

SIGNS

OF THE END

by

David W. Dyer

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PUBLICATION**

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PREFACE

In this book, we are going to be investigating some prophetic visions concerning the end of this age. Readers will find that almost everything presented here will be new or quite different from what is commonly understood or taught. Therefore, I would like to urge everyone not to simply react blindly and automatically to what is said. Do not shut your spiritual eyes and your mind.

Instead, open your Bible and read these passages for yourselves. Search the scriptures and become familiar with them. There is no need to take my word for anything. Weigh what is said here for yourself. Open up to God in prayer and humility and receive understanding directly from Him.

Due to the nature of biblical prophecy and the impossibility of knowing the future without personal, divine revelation, this book will include some speculation.

These ideas of the author will be indicated by words such as: possibly, could be, etc. These are not meant to be, and should not be taken to be concrete predictions or, even less, biblical truths. It is quite possible that this author is missing something or is even mistaken about some of these points.

Much of what we will study here involves prophetic visions. These things are mysterious and difficult to understand. Our God has not deemed it necessary to give us an exact, event by event, chronological timetable. He has deliberately obscured the future with a veil of secrecy and symbolism.

It is also not possible to, nor does God expect us to, perfectly understand all the details of the coming events. How all these visions of overcomers, witnesses, sealed servants, etc. exactly fit together is not clearly explained. No doubt this is because it not necessary for us to know these things so precisely.

What is important, however, is for us to hear from God. Contained in all these visions is revelation about the Person of God and His will.

Here we also find much to edify, challenge and prepare ourselves for what is coming upon the earth. It is this author's prayer that God will use this writing to warn, equip and strengthen His people for the coming time of the end.

D.W.D.

1.

THE TWO WITNESSES

In this chapter I would like to address a subject which has been the source of much speculation in religious circles. It is a topic about which some Christians may have fixed opinions or even dogmatic doctrinal positions. In spite of this, I would like to urge all readers to put aside for a moment, as much as they possibly can, any preconceived ideas and be open to the Holy Spirit. By so doing you will be allowing Him to speak into your hearts anything He would like to impart to you from this message.

The reason I request this is not that I am insisting that what you will read here is the definitive, "right" answer but simply because it is my desire that you might hear a word from God Himself.

If, through these words, the Almighty can reveal Himself and His purposes to you in some deeper way than you have ever known before, then all the effort put into both the writing and reading of this chapter will be worthwhile.

Biblical prophecy is very difficult to understand. No one man has everything about the end of this age figured out. In fact, if you find someone who thinks that they do, this may be a good indi-

cation that this person has lost his or her ability to be taught of God. Consequently, what you read here will be perhaps an imperfect attempt to elucidate what the Holy Spirit has revealed. But, in spite of this limitation, I believe you will find in this chapter some new ideas to re-invigorate your thinking concerning the end of this age.

Before we begin to discuss this subject together, I think it would be wise for every reader to take some time and read Revelation 11:1-15 – the passage about these two witnesses.

The reason for this is that if you are not familiar with this section of scripture, the following discussion will have little meaning for you. Additionally, it is very unwise to simply adopt other men's opinions about such things without thoroughly searching them out for yourself.

If you are not well acquainted with the verses involved, it will be impossible for you to know if what I or anyone else is saying is correct. On the other hand, once you do familiarize yourself with the scriptures, they will become a blessing to you as God speaks to your heart through them.

As we approach this topic, many of you may remember hearing that these two witnesses are going to be a reappearance of two former Biblical figures. Some think that these might be Moses and Elijah while others speculate that Enoch might replace Moses in this duo.

The Enoch and Elijah team is customarily chosen because these are the only two men who were taken up without ever experiencing death. Thus, some reason, they must come back again and be

killed since "...it is appointed for men to die once..." (Heb 9:27).

A difficulty with this line of reasoning arises however, when one attempts to reconcile it with the coming resurrection of believers, commonly referred to as the "rapture." At this event many human beings will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air without ever undergoing physical death (I Thess 4:17). It is easy to see from this that the Hebrews 9:27 verse does not demand that physical death is necessary for everyone.

While the understanding that these are two literal prophets may prove to be the correct one, there are a few things about this Revelation passage which seem to show something very different from such an interpretation. There are several indications given to us here that something larger and even more amazing is in view.

TWO "MEN" – ONE "BODY"

One of the first significant hints that something more than just two men is in view here was brought to my attention by a brother in England. He pointed out to me that in most of the original Greek manuscripts the word "bodies" (vs 8,9) appears twice in the singular form.

While many Bible translations have "helped" us understand these verses better by changing the two singular words into the plural, this is not what was written by the John the apostle.

These passages should actually read "And their dead *body* will lie in the street of that great city..." and "Then those from the peoples, tribes,

tongues, and nations will see their dead *body* three and a half days..." (Rev 11:8,9).

Now this is a little peculiar. Why would the inspired text twice make this kind of grammatical "mistake?" What is it that we can learn from this seeming error? It is just possible that there is no mistake at all but that God is showing us some further meaning about these future prophets.

Here we have our first indication that the scripture may not be merely referring to two individual men but instead to a group of people – a corporate entity. This word "body" reminds us of the use of this same word in the phrase "the body of Christ" which of course consists of countless individuals. We read in one place: "...we are members of His body" (Eph 5:30).

Furthermore, in Revelation 11:5 we are told that fire will come out of their "mouth," again the word is singular in the Greek language.

Verses such as this combined with many others certainly provide an adequate scriptural basis for supposing that the word "body" could be referring to a much larger group than simply the two prophets mentioned earlier.

This then leads us to the possibility that the sacred scriptures are speaking here about great numbers of men and women who, at the end of this age, fulfill some important function in preparing the world for judgment and the Lord's return.

The first thought that most people may have concerning the above postulation is: "If these witnesses are really a group of many people, why then does the Bible use the word 'two?' Isn't that

quite confusing?" Yes, it may be a little confusing, but there is also a very scriptural explanation for it.

Throughout the scriptures an unwavering principle is taught. It is that judgment can only be executed upon a sinning individual if at least two witnesses can be produced to verify the truth of any infraction. We read that: "Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness" (Deut 17:6). "Two" is God's number for verifying the truth of any accusation. Anything less than two is simply not acceptable.

The number two is everywhere in the scriptures the "number of testimony." The early disciples were sent out "two by two" as they testified concerning the truth of Jesus.

There were two tablets of stone in the Ark of the Covenant bearing testimony concerning the law of God. No doubt God could have written the ten commandments on one stone, but He chose to use two, the number of testimony.

On the lid of the Ark of the Covenant there were two cherubim symbolically witnessing the sprinkling of the blood, attesting to the fact that God's righteous requirements had been fulfilled. Obviously, there are more than two cherubim in the heavens, but only two symbolic ones "testified" to the sprinkling of the blood.

Therefore, the word "two" here could be understood as being symbolic – a representation of the dual witness required by God before His sentence can be carried out.

You see, at the end of this age God is going to judge His people (Heb 10:30) and the sinful earth. The bowls of His wrath are going to be poured out on rebellious mankind. But, according to His own law, before judgment can be executed, there must be at least “two” witnesses to testify to the sins of those about to be judged. Without the testimony of these two, judgment cannot begin.

Of course the Most High does not need anyone to tell Him what is in the heart of man. He is already aware of what is happening in these evil days. Yet these witnesses serve to fulfill the demands of His law and, perhaps even more importantly, to warn a perishing world and a backsliding church to repent before judgment comes.

WORLDWIDE WITNESS

Another thought which leads us to believe that these witnesses might be more than just “two” is the universality of their witness. Evidently, their testimony influences “peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations” (Rev 11:9).

The celebrations of their deaths certainly seem to be universal, leading us to conclude that the whole world was impacted by them. In this situation, the sins of a few individuals are not in view. Instead the rebellion of the whole world is being exposed by these prophets.

Since the impending judgment is worldwide or universal, it stands to reason that the charges which are being brought might necessitate a larger witness than just that of two men. The idea that it will be only two men presents a tremendous

problem. How could two individual men adequately prophecy to the entire world in 1,260 days?

While modern Christianity seems to think that the testimony of these two men will be spread over the globe by means of television, just a little thought about this idea renders it extremely unlikely.

Let us reason a bit together about this possibility. Is it likely that the major news channels are going to give lots of air time to two prophets who are exposing and condemning the sins of our age? Aren't these the very sins that many of the TV producers are promoting?

Television time is expensive. Do you suppose that these two will buy hours and hours of prime time to make their case to the nations? Would many people watch if they did? Would the news media give them a fair and complete hearing, so that they could fully expound the word of judgment which God is saying through them?

Perhaps some think that the Christian television will be the medium from which these two prophets can expound their condemnations.

But is the world listening to these channels? Who would actually hear or be convicted by these means? Would those in charge of these Christian productions be happy to hear what these two prophets are saying?

Isn't it possible that they too would be convicted by what is being preached? Would they give them all the time they needed? It is very doubtful that this would work.

Still another modern Christian concept is that these two prophets will junket around the world, either by airplane or simply appearing and disappearing. Upon close examination this too seems very improbable or even ridiculous.

Firstly, we must remember that there are currently over 194 countries in our world. For these prophets to reach each one of them individually in only 1,260 days they would have to visit a new nation every six and one half days (including travel time, if any).

It is impossible for any prophet to adequately convict an entire nation of sin in the manner which these two must do, in only six and one half days. This simply cannot work. How could their message possibly reach the populations of these nations, some with over one billion inhabitants, in only six and one half days?

Today for example, in some countries there are famous preachers on television stations, some of them broadcasting for hours every day on national channels. They have been doing this for years. But have they reached everyone in their nation? Has the entire population heard their message. It is clear that they have not. Therefore, such a whirlwind ministry is not logical or probable.

