destroy his own idols, but he cannot destroy idols not belonging to him. If he rents a house or apartment that has an idol, he should ask the landlord if he can remove or cover up the idol while he is occupying the facility. If the landlord does not agree, the believer should find another place to rent, but he is not authorized by the Bible to destroy idols that don't belong to him.

Consider Ezekiel 33:12-16, which says men are judged by whether or not they keep the law. Many have erred by thinking that this teaches us how to be saved. Those who believe you can lose your salvation use verses like these to prove their doctrine. But the Bible student must interpret every passage in its dispensational context, and the context here is the law of Moses. We know from the New Testament that Moses' law was not written to show men how to be saved. It was written to show men that they are sinners under God's judgment and that they need to flee to Christ for salvation (Romans 3:19-20). The law of Moses required perfect obedience (Ezek. 33:15), which no sinner can provide. Compare Galatians 3:10-12.

Consider Matthew 5:25-26, which calls for imprisonment for those who do not reconcile with their adversaries. This is not referring to believers in the churches. Nowhere in the book of Acts or in the New Testament epistles do we see the early churches operating prisons. In Matthew 5 Jesus is preaching the principles of the kingdom He will establish when He returns.

Consider Matthew 10:5-15. Here Christ sends out His disciples to preach, but note the following restrictions: (1) They were to preach only to Jews

(v. 6). (2) They were to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (v. 7). (3) They were to do miracles (v. 8). (4) They were not to carry any money or extra clothes (v. 9-10). (5) They were to carry no weapons (a staff). This is directly contradictory to the commands given later in the New Testament. Later Christ instructed His disciples to preach to all men (Matt. 28:18-20), to preach the gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection rather than “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mark 16:15), to carry both money and a sword (Lk. 22:35-26), and there is no command to do miracles. What is the difference between these accounts? The difference is that they are spoken under different dispensations. In Matthew 10, Christ was sending His disciples out to proclaim to Israel that their Messiah and King was present. That is the meaning of the message they preached, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” It was at hand because the King was standing right there! Thus in Matthew 10 the messengers were to preach only to Jews, were to do miracles to demonstrate that the Messiah had come as foretold in the prophets, were not to provide anything for themselves because it was just a short period of time and they were operating under the direct earthly supervision of the Messiah. Later, after Israel had rejected Jesus, He began to prepare for the church age and the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the church age, the program of God changed.

Consider the miracles of Christ in the Gospels and the miracles of the apostles in the book of Acts. These are not examples for believers today to imitate. Rather, they were signs to authenticate special ministries. Jesus did miracles to prove that He was the Messiah (John 5:36; 20:30-31). The apostles did miracles to demonstrate that they were the Lord’s special apostles (2 Cor. 12:12). Today we don’t live in the dispensation of the Gospels, which was primarily the dispensation pertaining to Israel. And we don’t live in the dispensation of Acts, which was a transitional dispensational, transitioning between the Gospels and the Church age.

Consider Revelation 13:10. This is written in the context of the reign of the antichrist (see verses 1-8). When verse 10 says, “He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword,” it refers to the antichrist’s law that will require all people to worship him (see v. 8). It is not referring to using the sword at any time and age. Pacifists who use this verse to forbid the use of weapons in every situation are abusing the Scripture by taking things out of context. Jesus Himself at one point instructed His disciples to get a sword (Lk. 22:36). What Revelation 13:10 is warning about is joining hands with the antichrist in his war against those who refuse to bow to him.

- (2) Dispensational theology allows us to see that not everything in the Bible was written *to* or is directly *about* the church-age believer, but everything in the Bible is *for* the church-age believer because everything has lessons for us. See Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11.

Consider Psalm 126:5-6. These verses are used for evangelism, but the verses actually refer to the return of Israel to the land. See verses 1-4. This is a promise that God will fulfill His covenants with Israel and will bring them back to the land. We can apply these verses to evangelism, but it is important first to understand the main interpretation of a passage according to its dispensational context.

Consider 2 Chronicles 7:14. This is a promise given to Israel when the First Temple was built by Solomon. The promise, therefore, belongs particularly to Israel and not to the churches. Israel had a promised land and an earthly kingdom, but the churches don’t have those things. We can make an application of this promise, though. God does bless nations to some extent when His people in the churches walk in obedience. How Christians live will have an effect upon their nations. But we are strangers in this present world and our citizenship is in heaven, and nowhere does God promise to heal a pagan nation if the Christians in that nation have a spiritual revival.

# Review Questions on Interpretation of Prophecy

1. What passage describes the three types of men according to spiritual understanding?
2. What is a “natural man”?
3. What is a “spiritual man”?
4. What is a “carnal man”?
5. The Parable of the Sower says the Word of God can be choked out of one’s life. How is it choked out?
6. How long was Israel ruled by judges?
7. How long was Israel ruled by kings?
8. Who were the first three kings?
9. During the reign of what king was the kingdom of Israel divided into two parts?
10. What nation destroyed Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel?
11. What nation destroyed Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Israel?
12. How long was Israel in captivity in Babylon?
13. Who led Israel in rebuilding the temple?
14. Who led Israel in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem?
15. What three prophets prophesied during the time when the temple and walls were being rebuilt?
16. How many years passed between Malachi and Matthew?
17. What is the “literal” method of Bible interpretation?
18. What is “allegorical” interpretation?
19. What is an example of allegorical interpretation of prophecy?
20. Where was allegorical interpretation invented?
21. Who are two of the fathers of allegoricalism?
22. Where did the Protestant denominations obtain allegorical interpretation?
23. What are four reasons why we interpret prophecy literally?
24. What famous church continued to interpret Bible prophecy literally for hundreds of years?
25. What verse says the secret things belong to the Lord but the things He has revealed belong to us?

26. What are three Bible passages that show us how the early Christians interpreted prophecy?
27. What are three ways that the prophecy about Tyre was fulfilled literally?
28. What are four prophecies of Christ's first coming that were fulfilled literally?
29. In what book and chapter did Jesus teach that the Great Tribulation will occur just prior to His second coming?
30. What are two ways in which the stage is set for the literal fulfillment of Bible prophecy?
31. Why does practical necessity demand the literal interpretation of prophecy?
32. If prophecy does not mean exactly what it \_\_\_\_\_, there is no way to know exactly what it does \_\_\_\_\_.
33. What are the two ways that the student interprets the Bible symbolic language?
34. What is the most important rule of Bible interpretation?
35. What is a study book to help the Bible student compare Scripture with Scripture?
36. What are three types of Hebrew parallels that can be found in Old Testament prophecy?
37. What is "the perspective of prophecy"?
38. How is "the perspective of prophecy" like viewing a mountain range?
39. What are two examples of prophecies that speak of different events in the same passage?
40. What verse says there are Jews, Gentiles, and the Church in the world today?
41. What is Replacement Theology?
42. What ancient prophecy that was given before Israel entered the Promised Land said that Israel would be scattered among the nations and then restored?
43. What is a mystery in the New Testament?
44. How is the church a mystery?
45. What New Testament passage says that Israel is blinded at present but after the church age is finished God will fulfill His covenants with Israel?
46. What prophecy describes the return of Israel in two stages?
47. What are these stages?
48. How do we know that Israel is spiritually dead today?
49. What is dispensationalism?
50. What are two other words that the Bible uses to describe dispensations?

51. What are two benefits of interpreting the Bible dispensationally?
52. What Bible verse exhorts us to rightly divide the Word of God?
53. When in man's history did God allow him to eat meat? In what book and chapter do we find this?
54. What passage in the New Testament says the believer is free to eat meat?
55. How do we know that Ezekiel 33 doesn't teach that salvation is through obedience?
56. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus referred to people being imprisoned. When will this happen?
57. How do we know that we do not have to follow the instructions of Matthew 10 in the churches today?
58. Why did Jesus do miracles?
59. Why did the apostles do miracles?

# The Covenants

*MEMORY VERSES:* Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Jeremiah 31:33; Hosea 3:4-5; Romans 3:19-20

To understand Bible prophecy it is necessary to understand the covenants that God has made with Israel.

A covenant is also called a testament. It is an agreement between God and man.

There are two kinds of covenants that God has made with man: *conditional*, meaning that man's obedience is necessary for the fulfillment of God's promise (such as the Mosaic Covenant), and *unconditional*, meaning that God Himself pledges to do something and it is not dependent on man's obedience (such as the Abrahamic Covenant).

## ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-18; 15:1-21

God promised to bless Abraham and his nation and the entire world through his seed.

### The Setting of the Abrahamic Covenant

Abraham was still in the idolatrous city of Ur when God spoke to him, commanding him to leave his father to go to Palestine (Gen. 11:27-32). He disobeyed at first, by taking his father with him and by stopping in Haran. After his father died, though, Abraham continued the journey to the Promised Land and dwelt there by faith, waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises (Heb. 11:8-10).



## **The Two Parts of the Abrahamic Covenant**

God promised Abraham both **NATIONAL** blessings and **UNIVERSAL** blessings (Gen. 12:2-3).

The **national** aspect of Abraham's covenant belongs to the nation Israel, which inherited the covenant through Isaac (Gen. 26:1-4) and Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (Gen. 35:9-12). To Israel is promised spiritual blessings as well as the land that God gave to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-20; 17:7-8).

The **universal** blessings are enjoyed by all believers through Abraham's Seed, Jesus Christ. By receiving Christ, we become Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:6-7). Like Abraham, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life (Gal. 3:8-9). We become children of God (Gal. 3:26-29). As Abraham's children, New Testament Christians will partake of the coming kingdom and the new heaven and new earth beyond that (Rom. 4:13, 16, 17). But the New Testament believer does not possess the land of Israel and our hope is not tied to that land. Our hope is not earthly but heavenly. We will rule and reign with Christ, not as Israel but as Jesus' Bride.

## **The Character of the Abrahamic Covenant**

1. The covenant was unconditional (Gen. 15:1-21). The covenant was affirmed by God Himself while Abraham was in a deep sleep (v. 12). God alone passed between the sacrificed animals in the form of a burning lamp (v. 17). This signified Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross, which is the basis of all of God's covenants with man. Sinful man can have no relationship with the thrice holy God apart from Christ's atonement. The fact that Abraham was asleep and that God passed between the sacrificed animals alone signifies that fact that God purchased salvation without any help from man. Hebrews 1:3 says that He purged our sins "by himself."

2. The covenant was eternal (Gen. 13:15; 17:7-8).

## **The Seed of the Abrahamic Covenant**

1. Abraham's physical seed is the nation Israel (Gen. 15:13).
2. Abraham's spiritual seed is Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16).

## **MOSAIC COVENANT**

Exodus 19-24

This is also called the Old Covenant (Testament), or the law of Moses. The Mosaic covenant was a system of law that God gave to Israel from Mt. Sinai.

The purpose of this law was to prepare Israel and the world for the Saviour.

It was a conditional covenant that required complete obedience on the part of Israel (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 11:27-28).

## **The Purpose of the Law of Moses**

1. It showed man's lost condition by revealing God's perfect holiness and man's sinfulness (Romans 3:19-20; Galatians 3:10-13, 24).
2. It showed God's way of salvation by pointing to Christ in types such as the tabernacle, the Levitical offerings, the priesthood, and the feasts (Rom. 3:21-22).

The Mosaic law was never intended as the way of salvation. Salvation has always been by faith through God's grace on the basis of the shed blood of Christ (Rom. 4:3-8).

3. The Mosaic law was also given to separate Israel from other nations that she might remain pure through the centuries as God accomplished His will through her (Lev. 20:22-26).

For the following reasons we know that Israel's disobedience to the law of Moses and God's judgment which followed have not annulled the promises contained in the other covenants:

1. God promised that He would not forget His covenant with Israel even if she disobeyed Him (Deut. 4:30-31; 30:1-9).
2. The Mosaic law was intended to be only a temporary system to prepare for the coming of Christ; it was not given to overthrow God's promises in the Abrahamic covenant (Gal. 3:21-25).
3. The New Covenant, which reaffirms to Israel all the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, was given AFTER Israel had miserably broken the Mosaic law and judgment had been pronounced by God (Jer. 31:32).
4. The Mosaic covenant was done away when Christ died (2 Cor. 3:11), but the apostles taught that God's promises with Israel are still in effect (Rom. 11:25-27).

## **RETURN TO THE LAND COVENANT**

### Deuteronomy 29-30

This is usually called the "Palestinian" Covenant and we called it that in previous editions of this course, but upon further reflection we do not believe this name is appropriate. "Palestine" is a term that has been popularized by the Muslim Palestinian movement which argues that the land belongs to the "Palestinians" rather than to Israel. The land is not called *Palestine* in Scripture. (The one mention of "Palestine" in the King James Bible in Joel 3:4 is translated from the same Hebrew word as "Philistia" and refers to the coastal area that was occupied by the Philistines.) Before Israel possessed the land it was called *Canaan* after the pagan Canaanites who occupied it (Gen. 12:5). God gave the land of Canaan to Israel (Deut. 32:49). Since it has been occupied by Israel it has been called the land of promise (1 Kings 8:34; Heb. 11:9), the land of your fathers (Deut. 11:21), the land of Israel (2 Chron. 2:17; Ezek. 11:17), and land of the Lord (Isa. 14:2).

1. This covenant was made with Israel at the end of the 40 years of wilderness wandering just before they entered the Promised Land. It was made in the land of Moab (Deut. 29:1), which borders the land of Canaan on the east.
2. This covenant is different from the Mosaic covenant that was given on Mt. Sinai (Deut. 29:1). “Horeb” is another name for Sinai (Deut. 5:2-23).
3. The covenant promises that Israel will be restored to the land and blessed after the judgments of God are finished (Deut. 30:1-9).
4. The covenant is unconditional and sure. See Deuteronomy 30:1-9--“thou SHALT return and shalt obey his voice” (vv. 2-2); “the Lord thy God WILL bring thee into the land” (v. 5); “God WILL circumcise thine heart” (v. 6); “God WILL put all these curses upon thine enemies” (v. 7); “thou SHALT return and obey the voice of the Lord” (v. 8); “God WILL make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand” (v. 9).

*Question:* What about the conditional statement in Deuteronomy 30:10?

*Answer:* It does not and cannot overthrow the previous divine promises and prophecies that are given in an unconditional manner. What we see in Deuteronomy 30:10-20 is that after God states the facts of the Return to the Land Covenant, He returns to the theme of Deuteronomy 28 and warns Israel again about departing from Him.

### **Promises of the Return Covenant**

1. God will gather the scattered Israelites (Deut. 30:1-4).
2. God will restore them to the land of their fathers (Deut. 30:5).
3. God will bless them there and multiply them (Deut. 30:5, 9).
4. God will regenerate them so that they will love God and obey Him (Deut. 30:6, 8).
5. God will judge their enemies and they will no longer be persecuted (Deut. 30:7).

## **DAVIDIC COVENANT**

2 Samuel 7:4-17

The Davidic covenant is an extension of the covenant God made with Abraham. In the Davidic covenant, God gives more details about the national kingdom aspect of the Abrahamic covenant.

Israel's future existence, restoration to the place of God's favor, and the re-establishment of her kingdom is based on God's unconditional promise to David.

### **Details of the Davidic Covenant**

1. The house and throne of David will be established forever (2 Sam. 7:13, 16).
2. David's children will be chastised for sin, but the covenant can never be annulled (2 Sam. 7:14-15).
3. The Davidic covenant will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, David's Son, who has inherited David's throne (Mat. 1:1) and who will establish the Davidic kingdom at His return from heaven (Isa. 9:6-7).

### **Other Old Testament Mentions of the Davidic Covenant**

1. The Psalmists mention it and interpret it literally (Psa. 18:50; 89:3-4, 20-37; 132:11-18). The Psalmists teach us that the Davidic Covenant is the means whereby God will establish His kingdom on earth (Psa. 89:20-29). Psalm 72 describes in much detail the kingdom of David's Son Jesus the Messiah.
2. The prophets often mention it and interpret it literally (Isa. 9:6-7; 16:5; 22:22-24; 55:3-5; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:15-26; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Amos 9:11-15; Zec. 12:7 - 13:1). Hosea describes the fall of Israel followed by her return and the re-establishment of the Davidic kingdom (Hos. 3:4-5).

## **THE NEW COVENANT**

### **Jeremiah 31-33**

The New Covenant is God's promise to convert Israel, restore her to her own land, and bless her.

#### **Some Facts about the New Covenant**

1. It was made with the nation Israel (Jer. 31:31).
2. It promises the following things:
  - a. The regathering of Israel (Jer. 31:6-11)
  - b. God's blessing upon Israel's land (Jer. 31:4-5, 12-14, 24-25). Ezekiel often refers to the land as "the land of Israel" when he prophesies of Israel's restoration (Ezek. 11:17; 20:38, 42; 37:12; 38:18-19; 40:2; 47:18).
  - c. The spiritual conversion of the people and cleansing from sin (Jer. 31:33-34)
  - d. The reestablishment of Israel's kingdom and the possession of the land (Jer. 31:35-37)
  - e. Blessing upon Jerusalem as the capital of the kingdom (Jer. 31:38-40)
3. The New Covenant is unconditional and sure (Jer. 33:19-26).
4. The New Covenant is eternal (Jer. 32:40).

#### **Other Old Testament Mentions of the New Covenant**

1. It will be established when Israel is restored and blessed before the eyes of all nations (Isa. 61:8-11; Ezek. 37:21-28).

2. It will involve the placing of God's sanctuary in the midst of Israel forever (Ezek. 37:26-27).
3. Some Psalms picture the fulfillment of this covenant (Psa. 72; 85; 130).
4. Jesus referred to the New Covenant in His teaching of the new birth (compare John 3:1-15 and Ezekiel 36:24-29).

### **The New Covenant and Church-age Believers**

*Question:* If the New Covenant is not fulfilled in the church, why does the writer of Hebrews quote it (Hebrews 8:6-13; 10:15-19)?

*Answer:*

1. Hebrews does not say the New Covenant is fulfilled in the church; it twice states, rather, that the New Covenant belongs to "the house of Israel" (Heb. 8:8, 10).
2. Hebrews refers to the New Covenant to show that the Mosaic law was only temporary and that even the Old Testament promised that it would be abolished and replaced by another covenant. Hebrews was written to Jews who professed Christ, some of whom were being tempted to return to the Jewish religion because of persecution. It was written to encourage them that Christ is superior in every way. The writer of Hebrews mentions the New Covenant to show that God had all along planned to replace the Mosaic Covenant with a better one.
3. The writer of Hebrews indicates that the New Testament believer partakes of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant through Christ (Heb. 10:15-18), but nowhere does he say that this covenant has been transferred from national Israel to the church or that the physical aspects of the covenant should be spiritualized. Since the spiritual aspects of the New Covenant (and the spiritual aspects only) are cited in Hebrews 8:8-11 (from Jeremiah 31:31-34), it appears that New Testament believers participate only in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant through Christ's atonement.

4. The apostle Paul plainly taught that the New Covenant will be fulfilled literally in Israel following the church age (Rom. 11:25-27).



## Review Questions on the Covenants

1. What is a covenant?
2. What are the two types of covenants we find in the Bible?
3. What error does Covenant Theology make in regard to Israel's covenants?
4. In what chapter of the Bible do we find the first mention of the Abrahamic Covenant?
5. Where was Abraham living when God gave him the covenant?
6. What are the two aspects to the covenant?
7. What verse says that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham?
8. In Genesis 15 God instructed Abraham to sacrifice animals, and after Abraham fell into a deep sleep a burning lamp passed between the pieces of the sacrifice and God renewed His promise to Abraham. What did this signify?
9. What is the physical seed of Abraham?
10. Who is the spiritual seed of Abraham?
11. Where was Israel when God give the Mosaic Covenant?
12. What are two other names for this covenant?
13. In what way was the Mosaic Covenant conditional?
14. What was the three-fold purpose of the law of Moses?
15. What are two key chapters in the New Testament that teach the purpose of the law?
16. How does the law of Moses point to salvation?
17. What are four reasons why we know that Israel's disobedience to the law of Moses did not annul God's other covenants with her?
18. What passage promises that after the fulness of the Gentiles are brought in during the church age that "all Israel shall be saved"?
19. What was the land of Israel called before Israel possessed it?
20. What are some other names that the land is called in Scripture?
21. When was the Return Covenant given to Israel?
22. Where do we find this covenant in the Bible?
23. What is Mt. Horeb?
24. What did God promise in the Return Covenant?

25. How do we know that the Return Covenant is unconditional and sure?
26. What are five things that God promises in the Return Covenant?
27. Where in the Bible do we find the Davidic Covenant?
28. What are the two aspects of the Davidic Covenant?
29. Who is David's Son through which the covenant will be fulfilled?
30. What famous Messianic prophecy says Jesus will sit upon the throne of David forever?
31. What Psalm describes the kingdom of David's Son?
32. What two-verse prophecy describes the fall of Israel and her throne followed by the return and re-establishment of the kingdom?
33. Which prophet describes the New Covenant in the greatest detail?
34. According to this prophet, God will make the New Covenant with whom?
35. What are five promises of the New Covenant?
36. When will the New Covenant be established?
37. Jesus referred to the New Covenant in His teaching on the \_\_\_\_\_.
38. Does the book of Hebrews say the New Covenant is fulfilled in the Church?
39. Hebrews was written to whom?
40. Why does the writer of Hebrews mention the New Covenant?
41. Hebrews says the New Testament believer partakers of the \_\_\_\_\_ blessings of the New Covenant through Christ.
42. In what passage did Paul teach that the New Covenant will be literally fulfilled following the church age?

# Messianic Prophecies

*MEMORY VERSES:* Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; 53:6; Micah 5:2

In this section we will look at some of the prophecies leading up to and including Christ's first coming.

The Messianic prophecies pertaining to Daniel's 70th Week and the kingdom and beyond are dealt with under the section on Future Prophetic Events.

The title *Christ* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, meaning "anointed," referring to Jesus as the Messiah promised in O.T. Scripture (John 1:41; 4:25; Acts 2:36). The Hebrew word "mashach" is translated "Messiah" in Daniel 9:25 and "anointed" in Psalm 45:7.

One of the greatest evidences that Bible prophecy must be interpreted literally is the fact that prophecy has always been fulfilled literally. The prophecies of Christ's first coming illustrate this in the most dramatic way.

## SOME PROPHECIES LEADING UP TO CHRIST'S FIRST COMING

### Genesis 3:15

**"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."**

This amazing verse, which was written by Moses about 3,500 years ago, contains the first gospel message and the first Messianic prophecy in Scripture. God promised that the coming Messiah would conquer the devil in the stead of fallen Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15).

- a. The Messiah will be the Seed of the woman. This is a prophecy of the virgin birth. It refers to something supernatural. A woman does not naturally have seed and cannot naturally bear a child without the seed of the man. Normally

children are the seed of their fathers, but Jesus had no earthly father. Compare Galatians 4:4 -- “God sent forth his son, made of a woman.” It was through the virgin birth that Christ came into the world as a sinless man to make atonement for sin. The sin nature is inherited through the father (Rom. 5:12).

- b. The Messiah will be bruised in His heel by the devil. This is a prophecy of Christ’s death on the cross. It is described as a bruising of the heel because it was not permanent or ultimately deadly, since Christ rose from the dead. See Isaiah 53:5, which says that Christ was bruised for our iniquities.
- c. Christ will bruise the devil’s head. A head wound refers to a deadly wound, signifying the complete defeat of the devil’s program and his eternal destruction. See Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 20:10.
- d. God prophesied that mankind would be divided into two streams--Satan’s family and God’s family--and there will be hostility between them. Compare Matthew 13:38. We see this age-long conflict beginning immediately in Genesis 4 when Cain hated his brother Abel because he was a believer and a prophet of God. Compare 1 John 3:12.

### **Genesis 3:21**

**“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”**

The coats that God made are symbolic of the Messiah, and God’s clothing of Adam and Eve typifies salvation in Christ. Compare Isaiah 61:10.

- a. The coats were provided through the shedding of the blood of an innocent sacrifice. Compare John 1:29; Hebrews 9:22.
- b. The coats were entirely of God’s design and making, signifying the truth that salvation is 100% of God. It was conceived of by God and wrought by God. Compare Hebrews 1:3, which says that Christ “by himself purged our sins.”

- c. The coats replaced the fig leaf aprons of man's design. Man's attempts to make himself right with God through religion and morality are insufficient and unacceptable. Our very righteousness is as filthy rags before God (Isa. 64:6).
- d. The coats were sufficient. They covered them properly and sufficiently so that they were acceptable in God's sight. This signifies how that through Jesus' righteousness the sinner is justified or declared righteous before God because of His sacrifice on the cross. See 2 Corinthians 5:21. There was nothing that Adam and Eve needed to add to that which God provided, and there is nothing that the sinner needs to add to Christ's salvation (1 Cor. 1:30).
- e. The coats were God's gift of grace to the needy sinners; they were provided freely. Adam and Eve did not merit or earn the divine favor. Compare Ephesians 2:8-9.
- f. The coats were received by repentance and faith. Adam and Eve's repentance and faith was evidenced by the fact that they submitted to God's salvation. By receiving the divinely-offered coats they were rejecting their own fig-leaf garments, thus acknowledging both their guilt and the insufficiency of their own righteousness and religion. The apostle Paul taught that salvation has always been by faith, both before, during, and since the law of Moses (Rom. 4:1-8).

### **Genesis 49:8-11**

**“Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? 10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. 11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.”**

This is another great Messianic prophecy. It was spoken by Jacob (Israel) to his 12 sons, the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. In Genesis 49 we are told that Christ's lineage would descend through the tribe of Judah.

- a. Judah will be praised by his brethren (Gen. 48:8). Judah's name means *praise* and some of his sons were praised, such as David and Solomon, but a greater Son, Jesus, will receive all praise and glory.
- b. His hand will be on the neck of his enemies (Gen. 48:8). Judah defeated his enemies in the days of the Judges (Jud. 1:2-9) and in the days of David and Solomon (Psa. 18:40), but a greater Son of Judah will defeat all enemies when He returns from heaven.
- c. His brethren shall bow down before him (Gen. 48:8). They will bow before Judah in his greater Son Jesus Christ.
- d. He is a lion's whelp (Gen. 48:9). Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5).
- e. He will hold the scepter, which is a rod signifying a king's authority (Gen. 49:10). This refers to the kings of Judah beginning with David, who was in the lineage of Judah (1 Ch. 5:2; 28:4). Beyond this it points to Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords. God promised that He would establish the throne of David forever (2 Sam. 7:13). Why does Jacob prophesy that the scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Christ come, since we know that the Davidic kingdom was cut off in 586 B.C. when Babylon conquered Jerusalem (Gen. 49:10)? While it is true that the kings of Judah were cut off at the Babylonian captivity, Judah's reign over Israel continued in the governors such as Ezra and Nehemiah until the time of the Roman Empire when Christ came.
- f. Judah will be the father of Shiloh (Gen. 49:10). This means "peace" or "tranquil" and refers to the Messiah, the Prince of peace (Isa. 9:6), who

brings rest to those who trust Him (Isa. 11:10; Mat. 11:28), and who will bring peace to the world at His return.

- g. Unto him shall the gathering of the people be (Gen. 49:10). This refers to the gathering of Israel in the kingdom of God and the gathering of the Gentiles through the gospel.
- h. He will be victorious (“washed his clothes in the blood of grapes” Gen. 49:11). This refers to Christ’s destruction of His enemies. Compare Isaiah 63:1; Revelation 19:13-15.
- i. He will be prosperous (Gen. 49:12). Compare Isaiah 9:7; 53:12.

### **Numbers 24:17-19**

**“I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. 18 And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. 19 Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.”**

This Messianic prophecy was spoken by Balaam. He was a false prophet who practiced witchcraft, but God used him to speak His Word. He pretended to be an honest man who spoke only the truth, but he was actually a covetous and crafty man (2 Pet. 2:15). Balaam counseled Balak to tempt Israel with immoral women (Rev. 2:14). He died with Israel’s enemies at the hands of Israel (Num. 31:16).

Here the Messiah is described as a star and a scepter, denoting His glory and power. The star might refer to the star that the wise men saw at Christ’s birth (Mat. 2:1-2). Jesus is called the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16).

## **PROPHECIES OF CHRIST’S FIRST COMING**

1. His birth was foretold

- a. The lineage (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). The genealogies of the Bible can be boring to read, but they are extremely important because they give us the lineage of Christ, from Adam through Abraham and David to Joseph and Mary. The genealogies were prophetic in that they pointed to Christ's coming.
- b. The time (Dan. 9:25). The 70 weeks of Daniel's prophecy are weeks of years. Christ came 69 weeks or 483 years after the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem, which was given by the Persian king Artaxerxes as described in Nehemiah 2.
- c. The place - Bethlehem (Mi. 5:2)
- d. The miracle - virgin born (Isa. 7:14; Mat. 1:22, 23)
- e. The forerunner - John the Baptist (Mal. 3:1; Mat. 3:1-3)
- f. The flight to Egypt (Hos. 11:1; Mat. 2:15)
- g. The massacre of infants (Jer. 31:15; Mat. 2:17-18)
- h. Dwelling in Nazareth (Isa. 11:1; Mat. 2:23). This is why Jesus was called "a Nazarene."

## 2. His life was foretold

- a. Dwelling in Galilee (Isa. 9:1-2 - Mat. 4:14-6)
- b. Endued with the fulness of the Spirit (Isa. 11:2-3)
- c. Sinless (Isa. 11:5; 53:9)
- d. Speaking with the tongue of the learned (Isa. 50:4 - Mat. 7:29; Lk. 4:22; Jn. 7:46)



- e. Preaching the good news of salvation (Isa. 61:1-3 - Lk. 4:18-19)
- f. Healing the blind and the deaf (Isa. 35:4-6; 42:7)
- g. Determined to finish the Father's will (Isa. 50:7 - Mat. 4:34; 9:4; Lk. 2:49; 9:51)
- h. A man of sorrows (Isa. 53:3 - Lk. 19:41; Jn. 11:35)
- i. Rejected by the Jewish nation (Isa. 53:2-3 - John 1:11)
- j. Entering into Jerusalem (Zec. 9:9 - Mat. 21:2-5)

### 3. His death was foretold

- a. Betrayed by a friend (Psa. 41:9 - Mat. 26:14-36, 47-49)
- b. Forsaken by his disciples (Zec. 13:7 - Mat. 26:31, 56)
- c. Justice perverted (Isa. 53:7-8 - Mat. 26:57-60; 27:11-14)
- d. Beaten (Isa. 50:6 - Mat. 26:67; 27:26)
- e. Crucified (Psa. 22:14-16 - Jn. 19:16-18). Psalm 22 describes Jesus' crucifixion in great detail.
  - (1) The words spoken from the cross (Psa. 22:1 - Mat. 27:46)
  - (2) The mocking crowd (Psa. 22:6-8 - Mat. 27:39, 41-43)
  - (3) The thirst from loss of blood (Psa. 22:14-15 - Jn. 19:28)
  - (4) No bones broken (Psa. 22:17; 34:20 - Ex. 12:46; Nu. 9:12; Jn. 19:33-36)
  - (5) The people sitting and staring (Psa. 22:17; Mat. 27:36)
  - (6) The soldiers casting lots for His garments (Psa. 22:18; Mat. 27:35)
- f. Vinegar to drink (Psa. 69:21 - Mat. 27:34, 48; Jn. 19:28-30)

- g. Numbered with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12 - Mat. 27:20-22, 38)
  - h. Vicariously suffering for sinners (Isa. 53:5-6 - Heb. 9:28)
  - i. Buried in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9 - Mat. 27:57-60)
4. His resurrection was foretold (Psa. 16:10; Lk. 24:1-7)

# Review Questions on Messianic Prophecies

1. What is the meaning of the title *Christ*?
2. What is the Hebrew equivalent of *Christ*?
3. One of the greatest evidences that Bible prophecy must be interpreted literally is the fact that prophecy has \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What is the first Messianic prophecy in the Bible?
5. Who gave this prophecy?
6. To whom was this prophecy spoken?
7. What does prophecy mean when it says that Christ will be the Seed of the woman?
8. What verse says Jesus was “made of a woman”?
9. What does this mean?
10. What does the Bible mean when it says the serpent would bruise Jesus’ heel?
11. What does the Bible mean when it says the Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head?
12. What are four ways that the clothing of Adam and Eve signifies salvation in Christ?
13. In what chapter of Genesis do we learn that Christ’s genealogy would descend through the tribe of Judah?
14. Why does Jacob refer to Judah as a lion’s whelp?
15. What is a scepter?
16. What does “shiloh” mean?
17. How do we know that Jesus is “Shiloh”?
18. In what verse is Jesus called the “Prince of peace”?
19. What did Jacob mean when he said that Shiloh would “wash his clothes in the blood of grapes”?
20. Where is Jesus called the bright and morning star?
21. What prophecy foretold when Jesus would come?
22. What prophecy foretold Jesus’ birthplace?
23. What prophecy foretold Jesus’ virgin birth?
24. What prophecy described Jesus’ crucifixion in great detail?
25. What prophecy described Jesus’ vicarious suffering for sinners?

26. What prophecy described Jesus' burial in a rich man's tomb?
27. What prophecy foretold Jesus' resurrection?

# Prophecies Being Fulfilled Today

*MEMORY VERSES:* Daniel 12:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; 2 Timothy 3:1-2

The Rapture is the next major event on God's prophetic calendar and the Bible tells us that it is imminent. We don't know when it will occur but it can happen at any time (Mat. 24:44; 25:13). True Christian living, as exemplified by the believers at Thessalonica, is to serve the living and true God while waiting for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Though we cannot know the exact time of the Rapture, we can know that it is drawing near because we can see many prophecies being fulfilled. See Hebrews 10:25.

Following are some of these prophecies:

**MEN RUNNING TO AND FRO** ("many shall run to and fro," Daniel 12:4)

Men running to and fro is a definite sign of the end times. For the first 6,000 years of man's history transportation didn't change much from century to century--with men walking, riding beasts of burden, or traveling on sailing ships--but since the 19th century there has been an explosion of transportation technology to allow men to run to and fro. First there were railroads and steam ships, then automobiles and modern all-weather highways, airplanes, and space shuttles. When Adoniram Judson traveled from Boston to India as the first American foreign missionary in 1812, the journey took four months. Today the same journey takes one or two days.

**THE KNOWLEDGE EXPLOSION** ("and knowledge shall be increased," Daniel 12:4)

The explosion of knowledge is a sign of the end times.

“Up until the 1900s it was said that the accumulation of knowledge doubled every century. At the end of World War 2 every 25 years. Today knowledge is doubling every year and a half. IBM predicts that in the next couple of years, information will double every 11 hours” (“Knowledge Doubling Curve and You,” MartinGover.com, Oct. 6, 2009).

Those who were born near the turn of the 20th century, such as my parents, witnessed an explosion of knowledge such as the world has never seen. In that one lifetime the world moved from the buggy age to the space age. When my mom was born in rural central Florida, they had no electricity or indoor plumbing. The airplane had only recently been invented and even the telephone was still relatively new. Those who had telephones were on “party lines” and could hear other people’s conversations, but in her lifetime, the ultra-modern Kennedy Space Center was built not far from where she was born as the prominent symbol of the rocket age.

The increase of knowledge has brought us into the computer age. The first general purpose computer, UNIVAC, was built in 1951. It weighed 29,000 pounds, took up 350 feet of floor space, stood 8.5 feet high. In the 1960s the integrated circuit was invented, and today’s tiny laptops are millions of times more powerful than the UNIVAC.

The increase of knowledge has allowed man to walk on the moon and to send robot craft on a 154-million-mile journey to explore the surface of Mars.

The increase of knowledge has allowed scientists to discover the fundamental elements of the universe and map the DNA of the living cell.

The increase of knowledge has brought us into the global communications age, with its satellites, Internet, and smart phones. There are nearly six billion connected mobile devices and two billion people on the Internet (“No Borders Mean Flatter World,” *BBC News*, June 29, 2012). With this technology the nations will be able to observe the events described in Revelation 11:7-10.

## **GLOBAL REBELLION AGAINST GOD’S LAW (Psalm 2)**

The Psalms contain many prophecies, some of which were fulfilled at Christ’s first coming and many of which point ahead to His second coming.

### 1. Consider the events described in this Psalm.

- a. The Gentile kings and their people will unite in rebellion against Jehovah God and His Anointed (Psa. 2:1-3). The “heathen” are those who reject the God of the Bible. They “rage” against God. They intend to cast away His bands and cords, referring to His holy laws, so they can live as they please. This is fulfilled throughout the earth today. The heathen have been raging against God since man’s fall and since Cain, the first son of Adam, killed his prophet brother, Abel (Genesis 4). But the rage has grown in intensity in these last days and will culminate in Armageddon. Rage against God’s holy laws is the chief characteristic of the western pop culture that has spread throughout the earth. The rage is expressed continually through movies, television, literature, the news media, the fields of education, fashion, and art. The rebellion is seen in the false religions, communism, evolution, militant atheism (e.g., the American Atheists paid for billboard ads in September 2012 calling the God of the Bible “sadistic” and Jesus a “useless Savior”), and the homosexual rights movement. Consider that the blessed gospel has been preached in every nation and at least portions of the Bible have been translated into most languages, but the vast majority of the people have turned their backs to God’s gracious offer of salvation through His Son.
- b. God will laugh at the rebels, not in joy but in scorn, because puny man cannot pull Him from His throne or thwart His plans.
- c. God will establish Christ’s kingdom with its headquarters in Jerusalem in spite of worldwide opposition, and He will not establish it by a-millennial reconstructionists or by charismatic or emerging kingdom builders, but by almighty power and the rod of iron (Psa. 2:5-6).

2. Consider the exhortation by the Psalmist.

Men are exhorted to submit to the Son of God and put their trust in Him now while there is an opportunity (Psa. 2:10-12). Compare 2 Corinthians 6:2.

The expression “kiss the son” signifies, first of all, submission. It was customary in Bible times for subjects to kiss kings. See 1 Samuel 10:1. To kiss an idol was a sign of submission to the god represented by the idol (1 Kings 19:18). To “kiss the son” therefore refers to a sinner repenting of his rebellion against God and surrendering to Christ as Lord. The expression “kiss the son” is also a sign of compassion. A kiss is a tender thing. It reminds us that salvation in Christ is not a matter of cold religious duty; it is a personal and intimate relationship with the Son of God. Compare Matthew 11:28-30.

We are reminded that God delights in mercy more than judgment. Compare 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

We see that men are to serve the Lord in fear and trembling. This is the evidence of true salvation. It is not a mere sinner’s prayer. It is a life-changing conversion experience.