Secondly, when you add to this idea the fact mentioned earlier that not only "nations" but also "peoples," "tribes" and "tongues" are involved here, all possibility of such a tour disappears. No two men, no matter how fast they worked or were translated from place to place, could conduct such a ministry in 1,260 days. With only a small

amount of logic and sound reasoning, the fallacy of such a fantasy is quickly exposed.

“TWO” MUST BE A SYMBOLIC NUMBER

With all this in mind, we are led to the logical conclusion that the number “two” is symbolic. It is meant to represent the number of God’s testimony and not indicate merely two men. Instead we are led to believe that this “body” is a group of prepared men and women who are raised up by God to testify against an exceedingly sinful generation and a backslidden church to prepare the world for judgment.

It seems logical to suppose that God is, even now, preparing in every nation, people group, tribe and tongue, faithful believers who will be anointed and raised up on the last hour to fulfill this essential ministry.

It also seems reasonable that by means of a larger number of prophets this testimony could be adequately carried out in the time allotted.

Still another problem we encounter with the idea of a literal “two” men from the past being the “two witnesses”, is the efficacy of their testimony. A couple of outsiders making sweeping accusations from great distances may not be sufficient to powerfully convict the guilty. It is possible that they could not be considered true witnesses.

The evidence against each nation or group of people would be most convincingly brought by those who were intimately acquainted with each respective situation and who therefore could give accurate testimony against them.

As an example, let us suppose that you are summoned to court to testify at a trial concerning a traffic accident. But you can't understand why you were summoned. You weren't there at the time and did not see the accident. You know nothing about the people involved, the vehicles, or the situation. Therefore you cannot be considered to be a true witness.

A witness is someone who can give testimony to what they have seen and heard. Only those who live in each country, culture, and situation, and have seen the sin thereof, can adequately testify against the inhabitants. The testimony of some outsiders would not be readily accepted. Although some might imagine that Enoch and Elijah are right now up in heaven peering over the railing of the balcony and noting down the sins of each nation, tongue, tribe, etc. this is a little ridiculous.

It seems much more reasonable to suppose that God's final witness will be given to everyone in their own language, by someone living within their own culture, thereby exposing their sinful condition in a way that they can easily understand.

It is therefore probable that some number of "in place," holy agents will be raised up and anointed by God to testify concerning His righteous judgment in these last days.

As an aside here, some might be curious to know why the third use of the word "bodies" in the text is actually plural in the Greek (vs 9). We read: "...and not allow their dead *bodies* to be put into graves" (Rev 11:9).

The answer could be as follows: It is possible for the world to “see” a corporate “body” (vs 8). It is also possible for a collective “body” to “lie in the street” (vs 9a). But when you go to bury them, you must bury individual “bodies” (plural). It is rather awkward to try to bury a collective group scattered over the earth at the same time.

This use of the plural word “bodies” in the last part of verse 9 reinforces the idea that the first two uses of the word “body” in the singular was not a grammatical error but is part of an important revelation.

WAR ON THE SAINTS

Another word in this passage which gives us some indication that the “two witnesses” are not merely “two” at all is found in verse 7. Here we find the coming beast makes war against the witnesses. This word “war” in the Greek is POLEMOS. This word means a prolonged engagement spanning a considerable length of time and probably involving many battles.

Such a meaning is in direct contrast to the Greek word PHONEUO which means to murder and also to the word MACHE used to signify a single battle. The distinction between these words is certainly important. Why would the antichrist need to fight a prolonged war against two individual men? Could he not just kill them?

Of course some may point out that their power is so great that a single attack will not do the job. While God’s protection is upon them this is certainly true. During this period of time they are invincible.

But once this covering is removed, as it evidently is at some point, there is no need for a protracted struggle which could be described as a "war." Simple murder will do the job. Furthermore, this word "war" ordinarily refers to a slaughter on a far greater scale than just the murder of two peculiar prophets.

This too reinforces the idea that these are not just two men, but a group of people, thus requiring a "war" against them and not just a single battle.

Interestingly, there are a few other places in the Bible where we find this word "war" used in a context which could have some bearing on our subject at hand.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel chapter 7, verse 21 we are told of a "horn" (which here symbolizes the coming "man of sin") who makes "war against the saints" and prevails against them. Evidently this sinister, evil man will begin a crusade to annihilate every one of God's people who opposes him.

In Revelation 13:7 we are reminded a second time that this man is granted permission to "...make war (POLEMOS) with the saints and to overcome them."

So we discover that at some point in time, whatever protection has been afforded these sanctified believers (saints) is removed and the antichrist/beast is given power to begin a whole-sale bloodbath.

A war of tremendous, global proportions will be waged against Christian men and women

whose lives and testimony oppose the purposes of this satan-inspired madman.

While it is just not possible to prove conclusively from the scriptures that the “war” waged against these end-time witnesses is the same as the “war with the saints” mentioned above, the parallelism here is unmistakable.

1,260 DAYS

At this point it seems appropriate to discuss some of the time elements involved in this passage. The almost 3.5 year (1,260 day) period found in verse 3 is possibly a reference to the first half of the seven-year period often called the “tribulation.” This then could be the time during which this powerful prophetic witness takes place. But there is also another number 3.5 mentioned – the duration of “days” which “their dead body” lies unburied in the streets (Rev 11:9).

Quite honestly, it seems a little strange that a fraction of a day should be recorded here. Are we to really understand that this “body” is left to rot until exactly noon of the fourth day? Or is it possible that something more than simple days is being indicated? Although nothing in Bible prophecy can be proven, it seems reasonable to suppose that this second number 3.5 might have some connection with the first one.

Earlier in the same book, we read that some believers of the church in Smyrna were going to suffer tribulation “ten days” (Rev 2:10). While the exact meaning of this phrase is not clear, it may

have meant a ten year period of intense persecution.

If we apply this one-year-for-one-day formula to our present considerations we could then hypothesize that the coming slaughter of the saints will occur during the second 3.5 years of the tribulation.

At the end of this time they are resurrected, possibly during the “rapture.” Confirming this idea is the fact that their resurrection is precipitated by a “loud voice from heaven” which could correspond to the “shout of the archangel” mentioned in I Thessalonians 4:16. Also, it occurs just at the sounding of the seventh trumpet which is probably the same as the “last” trumpet (Rev 11:15; I Cor 15:52). This would then correspond to the “trumpet of God” also mentioned in this same verse (I Thess 4:16).

THE SPIRIT OUTPOURED

In Joel 2:28-32 and also in Acts 2:17-21 a very significant prophecy is recorded. Peter, the apostle, quotes this passage in reference to the early disciples’ experience on the day of Pentecost. However, it is clear from a careful reading of this prophecy that Pentecost was only a partial fulfillment of the prophecy. We can easily conclude this because not everything which the prophecy predicts, happened in Jerusalem on that day.

Although Peter may have thought that he was living in the “last days,” the context of the passage clearly links it to an even later “last days” – the completion of the age. For example, we read that

“the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20).

This prophecy was not fulfilled exactly when Jesus died. Although there was a “darkness” (Mt 27:45) we read nothing about the moon being turned into blood.

Yet in the book of Revelation, predicting the future events, we see that when the sixth seal is broken: “...there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood” (Rev 6:12). This is something which will happen in the future.

Also we read: “Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night” (Rev 8:12). This too has not yet occurred.

Undeniably, something further is in view. Please remember what was stated at the beginning of this article – prophecy can often have more than one fulfillment. In this case, it seems evident that the full realization of this prediction which Peter quoted is yet to come.

Now we come to a further consideration. This prophecy seems to be divided into two parts, separated by the word “and” in verse 18. In the first part, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon “all flesh” (vs 17). This seems to mean anyone and everyone who believed into Jesus could receive the Spirit.

But the group of believers who receive the Spirit in verse 18 is not just anybody or every-

body. It seems to be another group. It is limited to a special kind of believer, ie. “menservants” and “maidservants.”

While anyone can believe in Jesus, to be thought of by God to be a “servant” requires diligence and faithfulness. This is something quite different.

A further confirmation of the division of this passage into two parts comes when we consider the outcome of the anointings given. The first case includes “dreams” and “visions” in addition to prophesy.

The second anointing is specifically for a prophetic witness. Here we are informed that in the “last days” there will be a mighty spiritual anointing poured out upon the servants of the Lord. This supernatural unction is given for one stated purpose – so that they might prophesy.

Therefore, we find a hint here that at some time in the future, there will be a second outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This possibility corresponds with what many see as “the early and the latter rain” (Deut 11:14; Ho 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zec 10:1; Jas 5:7). In the Old Testament in Israel, the first rain came at the time of planting. The “latter rain” came shortly before the time of harvest.

At Pentecost, there was the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit – the early rain. It seems probable therefore, that before the second coming of Christ, there will be a second, mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful servants of Jesus – the latter rain. This tremendous anointing will precipitate one last, earthshaking, prophetic wit-

ness to the truth of God and against the corruption of the world and the apostate church.

This thought combines smoothly with the Revelation scripture which speaks about the “two witnesses”. Remember that all believers already have one “portion” of the Holy Spirit. Yet here in the book of Revelation it seems as if these “two” are given an additional anointing or portion. We read: “And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy...” (Rev 11:3). This giving of power clearly seems to be something above and beyond what has already been given on the day of Pentecost.

Here we have before us some substantial evidence that there may be a further, final outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon those who will prophesy for Jesus during the last days. “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10).

MEASURING THE “TEMPLE”

Revelation chapter 11, which speaks about the two witnesses, begins with an interesting scenario. While beholding this vision, John the apostle is instructed to measure the temple.

Why is this little section included here? Has God suddenly gotten old and forgotten the dimensions of this building? But wait. Not only is he to measure the temple but also the “altar” (the place of sacrifice) and very significantly, “those who worship there” (vs 1).