### **WILLFUL SKEPTICISM (2 Peter 3:1-10)**

This amazing 2000-year-old prophecy describes the skepticism that prevails in the 21st century. “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers...” (2 Pet. 3:3).

The prophecy indicates that the 19th century marked the beginning of the “last days” of the church age, because it was in the 19th century that this prophecy began to be fulfilled to perfection. The 19th century witnessed an explosion of skepticism in the form of theological modernism, humanism, Unitarianism, Darwinian evolution, communism, and agnosticism.

1. We see the rejection of the Bible’s doctrine of the Flood (2 Peter 3:4-6).



Peter describes scoffers in the last days who will say that “since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:4). This is a perfect description of the “uniformitarian” view of geology, which came to the fore in the 19th century through Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*. Lyell had a great influence on Charles Darwin. According to this view, the geological strata were laid down gradually over millions of years and there was no global Flood. Walt Brown, Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), describes the view that has prevailed since those days. “Professors in the new and growing field of geology were primarily selected from those who supported the anti-catastrophe principle. These professors did not advance students who espoused catastrophes. An advocate of a global flood was branded a ‘biblical literalist’ or ‘fuzzy thinker’--not worthy of an academic degree” (*In the Beginning*, p. 253).

Prior to the 19th century, it was generally believed even by scientists that God created the world and that there was a catastrophic universal Flood. In 1930 Merson Davies observed, “We should remember that, up to 100 years ago [up to 1830], such a marked prejudice against the acceptance of belief in the Deluge did not exist.” For example, in the 17th and 18th centuries Cambridge University scholars believed in a universal Flood, but by Darwin’s day in the mid-19th century they did not. Thomas Burnet (1635-1715), royal chaplain to king William III, argued for a worldwide flood in *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681). This was one of most popular works on geology prior to the 19th century. John Woodward (1665-1728), founder of the Woodwardian Professorship of Geology at Cambridge, argued that the global Flood was the cause of the fossil beds. This position was published in *An Essay Toward a Natural Theory of the Earth* (1695).

But by the 19th century, the evolutionary view took control and the prophecy of 2 Peter 3 was being fulfilled.

2. We see mankind’s rejection of divine creation (2 Peter 3:5).

Peter says the scoffers will reject the Bible’s teaching that the world was made “by the word of God.” The doctrine of evolution has gone hand-in-hand with

agnosticism, atheism, and a denial of the supernatural. It was Thomas Huxley, “Darwin’s Bulldog,” who coined the term “agnosticism” to describe the view that man cannot know whether or not there is a God, that man can only know the truth through “science” and that “religion” isn’t allowed a voice.

The scoffers do mention “creation” (2 Pet. 3:4), but by this they don’t mean the six days of creation according to the Bible. Even Charles Darwin used the word “creation” at the end of *On the Origin of Species*, but he later explained that he simply meant by this that life “appeared by some wholly unknown process” (Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 272).

3. We see the motive of the scoffers (2 Pet. 3:3).

The Bible is a supernatural Book that reveals the secrets of men’s hearts. It pierces “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12). In the case of the last days scoffers, the Bible peers deeply into the human soul and reveals that their unbelief is “willful” because their motive is to walk in their own lusts and not be bound by God’s moral laws. It is their love of sin that puts them in rebellion against God. Men first refuse to submit to God, then Satan blinds their minds. See 2 Corinthians 4:4.

The will of man must surrender to God and His truth for the blindness to be lifted (2 Cor. 3:14-16). The will is the difference between a Ph.D. like Lowell Coker (microbiology and biochemistry, author of *Darwin’s Design Dilemma*), who believes the Bible, and a Ph.D. like Richard Dawkins (author of *The Blind Watchmaker*), who doesn’t. Both men are trained in modern science at a high level and both look at the same evidence, but they come to completely different conclusions, and this is because one man simply refuses to believe the implications of what he sees with his own eyes.

Evolutionist Richard Lewontin admitted as much when he said, “We have a prior commitment to materialism. ... we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door” (“Billions and Billions of Demons,” *The New York Review*, Jan. 9, 1997, p. 31).

Most of the committed skeptics don't know any more about Bible than I did before I was saved. In fact, most of them probably don't know as much. I thought I knew the Bible, because I had grown up in a Bible-believing church and had attended faithfully until my teenage years, but actually I just knew some disjointed Bible stories that didn't seem to have any real bearing on daily life. I didn't understand the overall theme of the Bible; didn't understand how each part of the Bible fits together to form the whole; didn't know the rules of proper Bible interpretation or how to apply them. I had never been taught how to defend the Bible against skepticism, and didn't even know it was defensible. I didn't know any of the evidences for the Bible's divine inspiration. I didn't even have a really clear understanding of the gospel, though I had made a profession of faith in my youth. I had never read the whole Bible through, but I argued against Bible-believing Christians as if I were a true expert! (My impenitence and rebellion was my own fault, but my ignorance can be attributed to some part to the shallowness of the church in which I was raised.)

4. We see their ignorance (2 Pet. 3:5).

Skeptics tend to be proud of their knowledge, but in reality they are ignorant of the knowledge that counts the most, which is knowledge of God's Word. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10).

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had never read the whole Bible through, but I argued against Bible-believing Christians as if I were a true expert!

5. We see their faith (2 Pet. 3:4-5).

Evolutionary skeptics typically pride themselves in thinking that they are following the scientific facts, whereas the Bible believer is pursuing “blind religious faith.”

The truth is exactly the opposite. In reality, they are pursuing their own lusts rather than truth. They are willfully ignorant and are holding blindly to myths.

There is nothing more mythical than to believe that everything came from nothing, that life came from non-life, that intelligence came from non-intelligence, and that great intelligence is a product of small intelligence!

6. We see their undeserved opportunity (2 Pet. 3:9).

God is not willing that any perish. The reason that He sent His Son to die for man’s sin is His love for the world (John 3:16) and every skeptic has an opportunity to be saved through repentance and faith in Christ.

Many highly educated scientists have believed God’s Word. The book *Testimonies of Scientists Who Believe the Bible* contains biographical sketches of about 70 men and women with Ph.D.s in the hard sciences that believe in a six-day creation. This free eBook is available from the Way of Life web site -- [www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org).

God cannot be blamed for man’s judgment. Unlike the caricature of God that many evolutionists believe, God is compassionate. For example, the late atheist Christopher Hitchens called God a “divine dictator” and likened Him to the brutal ruler of North Korea. In fact, God is so merciful and compassionate that He Himself came to this sin-cursed earth, through His Son, and suffered on the cross in the place of the very creatures who had rebelled against Him. God has not sinned against man; man has sinned against God and broken His holy laws.

I am thankful that skeptics can be saved. I was a skeptic in 1973 when God convicted me of my sin and showed me the truth through His Word and I bowed my knees before His majesty and repented of my rebellion and trusted Jesus as my Saviour. Multitudes of skeptics have been saved by God's grace, and you can be, too.

7. We see the future of skeptics who persist in unbelief (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

God is merciful and compassionate and longsuffering, but He is also holy and just and He does not ignore the breaking of His laws. Salvation is available in Jesus Christ for every man, but if a man dies in his sin without the Saviour he will suffer eternal condemnation. There will be no end to the judgment because there is no end to the sinning. Sinners who die in their sin do not cease to exist; the body dies but the spirit lives, either in heaven or in hell. And unconverted sinners persist in their rebellion against God even beyond the grave. To reject Jesus Christ is to reject the only divinely-appointed means of salvation. To reject God's gracious offer of salvation in Christ, to resist the Spirit of God who is in the world to draw men to Christ, is the unforgivable sin.

### **THE PEACE MOVEMENT (1 Thessalonians 5:3)**

The cry of peace is another sign of the end times. The first International Peace Conference was held in 1899 in The Hague with the objective of preventing wars and ushering in world peace. After World War I the League of Nations was formed with the same objective, and after World War II the United Nations took its place. At the UN headquarters in New York is a statue of a man beating a sword into a plow and the words of Isaiah 2:4 are inscribed in a wall. But the UN will never bring peace to this troubled earth, because "there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). The prophecy being fulfilled today is not Isaiah 2:4, but it is Joel 3:10, which is a call for the nations to beat their plowshares into swords and arm themselves for war.

The ultimate fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 5:3 will occur when the antichrist comes on the scene as a man of peace. The world will be convinced that he will solve all problems and usher in an age of peace and prosperity.

### **THE ME GENERATION (2 Timothy 3:1-2)**

The first characteristic of the end-time apostasy that the Spirit of God describes in 2 Timothy 3 is that men shall be “lovers of their own selves.” There has never been a better description of the modern pop culture that has permeated the world through the facilitation of modern communications technology.

The *Time* magazine “Person of the Year” for 2006 was “YOU.” The magazine cover featured a sheet of Mylar to reflect the reader’s own face.

It is the age of MySpace, YouTube, my music, my tweets, my fashion, my generation, my attitude.

The pop culture is all about me, and it is a dramatic fulfillment of Bible prophecy and a sign of the end times.

### **THE EXPLOSION OF APOSTASY (2 Timothy 3:13; 4:3-4)**

We will look in more detail at the New Testament prophecies of apostasy in the next section of the course, but here we will simply mention that it is a great sign of the times and powerful evidence that we “see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). The apostasy has spread so widely that the vast majority of churches are false. This shows us that the hour is very late.

There is the Roman Catholic Church, which is nothing more than Christianized heathenism. Consider Santa Maria Maggiore church (Saint Mary Major) in Rome, where Mary is depicted as the Queen of Heaven sitting with Jesus on His throne, and Mary is depicted in a statue as the Queen of Peace, and Mary is even hanging with Jesus on the cross! (For photos of these and other blasphemous depictions of

Rome's Mary see "Rome's Mary on the Cross and on God's Throne" at the Way of Life web site.)

There is the World Council of Churches, which has 340 member denominations in 120 countries representing 500 million professing Christians. It is totally apostate. For example, at the 1993 Re-imagining women's conference, sponsored by the World Council, the participants worshipped the goddess Sophia, prayed to trees, were encouraged to wear Hindu tikas to "represent the divine" in them, and gave a standing ovation to lesbians.

There is the Evangelicals and Rome movement which has brought non-Catholics into close association with the Roman Catholic Church. One of the groundbreakers in this movement was Billy Graham, the world's most famous evangelist. Throughout his career, Graham praised the popes and turned his "converts" back over to the Catholic churches. For example, at the 1984 Graham crusade in Vancouver, British Columbia, crusade vice-chairman David Cline stated, "If Catholics step forward there will be no attempt to convert them and their names will be given to the Catholic church nearest their homes." The Evangelicals and Rome movement can be seen in the close relationship between Charismatics and Rome and Contemporary Christian musicians and Rome. It can be seen in the spread of Roman Catholic contemplative prayer practices among evangelical Christians.

There is Rock & Roll Christianity, which is a perfect fulfillment of 2 Timothy 3:3-4 in that it is a Christianity that lives according to its own lusts ("don't tell me how to live, what music I can listen to, what movies I can watch, where I can go"). Multitudes of churches are mere entertainment centers. A 2006 report on the largest churches in Toledo, Ohio, by a secular newspaper, was entitled "Viva Las Jesus" because the newspaper had observed that the churches were presenting a Christ that was more akin to Las Vegas than Scripture. The reporters said they loved the rockin' music and the "short and sweet sermons" with no hellfire.

These evidences of the explosion of apostasy are clear signs of the end times.

## **THE HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT (Luke 17:28-32)**

Jesus likened the end of the church age to the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is a reference to aggressive homosexuality. See Genesis 19:4-7. Sodom is mentioned three other times in the New Testament in reference to the end times (Luke 17:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7; Revelation 11:8).

The spirit of homosexuality has swept across the world like wildfire in the past 25 years. When I was growing up you didn't hear anything about homosexuals. Those who existed were "in the closet" and certainly weren't marching on the streets and demanding "marriage" rights. That was a different world compared to today. "Gay marriage" has been legalized in several states and countries. Global, multibillion dollar corporations such as Microsoft, Apple, Starbucks, and Google, campaign for homosexual rights. The Episcopal Church in America ordained a homosexual bishop in 2003. The Metropolitan Community Churches, founded in 1968, has 222 congregations in 37 countries that are largely composed of homosexuals. They describe themselves as "a leading force in the development of Queer theology." When the president of Chick-fil-A made a public statement in August 2012 in support of "traditional marriage," he was treated like an enemy of mankind by large numbers of prominent people and the mayors of some major cities said his restaurants aren't welcome in their towns.

This is a dramatic sign of the end times.

## **THE EUROPEAN UNION (Daniel 2:40-45; 9:25-27)**

According to the prophecies of Daniel, a revived form of the Roman Empire will play a central role in the end times.

The Roman Empire is the fourth kingdom described in the vision of Daniel 2, and we are told in this passage that it will not cease to exist until it is destroyed at Christ's return. See Daniel 2:40-45. The old Roman Empire was signified in Daniel as two legs of iron, as it was divided into eastern and western portions. The feet and



toes of the empire will still exist in the end times and will be broken and consumed by God's kingdom.

Daniel also tells us that the antichrist will arise as a prince out of the Roman Empire. In the prophecy of the 70 Weeks, Daniel identifies the antichrist as the prince of the people who destroyed Jerusalem after the death of the Messiah. This occurred in 70 A.D. at the hands of Rome under General Titus. This key prophecy tells us that the antichrist will not arise from one of the Muslim countries, though there is no doubt that Muslims will be aligned with the antichrist, as will all religions. The Muslims have their own prophecies about an antichrist and a false prophet and even have prophecies about the return of Jesus as a Muslim, but it is vain to speculate as to how these might or might not be fulfilled. The Muslim prophecies have no biblical authority and they disagree among themselves, and the Bible itself does not give us enough information about how the Muslims will fit into the antichrist's scheme. It is obvious that something will happen to allow the Jews to build the Third Temple, which will eventually be occupied by the antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3-4). I would guess that the antichrist will make this happen somehow.

According to Daniel's prophecies, we know that western Europe will play a major role in the end times. In that light it is interesting that the European Union was formed in 1993. It encompasses 500 million people and owns 30% of the world's gross domestic product. The Euro was adopted January 1, 2002, as a common currency. Someone was quoted in 2008 as follows: "... now Europe is free from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea, its peoples mingling happily trading with each other, watching the same football games, sharing the same Aegean beaches" ("The Road Ahead," *Time*, Dec. 1, 2008). The symbol of the European Union is the ancient Tower of Babel, and outside of the Union's headquarters is a statue of a woman riding a beast!

We don't know if the existing European Union will play any role in the rise of the antichrist, but we do know that some sort of European union will!

**ISRAEL BACK IN THE LAND** (Ezekiel 37:4-8)

The most significant sign of the end times is the restoration of Israel to her land and the creation of the modern state of Israel.

The continued existence of Israel in spite of 2,000 years of global disbursement is one of history's amazing stories and it was prophesied in ancient Bible passages such as Deuteronomy 28-30. In Deuteronomy 28 God warned that if Israel turned away from Him and rebelled against His law she will be scattered to the ends of the earth and troubled wherever she went. See Deuteronomy 28:63-67. This is a perfect description of what happened to Israel following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. But the same prophecy said Israel would return to the Lord. See Deuteronomy 30:1-5.

Ezekiel gave more information about the return of Israel, telling us in the prophecy of the valley of bones that she would return in two stages. First, she would return to the land in a spiritually dead condition ("no breath"). After that she would be converted. See Ezekiel 37:7-10.

We are witnesses to the fulfillment of the first part of this prophecy. In May 1948 the new state of Israel was established. The official declaration said: "Our call goes out to the Jewish people all over the world to rally to our side ... and to stand by us in the great struggle for the fulfillment of the dream of generations for the redemption of Israel." U.S. President Harry Truman immediately announced his recognition of Israel. The Jews celebrated throughout the world. In Rome they paraded under the Arch of Titus, which was built by the Roman emperors to celebrate the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple.

But Israel remains in a spiritually-dead condition. Most Jews are "secular Jews," meaning they don't make any pretense of honoring Jehovah God or following His Word. The conservative religious Jews are walking in the footsteps of the Pharisees of old who professed to honor the Holy Scripture but actually exalted Jewish tradition above God's Word. The greatest evidence that Israel remains in the condition of spiritual death is the fact that she persists in rejecting her own Messiah, Jesus.

## **PREPARATION FOR BUILDING THE THIRD TEMPLE (2 Thessalonians 2:4)**

Another sign of the end times is the preparation for the building of the Third Temple. The Temple is mentioned in prophecies pertaining to the antichrist. See Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

The first temple was built by Solomon and the second temple was built by Nehemiah and later enlarged by Herod the Great.

A visitor is reminded of the Temple on every hand in Israel today. It is even on their coins. The 1/10 shekel features a menorah. The 1/2 shekel has a 7th-century lyre of the type that was used in the Temple. The menorah is also the symbol of the Israeli Knesset or Parliament. There is a large one right outside the Knesset's main gates and another one in a little garden at the entrance from the main road.

Since the 1980s, the idea of building the Third Temple has gained rapidly in popularity among the Jewish citizens of Israel. In 1986, David Shipler wrote in his book *Arab and Jew*, "During my five years in Jerusalem [1979-84], the idea of building a Third Temple in place of Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock evolved from a wild notion held by a very few fringe militants into a goal embraced and legitimized by parts of the established right wing." By 2003, a poll by the *Jerusalem Post* found that 80% of Jews in Israel want to see the Temple rebuilt.

Since 1994, the Women in Green movement has organized a march around the Temple Mount in recognition of Risha B'Av, the day of mourning over the destruction of the Jewish temple. The march begins with the reading of the book of Lamentations in front of the American Consulate and then proceeds to circle the walls of the Old City. Thousands joined in the march in July 2012. Nadia Matar, the leader of Women in Green, told Arutz Sheva TV, "We walk around the Old City to say that Jerusalem is ours. The Temple Mount is ours. Like a bride going around the groom we go around the Temple Mount, showing our loyalty and our love to Jerusalem. ... Altogether we are saying the land of Israel is ours, Jerusalem is ours,

and we pray for the day that Tisha B'Av will turn from a fast day into a day of holiday when we can all dance to the Temple Mount.”

In March 2010 posters calling for the building of the Third Temple appeared on buses plying eastern Jerusalem routes. The posters, sponsored by Our Land of Israel, featured a depiction of the Temple occupying the place of the Dome of the Rock mosque and a Hebrew phrase that translates, “May the Bais Hamikdosh [Jerusalem temple] be rebuilt speedily and within our days.” A leader of Our Land of Israel, Baruch Marzel, said, “We’re representing the truth, in front of everyone, and saying out loud what every Jew believes. That the Third Temple needs to be built immediately on the Temple Mount and that the mosque should not be there” (*Jerusalem Post*, May 29, 2010). Predictably, the posters caused a storm of protest from Muslims and were removed after a couple of days.

In the late 1960s the Temple Mount Faithful (the full name is the Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful) was established to rebuild the Temple. Its leader, Gershon Salomon, is a descendant of Rabbi Avraham Shlomo Zalman Zoref, who in the early 1800s was one of the pioneers of the modern movement to prepare for the rebuilding of the Temple. Zoref even sent one of his sons overseas to locate the “ten lost tribes” of Israel, but the rabbi’s life was cut short when he was assassinated by Arabs. The great grandson Salomon is a military officer who has fought in most of Israel’s modern wars, beginning with the War of Independence. During a battle in 1958 on the Golan Heights, a battle in which his company of 120 Israeli soldiers was ambushed by thousands of Syrians, Salomon was run over by a tank and seriously injured (he claims he actually died). When the Syrians were about to shoot him to make sure he was dead, they suddenly ran away, leaving the battlefield in the hands of the little company of Israelis. The Syrians later reported to UN officers that they had seen thousands of angels around Salomon. He says that during that experience he saw the light of God and he knew he still had work to do, which was the rebuilding of the Temple and the preparation of the “coming of Messiah ben David.” Salomon was one of the soldiers that liberated the Temple Mount in 1967.

The Temple Mount Faithful has prepared plans for the Temple and is constructing articles for its operation. Since 1989, they have been trying to place a large stone on the Temple Mount as the cornerstone of the Third Temple. (The first stone was stolen and was replaced in 2001 by two stones.) Each year they parade the stones through Jerusalem on a truck to stir up support for their objective.

In 1986, the Temple Institute was founded with the goal “to see Israel rebuild the Holy Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.” The founder and director of the Temple Institute, Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, was a member of the paratrooper unit that liberated the Temple Mount.

Like the Temple Mount Faithful (but with competing plans), the Institute is preparing articles to be used in the new Temple. At much expense (\$20 million has been donated so far) and based on extensive research, they have fashioned priestly garments, the high priest’s golden crown costing \$30,000, the high priest’s breastplate with its 12 precious stones inscribed with the names of the tribes of Israel, a copper laver, an incense altar, silver trumpets, gold- and silver-plated shofars, harps, and many other things.

Of special interest is the large menorah that has been fashioned from 95 pounds of pure gold, valued at \$2 million. In December 2007 the menorah was moved to an outside location on the Western Wall Plaza across from the Temple Mount. Prior to that it had stood in the old Roman Cardo. The plan is to move the menorah ever closer to the Temple Mount itself and ultimately to place it in the Third Temple. The Temple Institute compared the 2007 dedication of the menorah in its new location to the dedication of the Arch of Titus in Rome 1,900 years ago. Then, the menorah was moving away from the Temple, whereas today it is moving back toward the Temple.

The Temple Institute is constructing a full-scale model of the Temple (covering 269,000 square feet) near the Dead Sea to use for training priests.

In July 2012 the Temple Institute published a video entitled “The Children Are Ready,” depicting children building a model of the Third Temple on an Israeli beach.

Both the Temple Mount Faithful and the Temple Institute have received support from Christians, particularly from charismatics. The Temple Mount Faithful, for example, has been heavily promoted by Pat Robertson's *700 Club*. Even though the Bible says it is the Antichrist who will occupy the Third Temple, these gullible, emotionally-led Christians have given millions of dollars toward the project. The Apostle Paul was persecuted by the Christ-rejecting Pharisees, but these modern Christians join hands with the descendants of the Pharisees in spiritual projects. We believe that Christians should bless and not curse Israel, but this does not mean that we should support their apostasy. The best way to bless the Temple Institute is to preach the Gospel to its members.

In Jewish tradition, the rebuilding of the Temple is associated with the coming of the Messiah. According to Maimonides (also called Rambam), the highest rabbinical authority, any Jew that starts rebuilding the Temple is a potential Messiah. Shimon ben Kosiba was considered a Messiah in the second century when he led a revolt to recapture Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. He was named *Bar Kokhba* ("Son of the Star") based on the Messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17, and a coin was struck depicting the Temple with the Ark of the Covenant inside and the Messianic star on the roof.

By this tradition, it is simple to see how the antichrist will be looked upon as the Messiah.

## **Conclusion**

These ancient prophecies, which are being fulfilled before our very eyes, tell us the Bible is divinely inspired. Only God knows the future. We don't even know what will happen tomorrow, let alone 1,000 years in the future.

The times are in God's hands. The devil's program to put the man of sin on the throne of this world is moving ahead, but God is in ultimate control. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" (2 Thes. 2:7).

Christ's return is imminent. Are you ready? There are multitudes of people who have not been born again, including nominal Christians. There is no second chance after death, and when Christ takes away His Bride, those who have heard the gospel will be smitten with strong delusion because they "believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:11-12).

# Review Questions on Prophecies Fulfilled Today

1. What is the next major event on God's prophetic calendar?
2. Which New Testament church was "waiting for His Son from heaven"?
3. What are five prophecies that are being fulfilled today?
4. What prophet said that in the end times men will run to and fro and knowledge shall increase?
5. What prophecy describes the nations raging against God?
6. Why do men want to cast off God's holy laws?
7. When did the rage against God begin?
8. What is the major teaching of the modern pop culture?
9. Why do we say that when sinners reject the gospel they are raging against God?
10. What are the two meanings of "kiss the son"?
11. What is the first characteristic of the apostasy described in 2 Timothy 3?
12. What church teaches that Mary is the Queen of Heaven?
13. In what passage does the Spirit of God describe apostate Christians as those who "live according to their own lusts"?
14. What prophecy tells us that we will witness an increase in homosexual activity in the end time?
15. What is the identity of the fourth empire described in the vision in Daniel 2?
16. How is this empire depicted in Daniel 2?
17. When and how will this empire be destroyed?
18. What prophecy describes the antichrist as a prince who will come out of the Roman Empire?
19. What prophecy describes Israel's return to the land in two stages: first in a spiritually-dead condition, then being converted?
20. What year was the modern state of Israel established?
21. What is the greatest evidence that Israel is in a spiritually-dead condition today?
22. What prophecy says the antichrist will sit in the temple of God showing himself as God?
23. According to a 2003 *Jerusalem Post* survey, what percentage of the Jews in Israel support the rebuilding of the temple?
24. What institute is preparing for the building of the Third Temple?
25. Why is the next Jewish temple called the Third Temple?



# Great Prophetic Events of the Future

*MEMORY VERSES:* Isaiah 2:10-12; Matthew 24:21; 24:24; 24:29-30; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:4-5; 2 Timothy 3:13; 4:3-4

## THE APOSTASY

### The Bible's warning about the apostasy

A major theme of New Testament prophecy is the apostasy that will leaven the churches, beginning even in the days of the apostles and increasing throughout the church age.

1. "Apostasy" means to turn away from the true New Testament faith (2 Tim. 4:3-4).
  - a. Apostasy happens among those who profess Christ. Apostasy is not in the world; it is in the churches. The world has never cared about the truth of God's Word one way or the other, so the passage in 2 Timothy 4 is not talking about the world of unbelievers. We see the same thing in 2 Timothy 3. The apostasy that is described in this chapter is something that happens among those who "have a form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:5). This refers to professing Christians.
  - b. Apostates "turn away their ears from the truth" because they don't like the truth. Apostasy is not a problem of ignorance; it is a problem of the will. Apostasy is a willful rejection of the truth of God's Word.
  - c. Apostates turn from the truth because they want to live according to their own lusts (2 Tim. 4:3). This is their motivation. They desire a new kind of Christianity that doesn't put unwanted restrictions on how they live.

d. When professing believers turn away from the truth, they are “turned unto fables.” This describes how the devil blinds the minds of those who reject the truth and leads them into error. The devil can only blind those who refuse to believe God’s Word (2 Cor. 4:4). Men give the devil permission to blind them, in a sense, by their rebellion against God.

2. The Bible says the apostasy will increase throughout the church age (2 Tim. 3:13).

3. The Lord Jesus described the increasing apostasy in the parables of the mystery of the kingdom in Matthew 13.

In these parables Christ revealed the “mystery” period of the kingdom (Mat. 13:11). This refers to the course of the church age. It is called a “mystery” because it was not described in Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom stated that Christ would suffer (Isa. 53) and would reign (Isa. 9:6-7). We see both aspects mentioned in Zechariah 9:9-10. But the Old Testament prophecies did not reveal the church age in between these two great events during which God would set aside the nation Israel and build the church composed of both Jews and Gentiles. See Romans 11:25-26; Hosea 3:4-5.

Each of the parables in Matthew 13 describes some characteristic of the church age:

- a. *The Sower* (Mat. 13:1-23). The gospel is preached worldwide and falls upon different types of soil, which signify people and nations. Only a small part of the seed of the Gospel falls on good soil and brings forth good fruit.
- b. *The Tares* (Mat. 13:24-30). Satan sows false Christians and false churches in the world among the true.
- c. *The Mustard Seed* (Mat. 13:31-32). The “church” experiences abnormal growth and becomes the abode of evil things. A seed intended to produce a vegetable plant becomes a tree. The birds are revealed as evil in verse four. They are demons and apostate Christians controlled by demons. Compare I

Timothy 4:1 and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. This is exactly what has happened in Christianity. The simple New Testament church that Christ established, with its sound doctrine and holy living, grew into great false “churches” such as the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox and large Protestant churches, filled with heresies and unholiness.

d. *The Hidden Leaven* (Mat. 13:33). Christianity will gradually increase in error until it is entirely apostate. “Till the whole was leavened.” As we will see, the final apostate “church” is pictured in Revelation 17 as the Great Harlot.

4. Throughout the New Testament, there are many warnings about false teachers and the apostasy.

a. In the Gospels, Jesus warned about the coming of false teachers (Matthew 7:15-23; 24:4, 11, 24).

b. The book of Acts warns about the coming of false teachers (Acts 20:28-30).

c. Most of the Epistles warn about this (e.g., Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 15:12; 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, 12-15; Philippians 3:17-19; Colossians 2:8, 16-19; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:1 - 4:4; Titus 1:9-11; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-6; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3-19).

d. In Revelation 2-3 Jesus warned about false teachers in His messages to the seven churches (Rev. 2:2, 6, 14, 15, 20-23).

### **The Religious Harlot “Church” of Revelation 17**

The Bible teaches that the apostasy will increase until a “one world church” is formed. This is signified by the religious harlot of Revelation 17.

1. The pure Bride of Christ becomes a wicked fallen woman.

- a. This downfall started even during the days of the apostles when some of the churches were committing spiritual fornication with the world (James 4:4). Demas was one of those who turned from the truth because he loved the world (2 Tim. 4:10).
  - b. The doctrine of Balaam and Jezebel was operating in the early churches (Rev. 2:14, 20). According to this false doctrine, Christians have liberty to participate in the wicked things of the world. The doctrine of Balaam and Jezebel has increased throughout the age.
2. The harlot “church” is already taking shape. Though it won’t be complete until the time of the antichrist, it is already growing rapidly in the world.
- a. The harlot “church” is being built through the unity movement. Throughout Christianity there is a call for “unity.” We are told that unity is more important than doctrine. We are told that we should not create divisions among Christians. We are told that we should not judge other Christians, but that we should join them in fellowship and ministry. We are told that the different denominations are like ice cream. There are many different flavors of Christianity--Roman Catholic, Anglican, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Evangelical, Baptist, Church of Christ, etc.--but we cannot say one is right and all the rest are wrong. We should learn from one another and not condemn one another. This ecumenical philosophy is creating the one-world church, but the Bible teaches us to earnestly contend for the one true faith (Jude 3). Paul taught that we are not to allow any other doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3). We are to separate from those who teach different doctrine (Rom. 16:17).
  - b. The harlot “church” is being built by contemporary worship music. This music merges the things of Christ with the world’s party music. The Christian rock philosophy is a Balaam/Jezebel philosophy. Contemporary Christian Music creates an appetite for the things of the world. It builds bridges to the world and to apostasy so that the churches that use it become corrupted in doctrine and practice. There is a close association between

contemporary worship music and the Roman Catholic Church. See 1 Corinthians 15:33, which warns that wrong associations corrupt good manners of Christian living. (See the book *The Directory of Contemporary Christian Worship Music* and the video presentation *The Foreign Spirit of Contemporary Worship Music*, which are available from Way of Life Literature.)

c. The harlot “church” is being built by many other things, including the social gospel, kingdom building, the positive philosophy (don’t speak about “negative,” controversial things), contemplative prayer, and the heresy of “non-essential” doctrines. (See *What Is the Emerging Church?* from Way of Life Literature.)

3. The harlot “church” will take its final form after the Rapture.

We see an outline of this in the book of Revelation.

a. In Revelation 2-3 Jesus addresses the seven churches, and we can see in these chapters a description of the apostasy that began small in the days of the apostles (signified by the church of Ephesus losing its first love, Rev. 2:4-5) and grows through the age until most of the churches are apostate (signified by the church of Laodicea, Rev. 3:15-17).

b. In Revelation 4 the true churches are taken out of the world to heaven’s throne room to be with Christ. Just as John was called up to heaven in Revelation 4:1, so will all of the New Testament believers be called up to heaven at the Rapture (1 Th. 4:15-17). See Jesus’ promise to the faithful Philadelphia church (Rev. 3:10-11). This church signifies the true churches that still exist at the end of the age. They are weak but they keep God’s Word (Rev. 3:8).

c. In Revelation 6 the judgments begin to fall on the world of unbelievers for seven years. During this time, the antichrist will come to power and the harlot “church” will reign with him for a brief time.

#### 4. The characteristics of the harlot “church” of Revelation 17

##### *a. She is descended from ancient Babylon (Rev. 17:5).*

- (1) The apostate harlot “church” descends from the false religion established at Babel during man’s early history (Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9). Ancient Babylon is “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” (Rev. 17:5), meaning that the world’s dark religions had their evil beginning with her. At Babel the devil organized the first idolatrous religion. The Tower of Babel was preeminently an act of idolatry. It was the beginning of the mystery religions that eventually permeated the world. Men united against the Creator and His holy laws. At the heart of Babylonianism is the worship of self, which is based on the ancient lie that Satan uttered to Eve, “ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:5). Babylon is the devil’s world kingdom, with all of its religious, political, and commercial aspects. The head of this dark kingdom is called “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2).
- (2) The Babylonian religion spread throughout the earth. Idolatrous towers were built all across Mesopotamia. These were devoted to the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. Goddess worship was also prominent. The idolatry was practiced by the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman. It spread from the Middle East to Africa, Europe, North and South America. We deal with this in the section on Babylon in the apologetics course *An Unshakeable Faith* and in the PowerPoint/Keynote presentation on Babylon that accompanies that course.
- (3) The Roman Catholic Church is a merger of Christianity with Babylonianism. In the Roman Catholic Church Babylonianism spread throughout “Christianity.” The Papacy, the Mass, Mariolatry, the Rosary, the Priesthood -- all of these were borrowed from the idolatrous Babylonian religions. The ancient Babylonian mother-goddess worship was the basis for Rome’s doctrine of Mary. In the Bible, Mary is never called Queen of Heaven or the Mother of God, but the old mother-

goddesses had these titles. The images of the goddess Isis and her baby Horus were the models for the Madonna and child. Evidence for this can be found in the section on Babylon in the apologetics course *An Unshakeable Faith* and in the PowerPoint/Keynote presentation on Babylon that accompanies this course.

- (4) “Babylon the great” in Revelation 17 is the final form of Satan’s world religion and government. It is taking shape today and will come to power during the Tribulation and will be destroyed when Christ returns (Rev. 19:1-3). (For a detailed study of Revelation 17-18 see the *Advanced Bible Studies Series* course on Revelation, which is available from Way of Life Literature.)

b. *She is worldwide* (Rev. 17:1, 15). The “many waters” are “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.”

c. *Her headquarters is in Rome* (Rev. 17:9).

- (1) Rome is famous for her “seven hills.” Rome, of course, is the headquarters for the Roman Catholic Church, which is at the center of the great harlot religious system.
- (2) She will probably be ruled by the pope. On August 7, 1977, Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury in the Anglican Church, said: “We should like to see the churches of England, Scotland, the United States and any other countries, bound together in one body. If the pope would like to come in as chairman, we should all welcome him” (*Why Were Our Reformers Burned?*). Our books *Evangelicals and Rome* and *The Directory of Contemporary Worship Music* document the back-to-Rome movement within practically every segment of Christianity.

d. *She is filled with blasphemy* (Rev. 17:3).

- (1) This is true of the Roman Catholic Church. *The titles of her popes are blasphemous* (e.g., “holy father,” “his holiness,” “vicar of Christ”). *Rome’s mass is blasphemous*. It is blasphemous to claim that bread actually becomes Jesus and it is blasphemous to worship the bread when it is put into a box called a tabernacle in the Catholic churches. *Rome’s doctrine of Mary is blasphemous*. Rome has created fables about Mary’s sinless birth, her bodily assumption into heaven, her coronation as queen of heaven, her intercession for sinners. Consider Santa Maria Maggiore Church (Saint Mary Major) in Rome, which was built to honor Mary as the “Mother of God.” It features a large mosaic on the ceiling depicting Mary sitting with Jesus on His throne and being crowned by Him as Queen of Heaven. Another image of Mary in this church is titled “Mary Queen of Peace,” which is blasphemous because peace only comes through Christ. Outside of the St. Mary Major Church, Mary is even depicted as hanging on the cross with Jesus! The large cross has Jesus hanging on one side and Mary hanging on the other. The Saint Stanislaus Kostka Catholic church in Chicago has an image of Mary sitting on the ark of God and surrounded by worshiping angels. This is a great blasphemy, as the ark was the place where Jehovah God abode in the tabernacle (Ex. 30:36). (For photos of these things see “Rome’s Mary on the Cross” at the Way of Life web site -- [www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org).)
  
- (2) The blasphemy is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church. It is spreading throughout Christianity. It is blasphemous, for example, to mix the holy things of Christ with the unholy party music of this world. The emerging churches even go further in their blasphemy, by performing wicked secular rock songs in their church services. For example, NewSpring Church in Florence, South Carolina, performed “Highway to Hell” by the vile rock band AC/DC for Easter service 2009, and Northpoint Church of Springfield, Missouri, performed “Sympathy for the Devil” by the Rolling Stones for Easter service 2011. It is also blasphemous to say that God accepts the moral perversion of homosexuality, which many evangelicals are saying. (See *The Treacherous Waters of Evangelicalism*, which is available as a free



eBook from Way of Life Literature -- [www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org).) It is blasphemous to say that the God who sends sinners to hell is a mean God, but this is what some in the emerging church are saying. (See the book *What Is the Emerging Church?*)

*e. She is clothed in purple and scarlet* (Rev. 17:4).

- (1) The apostles and Christians of the early churches lived simple lives and built simple churches, but apostate Christians love impressive cathedrals, flowing robes, ritualism, candles and incense, and expensive clothing.
- (2) Revelation 17:4 describes exactly how Rome's bishops and archbishops and cardinals and popes are clothed even to this day. In 2003 I witnessed a mass in the St. Paul Without the Walls basilica in Rome in which the bishops were clothed in scarlet. When Pope John Paul II died, the cardinals who met to elect a new pope were clothed in scarlet.
- (3) Many of the emerging churches are moving in the direction of Rome by adopting things such as candles, incense, dim lighting, ambient music, labyrinths, icons, prayer stations, art, dance, meditation, chanting, and contemplative prayer. (See *What Is the Emerging Church?* from Way of Life Literature.)

*f. She is immoral* (Rev. 17:1-2). She is described as a whore. This refers both to spiritual and physical fornication.

- (1) The apostasy has always been associated with living after "the lusts of the flesh" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).
- (2) The Roman Catholic Church has been immoral throughout its history. After Martin Luther visited Rome he observed, "If there be a hell, Rome is built over it." He was referring to the wickedness that he found in that city. Many of the popes, who were supposed to be "celibate," committed fornication. Pope John XII (955-63) is described by the *Catholic*

*Encyclopedia* as “a course, immoral man, whose life was such that the Lateran palace was spoken of as a brothel.” Pope Benedict IX (1032-1045) lived a “dissolute life.” Pope Sixtus IV (1471-84) erected a house of prostitution in Rome. Pope Pius II (1458-64) and Pope Innocent VIII (1484-92) each had at least two illegitimate children. Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) had at least four illegitimate children whom he made rich through church positions. Alexander held unspeakable orgies in his palace and kept mistresses who were married women. Pope Julius II (1503-13) had at least three illegitimate children. Throughout the world, Roman Catholic priests are infamous for homosexuality and child abuse. In Northern Ireland they are called “filthy beasts” by the Protestants. According to Roman Catholic bishop Pat Buckley, studies have shown that 80% of the Catholic priests in Ireland have broken their vows of celibacy (“500 Irish Priests Having Regular Sex with Women,” *London News Telegraph*, Jan. 21, 2006). In America, Rome has paid over \$1 billion to settle court cases against child-molesting priests. Most of these are homosexuals. A 2004 study found that 5,148 priests had been charged with committing this wickedness.

- (3) The rock & roll Christianity of these last days is filled with immorality. Rock & roll Christians live almost the same as the world. They love the world’s wicked movies and television programs and the world’s music and the world’s immodest dress fashions and the world’s vain sports stars and the world’s strange video games and the world’s Internet sites. Even homosexuality is widely accepted among the rock & roll churches. (See *The Treacherous Waters of Evangelicalism*, a free eBook available from Way of Life Literature.)

g. *She is wealthy* (Rev. 17:4).

- (1) This is an accurate description of the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church. The crown of Pope Paul II (1464-1471) was “set with diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, chrysolites, and jaspers” (Ouseley, *A Short Defence*,

1821, p. 230). The wealth of the Catholic Church is vast. In the 1970s, the Vatican was the third wealthiest “nation” behind America and Japan.

- (2) The wealth also describes the Protestant denominations and “evangelicalism” and the charismatic movement today. Like the church at Laodicea, they are rich and increased with goods (Rev. 3:17). Evangelical and charismatic churches are large and prosperous. Evangelical and charismatic colleges and publishing houses are influential. Their radio and television ministries are heard by millions. Some of the evangelical and charismatic leaders own many mansions and fly around the world in their own luxury jets. In 2006, churches in America spent \$8.1 BILLION just on audio and projection equipment (“High Tech Churches,” *Christian Post*, Sept. 26, 2007). An article in *Christianity Today* in October 2006 entitled “Let’s Improve the Public Perception of Evangelicalism,” described “evangelicalism” in the following terms: “We now have institutional resources and influential churches to a degree barely hoped for 50 years ago. Our people are better educated and more affluent. Our global networks are connecting believers like never before.” This is more representative of the apostate church of Laodicea and the harlot “church” of Revelation 17 than the simple churches founded by the apostles.

*h. She is ecumenical* (Rev. 17:5).

- (1) She has many daughters who share her character. This refers to the ecumenical movement that is joining together all branches of Christianity: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, Baptist, Pentecostal, evangelical, charismatic, etc. The ecumenical movement is even bringing “Christians” together with pagan religions.
- (2) The emerging “harlot church” was seen at the 1983 World Council of Churches general assembly in British Columbia, Canada. The World Council of Churches is made up of more than 340 denominations representing roughly 500 million professing Christians. The opening

ceremony was led by North American nature-worshipping Indians who burned fish and tobacco in a fire to their pagan gods. Three Hindus, four Buddhists, two Jews, four Muslims, and a Sikh participated in the Assembly. There were readings from Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim scriptures. A Hindu woman from South India performed a pagan dance to the earth mother goddess. Philip Potter, General Secretary of the WCC, said that it is God's will "to unite all nations in their diversity into one house." Dirk Mulder, moderator of the WCC interfaith dialogue program, said that a Buddhist or Hindu can be saved without believing in Jesus (*Foundation*, Vol. IV, Issue III, 1983). There were also "evangelicals" who participated in this abominable conference. Clearly this is the "church" of Revelation 17.

- (3) The emerging "harlot church" was seen on January 24, 2002, when Pope John Paul II led the Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, Italy. The interfaith prayer gathering featured some 200 religious leaders, including representatives of "Christian" denominations (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran, Mormon, Mennonite) as well as representatives of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Bahai, Confucianism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, etc. Prominently featured were 29 Muslim leaders from such countries as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, and Libya, all of which persecute Christians to various degrees. Thus, there is already a harlot "church" taking shape and sitting upon many waters.
- (4) The emerging "harlot church" is seen in the contemplative prayer movement which is spreading quickly throughout Christianity. This movement borrows practices from the old Roman Catholic monasticism system, which in turn were borrowed from pagan Babylonian religions. The contemplative prayer movement promotes the writings of Roman Catholic mystics such as Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis of Assisi, and Madame Guyon. Many within the contemplative prayer movement are openly promoting Zen Buddhism and Hindu yoga, which are Babylonian religions. The late

Thomas Merton, one of the most influential men in the movement, was both a Buddhist and a Catholic monk. Jesuit priest Thomas Clarke admits that the contemplative movement has “BEEN INFLUENCED BY ZEN BUDDHISM, TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION, OR OTHER CURRENTS OF EASTERN SPIRITUALITY” (*Finding Grace at the Center*, pp. 79, 80). The contemplative prayer movement puts professing Christians into communication with the demons that are the powers behind the ancient Babylonian idolatry. Many of the most influential evangelical leaders are recommending contemplative prayer, including Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, Beth Moore, Max Lucado, Philip Yancy, Lee Strobel, and Charles Stanley, as we have documented in the report “Evangelicals Turning to Catholic Spirituality,” which can be found at the Way of Life web site -- [www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org).

*i. She is a persecutor* (Rev. 17:6).

- (1) It has been estimated by reputable historians that during the Roman Catholic Inquisition 50 million people were killed for the crime of “heresy” between A.D. 600 and A.D. 1850. This is the number cited by John Dowling, who published *The History of Romanism* in 1847 (book VIII, chapter 1, footnote 1).
- (2) From A.D. 1160-1560 the Waldensian Christians who dwelt in the mountains in northern Italy and France were visited with 36 terrible persecutions because they refused to submit to the Roman Catholic Church (Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*). They were almost completely destroyed. For example, in 1209, Pope Innocent III called for a war against the Waldenses. Anyone who volunteered to join the war was promised forgiveness of sin and many rewards. Tens of thousands took up arms for the Pope and marched against the Waldenses. Some 200,000 non-Catholic Christians were killed within a few months. Two large cities were destroyed, together with many smaller towns and villages. The Christians were thrown from high cliffs, hanged, disemboweled, pierced through, drowned, torn by dogs, burned alive,

crucified. In one case, 400 mothers fled for refuge with their babies to a cave in Castelluzzo, which was located 2,000 feet above the valley in which they lived. When they were discovered by the rampaging Catholics, a large fire was built outside of the cave and they were suffocated. Thousands were made homeless and were forced to wander in the woods and mountains to escape the persecutors. “In this manner, the war was carried on for twenty years. Town after town was taken, pillaged, burnt. Nothing was left but a smoking waste” (John Christian, *A History of the Baptists*).

- (3) During the Great Tribulation, terrible persecution will be unleashed against those who refuse to submit to the antichrist (Mat. 24:9-10; Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9-14; 13:15).

The New Testament describes two types of churches: true and false. There will be true churches in the world until Jesus takes them away through the Rapture. But false churches will outnumber true churches by far and will eventually be formed into the great worldwide harlot “church.” This “church” will rule with the antichrist for a short season and will then be destroyed.

### **The way of spiritual victory in the time of apostasy**

1. Separate from those who are apostate (2 Tim. 3:5). See also Revelation 18:4. Separation from apostasy is the only effective solution to the problem of error. False teaching is likened to a leaven (Gal. 5:9) because it spreads, and the only protection is separation. Separation is despised in the ecumenical climate of these last days, because separation hinders the unity that is required to build the one-world church, but it is God’s prescription against the disease of false teaching.

2. Hold to sound New Testament doctrine (2 Tim. 3:14). Christians in every century are to follow the doctrine and practice that was given by divine revelation in the New Testament. We do not have the authority to create new doctrines or new kinds of churches. We are to fight to preserve the true teaching of the Bible (Jude 3). We are not to allow *any* false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3).

3. Remain confident in the Bible as the divinely-inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

From the beginning of history, the devil has attacked the Word of God and tried to get men to doubt it. This is what he did in the Garden of Eden when he lied to Eve about God's Word (Gen. 3:1-5). The attack on the Bible has never been more fierce than it is today. Not only is the Bible attacked from without by unbelievers in the world and evolutionists and by pagan religions, but it is also attacked by those who claim to be Christians. The Bible is attacked by Roman Catholicism (which claims that its own religious traditions are equal in authority to the Bible), by theological liberalism (such as the false doctrine that Moses didn't write the Pentateuch and Jonah is a myth), by the multiplicity of conflicting Bible versions, and by the cults (such as the Mormons who add the writings of Joseph Smith to the Bible).

Paul urged Timothy to remain confident in the Bible. Note some of the important lessons from this passage:

- a. The nature of the Bible -- It is a holy book. "Holy" means "set apart," referring to the truth that the Bible is unlike any other book. It is God's Book.
- b. The perfection of the Bible -- It is from God in its entirety. The Greek word translated "inspiration" literally means "God-breathed." The Bible, though written by men, was breathed out from God through holy, chosen, prepared prophets. Compare 2 Peter 1:21.
- c. The purpose and power of the Bible -- It produces salvation (2 Tim. 3:15) and sound Christian living (2 Tim. 3:17).
- d. The sufficiency of the Bible -- It is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Obviously, then, nothing else is necessary. God's people don't need human tradition or other "holy" books. We don't need extra-biblical visions and prophecies. The completed canon of Scripture (Genesis to Revelation) is the sole authority for faith and practice.

4. Make sure of your salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). The Lord warned that many will minister in His name who will not be genuine Christians (Mat. 7:21-23). A major reason why churches become apostate is that they become careless about trying to make sure that the members are born again. When this happens, the churches become mixed multitudes of saved and unsaved and there is no spiritual conviction and power. The head of the Bible Society in Calcutta, India, told me in the 1980s that he was a “third generation Christian.” He claimed to be a Christian simply because he was born into a Christian home and grew up in church, but Jesus said that if an individual is not personally born again he will not see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

5. Preach the Word of God (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Here we see the necessity of preaching and its role in the protection during apostasy. Paul’s command for Timothy to preach the Word of God is right in the midst of his warnings about end-time error. Here, too, we also see the characteristics of sound preaching.

- a. Preaching is a solemn charge from God (2 Tim. 4:1). Every preacher will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and give account for his preaching. It is this truth that keeps the preacher straight and keeps him preaching the whole truth regardless of the attitude of his hearers. He must fear God more than man.
- b. Preaching is to be done in season and out of season: when it is convenient or inconvenient, lawful or unlawful, popular or unpopular, culturally acceptable or unacceptable, believed or not believed, resisted or not resisted.
- c. Preaching involves negative as well as positive proclamation. The first two aspects of sound preaching referred to in 2 Timothy 4 are “negative”—reprove and rebuke! “Reprove” means to convince of sin or error. “Rebuke” means to warn. “Exhort” means to encourage, to appeal. We do well to remember this when we are told on every hand to “keep it positive” and “avoid controversy.”



- d. *Preaching is to be practical* (“reprove, rebuke, exhort”). It is to reach down to where people live. The preacher is not merely to *read* the Bible; he is to “preach” it. He is to apply it to every area of life so that waywardness is exposed and God’s people are kept fenced in to the good but narrow way by God’s holy precepts on the right hand and the left.
- e. *Preaching is to be done in the proper attitude* (“with all longsuffering”). Christ and the apostles show us the example of godly preaching, which is forthright, uncompromising, yet compassionate. God is patient with us, and we must be patient with others, though there is an end to His patience and there must be an end to ours, as well, when people persist in impenitence.
- f. Preaching is to be doctrinal. Sound preaching builds God’s people up in biblical truth and equips them to understand and rightly interpret the Bible for themselves. Sound preaching does not create believers who are dependent on man but who are dependent on God, who can stand on their own feet spiritually and walk in God’s perfect will.
6. Be on guard against sin and error (“watch thou in all things,” 2 Tim. 4:5). Churches that become careless in the last days will be devoured by the devil and led astray into his false and deceptive paths (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 11:3).
7. Continue to preach the gospel to all men (2 Tim. 4:5). The Lord’s Great Commission is the main work He has given to the churches, and He has promised to be with us to the end of the age as we do this work (Mat. 28:18-20).

## **THE RAPTURE**

The next major event on God’s prophetic calendar is the Rapture of church-age believers.

The word “rapture” does not appear in the Bible, but it describes the catching away of the church-age saints at the end of the age.

There are two major passages that describe the Rapture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13 -- 5:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.

The Greek word translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is used in Acts 8:39 of the Spirit of God snatching away Philip after the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13 -- 5:11**

1. The Rapture is an event in which the dead in Christ will be raised (1 Th. 4:14-16) and the living New Testament saints will be changed and glorified (1 Th. 4:17).
2. The dead in Christ are presently with Him in heaven (1 Th. 4:14). The dead in Christ do not “sleep in the grave” as some false teachers claim.
3. The Rapture is the believer’s hope and comfort (1 Th. 4:13, 18). This is what we are waiting for. We are not looking for the antichrist and the Great Tribulation. If the Rapture did not occur until the end of the Great Tribulation, it could not produce hope and comfort for the Christian.
4. The Rapture occurs before the day of the Lord’s wrath (1 Th. 5:1-10).
  - a. The “day of the Lord” is the time of Tribulation when God will judge the world for its sin and idolatry. In that “day,” God will be exalted and rebellious men will be humbled. See Isaiah 2:10-21.
  - b. Note the change in pronouns in this passage. In verse 3 the pronoun “they” is used, because the day of the Lord will come upon the unsaved world. But in verses 4-5 the pronoun “ye” is used, referring to believers. That day will not overtake us.
  - c. The Rapture will occur as a thief in the night (1 Th. 5:2), but this is not how the Lord’s return in glory will occur. It will come with unmistakable signs in the heavens and will be seen by all (Mat. 24:27-31). The Rapture pertains

to the church, whereas Christ's Second Coming pertains to Israel and the world.

- d. The believer is to be watching for the Lord's return at all times (1 Th. 5:6). We do not know when it will happen. It is imminent.
- e. Believers are not appointed to go through the time of God's wrath (1 Th. 5:9). Compare 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Believers have been subject to the wrath of men and devils throughout the church age, but we are not appointed to go through the wrath of God that will be poured out upon this wicked world. Compare Isaiah 2:9-21.
- f. The place of protection during the days of apostasy before the Rapture is the Bible-believing church (1 Th. 5:12-14). Each believer needs to be a faithful member of a good church that is led by godly men who are sound in the New Testament faith. The leaders and the church members work together to accomplish God's will on earth in preaching the gospel to every nation while they wait for the Lord's return. The way to have peace in the churches is for the leaders to teach the Bible faithfully and for the members to show respect to the leaders and follow them. Church leaders should be honored and obeyed as long as they are following the Bible. Those who are unruly in the churches should be rebuked, because they hurt the Lord's work.

### **1 Corinthians 15:51-58**

1. The Rapture is a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament prophecies (1 Cor. 15:51). The Old Testament prophets taught about the bodily resurrection, but they did not teach that some would be glorified without dying. They prophesied about the resurrection of Jews at the end of the Tribulation (Dan. 12:1-2), but they did not see the Rapture of New Testament believers before the Tribulation.
2. The dead in Christ will be raised to incorruption and the believers who are living at that time will be changed from mortal to immortal (1 Cor. 15:52-53).

“Incorruptible” means the resurrection body will be incapable of such things as pain and sickness. “Immortal” means incapable of dying.

3. The Rapture of church-age believers is a source of great encouragement and motivation to godly Christian service (1 Cor. 15:58). The Rapture is a very important doctrine. It helps to motivate the Lord’s people to stay awake spiritually and it helps to motivate the churches to stay busy in the work of preaching the gospel to lost souls before it is too late.

4. What about “the last trump”?

The trumpet that will sound at the Rapture of the church-age saints is not the same as the trumpets that will sound in Revelation as judgments on this world or the trumpets that sound in reference to Israel. The church is not a part of these other programs. Her “trump” is a different one. The church’s last trump is when she shall finally be congregated together to the Lord (1 Th. 4:17). Compare Numbers 10:7.

### **The Time of the Rapture**

*NOTE TO TEACHERS:* The following section can be omitted if there is a shortage of time to teach this course. Or you might want to hit the highlights of the following study by way of review and amplification of what has already been taught

Among those who believe in a literal Rapture of church-age saints, there are three positions regarding its timing in relation to the Tribulation. The three views are as follows:

*Pre-tribulational* -- church-age saints will be raptured before the Tribulation

*Mid-tribulational* (also called Pre-wrath) -- church-age saints will go through the first half of the Tribulation

*Post-tribulational* -- church-age saints will go through the entire Tribulation period

For the following reasons we are convinced the Bible teaches a Pre-tribulational Rapture. In this study, we are using the term “church” in a general, institutional sense. We have already looked at most of these reasons in the previous sections, but we want to gather all of the points together in one place and elucidate more on some of them:

1. Church-age believers are promised salvation from wrath (1 Th. 1:9-10; 5:1-9; Rev. 3:10).

The Great Tribulation is expressly called the day of God’s wrath. Today the Lord is withholding His anger; He is offering men salvation through the preaching of the gospel, but the day approaches when He will take the seat of judgment. Then “*the day of his wrath*” will be upon all the world (Psa. 110:5; Isa. 13:6-13; Rev. 6:16-17). It is true that in every century, Bible-believing churches have been subjected to persecution, but this is different from the Great Tribulation. The persecutions of the saints are caused by the wrath of wicked men and the devil, whereas the seven-year Tribulation is a period especially pertaining to **God’s wrath** (Rev. 6:16-17; 14:10). Some believe that the church will not be saved *out of* the time of wrath, but will be saved *through* it. This cannot be true, since the Bible clearly reveals that those who are on earth during the Great Tribulation will not be delivered from wrath but will be overcome (Rev. 13:7). The Scriptures that promise church-age believers deliverance from wrath must refer to salvation out from the very presence of the wrath. Concerning the Great Tribulation, we are told that “*as a snare shall it come on ALL them that dwell on the face of the whole earth*” (Lk. 21:35). Church-age believers must either be physically removed from the earth, or they will be involved in the day of wrath. God promises removal. “... *I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth*” (Rev. 3:10). This verse does not say that God will keep the church age saints *through* the temptation but *from* it.

2. The Holy Spirit will be removed before the Tribulation (2 Th. 2:1-8).

In other passages of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is said to be the restrainer of sin (Gen. 6:3; Isa. 59:19). The Holy Spirit came into the world in this present

dispensation at Pentecost (Acts 2), when He came to empower the church for the Great Commission (Acts 1:8). He will remove the church-age believers before the time of God's great wrath. This does not mean the Holy Spirit will not be present in the world at that time. The Holy Spirit is God and is omnipresent. It means that He will not be present in the same sense that He is in this age.

3. Church-age believers are promised mansions in heaven (John 14:1-3).

When the Lord Jesus returns to earth at the end of the Tribulation, He sets up His Messianic kingdom. If the Rapture occurred at the end of the Tribulation, the promise to church-age believers pertaining to heaven would not be fulfilled. Church-age believers are a heavenly people with a heavenly hope (Eph. 1; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3). Some dispensationalists teach that the church-age saints will live in heaven during the millennium. I believe they will live both in heaven and in earth. Jesus promised the apostles, who are the founders of the churches, that they would reign with Him over Israel (Mat. 19:28).

4. The Rapture of church-age saints is imminent (it could happen any time) whereas the Second Coming is said to be preceded by specific signs.

**Christ** taught that the Rapture is imminent (Matthew 24:42, 44; 25:13; Mark 13:33). **Paul** taught it (Phil. 4:5; Titus 2:12-13). **James** taught it (Jam. 5:8-9). And **Peter** taught it (1 Pet. 4:7). The early Christians were living in constant expectation of Christ's return (1 Th. 1:9-10). The apostle Paul instructed the church at Thessalonica that they did not need to heed signs and times, because the New Testament believer has been promised redemption from the "day of darkness" that shall overcome the whole world (1 Th. 5:1-9). The church is not waiting for the antichrist, but for Christ Himself.

5. The church is a mystery that is not revealed in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:1-11).

The New Testament church has no part in the chronology of events foretold by the Old Testament prophets. They clearly foretold the first coming of Christ, His miraculous birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The same prophets

described Christ's Second Coming in glory, preceded by a time of unprecedented worldwide tribulation and followed by the establishment of the glorious Messianic kingdom centered in Jerusalem. But these prophets did not see the church age--*"which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit"* (Eph. 3:5).

Between the first and second coming, there is a time gap that was not seen by the Old Testament prophets. This gap is the church age. The prophets did not see that Israel would be set aside temporarily while God called out from among all nations a special body of people. After He has accomplished this purpose and the fullness of the Gentiles is come in, God will restart Israel's prophetic clock with the last seven years of Daniel's 70th Week and will fulfill all Old Testament prophecies in relation to His ancient chosen nation. *"... blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in"* (Rom. 11:25).

The Great Tribulation pertains to God's dealing with Israel and the Gentile nations, not to the church. This present mystery period will end with the removal of church-age believers from the earth; and the Lord will then pour out His judgments on the Gentile nations and fulfill His covenants with Israel. The Great Tribulation is called "the time of the heathen" (Ezek. 30:3), referring to the Gentile nations, and "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), referring to Israel.

6. The book of Revelation shows that the church is not on earth during the Tribulation.

- a. The church is not seen on earth in chapters 4-18.
- b. The witness for God in the earth during the Tribulation is Israel, not the church (Rev. 7).
- c. The prayers of the saints in Revelation 8 are prayers for judgment. Only Israel prayed such prayers. The church-age saints are instructed to pray *for* her enemies, not *against* them (Lk. 9:51-56). The imprecatory prayers of

Revelation are those of the Psalms and are based on God's promise to Abraham to curse those that cursed Israel (Gen. 12:1-3).

- d. Revelation 10 identifies the events of Revelation 6-18 with those foretold by Old Testament prophets--the days of the Great Tribulation, the "day of the Lord." The church age was never in the view of these Old Testament prophecies; it was a mystery not yet revealed. The church has a different purpose and program than national Israel. It is Israel that is in view in Old Testament prophecy and in Revelation 6-18.
- e. The ministry of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 identifies them with national Israel and with Old Testament prophecies of the "*day of the Lord*." The two witnesses minister from Jerusalem, Israel's capital. The churches have no such capital, her hope being heavenly, not earthly (Col. 3:1-4; Phil. 3:17-21). The two witnesses are clothed in sackcloth, which speaks of Israel, the sackcloth signifying repentance from sin or sorrow because of some calamity (1 Ki. 21:27; 2 Ki. 19:1; Est. 4:1; Isa. 15:3; Jer. 4:8). Nowhere are the churches seen in sackcloth. The churches are told, rather, to "*rejoice in the Lord always*" (Phil. 4:4). The church-age believer's judgment is forever past, and he is to keep his mind centered in the heavenlies where, positionally, he is already seated, eternally victorious with Christ (Eph. 2:5-10). Revelation 11:4 identifies the two witnesses with the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah 4:3, 11, 14. This is a prophecy about Israel, not the church. Further, the two witnesses call down judgment upon their enemies in Revelation 10:5-6. Jesus rebuked his disciples for desiring to do just this and instructed the church-age believer to pray for the well-being of his enemies, not for their destruction (Lk. 9:54-56; Rom. 12:14, 17-21).
- f. The devil persecutes Israel, not the church, during the Tribulation (Rev. 12). There can be no doubt that the woman in this chapter signifies Israel. Verse 5 shows the woman bringing forth Christ; it is obvious that Jesus was brought forth by Israel, not by the churches (Isa. 9:6-7; Rom. 9:5). Also, the symbols of Revelation 12:1-2 recall familiar Old Testament typology of Israel. She is referred to as a woman (Isa. 54:5-7). The sun and moon and the 12 stars of



verse 2 remind us of Joseph's dream regarding Israel (Gen. 37:9). The words of Revelation 12:2 are almost an exact quote from Micah 5:3, again speaking of Israel's delivery of the Messiah. These symbols are not used in the New Testament of the churches.

## **The Attack on the Pre-Tribulational Rapture**

The doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture is under severe attack today. Consider some examples from the emerging church:

Brian McLaren calls the imminent return of Christ the "eschatology of abandonment" (interview with Planet Preterist, Jan. 30, 2005). This is because he believes that Christians should build the kingdom of God on earth today instead of waiting until Christ returns, so he claims that those who believe in a pre-tribulation Rapture are abandoning their alleged duty to save the earth from global warming and to solve the problems of hunger, disease, war, etc.

Jonny Baker of Grace in London, England, rejects dispensationalism as "escapology theology" and "advocates that Christians need to invest themselves in the current culture, not live on hold until time runs out" (*Emerging Churches*, pp. 78, 79).

N.T. Wright, who has a great influence on the emerging church, warns that the doctrine of an imminent rapture is dangerous because it interferes with kingdom building and environmental activities. "If there's going to be an Armageddon, and we'll all be in heaven already or raptured up just in time, it really doesn't matter if you have acid rain or greenhouse gases prior to that. Or, for that matter, whether you bombed civilians in Iraq. All that really matters is saving souls for that disembodied heaven" ("Christians Wrong about Heaven, Says Bishop," *Time*, Feb. 7, 2008).

Tony Campolo says: "I think that we need to challenge the government to do the work of the Kingdom of God, to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. That whole sense of the rapture, which may occur at any moment, is used as a device to

oppose engagement with the principalities, the powers, the political and economic structures of our age” (“Opposition to women preachers evidence of demonic influence,” Baptist Press, June 27, 2003).

Mark Driscoll refers to the pre-tribulational Rapture as “pessimistic dispensationalism” (*Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, p. 146). He has said that “eschatology-minded Christians” are not welcome in his church.

### **The Importance of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture**

The doctrine of the pre-tribulational Rapture is not a minor one. As we have seen, Jesus, Paul, James, and Peter taught that the return of Christ is imminent and is to be expected at any time (Mat. 24:44; Phil. 4:5; Jam. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7). The early Christians lived in expectation of Christ’s return and the literal fulfillment of the prophecies (1 Th. 1:9-10).

The doctrine of a pre-tribulational Rapture is a great motivator for purifying one’s personal Christian life.

1. It encourages the believer in trials and persecutions. “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18).

2. It keeps the church’s focus on the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lk. 24:44-48; Acts 1:8). It teaches us that preaching the gospel, winning people to Christ, and establishing churches as the pillar and ground of the truth is the most urgent matter. D.L. Moody had it right when he said: “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can.’”

3. It motivates us to be busy in the Lord’s work (1 Cor. 15:58).

4. It motivates us to live obedient lives (1 Jn. 3:1-3; 1 Th. 5:4-7).

5. It motivates us to separate from evil (Tit. 2:13-14).

### **What about the pre-wrath position that says believers will not be raptured until part way through the Tribulation?**

The “pre-wrath” doctrine says that the Rapture occurs mid-way between Daniel’s 70th Week. It is based on the view that the “church” is to be kept from God’s wrath and the wrath is limited to the last half of the seven-year tribulation period, beginning when the antichrist sets himself up in the Jewish temple as God.

I believe this position is wrong for three reasons, chiefly.

1. The doctrine of the imminency of the Rapture refutes this view. See Matthew 24:42; 44; 25:13; Mark 13:33; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Philippians 4:5; James 5:8-9; 1 Peter 4:7. If the believer is not taken away until part way through Daniel’s 70th Week, he would know the time of the Rapture precisely, almost to the day, because he would see the events unfold during the first half of Daniel’s 70th week. He would see the antichrist come on the scene with his peace program. He would see the “Middle East problem” seeming solved and the building of the Third Temple. He would see the Two Witnesses preaching in Jerusalem. He would see the judgments of Revelation 6, etc.

2. We do not accept the view that only the last seven judgments are the wrath of God. It’s true that the seven last plagues are called “the wrath of God” (Rev. 15:1; 16:1). But the wrath of God is also mentioned in Revelation 6:16-17 at the beginning of the Tribulation. The fact is that the entire period of Daniel’s 70th Week is the wrath of God, each part growing in intensity. The seal judgments affect a fourth of the world (Rev. 6:8). The trumpet judgments affect a third of the earth (Rev. 8:7-11; 9:15). The vial judgments affect the entire world (Rev. 16:2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 14, 20). But all are outpourings of God’s wrath on impenitent men.

3. The entire period of Daniel’s 70th Week pertains to Israel and not to the church. As we have seen, the church is not seen on earth after Revelation 3. Everything described on earth in Revelation 6-18 pertains to the Gentile nations and Israel. The

“pre-wrath” position does not make a proper and consistent distinction between Israel and the church.

## **THE TRIBULATION**

The Great Tribulation is the period of terrible judgment that will occur in the world before Christ’s return (Mat. 24:15-31; see verse 21). The Old Testament prophets also spoke of this time (such as in Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7; Joel 2:2). Revelation 6-19 describes this period in great detail.

### **Other Names for the Great Tribulation**

Following are some of the other names of the Tribulation in Scripture:

- “the day of the Lord” (Isa. 2:12; 13:6)
- “the indignation of the Lord” (Isa. 26:21; 34:2)
- “the day of the Lord’s vengeance” (Isa. 34:8)
- “the Lord’s controversy with the nations” (Jer. 25:31)
- “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7)
- “a destruction from the Almighty” (Joel 1:15)
- “a day of darkness” (Joel 2:1)
- “the day of the Lord’s wrath” (Zep. 1:18)
- “the fire of my jealousy” (Zep. 3:8)
- “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5)

### **Major Prophecies of the Great Tribulation**

The Bible has a lot of teaching about the Great Tribulation. Following are the major passages:

Isaiah 2:10-22; 13:1-16; 26:20-21; 28:21-22; 30:26-33; 31:4-9; 34:1-10; Jeremiah 25:30-33; 30:7; Ezekiel 30:1-3; Daniel 12:1; Joel 1:14-20; 2:1-11; 3:9-17; Amos 5:18-21; Obadiah 15-21; Micah 1:3-4; 5:8-15; Zephaniah 1:7-18; 2:1-2, 11; 3:6-8; Haggai 2:6-7; Zechariah 14:1-3; Malachi 4:1-3; Matthew 24:3-31; Mark 13:5-37;

Luke 21:8-35; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Revelation 3:10; Revelation 6-19

## **Highlights of Matthew 24**

In Matthew 24 Christ described the major events that will occur during the Tribulation. The Lord's disciples asked Him, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Mat. 24:3). Beginning in verse 4 we find Christ's reply to this question. Thus, He is speaking of things that will occur in the future during the time of His return.

### 1. The two divisions of the Tribulation prophecy

a. Jesus says the period of the Tribulation is divided into two major parts:

- (1) The beginning of sorrows (vv. 5-8)
- (2) The great tribulation (vv. 9-28)

b. The same division is described in Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks (Dan. 9:24-27).

- (1) The 70 weeks are weeks of years, or 490 years.
- (2) During the 70 weeks, God's judgments upon Israel will be completed and Christ will return to bring in the kingdom. The angel tells Daniel that the prophecy pertains to his own people, the Jews, and to the holy city, which is Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24).
- (3) The first 69 weeks (483 years) lasted from the time that the commandment was given to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity to the time of Christ's first coming. The commandment to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was given by Artaxerxes the king of Persia, and is described in Nehemiah 1:1-8. (The same king gave the commandment to rebuild the temple 13 years earlier as described in the

book of Ezra, but Daniel 9:25 speaks particularly of the rebuilding of the city wall.) Daniel's prophecy describes four great events that occurred between that time and the time of Christ's coming (Dan. 9:25-26). First, Jerusalem was rebuilt. The rebuilding of the city streets and walls in troublous times is described in the book of Nehemiah. Second, Messiah was "cut off, but not for himself," meaning that He died on the cross for man's sins. His death was substitutionary. Third, the city and temple were destroyed. This occurred in A.D. 70 when the armies of the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem. Four, after that there will continue to be wars until the time of the end. That describes the last 2,000 years of Israel's history. Even today, though Israel is back in the land, she has had no peace, and she will have no peace until she repents and receives her Messiah, Jesus.

- (4) The last week, or seven years, of Daniel's prophecy remains to be fulfilled (Dan. 9:27), and it is this period that Jesus describes in Matthew 24. Between the 69th and 70th weeks (between Daniel 9:26 and Daniel 9:27) is the church age, which is called a "mystery" because it was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets (Eph. 3:3-6). The church age is like a valley that the Old Testament prophets did not see lying between the peaks of the first and second coming of Christ. Paul describes the church age as the time of Israel's blindness in Romans 11:25-27.
- (5) The last week (seven years) of Daniel's prophecy is divided into two parts (Dan. 9:27). At the beginning of the seven years, the antichrist will make a false peace covenant with Israel. It is probably at this time that the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Mid-way through the seven years the antichrist will break this covenant and exalt himself as God. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. This event marks the beginning of the 3.5 years of Great Tribulation. Jesus calls this event "the abomination of desolation" (Mat. 24:15).

c. Revelation 6-19 describes the same period of time (the last “week” of Daniel’s vision) and Revelation also divides the time into two 3.5 year periods.

(1) During the first half of the Tribulation, the two witnesses of Revelation 11 will preach for 1260 days, or three and a half years (Rev. 11:3).

(2) During the second half, the antichrist will rule for 42 months, or 3.5 years (Rev. 13:5), and converted Israel shall flee into the wilderness for 1260 days, or 3.5 years (Rev. 12:6).

## 2. The description of the tribulation in Matthew 24

a. *There will be many false teachers* (Mat. 24:4-5, 11, 23-24).

(1) This problem began during the days of the apostles and will increase throughout the church age (2 Tim. 3:13). In light of these prophecies, it is not surprising to see that most churches in the world today do not hold to sound Bible doctrine.

(2) As for false christs, they already existed in the earliest days of the churches (2 Cor. 11:4), and Jesus warns in Matthew 24 that they will increase as the time of His return draws near. There is **the Hindu New Age christ**. The *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* claims that Jesus learned wisdom from gurus in India. There is **the Islamic christ** named Isa, who is not the Son of God, did not die for man’s sins, and did not rise from the dead. There is the **Roman Catholic christ** who is a wafer of bread and a helpless babe in Mary’s arms. According to Catholicism, you can worship Christ in the form of bread in a little tabernacle in a Catholic church. There is **the Mormon christ** who is the spirit brother of Satan. There is the **Jehovah’s Witness christ** who is Michael the Archangel. There is the **natural christ** of theological modernism who was not born of a virgin. For example, the influential theologian Nels Ferre said Jesus’ father was a German soldier. There is the **liberation**

**theology christ** who is a communist freedom fighter and a social justice hero. There is ***The Shack christ*** who is a non-judgmental buddy who doesn't require repentance and doesn't put any "obligations" on people. There is the **rock & roll party christ** of the Christian rock crowd. There is the **ecology christ** who is out to save the environment. There is the **universalistic christ** whose love is "unconditional" and therefore will be effective for the salvation of all (e.g., Rob Bell's *Love Wins*). There is the **contemplative christ** who is "experienced" by such practices as centering prayer and imagination prayer and repetition prayers. These are only a few examples. The number of false christis is increasing today.

- (3) Jesus also warns about false miracles (Mat. 24:24). When the Bible speaks of miracles at the end of the church age, it always refers to false miracles. See also 2 Thessalonians 2:9 and Revelation 13:14. We must not be deceived into thinking that miracles prove that something is of God. The devil can do miracles, as he did when the Egyptian magicians turned their rods into snakes (Ex. 7:10-12).

*b. There will be wars, famine, pestilence, earthquakes (Mat. 24:6-8).*

This is "the beginning of sorrows" (Mat. 24:8). It describes the general course of the church age, but there will be a dramatic increase in these things at the end of the age during the first half of the Tribulation. Compare Revelation 6.

**Wars:** 180 million people died in wars and atrocities in the 20th century.

**Famine:** Between six and eight million people starved to death in the Ukraine under Stalin's regime. 30 million people died of starvation in China under Mao's regime. The starving people turned to cannibalism and eating their own children. The World Health Organization estimates that four million people starve to death each year even under "normal" circumstances in these end times.



**Pestilence:** This includes disease and plagues. The AIDS epidemic has killed 24 million people and decimated some parts of Africa, where there are 14 million AIDS orphans. Three million people die of malaria each year. The influenza virus and pneumonia kill 56,000 Americans per year. Bacterial infections in hospitals kill hundreds of thousands annually and are on a sharp rise due to new strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Pestilence also includes biological and chemical warfare. The Germans used it in WWI; the Japanese used it against the Chinese in WWII; Iraq used it against Iran. The 2001 book *Living Weapons* called biological weapons “the poor man’s hydrogen bomb.” In Matthew 24 we see that pestilence will increase during the Tribulation.

**Earthquakes:** A million people have died in earthquakes just in the last 50 years and more die every year.

c. *The gospel of the kingdom will be preached and the Jewish evangelists will be persecuted* (Mat. 24:9-10, 14). Compare Luke 21:12-19.

- (1) The gospel of the kingdom is the same message that Christ preached when He came the first time (Mat. 4:17). It is the message that the kingdom of God is about to be established on earth and God commands that men repent and receive Jesus as Messiah and King. It was first preached by John the Baptist (Mat. 3:2).
- (2) It will be preached by the Jewish evangelists described in Revelation 7. They will announce the coming kingdom and will be persecuted by the antichrist.
- (3) The whole world will be opposed to them and false teachers will further confuse things. This will be a time of great testing and dividing to show who believes and who doesn’t (Mat. 24:9-13). God always tests faith (1 Pet. 1:7).

*d. The antichrist will reign (Mat. 24:15-21).*

This refers to when the antichrist will set himself up as God in the Third Temple. The “holy place” refers to the holy of holies where the ark of God resides (Ex. 26:33-34). The antichrist will require the whole world to worship his image. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:11-18.

*e. God will finish His judgment of Israel and will convert the remnant (Mat. 24:16-21).*

- (1) Two-thirds of the Jews will perish, but one-third will repent and believe in Christ (Ezek. 20:35-38; Zech. 13:8-9; Isaiah 1:28).
- (2) The saved remnant of Jews will flee to a place where God will protect them (Rev. 12:6).

*f. God will judge the world (Mat. 24:21-22).*

Compare Isaiah 2:10-21.