Probably every Christian realizes that the individual members of the body of Christ are the

true “temple of the living God” (I Cor 6:16). It is quite conceivable, therefore, that John is conducting a survey, not of a physical building, but of believers. Perhaps God, before He pours out His end-time anointing is searching for those whose lives have been prepared to receive it. This “measurement” may in fact be an inspection which is being carried out to determine who among God’s people is ready and able to fulfill this last great commission.

And what is the measurement which will be required of those who are chosen? What is the standard by which they will be judged? No doubt it has something to do with the altar. In other words, the men and women who are selected must be those whose lives have become a living sacrifice to God – those who know what it means to have died with Christ completely.

Worship also seems to be a factor. In order to be qualified for such a task, these individuals must have spent much time “in the temple” – in the very presence of God.

These are ones who have become intimate with Him. They do not just “go to a worship service” on Sunday morning. Their whole lives have become a spiritual offering to Him. Moment by moment their souls are poured out in worship to God Almighty.

This surely is the requirement – to be living only for Jesus. These are the ones who have been prepared and qualified by God to receive a second “portion” of the Holy Spirit and execute an essential prophetic ministry at the time of the end.

THE COMING OF ELIJAH

No discussion of this subject would be complete without the mention of a very important event: the appearance of Elijah the prophet before the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal 4:5). Before the first advent of Jesus, this prophecy had a preliminary fulfillment in the person of John the Baptist. We read that he came in “...the spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk 1:17). His mission was to prepare one small race, located in one tiny spot on the globe for the appearance of their promised Messiah.

When the disciples questioned Jesus about the coming of Elijah He answered them in a very peculiar manner. In essence He said: “He has already come...and he will yet come in the future.”

We read: “And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Indeed, *Elijah is coming first* and will restore all things [this is the future coming of Elijah]. But I say to you that Elijah *has come already*, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist” (Mt 17:10-13).

What we are exploring now is the possibility that this “second coming of Elijah” will, in fact, be a worldwide outpouring of the “spirit and power of Elijah” upon many thousands of believers who have been prepared by God. Their job will be to

testify to the entire planet that the Lord's righteous judgment is about to be manifested and that men must make themselves ready.

If this is so, then the following features will no doubt also be true of these individuals. They will certainly be, as John the Baptist was, completely outside of any religious organization. Significantly, John's prophetic testimony was completely separate from and even against the hypocrisy of the ecclesiastical establishment of his day.

These will be men and women who are uncompromising. They will be owned by no one. Theirs will not be a zeal for fame, fortune, or earthly power. Instead they will burn with the flame of what will glorify their Master. They will be fearless, bold prophets who are bent upon telling people exactly what they don't want to hear. They will be the mouthpieces of God, exposing the sins of the world and the worldly church to turn them from their folly before it's too late.

Additionally they will be the kind of people whom God can trust with His power to such an extent that their words will be backed by supernatural plagues of every description.

Can't you see why everyone hates these prophets? The deeply rooted evil within the hearts of men desperately does not want to be exposed. How many Christians, for example, are continually attempting to cover their sins instead of repenting of them and receiving God's cleansing power?

Oh, how we justify ourselves against the righteous requirements of the Most High! How

we like to pretend that we are doing all we can to serve Jesus! And how uncomfortable such prophets will make us when they come around spouting the unbearable truth that we are not really right with God! If the church is in such a state, how much more strongly will the world react against those who try to reprove them for their wickedness.

This then is the ministry of this twofold witness. It is to bring to repentance those who will hear, thereby preparing them for the coming of the King and to warn those whose stubborn hearts refuse to bend before Him.

John came clothed with camel's hair, eating insects and wild honey. He was different, non-conforming and offensive. He was not well received by the religious crowd. Similarly these future witnesses will arrive "clothed in sackcloth," the garments of mourning (Rev 11:3). Whether they be two or many, one thing is sure, they will not be welcomed either.

These unpopular figures will have nothing to gain in this world. They will have already forsaken their appetite for the things of the earth. They will not be looking forward to ministering to great crowds on Sunday morning. Their "ministry" coffers will not be bulging with the contribution of widows, divorcees, the unemployed, and other poor saints whom they have sucked dry of their last penny with unfulfilled promises of health, success, blessings, prosperity, etc.

Madison Avenue building projects and theatrical productions will hold no glamour for

them. Acclaim and all the trappings of today's "successful Christianity" will not attract them in the least. The only future they have in this life is death – to be struck down for their faithful testimony to the righteousness of God.

These burning, holy prophets are evidently slain in the "great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (vs 8). Some have taken this to refer to Jerusalem in a very immoral state, but I believe that something much more significant may be in view.

If God were trying to indicate Jerusalem, He could have done so without all this mysterious, veiled language. It is possible that these three identifying characteristics of this great city – "Sodom," "Egypt" and "where our Lord was crucified" – may simply be descriptive language indicating to us three characteristics of those who will participate in the coming massacre of God's prophets.

Sodom was a city of great wickedness and sin. Egypt is often used in the Bible to typify worldliness and sensual pleasure. Finally, "where our Lord was crucified" indicates Jerusalem, the Jewish religious center at that time.

Keeping in mind that Judaism was the only God-ordained religion but it had strayed far from Him, we can identify here three elements which will join together to attack God's end-time witnesses: sin, worldliness, and an empty Christian religious establishment. This would lead us to conclude that the inhabitants of the earth

involved in sin, worldliness and vain, hypocritical religion, will combine forces, just as they did in Jesus' day, to destroy these prophets who trouble them. They will strive to silence the voices which are condemning them.

THE ELISHA MINISTRY

As we have seen, when Jesus' disciples asked Him about the coming of Elijah, He responded by saying two things: "Yes, he will indeed come and restore all things, and, he already has come."

The book of Malachi informs us that before the second coming of Jesus, there will be an Elijah style ministry which will accomplish a sort of "restoration" among the people of God (Mal 4:5,6).

The first "reappearance" of Elijah – John the Baptist – was killed. His ministry, like that of the first Elijah is over. But there is another important Elijah type of ministry yet to come.

After Elijah died, his ministry was carried on by Elisha. However, Elisha's ministry had an important difference. He was granted a double portion of the Spirit which was on Elijah.

This fits very well with what we have been suggesting: that at the time of the end, there will be a double portion of the Holy Spirit poured out upon faithful menservants and maidservants to carry out an Elijah type ministry. They will be preparing the world and the church for the soon coming of Jesus. Theirs will be a ministry of restoration of the hearts and minds of people to their God.

OLIVE TREES AND LAMPSTANDS

In Zechariah 4:14 we read about these two witnesses. There they are the “two anointed ones who stand beside [in the presence of] the Lord of the whole earth.” These last days prophets have made a trade. They have been willing to forego all the pleasures and attractions of this life – even the religious ones – for the incomparable privilege of standing in the immediate presence of God Almighty.

This fourth chapter of Zechariah shows us an eloquent picture of these future prophets. Here they are described as two olive trees continually pouring oil out of themselves. This may be a reference to the “double portion of the spirit” which was received by Elisha when Elijah departed from him. It no doubt also has an association with our previous discussion of how the Holy Spirit will be especially poured out upon God’s faithful servants in the last days.

You may notice as you read through this text that only one lampstand is mentioned here while in Revelation we are told of two. The explanation for this may be that at the end of this age the testimony of God will be intensified twofold – the number necessary before judgment can begin.

While the olive trees speak of the anointing, the lampstands portray the shining testimony of all that God is. This then is what will characterize the ministry of the “two witnesses” – a double portion of God’s Spirit and a twofold testimony to the righteousness of God.

GOD'S HOUSE

Here in the Zechariah passage, we are also given further hints about these two witnesses' ministry with respect to the church. Here we read again about the temple (vs 9) which today consists of the people of God. Then we see that someone called "Zerubbabel" has a plumb-line in his hand.

A plumb-line is used in construction to check a building to see if it is truly vertical, to see if it is well built and sound. It appears then that the ministry of these "two witnesses" – the two olive trees of the Zechariah prophecy – has something to do with verifying the construction of God's temple (vs 9).

We also remember the beginning of the passage in Revelation about these two. First, there was a measuring of the temple. Therefore, this passage about the ministry of the two witnesses must also be related to a checking out or verifying of how the construction of God's house is proceeding.

Our conclusion is something about which we have already spoken in other writings: God's house is not in order. Much of the construction which has been done and is being done, is faulty.

One of the primary functions of these "two" witnesses therefore, seems to be bringing a correction to the church. They have an important bearing on "restoring" of what really is on God's heart. This no doubt will involve a rebuking of the careless and self-centered builders and a calling of God's people back to Himself. It will be a doubly

anointed, prophetic witness against the impurity, error, and worldliness of His church.

These prophets will have a two-fold anointing to penetrate the lies and deceptions which are so rampant today. They will have a clarity of vision to see and expose the way in which men have corrupted the scriptures and polluted the house of the Lord with their own ideas and plans. They will preach with astounding power against those who have used the people of God to further their own selfish interests.

They will prophesy against those Christians in whose hearts are lies and whose lives are a sham, not really being submitted to the rulership of Jesus. These prophets will not be popular people. Yet their ministry is essential in these last days. Theirs is a ministry of "restoration."

Today's church is full of sin and hypocrisy. Many, including leaders, are involved in sexual sin. The glorious gospel of Jesus Christ has been diluted and, therefore, its power to transform men and women into the image of God has been lost.

We are in desperate need of something powerful, much, much more powerful than we have seen until now, to speak the words of God into this situation and bring the needed change. We urgently need the ministry of these two witnesses!

There are some, realizing that the church is in need of profound correction, who have thought that what is needed is the restoration of the apostolic ministry.

From examining the role of the apostles in the New Testament churches and noting the apparent

lack of men with such titles today, they have concluded that this is what is needed to bring the church back to God.