These judgments are also described in Revelation 8-18. Some of the highlights of the judgments are as follows: A third part of the sea will be turned to blood and a third of the ships destroyed (Rev. 8:7-9). A third part of the waters will be made bitter (Rev. 8:10-11). Demonic armies will torment and destroy men (Rev. 9:1-19). One-third of mankind will perish in this one judgment. The antichrist will force all men to worship him and will kill those who refuse (Rev. 13:15-18). Men will be scorched with the sun and gnaw their tongues for pain (Rev. 16:8-11). A great earthquake will shake the world so terribly that the mountains will fall and the islands will flee away (Rev. 16:18-20). Hail stones weighing 100 pounds will fall upon the earth (Rev. 16:21).

g. *Christ will return* (Mat. 24:27-30).

- (1) His return will be visible to the whole world (Mat. 24:27-30).
- (2) He will return in power and glory (Mat. 24:30). In His first coming he came in lowliness, born as a babe in a manger, living in the home of a carpenter, and dying as a criminal. But when He comes again, He will come in the power and glory of the eternal Son of God.
- (3) The nations will mourn His coming (Mat. 24:30), because they will know that the day of man is finished and God will reign on earth and His law will be obeyed.
- (4) Christ will destroy the antichrist's armies that will be gathered together in Israel in the valley of Megiddo (Rev. 16:13-16; 19:11-21).

### 3. New Testament believers and Matthew 24

- a. The Tribulation pertains to Israel and to the world, not to the church. It is called "the Lord's controversy with the nations" (Jer. 25:31) and "the time of the heathen" (Ezek. 30:3). The church is not part of the nations; God has called us out from among the nations to be a special people for His name (Acts 15:13). The tribulation is also called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). Jacob is not the father of the church; he is the father of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- b. In the book of Revelation, the church is not seen on earth after chapter 3. The church will be raptured before the beginning of the tribulation. For church-age saints, the coming of Christ is imminent, meaning it can happen at any time. Therefore, it is not preceded by the signs described in Matthew 24 and in the book of Revelation. Otherwise, we would know exactly when Christ will return, because we could watch the signs unfold beginning with the antichrist's false peace accord with Israel. Matthew 24:33 is talking about the

signs that precede the Lord's return in glory, not His return to catch away church-age saints.

## **THE ANTICHRIST**

During the seven years preceding Christ's return, a world ruler will arise who is called "the antichrist" in Scripture.

### **Antichrists and Antichrist**

This is a New Testament word that is used in two senses in 1 John 2:18. John said there were antichrists, plural, in the world even in his day, and he also spoke of a future antichrist, singular.

1. The "antichrists," plural, refers to the spirit of antichrist that is at work in this present age whereby Satan's emissaries resist the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and attack the person and doctrine of Christ (1 John 2:18-33; 4:1-3; 2 John 7). Satan's objective is to overthrow the truth and put his man on the throne of the world. This evil work is as old as Babel, but it began in a special sense in the days of the apostles and is carried on by false teachers energized by demonic powers (2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:8, 13; 1 John 4:1).

The spirit of antichrist that is operating in the world is called "the mystery of iniquity" in 2 Thessalonians 2:7. It is being restrained by the Holy Spirit. He came at Pentecost to empower the churches for world evangelism (Acts 1:8), to take out a people for God's name from among the Gentiles (Acts 15:14). During this time the Holy Spirit is restraining the devil's program. After this work is finished, the Holy Spirit will take the New Testament saints away at the Rapture and gather them together to Christ.

At that time the antichrist will be revealed (2 Thes. 2:7-8). The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead and He is therefore omnipresent. Thus He was in the world before Pentecost and He will be in the world after the Rapture. When the

Bible says the Holy Spirit came from heaven at Pentecost, it simply means that He came for the special work of this church age.

God is in control. As long as it is God's will to continue saving Gentiles and building the churches, the devil cannot bring his plan to fruition. Daniel says the timing of the antichrist's work is "appointed" and "determined" (Dan. 11:29, 35, 36). The antichrist cannot come to power until God allows it.

2. The future antichrist, singular, is a man who will arise in the world to make one final attempt to destroy Christ's work and people before the Lord's return (Rev. 13).

### **Bible Names for the Antichrist**

The Bible uses many names to describe the antichrist.

The *little horn* (Dan. 7:8; 8:9) -- Jesus said this "little horn" is yet future and will come during the tribulation period just before His return (Mat. 24:15-29; Dan. 8:11; 9:27; 11:31; 12:1).

*A king of fierce countenance* (Dan. 8:23) -- He will be a fierce and powerful-looking person who will awe all who meet him. Daniel 7:20 says his "look was more stout than his fellows."

*The prince that shall come* (Dan. 9:26-27) -- He is a prince that will arise from the old Roman Empire that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

*The abomination of desolation* (Mat. 24:15; Dan. 11:31; 12:11) -- This refers to the setting up of the idolatrous image of the antichrist in the Jewish temple which will usher in the Great Tribulation with its worldwide desolations.

*The man of sin* (2 Th. 2:3) -- He is called the man of sin because he is the culmination of 6,000 years of man's sin and rebellion against God.

*The son of perdition* (2 Th. 2:3) -- He is called the son of perdition because he will spend eternity in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10).

*That wicked* (2 Th. 2:8) -- He is called wicked for the same reason that he is called the man of sin.

*Antichrist* (1 Jn. 2:18) -- He is the antichrist because he opposes the true Christ and he sets himself up as God in the Jewish Temple.

*The beast* (Rev. 13:1; 19:20) -- He is a man, but in character he is a fierce and destroying beast.

### **The Nationality of the Antichrist**

The antichrist will arise out of and rule over an end-time Roman Empire. The connection between the antichrist and the Roman Empire is made three times in the prophecies of Daniel.

1. He is the prince of the people who destroyed Jerusalem after Christ's death (Dan. 9:26-27). This, of course, was Rome. The Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The armies were led by Titus, who became emperor. The objects from the destroyed Temple and captive Jews were taken to Rome and paraded through the streets as a show of force.

2. The Roman Empire is also the fourth empire in the vision of Daniel 2, and we are told that this empire will continue to exist during the days of the antichrist and will be destroyed by God's kingdom. See Daniel 2:40-44. The legs of iron signify the former Roman Empire and its division into eastern and western portions, whereas the feet of iron mixed with clay and the ten toes signify the end-time Roman Empire that will be ruled by the antichrist and destroyed at Christ's return.

3. The antichrist is also depicted as arising out of a revived Roman Empire in Daniel 7:19-20. The fourth beast corresponds to the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2, and the antichrist will arise after the 10 kings of an end-time Roman Empire. The

10 horns of Daniel 7 correspond to the 10 toes of Daniel 2, signifying 10 kings or rulers in the end times.

There is a small but growing movement today to see the antichrist as a Muslim who will arise from the Muslim nations, but this leans heavily on a study of current history and Muslim prophecy instead of being developed from a right interpretation of the Bible prophecies themselves.

We do not believe that the antichrist or his false prophet will be a Muslim. Why would the Jews accept a Muslim antichrist or a Muslim prophet? But there might be a Muslim messiah who will be associated with the antichrist. Somehow the antichrist will make it possible for the Jewish temple to be rebuilt. Since he will operate in the power of the devil, who is the god of this world, he will be able to find a solution to the age-old animosity between Israel and the Muslims. At the beginning of his reign, the antichrist will be acclaimed as a great problem solver and a man who will bring peace to earth.

### **Old Testament Types of the Antichrist**

Cain—by his murder of the chosen seed (Ge. 4:5-14; Jude 11; 1 Jn. 3:12)

Nimrod—by his creation of Babylon and the tower of Babel (Ge. 10, 11)

Pharaoh—by his oppression of God's people (Ex. 1:8-22)

Korah—by his rebellion against God's ordained man Moses (Nu. 16:1-3; Jude 11)

Balaam—by his attempt to curse Israel (Nu. 23, 24; 2 Pe. 2:15; Jude 11)

Absalom—by his attempt to steal the throne of David (2 Sa. 15:1-6)

Nebuchadnezzar—by his golden statue (Dan. 3:1-7)

Haman—by his plot to exterminate the Jews (Est. 3)

Antiochus Epiphanes—by his idolatrous defilement of the temple (Dan. 11:21-35)

### **The Reign of Antichrist**

1. The time and length of his rule

The antichrist will be in the world for the full seven years of Daniel's 70th week (Dan. 9:27). The beginning of his reign is marked by a false peace covenant with Israel which will last for 3.5 years. At that point he will break the covenant and set himself up as God in the Jewish temple, which will mark the beginning of the Great Tribulation and the period of his complete power over the earth (Rev. 13:5-8; Dan. 7:25).

## 2. The extent of his rule

For a very brief time the antichrist will rule over all the world (Rev. 13:7; Dan. 7:23). He will rule all people, nations, religions (Rev. 13:14-15) and the entire world economy (Rev. 13:17). His rule will break down quickly, though, as he is opposed by various powers (Daniel 11:40).

## 3. The source of his power

The source of the antichrist's power is Satan, the god of this world (Rev. 13:4; 2 Th. 2:9).

## 4. His rise to power

- a. He will come to power through spiritual delusion (2 Thess. 2:9-11). The antichrist's appearance will be accompanied both by satanic deception and by strong delusion sent by God as a judgment upon those who reject the truth. Those who think they can wait until these events begin to happen and get saved at that time are foolish. Those who have heard and rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ will be blinded. Note that God does not blind arbitrarily; He blinds those who reject the truth. Every man has a choice. Christ gives light to every man (John 1:9).
- b. He will make a false peace pact with Israel (Dan. 9:27). Five times in Daniel the antichrist is called a liar and a flatterer (Dan. 11:21, 23, 27, 32, 34). Daniel says by peace he will destroy many (Dan. 8:25). Revelation depicts the antichrist coming on the scene on a white horse, signifying peace, and



carrying an empty bow (Rev. 6:1-2). The empty bow signifies that the antichrist will have the capability to make war but initially he will come as a man of peace.

- c. He will overthrow other kings (Dan. 7:7-8, 24). The antichrist's false peace face will not last long. He will soon show his true violent, tyrannical nature.
- d. He will speak great things (Dan. 7:8). The antichrist will be incredibly eloquent. He will be a spell-binding speaker. Like Hitler, he will be able to hold the multitudes in rapt attention and sway their thinking and emotions. The nations will be swept up in idolatrous fervor, saying, "Who is like unto the beast?" (Rev. 13:4). As the incarnation of that great God-hater Satan, the antichrist will be more blasphemous than any that have come before him, speaking great things against Almighty God (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:5-6). He will wear blasphemy upon his very person (Rev. 13:1).
- e. He will make great wars and cause great destruction (Dan. 7:19). Revelation depicts the antichrist's kingdom as a composite of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek empires. Compare Revelation 13:2 with Daniel 7:3-6. The lion signifies Babylon; the bear signifies the Medo-Persian kingdom that overcame Babylon; the leopard signifies the Greek kingdom of Alexander the Great which quickly conquered Medo-Persia. All of these were brutal kingdoms that destroyed other nations as they pleased and treated people with great cruelty. The antichrist will have the same spirit as these ancient kingdoms but he will have even more power and his reign will extend even farther and he will be even more despotic and cruel.
- f. He will survive a deadly wound or will be resurrected from the dead (Rev. 13:3). At some point the antichrist will suffer a deadly wound and will either actually die or appear to die. This will amaze the world and surround him with great mystique. The multitudes of Hindus today say that no one has come from the dead to tell us what is there (ignoring the fact that Jesus did exactly this), and they will be sore amazed and impressed when they witness the antichrist's resurrection.

g. His prophet will perform great miracles (Rev. 13:11-17).

- (1) A false prophet will be associated with the antichrist. He is called “another beast” in Revelation 13:11-17 and a “false prophet” in Revelation 20:10. This false prophet could be the pope. He is described as having horns like a lamb but speaking as a dragon, which means that he will appear to be a man of peace and religion, but he will speak blasphemies against God. He will promote the worship of the antichrist through miracles, such as making fire to come down from heaven and giving life to the image of the antichrist in Jerusalem so that it will speak.
- (2) The Jews demanded a sign from Jesus (Mat. 12:39), and though He performed mighty miracles by the power of God, they rejected Him. The antichrist and his false prophet will perform lying wonders by the power of Satan and the Jews will receive him.
- (3) Every mention of miracles at the end of the church age pertains to satanic miracles. See Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:13-14. Just because someone can perform miracles does not mean that he is of God. The devil can do miracles. The Egyptian sorcerers could even turn their rods into snakes (Ex. 7:10-13).
- (4) As a co-ruler with the antichrist, the second beast will force the world to worship the antichrist’s image and those who refuse will be put to death (Rev. 13:15-17). All men will be required to wear the antichrist’s mark in order to buy or sell. We don’t know the exact nature of the mark, but it will be worn either on the forehead or the hand. In light of the technology of these times, it could be a computerized mark. Current technology can print letters and symbols embedded with radio activated communications devices.

### **The Character of the Antichrist as Described by Daniel**

1. He will be a blasphemer, a hater of God (Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; Rev. 13:5-6).

2. He will have an impressive appearance (Dan. 7:20; 8:23).
3. He will be a murderer and a destroyer (Dan. 7:23; 8:24; Rev. 13:7, 15).
4. He will have great intelligence (Dan. 8:23).
5. He will be exceedingly proud (Dan. 8:25) and will exalt himself (Dan. 11:36-37).
6. He will be a hard man with no natural sympathy or tenderness (Dan. 11:37).
7. He will worship military might (Dan. 11:38).

### **The Antichrist and the Third Temple**

Bible prophecy associates the antichrist with the building of the Third Temple (2 Th. 2:3-4). (The First Temple was built by Solomon, and the Second Temple was built after the Jews' return from the Babylonian captivity and was extended and glorified by King Herod, so that it was called Herod's Temple.)

Great preparations are being made in Israel for the building of the Third Temple. The Temple Institute, founded in 1986, has prepared all of the articles, including a menorah (candlestick) fashioned from 95 pounds of gold (valued at \$2 million) and the high priest's golden crown costing \$30,000. When I visited Jerusalem in 2010, the menorah was on display on the Western Wall Plaza across from the Temple Mount. The Temple Institute is constructing a full-scale model of the temple near the Dead Sea to use for training priests.

### **What Messiah are the Jews looking for?**

The Jews today are looking for the Messiah, but the Messiah they are looking for is actually the antichrist.

1. The Jews are looking for a Messiah that will rebuild the temple.

In Jewish tradition, the rebuilding of the temple is associated with the coming of the Messiah. According to Maimonides (also called Rambam), the highest rabbinical authority, any Jew that starts rebuilding the temple is a potential Messiah. Shimon ben Kosiba was considered a Messiah in the second century A.D. when he led a revolt to recapture Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. He was named Bar Kokhba (“Son of the Star”) based on the Messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17, and a coin was struck depicting the temple with the Ark of the Covenant inside and the Messianic star on the roof.

A representative of the Temple Institute told us in 2010 that they are looking for a temple builder: “We are waiting for a Messiah. In Jewish tradition, we believe that in every generation there is someone who can be the Messiah. The question is who will he be. The answer is only someone who does specific things can be called the Messiah. The one who brings Israel back to Israel. The one who builds the temple again.”

By this tradition, it is simple to see how the antichrist will be looked upon as the Messiah. He will come as a peacemaker and by his satanic power he will make a way for the Jewish temple to be rebuilt in spite of Muslim animosity.

2. The Jews are looking for a Messiah that will solve their problems and bring peace when things look dark.

In a video interview in Jerusalem in 2010 a Reformed Jewish rabbi told us that the Messiah will come when things look really dark and will establish peace. He said: “Jerusalem is to be whole, and when the Messiah comes the temple will be returned to us. But that can’t happen until there is eternal peace. Ultimately we have to go deeper into destruction before we come out into the light and until God redeems not only the Jewish people but also the rest of the world. Peace has to come, but peace can only come when things get really dark.”

But the Jewish prophets said there is no peace to the wicked (Isa. 57:21). There can be no peace for Israel until she is in right relationship with God, until she repents of

her sin and is forgiven and converted. Until then, any so-called peace will turn out to be a false peace, which is exactly what the antichrist will bring (1 Thess. 5:3).

3. The Jews are NOT looking for a Messiah who will save them from sin.

The Jews have no sacrifices, and they are content with that, thinking that they don't need a blood atonement. They celebrate the Passover and the Day of Atonement without a lamb and without the shedding of blood. We asked a Reformed Jewish rabbi in Jerusalem, "How do you purge your sins?" and he replied, "We ask God for forgiveness through prayer and through actions." When asked about Leviticus 17:11, "... it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul," the rabbi said that to interpret that as meaning that man needs a literal blood sacrifice to be acceptable to God is a false interpretation.

A representative of the Temple Institute said the same thing: "God knows that we don't have the sacrifices. That is why He has given us a different way of atonement, and that's by prayers. We have prayers that great rabbis wrote just after the destructions, and we say these prayers and that's as if we are sacrificing."

The Jews stumbled at the Suffering Messiah 2,000 years ago. They were looking for a Messiah to save them from Rome and to provide for their physical needs, not a Messiah who would die for them. They wanted a king, not a Saviour.

Why should they need a suffering Messiah when they don't think of themselves as sinners! When we asked the aforementioned American rabbi if he is a sinner, he looked around in sort of a perplexed manner and even had to be asked the second time before admitting that "we all make mistakes in the world." But he only admitted to mistakes and "negative inclinations," not to sin. He said that the Jew's righteousness is in the law of Moses and in the Talmud, the rabbinical tradition.

This is the same blindness and spiritual stubbornness that the apostle Paul wrote about 2,000 years ago in Romans 9:30-33.

Thus, the Jews are not looking for a Saviour from sin; they are looking for a Messiah that will bring peace, that will solve their problems, that will help them to rebuild the temple, that will not rebuke them as sinners but will help them follow their “positive inclinations.”

Though they don’t know it, they are actually looking for the antichrist and they will accept him when he comes.

### **The Antichrist’s Mysterious Origin**

The antichrist ascends out of the bottomless pit (Rev. 11:7; 17:8). The antichrist will be Satan incarnate in some mysterious way, but he will also be an independent personality who will be cast into the lake of fire with the false prophet 1,000 years before Satan meets the same doom (Rev. 19:20; 20:7-10).

### **The End of the Antichrist**

The antichrist will be defeated at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and cast into the lake of fire to suffer eternal torment (2 Th. 2:8; Rev. 19:19-21; 20:10).

### **The Abomination of Desolation**

1. “Abomination of desolation” is the term Jesus used to describe the antichrist spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Mat. 24:15). See Daniel 8:9-13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11. Daniel described one who would arise and persecute the Israelites, take away Israel’s sacrifices and place in the temple an abominable thing to desecrate it. The New Testament tells us that the abomination is an idolatrous image of the antichrist which men will be required to worship (2 Th. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:11-15).

2. The abomination of desolation was previewed in history by Antiochus Epiphanes. In 168 B.C. he destroyed many thousands of Jews and profaned the Temple in Jerusalem by sacrificing a pig—an animal unclean by the standards of the Mosaic law. He also erected an altar to Jupiter in the Jewish temple. A great massacre followed, and the people fled the city. True temple worship was

abandoned for three years while the Temple was used as a place of idolatry and blasphemy. Antiochus struck coins with the words “Epiphenes Theos,” meaning “God Manifest.” Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner of the antichrist. He did not completely fulfill Daniel’s prophecies any more than the earthquakes and wars of today fulfill the prophecies of the troubles that will shake the world during the Great Tribulation foretold in Matthew 24 and in Revelation. Jesus said these events will not be fulfilled until just prior to His return from heaven (Mat. 24:29-30).

## **THE CONVERSION OF ISRAEL**

See Ezekiel 20:34-38, 42-44; Zechariah 13:7-9; 12:10-14.

1. The conversion of Israel will occur in conjunction with a winnowing process whereby the Jewish rebels against God are judged throughout the world (Ezek. 20:22-38). Only one-third of the Jews living in that day will be converted (Zech. 13:8).
2. The conversion of the Jewish remnant will probably occur during the first half of Daniel’s 70th Week. The book of Revelation says that at the mid-way point they will flee into the wilderness and be protected by God for 3 1/2 years (Rev. 12:6, 13-16).
3. They will be converted through the ministry of God’s Spirit (Zech. 12:10). As on the Day of Pentecost, they will be pricked in their hearts by the convicting power of the Spirit (Acts 2:36-37).
4. They will be converted by God’s grace (Zech. 12:10). Salvation has never been by works. The law of Moses was not given as the means of salvation; it was given to reveal God’s holiness and to expose man’s fallen condition in order to lead the sinner to Christ (Romans 3:19-22). In Romans 4:1-8 Paul teaches that salvation has always been by grace, both before and during the law. The Jews made the law into a way of self-righteousness (Romans 9:30-33). In that day the Jews will finally cease to stumble at the Stumbling-stone, who is Christ the Suffering Saviour.

5. They will be converted through repentance. They will acknowledge and repent of their sins against God (Ezek. 20:43). Today the average Jew doesn't think of himself as a sinner. If he is religious at all, he thinks his righteousness is in the law. Israel does not see her sufferings over the past 2,000 years as the result of her sin. She justifies herself, but in that day the remnant will repent and abhor their self-righteousness.

6. The conversion will involve mourning. They will mourn greatly when they realize that they rejected and crucified their own Messiah (Zech. 12:10-14). The mourning will be like for an only son. It will be like the mourning for King Josiah when he was killed at Megiddo (Zech. 12:11; 2 Chron. 35:22-25). Josiah was a spiritually zealous and much beloved king who died young and unexpectedly and was therefore greatly mourned.

7. The conversion will be individual. The Israelites will repent and mourn individually and by families (Zech. 12:12-14). Salvation is a personal matter, and both male and female, rich and poor, small and great will repent individually before Christ. Levi and Shimei represented the highest and lowest of the priestly order; Levi was the father of the entire tribe bearing his name that ministered in the house of God. Shimei was the youngest son of Gershon (Num. 3:18), the family that handled the coverings and curtains of the Tabernacle (Num. 4:22-26). At that time, the Jews will no longer trust in their physical lineage but will acknowledge their personal need of salvation. The family of Nathan, the youngest son of David (Zech. 12:12), will not glory in that day in their physical relationship with David but will acknowledge that they are sinners in need of Christ's atonement.

8. Those who are converted will be purified through suffering (Zech. 13:9). The Great Tribulation will be a terrible time for everyone. For the unsaved Jews it is a time of judgment, and for the saved it is a time of purifying.



## THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

Daniel's 70th Week concludes with the Battle of Armageddon. This is not one battle in one place but a battle that extends over a wide territory and that involves a series of events.

Following are the major prophecies that describe the battle:

### **Revelation 14:18-20**

1. This prophecy says the full length of the Battle of Armageddon is 1,600 furlongs, or about 175 miles. Thus the battle will extend the entire length of Israel from the north to the south. Armies will come from all over the world, particularly from the west and north (the Antichrist's armies), and from the east (Revelation 16:12-14, 16).

2. This prophecy describes the eastern confederacy, which will number 200 million men. Compare Revelation 9:15.

3. Here we see that the battle will take place at Armageddon, which means in Hebrew "mountain of Megiddo." It refers to the valley of Jezreel. In April 2010 we observed this valley from Mt. Carmel, from Nazareth's brow, and from the mountain of Megiddo itself.

- a. Megiddo occupies a strategic location on a pass through the Carmel mountain range, straddling the major north-south route between Mesopotamia (Syria, Babylon) and Egypt. Called "The Way of the Sea," this valley has been the scene of battles from ancient times. "During the past 4000 years, at least 34 bloody conflicts have already been fought at the ancient site of Megiddo and adjacent areas of the Jezreel Valley. Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Midianites, Amalekites, Philistines, Hasmonaeans, Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Mongols, French, Ottomans, British, Australians, Germans, Arabs and Israelis have all fought and died here. The names of the warring generals and leaders reverberate

throughout history: Thutmose III, Deborah and Barak, Sisera, Gideon, Saul and Jonathan, Shishak, Jehu, Joram, Jezebel, Josiah, Antiochus, Ptolemy, Vespasian, Saladin, Napoleon, and Allenby, to name but a few of the most famous” (Eric Cline, “The Battles of Armageddon,” n.d., BibleInterp.com).

- b. Israel has fought several famous battles at Megiddo. It was the scene of Barak’s victory over the Canaanites (Jud. 5:19) and of Gideon’s victory over the Midianites (Judges 7). Three of Israel’s kings died here: Saul at the hands of the Philistines in the 10th century B.C. (1 Samuel 31:8, Mt. Gilboa is in that same area), Ahaziah at the hands of Jehu in the 9th century B.C. (2 Kings 9:27), and Josiah at the hands of the Egyptian army in the 7th century B.C. (2 Kings 23:29).
- c. A significant battle was fought here in 1918 when the British forces under General Edmund Allenby (a large, forceful man known as “the Bull”) defeated the Ottoman armies to gain control of the land of Israel, thus loosing the Ottoman Empire’s four century-long grip on the land and paving the way for the establishment of a Jewish state. (The Bahais believe that this was the Battle of Armageddon.) Preceding Allenby’s battle of Megiddo the famous British officer called Lawrence of Arabia led his Arabian followers in attacks east of the Jordan to distract the Ottomans. When Allenby was made a viscount, he took the title “Viscount of Megiddo” to commemorate his victory. The defeat of the Turks led to the British Mandate over Palestine in 1922 which incorporated the Balfour Declaration to “secure establishment of the Jewish National Home.” Though the British backtracked from this promise later and armed the Arabs against the Jews (and suffered greatly for it, in my estimation), they still played a major, if unwilling, role in the establishment of a modern state in Israel.
- d. The final Battle of Armageddon will witness Gentile armies massed throughout the valley of Jezreel and beyond.

## **Isaiah 63:1-4, 6**

Here we consider the southernmost extremity of the battle.

1. Bozrah in Edom is southeast of the Dead Sea. Thus, we see that the Battle of Armageddon will extend from north of the valley of Jezreel all the way to the extreme south of the country. Today the ancient land of Edom is occupied by Jordan, which is a somewhat pro-Western Arab nation but which fought against Israel in the War of Independence and the Six-Day War.

2. The Isaiah 63 passage has been interpreted by Roman Catholics and Protestants as referring to Christ's suffering for our sin. In the Anglican Prayer Book, for example, it is read just before Easter. This is based on the allegorical method of interpretation that spiritualizes the prophecies. It was invented by heretics such as Origen and Jerome centuries after Christ and brought into the Catholic Church, and it is one of the errors that the Protestants retained from Rome.

3. From the context of the prophecy we can see that the subject is not Christ's suffering, but His return to defeat Israel's enemies. See the preceding chapter, which is about the re-establishment of Israel's kingdom. Isaiah 62:4-5 says Israel will be married to the Lord in that day. Isaiah 62:7 says Jerusalem will be a praise in the earth. That certainly does not describe her condition today. The prophecy, therefore, describes Christ coming in His glory and power (Isa. 63:1). In that day He will be mighty to save: not saving sinners from sin but saving Israel from her enemies. That will be the day of vengeance (Isa. 63:4). It is not the day of Christ's grace but of His wrath. His garments are not red with His own blood but with the blood of His enemies. The poetry likening the destruction of Christ's enemies to the pressing of grapes in a wine vat is the same as in Revelation 14:18-20. At the harvest, the grapes were put into a large vat and trampled, and the garments of those that trod the grapes were stained with the red juice.

4. In Revelation 19 Christ destroys the antichrist's army with His word, but in Isaiah 63 the judgment is much more up close and personal. Whether the dyeing of Christ's garments with the blood of His enemies is literal or whether it is poetic is

not certain. What is certain is that Christ will destroy Israel's enemies in a mighty battle.

### **Joel 3:9-17**

1. Here we move to Jerusalem, the heart of the battle. The name *Jehoshaphat* means "Jehovah judges," and the valley of Jehoshaphat traditionally refers to the Kidron Valley between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. Though this is a later tradition and is not stated in the Bible, Joel does say that Christ will roar out of Zion or Jerusalem, so the Kidron Valley fits the context. This also agrees with Zechariah 14, which says that Christ will return to the Mount of Olives.

2. Thus, it appears again that the entire land of Israel will be overrun and Christ will defeat the enemies of Israel in two or more battles.

### **Zechariah 12:1-9**

1. Jerusalem is at the heart of Bible prophecy. It is the city of the great God (Psa. 48:1), and he that touches Jerusalem touches the apple of God's eye (Zech. 2:8). It is no wonder, then, that this small, seemingly insignificant city often makes front page news throughout the world in these end times.

2. When Jerusalem is surrounded by enemy armies at the end of the Great Tribulation, Christ will return and defeat them. He will strike them with blindness and madness so that they turn on one another. And the Jewish remnant will be made strong and courageous, with the feeblest becoming a mighty warrior like David.

**Zechariah 14:1-7, 20-21** describes this scene in more detail:

1. This is a major prophecy that gives details of Christ's return not given anywhere else in Scripture.

2. It is identified as "the day of the Lord," which refers to the period of time in which God will judge the world and establish His kingdom on earth. It is called the

Lord's day in contrast to man's day, which has lasted 6,000 years. In the day of the Lord, God will be exalted and rebellious men will be humbled and the throne of the world will belong to Christ. See Isaiah 2:10-12.

3. Zechariah 14 begins with the nations gathered against Jerusalem and the city ransacked. At that point Christ will return and the Mount of Olives will split to form a valley, providing a passageway of escape for the remnant Jews. *Azal* means adjoining; thus the valley will extend from near the city walls and lead away from the city.

4. Christ will destroy the armies that are gathered around Jerusalem (Zech. 14:9). The fearful manner of the destruction is described in Zechariah 14:12-15.

5. Christ will then establish the headquarters of His world kingdom in Jerusalem. It will become a place of safety and joy and holiness (Zech. 14:11, 20-21). How different this will be from its condition today! There is no true holiness in Jerusalem today. Instead of holiness and righteousness and peace there is covetousness and pride and sensuality, envy and hatred and variance. Instead of obedience to God's law there are vain human traditions and empty religious rituals. Instead of true righteousness, there is self-righteousness.

## **CHRIST'S KINGDOM**

### **Introduction**

1. Christ's kingdom, which will be established when He returns in power and glory, is a major theme of the Prophets as well as of the Psalms.

2. Christ's kingdom is described in great detail in Bible prophecy because it is a great comfort in trials and a great motivator to godly living and zealous Christian service. Most of the prophets spoke of this future kingdom. The following are most of the passages about the kingdom. The ones identified with asterisks are the most important:

**Psalms** 1:5-6; \*2:1-12; \*9:1-20; 10:12-18; 14:7; \*18:4-19; \*18:43-50; 21:4-13; 22:22-31; 24:7-10; \*37:9-11, 17-18, 20, 22, 28-29, 34, 38; \*45:2-17; \*46:2-11; 47:1-9; \*48:1-14; 50:1-6; 53:6; 58:9-11; \*60:2-12; \*65:1-5; \*66:1-4; \*67:1-7; \*68:20-35; 69:32-36; \*72:1-19; 76:1-12; 85:9-13; 86:9; 96:11-13; 97:1-12; 98:1-9; 99:1-5; 100:1-5; 102:12-22, 26-28; 110:2-3; 132:13-18; 138:4-5; 145:10-13; 146:7-10; 147:2-3, 12-15; 148:14; 149:1-9

**Isaiah** \*1:25-31; \*4:2-6; 9:7; 10:20-21, 25-27; \*11:4-9; 12:1-6; \*14:1-7; 15:5; 17:6-8; 18:7; 19:18-25; 22:20-24; 23:18; 24:23; \*25:6-9; 26:1-2, 12, 19; 27:1-6; 28:5-6; \*29:17-24; 30:18-26; 32:15-20; 33:17-24; \*35:1-10; 40:1-11; \*41:10-20; 42:1-12; 44:1-5, 21-23; 45:22-25; 49:5-26; \*51:1-5, 11; 52:1-2, 7-15; \*54:1-17; \*55:5, 12-13; 56:1-8; 59:16-21; \*60:1-22; \*61:2-11; 62:1-12; 65:8-10; \*65:19-25; 66:5-24

**Jeremiah** 3:14-9; 16:14-21; 23:3-8; 30:3, \*8-11, \*16-23; \*31:1-14; 23-40; \*32:37-44; \*33:6-26; 46:27-28; 50:4-5, 19-20; 51:19-24

**Ezekiel** 11:17-21; 14:22-23; 16:53-55, 59-63; \*20:33-38, 40-44; 28:25-26; \*34:11-16, \*22-31; 35:14-15; 36:8-15, 23-38; \*37:21-28; 39:21-29; 40:1 – 48:35

**Daniel** 2:44; \*7:13-14, 26-27; \*12:1-3

**Hosea** 1:10-11; \*2:14-23; \*3:5; 6:1-3; \*14:1-9

**Joel** \*2:15-32; 3:1, 7-8, \*16-21

**Amos** \*9:11-15

**Obadiah** 17-21

**Micah** 4:1-13; 5:3-9; \*7:9-20

**Nahum** \*1:13-15

**Zephaniah** \*3:9-20

**Haggai** \*2:6-9, 21-23

**Zechariah** 1:16-21; 2:10-13; 3:8-10; 6:12-13; 8:3-8, 11-15, 18-23; 9:16-17; 10:5-11; \*12:6-13; \*13:1-9; \*14:1-21

**Malachi** 1:11; 3:1-5, 17-18; 4:1-3

**Matthew** 25:31-46

**Acts** 3:19-21

**Romans** 11:25-27

**Colossians** 3:4

**2 Thessalonians** 1:10

**2 Timothy** 4:1

## **Revelation 2:26-27; 20:1-10**

3. Christ's kingdom is called the millennial kingdom from Revelation 20:2-7. "Millennium" is a Latin term that means 1,000. Christ's kingdom will not end at the conclusion of the 1,000 years; it will continue forever (Isa. 9:7). The millennial reign is only one phase to Christ's eternal rule which begins at His return.

4. In the Old Testament, the kingdom of God on earth was His kingdom in Israel (1 Chron. 28:5; 2 Chron. 13:8). That kingdom was destroyed because of Israel's disobedience, but Old Testament prophecy promises that the kingdom will be reestablished on earth by Christ, David's greater Son, and that He will reign in truth and righteousness (Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 2:44; 7:14).

5. When Jesus came to earth the first time He proclaimed this kingdom to Israel (Mat. 3:2). He came to His own people, Israel, but they rejected Him (John 1:11). He warned them that the kingdom would be taken from them because of their rebellion and given to another nation (Mat. 21:43). This is not another nation in the sense of England or America. It is not another group or body of people in the sense of the church. It is another incarnation of Israel in another time. Jesus was saying that the Israel that existed then, the Israel that rejected Him, would be destroyed nationally, and after a two millennium dispersion a new Israel would be constructed. The Lord Jesus preached a literal kingdom that would be established on earth at His return. See Luke 9:27-36; 13:28-30; 14:15-24; 19:11-27; 21:31; 22:18, 28-30.

For a study of Matthew 21:41-43 ("the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof") and Luke 17:20-21 ("the kingdom of God cometh not with observation") see *Things Hard to Be Understood: A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties* 2012 edition, which is available from Way of Life Literature.

6. There are many heretical teachings on the kingdom of God.

- a. There is the charismatic “kingdom now” theology (the “kingdom authority” in the lyrics to Pentecostal preacher Jack Hayford’s popular song “Majesty”).
- b. There is the emerging church’s kingdom building program. For example, Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, formerly pastored by Rob Bell, proclaims, “We take great joy in partnering with God to change the world, embracing the truth that all of life is sacred.” Tony Campolo says, “Our call is to be God’s agents, to rescue not only the human race but the whole of creation.”
- c. There is dominion theology. For example, Vision Forum and Patrick Henry College’s movie *God’s Next Army* has the goal of training young people to enter the halls of government and become national leaders in order to take dominion of this present world. D. James Kennedy’s ministry was dedicated to the precept that “the kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdoms of God and of His Christ” so he built a ministry to transform society and government (“Truth in Action Ministries Offers a Picture of Hope,” *Truth in Action*, June 1, 2012).

But as we have seen, according to a literal interpretation of Bible prophecy, the kingdom of Christ is yet future.

The kingdom is the re-establishment of Israel’s fallen throne (Hos. 3:4-5).

It is the fulfillment of God’s promises in the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Psa. 89:20-29; Jer. 23:5-8; 33:15-26). God promised that Jerusalem and the land of Israel would be at the heart of an eternal, worldwide kingdom and that David’s Son would rule over this kingdom.

7. In the church age, the kingdom of God exists in two forms:

- a. Believers enter a spiritual kingdom of Christ when they are born again (Col. 1:12-14). This is the kingdom composed of all the redeemed of all ages (Eph. 2:12-19; Heb. 12:22-24).



b. The kingdom of God also presently exists in a mystery form as described in Jesus' parables (Mat. 13:10-11). A "mystery" refers to truth that was hidden in the Old Testament but is revealed in the New (Eph. 3:4-6). The Old Testament did not see the church age in between Christ's two comings: His coming in lowliness to die for man's sin and His coming in glory to rule. In the church age, the kingdom takes a strange form not described in Old Testament prophecy. The king is in heaven and the kingdom is not yet established on earth. Instead, the kingdom of God resides in the small, despised apostolic churches, while the devil's false kingdom grows quickly and spreads throughout the world (Mat. 13:31-32).

Believers are not building the kingdom of God on earth today. They are snatching brands from the coming fire before the opportunity of salvation is finished (1 Cor. 9:19; 10:33; 2 Cor. 5:11, 18-21; 6:2; Jude 23).

Today the "whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19), and the devil is its god (2 Cor. 4:4). It would be impossible to build the kingdom of God on earth unless we had the power to bind the devil and to take control of every aspect of the world system--government, education, economy, social, etc.--but we don't have this power. This will not happen until Christ returns (Rev. 20).

The apostles and prophets in the early churches did not band together with unbelievers to accomplish grandiose social-justice projects. They preached the gospel and shined as lights in this dark world by their holy lives. Christ's Great Commission emphasizes gospel preaching (Mat. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:46-48; Acts 1:6-8).

Believers in the first churches were looking for the imminent return of Christ. This is preached by Paul (1 Thess. 1:9-10), by James (Jam. 5:9), by Peter (1 Pet. 4:7), and by John (Rev. 1:3).

The New Testament epistles plainly teach that the promised kingdom of Christ is yet future and will be fulfilled literally upon His return. See Acts 14:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Timothy 4:1; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 12:10.

Man has messed up God's world, but he won't have the final say. The 6,000 years of human history are only like six days to the eternal God (2 Pet. 3:8).

In Christ's kingdom the fashion of this world will be completely changed (1 Cor. 7:29-31).