Let me state clearly here that I am not in any way against Spirit-led apostolic ministry. In no way am I disparaging this biblical function. But, since my youth in Christ, I have seen very many who claimed to be apostles, circulating in the church. While they no doubt have brought some benefit to some believers, the church as a whole has not changed. She has not been brought back to God. Very little has been “restored.”

In the past, especially in the Old Testament times, God has always used prophets to bring a word of correction. It has always been the prophetic ministry to point out error and shortcomings.

Yet today, we need even more than just more apostles or even prophets. We desperately need to experience a much larger anointing – a double portion of the Holy Spirit upon prepared men and women – who have God’s power to break through the darkness and error of today’s Christianity and bring God’s people back to Himself. We read: “...the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing” (Is 10:27 KJV).

I have no doubt that it will be through the ministry of the doubly anointed, end-times prophets that God will bring correction to His people, his church.

Confirming this viewpoint is what we are taught in the book of Malachi about the coming of “Elijah.” The Old Testament ends with the follow-

ing pronouncement: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Mal 4:5,6).

At first reading, it seems as if what is on the heart of God has something to do with the restoration of family relationships. It appears that God is mainly concerned about "children" and "fathers" getting along better.

But could this really be what our Lord is anxiously wanting at the end of this age? Is this what is necessary to prevent His cursing the earth? Are nice, fuzzy, warm family relationships the solution to today's rebellious world and apostate church? Could this be what this doubly anointed ministry is all about? This seems doubtful.

However, reading in the gospel of Luke seems to convey a different impression. Here is something a little more cogent and up-to-date. The second part of the verse in Luke is a bit different, possibly quoted by the angel from another source and not from today's version of the Hebrew Tora.

Perhaps, in reality, this word from God has much more to do with *His* family than merely with human families. We read: "He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the *disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Lk 1:17).

Here we understand that the goal of this "restoration" is to "make ready a people prepared

for the Lord." It is to prepare the church for Jesus' coming.

This verse is not really speaking about a ministry to families (as important as that might be), but referring to an essential work of cleansing and restoration of the church in the end times. Here is a work that is at the core of God's heart.

An important part of this preparation is to turn the "disobedient" (God's rebellious, untransformed children) to the wisdom of those whose lives are a testimony of righteousness (those who are "just"). It is actually *His* family which is in view.

Further supporting this thought is another translation of the phrase "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children."

According R. N. Champlin Ph.D. in his New Testament commentary, some have understood this to mean: "Restore the children to the devout disposition of the early fathers" or "to the faith of the early fathers." In other words, to bring the children back to the heart attitude which the fathers had.

This interpretation may be a result of the translation of the word "to" in Greek which is "EPI." In many versions this is rendered "to" as in "turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children" which seems to indicate "towards" or "in the direction of" in English.

Yet literally this Greek word EPI means "superimposition," "over," or "upon." Therefore, we see that this probably means a superimposition of the hearts of the fathers over or upon those

of the children, instead of turning the father's hearts "to" or "towards" the children.

This certainly harmonizes well with what we have been seeing and gives a clearer understanding. The family which needs restoring today is clearly that of God.

To accomplish this end, these "fathers" – who most likely are the mature, prepared vessels about whom we have been speaking – receive an anointing: "the spirit and power of Elijah."

If our postulations are correct, they receive a double portion of the Spirit as Elisha did. Then, they exercise a prophetic ministry with respect to the church which results in restoration. This is a restoration of the hearts of God's people to Him alone. When this "Elijah" comes, he will genuinely "restore all things" Mt 17:10).

Of course, these prophets also have a huge impact on the unbelieving inhabitants of the world, both through their words and through the plagues which come through them. But we must never lose sight of how important these "two" prophets will be to restore and prepare the church for the coming of Jesus.

A TIME OF PREPARATION

No one could live the way these prophets will live, or carry out such a potent ministry, without going through an intense period of preparation. John the Baptist was "in the deserts" until the hour came for his ministry to Israel to begin (Lk 1:80).

Paul, the apostle, spent significant time in Arabia (Gal 2:17). Both of these men were called to

do something out of the ordinary. Both of them eventually had to stand against the religious trends of their time.

John felt constrained to confront the Pharisees with their sin. Paul constantly opposed the work of the "Judaizers" who were trying to bring Christian converts back under the bondage of the dead, impotent laws and practices of Judaism. Neither of these men could have stood firm under such stress if it were not for the time of preparation through which God had taken them.

In the same way, those who are chosen by God to fulfill this prophetic calling will no doubt also pass through some kind of spiritual wilderness, much stress and difficult, painful trials. A true man or woman of God must someday learn to stand alone.

Fellowship is important. The enjoyment of true spiritual relationships with others is unparalleled. But if God is calling you to be His prophet or prophetess you may come to a time in your life when you find yourself alone with only Him to lean upon. This does not necessarily mean being in physical solitude but just somehow unable to find comfort or companionship from others.

Such experience is essential because it teaches us not to rely upon Christian friends, Bible teachers, movements, or groups but upon Christ exclusively. He must become our all in all.

These times of trials wean us from the outward props which have been keeping us going but which at the same time have been masking our inner weaknesses. Such periods of spiritual

difficulty serve to expose us in a deeper way than ever before and press us to seek the only One who can carry us through to the final goal.

Only those who have undergone such “wilderness experiences” will be equipped to stand unshaken in the evil day, boldly testifying for Jesus. Coming out the other side of these fiery testings are men and women of God who are purified, anointed, and ready for the Master’s service.

I am not recommending here that Christians should be abandoning church meetings or cutting off relationships with other believers. Such is the way of fleshly individuals who are overly sensitive to criticism or are attempting to be something or “somebody” by pretending to be more spiritual than others. Neither am I sanctioning those whose impatience, self-righteous behavior, and/or offensive personalities alienate them from their fellow believers.

This is not a word for spiritual babes or neophytes. It is not a commission which you can take upon yourself. Don’t even try. Nothing of what I have been describing here is something which can be attained by self-effort.

I am only stating here what should already be obvious: anyone who is called of the Lord to an end-time prophetic ministry will undoubtedly undergo painful testings and trials – many of which will have to be endured alone.

Now with all this in mind, I would like to ask all of you readers some important questions. Would you be willing to say “yes” if God called you to be one of these? How do you find yourself

responding to this message which has been given?

If all this makes you a little uncomfortable, it is certain that there is something within your heart at this moment which is not right with God. Don't delay. Make your peace with Him right now. Repent of whatever He is touching in your life and decide never to be involved with that unclean thing again. You can be assured that whatever it is, if you are completely willing, God will deliver you.

On the other hand I would like to ask others of you, does your heart respond to the upward call of "holiness to the Lord" (Ex 28:36)? If so, do yield yourself to Him right now more completely than you ever have before. Take a moment and pray sincerely towards this end.

Only He can do the cleansing and preparing work in your heart that is necessary for you to be truly useful to Him. If you will only present your body as a living sacrifice, He will accept it and begin to work in and through your life in ways you never thought possible.

In closing I would like to say that no one knows certainly who these "two witness" will be. However, there is one main point which I have been attempting to bring forth in this chapter of which we can be utterly confident – God knows your heart and He is calling every single believer to a life of consecrated ministry for His name before He comes.

No one is exempt. No one is too weak or spiritually impoverished to serve Him with all of their

heart. It is certain that He is going to hold all of us responsible for what we did with what He has given to us.

The message of the Revelation prophets is also our message today as servants of the living God. What He will declare then in twofold power, He greatly desires to say right now today through us to a perishing world and a backsliding, compromising church.

We don't need some supernatural appearance of angels or voices from heaven calling us to this work. The command has already been given (Mt 28:19). The fields are already white (Jn 4:35).

Perhaps only one thing hinders us from hearing His voice and responding. It is the one issue which remains central in every Christian life. It is the one choice which will become astonishingly real to all of us one day. It is the one question that each one of us must ultimately face. ARE YOU WILLING TO DIE FOR JESUS?

2.

THE FOUR SEALS

The following message is taken from the book of Revelation chapters 5 and 6. It concerns the breaking of the first four seals. You may remember that while John, the apostle, was seeing this vision, he saw a scroll with writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals. As he was looking, he began to weep because no one in heaven or earth was found worthy to look at the scroll or to open these seven seals.

Then, the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world comes into view. He is the One who has been found worthy to break the seals and open the book.

As the vision proceeds, Jesus the Lamb of God begins opening these seals one by one. When each of these first four seals is broken, a mysterious horseman comes riding forth to accomplish something upon the earth. Let us read together from Revelation chapter 6 about these four horsemen, beginning with verse 1.

"Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, 'Come and see.' And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

"When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come and see.' Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

"When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'

"When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth" (Rev 6:1-8).

This is truly a terrifying vision. In it we have portrayed for us some of the things which God says are going to be happening at the completion of this age. Since the breaking of these first four

seals signals the beginning of the end of this time period, it is well worth the effort to look into their meaning.

COMMON EXPLANATIONS

Ever since becoming a Christian I have heard or read Bible teachers expounding on this passage. Many of today's expositors seem to share similar interpretations. These teachings, which some of you may have heard, are that the first horseman on the white horse represents Jesus and/or the gospel. The second represents war. The third speaks of famine, and the forth horseman symbolizes death.

Somehow, none of these explanations ever really satisfied me. I never felt as if there was anything conveyed by these ideas which had any real revelation or meaning. Nothing new, different or significant was being offered.

For example, the first horseman is supposed to signify Jesus and/or the gospel. The main basis for this assertion appears to be that the horse is white and the rider has a crown. Perhaps this interpretation is adopted because later in Revelation, Jesus also appears on a white horse (Rev 19:11-16). There He is seen with "many crowns" and instead of a bow, a sword goes forth out of His mouth.