The saved, who have no authority now, will have all authority then; they are nobodies now, but they will be the somebodies then!

**Following is a study of some major passages which give an overview of the kingdom:**

Note to teachers: If there is a time limit to the course, we suggest skipping to the study on Psalm 72.

### **ISAIAH 49:11-23**

The redeemed Jews will return to the land. This is another major subject of Bible prophecy.

See also Deuteronomy 30:1-5; Isaiah 11:11-12, 16; 27:12-13; 35:8-10; 51:11; 60:8-10; 66:20-21; Jeremiah 23:3; 30:3; 32:37; 33:7; 46:27; 50:4-5; Ezekiel 11:17; 34:11-13; 37:12-13, 21; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:14-15; Zephaniah 3:19-20; Zechariah 8:7-8; 10:6-10.

1. These passages do not describe the first regathering after the Babylonian captivity. This is a second gathering. The first regathering was only from Babylon, whereas the second regathering is from the ends of the earth (Isa. 11:11-12; 43:5-6; 49:12).

2. There will be a special highway or highways for the return of the redeemed (Isa. 49:11-12). See also Isaiah 11:16; 35:8-10; 62:10-12.

- a. The highways will be holy (Isa. 35:8). Unlike the highways in this present world, that highway will not be used by the unclean. It is dedicated to the converted Jews who love God's Law.
- b. The highways will be peaceful and nothing shall hurt the travelers (Isa. 35:9).
- c. The highways will be the way of joy and gladness (Isa. 35:10). They will be filled with happy people who sing as they go.

3. Israel will be amazed when she sees all of the redeemed gathered together and she will be increased in size to make room for the ingathering (Isa. 49:18-21).

4. Redeemed Jews will be brought to Israel by the Gentiles and cared for by Gentile rulers (Isa. 49:22-23; 60:8-10). This is in great contrast to the return of the Jews to their land in the 20th century. Great Gentile powers such as Britain resisted the Jews. Hitler controlled most of Europe and was doing his best to annihilate the Jewish people. Russia and Japan were anti-Israel. Though England signed the Balfour Declaration promising Israel a homeland, she backtracked on the terms and supported the Arabs, instead, because of her lust for oil. Before handing the country over to the newly established state of Israel in 1948, England did everything possible to disarm the Jews and strengthen Israel's enemies. Israel was forced to fight for her life with few guns and munitions. America has been a fair-weather friend at best and has often demanded that Israel pursue actions that were detrimental to her own security. When Christ rules, the situation will be entirely different. The Gentile nations will eagerly help the Jews.

## **ISAIAH 2:2-4**

1. Christ's kingdom will be a worldwide theocracy ruled by God in the person of His Son.

In Isaiah 2 the governments of the world are signified poetically as mountains and hills. As mountains tower over the surrounding countryside, so governments rule

over people. The top mountain or government will be “the LORD’S house” (Isa. 2:2). Thus we see that the heart of Christ’s worldwide kingdom will be the temple in Jerusalem that is described in Ezekiel 40-48.

Christ will be legislator, judge, and executor (Isa. 33:22). All authority will be designated and appointed by Him and will be under His direction. Every ruler will be appointed by Christ. Every law will be given by Christ. Every judge will operate under His authority and direction. Even in this present world, “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1), but whereas today God allows wicked men to rule, in the kingdom only the righteous will rule.

2. Christ’s kingdom will be a kingdom ruled by God’s Word, which will be the law of the world (Isa. 2:3, “for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”).

In Christ’s kingdom righteousness will be defined by God’s law. Unrighteousness will be illegal and will be judged by Christ’s emissaries. Abortion, adultery, murder, kidnapping, theft, homosexuality, filthy speech, immodesty, blasphemy, profanity, selfish greed, and such things will be serious crimes (Rom. 1:29-32). In this present world, most of these things are not crimes at all. In fact, things such as abortion, fornication, blasphemy, profanity, and covetousness are acclaimed by the world.

In every decision throughout Christ’s kingdom the first principle will be whether it is according to God’s law and whether it is in conformity to God’s will. Six thousand years of wretched human history will provide irrefutable evidence that living by God’s will is the path of true liberty. God’s will is the way of blessing.

God’s Word will be the law of the entire world (Isa. 2:3). The nations will come to Israel to learn God’s law, and teachers will travel throughout the earth to teach it (Isaiah 66:19). We see a glimpse of this in 2 Chronicles 17:7-10 where teachers were sent across Israel to teach God’s Word during Jehoshaphat’s reign. We also see a glimpse of this in Solomon’s kingdom when people came from many countries to hear his wisdom (1 Kings 10:24).

The priests will be teachers, showing the people the difference between the holy and profane, the clean and the unclean (Ezek. 44:23).

Instead of ignoring, resisting, and persecuting God's ambassadors, as the nations have done for thousands of years, in that day the nations will welcome them and listen eagerly to their teaching (Isa. 29:24). Some will listen from the heart and be converted and some will only conform externally to avoid punishment, but all will listen. (Those who only conform externally and survive to the end of the millennium will join Satan's final, short-lived rebellion as described in Revelation 20:7-10.)

The entire educational system of the earth will be dedicated to teaching God's Word and glorifying God!

The law will be simple. It will be easy to understand and easy to judge. Compare the moral law of God in the book of Exodus, minus the ritualistic laws such as those pertaining to the Tabernacle, to the law libraries full of human ordinances that exist today in every nation and internationally.

The essence of God's law is love of God and love of neighbor (Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jam. 2:8). To love one's neighbor as oneself means that you will not sin against him and mistreat him. It means you won't injure, kidnap, or murder him; you won't steal his goods or his wife; you won't lie to him or lie about him; you won't cheat him; you won't put a stumbling-block in his way. But it means more; it means you will treat him with compassion and mercy. You will help him if he has a need; you will warn him if he is in danger; you will try to lift him up and not hold him down; you will be your brother's keeper. This "royal law" will be the foundation of the law of the world in Christ's kingdom. It will be taught to children from their earliest years and will permeate every level of society.

There will doubtless be great light thrown upon the Bible. The hymn writer Isaac Watts observed that at the conversion of the Jews, "Divine light shall be spread over all the ancient dispensations, and a brighter glory diffused over all the rites and forms of religion which God ever instituted among the race of Adam" (Watts,

“Apparent Folly Real Wisdom,” cited from Paxton Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Hymns*). We have great insight into the Scriptures even in this present age, but the spiritual wisdom that will be imparted in the next age will greatly exceed that which we have today. Many things that cannot be understood or even told today (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:3-4; Hebrews 5:10-11) will be understood then.

Proverbs will doubtless be a part of the educational system as men are taught the practical wisdom of God in such things as being diligent and dependable and honest in labor (as opposed to sluggardism). God’s Word enables men to get at the root causes of societal ills such as poverty rather than dealing with mere peripheral issues. There will be no misguided campaigns such as that led by rock star Bono to transfer wealth to poor nations where it is squandered. (See the study on “The Poor” in the Advanced Bible Studies course on Proverbs.)

Men will also learn of God in creation, as creation is a textbook of God’s character and a revelation of spiritual wisdom (Job 12:7-9; Psa. 19:1-4). Today the unsaved men of this world are spiritually blind (2 Cor. 4:4) so that they are crippled in their thinking and research by the willful rejection of the Creator (2 Pet. 3:3-5). They stumble along as blind men rather than walking in the glorious light of God’s Word. They study creation but don’t have the key to unlock its meaning. They lack even the basic fundamental of wisdom, which is the fear of God (Psa. 111:10). When Christ reigns, the spiritual darkness will be lifted (Isa. 25:7). Satan, the father of the darkness of this present world, the “prince of the power of the air,” will be incarcerated in the bottomless pit (Eph. 2:1-2; Rev. 20:1-3; Isa. 29:20). Even today, though we live in a world under God’s curse, the believer thrills to study God’s creation and to see His glory reflected everywhere, from the basic elements of the universe and the details of the living cell to the mind-staggering depth and beauty of the galaxies and the perfectly-tuned laws of physics. Today, though, our exploration of the Lord’s world is handicapped by the fact that the fields of science are typically controlled by unbelieving men and antichrist governments, and believers rarely have the proper resources to study and explore. But in Christ’s kingdom, all of the instruments of research will belong to the Lord’s people. In that day, science and technology will be dedicated to God’s glory, and in His light we will see light (Psa. 36:9). Unlike today, when science textbooks and natural history

museums are filled with myths and lies, in that day they will be shining bastions of truth!

The global educational system in Christ's kingdom will be facilitated by the fact that there will be one language (Zeph. 3:9).

### **ISAIAH 11:6-10**

1. In Christ's kingdom peace will reign even within the animal kingdom (Isa. 11:6-8).

Men have longed to return to paradise from the time that our father Adam was evicted from Eden, but it can never come through man's efforts.

God will change the very nature and habits of the animal kingdom so that the lion will eat grass instead of meat (Isa. 11:7). We do not understand how this will happen throughout the animal world, but the same Almighty God who made the creation can change it as He sees fit. Those who have a problem believing the miracles described in the Bible simply don't understand the almighty power of God. If you believe the first verse of the Bible, you can easily believe every other verse.

God did not create the world to be as it is today. In the beginning, animals did not struggle for survival and devour one another. The world was not in constant turmoil, swept by violent storms, and animals were not fierce. The reason the animal kingdom is "wild" and "red in tooth and claw" (as described by the poet Tennyson) is man's sin against God.

When man gets right with God, the world will be right with man.

2. In Christ's kingdom the knowledge of God will cover the entire earth (Isa. 11:9).

What a contrast that will be to the condition that exists now. Today spiritual darkness covers the nations, and a veil is over men's eyes (2 Cor. 4:4). The world is filled with lies, false religion, and godless philosophy.

3. In Christ's kingdom the Gentiles will trust in Him (Isa. 11:10).

The "root of Jesse" is Jesus, the Messiah, who is both the root of David (Jesse was David's father) and the branch of David (Isa. 11:1). Christ is both David's God and David's Son, which is a puzzle solved by the fact of Christ's incarnation through the virgin birth. He is Immanuel or "God with us" (Isa. 7:14).

When the kingdom is established, Jesus Christ will be an ensign or flag that will be preached to the Gentiles. The gospel will again be preached throughout the earth and multitudes of Gentiles will put their trust in Jesus as Saviour. Jeremiah says, "... the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods?" (Jer. 16:19-20).

Many prophecies describe the turning of the Gentiles to Christ. See Romans 15:8-12. These prophecies apply to the church age and the Great Commission that has been going on for 2,000 years (Acts 1:8), but the same prophecies also look beyond this age to the millennial kingdom.

But not all Gentiles will trust Christ nor submit to Him from the heart. As we have noted, many will remain unconverted and will submit only externally out of self-interest and fear of punishment, and those in this condition who live to the end of the millennium will join Satan's final rebellion (Rev. 20:7-9).

### **ISAIAH 35:1-7**

1. The wildernesses will blossom (Isa. 35:1-2, 7).

Lebanon and Carmel are in the northern part of Israel where the most rain falls. Even today this part of Israel is the most beautiful.



The blossoming of the wilderness will begin in the land of Israel and spread throughout the earth (Isa. 27:6). Israel's wilderness will be like Eden (Isa. 51:3).

This is in great contrast to the conditions that exist today. The land of Israel has been much improved since the Jews began resettling there in large numbers in the 20th century, but it is still largely arid, particularly south of Jerusalem. Most of the land receives very little rainfall and any agricultural productivity is found in small sections that are worked by dry farming techniques.

But when Christ reigns, the land will receive its rains and will blossom and provide an abundance of harvest (Joel 2:21-27).

The citizens of Christ's kingdom will continually thrill at the beauty of God's glorified creation. There will be no industrial pollution and no greedy misuse or natural disasters to spoil it.

2. The sick and crippled will be healed (Isa. 35:5-6).

See also Isaiah 29:18; 33:24.

Christ's healing ministry during His first coming was a little foretaste of "the powers of the world to come" (Hebrews 6:5). His healing miracles were for the purpose of authenticating His Messiahship (Lk. 7:19-23; Jn. 5:36; 6:14; 7:31; 9:30-32; 10:37-38; 11:42; 14:10-11; 15:24; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22).

In His kingdom, good health will be universal and the medical industry will be shut down. There will be no deformities, no crippled babies. Then will be fulfilled the promise of Psalm 103:3. The context of these Psalms is the coming kingdom. Compare Psalm 102:13-16 and 104:35.

There will be aging and death in the millennium, because there will be people in their natural bodies (Zech. 8:4). But man's normal lifespan will increase dramatically as in the days before the Flood. Man's lifespan in the kingdom is likened to "the days of a tree" (Isa. 65:22). Men will not die young except as a

judgment for crimes (Isa. 65:20-22). This passage says that “a child shall die an hundred years old,” meaning that if someone dies at 100 he will be like a child who dies in this present age. Some men will die young because of their sin. “The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.” Death is the last enemy to be conquered (1 Cor. 15:26), and it will cease with the coming of the New Heaven and the New Earth (Rev. 21:4).

There will be mortal and immortal souls in the kingdom. In fact, the citizens of the kingdom will be composed of four types: *angels* (Mat. 25:31), *born again Christians* (who will then dwell in immortal bodies like Christ’s, 1 Cor. 15:51-53), *resurrected Jews* both of Old Testament and Tribulation saints (Dan. 12:1-3; Rev. 20:4-6), and *men living in natural bodies* (those who will be alive on earth at Christ’s return and those who are born during the Millennium).

3. There will be joy and singing everywhere (Isa. 35:2).

Sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isa. 35:10). Jeremiah says “they shall not sorrow any more at all” (Jer. 31:12). Isaiah says “everlasting joy shall be upon their head ... sorrow and mourning shall flee away” (Isa. 51:11). The souls of the redeemed will be “as a watered garden” (Jer. 31:12). All of the depression, discouragement, bewilderment, fear, and such things will be gone forever. Singing and laughter, which are exceptional experiences in this present world, will be the normal way of life (Psa. 149:2-5; Jer. 31:4).

## **PSALM 72**

Psalm 72 describes Christ’s kingdom in great detail.

### **1. Christ will rule UNIVERSALLY (Psa. 72:8-11).**

“And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one” (Zech. 14:9).

### **2. Christ will rule ABSOLUTELY (Psa. 72:9-11).**

His kingdom will be a divine dictatorship, a theocracy. There will be no elections, no people's rights. Solomon's kingdom was a foretaste of this. Christ's Word will be the final authority. There will be no appeal to a "higher authority," since there is no higher authority! He has been given ALL power in heaven and in earth (Mat. 28:18).

### **3. Christ will rule IN RIGHTEOUSNESS (Psa. 72:2-4).**

Righteousness is a major theme of the kingdom prophecies, because God is righteous and He has always required this of His people. In Christ's kingdom righteousness will reign in action, speech, attitude, literature, music, dress, entertainment, everything. Holiness will characterize the kingdom even to the ordinary cooking pots (Zech. 14:20-21). The most common things will be done to the glory of God and according to His righteous standards.

Righteousness will be defined by God's absolute law, not by man's changing, self-serving standards.

The filthy, proud, idolatrous pop culture will be a thing of the dim past. The international pop culture of the last days, which thumbs its nose at God's laws, originated with the God-hating Cain and his sons (Gen. 4:16-24). Music was a prominent part of Cain's culture, as it is today. Later, at the Tower of Babel, the culture of the world became permeated with idolatry (Gen. 11:1-4; Rom. 1:21-23). Through the technology of these last days the wicked pop culture has spread to every realm of man's life. Cain's sons could only listen to their party music when it was played live, but the sons of the world in the last days can plug the music into their ear and listen to it whenever they please, and they can access the devil's culture 24/7 via the Internet.

In Christ's kingdom the righteous will no longer be vexed in the soul by the wickedness and idolatry of society.

In that day the redeemed Jews will have God's laws written in their hearts and they will know the Lord personally and individually (Jer. 31:33-34). They will not

merely conform to external laws; they will conform enthusiastically from the heart, and they will teach God's righteousness to the nations.

In that day the New Testament believer will be able to enjoy Christ's righteous kingdom without reservation or limitation because He will be perfectly righteous. We will not be subject to indwelling sin, discouragement, fear, doubt, pain, sorrow, disappointment. Today the believer is righteous positionally by justification but his practical righteousness is never perfect (1 John 1:8-10). We have the indwelling "old man" (Eph. 4:22) and live in a body of death (Rom. 7:24). In this present life we are subject to the bondage of corruption, to groaning and travailing, and we hold God's promises by faith rather than sight (Rom. 8:20-25). We groan to be clothed in that incorruptible, immortal body that God has promised (2 Cor. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 15:51-54). At the Rapture we will receive that body and we will therefore be able to enjoy Christ's righteous kingdom to its fullest.

#### **4. Christ will rule IN WISDOM (Psa. 72:2).**

In that day, the world will be ruled by men guided by God's Spirit. Isaiah 33:5-6 and 28:5-6 associate the rule of justice with wisdom.

Christ possesses "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge" (Isa. 11:2). He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), and this wisdom will be imparted by the Spirit of God throughout society.

Wise men will be in power. They will have the wisdom of Solomon to make right decisions. They will have the wisdom to know when to exercise mercy and when to exercise judgment, to discern truth from lies. They will not be tricked by human deception or fooled by clever lawyers or led astray by wrong philosophy.

They will have the wisdom to use the resources of creation to build a lovely society. There will be new inventions and new technology. As wisdom incarnate, Christ is the author of "witty inventions" (Prov. 8:12). He is an infinite library of prudence and inventiveness from which men will draw in that day. All of the knowledge and

wisdom that men have exercised over the last 6,000 years will not equal even a small pamphlet in the vast British Library compared to what we will learn in the millennial kingdom! In the day of Christ's reign there will be no spiritual darkness and no willful blindness to hinder the pursuit of godly knowledge. The redeemed will draw from the infinite Fount of Wisdom, while glorifying Him in all things.

Men will have the wisdom to use resources wisely. There will be no waste or fraud or misappropriation. Resources will not be spoiled by foolish decisions. There will be no redistribution of wealth from the workers to the lazy, from the righteous to the unrighteous. There will be no unjust taxation.

### **5. Christ will rule IN EQUITY AND JUSTICE (Psa. 72:4; Ezek. 45:8-9).**

Each individual will be treated equally and judged without consideration of person or position. You won't have to be "somebody" to be treated properly. You won't have to be wealthy or part of an elite group within society to get justice. Rulers will not oppress even to provide for their own sons (Ezek. 46:18).

Cheating, and stealing, and corruption won't be allowed (Ezek. 45:10). There will be no "hidden fees" and abuse of "legal fine print."

If you are cheated, slandered, robbed, or injured, you will be able to call upon the authorities and they will care about your case and will deal with the problem! They will not turn a blind eye to corruption and injustice.

The priests will judge according to God's law (Ezek. 44:24).

Each ruler in Christ's kingdom will be like Samuel of old, who could stand before the people and ask, "Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?" (1 Samuel 12:3).

A little foretaste of Christ's kingdom can be seen in Jehoshaphat's reign. He appointed judges who were instructed to rule justly and equitably in the fear of God

without respect of person (2 Chron. 19:5-10). They were under the oversight of the high priest (2 Chron. 19:11). This is how it will be in Christ's kingdom. Rulers will be appointed by Christ and His representatives and they will be under the oversight of the Temple, which will be the center of government.

Businesses will not cheat nor sell shoddy materials to make a quick profit. There will be honesty and pride of workmanship to the glory of God.

Money will not be lent at exorbitant rates.

There will be no graft, no bribes. Everything will be done in the light; nothing will be done in the darkness.

There will be no abuse of position and privilege for personal gain.

This is in great contrast to the world that has existed for 6,000 years since man's fall. Typically the world has been ruled by corrupt officials and tyrants, such as the Pashas who ruled in the Middle East in the 19th century as described as follows by the archaeologist Henry Layard: "The Pasha was accustomed to give instructions to those who were sent to collect money, in three words--'Go, destroy, eat,' referring to robbery, pillage and mayhem" (*Nineveh in Its Remains*).

In most parts of the world, government officials and courts are exceedingly selfish and corrupt and "justice" is non-existent except for those who pay bribes. And it is not only the governments that are corrupt; the corruption exists at every level of society. Consider poor villagers in Nepal who are tricked into selling their kidneys. They are promised \$1300 but receive perhaps \$400, if anything, and often die or are crippled after surgery at the hands of unqualified, uncaring "doctors." Many young Nepali girls are sold into slavery for a payment of \$10 to \$60 a year and are abused by their cruel masters, and there is no one who cares. There is no justice available. These are but tiny windows into the wretched corruption that exists in this present world and that has existed for thousands of years since man rebelled against God, but such things will only be a dim memory when Christ rules.

## **6. Christ will rule with A ROD OF IRON (Psa. 2:9).**

Justice will reign inflexibly, and corruption will not be allowed.

The rule by a rod of iron means that Jesus Christ will be the King of kings. In that day the statements in Proverbs about the rule of a righteous king will be fulfilled. See Proverbs 16:10, 14, 15; 20:2, 8, 26.

The Sermon on the Mount looks ahead to that day. See, for example, Matthew 5:21-26. The councils and prisons mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount will exist in Christ's kingdom.

Consider Matthew 5:21-26. A person who is angry at someone without a just cause will be in danger of the judgment. This probably refers to punishment administered by local authorities. If a person calls another "Raca," he will be in danger of the council, which probably refers to a higher level of magistrate. "Raca" is a term that literally means "O empty or worthless one." It is a term of "utter vilification" (Strong). If, on the other hand, a person calls someone a fool, he will be in danger of hell fire. It is not the use of the word "fool" itself that defines this great sin, but the use of the word "fool" as an expression of hateful maliciousness. It is the verbal expression of a murderous heart. Christ Himself called men fools on occasion (Mat. 23:17, 19; Lk. 11:40; 24:50), and the apostle Paul called certain false teachers fools who were questioning the bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:36). But Paul was speaking the truth, not hurling malicious accusations.

The point is that during Christ's Millennial reign even sinful actions that are deemed harmless in this present time will be dealt with firmly, even severely.

It appears that there will be the potential, even, for rebels to be cast directly into hell fire during the Millennium because of their sinful actions (Mat. 5:22). Compare Isaiah 66:24.

This is indeed rule by "a rod of iron." Note that Jesus does not say that a person who does these things "shall be" judged but that he is "in danger of" being judged.

There will be a place in God's righteous kingdom for genuine repentance and mercy.

Consider Matthew 5:25-26. Again, this has never been fulfilled in any context on earth. It was not fulfilled in Israel during Christ's day and it has not been fulfilled in the church age. New Testament churches have no authority to imprison anyone. These verses look ahead to conditions that will exist during Christ's kingdom. If an individual does not quickly reconcile with an adversary over an unpaid debt or other obligation he will be put into prison until the matter is entirely satisfied. This is rule with a "rod of iron."

Those who are wicked and who serve idols will be judged throughout the earth (Psa. 149:5-9).

All that "watch for iniquity" will be cut off (Isa. 29:20-21).

Wickedness will be sought for and rooted out and the wicked will be rendered powerless (Psa. 10:15-18).

The rule by a rod of iron is described in Zechariah 14:16-19. Each year during Christ's Millennial reign the nations will come to Jerusalem to worship during the feast of tabernacles, and if any nation does not come it will be judged with a drought (Zech. 14:16-19).

The nation that absolutely refuses to serve Christ will perish (Isa. 60:12).

Unrighteousness will be punished swiftly. Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." This is true in this present world, but it will not be true in Christ's kingdom. Crimes will be punished immediately as in the days of Moses and Joshua. See Leviticus 24:11-23 for the case of the blasphemer, Numbers 16 for the case of Korah, and Joshua 7 for the case of Achan.



Consider Brian Mitchell who in 2002 kidnapped and raped 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart for nine months. He was caught red-handed in March 2003 in possession of the girl, but his trial didn't start until seven years later because of humanistic psycho-babble about his "incompetency" and because of the inherent foolishness of the modern U.S. judicial system. Even when the trial did finally begin it was halted temporarily by the 10th Circuit Court Appeals because the jury pool was allegedly so tainted by publicity that the wicked man couldn't get a fair trial, even though 500 prospective jurors had filled out a 42-page questionnaire! Finally in May 2011 Mitchell was sentenced to life in prison where the vile man will be coddled for the rest of his life.

Nothing like this will happen in Christ's kingdom. Justice will be exercised with wisdom and righteousness, and it will be exercised swiftly.

There will be no sinful foolishness in the justice system in Christ's kingdom, such as prisoners suing their victims. There will be no frivolous lawsuits such as suing over spilt hot coffee. There will be no tricky lawyers overturning justice through "technicalities." There will be no "insanity" defense for people who commit crimes while drunk or high on drugs. There will be no deluded psychotherapists to be tricked by clever criminals.

## **7. Christ will rule in MERCY AND GRACE (Psa. 72:12-14).**

Christ's rule will not be characterized by justice alone, but also by mercy (Psa. 89:14; Prov. 20:28; Isa. 16:5; Jer. 9:24). The One who will sit on the throne is Jesus, whose very name means "Saviour," speaking of tender mercy and grace! He is the One who delighteth in mercy (Micah 7:18). He is the One who told the adulterous woman, "Go, and sin no more." When there is repentance, there is forgiveness, as we see throughout Scripture.

Christ loves repentance and mercy more than judgment. His officers will be kind and gracious, desiring to show mercy. We see this in sound, Bible-believing churches today. Godly pastors delight in mercy and they are kind and patient,

looking for repentance in sinning church members, but they do not hesitate to exercise discipline when necessary.

Christ's laws are not mean and unreasonable; they are compassionate. His commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3). Love of one's neighbor is the very essence of the second table of God's law (Mark 12:28-31). (The first table of the law in Exodus 20:1-12 pertains to man's relationship with God.) God's law requires that we leave corners of our crops for the poor, that we not withhold wages that are due, that a husband be faithful to his wife and treat her with love, that a man care for his family's spiritual and physical needs, that we not lie against our neighbor or cheat him. God's law even promotes a Jubilee release from debts, and this will operate in the Millennium (Ezek. 46:17).

#### **8. Christ will rule IN PEACE (Psa. 72:3, 7, 13-14).**

Peace will reign over the whole earth and there will be no danger or hurt or fear.

*There will be peace in the animal kingdom*, with the wolf lying down with the lamb (Isa. 11). The ferocity within the animal kingdom is part of God's curse because of man's sin, and it will be lifted during the millennial kingdom.

*There will be peace among nations* (Isa. 2:4). In Christ's kingdom there will be peace and safety throughout the earth (Isa. 32:18; 54:14).

But there won't be peace until then. The prophet Isaiah twice warns that there is no peace to the wicked (Isa. 48:22; 57:21). Today's peace movement will end in destruction (1 Th. 5:1-3). The United Nations is supposed to be an instrument of world peace. Outside its New York headquarters is the statue of a gun with its barrel twisted, a symbol for world disarmament, but peace is a pipe dream in this present world. The United Nations is not looking for the Man of Peace, Jesus Christ, but for the Man of Sin who will bring tyranny, waste, and destruction. The wicked nations will soon arm themselves for the battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:10-16).

There is no peace without righteousness. Before man can have peace with man he must have peace with God. The peace movement is a hypocritical movement. Its adherents demand world peace but have no peace in their own hearts and lives and homes. Take the Beatles, for example. Since 2008 Beatles' drummer Ringo Starr has encouraged fans to host a world peace get together at noon on his birthday in their time zones. In 2012 Starr joined fans at the Hard Rock Cafe in Nashville, where they shouted "peace and love," flashed peace signs, and sang the chorus of John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance." The modern peace movement is blind mysticism with no power to change the fundamental problem that has brought turmoil to the earth, that problem being sin. The Beatles sang a lot about peace, but it is hypocritical. The breakup of the band was anything but amicable and they have had nine marriages between the four of them. That doesn't add up to a lot of peace. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

### **9. Christ will rule GLORIOUSLY (Psa. 72:10, 15-16, 19).**

The word "glory" in verse 19 refers to kingly splendor, wealth, beauty, power. Christ will come in glory and sit upon a throne of glory (Mat. 19:28; 25:31). Isaiah describes the "king in his beauty" (Isa. 33:17). The Psalmist sees Christ coming out of ivory palaces, happy, with garments smelling of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, and the queen standing by his right hand clothed in the most precious gold (Psa. 45:8-9). He further sees the great King dwelling in Jerusalem at a time when it is "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth" (Psa. 48:1). This has never been fulfilled. Jerusalem was not the joy of the whole earth even during the height of Solomon's kingdom. Psalm 48:1 will not be fulfilled until Christ establishes His kingdom. See also Isaiah 54:11-12; 60:10-17; 61:6.

The Gentile nations will bring their wealth to Israel to beautify Jerusalem (Isa. 60:10-17).

The Millennial Temple will sit at the top of a mountain north of Jerusalem (Ezek. 43:12). Glorious in composition, it will be filled with Christ's glory (Ezek. 44:4).

Isaiah says that the glory of God will be upon every dwelling in Jerusalem, "a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night" (Isa. 4:5). Even at night the city will be lit up with fiery splendor that will be visible from long distances in the clear millennial air.

From Christ's perspective, the most precious jewels of the kingdom will be the people that He has redeemed by His great sacrifice (Mal. 3:16-17). His delight is with the sons of men (Prov. 8:31).

From Christ's beautiful temple will flow a crystal clear river of water that will flow east and south through the land and heal the desolate places and the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:1-11). On the banks of the river will grow groves of lovely trees whose leaves will be for healing and whose delicious fruit will be for food (Ezek. 47:12). The trees will bear fruit continually. The waters will be filled with a vast assortment of fish and fishermen will fish along the shores of the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:9-10). (Engedi and Eneclain were towns on the Dead Sea.)

The whole world will be glorified as a suitable dwelling place for the Creator. It will exceed Eden. The waste places will become paradise (Isa. 35).

The glories of this present world, which are great, will seem as nothing. I have visited every state of America and 35 other countries. I grew up in Florida where the sunsets are breathtaking. I have lived in the Pacific Northwest, which is a paradise of oceans and rivers and snow-covered mountains. I have traveled the Rocky Mountains from Banff to the Spanish Peaks. I have seen the northern lights and have lived in Nepal with its majestic Himalaya Mountains. I have seen the glories of nearly every Asian country, of Australia and Fiji and Great Britain and Europe and the Middle East and Asia Minor. But the glories of this present world, sitting as it does under God's curse, will seem as nothing in the day when Christ is glorified.

Daniel was accustomed to the glory of two of the greatest kingdoms that have ever existed: Babylon and Medo-Persia. These were the gold and silver kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2 and they would make any nation today look like weak, pathetic, poverty-stricken things. We live in the age of plastic, not of gold. Daniel was accustomed to living in the most glorious of this world's palaces, in Babylon and Shushan, but he collapsed when he saw just one angel (Dan. 10:5-9)! Yet in Christ's kingdom angels in their glory will be everyday sights (Mat. 16:27; 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7).

The glory of Christ's kingdom was fore-viewed on the Mount of Transfiguration when Christ's "face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Mat. 17:2; Luke 9:31).

The glory of Christ's kingdom was fore-viewed by Solomon's kingdom. Jesus spoke of "Solomon in all his glory" (Mat. 6:29). That kingdom was the wisest and richest that has ever existed on earth. Silver was counted as nothing (1 Kings 10:21). Even the shields were made of gold (1 Kings 10:16-20). From far-flung places gold and all sorts of desirable goods were brought to Solomon, which he used to glorify his kingdom (1 Kings 10:10-12, 14-21). When the Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon's kingdom she was amazed and said, "Behold, the half was not told me." She was so shaken by what she witnessed that "there was no more spirit in her" (1 Kings 10:1-7), and she herself was a very wealthy queen who was accustomed to living in the lap of glory and luxury. She was the queen of the great spice kingdom of that day in the land where modern Yemen exists.

The glory of Solomon's kingdom and of every kingdom that has ever existed on this earth will pale in comparison to Christ's kingdom.

### **10. Christ will rule a kingdom filled with PLEASURE (Psa. 72:7, "flourish").**

The word "flourish" refers to every type of prosperity and legitimate pleasure. The Psalmist said, "thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Psa. 36:8), and, "at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psa. 16:11).

The Christ who will rule the world is the God who made Eden for man's delight and pleasure. He is the God who "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). He is the One who came that the redeemed "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

### **11. Christ will rule IN THE MIDST OF WORSHIP (Psa. 72:15).**

The continual worship that will characterize Christ's kingdom is a major theme of prophecy. See, for example, Psalm 66:4; 67:3; 68:32; 97:1; 100:1-2; 117:1-2; 138:4-5; Isaiah 42:10-12.

The Psalms end in a great explosion of praise, which describes the worship that will permeate every aspect of Christ's kingdom. See Psalm 146-150.

All of the false gods and false religions of this present darkness will be destroyed. In Christ's kingdom, if someone tries to preach a false god, he will be put to death (Lev. 20:2-6; 24:15-16; Deut. 13:6-16).

There will be *corporate praise* (Isa. 66:23) and *continual praise* as men learn of God's character, power, works, wisdom, grace (Psa. 145:1-3; Eph. 2:5-7).

*There will be praise in music* (Ezek. 40:44). Many of the Psalms depict this (e.g., Psa. 149:3; 150:3-6). It will be like in the days of David and Solomon, only much more glorious, with godly, gifted, highly trained, well-disciplined priests set apart for worship (1 Chron. 15:16-24, 27-28; 16:4-6; 25:1-7; 2 Chron. 5:12-13; 7:6). The musicians were dedicated to the service of God's house (1 Ch. 25:6). They ministered according to the order of the king (1 Ch. 25:2) and were under the oversight of prophets such as Hemen (1 Ch. 25:5-6). They were appointed specifically to this work (1 Ch. 15:16). They prophesied with harps, psalteries, and cymbals (1 Ch. 25:1), cornets and trumpets (1 Ch. 15:28). David made some of the instruments specifically for the worship of God (2 Ch. 7:6). At times there were 120 trumpeters playing in unison (2 Ch. 5:12). The musical prophets were "instructed in the songs of the LORD" (1 Ch. 25:7). The overseers were "skillful" (1 Ch. 15:22), and the players were "cunning" (1 Ch. 25:7). They excelled (1 Ch. 15:21),

mediocrity being unacceptable. They were arrayed in white linen (2 Ch. 5:12), in contrast to the cheap and profane “dress down” philosophy of contemporary Christian music today. They sang with joy (1 Ch. 15:6). The kingdoms of David and Solomon give a little foretaste of Christ’s kingdom, but it is impossible to fully comprehend how glorious the temple worship will be in that day. The skillful and glorious praise of God will be headquartered in the Millennial Temple and spread throughout the earth.

In that day there will be no carnal mixing of the flesh and the spirit, the world and Christ, in worship music. In Christ’s kingdom the priests will teach the people “the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezek. 44:23).

There will be no satanic influence to hinder the praise in that day. And for those who are resurrected, there will be no sin nature to deal with.

## **12. Christ’s kingdom will be an ACTIVE kingdom (Psa. 72:15-16; Ezek. 46:1 “six working days”).**

God made man to work and explore and learn (Gen. 2:28). That is the purpose of the creation over which man is the head (Gen. 1:27-28).

A lazy life is a wasted life out of God’s will. The book of Proverbs emphasizes how much God hates sluggardism.

We don’t know all of the things that men will do in the kingdom, but we read about mineral works (Psa. 72:15), husbandry (Jer. 32:12-13), agriculture (Mic. 4:3-4), construction (Jer. 31:38-40), real estate commerce (Jer. 32:43-44), teaching God’s Word (Isa. 66:19), and fishing (Ezek. 47:10).

The kingdom will not be a communist state; there will be private ownership of property (Isa. 65:21-22; Micah 4:4). Some have tried to use the situation in the church at Jerusalem in Acts 2:44-45 as evidence that God’s people should practice communism and divide their income equally, but that was a temporary situation and

it was strictly voluntary and not prescribed by God's law. Peter told Ananias that his property was under his own power and that he was not compelled to give it to the church (Acts 5:4). Ananias' sin was not in holding back part of the profit for himself from the sale of his property, but was in lying about the matter and claiming to have given everything to the Lord.

In Christ's kingdom business and commerce will not be based on the old Babylonian model of greed and the selfish pursuit of profit by any means as described in James 5:1-7 and Revelation 18. There will be a focus on contentment and compassion rather than covetousness (Heb. 13:5). The golden rule will reign. Men will be like Boaz who had compassion on the poor (Ruth 2:4-8).

Business will be honest and considerate. Manufacturers will not make cheap junk to sell at a high profit. The deception and greed and manipulation that characterize business in this present world will not be allowed in Christ's kingdom. Profit will be as much for others as for self (Eph. 4:28). All will be done in accordance with God's law and by His will and for His pleasure and glory. Businessmen will be like George Burns, founder of the famous Cunard Line of ocean liners, who believed in putting the glory of God and human safety before profit. He said, "I believe in the power of prayer, but I also believe in doing work well, and subordinating profit and speed and public opinion to safety, comfort, and efficiency."

In Christ's kingdom, the main work will be to learn of God in Christ (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). Man was not created to live for himself but to know God and to walk in fellowship with Him in obedience to His law (Ecc. 12:13). Christ invites men, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Mat. 11:28-29). As the eternal ages progress, we will be ever learning of God's wisdom (Eph. 1:8-9), God's grace (Eph. 2:7), God's love (Eph. 3:17-19), and of every aspect of God's character.

## **Conclusion to the Studies on Christ's Kingdom**

1. The church is an outpost of the coming kingdom. In that day, the New Testament saints will reign with Christ and will administer justice together with the converted Jews (Rev. 5:9-10).



The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), and it is preparing believers for the Lord's earthly kingdom.

By obeying God's Word today as taught in Bible-believing churches, God's people are preparing for their entrance into Christ's kingdom (2 Pet. 1:10-11). Peter does not mean that we gain an entrance into Christ's kingdom by our work. The Bible plainly teaches that salvation is a free gift of God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Peter is saying that by our work in the church today we prove that we are saved and we are laying up rewards for when Christ comes.

We see the same thing in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Paul does not mean that we gain eternal life by doing good works. He is not talking about "gaining" eternal life, but about "laying hold" on it. He is saying that through our service to Christ in this present world, including by our giving, we are laying up treasures in Christ's kingdom. Compare Matthew 6:19-20.

The believer's position in Christ's earthly kingdom will be determined by his service in this present world (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21).

See also the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-26).