But is the simple fact that the horse is white and that the rider has a crown really revelation? How can it be that "the gospel" is going forth just at the end of the age? The gospel has been going

out for almost two thousand years already. Does identifying this rider as Jesus or the “gospel” really show us something new, important, or relevant? This explanation seems to be just a repetition of ancient history. How can this really be the interpretation of such an important vision?

Next, most seem to assert that the red horse and rider signify war. What sort of revelation is this? Wars have been going on fairly constantly, in some part of the world or another, for thousands of years, both before and after the advent of Christ. Why then should the appearance of wars at the end of the age be something new or different? Is there any fresh or valuable understanding conveyed by this explanation? It seems not.

Then we come to the third seal. The popular explanations for this horseman seem especially inaccurate. As mentioned, most assert that this seal represents famine, yet the different parts of the passage do not seem to fit with this idea.

We could reason in this way: A famine is usually caused by a drought, war, or any interruption in the production of, or transportation of, food. But these things would not only cause shortages in wheat and barley mentioned in the prophecy, but *also* in commodities such as oil and wine, which come from olive trees and vineyards.

Nevertheless, we hear the voice saying, “...and do not harm the oil and the wine.” “Harm” means to reduce the supply of, or the production of, oil and wine. Surely a famine, or any other such cause, would do just that: harm the oil and the wine. There is no scenario which I can imagine

which would reduce the supply of wheat and barley and yet the population still have a normal supply of oil and wine.

Being thus dissatisfied with the explanations which I had been given, I began to seek the face of the Lord for understanding concerning these things. What I am about to share with you is the result of prayer and diligent searching for the true meaning of these Revelation passages.

The ideas which you are about to read did not come to me in a vision or by any kind of fantastic revelation. Nevertheless, I believe that they may be from the Lord. Whether they are absolutely correct or not, this message still contains very important truth which has application to every believer's life. So let us open the Bible together, open our hearts to the Lord, and seek Him for what He is speaking to us through these things.

THE ZECHARIAH HORSES

You might remember that something very similar to these four horsemen is also pictured in the book of Zechariah; there, however, they appear in a slightly different form. In Zechariah chapter 6, verses 1-8, we read of four chariots drawn by four teams of different colored horses coming out from behind a mountain of brass. The metal brass often represents judgment in the scriptures. These horsemen are coming forth immediately before the impending great and terrible day of the Lord.

When these chariots, with their different colored horses, are seen by the prophet Zechariah,

the following explanation is given to him. The angel says: "These are the four spirits of heaven who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth" (Zech 6:5). Here we have an important key to understanding the Revelation prophecy. These four horses almost certainly represent four spirits as the Zechariah horses and chariots do.

A spirit being possesses supernatural power. Spirits have the ability to influence the minds of men and even the course of the world. It seems that these four spirits are coming from the presence of God to influence situations and events in preparation for the end of the age.

As an example of the influence of such spirits, further on in the book of Revelation we are told of three unclean spirits like frogs which come out of the mouth of the beast, the false prophet and the dragon and go forth to gather all the nations to war against the Lamb (Rev 16:13-16). These spirits have power to influence the thoughts and actions of men and nations, causing them to come together to battle.

So we can deduce that these four horsemen in Revelation are also spirits which come forth, in this case from God, to accomplish some purpose upon the earth. This purpose, I believe, is to set the stage for the "end times." Each one of them is accomplishing a different task to prepare the situation on the earth for what will come to pass. They are setting things up for the end.

Before we begin our examination of these verses we should realize that it is not necessary

for these seals to represent judgments and/or disasters. Although most seem to assume that these seals must signify calamities, this is nowhere indicated in the scriptures. In reality, they are spirit beings which come from God to accomplish His purposes on the earth. These purposes may or may not involve catastrophes.

Another important fact to consider is that these events described in Revelation are referred to as "birth pangs" (I Thess 5:3). When labor pains begin in a pregnant woman, at first they are mild and sometimes have long periods of time between them. As the birth process goes on however, they get more frequent and stronger. This sequence continues until the pains come one almost right after the other and become unbearably intense and painful until finally the baby is born.

This is a very vivid and accurate picture of how the events of the end times will unfold. The first several events may have many years separating them, with the later ones becoming increasingly frequent and "stronger."

THE FIRST SEAL IS BROKEN

The first seal is the horseman who goes forth "conquering and to conquer." It is my opinion that the first seal has already been broken. This spirit probably went forth about five hundred years ago. At that time, great, unprecedented changes began to take place on the earth.

"Western" civilization as we know it today, started "going forth" from its location in Europe conquering and to conquer. There followed a period of several centuries during which this spir-

it of "conquering" was at a fever pitch among many of the European nations.

Explorers, "conquistadors" and adventurers of every variety set out to conquer new lands. It was almost as if some invisible force or spirit was driving them to push further and further afield in quest of adventure and riches. In a short period of time spanning only several hundred years the whole earth was colonized and "conquered," by the European countries, notably Spain, France, Italy, Portugal, Holland and England.

As an example, this "spirit" of going out and conquering worked very powerfully just within the continent of North America. Many men and women, during the westward expansion on that continent, did things which seem foolish or absurd.

Very many left homes, security, family, society and everything else to begin an extremely dangerous trek through hostile country toward a completely unknown destination. Most of them only knew about where they were going by hearsay. Such actions of men, defying logic and reason, can easily be explained by the activities of spiritual forces.

The result of this worldwide expansionism and colonization, was to spread the European civilization all over the globe. Never before in the history of the world had there been such a massive going forth and spreading out of men, except perhaps after the flood. Truly there was a tremendous, prolonged and widespread going forth "conquering and to conquer." For some reason it

seems that this was necessary for the events that are to follow. In God's plan it was His desire to redistribute the human race in this way.

Of course I realize that there were men on these other continents when the conquerers came; nevertheless, the point is that the Europeans went out everywhere around the globe conquering and expanding their empires. This was a time of unprecedented expansion and "conquering" which had never been seen before or repeated since.

Not only did these nations extend their territories but also, more importantly, this opened the way for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be taken to the ends of the earth. The conquering and exploring which was done, became an open door for many to follow after. Soon after this "conquering" many missionaries began to follow in their steps.

This then would be the purpose of the first spirit or horseman. His job was to stir up the Europeans to go out and conquer the rest of the globe so that the gospel, which was almost completely sealed up in Europe at that time, could go forth into all the world.

Although much of the conquering was done by Roman Catholic countries accompanied by priests, many protestant missionaries were soon to follow this far reaching conquest. Since that time, beginning more than five hundred years ago, the Christian church has also spread widely in these conquered regions. Undoubtedly, this has been essential for what will occur during the time of the end.

THE SECOND SEAL

The horseman of the second seal is perhaps slightly more recognizable. He rides on a red horse and has a great sword given to him. His power is to take peace from the earth, causing men to slay one another.

Some of you readers may remember the first and second world wars. Although for thousands of years wars have existed and there have been many, many different wars upon the earth, never before had there been a time like those times – when the whole world was at war. We read: “And power was given unto him to take peace from the earth.”

Almost every nation in the world was involved in some way in these two altercations: World Wars I and II. Beyond a doubt there was a spiritual power at work in Germany and other countries in those days. Clearly, a spiritual power was at work in the life and actions of Adolf Hitler and the men who were with him. In his time, the whole German nation was stirred up in such a way that the entire world was caused to be at war. Millions were killed. “And there was given unto him a great sword.”

The end result, from a prophetic point of view, of the two world wars and the atrocities that were committed in Germany against the Jews is quite surprising. It was something completely unforeseen. This was that many Jewish people were again gathered together in their own land.

The sympathy of the world and especially of those in the United States and England was aroused so much by these events that something came to pass which many Bible scholars for centuries thought impossible – the establishing of Israel again as a nation.

After being disbursed over the face of the earth for almost two thousand years, today again the Jews are residing in their own country. This fulfillment of prophecy is absolutely necessary to set the stage for the second coming. When Jesus returns this is where He will arrive, the land of Israel. His feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4). He is coming to His Old Covenant people again.

Although this is a curious and unexpected result of the two world wars, it is something which God accomplished to further His purposes and plans. It is a fact of history. It is also something essential for the completion of God's work at the end of this age.

THE THIRD SEAL

Now the third seal is something about which I would like to speak at length. As mentioned previously, many Bible scholars have taught that this seal represents famine. However, I would like to point to a parallel passage in scripture which clearly shows something very different. As you probably already realize, one of the best ways to interpret scripture is to examine other passages which speak about the same, or similar subjects.

Understanding scripture by using other scripture is one of the surest ways to arrive at the truth. Guesswork or imagination is not enough.

In Revelation we read that a measure of wheat was sold for a penny [denarius] and three measures of barley for a penny [denarius].

Now in the book of II Kings, we find a passage which is strikingly similar. In fact, the Revelation prophecy is almost a word for word quote of II Kings 6:24 - 7:20. Here in II Kings we read about a real famine.

At that time the city Samaria was surrounded by the Syrian army and had been besieged for quite some time. Naturally food was getting extremely scarce. We are told that an ass's head sold for 80 pieces of silver and a "fourth part of a cab of dove's dung" sold for five pieces of silver.

Now I don't know how big a "cab" is, but I can imagine that if you're paying five pieces of silver for any amount of dove's dung that you are very, very hungry. This dear friends is a genuine, full-blown famine. This is what it means to be starving. Some have tried to sidestep the fact that these people were so hungry that they were eating dung, by insisting that they were using it for fuel for cooking. But what food could they have been cooking? No doubt this dung was not being bought only by the few who were cooking and eating their own children because of the severity of the famine (II Kings 6:28,29).

It was in these unimaginably extreme circumstances that Elisha the prophet relayed the following message: "Tomorrow about this time a seah of

fine flour shall be sold for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria" (II Kings 7:1). This is a parallel passage to the one in Revelation. Here this man of God was prophesying plenty. He was telling them that the next day there would be an unbelievable abundance. There would be enough for everybody at a price they could afford.

The king's personal attendant did not believe in Elisha's prophecy. He said: "...if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" Elisha was speaking about such a prosperity, such an extravagant excess that this man could not conceive of it. He imagined it could only happen if windows opened up in heaven and food poured out.

You may recall the rest of the story. That evening four lepers who were sitting outside the city gate decided to defect to the camp of the Syrians. They reasoned, "If we stay here we're just going to starve to death, but if we go over to the other army, perhaps they'll have pity on us and feed us." But when they got there they found the camp deserted. The angel of the Lord had come and frightened the entire army away. So the next morning the gates of the city were opened and all the people went streaming out to collect food and buy and sell freely.

This reading leads us to rethink the passage in Revelation concerning the rider of the black horse. Since it is so similar to the II Kings verses – in fact so "parallel" as to be almost an exact repetition of Elisha's prophecy – it would seem that famine or

shortage is not indicated at all. In fact, it would instead seem to represent a time of plenty.

Lending support to this interpretation is the phrase we mentioned earlier which says, "...and do not harm the oil and the wine" (Rev 6:6). Oil and wine in those days were things which people had and enjoyed in times of prosperity. To have enough of these items was part of the blessing of the Lord upon His obedient people (see Deut 7:13). So it would be easy to conclude that, instead of famine, this passage is actually predicting plenty. It is foretelling a time of prosperity.

While many insist that these seals must represent catastrophes, nothing in the passage demands such an interpretation. Perhaps it is time then to rethink our ideas concerning these things.

Although some will argue that a "denarius" was a day's wage and a quart of wheat would only feed a man for a day, we must take into account several things. First, the prophecy says you can get *three* quarts of barley for the same amount. This, although a less attractive grain, would be three times the needs of one man, if indeed this calculation is accurate, which it may not be.

Second, in New Testament times, simply having enough to eat every day would have been considered being prosperous. In those days, something so simple as a change of clothes or enough food to eat was an enormous blessing. Many people, perhaps most of the population, did not have enough to eat to really satisfy them every day. Obesity was a problem only with the very rich.

Third, an uninterrupted supply of or an abundance of oil and wine could only happen in times of prosperity. Fourth, this prophecy is almost an exact parallel of the other in the Old Testament which is clearly predicting prosperity.

I believe that we are living in the time of the third seal today. It too has already been broken. Abundance – the influence of the third horseman – has been upon us for quite some time, and may very soon be drawing to a close. We live in a period of unprecedented prosperity and plenty. Never, ever before in history have so many in this world had so much.

Many parts of the world are enjoying a time of tremendous affluence. A good percentage of the world's inhabitants have cars, televisions, electricity, plenty of clothes and an abundance of food. One simple proof of this is how much of a problem obesity is becoming in many nations.

In this generation, much of the world lives at a level of comfort and abundance that previously only kings enjoyed. In fact, many of the ancient kings did not have a small fraction of the material things and comforts which we take for granted every day. Things like running hot and cold water, central heating and cooling, access to every kind of imaginable variety of meat, fruit, vegetable, drink and thousands of other items which to us seems "normal," as recently as one hundred years ago was unthinkable, even for the most wealthy.

Although there are certainly pockets of poverty and misery in today's world, the fact is that a

large proportion of the world's inhabitants enjoy a prosperity and ease which was, until very recently, unknown. Many live at a level of affluence which has never been seen on the earth before.

While this condition no doubt seems "normal" to those who were raised in it and have only known this prosperous state, it is in fact a huge anomaly in the history of this world. It is abnormal compared to the past 6,000 years.

Many in today's world live in luxury and excess. They don't see it that way since they have become accustomed to it, but yet it is true. In some countries people can control the temperature of their home, either cooling or heating it to the exact degree they desire, with the touch of a button.

Their cars too are temperature controlled, luxurious, and comfortable. When they shop at the grocery store, the options of food and drink are almost staggering. Their furniture, including the sofas and chairs, are cushioned and soft. The list of comforts and conveniences which we have could go on and on.

They travel in airplanes, cars, and cruise ships in comfort and style and arrive at their destinations often within hours. These same trips, as little as 100 years ago, would have taken months of uncomfortable dangerous travel (a word related to "travail").

They talk to families and friends whenever they choose, by telephone. They, anytime it suits them, choose from thousands of options of entertainments to amuse themselves. Restaurants of

every imaginable variety are available to satisfy their whims and desires for food and drink.

Yet we so easily forget this is all new. This is all recent. The world has never before been like this! As recently as one hundred and fifty years ago, no one had a car, a telephone, a computer, flew in airplanes, or had access to any of the thousands of luxuries which today we take for granted.

It is extremely hard for today's pampered populations to imagine sleeping on the ground, going hungry most of the time, having almost no changes of clothing, travelling by foot or by horse, not having hot water in abundance or even clean water to drink or any of the other thousands of inconveniences of a more primitive lifestyle.

It never enters many of today's people's minds to consider what life was like as little as one hundred years ago. We can't imagine enduring any of the "hardships" which the vast majority of the world's inhabitants experienced daily, without interruption, for almost 6,000 years.

WORLD ADDICTION

One result of this worldwide prosperity is that the world has become addicted. We have become addicted to ease and prosperity. We have come to believe that it is our right to live at this level of affluence which we enjoy today. It is something which is taken for granted and expected. No one imagines that anything could suddenly change.

In the 1930's the United States experienced a financial depression. Suddenly many people were

out of work, with no chance of an income or any way for them to support their families.

Some committed suicide. But most rolled up their sleeves and made out the best they could. They sold apples or pencils on the street. They took lowly, menial jobs. They worked hard to overcome the financial tragedy which had overtaken them.

But today, a financial collapse would have an entirely different result. Much of the world is pampered, spoiled, and addicted to leisure, ease, and plenty. They love their prosperity. If some sort of financial collapse happened today people would have an entirely different reaction. They would riot, even resorting to looting, robbery, and setting things on fire. They would scream and shout. There would be public protest and marches. They would demand that their government do whatever would be necessary to restore their ease and pleasure. The sooner, the better.

You see an addict does not behave like a normal person. Their dependence upon that to which they are addicted is so strong that they will do things which others people would not do. Today, the addiction of much of the world to prosperity and pleasure is acute. Be warned, when this is threatened or removed, people will do anything necessary to get it back.

Now this brings us to an interesting point. There is one substance upon which all this prosperity depends. There is one single product which enables all this luxury to continue – oil. Without oil, all this modern wealth and ease which so

many enjoy would suddenly disappear. We depend upon oil to plant, to reap, to transport, to work, to travel and in fact to do almost anything which modern man does.

Modern man has become addicted to prosperity and simultaneously to the substance which makes this possible: oil. The world economy today and all the luxury and ease that goes with it, is completely dependent upon this "black gold." Never before in history has the world been so completely dependent on one single product.

THE COMING BEAST

We have studied in the previous book in this series, *Antichrist*, about how the coming Beast will have his empire in the Middle East. He will unite ten nations in that region.

No doubt most, if not all of them, will be oil producing countries. Although he will not control all the world's oil, it appears that he will control a very significant percentage of it. This then will put him in the driver's seat. He will have the power to control the world financial situation.

Anyone who had power over a substantial part of the earth's oil, could bring the nations to their financial knees in just a few days. Even the mere threat to cut off, let us say, 30% of the world's oil, would spell economic disaster for all the "developed" nations.

The price of gasoline and diesel fuel would soar. Transportation and travel would stall. The price of all goods and services would shoot up beyond imagination. Everyone would be profoundly affected.

One hundred years ago, such an act would have had almost no impact whatsoever on the world economy. Oil was not an essential commodity. But today, the world is addicted. It has to have an uninterrupted supply of oil to fuel its prosperity and keep its citizens content. This too is part of the plan of God.

So we see that this spirit of prosperity which has come forth from God is an essential of the end-times scenario. It is necessary that the world arrive at this point for a Middle East dictator to be able to make his demands and have them met.

The world's addiction to prosperity and, consequently to oil, is an essential element for the plans of God to be fulfilled. So, this spirit of plenty, prosperity, and abundance has come out from Him to prepare the earth for the end.

When and if this supply of oil and therefore prosperity is threatened or cut off, many governments and their people will quickly agree to anything to restore the "flow" that they need to maintain their addiction to the world and the things which are in it.

In the case of the coming man of sin, what he will demand from the nations to continue as usual will be things regarding his religion. All that will be necessary to continue to buy and sell as before will be to accept all or part of his religion. This conversion does not need to be heartfelt or deep. Any superficial sign of acceptance will suffice.

The nations needing to continue to receive the flow of oil/prosperity will only need to change a few small things. They will merely be required to

pressure their own populations to receive the “mark” of conversion and then they can return to their self-indulgent lifestyles unhindered.

While you might imagine that it would be difficult to convert the whole world so quickly, you underestimate the power of addiction. Perhaps you have not understood how much power money has. When and if someone else suddenly controls all their money, many, if not most people will do almost anything to get it back. Those who have little, if any, moral commitment to God or others will be easily swayed. Very few are prepared to lose everything, including food, shelter, and even their lives, to remain faithful to Jesus.

WHEN THE FOURTH SEAL IS BROKEN

The breaking of this seal is extremely frightening. This horseman is called “death” and we are told that “hades” or “hell” follows him. He is given authority over a fourth part of the earth to kill. This killing is accomplished in four different and important ways. People are slain with: 1. the sword, 2. with hunger, 3. with death, and 4. with the wild beasts of the earth (Rev 6:7,8).