The church is preparing us for Christ's kingdom by teaching us to live holy lives (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Pet. 3:10-11), by teaching us to serve God in strict obedience to His Word (2 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 12:28-29), by teaching us that God's commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:2-3), by teaching us to submit to God-ordained authority (Heb. 13:17; Eph. 6:1-3, 6; Rom. 13:1-2), by teaching us to praise God (Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:9), by teaching us to love one another, which is the "royal law" (Jn. 13:34-35; Jam. 2:8; 1 John 3:16-18; 4:20-21), by teaching us to put God first and seek His perfect will (Mat. 6:33; Roman 12:1-2), by teaching us that God judges sin (1 Pet. 4:17), by teaching us to be ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20).

2. The Lord's coming for the church is imminent and could happen at any time.

We need to awake out of sleep and separate ourselves unto God and be ready to stand before Him. Three times in the last book of the Bible, Jesus says, “Behold, I come quickly” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). His coming is not “quick” from man’s perspective, but it is quick by God’s perspective, for to Him a thousand years is as a mere day (2 Pet. 3:8). The reason Christ has waited this long is because He loves souls and wants to save men (2 Pet. 3:9). He delights more in salvation than in judgment, but the time of judgment will come and we must be ready to leave this world at any moment.

Bible prophecy should be a great motivator to walk in God’s perfect will.

## **THE NEW JERUSALEM**

Revelation chapters 21-22 describe the eternal state that will exist after the destruction of this present sin-cursed universe. It is called the new heaven and the new earth.

### **The New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 21:1)**

1. The new heaven and the new earth are established after the destruction of the old creation by fire as described in 2 Peter 3:10-13. When God made the original creation He pronounced it “good” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), but sin entered and it was placed under God’s curse (Gen. 3:17-18; Rom. 8:22). Ultimately God will destroy the original creation and make an entirely new one that is not spotted by sin. He will make all things new.

2. We are not told much about the new heaven and new earth. One thing that is revealed is that there will be no more sea. Following are some possible reasons why:

- a. *The sea causes division.* John was exiled on the Isle of Patmos by means of the sea.

- b. *The sea is restless and tumultuous*, representing wickedness (Isa. 57:20-21), whereas there will be only righteousness and peace in the new heaven and the new earth.
- c. *The sea is a place of depth and mystery*, whereas in the new heaven and the new earth we will know even as we are known and will see God face to face (Rev. 22:4).
- d. *The sea is a place of storm, danger, and destruction*, whereas there will be no such things in the new heaven and the new earth.
- e. *The sea contains our sins* (Mic. 7:19). God has promised to cast our sins into the depths of the sea. Now we see that in the new earth there is no sea. It reminds us of how completely our sins are removed by the blood of Christ.

### **The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2 - 22:5)**

The focus of these chapters is the New Jerusalem, which is the dwelling place of the saints of all ages but which is particularly associated with the Bride of Christ.

1. The city is said to be “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2) and is called “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9). This does not mean that the city itself is Christ’s bride; it means that the city is the dwelling place for His bride. The bride of Christ is the church (Eph. 5:25-32). The Lamb’s wedding is described in Revelation 19:6-9. The New Jerusalem is the bride’s city, but all of the saints of the ages are at home there. Israel will be there, for the names of her 12 tribes are engraved on the gates of the city’s wall (Rev. 21:12). In that day the holy temple of the saints that God has been building through the ages will be revealed (Eph. 2:19-22).

2. The characteristics of the city are as follows:

- a. The New Jerusalem is a holy place (Rev. 21:2).

- (1) God is a holy God and He requires holiness of His people (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7; 21:8). Thirty-one times God is called “the Holy One of Israel” (2 Ki. 19:22; Psa. 71:22). The seraphim continually cry, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:3). Holiness is the absence of sin, and nothing pertaining to sin will be in the New Jerusalem. There will be no fornication, adultery, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, theft, deceit, malignity, whispering, backbiting, despite, pride, boasting, inventing of evil things, disobedience, covenant-breaking, unmercifulness, wrath, strife, sedition, drunkenness, drug abuse, rebellion, tyranny, treachery, lying, dissembling, blasphemy, false witness, or any other unholy thing.
  - (2) Except a sinner be converted, he would never be happy in God’s holy heaven.
- b. The New Jerusalem is a place where God will dwell with His people (Rev. 21:3). Today we live by faith. We cannot see God, and though the Holy Spirit lives in us we are separated from God physically. Faith will become sight in the New Jerusalem. We have longed to see Jesus face to face, to have Him put His arms around us and physically comfort us. That longing will become reality in the New Jerusalem.
  - c. The New Jerusalem is a place where no sorrow or pain exists, where the former things are passed away and all things are new (Rev. 21:4-5).
- (1) This is the wonderful condition for which the saints of all ages have longed since trouble entered the world through man’s fall. Our sorrows and pains in this present world are incalculable, but when we dwell in that city these will be but vague memories, if that. There will not be the slightest tinge of sorrow or sadness there, no pain of any kind, no depression, no sickness or disease, no injury, no old age, separation from loved ones, no confusion or uncertainty, no bullying, no tyranny, no frustration, no mental torment, no longing for that which cannot be

attained, no fear of tomorrow, no pain from yesterday, no failure, no coming short, no fear of what others will or will not do, no doubt, no persecution, no torture, no false accusations, no pain from physical exertion, no pain from heat or cold, no burns, no scrapes, no tearing, no lack, no debt, no fear, no death. There will be no cripple there or blind or deaf or dumb or simple or deformed.

(2) Note that the promise that all things will be made new is accompanied by the solemn promise that “these words are true and faithful.” Nothing is more certain than the promises of God.

- d. The New Jerusalem is a place where the water of life is freely available (Rev. 21:6). The fountain of the water of life will flow literally in the New Jerusalem and the saints can drink freely at their will. Though we do not know the exact benefits of drinking this water, we know that it will be delightful. A fountain is the source of water. From the fountain the water flows forth to offer its life-giving benefits. The fountain of the water of life is God Himself. The river of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). The fountain of life is with Him (Psa. 36:9). From Him flow all of the delightful blessings of eternity. He is the God who has “given us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17), who “shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures” (Psa. 36:8), in whose “presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:11). The Lamb is the One who said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).
- e. The New Jerusalem is a place where the saints shall inherit all things (Rev. 21:7). In this present world the saints, typically, own very little. The bulk of the riches of this world are owned by the unsaved. Through the ages the Lord’s people have “wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb. 11:37). They have been warned about the dangers of riches in this present life and have been instructed that “having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Tim. 6:8-10). But in

the New Jerusalem the saints will own all things and will delight in God's unspeakable glory.

f. The New Jerusalem is a place where no unregenerate sinners will enter (Rev. 21:7-8, 27; 22:15).

(1) Jesus said that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3:3). Sinners have to be forgiven and converted (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

(2) The overcomer is the true believer in Jesus Christ, the born again Christian who shows the reality of salvation in his life as opposed to a nominal Christian (1 John 5:4-5). See the comments under Revelation 2:7 in the Advanced Bible Studies Series course on Revelation.

(3) Specific sins are listed, because in multitudes of cases, the sinner does not trust Christ because his love for sin is greater than his desire to be saved. Once after I had witnessed to a man a few times he asked me what he would have to do about his adultery and dishonesty if he were to trust Christ as Saviour. I told him that the Lord would make him a new creature and give him a desire for holiness and would help him get victory over such sinful things but that it was not God's will for him to continue in his sin. That was the last time he was willing to listen to me, because he loved his sin too much to repent. The rich young ruler went away from Christ sad because he was not willing to repent of his sins of covetousness and self-righteousness.

(4) Any sin can be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ if the sinner will receive Him as Lord and Saviour. "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). "Propitiation" means that the full satisfaction for our sin debts was paid by Jesus on the cross when He suffered in our place.

g. The New Jerusalem is a place of glory (Rev. 21:11, 23).

- (1) *Glory* refers to kingly splendor and wealth (Mat. 6:29; 19:28; 25:31; Jn. 12:41; 17:5, 22, 24; Col. 3:4). It refers to great beauty (Isa. 28:1; 63:1). God's presence is characterized by light and brilliant color and breathtaking beauty.
- (2) The light of the New Jerusalem is "like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:11). The jasper that is used to describe the overall appearance of the city is like our diamond. It is a brilliant clear stone which reflects the light and through which the light passes. The entire city sparkles like a massive diamond.
- (3) The city's source of light is the Lamb (Rev. 21:23). When John saw the resurrected Christ he saw "his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (Rev. 1:16). When Peter, James, and John saw Christ in His majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration, "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Mat. 17:2). That is the glory that will lighten the holy Jerusalem! Since the very light of the holy city is from the Lamb, the occupants will be reminded at every moment that He is the source of their every blessing. The light will shine into every corner and crevice, for there will be no darkness in that city. There will be no need of sleep or of hiding.

h. The New Jerusalem has a wall (Rev. 21:12, 17-18).

- (1) The wall is not there to provide protection but to mark out the boundaries of the city and to act as the entrance thereto.
- (2) The wall is massive. It is 5,368 miles long (surrounding the city on all four sides, each side being 1,342 miles). It is 144 cubits high (Rev. 21:17), which is 216 feet if the cubit is 18 inches (the measure from a man's elbow to the tip of his fingers). The wall, therefore, is much shorter in height than the city, which rises miles above it.

- (3) The wall is very strong and beautiful, being made of jasper (Rev. 21:18). This type of jasper is apparently the same as that which is described in 21:11, which is “clear as crystal.” In this world we might own small pieces of precious stones, but in the New Jerusalem thousands of miles of high walls are made from it! The city behind the wall is readily visible through the clear stone.
- (4) The wall has 12 foundations, each garnished with 12 types of precious stones (Rev. 21:14, 19-20). Obviously they are exceedingly beautiful, bathed in the light of the glory of God. “Though the precise colors of these stones in some cases are not certain, the general picture here described by John is one of unmistakable beauty, designed to reflect the glory of God in a spectrum of brilliant color. ... The city is undoubtedly far more beautiful to the eye than anything that man has ever been able to create, and it reflects not only the infinite wisdom and power of God but also His grace as extended to the objects of His salvation” (John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 1966).
- (5) The foundations of the wall contain the names of the 12 apostles (Rev. 21:14). This proves that there are only 12 apostles for all eternity and disproves any doctrine of apostolic succession or the continuation of the apostolic office throughout the church age. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the Chief Corner Stone (Eph. 2:20). The apostles and prophets laid a solid foundation by completing the New Testament Scriptures under divine inspiration.
- (6) The wall has 12 gates (Rev. 21:12-13, 21, 25).
- An angel stands at each gate (Rev. 21:12). These obedient angels are apparently tasked with sentry duty, such as that performed by British soldiers outside of Windsor Castle in London.



- The 12 gates contain the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12). The doctrine of replacement theology, whereby the “church” is said to have assimilated Israel’s covenants, is shown to be heresy. Israel in the form of her 12 tribes continues to exist in the New Jerusalem. The church continues to exist, as well, as a separate entity from Israel, though intimately associated with her, as depicted by the names of the 12 apostles in the foundations of the wall.
- There are three gates on each side: east, west, north, and south (Rev. 21:13, 21, 25). That the gates face in every direction remind us that God is saving people from all corners of the earth.
- Each gate is made of a single pearl, which in the natural realm are the result of irritation on the inside of an oyster and thus speaks of Christ’s suffering for our sins. “To protect the pearl oyster’s tissue from the foreign body, the cells of the pearl sack secrete layer upon layer of a substance called nacre. Made of minerals and proteins, nacre (also called *mother-of-pearl*) is the same material that makes up a pearl oyster’s shell. Eventually this results in a natural pearl” (“Making Pearls,” the Chicago Field Museum’s web site). The pearly gates of the New Jerusalem also remind us of the “pearl of great price,” which is the church that Jesus purchased with His blood (Mat. 13:45-46). A perfect pearl is very lovely and with the light of God’s glory striking it, what a sight these gates must be!
- Through the gates the nations that are saved will bring their goods (Rev. 21:24, 26). Apparently there will continue to be nations throughout eternity. In this present age there are “the saved of the nations,” referring to the fact that there is a minority of saved people within the majority of unsaved; but in the new earth there are “the nations of the saved,” referring to the fact that in that day all will be saved. “These are the redeemed gentile nations ... they are redeemed after the church is removed from the earth (or before the church came into existence). They

come as visitors to the city. They come as worshipers” (J. Vernon McGee).

- The gates will never be shut (Rev. 21:25). There will be no need to shut the gates to protect the people from enemies, for there will be none, and there will be no need to shut the gates to keep the people locked up, for they will be perfectly free. Perhaps the saints will leave the city at times to travel to other places on the new earth and possibly elsewhere, but we are not told of that.
- i. The New Jerusalem is a massive city (Rev. 21:16). The city is apparently a cube that is 12,000 furlongs wide, long, and high (Rev. 21:16). (Some commentators have theorized that it is a pyramid or a sphere, but we do not agree with this, seeing nothing in the Bible’s description to support it.) A furlong being 582 feet, this means that the city is a cube of 1,342 miles (2,160 kilometers). If the city were placed in the United States it would cover the eastern half of the nation, from Maine to Florida and from the Atlantic coast to Colorado, and would also rise up 1,342 miles above sea level! It is larger than the moon.
- j. The New Jerusalem is made of gold (Rev. 21:18). The city is made of pure gold like unto clear glass (Rev. 21:18). This an amazing type of gold that is not known in this present world and is obviously more lovely than anything found here, but it is described as gold nonetheless. This gold is transparent and the light of God’s glory will reflect from it and shine through it to every part of the city. Those who live for the self-willed pursuit of gold in this life will have no gold in the next, but those who renounce the pursuit of gold as a figure of sinful-selfish living as the objective of life here in repentance and faith will be surrounded by gold in the next (1 Tim. 6:6-12; Jam. 4:1-3).
- k. The New Jerusalem has a street (Rev. 21:21). It is made of pure gold, as it were transparent glass. The saints shall indeed walk on gold! The street is described as “singular,” which apparently means that one street runs

throughout the city. Or it could be that the term “street” here is generic and refers to all of the streets in the city.

- l. The New Jerusalem has no temple (Rev. 21:22). “Deity will then have come forth from behind all veils, all mediating sacraments, all previous barriers and hidings because of the infirmities of the flesh or the weaknesses of undeveloped spirituality. Himself will be the Temple thereof. The glorious worshippers there hold direct communion with his manifested glory, which encompasses them and all their city alike. As consecrated high priests they will then have come into the holiest of all, into the very cloud of God’s overshadowing glory, which is at once their covering, their Temple, their God” (Joseph Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on Revelation*, 1900).
- m. The New Jerusalem has no night (Rev. 21:25). Night stands for such things as darkness, sin, crime, hiding, suffering, fear, anxiety, uncertainty. There will be no night there. “Oh, the nights of darkness and of anguish that many of God’s beloved people have known in this poor world! The day will bring the glad fruition of all of our hopes, and, in the full blessing of that uncreated light, we shall reign in light through the ages of ages--at home in the city of God” (Harry Ironside, *Revelation*).
- n. The New Jerusalem has a river (Rev. 22:1).
  - (1) The river of the water of life flows through the city, emanating from God’s throne, perhaps flowing through each level of the city in some manner as the water flowed to every level of the ancient hanging gardens of Babylon.
  - (2) The water is pure, in contrast to the water in this present world, which is rarely pure and never perfectly pure.
  - (3) The water is crystal clear. Nothing is hidden; there are no dark recesses, no secrets. Everything in the city is clear and bright; the city itself and the wall (Rev. 21:18) and the street (Rev. 21:21).

o. The New Jerusalem has trees (Rev. 22:2).

- (1) In the midst of the street and on the banks of the river stands the tree of life. This apparently refers to the tree of life not as a single tree but as a species of tree, and there are many specimens of this tree beautifying the city. Few things are more lovely than a magnificent tree, and certainly no tree is as magnificent as the tree of life. The tree itself, with its glorious bark and habit and leaves and fruit, is doubtless breathtakingly lovely, and its setting beside the crystal clear flowing river will be perfectly fitting, designed by the same God who made the beautiful rivers and streams and dales of this world. What a lovely place is the New Jerusalem! It is paradise regained. It is the Garden of Eden and yet more wonderful, for there is no restriction in this eternal garden as there was in that first garden and there is no deceiver lurking anywhere. The occupants of the New Jerusalem can freely partake of anything in its realm.
- (2) The tree bears 12 manner of fruit. It is thus obvious that the saints will continue to eat and drink in the New Jerusalem and throughout eternity. Doubtless the taste of this tree's fruit will be glorious, and there will be 12 varieties to enjoy. Jesus ate after His resurrection (Lk. 24:42) and spoke of His disciples eating in the kingdom of God after their resurrection (Lk. 22:3). The angels ate Abraham's food (Gen. 18:6-8).
- (3) The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. This assumes that the nations outside of the city will need healing (Rev. 21:24, 26). Apparently there will be natural men living then and bearing children and those children will be healed by the leaves of the tree of life. They won't be healed in the sense of the healing of sickness, because we are told that there is no sorrow, crying, or pain there (Rev. 21:4). The healing is not of sickness but possibly of mortality itself. "The Greek word for healing is a word where we get the English 'therapeutic.' It may have the connotation of health and benefit, instead of healing [in the sense of a] cure. The idea of preserving rather than restoring is

indicated” (Paul Lee Tan, *A Pictorial Guide to Bible Prophecy*). By this means, it would seem, the nations will have eternal life. In Adam and Eve’s case, it was to keep this from happening in their sinful state that the Lord drove them from the Garden of Eden and posted a cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24). In the New Jerusalem the nations will partake of this marvelous tree.

- p. The New Jerusalem is a place where there is no curse (Rev. 22:3). The curse came because of Adam’s sin (Gen. 3:14, 17). It will be partly lifted during the Millennium with the desert blossoming as the rose and the wolf lying down with the lamb (Isa. 35:1; 11:6), but the curse will be completely lifted in the New Jerusalem. The cause of the curse is sin, and in the New Jerusalem there is no sin.
  
- q. The New Jerusalem is where the throne of God and of the Lamb is located (Rev. 22:3).
  - (1) This is irrefutable evidence that Jesus is God. Here God and the Lamb are sitting together in one throne, which speaks of the Father and Son of the Trinity.
  - (2) God’s glorious throne is described in some detail in Ezekiel 1:26-28 and Revelation 4.
  
- r. The New Jerusalem is a place where God’s servants shall know and serve him (Rev. 22:3-5).
  - (1) For the believer, this is the focus and joy of the New Jerusalem. We shall delight in the lovely environs, but seeing God’s face and knowing Him and serving Him--that will be the blessing from which all other blessings flow. The face of God is Jesus Christ, of course (2 Cor. 4:6). In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9).

- (2) Heaven is not a place of inactivity, a place where saints sit on clouds lazily strumming harps. It is a place of joyous, holy service. What that service will consist of in the New Jerusalem we are not told. “Ours will be a service without cessation, without weariness, without flagging energy. In joy and freedom our service then will be one of pure love; without a flaw, and without one legal thought. How varied the character of service! How gladly the whole being enters upon an eternal life of service to Him” (Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, c. 1930).
- s. The New Jerusalem is an eternal place (Rev. 22:5). We see the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem and those living in it, knowing and serving God, and that is where the Bible’s prophecies end. We do know, though, that this condition is eternal and nothing will enter in to hinder or spoil it. The God who knows the beginning from the end has told us this. Never again will sin rear its ugly head. Never again will the devil be loosed to work his damnable deeds. Never again will the creation be plunged into darkness. Hallelujah!

# Review Questions on the Future Events

## REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE APOSTASY

1. What is “apostasy”?
2. How do we know that apostasy refers to professing Christians and not to unbelievers in the world?
3. Why do apostates turn away their ears from the truth?
4. What verse says the devil blinds the minds of them which believe not?
5. What verse says that evil men and seducers will grow worse and worse?
6. What do the parables of Matthew 13 describe?
7. Why are these parables called “the mysteries of the kingdom of God”?
8. What prophecy says Israel will abide many days without a king and without a sacrifice but that afterward Israel will return to God?
9. What passage says Israel will be blinded until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in?
10. What is the message of the parable of the mustard seed?
11. What is the message of the parable of the hidden leaven?
12. In what Gospel and what two chapters did Jesus warn about the coming of false prophets?
13. In what chapter of Acts did Paul warn about the coming of false teachers?
14. How many of the New Testament Epistles warn about false teachers and apostasy?
15. What chapter of the Bible describes the harlot “church” that rules on earth with the antichrist?
16. What verse says that some of the Christians in the first churches were spiritual adulterers who loved the world?
17. What is the doctrine of Balaam and Jezebel?
18. What are two ways that the harlot “church” is being built today?
19. When will the harlot “church” take its final form?
20. Where is the headquarters of the harlot “church”?
21. What are three blasphemies of the harlot “church”?
22. Martin Luther said, “If there is a hell, \_\_\_\_\_ is built over it.”

23. What happened at Babel in man's early history?
24. What are four ways to have victory in days of apostasy?
25. What does the Bible mean when it says false teaching is like leaven?
26. What did the devil attack in the Garden of Eden?
27. What does "holy Scripture" mean?
28. Why do churches become apostate if they aren't careful about receiving members?

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE RAPTURE**

1. What are the two major passages that describe the Rapture? (give the books and chapters)
2. Whom did the Spirit of God catch up in the book of Acts?
3. What two things will happen at the Rapture?
4. What passage says that the Rapture will occur as a thief in the night?
5. How do we know that the dead in Christ are not sleeping in the grave?
6. What is the "day of the Lord"?
7. The day of the Lord will come for destruction upon whom?
8. How is the Rapture different from Christ's return in glory?
9. What does the Bible mean in 1 Thessalonians 5 when it says God has not appointed us to wrath?
10. How can we have peace in the church?
11. What does Paul mean when he says the Rapture is a mystery?
12. What does "incorruptible" mean?
13. What does "immortal" mean?
14. What does Paul mean when he says the Rapture will occur at the "last trump"?
15. What are the three views on the timing of the Rapture?
16. What verse says the early believers were waiting for the Lord to come?
17. What is one verse each from Paul's writings, from James' writings, and from Peter's writings that teach that the Rapture of church-age saints is imminent.
18. What verse says the Tribulation is "the time of Jacob's trouble"?
19. What verse says the Tribulation is "the time of the heathen"?
20. Who are "the heathen"?



21. What are three ways that the book of Revelation shows that the church is not on earth during the Tribulation?
22. What did the wearing of sackcloth signify?
23. Why do New Testament believers not wear sackcloth?
24. How do we know that the woman depicted in Revelation 12 is Israel?
25. Why do the enemies of the pre-tribulation Rapture refer to this doctrine as the “eschatology of abandonment” and “escape theology”?
26. What are three reasons why it is important to believe in the imminent return of Christ?

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE TRIBULATION**

1. What is the Great Tribulation?
2. What are three verses that speak of the Great Tribulation?
3. What are four other names that the Bible uses for the Great Tribulation?
4. In Matthew 24, Jesus is answering what question?
5. What are the two major parts of the Tribulation?
6. Where in the Bible is the prophecy of Daniel’s 70 Weeks?
7. What happened during the first 69 weeks or 483 years of Daniel’s 70 Weeks?
8. What does Daniel mean when he says the Messiah was “cut off, but not for himself”?
9. Who were the people who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple after Christ rose from the dead and went back to heaven?
10. What are the things that will happen during the last week of Daniel’s 70th week?
11. What is “the abomination of desolation”?
12. According to Matthew 24, what are the seven major things that will happen during the Tribulation?
13. What are four false christs that are preached today?
14. If someone can do miracles, does that mean he is of God?
15. How do we know that the devil can do miracles?
16. What is the gospel of the kingdom?
17. When was it first preached?
18. What is the holy place where the antichrist will stand?

19. What passage says that two-thirds of the Jews will perish during the Tribulation?
20. What will happen to the rest of the Jews?
21. What are four of the judgments that will fall on the world during the Great Tribulation?
22. Why will the nations mourn when they see Christ returning?
23. Where is the valley of Megiddo?
24. What will happen there in the future?
25. How do we know that the Tribulation is not something that pertains to the church?

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE ANTICHRIST**

1. What verse speaks of antichrists plural and antichrist singular?
2. What does “antichristS” refer to?
3. What verse speaks of “doctrines of devils”?
4. In what verse did Paul warn of false christs, false gospels, and false spirits?
5. What verse warns us not to believe every spirit?
6. What is “the mystery of iniquity”?
7. Who is restraining the mystery of iniquity?
8. For what special purpose did the Spirit of God come at Pentecost?
9. What prophet said that the timing of the coming of the antichrist is “appointed” and “determined” by God?
10. What are five other names that the Bible gives to the antichrist?
11. What will be the nationality of the antichrist?
12. Where does the Bible teach the antichrist’s nationality?
13. How long will the antichrist’s reign last altogether?
14. How does it begin?
15. What happens at the half-way point of his reign?
16. How widely will the antichrist rule?
17. What is the source of the antichrist’s power?
18. The antichrist will speak great things against whom?
19. The antichrist’s kingdom will be a composite of what three ancient kingdoms?

20. What amazing thing will happen to the antichrist to cause the world to be amazed?
21. What miracles will the antichrist's false prophet perform?
22. What did the Jews demand of Jesus?
23. What did Jesus say about those who demand a sign?
24. What three passages describe the satanic miracles during the time of the antichrist?
25. What will happen to those who refuse to put on the antichrist's mark?
26. Who will occupy the Third Temple?
27. Who built the first two Jewish temples?
28. What organization is preparing the articles for the Third Temple?
29. What are three reasons why we know that the Jews are looking for the antichrist rather than the true Messiah?
30. What is the mysterious origin of the antichrist?
31. What is the end of the antichrist?
32. What is the "abomination of desolation"?
33. What historical figure previewed the abomination of desolation?

### **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE CONVERSION OF ISRAEL**

1. What percentage of the Jews will be converted during the Tribulation?
2. What verse describes this percentage?
3. When will the conversion of the Jewish remnant occur?
4. What passage teaches that salvation has always been by grace, both before and during the law of Moses?
5. Why will the Jews mourn greatly when they are converted?
6. Why did the Jews mourn King Josiah?
7. Who was Shimei?

### **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON**

1. What are four major Old Testament Bible passages that describe the Battle of Armageddon?
2. What is a major New Testament passage that describes this Battle?

3. The Battle of Armageddon extends over a \_\_\_\_\_ territory and involves a \_\_\_\_\_ of events.
4. The full length of the Battle is how long?
5. What is the number of soldiers who will come from the east to attack Israel?
6. What is the meaning of “Armageddon”?
7. It is also known as the valley of \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Where is this valley located in Israel?
9. During the past 4,000 years, how many battles have been fought in this valley?
10. What three Jewish kings died during battles in this valley?
11. Where was ancient Edom located?
12. What modern nation occupies this territory today?
13. Why does Isaiah 63 say Christ’s garments are red?
14. What does Isaiah 63 mean when it says Christ will tread the winepress?
15. What passage in Revelation explains the meaning of treading the winepress?
16. Where is the valley of Jehoshaphat probably located?
17. What verse says Jerusalem is the city of the great God?
18. What will happen when the antichrist’s armies surround Jerusalem at the end of the Tribulation?
19. In the day of the Lord, \_\_\_\_\_ will be exalted and \_\_\_\_\_ will be humbled.

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE KINGDOM**

1. What is a theocracy?
2. Why does prophecy speak of governments as mountains and hills?
3. What will be the law of the world in Christ’s kingdom?
4. The educational system of the world will be dedicated to teaching what?
5. What Psalm says that the creation speaks of God?
6. Why is the animal world filled with pain and death?
7. How will it be possible in Christ’s kingdom that the wolf will lie down with the lamb?
8. What verse says the devil blinds the minds of those who do not believe?
9. What does the Bible mean when it says that Jesus is the “root of Jesse”?
10. What is an “ensign”?
11. The prophecies quoted in Romans 9:8-12 refer to what two periods?

12. Where is Carmel located in Israel?
13. What verse speaks of the “powers of the world to come”?
14. What will happen to man’s normal lifespan during Christ’s kingdom?
15. What will be the four types of citizens in Christ’s kingdom?
16. According to Isaiah, what will happen to sorrow and sighing in Christ’s kingdom?
17. Christ will rule over how many nations of the world?
18. What does the Bible mean when it says the cooking pots will be holy in Christ’s kingdom?
19. What verse says that all the treasures of wisdom are hid in Christ?
20. What verse says Christ (as wisdom incarnate) is the author of “witty inventions”?
21. What kind of ruler was Samuel?
22. What does ruling with “a rod of iron” mean?
23. How does Christ’s Sermon on the Mount look forward to the kingdom?
24. What verse says that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of man is set to do evil?
25. What does the name “Jesus” mean?
26. What verse says God’s commandments are not grievous?
27. What are the two great commandments of God’s law?
28. What prophet said there is no peace to the wicked?
29. What passage says that when the world cries, peace, peace, then sudden destruction will come?
30. What prophet calls upon the nations to beat their plows into swords?
31. What does the Bible mean when it says Christ will sit on a throne of glory?
32. What Psalm describes the ivory palaces of Christ’s kingdom?
33. When will Jerusalem be the joy of the whole earth?
34. In what direction will the river flow when it comes out of Christ’s temple?
35. How was Christ’s kingdom fore-viewed on the Mt. of Transfiguration?
36. How did the Queen of Sheba react to seeing Solomon’s kingdom?
37. What verse says God gives us richly all things to enjoy?
38. What are the two main chapters in the Old Testament that describe the musical worship under David and Solomon?

39. What are three characteristics of the temple music in the days of David and Solomon?
40. How do we know that men will not sit around and be lazy in Christ's kingdom?
41. How do we know that Christ's kingdom will not be a communist state?
42. How do we know that Acts 2:44-45 is not describing communism in the church?
43. What will be the main work in Christ's kingdom?
44. What verse says that God has made New Testament believers kings and priests and we shall reign with Christ on earth?
45. What does 2 Peter 1:10-11 mean?
46. What does Paul mean in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 when he says that by good works we lay up in store for the future?
47. In what book and chapter did Jesus instruct us to lay up treasures in heaven?
48. Where did Jesus promise that the overcomer will rule over the nations?
49. What are four ways that the church is preparing God's people for Christ's kingdom?

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH**

1. When will the new heaven and new earth be established?
2. What passage says that the church is Christ's bride?
3. What passage describes the wedding of the Lamb?
4. Why would sinners be unhappy in the New Jerusalem if they weren't converted?
5. What are five things that will not be in the New Jerusalem?
6. From where does the river of the water of life flow?
7. What must happen to a sinner before he can live in the New Jerusalem?
8. What does "glory" refer to?
9. What precious stone is like the jasper?
10. How high is the wall around the New Jerusalem?
11. How many gates does the city have?
12. The foundations of the wall contain whose names?
13. The gates of the city contain whose names?
14. Of what substance is each made of?
15. Who will come in and out of the gates?

16. How often will the gates be shut?
17. What shape is the New Jerusalem?
18. How big is the New Jerusalem?
19. Of what substance is the New Jerusalem made?
20. How many types of fruit does the tree of life bear?
21. The leaves of the tree of life are for what?
22. When and why was God's creation cursed?
23. When will the curse be partially lifted?
24. When will the curse be completely lifted from the creation?

# The Resurrections and the Judgments

*MEMORY VERSES:* Jeremiah 23:29; John 12:48; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 15:22-23; Ephesians 2:5-6; 1 John 5:4; Revelation 20:10, 12

## THE RESURRECTIONS

### Christ's Resurrection

The first resurrection was that of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:20). The Old Testament feast of first fruits depicted Christ's resurrection as the first fruit from the dead (Lev. 23:9-14). This feast occurred at the beginning of the harvest when the very first part of the crop became ripe. "Every Israelite understood that figure. The days of planting and the days of cultivation had gone by, the summer was ending, the harvest days just beginning, and the Israelite went out in his field and saw a fast ripening sheaf. He plucked it and presented it to the Lord in the temple or at the Tabernacle gate as the firstfruits, the earnest of the coming harvest, and by-and-by when a few more days or weeks had gone by, he went back to that field and the ripened grain was everywhere, but the great harvest was like the sheaf of the firstfruits, it was the same in character, and so our Lord Jesus is the firstfruits of resurrection" (Ironsides).

(For a study on the resurrection body see the *Advanced Bible Studies Series* course on 1 Corinthians, available from Way of Life.)

### Spiritual Resurrection

1. This occurs when a person is born into God's family by faith in Christ's blood. The believer is raised spiritually with Christ and seated with Him at the right hand of God in heaven (Eph. 2:4-6).



2. Baptism signifies this resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4). When the believer is placed under the water and lifted out of the water, it is a picture of dying with Jesus and being raised to new life in Jesus.

3. This spiritual resurrection is not the fulfillment of the physical resurrection but is the promise and guarantee of it (Rom. 8:9-11, 23-25). As surely as there is a spiritual resurrection for the believer, there is also a physical one.

## **Future Resurrections**

There will not be one general resurrection, as some have erroneously taught. 1 Corinthians 15:23 says there are groups of resurrections. Daniel 12:13 says the resurrection will be in “lots.”

There are at least three future resurrections spoken of in the Bible.

### **1. The resurrection of church age believers at the Rapture (1 Th. 4:13-17)**

We have dealt with this under the section on future prophetic events.

### **2. The resurrection of the redeemed of Israel and of other Old Testament saints at the coming of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6)**

- a. The first resurrection includes New Testament saints that are raised before the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17) as well as Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints that are raised when Christ returns to establish His kingdom (Dan. 12:2-3; Revelation 20:5)
- b. Those who participate in the first resurrection are blessed and holy (Rev. 20:6). This is a description of their salvation. They are blessed and holy in Christ. For this reason they are not subject to eternal judgment.
- c. They are also priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him (Rev. 20:6). Their reign will have both a political and religious aspect. We know

that the church-age saints are priests and kings (1 Pet. 2:9), but in Revelation 20:6 we see all of the saints of the ages described in this manner. Though the church has a special relationship to Christ as His Bride and has a special part in His kingdom and a special place in the New Jerusalem, it is but one group of the saved and all of the saved are blessed and holy, priests and kings, and children of God.

### **3. The resurrection of the unsaved dead at the Great White Throne following the Millennium (Rev. 20:5-15)**

- a. This is the second resurrection and the second death. The first resurrection was that of the saved, while the second is that of the unsaved. The first death is the separation of the spirit from the body, while the second is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire.
- b. Currently, the unsaved dead reside in hell where they go immediately after death. In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus plainly taught what happens when people die today. This is not a parable. Jesus named the name of the poor man and Abraham, which He never did in parables. The poor man, who was a believer, went immediately to heaven when he died, but the rich man, who was unsaved, went immediately to hell. After the Millennium, hell will deliver up the dead to be judged at God's throne (Rev. 20:13).

## **THE JUDGMENTS**

Every man is accountable to God for his life and every man will stand before God to be judged. All judgment has been given to Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:22; Acts 17:30-31).

Just as there are different groups of resurrections, there are also different judgments. Before God, all men are not in the same position and they are not grouped together in one general judgment. In a broad sense, men are divided into the saved and the unsaved (1 Jn. 5:12, 19; Jn. 17:6-9). The Bible speaks also of three groups of men in the world today: Jews, Gentiles, and the Church (1 Co. 10:32).

## Three Future Judgments

### 1. The Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Rom. 14:10-12).

#### a. The purpose of the judgment seat of Christ

(1) It is for Christians, not the unsaved (1 Co. 3:1, 11-12). The teaching of the judgment seat of Christ in 1 Corinthians 3 is addressed to believers. It is addressed to those who are “brethren” and who are “in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1). It is addressed to those who have built their lives upon the eternal foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). The genuine Christian life can consist of gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, stubble, but if it is built on the foundation of faith in Christ, it is sure. The believer can fall *on* the foundation, but he cannot fall off the foundation! He can build a shabby structure on the foundation in this present life, but he cannot render the foundation ineffective. This is because salvation is a free gift that was purchased in full by Christ through His atonement on Calvary.

(2) It is to examine the believer’s service, not to determine his salvation (1 Co. 3:8). The believer is judged as a son and an heir (Ga. 4:6-7). The believer’s judgment is not for punishment, but is to manifest his service for reward or loss of reward. It is the judgment of a son in the family business. If a son is lazy and doesn’t work properly in the father’s business, he is still a son and is still loved by the father, but he is not rewarded as the good son is rewarded.

b. The fire at the judgment seat of Christ -- The fire that shall try the believer’s work is the Word of God (Jer. 23:29; Jn. 12:48). We don’t have to wait until eternity to know God’s will. He has revealed this in the Scriptures, and it is therefore imperative that we study it diligently (2 Tim. 2:15), and sit faithfully under the sound of its preaching, and obey it implicitly.

c. The materials tested at the judgment seat of Christ

Paul poetically describes two types of Christian lives: *wood, hay, stubble*, and *gold, silver, precious stones*.

- (1) The “wood, hay, and stubble” are associated with that which is of this world, temporal, perishable. The “wood, hay, stubble” type of Christian life is a lazy, carnal, unfaithful Christian life. It is a picture of a Christian who serves himself more than Christ, who puts his own will and pleasure ahead of Christ’s, who neglects the Lord’s great Harvest for his own selfish pursuits.
- (2) The “gold, silver, and precious stones” denote that which is of God, that which is imperishable and thus has eternal value. The “gold, silver, precious stones” type of Christian life is an obedient Christian life; it is a Christian life that is lived with eternity in mind; it is a Christian life that seeks those things in life that have eternal value rather than the cheap things of the world; is a Christian life that is lived in fellowship with Christ.
- (3) We see that it is not the size of one’s Christian labor, but its value before God that is important. It is possible to build a large and impressive structure out of wood, but when touched by fire it will quickly be reduced to ashes. Likewise, it is possible to live a Christian life and build a Christian ministry that impresses men but which has little or no value before God. Jesus described those who will do many wonderful works, but they do not even know Christ personally (Matthew 7:22-23). The church at Sardis had a name that it lived, but in reality it was dead (Rev. 3:1). The church at Ephesus was an impressive church in many ways and Jesus Himself praised it for many things (Rev. 2:1-3, 6), but the church had left its first love (Revelation 2:4-5). It was still a gold, silver, precious stones type of church at that point in time, but the seeds of spiritual destruction had been sown through its loss of passion for Christ and it was on its way to wood, hay, and stubble. Some of the things that are “gold, silver, and precious stones” would be as follows:

Seeking God (Heb. 11:6; Pr. 8:34-35)  
Being filled with the Spirit (Ep. 5:18)  
Dying to self for Christ's sake (Mk. 10:29)  
Yielding one's life to Christ and pursuing His perfect will (Romans 12:1-2)  
Being pure in spirit and body (2 Cor. 7:1)  
Being a loving, providing husband (Ep. 5:25; 1 Ti. 5:8)  
Being a submissive, serving wife (Ep. 5:22; Tit. 2:4)  
Being an obedient child (Ep. 6:1)  
Gospel preaching and world evangelization (Mk. 16:15)  
Training children in the way of God (Pr. 22:6)  
Faithful church membership (Ac. 2:42; 1 Ti. 3:15; He. 10:25; 13:17)  
Approving excellent things in one's Christian life (Ph. 1:10)  
Separating from the evil things of the world (Ephesians 5:11; 1 John 2:15-17)  
Separating from false teachers (Romans 16:17)

d. The loss at the judgment seat of Christ

- (1) The loss will NOT be salvation (1 Cor. 3:15, "but he himself shall be saved"). Salvation is not gained through faithful service, but through faith in the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:24 - 4:8; Eph. 2:8-9). For the Christian, God's wrath was poured out upon the Saviour on the cross, and he will never be condemned (Jn. 3:18, 36).
- (2) The loss will be shame and loss of crowns (Prov. 10:5; 1 John 2:28; 2 John 8; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). No one who appears at this judgment will lose his salvation for poor Christian service; but he WILL lose rewards and suffer shame.

e. The grace displayed at the judgment seat of Christ

It is God's nature to be gracious (Psa. 103:8-14), and His marvelous, free grace in Jesus Christ will be manifest in the believer's judgment.