When this seal is broken, the time of relative peace and prosperity suddenly will end. Just when men were saying “peace and safety,” devastation breaks forth upon them. This, of course, is just the beginning of many great plagues and sorrows which will come upon mankind. When the fourth seal is broken, the comfortable situation in which we now live will end!

Please pay careful attention to this. Today's situation of ease, comfort and prosperity will not last. It is not eternal. According to the word of God, it is going to end suddenly, painfully and dramatically. Once the fourth seal is broken, a series of increasingly frequent and devastatingly terrible events begin to come upon this earth. Don't be caught unawares and unprepared!

Now let us consider this passage a little more carefully. What could happen to cause twenty-five percent of the earth to perish? It is not clear if "a fourth of the earth" is speaking about a quarter of the land area or a fourth of the population.

If this "fourth" means one quarter of the people, then we are looking at the deaths of well over one billion human beings. For that many people to die, something very large scale and tragic has to happen. If the "fourth" means land area, we are still speaking about the tremendous destruction of human life.

When we look at the causes of these deaths here, we can find some possible clues as to what this event might be. When people are being killed by wild animals in large numbers, for example, we must deduce that something extraordinary has happened. Normally, wild creatures are afraid of humans. Although lions, large bears, and a few other animals can and do kill people from time to time, for this to impact millions or even billions of people is not normal. Perhaps we can learn something from this.

Large scale attacks by wild animals indicates that those who are being killed are in a very weak-

ened state. It must be that due to disease, hunger or some other factor, they cannot defend themselves. Something has happened to greatly weaken these people physically.

Another thing which we can surmise is that these people are without shelter. Even a sick, weak person who is safe within their home will not be attacked by wild animals.

There are not many beasts in the world which are capable of attacking and killing a healthy man. But if men and women are outside without shelter and greatly debilitated from sickness, hunger, etc., there are many carnivores which might eat them. This could be bears, dogs, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, ravens, buzzards, ants or any other number of different animals. Even house pets who are starving because they have lost their food supply will turn and eat their owners who cannot defend themselves

Another clue we have as to what this horseman might signify is that hunger or famine is part of his arsenal. Famine must be caused by drought or some other interruption of the food supply.

Although it is possible, it is difficult to imagine a drought which would impact twenty five percent of the world with the rest of the world unable to do anything to help. It seems logical therefore to suppose that this famine might be a result of the interruption of transportation and/or the food supply.

The method of killing which is called "the sword" seems easy enough to understand. This clue must indicate some kind of war.

Next, it seems interesting that some are killed with something called "death." Since all dead people have died, this appears somewhat redundant to mention the word "death" here. Why does the Bible say that they are killed by "death?" Perhaps this is suggesting a kind of death which was unknown in those days. Possibly there is a cause of "death" being indicated here which is not caused by sickness, war, or famine.

Bringing all these clues together, one idea springs immediately to mind. All these things could easily be the result of nuclear explosions. Some kind of nuclear attack could produce all these effects.

To begin, many people would be killed immediately from such a blast or blasts. But many more "survivors" would suffer other effects. Among these effects would be "death" from radiation – a slow, painful kind of death which has been unknown until recently. Also, many would be weakened physically to the extent that they would be vulnerable to wild animals which seem to be more resistant to radiation.

Adding to this problem would be the lack of shelter and food. No doubt the food supply would be interrupted, since no one would be willing to come near the area where these explosions have occurred for fear of the radiation. This of course would cause the famine.

So here we have a possible explanation for the effects of the fourth horseman. A nuclear bombardment or attack and the resulting contamination by radiation would produce: the "sword,"

“famine,” “death” and make people vulnerable to wild beasts. This horseman really deserves his names: “death” and hell or “hades.”

(Of course the above mentioned scenario is only an educated guess and should not be considered as the only possible explanation of such a disaster.)

POSSIBLE CAUSES

Although it is impossible to predict the future without some direct revelation from God, there are a couple scenarios which might precipitate the detonation of a number of nuclear weapons. The most obvious one would be a war between nations who now possess such weapons. Any kind of larger scale nuclear exchange would produce all the results mentioned above.

Another possibility which is becoming ever more real in our present world is nuclear terrorism. As time goes on, the likelihood becomes ever more real that some group of terrorists could get possession of nuclear weapons and the means to use them.

The country of Iran, which is accused of supporting terrorism, is developing such weapons, including missiles. According to some recent news articles, they are also putting some of their missiles in cargo ships. Another development is that they are deploying very many mini submarines as attack vehicles.

Pakistan, which already has 50 to 100 nuclear bombs and the missiles to deliver them, is in a

very precarious political state. As time goes on, it is not very difficult to imagine that some terrorist faction could gain control of and use such weapons.

From the book of Revelation, we can conclude that there will be a spirit who will be behind this death and destruction of one fourth of the world. This spirit is sent from God to do something which will prepare the world for the end. Certainly there is a spirit propelling the rise of terrorism in recent times. Also, such a spirit could certainly stir up some of the world's superpowers to attack each other.

Whatever the cause behind the use of nuclear arsenals might be, the results would be the same. Any large scale attack or exchange of nuclear devices which would annihilate twenty-five percent of the earth's population, would alter the power structure of the world. The balance of power would shift.

This would be especially true if the nations affected by this war were part of the "first world." It is possible that nations which are powerful and influential today would be greatly reduced in population and military / political power.

Only a "large scale" attack would be able to annihilate one quarter of the world's inhabitants or impact one forth of the world, therefore we must presume that this will be something widespread and drastic.

There is no doubt that if twenty-five percent of the world suffered such a catastrophe, this would have a significant impact on the nations

who lost many of their citizens. This loss would include not only people but possibly also devastating effects on the infrastructure, including communications, energy, transportation, etc.

A NEW WORLD ORDER

Since becoming a believer over 40 years ago, I have frequently heard Christians worrying about "a new world order." Linked with this fear are various theories that there exist one or several conspiracies involving powerful and wealthy men who are (or are trying to) control the world.

Names like the Bilderbergs, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Illuminati, the Skull and Bones Club, the Club of Rome and many more are bandied about. Many believe in these things blindly and religiously. They are completely convinced that these men are in league with the devil and that they are the ones who will eventually bring in the coming man of sin.

Here in the book of Revelation we see that indeed there will soon be a new world order. But it is not the new order which many are expecting and preaching about. Whether or not there exist such powerful groups trying to control the world or not will not make any difference. God Himself is soon going to send forth a spirit which has power to influence and change the world according to *His* plan. It is this spirit that will bring about "a new world order" which God has ordained.

Rich and powerful men will have no way to stop or even impede this spirit. It is very possible

that the events of the fourth seal will remove their wealth, their power base and even their lives. If, as some insist, they are plotting and planning to control the world, this will come to nothing. There is no reason for any believer to waste time being concerned about them or “investigating” them.

It is possible that this coming destruction of twenty-five percent of the earth will involve countries which are called the “first world,” that is the wealthy and proud nations of the “west.” If this is so, then this would certainly cause a great realignment among the powers and nations of this world, especially if this impacted the “first world” very significantly.

Those who suffered much damage would obviously be in decline. Those who did not and still had many resources would certainly rise up. This will produce God’s “new world order.” It will set the stage for His plan for the last days.

One biblical clue we have that the nations devastated by the breaking of the fourth seal may be “western” ones is that the “kings from the east” (probably India and China) are not destroyed. Their armies are still intact much later on. We can know this by looking at Revelation 16:12, which may possibly be related to the armies and events of Revelation 9:16.

How then would this affect the “end times” which we have been studying? My guess is that it would prepare the way for the rise of the coming Beast. Perhaps nations which would have strongly opposed his rise to power would be weakened or eliminated by these events. The sudden power

vacuum which would be created by catastrophic destruction in the “west” would open the door for many unexpected things to happen.

There is no doubt that this drastic change in the world situation will play into the hands of the devil and the man who will be his pawn in the end game, which will be played out at the close of this age.

So we may consider the possibility that the fourth horsemen/spirit comes forth near the conclusion of this age to cause a great, catastrophic event leading to the restructuring of the world powers. This then could facilitate the rise to power or the consolidation of power of the coming man of sin.

PEACE AND SAFETY

Brothers and sisters, whether or not my interpretation of these seals is correct, still the facts remain – we live in a time of great peace and prosperity, and someday, probably very soon, we know that this will be taken away. The second coming of the Lord will be preceded by a time of great persecution, destruction, and tribulation and it is for these things we must be getting ready.

This situation corresponds very closely to what the scripture says the situation at the end of the age will be. I Thessalonians 5:3 states: “When they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them... And they shall not escape.” Please note that this future destruction is both “sudden” and inescapable.

This passage reveals that when things begin to get bad, the event or events which precipitate this will be completely unexpected. The word "sudden" here is very important. This shows that the world situation will not slowly get worse and worse but something dramatic and very rapid will occur which is called "destruction." An almost instantaneous change in the world picture will occur which will be the result of very great destruction.

There will be no warning. No notices will be sent out, beyond the few prophets whom God is using today. Those who are not walking in intimacy with the Lord will not have the foresight and foreknowledge to make preparations to avoid or survive this event.

There will be no recovery from this destruction. From that point on, things will only get worse and worse. The breaking of the fourth seal will just be the beginning of the judgments which will take place at the end of the age. What will follow will only get increasingly terrifying. The "birth pangs" will only get more severe and closer together.

HOW ARE WE LIVING TODAY?

Today many have almost everything they could desire. They are enriched in every way. Food, clothing, and the material things of life, are available to many in great abundance. Yet we are rapidly approaching the time of the fourth seal. And it is when this seal is broken, that the earth

will suddenly begin to experience tremendous upheaval and destruction.

Let us therefore not allow ourselves to be lulled to sleep by our current ease and comfort. The day of the Lord is coming swiftly and we have been charged to make ourselves ready.