“In the counsels of God I am elect before the foundation of the world; hence I think that my own history will be detailed before the judgment seat, and, parallel with it, the history of the grace and of the mercy of God toward me. The why and the how we did this or that will be manifested then. For us the scene will be declarative, not judicial. We are not in the flesh before God; in His eyes, by His grace, we are dead. But then, if we have walked according to the flesh, we must see how we lost in blessing thereby, and what loss we have incurred. On the other hand, the ways of God towards us, all ways of wisdom, of mercy, and of grace, will be perfectly known and understood by us for the first time” (J.N. Darby).

Faith is the victory that overcomes (1 John 5:4). The great heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 were only frail men and women, and it is by God’s grace that they are listed as people of faith. Noah got drunk. Abraham doubted the promise of God at one point and laughed; he also lied about his wife. Sarah, too, laughed at God’s promise at one point. Jacob was a tricky man by nature, always trying to manipulate people and situations. Moses got angry and disobeyed God in smiting the rock and could not go into the promised land. Gideon made an idol. Barak was too weak to lead the battle himself and had to follow a woman. Samson was immoral. Jephthah made a foolish vow and possibly sacrificed his own daughter. David committed adultery and had a man killed in his attempt to hide his sin. Samuel did not raise his sons properly and they became corrupt judges. The heroes of the faith were only weak people who believed in God, and in each case, God’s grace was sufficient to cover their sins and to reward them for their faith and service.

f. The motivation of the judgment seat of Christ -- The judgment seat of Christ is one of the greatest motivators in the Christian life.

- (1) It should motivate the Christian to walk in the Spirit (1 Co. 3:1-3).
- (2) It should motivate the Christian to be busy (1 Co. 3:9-10).
- (3) It should motivate the Christian to be faithful (1 Co. 4:2-4).

## 2. The Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46)

- a. When the Lord returns, He will establish His kingdom in Israel and will rule the world. At that time He will judge the Gentile nations.
- b. The basis of the judgment is how the nations treated the Jews during the Tribulation. See Joel 3:1-8.
  - (1) The judgment is based on God's promise to Abraham, that He would bless them that bless him and curse them that curse him (Gen. 12:1-3). This was emphasized by the prophets (e.g., Jeremiah 48:25-27; Ezekiel 25:2-3, 12, 15; 26:2; 35:5, 12-15; Obadiah 10-14).
  - (2) This is evident by Jesus' words in Matthew 25:40. "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these MY BRETHREN, ye have done it unto me." Christ's brethren don't consist of all people indiscriminately. In this church age His brethren are those who are saved (Rom. 8:29). We become children of God through faith in Christ (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26). In the Great Tribulation, Jesus' people on earth will be the Jews who receive Him as their Messiah and those who are converted through their preaching. When Jesus says, "I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not" (Mat. 25:42-43), He is referring to the persecuted Jews and the Jewish proselytes of the Tribulation period.
  - (3) This is evident in the book of Revelation. After chapter three, we don't see the churches on earth. The promise to the church of Philadelphia and to every other true New Testament church that keeps God's Word (Rev. 3:10) will be fulfilled when the New Testament saints are taken away at the Rapture. During the Tribulation, God will regenerate Israel and 144,000 Jewish evangelists will preach the gospel of the kingdom and announce the soon coming of Christ. As a result, multitudes will be saved

out of every nation and tongue (Revelation 7). Further, the two Jewish witnesses will preach in Jerusalem for three and a half years and perform miracles (Revelation 11:1-6). This same period is described by Jesus in Matthew 24:9-14. Thus, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world during the Tribulation in the midst of great persecution and hatred. The gospel of the kingdom is the gospel that Jesus preached when He presented Himself to Israel as the Messiah. Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat. 3:2; 4:17). This was the announcement of the kingdom promised to David’s Son (Isaiah 9:6-7). The Jews rejected their Messiah and His kingdom (John 1:11; 19:15), and He warned them that the kingdom would be taken from them because of their rebellion and given to another (Mat. 21:42-26). Jesus came unto His own people, Israel, and was rejected (John 1:11-12), and this was prophesied in Scripture (e.g., Isaiah 53:3). He then turned from Israel and said, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). In this present church age Christ is calling out a people for His name from among the Gentiles while Israel is blinded, but when this dispensation is finished God will fulfill His covenants with Israel (Romans 11:25-27). At the end of the first three and a half years of the Tribulation the antichrist will come to power and reign over the earth with cruelty (Rev. 13:15-18). He will overcome the Jewish evangelists in Jerusalem and they will die, and after three and a half days they will be raised up and ascend to heaven (Rev. 11:7-12). After this, the antichrist will overcome Israel (Rev. 13:7-10) and the remnant will flee into the wilderness where they will be protected by God (Rev. 12:12-17). In Daniel, the antichrist is called the little horn and a king of fierce countenance and a vile king, and we are told that he will overcome Israel (Dan. 7:21-25; 8:23-25; 11:32-34). The people of the earth will see these things and will have a choice of whether to help the Jews or curse them, similar to the choice they had during World War II under Hitler’s regime, and at the end of the Tribulation Jesus will judge the people of the nations on that basis.



### 3. The Great White Throne Judgment

- a. Its color (Rev. 20:11) -- White signifies holiness and righteousness. This is God's throne of holy judgment against all sin. There is no rainbow of promise as there was in Revelation 4. There is no grace, no mercy, no covenant of hope. In contrast to the believer, who comes freely and boldly to a "throne of grace" because of Christ's blood (Heb. 4:16; 10:19), the unbeliever is dragged before a fearful, blazing white throne to obtain unmitigated judgment for every sin he has ever committed. "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him" (Nahum 1:6). "For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God" (Deut. 4:24). "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about" (Psalm 97:2-3). "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).
- b. Its size (Rev. 20:11) -- It is great, which signifies God's omnipotence. The sinner, who invariably thinks of himself as important and worthy of favor and who thinks that he has some special deal with God, will be fully aware of his lowly insignificance and vanity when he stands before this great throne.
- c. Its occupant (Rev. 20:11) -- The occupant of this throne is Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has given all judgment (John 5:22). Mankind has said, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Lk. 19:14), but now they will stand before Him, the very object of their rebellion, and give account.
- d. Its situation ("from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away," Rev. 20:11) -- The sinner will stand before God alone. All other things that occupy the heart will be gone. The sinner who ignored God and did not seek God's will and who worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25) will now be alone with the God he despised.

e. Its subjects (Rev. 20:12-13)

- (1) These are the unsaved. We know that these are the unsaved, because they are not part of the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6) and they are judged by their works. We know that these are the unsaved because their names are not written in the book of life through faith in Jesus Christ. Compare Revelation 20:15. There are no exceptions mentioned. We know that these are the unsaved because those who believe in Christ will not be condemned (John 3:18; 5:24). The judgment of the saved, those who have built their lives upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, is described in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. It is a judgment of work (singular) rather than works (plural). The believer's judgment is for the purpose of examining his work or service for Christ to determine rewards or loss thereof. The unbeliever's judgment is for the purpose of examining his works (plural) to demonstrate his sin against God's law and his rejection of God's light and to justify his eternal condemnation. The judgment of the believer's work can result in loss of reward, "but he himself shall be saved" (1 Cor. 3:15). The judgment of the unbeliever's works, on the other hand, results in the person himself being cast into the lake of fire. No exceptions are mentioned.
- (2) These are the small and great of the unsaved. Regardless of what one's position was on earth, whether king or pauper, whether despised or acclaimed, whether a public sinner or a private one, all who die without Christ will stand before God at this judgment. Men care so much for position and prestige in this world, but such things mean nothing before God. There will be some there who "gained the whole world" but they have lost their souls. The great are treated no differently by God. Sinners are sinners, and God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).
- (3) They come from the sea, from death, and from hell (Rev. 20:13). The sea is probably mentioned to show that all of the unsaved dead will be raised up to stand here, even those who have no grave site. It could also refer to the flood of Noah's day and the destruction of that generation. Death and

hell work together; death taking man's soul from his body and hell being the place where unbelieving men's souls are incarcerated.

f. Its basis (Rev. 20:12-13) -- It will be a judgment of works; and this means that those who appear here will be condemned, for all are sinners (Romans 3:9-18), and "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Salvation, on the other hand, is not of works but is by the grace of Christ in that He died in our stead (Ephesians 2:8-9). The believer's "work" (singular) will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:13-14), referring to an examination of his service for Christ for reward or loss of reward. But the unbeliever will give account for his "works" (plural), referring to his thoughts and deeds being judged by God's holy law.

g. Its books (Rev. 20:12)

(1) *The book of life* will be opened. This is the book containing the names of those of all ages who are elect in Christ according to the foreknowledge of God through faith in the gospel (Rev. 13:8; 17:8). The election is based on "whosoever believeth" (John 3:15, 16; 11:16; 12:46; Acts 10:43; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 John 5:1) and "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17). The very presence of the book of life will remind every sinner that a Saviour came into the world to die for the sins of all men (1 John 2:2). The word "propitiation" means satisfaction for man's sin debt. The book of life will remind those who stand at the Great White Throne that salvation was offered to all men, because God would have all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4-5; 2 Peter 3:9). "The Book of Life will be unfolded there, because many people in that vast throng have taken for granted that their names are there because, perchance, they have been listed on the roll of some church or religious society" (Ironsides).

(2) *The book of works* will be opened. A record is kept of every man's works, including every thought, every idle word, and every secret thing (Mat.

12:36; Lk. 8:17; Rom. 2:16). Psalm 50:16-21 describes the type of things that will come up at the Great White Throne Judgment.

- (3) *The book of God* will also be there. In John 12:48 Jesus said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” The Bible has been translated into every major language of the world and parts of into most minor languages. At the Great White Throne the Bible will be opened as a testimony to every sinner.

h. Its conclusion (Rev. 20:14-15)

- (1) No sinner can stand before a holy God and be judged for his works without a Saviour without being condemned, so the conclusion of this judgment is foregone. Though there will possibly be degrees of punishment in the lake of fire (compare Matthew 11:20-24) all the unsaved will be condemned and consigned there.
- (2) This is God’s other “whosoever.” Contrast Revelation 20:15 with Revelation 22:17 and John 3:16.
- (3) The punishment is eternal conscious suffering. Compare Revelation 20:10. Since the unsaved can never atone for even one sin that they have sinned against God and since they will never stop sinning against God’s law, their punishment is eternal.

i. Its message for today -- The message of the Great White Throne judgment is that God is a holy lawgiver and judge and He will not overlook man’s sin against His law. The only salvation from God’s wrath is in the atonement that Christ made on the cross. There is no other Saviour and no other way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Further, there is no opportunity for salvation following death. Man must flee to Christ for salvation in this present life or be forever doomed.

# Review Questions on the Resurrections and Judgments

1. What verse says Jesus is the firstfruits from the dead?
2. What Old Testament feast depicted Christ's resurrection?
3. What did the Jews do during this feast?
4. What passage says the believer is raised up together with Christ and is sitting with Him in heavenly places?
5. What passage says baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ?
6. What two verses teach that there are groups of resurrections?
7. What are three future resurrections?
8. The "first resurrection" includes what two groups of saints?
9. What is the "second resurrection"?
10. Where is the second resurrection described in the Bible?
11. Where are the unsaved dead now?
12. In what passage did Jesus describe what happens when people die?
13. How do we know that this passage is not a parable?
14. What verse divides men into three groups today?
15. What are three future judgments?
16. What are three chapters that describe the judgment seat of Christ?
17. What is the purpose of the judgment seat of Christ?
18. What is the foundation of the judgment seat of Christ?
19. What is a "wood and hay" type of Christian life?
20. What is a "gold and silver" type of Christian life?
21. According to 1 Corinthians 3, how do we know that the believer will not lose his salvation at the judgment seat of Christ?
22. What will be lost at the judgment seat of Christ for "wood hay" Christians?
23. What verse says faith is the victory that overcomes the world?
24. How should the judgment seat of Christ motivate the believer?
25. How will Christ judge the nations when He returns?
26. In what verse did God promise to bless those who bless Abraham and to curse those who curse him?

27. Who will occupy the Great White Throne to judge the unsaved dead?
28. What verse says God is no respecter of persons?
29. What names does the book of life contain?
30. How does a person get his name written in the book of life?
31. What verse says Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the world?
32. What verse says that God would have all men to be saved?
33. What verse says God is not willing that any man perish?
34. What is contained in the book of works?
35. What verse says men will give account for every idle word?
36. What verse says that God will judge the secrets of men?
37. What is the book of God?
38. How long will the unsaved be punished in the lake of fire?
39. What is the main message of the Great White Throne judgment?

# The Nations in Prophecy

The study of the nations in prophecy that was found in previous editions of *Understanding Bible Prophecy* is being replaced with the following.

Some of the most amazing Bible prophecies pertain to the Gentile nations. God's Word gives prophecies about Ammon, Arabia, Assyria, Babylon, Damascus, Edom, Elam, Egypt, Greece, Medo-Persia, Moab, Nineveh, Philistia, Rome, Samaria, Tyre, and Zidon.

Some key passages on the nations in prophecy are the following: Isaiah 15-23; Jeremiah 46-50; Ezekiel 25-32; Daniel 2; Daniel 7-12; Amos 1-2; Obadiah; Nahum; Zephaniah 2.

## Miscellaneous facts about the nations in prophecy

1. The nations in prophecy are viewed and judged in relation with Israel. See, for example, the prophecies pertaining to Ammon, Moab, Edom, the Philistines, and Tyre in Jeremiah 48:26-27; Ezekiel 25:3-4, 6-7, 12-16; 26:2-3; 35:12-15; and Babylon in Jeremiah 50:10-11.
2. The God of the Bible is the God of all nations and He judges them (Isa. 34:1-2).
3. God particularly hates the pride and idolatry of the nations. See Moab in Jeremiah 48:7, 13, 29, 42 and Babylon in Jeremiah 50:2, 29-32.
4. God is in ultimate control of the nations (Prov. 21:1; Dan. 2:20-21).

## The Muslim Nations that Surround Israel

(For maps of the following territories we recommend *Then and Now Bible Maps* by Rose Publishing.)

Bible prophecy describes Israel's relationship with the modern Muslim nations following her restoration to the place of God's blessing in Christ's kingdom. It will be a dramatic turnaround compared to the conditions that exist today.

Since the birth of the modern state of Israel on May 14, 1948, Israel has fought continual wars with her Muslim neighbors. There was the War for Independence in 1948 against the Arab League composed of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. There was the Suez War in 1956 to force Egypt to allow free access for Israel's ships through the Canal. There was the Six-Day War in 1967 against the coalition of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria contributing troops and arms. There was Egypt's War of Attrition against Israel from 1968-70. There was the Yom Kippur War of 1973 when Israel was attacked by Egypt and Syria. And Israel has been under constant attack by Muslim organizations such as Hamas, the PLO, and Hezbollah.

This is the present situation. Now let's look to the future through the sure word of Bible prophecy.

The situation is described in general in Ezekiel 36:6-7. Whereas Israel has born shame for 2,000 years under God's judgment, in that day she will be exalted and her enemies will bear their shame.

### **The Palestinians (Philistines) and Jordan (Edom, Moab, Ammon)**

“The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them” (Isaiah 11:13-14).

The ancient name “Philistine,” from the Hebrew “Peleshet,” is the source of the modern name “Palestinian.” The original Philistines were not Arabs or Middle Eastern in origin; they migrated from Asia Minor and were of Greek stock. The only thing that the modern Philistines, the Palestinian Arabs, have in common with



the ancient Philistines is that they hate Israel and want to own the land. Today the Palestinians control the Gaza Strip which was one of the strongholds of the old Philistines. Bible prophecy describes the Philistines as being west of Israel in the day of Christ's return, and Gaza is in the western part of Israel. The Palestinians envision a Palestinian state composed of Gaza and the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as the capital. If this ever happens, it will be short-lived, because when Christ returns, Israel will conquer the modern Philistines.

Israel will also conquer Jordan. Jordan occupies the land of ancient Edom, Moab, and Ammon east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. All of these territories will "obey" restored Israel in that day.

### **Egypt, Syria, and Iraq (Assyria)**

"In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it. And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it. In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them. In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my

people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance” (Isaiah 19:16-25).

Egypt is Israel’s most ancient enemy, and nothing has changed. Egypt attacked Israel in 1948, 1949, 1967, and 1973, and she remains a part of the Islamic alliance that hates Israel. But Egypt’s attitude will change dramatically in the future.

The day will come when Egypt will be terrified of Israel. This is an amazing prophecy. Historically, Egypt was a mighty power compared to Israel, and it still has a much larger military machine. Some believe that this prophecy is being fulfilled today, since Egypt has lost four wars to Israel, but though Egypt might hesitate to go to war with Israel again, it can hardly be said that she is terrified of Israel. The prophecy will not be fulfilled until Israel is converted and becomes an indestructible weapon in the hands of Almighty God.

Egypt will cry out to the Lord and He will send them a saviour. We don’t know if this refers to Christ Himself or to one of His generals.

Egypt’s prophetic destiny is different than that of the other nations surrounding Israel. She will not merely be conquered; she will be converted and become a fervent worshipper of Jehovah God and an intimate associate of Israel (Isa. 19:18-21).

Many Egyptians will learn Hebrew and use it to swear allegiance to Jehovah God. There will be an altar to the living God in the midst of the nation and a pillar in His name at the border (Isa. 19:18-19). The name of *Allah* will be forgotten.

A highway will be built from Egypt to Assyria. The ancient Assyrian kingdom occupied the land held today by Syria and Iraq, plus the eastern portion of Turkey and the western portion of Iran. The highway will facilitate travel between the two lands (Isa. 19:23-25). Instead of being partners to oppose Israel, as they did in the Six-Day War, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria will be partners *with* Israel.

In place of division and animosity between these nations, there will be unity and love. Instead of Israel dividing the nations, she will unite them in that day! The highway from Egypt to Assyria will doubtless run right through Israel. “Never then shall there be rivalry of armies, fleets of sea or air. In vain shall be the search then for Protestant or Romanist, for Democrat or Republican, for Monarchist or Anarchist, for Aristocrat or Proletariat, for Jesus, Lord of all, has caused the earth to bask in universal peace and concord; and He, the Melchizedek Priest, is here seen spreading His hands in blessing over the whole scene. Egypt, those of the Gentiles once expressive of corruption, are now His ‘people;’ Assyria, those of the Gentiles once expressive of violence, are now ‘the work of His hands,’ and quite a different handiwork will they be then” (Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah*, p. 236).

Israel will maintain her exalted status as God’s “inheritance” even when she is joined by other nations (Isa. 19:25).

### **Lebanon**

“I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them” (Zechariah 10:10).

The land of Lebanon actually belongs to Israel by right of the Abrahamic covenant and she will own it when Christ returns (Gen. 15:18).

The city of Hamath is mentioned by Ezekiel as the northern border of the tribes of Israel during the millennial kingdom (Ezek. 47:15-17), and Hamath was located at the northern extreme of modern Lebanon.

### **Iran (Persia)**

“And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and

shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet. ... And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone” (Ezekiel 38:3-5, 22).

Iran, which was called Persia until 1935, is a friend of Russia and a vicious enemy of Israel.

In September 2008, Israel’s ambassador to the United States, Sallai Meridor, warned that Russian arms sales to Iran and Syria are “destabilizing and dangerous for Israel” (“Israel Irked by Iran-Russia Military Ties,” PressTV.ir, Sept. 13, 2008). Russia is a major player in providing Iran with nuclear technology and high-tech armaments. In 2009, Iran’s defense ministry hailed the nation’s military ties to Russia (AP, Feb. 20, 2009).

In August 2012, Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said “the ultimate goal of world forces must be the annihilation of Israel” (*Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 2, 2012). That same month, Ahmadinejad called Israel a “cancerous tumor” that must be removed and a top Iranian military commander said he would welcome an Israeli strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities because it would give his nation a reason to retaliate and “get rid of the Jewish state forever” (“Top Iranian Commander,” TheBlaze, Aug. 18, 2012).

According to Bible prophecy, the armies of Persia will join Russia’s attack on Israel and suffer destruction with her.

### **Saudi Arabia (Arabia, Midian)**

“For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. ... To wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day. ... And all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert. ... And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the

kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you” (Jeremiah 25:15, 18, 24, 26-27).

“The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD” (Isaiah 60:6).

Saudi Arabia will join the international alliance against Israel that will be destroyed at the Battle of Armageddon (Jer. 25). Afterwards, Saudi Arabia will worship Christ and send offerings to Him (Isa. 60:6).

### **Yemen (Sheba)**

“The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD” (Isaiah 60:6).

Yemen will submit to Christ and send offerings to Him. This is the location where the Queen of Sheba had her spice empire of old, but during the past 2,000 years it has become a desert and modern-day Yemen is impoverished. Obviously this will change dramatically after Christ returns and Sheba will again bring her riches to glorify the God of Israel.

# Dispensationalism

*NOTE TO TEACHERS:* For the new edition of *Understanding Bible Prophecy* (August 2012), the most important and practical aspects of dispensational theology have been incorporated into the section on interpretation of prophecy earlier in the course.

We suggest that you look through this section to see whether or not it needs to be taught in the context of your class.

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One of the things that I am most thankful for in my Bible education is having been taught the importance of a normal-literal method of interpretation of prophecy. I fondly recall how that this opened up the Scriptures to me in a wonderful way when I was a young Christian. I didn't accept it blindly. I had filled my mind and heart with Scripture before I went to Bible School, and I had learned to test all things by it. I was trusting in promises such as John 7:17 and 8:31-32, and the normal-literal method of interpretation rang true to me as soon as I heard it. I knew that it was the truth, and I sensed that it was a very important truth.

A consistent application of the literal method of interpretation will result in a dispensational theology. We agree with the following statement by Charles Ryrie: "If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is consistently applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist. As basic as one believes normal interpretation to be, and as consistently as he uses it in interpreting Scripture, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist" (*Dispensationalism*, revised 1995, p. 20).

This, to me, is the bottom line, because I am convinced that the normal literal method of interpretation is the only proper method.

Not surprisingly, those who are committed to Reformed theology and its allegorical method of interpretation despise dispensationalism. Charles Ryrie, in his book *Dispensationalism*, gives many examples of this, including the following. Arthur W.

Pink warned of the “crudities and vagaries” of dispensationalism and described those who follow it as “poor dupes” (Pink, *The Divine Covenants*, p. 10). John Gerstner called dispensationalism “a cult and not a branch of the Christian church” (Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, pp. 150, 262). John Bowman said Scofield dispensationalism “represents perhaps the most dangerous heresy currently to be found within Christian circles” (Bowman, “The Bible and Modern Religions: II. Dispensationalism,” *Interpretation*, April 1956, p. 172). *The Presbyterian Journal* called it “a conservative heresy” (*Presbyterian Journal*, Jan. 2, 1963, p. 8). Rousas Rushdoony called dispensationalism “unbelief and heresy” (Rushdoony, Foreword to *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed., 1984). The faculty of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary included dispensationalism in their list of “isms” alongside of Seventh-day Adventism and Perfectionism (Arnold Rhodes, ed., *The Church Faces the Isms*, 1958).

## What Is Dispensationalism?

Dispensationalism refers to the fact that Bible history can be divided into distinct periods of time during which God works out His purposes. Dispensationalism is based on a literal interpretation of the Bible and a clear distinction between Israel and the Church.

The Bible uses the word “**DISPENSATION**” in Ephesians 1:10. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” This is the Greek word *oikonomia* (oy-kon-om-ee’-ah), which Strong defines as “administration (of a household or estate); specially, a (religious) ‘economy.’” This Greek word is also translated “stewardship” (Lk. 16:2-4). It refers to a period of time during which God is doing some particular work.

Another Bible word for this is “**TIME**.” We see this word in Ephesians 1:10—“the fulness of times...” Though the word “time” means different things in the Bible, one of its meanings is a period of time during which God is working out His purposes. In Ephesians 1:10 we see God’s grand plan of the ages, which is to gather together all things in Christ. In Acts 1:7 we find the phrase “the times,” referring to God’s

plan. These are also called “the seasons.” It refers to the time on God’s great calendar. The Bible speaks of the “times of the Gentiles” (Lk. 21:24), the “times of the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), and “this present time” (Rom. 11:5).

Another Bible word for this is “**AGE.**” The Bible refers to “ages past” (Eph. 3:5), “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7), and “all ages” (Eph. 3:21).

Another Bible word for this is “**DAY.**” This term is used in many different ways in the Bible, but one of the ways it is used is to refer to a period during which God performs a certain work. Examples are “the day of salvation” (Isa. 49:8; 2 Co. 6:2), “the day of the Lord” (Isa. 2:12), “the last day” (Jn. 6:54), and “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Co. 1:8; Ph. 1:10; 2:16; 2 Th. 2:2).

Thus, the Bible teaches that there are great periods of time during which God works out His eternal plan. These periods are called “dispensations,” “ages,” “times,” and “days.”

Following are some definitions of dispensationalism based on the previous terms. These are taken from Charles Ryrie’s book *Dispensationalism*, pages 29-20.

Charles Ryrie: “Dispensationalism views the world as a house-hold run by God. In His household-world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these different economies constitute the dispensations” (*Dispensationalism*, p. 29).

W. Graham Scroggie: “[Dispensationalism is] the administration of the human race or any part of it, at any given time. Just as a parent would govern his household in different ways, according to varying necessity, yet ever for one good end, so God has at different times dealt with men in different ways, according to the necessity of the case, but throughout for one great, grand end” (Scroggie, *Ruling Lines of Progressive Revelation*, 1918, pp. 62-62).



Harry Ironside: “[Dispensationalism is] an ordered condition of things. ... There are various economies running through the Word of God. A dispensation, an economy, then, is that particular order or condition of things prevailing in one special age which does not necessarily prevail in another” (Ironside, *In the Heavens*, p. 67).

Clarence Mason, Jr.: “... in its Biblical usage, a dispensation is a divinely established stewardship of a particular revelation of God’s mind and will which brings added responsibility to the whole race of men or that portion of the race to whom the revelation is particularly given by God. Associated with the revelation, on the one hand, are promises of reward or blessing for those responding to the obedience of faith, while on the other hand there are warnings of judgment upon those who do not respond in the obedience of faith to that particular revelation. However, though the time period (age) ends, certain principles of the revelation are often carried over into succeeding ages, because God’s truth does not cease to be truth, and these principles become part of the cumulative body of truth for which man is responsible in the progressive unfolding revelation of God’s redemptive purpose” (Mason, notes on his course on Eschatology at the Philadelphia College of Bible, pp. 5-6).

Paul Nevin: “A dispensation is God’s distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure, and judgment. From the divine standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life, or a responsibility for managing God’s affairs in His house. From the historical standpoint, it is a stage in the progress of revelation” (Paul Nevin, “Some Major Problems in Dispensational Interpretation,” unpublished Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1963, p. 9).

## **What Are the Dispensations?**

The Bible does not specifically tell us how many ages there have been since God made man or how many there will be in the future. C.I. Scofield, author of the famous Scofield Bible, and many other well-known dispensational teachers, have taught that there are seven dispensations. Scofield said, “Each of the dispensations

may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment, marking his utter failure in every dispensation.”

The seven Scofield dispensations are as follows:

1. Man innocent (Genesis 2-3)
2. Man under conscience (Genesis 3-8)
3. Man in authority over the earth (Genesis 9-11)
4. Man under promise (from Abraham to Moses)
5. Man under law (from Moses to the first coming of Christ)
6. Man under grace (from the first coming of Christ until the second coming)
7. Man under the personal reign of Christ (the millennial kingdom and new heaven and new earth)

That is one way that the ages can be explained and divided; but there are other ways to look at them, and the number seven is not necessary. It depends on how you define an age. The important point is that there have been various periods during which God has worked out His purposes, and during these periods God has related to men in different ways and has required different things of him. The knowledge of this is necessary for a right interpretation of the Bible.

I am not satisfied with the Scofield dispensational system for several reasons. For example, to call the time from Adam’s Fall to the Flood “man under conscience” is misleading and arbitrary, it seems to me, because there is no significant difference in God’s dealings with man before the Flood or after the Flood. To call the age from the Flood to Abraham “man in authority over the earth” is also misleading, since man was actually in authority over the earth from the time of Adam’s creation. To call the age from Moses to Christ the age of “man under law” is misleading, since the law of Moses was given to Israel, not to mankind in general. Further, to call the church age “man under grace” is misleading, since salvation has always been by grace and always will be (Romans 4:1-8).

I believe it is more profitable to divide the ages into the following categories:

1. *The Age of Testing.* This refers to the time when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden before the Fall (Genesis 1-3). The first man and woman were created sinless and were given only one commandment, which was not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they were tempted by Satan and sinned, the age of testing ended. We do not know how long Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden before they sinned, but we do know that they didn't have any children until after they were put out of the Garden.

2. *The Age of Lawlessness.* This age lasted from Adam's Fall to Abraham (Genesis 4-9). During this period, rebels such as Cain built godless cities and societies. The world became so corrupt that God destroyed it with a global Flood and only Noah and his three sons and their wives survived. This period lasted roughly 1,600 years.

3. *The Age of Babel.* After the Flood Nimrod and his associates built the godless empire of Babel (Genesis 10:8-12; 11:1-9). Idolatry was invented at Babel and spread throughout the world (Romans 1:21-23). This resulted in great moral perversion (Rom. 1:24-28). The age of Babel has continued through the millennia and will not end until God destroys the Babylon world system during the Great Tribulation (Revelation 17).

4. *The Age of Israel's Beginning.* During this period, God built the foundation of the nation of Israel (Genesis 12-50). God called Abraham out of Ur and gave him the covenant; the covenant passed to Isaac, then to Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel), then to the 12 sons of Jacob who were the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. During the days of Joseph, Israel moved to Egypt and dwelt there until the time of Moses. This period lasted about 430 years.

5. *The Age of the Law of Moses.* This age lasted from Moses to the coming of Christ (Exodus to the end of the Old Testament). During this period, God put Israel under the Mosaic Law to prepare for the coming of Christ. The law does this in two ways: First, it shows God's holiness and man's sinful condition and condemnation before God and his need of salvation. Second, it points to Christ by many types, such as the Passover lamb and the Tabernacle. It is important to understand that men were never saved by keeping the law of Moses. Salvation has always been by God's

grace through faith in His Word (Romans 4:1-8). The law was given as a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ (Galatians 3:24). This period lasted roughly 1,500 years.

6. *The Church Age*. This age lasted from the Cross to the Rapture. During this age, God is calling out a special body of people from among all nations (Acts 1:8; 15:14-17; Romans 11:25-26). So far this period has lasted almost 2,000 years.

7. *The Age of Daniel's 70th Week*. This seven-year period lasts from the Rapture until the return of Christ in glory. It is the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks (Dan. 9:24-27). It is called the Day of Lord (Isaiah 2:12) and the day of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). It is described in Matthew 24:3-31 and Revelation 6-19. During this period, God will prepare Israel and the world for the return of Christ. He will judge the nations for their sin and rebellion and idolatry. He will complete His judgments upon Israel and convert her according to the New Covenant. The antichrist and his armies will be overthrown at Armageddon, and Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit.

8. *The Age of the Millennial Kingdom*. This age lasts from Christ's second coming to the end of millennial reign (Revelation 19-20). During this period, God will establish the Messianic kingdom on earth, with its headquarters in Jerusalem, and the nations will be ruled with a rod of iron. This period will last 1,000 years.

9. *The Ages of the New Heaven and New Earth* (Revelation 21-22). From this point on, God will continue to work out His plans from age to age throughout eternity, but the Bible does not reveal any further details. We call this the "ageS" plural rather than "age" singular, because the Bible indicates that there will be endless ages during which God will work out His eternal purposes. The Greek phrase translated "forever and ever" is *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, which means "into the ages of the ages" (1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 11:15; 20:10; 22:5).

## **The Benefits of Dispensationalism**

### **1. Dispensational theology employs a consistent normal-literal method of interpretation throughout the Scripture.**

We have already seen the importance of a literal approach to Bible prophecy. Dispensationalism is the only theology that uses the normal-literal method of interpretation consistently throughout Scripture.

### **2. Dispensational theology helps us to study the Bible within its proper context.**

Paul instructed Timothy to rightly divide God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). The Greek word *orthotomeo*, which is translated "rightly divide," means "to make a straight cut, to dissect correctly." The Bible is one Book, but it is also divided into individual books and major divisions (e.g., law, prophecy, Gospels, Acts, Epistles), and each segment must be rightly interpreted within its proper context. Dispensational theology enables the student to accomplish this.

Consider Genesis 1:29-30, which says that man may eat only vegetables. This is no longer in effect, though, since after the Flood God told Noah that he could eat meat (Gen. 9:30).

Consider Leviticus 11:7-8, which forbids the eating of pork. These dietary restrictions were required by the law of Moses, but Paul taught that the New Testament believer is not under dietary restrictions (1 Tim. 4:3-5).

Consider Deuteronomy 13:6-10 and Exodus 22:19, which command that idolators and witches be stoned to death. That was true in Israel under the law of Moses, and it will be true in Christ's kingdom, but in the church age Christians don't put idolators and witches to death. Paul didn't call for the death of the witch in Acts 16:16-18. When he visited the idolatrous city of Athens, Paul didn't try to seek to have idolators put to death; instead, he preached the gospel to them (Acts 17:22-34). We aren't living in the age of the law of Moses; we are living in the age of the Great Commission.

Consider 2 Kings 23:14-15, where King Josiah destroyed the idols. As a king of Israel operating under the law of Moses, he had God's authority to do this. But we never see the apostles and early churches breaking up idols, except for their own personal idols after they were saved. When Christ returns, He will destroy all idols from the earth, but today is the Great Commission age. It is not time to destroy idolators and break down their idols; it is time to preach the gospel to every person to give sinners an opportunity to be saved. This is what we see in the book of Acts. A believer can and should destroy his own idols, but he cannot destroy idols not belonging to him. If he rents a house or apartment that has an idol, he should ask the landlord if he can cover up the idol while he is occupying the facility. If the landlord does not agree, the believer should find another place to rent, but he is not authorized by the Bible to destroy idols that don't belong to him.

Consider Ezekiel 33:12-16, which says men are judged by whether or not they keep the law. Many have erred by thinking that this teaches how to be saved. Those who believe you can lose your salvation use verses like these to prove their doctrine. But the Bible student must interpret every passage in its context, and the context here is the law of Moses. We know from the New Testament that Moses' law was not written to show men how to be saved. It was written to show men that they are sinners under God's judgment and that they need to flee to Christ for salvation (Romans 3:19-20). The law of Moses required perfect obedience (Ezek. 33:15), which no sinner can do. Compare Galatians 3:10-12.

Consider Matthew 5:25-26, which calls for imprisonment for those who do not reconcile with their adversaries. This is not referring to believers in the churches. Nowhere in the book of Acts or in the New Testament epistles do we see the early churches operating prisons. In Matthew 5 Jesus is preaching the principles of the kingdom He will establish when He returns.

Consider Matthew 10:5-15. Here Christ sends out His disciples to preach, but note the following restrictions: (1) They were to preach only to Jews (v. 6). (2) They were to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (v. 7). (3) They were to do miracles (v. 8). (4) They were not to carry any money or extra clothes (v. 9-10). (5) They were to carry no weapons (a staff). This is directly contradictory to the

commands given later in the New Testament. Later Christ Himself commanded His disciples to preach to all men (Matt. 28:18-20), to preach the gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection rather than the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mark 16:15), to carry both money and a sword (Lk. 22:35-26), and there is no command to do miracles. What is the difference between these accounts? The difference is that they are spoken under different dispensations. In Matthew 10, Christ was sending His disciples out to proclaim to Israel that their Messiah and King was present. That is the meaning of the message they preached, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was at hand because the King was standing right there! Thus in Matthew 10 the messengers were to preach only to Jews, were to do miracles to demonstrate that the Messiah had come as foretold in the prophets, were not to provide anything for themselves because it was just a short period of time and they were operating under the direct earthly supervision of the Messiah. Later, after Israel had rejected Christ, He began to prepare for the church age and the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the church age, the program of God changed.

Consider the miracles of Christ in the Gospels and the miracles of the apostles in the book of Acts. These are not examples for believers today to imitate. Rather, they were signs to authenticate special ministries. Jesus did miracles to prove that He was the Messiah (John 5:36; 20:30-31). The apostles did miracles to demonstrate that they were the Lord's special apostles (2 Cor. 12:12).

Consider Revelation 13:10. This is written in the context of the reign of the antichrist (see verses 1-8). When verse 10 says, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword," it refers to the antichrist's law that will require all people to worship him (v. 8). It is not referring to using the sword at any time and in any age. Pacifists who use this verse to forbid the use of weapons in every situation are abusing the Scripture by taking things out of context. Jesus Himself at one point instructed His disciples to get a sword (Lk. 22:36). What Revelation 13:10 is warning about is joining hands with the antichrist in his war against those who refuse to bow to him.

**3. Dispensational theology allows us to see that not everything in the Bible was written *to* or is directly *about* the church-age believer, but everything in the Bible is *for* the church-age believer in that everything has lessons for us.**

See Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11.

Consider Psalm 126:5-6. These verses are used for evangelism, but the verses actually refer to the return of Israel to the land. See verses 1-4. This is a promise that God will fulfill His covenants with Israel and will bring them back to the land. We can apply these verses to evangelism, but it is important first to understand the main interpretation of a passage according to its dispensational context.

Consider 2 Chronicles 7:14. This is a promise given to Israel when the First Temple was built by Solomon. The promise, therefore, belongs particularly to Israel and not to the churches. Israel had a promised land, but we don't have a promised land in this present church age. We can make an application of this promise, though. God does bless nations to some extent when His people in the churches walk in obedience. How the Christians live will have an effect upon their nations. But we are strangers in this present world and our citizenship is in heaven, and nowhere does God promise to heal a pagan nation if Christians have a spiritual revival.

**4. Dispensationalism makes a clear distinction between Israel and the Church.**

1 Corinthians 10:32 states that there are three categories of people in the world today -- the JEWS, the GENTILES, and the CHURCH. Obviously, then, Israel is not the same as the church.

Some of the most common errors in theology have occurred through confusing the church with Israel. This is called "Replacement Theology."

This is one of the errors of ROMAN CATHOLICISM. Rome claims to be the new Israel and has adopted many things from the Old Testament dispensation, such as priests, temples, candles, incense, and sprinkling of water. This is one reason why



Rome attempted to take over the Holy Land during the crusades of the Middle Ages, but the Holy Land belongs to Israel, not the Church.

This is also one of the errors of PROTESTANTISM. By this, I am referring especially to Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Reformed, and Lutheran denominations. When the Protestant denominations left Rome, they did not leave behind all of Rome's errors. One of the errors they brought with them pertains to ecclesiology and the interpretation of prophecy. They teach that Israel was permanently rejected by God and replaced with the church. They do not believe that the Old Testament promises and prophecies pertaining to Israel will be literally fulfilled. To one extent or another they have also adopted certain rituals from the Old Testament dispensation, such as priests, liturgy, infant baptism (which they claim is the spiritualizing of circumcision), sabbath-keeping (which they foisted onto the first day of the week with no Scriptural authority), etc.

Most of the CULTS also claim to be a continuation of Israel in one form or the other. For example, the Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, claimed that 10 of the tribes of Israel had been lost and had re-surfaced today in England and America and had been restored in his cult. This is called British-Israelism, and there are other heretical groups that teach a form of it. Jehovah's Witnesses apply things from the book of Revelation that are for Israel, directly to itself, such as the sealing of the 144,000 from the 12 tribes in Revelation 7. Seventh-day Adventists claim that New Testament believers are obligated to keep the Sabbath and keep Old Testament dietary restrictions.

God's promises to Israel have not failed. God warned that if Israel rejected His Law she would be judged and evicted from her land and scattered among the nations (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 37, 64-67), but God also promised to restore Israel (Deut. 30:1-9). This is summarized in the prophecy of Hosea 3:4-5.

God's covenants with Israel (other than the Mosaic covenant) are unconditional, eternal, and unchangeable.

Consider the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7. In His covenant with David, God (1) promised that Israel would own her own land (2 Sa. 7:10), (2) promised that the throne of David would be established forever through David's seed (2 Sa. 7:13), (3) promised chastisement for sin, but never annulment of the promise (2 Sa. 7:14-15), (4) established David's house and kingdom forever (2 Sa. 7:16). All of this is fulfilled through Jesus Christ, David's Son, who has inherited the throne of David (Mat. 1:1) and who will establish the Davidic kingdom when He returns from heaven (Isa. 9:6-7).

All of God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament will be literally fulfilled.

- a. Israel will be restored to the land (Zech. 10:6-12).
- b. Israel will be brought through severe judgment during the Great Tribulation and one third of the Jews will call upon God's name (Zech. 13:8-9).
- c. Israel will repent and will be redeemed (Zech. 12:10 - 13:1).
- d. Messiah will return and defeat Israel's enemies and rule from Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-21).

In contrast to Israel's covenants and prophecies, the Church is a mystery that was not revealed in Old Testament prophecies. See Ephesians 3:4-6.

Romans 11:25-29 tells us more about the mystery of the church. Christ came to Israel but was rejected (John 1:11). Christ was crucified and raised from the dead and ascended back to heaven. A few years later the armies of Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the Jews were scattered among the nations and for 2,000 years she did not have a home of her own. Israel has been blinded because of her rebellion against God. During the Church Age, God is calling out people from among all nations to form the Church. See Acts 15:13-18. When God is finished with this work, the Church believers will be Raptured out of the world and God will turn His attention back to fulfilling His covenants with Israel.

## *Contrast Covenant or Reformed Theology*

The opposite of Dispensational Theology is Covenant Theology. This is the standard Presbyterian theology. It is also called Reformed and Federal Theology. It can be traced back to the time of the Heidelberg Catechism of 1584 and was encapsulated within the Westminster Confession one hundred years later. There is considerable variety within Covenant Theology traditions, but the following are some of the standard characteristics:

- a. Covenant Theology says that there were only two covenants. Traditional Covenant Theology says there was a covenant of works before the Fall and a covenant of grace since the Fall, a covenant of works with Adam and a covenant of grace with Christ. The Westminster Confession stated, “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ.” Another variety of covenant theology, called New Covenant Theology, says that the two covenants are the old covenant of law with Israel and the new covenant of grace with the church.
- b. Covenant Theology claims that the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to Israel have already been fulfilled spiritually or allegorically or symbolically in the church. Covenant theologians believe that Israel has been permanently rejected.
- c. Covenant Theology says there has been only one group of redeemed people: Israel in the Old Testament times and now the church, which supposedly has replaced Israel.
- d. Covenant Theology has traditionally been accompanied by the practice of infant baptism, which is seen as the entrance into God’s new covenant. They

argue that since the old covenant had the rite of circumcision for babies, the new covenant must have the rite of baby baptism.

*NOTE TO TEACHERS:* The rest of this study on dispensationalism can be skipped if there is a lack of time.

## **Some Dangers of Dispensationalism**

### **1. One potential danger of dispensationalism is thinking that the Bible student must accept one certain form of dispensational teaching.**

While it is obvious that there are different dispensations in the Bible, the Bible student is not forced to accept the view of dispensationalism as taught by any certain man or group of men. In fact, no two dispensational teachers have agreed in every point. They have differed as to whether the church will be on earth during the millennium, as to how the new covenant relates to the church, as to how men were saved under the Law of Moses, as to how the Church will relate to Israel in eternity, and other things. Every systematic theology and every teaching of man must be carefully tested by the Bible itself. We must never forget the admonition found in the following three important verses: Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

It appears to me that no one system of dispensational theology can satisfy everything the Bible teaches about Israel, the Church, and future events. One reason is that God does not tell us everything. Not every question can be answered in this present time.

Further, I do not agree with the doctrine of the church as taught by most of the aforementioned men. (I say most, and not all, only because I am not familiar with what is taught by every one of them.) Typically they hold to a Protestant view of a universal church and they speak of “the church” in a universal sense as much as or even more often than they speak of the local sense, and I do not see this in Scripture. There is a “church” that is beyond the local church as described in Ephesians 2-3, but this is not a Protestant universal church and it is not something

that is emphasized in the New Testament because it has no present practicality. Of the 110 mentions of the Greek word “ecclesia,” no more than two or three can refer to anything other than the local assembly by any standard of interpretation. It is not scripturally correct to refer to the church in a universal sense as Protestants use the term, such as “the church in America” or “the church in Europe.” There are churches, plural, in these localities, but it is unscriptural to refer to the church, singular, in this sense. The New Testament is very precise in the use of these terms. When referring to churches in a country or region, the term is always used in the plural -- e.g., the churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22), the churches of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1), and the churches of Asia (1 Cor. 16:19).

## **2. Another potential danger of dispensationalism today is Modified or Progressive Dispensationalism.**

Since the late 1980s some men have made significant modifications to the traditional dispensational view. Three names are prominent in this field: Darrell Bock (Dallas Theological Seminary), Craig Blaising (Dallas Seminary), and Robert Saucy (Talbot Theological Seminary). In 1993 Bock and Blaising published *Progressive Dispensationalism* while Saucy published *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*.

Some of the principles of Progressive Dispensationalism are as follows:

- a. The church is not a parenthesis but is the first step towards establishment of the kingdom of God.
- b. The term “mystery” does not mean that the church was unrevealed in the Old Testament, but only that it was “unrealized.”
- c. The church is not a separate category distinct from Israel and the Gentiles. There are not “two peoples of God.” There is no distinction between Israel and the church in the future state. A Jew who becomes a Christian will be a part of Israel in the Millennium.

- d. The Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant have already been inaugurated and Jesus is presently sitting on the throne of David.
- e. Within biblical history there are only four dispensational eras.
- f. Kingdom righteousness and “holistic redemption” (for all of society) is to be pursued in the church age. “Revisionists give more attention to social action than they feel normative dispensationalists did or do” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 176).

A good review and refutation of Progressive Dispensationalism can be found in the revised edition of *Dispensationalism* by Charles Ryrie.

### **3. Another potential danger of dispensationalism is in making improper dispensations and making too sharp a division between them.**

This is called “ultra-dispensationalism” or “hyper-dispensationalism” and is characterized by making a sharp division between the ministry of Christ and that of the apostles, and of further dividing Paul’s teaching from that of Peter and the other apostles. Some of the well-known teachers of ultra- or hyper-dispensationalism are E.W. Bullinger, Cornelius Stam, J.C. O’Hair, Charles Welch, Otis Sellers, A.E. Knoch, and Charles Baker.

There are many varieties of ultra-dispensationalism, but the following are some of the chief characteristics:

- a. The four Gospels are entirely Jewish and contain no direct teaching for the churches. Yet, the writer of Hebrews said that the same gospel of salvation that was preached by the apostles was preached by Christ (Heb. 2:3-4). Though we know that Christ presented Himself to the Jewish nation and we do understand that there are differences between the gospels and the epistles, yet in Hebrews 2 we do not see a sharp delineation between the gospel preached by Christ and that preached by the apostles who followed. In fact, the Gospel of John presents exactly the same gospel as that preached by

Paul. Further, 1 Timothy 6:3 shows that Christ spoke directly to the church age.

- b. The book of Acts is also largely Jewish. Hyper-dispensationalists commonly believe that after Christ was rejected by Israel in the Gospels, that they were given a second chance to receive the kingdom in the first part of the book of Acts. They teach that there are two different churches viewed in the book of Acts, and the true Pauline church only started after Acts 9, 13, or 28. The church mentioned in the first part of Acts allegedly refers to a different church than that of Paul's prison epistles. The earlier "church" in Acts is simply an aspect of the kingdom preached in the Gospels. Most of the book of Acts is therefore discounted as a guideline for the churches today. Yet, at the very end of the book of Acts we still find Paul preaching about the kingdom (Acts 28:23). In fact, he was still preaching about it in his epistles! (2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1). While we can see an obvious transition in the book of Acts, and not everything in Acts continues to be in effect in the churches today (e.g., tongues speaking and apostolic sign gifts) this does not mean that there are different gospels and different churches in various parts of Acts. The book of Acts is a book about and for the churches. The pattern of the first church as described in Acts 2 is the pattern for the churches throughout the age, except for the temporary and unique aspects pertaining to the coming of the Holy Spirit and the apostolic miracles.
- c. The mysteries given to Paul are a different revelation from that given to Peter and the other apostles, and only Paul's writings are directly for the church today. The other epistles, such as Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and John's epistles are not for us today in a direct sense. Yet, Paul himself said that the church is built upon the "apostleS" plural and not merely upon himself (Eph. 2:20) and the mysteries were "revealed unto his holy apostleS and prophetS" (Eph. 3:5) and not to him alone. Peter also referred to the writings of Paul and made no distinction between Paul's teaching and the teaching of the other apostles (2 Pet. 3:1-2, 15-16). Peter said Paul wrote to the same people and preached the same message. Though we know that Paul was the special apostle of the Gentiles and he was given unique revelations about the

church as the body of Christ, his revelations in no way contradict the revelations given in the General Epistles (Hebrews - Jude).

- d. The gospel preached by Peter in the early part of the book of Acts is different from the gospel preached by Paul. Yet, there is no difference between the gospel preached by Peter and that which Paul preached. (1) Consider the gospel Peter preached in his first epistle. He preached salvation through the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:2), salvation by God's free mercy (1 Peter 1:3), the new birth (1 Peter 1:3), eternal security because of the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3-4). (2) Acts 15 plainly states that all of the apostles, including Peter and Paul, agreed on the gospel. (3) Paul plainly said in 1 Corinthians 15:11-14 that they all preached the same gospel. (4) Even in Acts 2, Peter was preaching the gospel of the grace of Christ rather than a "kingdom gospel." He preached Christ -- His crucifixion (Acts 2:23), resurrection (Acts 2:24-32), ascension and Lordship (Acts 2:33-36). He preached that the people should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). This is not a "kingdom gospel." (5) Further, Paul states in Galatians 1, that anyone who preached a different gospel was cursed. If Peter were truly preaching a different gospel in those days, he would have fallen under this curse.
- e. Baptism and the Lord's Supper were given to Paul before he received the church age mysteries; thus they are not for the churches today. Hyper-dispensationalists differ on this point. Some accept both baptism and the Lord's Supper; some reject water baptism and the Lord's Supper altogether; while others reject only baptism and keep the Lord's Supper.
- f. According to hyper-dispensationalism there are different ways of salvation in the Old Testament and during the Tribulation. Peter Ruckman, for example, teaches that men were saved by faith plus works in the Old Testament and that they will be saved by faith plus works in the Tribulation and by works alone in the Millennium. In *Millions Disappear: Fact or Fiction?* Ruckman says: "If the Lord comes and you remain behind, then start working like a madman to get to heaven, because you're going to have to. ... You must keep



the Ten Commandments (all of them, Ecclesiastes 12:13), keep the Golden Rule (1 John 3:10), give your money to the poor, get baptized, take up your cross, hold out to the end of the Tribulation, wait for Jesus Christ to show up at the Battle of Armageddon, and be prepared to die for what you believe. In the Tribulation you cannot be saved by grace alone, like you could before the Rapture.” In fact, Romans 4:1-8 plainly states that Abraham before the law and David under the law were saved by faith without works. This is the only plan of salvation God ever has had and ever will have--salvation by grace alone through faith alone based upon the shed blood of Jesus Christ alone. The Old Testament saints did not know what the New Testament saint knows, but Romans 4 makes it plain that they were saved by faith without works. Like Abraham, they believed God and it was counted unto them for righteousness. Those who are saved in the Tribulation will also be saved through faith in God’s Word and by the blood of Jesus Christ and through this alone (Rev. 7:14).

A more recent statement of hyper-dispensationalism is presented in *One Book Rightly Divided: The Key to Understanding the Bible* by Dr. Douglas Stauffer (2000, McCowen Mills Publishers). Stauffer’s book comes with recommendations from some well-known independent Baptist preachers, including Evangelist Dennis Corle of Revival Fires, William Grady, and J. Wendell Runion of International Baptist Outreach Missions. In his glowing Foreword to Stauffer’s book (which he calls a “spiritual masterpiece”), Grady says that “this book will undoubtedly create shock waves within certain ‘camps’ of fundamentalism...” I doubt that the book will create shock waves within any camps, but it probably will create shock waves in some individual lives and churches.

Stauffer’s teaching is largely the same as that which has been promoted by Peter Ruckman for many years, though Stauffer gives Ruckman no credit. He does mention that he received “the principles of right division” from Dave Reese. I sat under Reese’s hyper-dispensational teaching in a course on prophecy at Tennessee Temple Bible School in the mid-1970s. It was a blessing when Reese was forced to leave part way through the course, and we were no longer subjected to his hyper-

dispensational rants. We had the joy of finishing the rest of the course under the sound and profitable teaching of Bruce Lackey.

There are many good things in Stauffer's book. He has an excellent section on repentance, defining it properly as "a change of mind and heart attitude which leads to a change of actions" and warning that "too many sinners bow their heads and say the 'sinner's prayer' without any inward conviction or belief on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Though Stauffer's hyper-dispensationalism is milder than some of the other approaches (he accepts both baptism and the Lord's Supper as church ordinances, for example), there is no doubt that he is teaching a form of hyper-dispensationalism and that his false teaching will produce confusion and division.

Following are some of the errors that Stauffer teaches:

- Paul is THE spokesman for the church age (p. 17).
- The epistles from Hebrews to Revelation, while containing some church age applications, are actually written for Great Tribulation saints (pp. 20, 27).
- Salvation is obtained by works during the Tribulation (p. 23).
- Hebrews and James do not teach eternal security (pp. 23, 29).
- Peter did not preach the gospel of the grace of God (p. 26).
- The seven churches of Revelation 1-3 are not the body of Christ (p. 29).
- John's first epistle teaches that salvation is through works (p. 56).
- The book of Acts was not given "to show how to establish the local church or its functions" (p. 72)
- Abraham had to keep his salvation through works (p. 175).

Stauffer even has a chapter warning about "hyper-dispensationalism"! In this, he conveniently redefines hyper-dispensationalism to mean something other than what he himself teaches. In fact, he sets up a straw man form of hyper-dispensationalism that doesn't actually exist, or if it does exist, is so exceedingly rare as to be of no concern. He claims, for example, that a real hyper-dispensationalist teaches that the law is inapplicable today, but in reality, hyper-dispensationalists commonly teach

that the law has applications for the church. He claims that hyper-dispensationalists exclude some portions of the Bible from study and application, but hyper-dispensationalists typically claim that all portions of the Bible have some value for study. Stauffer defines hyper-dispensationalism as “any intentional false division of the Bible” (his emphasis) (p. 149). Such a definition would be impossible to employ for the simple fact that we cannot look into the heart of a man and see what his motives are. In fact, hyper-dispensationalism is “any false division of the Bible” period, regardless of the motive of the one doing the teaching. A hyper-dispensationalist can be sincere or insincere. That is beside the point. The whole issue is whether he creates divisions in the Scriptures that should not be created. Stauffer’s book does precisely this. (He drops the word “intentional” in the third edition.)

Stauffer’s expanded third edition (2006) slightly modifies a few of these things, but it presents the same type of hyper-dispensationalism. He does not renounce anything he taught in previous editions. To me, his chief error is three-fold. First, his error is in allotting the book of Acts and the General Epistles to a dispensation different from the church age. In chapter 16 he divides the New Testament era into four dispensations -- the Age of Readiness (Matthew-John and Hebrews-Revelation 19), the Age of Church (Romans-Philemon), the Age of Kingdom (Revelation 20), and the Age of Eternity Future (Revelation 21-22). As for the book of Acts, Stauffer says, “The church should not base its existence or functions upon the book of Acts any more than upon a history book of the Soviet Union” (p. 72). The so-called Age of Readiness into which he lumps the General Epistles is a dispensation in which people are required to “seek the kingdom and to be ready whenever it might come” (p. 188). Stauffer claims that these books are not addressed directly to the church-age believer and that reading them is like reading mail intended for someone else (p. 28), and that they are primarily written for the Tribulation time (p. 47). To the contrary, the General Epistles are fully church-age revelations. The epistle of James was written for the churches in this present age as certainly and fully as Ephesians. There are no doctrinal contradictions between Paul’s epistles and the General Epistles. And the book of Acts, though we recognize its transitional character and the fact that there are things in it of a temporary nature (e.g., the

apostolic sign miracles, 2 Cor. 12:12), it should be studied as church doctrine rather than a book applying to some different dispensation.

Second, Stauffer's error is in setting up Paul as THE spokesman for the church and in contradiction to Peter and the other apostles and prophets who wrote the New Testament. He says, "God's specific directions for the Church are found predominantly in the thirteen epistles that God used Paul to pen for the Church" (p. 22). While we know that Paul holds a unique place as the apostle of the Gentiles and he was given some wonderful revelations of church truth, he was not the only apostle who wrote for the churches, the non-Pauline New Testament epistles are as much for the Church as Paul's are. Paul's revelations in no way contradict those of the General Epistles, and he did not preach a different gospel from the others.

Harry A. Ironside wrote a helpful little booklet about this problem called "Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ultra-Dispensationalism Examined in the Light of Holy Scripture." He deals largely with the error of Bullingerism. This is available on the Internet at <http://www.brethrenonline.org/books/ultrad.htm>.

For more about the way of salvation in other dispensations, see "Salvation Is the Same in the Old Testament and the New Testament" by Bruce Lackey and "Salvation in the O.T. and the N.T. Follow-up." These are available at the Way of Life web site and in the Fundamental Baptist Digital Library.

#### **4. Another potential problem with dispensationalism is not recognizing that there are transitional periods between dispensations.**

One problem that can arise when looking at the Bible dispensationally is to fail to recognize transitional periods. For example, John the Baptist is a transitional figure. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets to Israel, but he is also the forerunner of Christ, Who is the founder of the church. Actually, the four Gospels themselves are transitional books. They are for Israel and for the church, as well. In Matthew, for example, Christ is presented as the king of Israel and is rejected by the nation Israel and then He begins to focus His attention on building the church (Mat. 16:18). Yet, there is not a sharp and immediate transition; it is gradual. The book of

Acts is also a transitional book, and not everything in the book of Acts is the norm for churches today. Pentecost, for example, was unique. The gift of tongues was a witness to Israel (1 Cor. 14:21-22) and is no longer relevant. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was also unique for that initiation period of the church. None of the epistles instruct believers to seek a baptism of the Holy Spirit; they refer, rather, to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the past tense (i.e., 1 Cor. 12:13).

## **5. Neglecting some parts of the Bible, thinking that they are not important for us today.**

Some neglect the four Gospels or the book of Acts or the book of Revelation, but this is wrong. While not every part of the Bible is written TO us, every part of the Bible is written FOR us and has important lessons for Christians today. See 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; Rom. 15:4.

## **The Lie about Dispensationalism**

Some who despise dispensationalism have claimed that it was not taught until the 1800s. Some claim it was started by John Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement.

While it might be true that a certain form of dispensationalism, such as Darby dispensationalism or Scofield dispensationalism, might not have been taught until more recent times, it is plain that a belief in dispensations goes all of the way back to the apostles.

1. We have seen that the New Testament teaches that there are dispensations during which God has worked out His great purposes. These are also called ages, times, and days. In this sense, dispensationalism is 2,000 years old!

2. The early Christians after the apostles taught a form of dispensationalism. Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) believed in four phases of history in God's plan: From Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to the eternal state. Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) taught something similar, dividing the

dispensations into (1) the creation to the flood, (2) the flood to the law, (3) the law to the gospel, (4) the gospel to the eternal state. In *Ages and Dispensations of the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Larry Crutchfield observed that some of the early church leaders “came very close to making nearly the same divisions modern dispensationalists do.”

3. Influential Baptist leader Morgan Edwards, the founder of Brown University, was teaching the pre-tribulational doctrine in the first half of the 18th century. Between 1742 and 1744 he wrote a book presenting this doctrine. The book was published in 1788 in Philadelphia where Edwards was a pastor. John Bray, who for many years published a challenge that he would give \$500 to anyone who could prove that the pre-tribulational rapture was taught before 1830, was forced to pay out! The *Plains Baptist Challenger* observed: “If Morgan Edwards wrote a book in 1742-44 teaching the Pre-Trib Rapture, then many people must have read it. No doubt there must have been other preachers who read the same Bible that Edwards did and preached the same truth. I wonder if John L. Bray will offer \$500 to anyone teaching the Pre-Trib Rapture before Morgan Edwards? I hope he does. Of course Paul taught it, but the enemies of the Pre-Trib Rapture will never accept that. They just explain it away. Of course, the Apostle John taught it in the book of Revelation, but they spiritualize the book of Revelation away” (*Plains Baptist Challenger*, Lubbock, Texas, September 1995).

# Review Questions on Dispensationalism

1. Charles Ryrie said: “If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is \_\_\_\_\_ applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist.”
- 2-3. What is the object of God’s great plan of the ages and in what verse is this found?
- 4-7. The Bible teaches that there are great periods of time in which God is working out His eternal plan. These periods are called “\_\_\_\_\_,” “\_\_\_\_\_,” “\_\_\_\_\_,” and “\_\_\_\_\_.”
8. The Greek word translated “dispensation” is translated by what other English word?
9. To what does the “times of the restitution of all things” refer?
- 10-12. The Greek word translated “ages” is translated by what other English word?
13. Scroggie said that dispensationalism is “the \_\_\_\_\_ of the human race or any part of it, at any given time.”
14. Mason said that dispensationalism “is a divinely established \_\_\_\_\_ of a particular revelation of God’s mind and will which brings added responsibility to the whole race of men or that portion of the race to whom the revelation is particularly given by God.”
- 15-19. What are five dispensations in the Old Testament times?
- 20-22. What are three dispensations that are in the future?
- 23-25. What are three benefits of dispensationalism?
- 26-27. What are two chapters in the New Testament that teach the purpose of the law of Moses?
28. What verse in the New Testament says there are three groups of people, Jews, Gentiles, and the church?
29. In what book and chapter of the Pentateuch did God describe all of the judgments that would fall upon Israel if she turned away from Him?
30. What passage in Romans says that God will fulfill His promises to Israel?
31. To confuse the Church with Israel is called \_\_\_\_\_ Theology.
32. Covenant Theology is also called \_\_\_\_\_ Theology.
- 33-36. What are four principles of Covenant Theology?

- 37-239. What are three important verses that teach us to test everything by Scripture?
40. What is another name for Modified Dispensationalism?
- 41-43. What are three principles of Modified Dispensationalism?
- 44-46. What are three principles of ultra-dispensationalism?
47. What verse says that the salvation message preached by the apostles “began to be spoken by the Lord”?
48. In what verse did Paul teach that the words of Jesus Christ are to be kept by the churches?
49. What book and chapter describes the great conference at which all of the apostles agreed that salvation is by grace without works and that the Gentiles are not obligated to keep the law of Moses?
- 50-53. What are four Bible facts that demonstrate that Peter preached the same gospel as Paul?
54. What book and chapter teaches that salvation was by faith without works both before and under the law of Moses?
55. What verse says, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning”?
56. What verse says that the things in the Old Testament happened for our examples?
57. What is the lie about dispensationalism?
58. What Baptist leader taught dispensationalism and a pre-tribulational Rapture in the first half of the 18th century?



## Beware of Prophetic Speculation

Recently I received a report that said Jesus must be coming soon because of chip implant technology. Allegedly, someone saw a man pay for his groceries by running his hand over the store's cash register scanner as part of a government experiment.

There is no doubt that rapid advances have been made in chip implant technology, but this means very little as far as the coming of Christ is concerned. Christ's coming is imminent and is not predicated by signs. Further, we have no way of knowing if the sign of the antichrist will involve an implanted chip. The Bible says the sign of the antichrist will be "a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads" (Revelation 13:16). A computer chip is not a mark. Based upon the simple reading of the Scripture, it is more likely that the sign of the antichrist will be some sort of a visible tattoo rather than an invisible implanted chip.

To try to figure out the identity of the antichrist or the mark of the beast by observing current events is vain speculation and is a waste of time.

Jack Van Impe's 1993 video was entitled *A.D. 2000 - The End?* Though he didn't say for sure that the Lord would return in the year 2000, he came very close. In his catalog of publications, he advertised the video in these terms:

- A dynamic, power-packed video of Dr. Van Impe expounding on the following:
- The 6-Day Theory--as predicted in the Jewish Talmud and by the Apostles Peter and Barnabas, and also by church historians, including Irenus in A.D. 140.
- Chronological charts and calendar of Jewish holy days leading up to Messiah's appearing!
- Mystery circles in the field.
- Earthquakes, famines, AIDS ... and the end!
- Why Jewish rabbinical scholars, Hindus, Muslims, New Agers, and secular leaders are proclaiming A.D. 2000 as the beginning of the new and final age.

Though he denied that he was setting a date, it is obvious that in 1993 Van Impe strongly believed the Lord would return in A.D. 2000. In an article in the January-February 1993 issue of his magazine, *Perhaps Today*, he gave the following chronology to demonstrate that the Lord would probably return in September of 1999:

“Let’s figure that out again--1948.5 plus 51.4 equals 1999.9--around September of the year 1999. Now, we are not date-setters! Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my father only (Matthew 24:36). But wait! Don’t say, ‘No one can know the APPROXIMATE time when Christ will return,’ for Jesus also said in verse 33 that we will know when it is near, even at the doors.”

Van Impe would have done well to have quoted the entire verse in Matthew 24:33: “So likewise ye, WHEN YE SHALL SEE ALL THESE THINGS, know that it is near, even at the doors.” The Lord Jesus said those who see ALL of the events of Matthew 24 fulfilled will know the time of His return. He is referring, obviously, to those who are alive during the Great Tribulation. What are ALL THESE THINGS that Christ had prophesied in Matthew 24? Verse 15 refers to “the abomination of desolation” that shall “stand in the holy place.” Verse 21 refers to “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Verse 24 refers to powerful miracles performed by false christs. Verse 29 speaks of the sun and moon darkened, and the stars falling from heaven. We are seeing none of these things today, let alone all of them.

### **Matthew 24 and Revelation 6-18 Do Not Refer to Church-Age Events**

While it is true that portions of Matthew 24 have been fulfilled through church history in a preliminary, fore-viewing sense (e.g., false teachers, false signs, false christs, earthquakes, wars), the prophecy actually describes the events of Daniel’s 70th Week. Christ spoke of “the beginning of sorrows” in verses 4-8 as false teachers, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes. We believe the term “beginning of sorrows” has a two-fold application, as many prophecies do. For one, it refers to the general course of the church age. The things described in Matthew 24:4-8 have been evident throughout the age and have grown in intensity particularly in the last

century. But the beginning of sorrows more particularly refers to the first part of the Tribulation. And Matthew 24:9-30 clearly refers to events of the Great Tribulation that the church-age saints will not see.

I believe this exposes the error of concentrating on speculative prophecy. Sure, it's interesting to witness current events and to SPECULATE about when the Lord MIGHT come. It's interesting to SPECULATE about whether or not the European Union is the revived Roman Empire, but I don't believe the Lord wants His people to focus on these things. He wants us to focus, rather, on the Great Commission.

The writings of the apostles do not contain prophetic SPECULATION. Does SPECULATION really have a place in Bible preaching and ministry? Are we to be SPECULATORS? No, we are to preach the SURE Word of God and leave the speculation to the prognosticators of this world.

Repeatedly, preachers who have focused on prophetic speculation have proven to be false teachers. They observe; they speculate; then they prognosticate--and their prognostications turn out to be wrong. They prophesy economic collapse, but the economy doesn't collapse. They prophesy Y2K pandemonium, and there is no pandemonium. They speculate that the U.S. invasion of Kuwait to drive out Sadam Hussein will usher in the events of Revelation, but it doesn't happen. They speculate that the preparation for the rebuilding of the Jewish temple means that it will certainly happen in this present lifetime (e.g., Grant Jeffrey's *The New Temple and the Second Coming*, p. 3).

There are many preachers whose ministries focus almost exclusively on speculative prophecy. They are Middle East watchers; they delve into conspiracies; they see prophetic significance in El Nino; they speculate about the mark of the Beast and the identity of the antichrist.

There *are* prophecies being fulfilled today. There are the prophecies about apostasy (e.g., 2 Timothy 3-4; 2 Peter 2). There is Daniel's prophecy that many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased (Dan. 12:4). There is Israel's return to the

land in a spiritually-blind condition (Ezek. 37:7-8). There is the rage of the nations as described in Psalm 2.

There is no doubt that we are seeing the stage set for the grand fulfillment of Bible prophecy. The stage is being set by such things as computer and communications technology, military technology, religious syncretism, and globalism.

But when it comes to the events described in the book of Revelation (chapters six through 18), none of that will happen until the church-age saints are Raptured. The events of Revelation is not the church's program. Thus, it is a waste of time to speculate about the identity of the antichrist or the nature of his mark or Armageddon or the army of the east or whether the European Union is the revived Roman Empire or how the events of this present time will fit into Daniel's 70th Week, because we cannot know the answers of such questions.

### **This Present Period Is an Interlude**

The Old Testament prophecies about Israel's conversion and glorious kingdom look ahead to the 70th Week of Daniel and the second coming of Christ. This present church age is an interlude. Israel's prophetic clock ticked away through the 69 weeks of Daniel 9, which are weeks of years, then stopped at Christ's death. According to Daniel 9:25-26, the Messiah would come, and then be "cut off" after the 69th year. That is exactly what happened. The Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself as Israel's Messiah and King. John 1:11 says that "he came unto his own, and his own received him not." Christ was rejected by the nation Israel, as prophecy said He would be, and He turned to the Gentiles, to call out a people for His name from among the heathen nations. That is what He is doing today. This is explained in passages such as Luke 19:11-27; Acts 15:13-18; and Romans 11:1-29. Christ's disciples thought He would establish the kingdom immediately, but He explained that this would not happen. Christ would return to heaven; Israel would be scattered to the nations; and only later would Christ return to establish the promised kingdom.

During this present interlude in the prophecies pertaining to Israel, Christ is calling out a people for His name from among the Gentile nations (Acts 15:13-18). At the end of this period, New Testament believers will be caught away to heaven, and Israel's prophetic clock will start again and the final week of Daniel's 70 Weeks, a week of seven years, will be fulfilled. The events of Daniel's 70th Week are described in Scriptures such as Isaiah 2; Zechariah 12-14; Matthew 24; Luke 21; and Revelation 6-18.

During Daniel's 70th Week, also called "the time of Jacob's trouble," Israel and the world will be subject to great troubles--judgments from heaven and unspeakably horrible wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and such. The antichrist will make a peace pact with Israel and will rule the world. After three and one-half years, the phony peace pact will be broken and the antichrist will desecrate Israel's Temple and set himself up as God. That will mark the beginning of the last half of Daniel's 70th Week and the start of the most terrible period of trouble the world has ever seen (Dan. 9:26-27; Mat. 24:15-28). Sometime during the 70th Week, Israel will be converted and at the end, Christ will return in power and glory to establish the promised kingdom and to judge the nations (Mat. 24:29-30; 25:31- 32; Zech. 12:9-14:21).

### **The Christian's Duty Is Not to Look for Prophetic Signs**

Christians have an entirely different program from that of the nation Israel. We are not told to look for the fulfillment of Israel's prophecies. Our work is to carry the gospel to all people. That is the great business of the individual Christian and of the churches. Christians are to be ready at all times to be caught away from this world (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-58). For the Christian, the coming of Christ is imminent, meaning it can happen at any time. Christ warned: "Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. ... Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Mat. 24:42, 44; 25:13).

This is a very important Bible truth. It is essential that the Christian be ready to depart at any time, ready to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the

children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. ... For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:4-9).

The Christian can know the general times and seasons, but we cannot know the time of Christ’s return. We can’t know the day. We can’t know the year. We can’t even know the decade. In fact, we can’t be sure even about the century!

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS RESTRAINING THE DEVIL’S PROGRAM IN THE WORLD, AND THIS IS THE ELEMENT OF PROPHECY THAT MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO KNOW WHEN CHRIST WILL COME. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 says: “And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: ONLY HE WHO NOW LETTETH WILL LET, UNTIL HE BE TAKEN OUT OF THE WAY.”

I BELIEVE THESE VERSES SAY THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS RESTRAINING THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY (WHAT ELSE COULD RESTRAIN THE DEVIL’S PROGRAM?), AND HE WILL RESTRAIN UNTIL HE IS TAKEN UP WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS. THUS, EVEN THOUGH SIGNS ARE BEING FULFILLED IN PRESENT WORLD EVENTS, WE STILL CANNOT KNOW BY OBSERVING THESE EVENTS WHEN CHRIST WILL RETURN.

The Holy Spirit’s restraining presence is the missing element. We don’t know how long He will restrain. He has the power to slow the devil’s program down and to keep things from progressing.

The Bible says: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (James 5:7). The Lord’s primary purpose in this age is to call out a people for His name among all nations. The Spirit of God is the omnipresent God; He has always been in the world in one sense; but He came at Pentecost in the special sense of equipping the churches for the Great Commission (Acts 1:8) and convicting sinners of their lost condition and drawing them to Christ. He is controlling the events of history for this objective. He

will do this as long as He wants, and it is impossible to know when this evangelistic program will be completed and the time for the fulfillment of prophecy will occur.

The Bible plainly tells us that the reason that Christ has not yet returned is His desire to save sinners. “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:8-9).

We will not know the time of Christ’s coming until it happens. It will be a surprise. We will not see the antichrist make his covenant with Israel. We will not see the Two Witnesses stand in Jerusalem to denounce the antichrist and call upon men to repent. We will not see them killed and we will not see them resurrected. We will not see the antichrist stand in the temple and announce himself as God. We will not see the mark of the beast forced upon the world. We will not see the great judgments poured out. We will not see the northern power of Ezekiel 38-39 descend upon Israel and be destroyed by God. We will not see the armies of the world congregate in the Middle East to stand against Christ at Armageddon. Those events belong to Daniel’s 70th Week, which is part of Israel’s program.

Christians are part of another program altogether, and we need to mind our business and make sure that the work God has given us is fulfilled.

I fear that there is a lot of time wasted by Christians in the study of current events and in trying to find prophetic fulfillment in these events. I’ve done this myself at times, but I believe it is a sidetrack. Certainly, it is wise to know that the hour is late, but the fact is that the hour has been late for 2,000 years. We have been living in the last hours for all of that time. God has been longsuffering toward this wicked world, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). God has been calling out a people for His name. That is why the gospel is to be preached throughout the world in every generation. This is the means whereby God is saving people and adding them to the churches. God is calling men through the gospel (2 Thes. 2:14). It is therefore the worldwide

preaching of the Word of God that is to be the priority of every believer and of every Bible-believing assembly.

Just before Christ ascended to heaven, the apostles asked, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). They wanted to know about prophetic details and dates. The Lord’s reply is instructive: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

The Lord told them they were not going to know the details of prophetic events and dates beyond that which is written in Scripture. Instead, they were to give themselves to proclaiming the Word of God to the ends of the earth.

In conclusion, let me emphasize exactly what I am saying and what I am not saying:

First, I don’t believe it is wrong to study prophecy. Prophecy forms a large part of Scripture and it is important for the Christian life. Prophecy is a great light and encourager and motivator. At the same time, I don’t believe we should go beyond written prophecy and give ourselves over to speculation.

Second, I do not believe we can determine the time of the Rapture by observing world events. I believe the Rapture will be a surprise and will not be preceded by specific signs.

Finally, anything that detracts from the Great Commission is dangerous, even if it is the study of current events in light of Bible prophecy. Many who attend prophecy conferences have no zeal to win souls to Christ and no burden for world missions. They are caught up in carnal enthusiasm for prophetic speculation, but they are largely uninterested in the far more important business of holy living, discipleship, church building, and world evangelism.

This is unscriptural.



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