Anyone who is clinging to earthly things for security and spending his time being involved in the affairs of this life is going to be caught unaware. If we are spending our hours in leisure and self-gratification, we will not be prepared when these things begin to happen.

Today we have a great opportunity to use our present situation to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. Since our Lord has seen fit to provide us with so much should we not be using it to serve Him? What great spiritual needs there are in our world! How are we employing what He has given us to meet them?

This is probably the last great opportunity that Christianity will ever see to serve Jesus with so few restrictions. Dear readers, I challenge you before God to take advantage of today's relatively comfortable environment and use it for all it's worth to promote God's kingdom before it is too late. Some time, perhaps very soon, "...the night [will come] when no man can work" (Jn 9:4). Once the judgments begin, serving the Lord will become limited to your immediate surroundings.

No doubt it is easy to suppose that the way things are today is the way things will always be. It seems as if nothing will ever change. But the Bible tells us clearly that this is not so. Someday,

suddenly, all this will be dramatically changed. At that time many will be faced with important choices which they should have already made.

They will be forced to decide whether to follow Jesus or to do whatever they can to keep their security. They will be called upon to decide whether to receive the mark of the beast in order to keep the many material pleasures to which they've grown accustomed, or whether to trust God to supply them with everything. At this time very many will even have to die for the sake of Jesus' testimony.

I'm afraid that due to the comfort of the hour many Christians have fallen asleep spiritually. They have become unaware of the urgency of the need, both in their own lives and in the lives of those around the world, for a complete submission to Jesus. The times which are coming upon us are going to be awful, terrible times. It is imperative that we spend our time right now getting ready.

Let us therefore disentangle ourselves from the affairs of this life. Let us not spend our hours or moments in ease and pleasure, but let us rather seek the face of God while He may be found, learn to live by Him, to trust Him, and to spend our time serving Him, so that when destruction begins to happen on every side, we will be ready.

3.

THE MANCHILD

As we begin our investigation into this important revelation, let us read together from the book of Revelation, chapter 12, verses 1-11.

"Now a great sign appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

And another sign appeared in heaven; behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his

angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now, salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.' "

Let us begin our search for understanding with the obvious question: Who is this manchild? There are two possibilities to consider here. The first option is that this could be referring to Jesus Christ. Our main clue to the identity of this manchild is found in verse 5 where we read that he is destined to "rule all nations with a rod of iron." So, whoever he is, he has been selected by God to rule over the earth.

In Revelation chapter 19 we are told about a rider on a white horse who will rule the nations with a rod of iron (vs 15). Clearly this is a reference to Jesus Christ coming to establish His kingdom on the earth. Therefore, the first possibility is that this manchild could be the Lord Jesus.

However, there is also a second option which also must be considered as to the identity of the

manchild. In Revelation 2:26,27 we read: "And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – he shall rule them with a rod of iron and as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces."

So here we see that there is a second possibility. There is another "person" or group of persons to whom this same authority will be given. Consequently, the manchild could also be a group of followers of Jesus Christ who have demonstrated through their life and "works" (vs 26) that they are faithful and therefore have "overcome." From now on in this writing we will refer to them as "overcomers."

If this "manchild" is Jesus Christ, then the "woman" who gives birth to him would have to be Mary. Historically, Jesus was not caught up to the throne of God "as soon as he was born" (Rev 12:4) to avoid being devoured by the dragon. Also, we know that Mary did not "flee into the wilderness" after Jesus' resurrection for "one thousand two hundred and sixty days." In fact, just a few months after the crucifixion, she was specifically mentioned as being in the "upper room" with other disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Therefore, without stretching and twisting the words of the Bible beyond all recognition, the "woman" cannot be Mary and therefore the "manchild" cannot be Jesus Christ.

This then leaves us with our second possibility. The manchild here must be the group of "overcomers" to whom Jesus Himself promised that they would rule the nations with a rod of iron.

This understanding is further strengthened when we read that the manchild (singular) is later referred to as “they” (plural).

In verse 11 of this chapter we see that “they overcame him (the dragon) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” Thus this one manchild, in the course of the vision, is revealed as being “they” – a group of many spiritually victorious individuals. The identity of the “woman” would then have to be the church or some kind of collection of God’s people.

The arrival of this group or “manchild” before the throne of God has a surprising result: it provokes a war. Suddenly, Michael and all of his angels are fighting against the dragon and his group of angels. When the battle is over, Michael’s forces win and the devil is thrown out of heaven along with his fallen angels.

This leads one to ponder another important question. If Michael has the necessary forces and power to defeat the devil and throw him out of heaven, why wasn’t this done before? Why hasn’t he been thrown out long ago?

Of course there are some Christians who think that the devil has already been cast down out of heaven. However, this cannot be the case. Here we read in the book of Revelation, at the end of the “church age,” that the devil still is “in heaven” (Rev 12:3). We also know with certainty from other scriptures that the devil and his angels are “in heavenly places” (Eph 3:10, 6:12) right now, reigning with authority over this earth. The devil is this prince of the powers of the air (Eph 2:2).

Therefore, when Jesus said that He had seen “satan fall from heaven like lightning” (Lk 10:18) this must either be a prophetic foresight or a description of how he rebelled against the Most High for the first time. Another possible explanation is Satan fell from the “third heaven” which is the actual presence of God, on the day when he rebelled. This then would be the “fall” and “the heaven” to which Jesus is referring.

NO “PLACE” FOR THEM

So let us consider here what it is about the manchild’s arrival before the throne of God that precipitates this war. Verse 8 of this chapter gives us our necessary insight. Here we read that there was no “place found for them [the devil and his angels] in heaven any longer.” Before the arrival of the manchild, it seems that Satan and his forces had some kind of “place” in heaven.

But when the manchild arrives, their places have been taken over. It is logical to conclude that those who have been authorized to replace these evil rulers have finally come. This then apparently gives Michael and his angels the right to fight against the devil’s hordes, win the battle and finally throw them out.

Right now, the devil and his evil hosts are reigning over the earth from their positions of power in “heavenly places.” But there is going to come a day, perhaps very soon, when “the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven shall be shaken” (Mk 13:25).

You will remember that the angels are sometimes referred to as “the stars of heaven” (Job 38:7, Dan 8:10). Although this has not yet happened, it is something which Jesus prophesied and it will come to pass. The present rulers of this world will have their place in the heavens taken away and their authority removed.

What then is it about this manchild that is so special? In verse 11 we read that “they overcame him [meaning the devil].” This select group of men and women is essential to God’s plan because they are those who were victorious in their Christian lives. They are those who have wrestled against the “principalities and powers in heavenly places” (Eph 6:12) – and won.

They are those over whom the power and the temptations of the devil have no influence. Therefore, they are qualified to rule over the earth with Christ, taking the place of the present evil, spiritual rulers.

Do you understand that this has been God’s plan from the beginning? Do you remember how He created man in His image and after His likeness and then instructed him to have dominion over the earth? Here we see that man was put in a position of needing to confront and overcome the devil, the ruler of this world.

God created man with the intention that he would submit himself to Him. Then as he multiplied, the earth would be filled with men and women who would also be obedient to God. Finally, when the globe became populated with God’s obedient servants, He could rightfully

reclaim this lost territory. He could “legally” recover the lost earth from the reign of the devil.

No doubt you know that this effort initially failed. Adam and Eve fell into sin and also under the influence of the devil’s kingdom. Later God turned to a select group of chosen people, the children of Israel, who were given this task. Yet they too turned to disobedience. Again and again, throughout history, God has looked for men and women who will live in submission to Him and so defeat his longtime foe.

Well, here in this Revelation vision we see that in the end, God will succeed. He will, living in and living through men and women who are submitted to Him, demonstrate His authority to the universe. We read: “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be known through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10).

Unfortunately, it seems that these evil spirits know much more about this than we do. Many Christians have difficulty understanding why the devil is fighting against them at all. Why should he care if God wants to fill heaven with a bunch of human beings whom He redeemed from the earth? Of what importance is it to Satan if many people become born again?

The significant factor here is that every one who receives eternal life, becomes a potential threat to his kingdom. Every newborn spiritual babe has the potential to grow to maturity, submit themselves completely to God and become a threat to the devil’s empire. Every believer has the

capacity to overcome. Each and every child of God has the Most High residing in them and therefore has the possibility to live victoriously in this world.

You see, there must be some finite number of fallen angels who are working with Satan. Revelation 12:4 mentions that he draws one third of the “stars” to earth with his tail. So logically, God must need at least the same number of human beings who have overcome to take the places of these evil beings in the rulership of the world.

Although this idea about a certain number may not be exactly correct, it seems important that God would have a sufficient quantity of overcomers through whom He can rule. These then would take the place of those evil spirits who are today exercising authority over the earth. These “replacements” will then reign with Christ over this earth during the Millennial Kingdom.

At this point when the man-child is caught up, Satan is totally, practically defeated. Notice please the song which is sung after this event, starting with verse 10 of chapter 12: “Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their [soul] lives to the death” (Rev 12:10,11).

Praise God! The arrival of the manchild is the signal. Now is come salvation and strength and

the Kingdom! At last the Kingdom of God is manifested in victory!

This then explains why the devil and his hosts are fighting against you and me. They are constantly trying to get us discouraged, to give up, or to give in to their constant temptations. They are battling to cause us to sin in some kind of way. It may be gross sin such as fornication, adultery, theft etc. or simple, "innocent" sins such as gossiping and criticizing others, losing our temper, coveting something someone else has, proud thoughts or any such thing. Then, as soon as we bite the bait and sin, they go running off to the throne of God to accuse us.

In verse 10 of our passage we learn that we are constantly being accused before God day and night. But why are they accusing us? It is to demonstrate to the Most High that they are winning. It is to show that they are overcoming us with their power and we are succumbing to their temptations.

This is essential to them, because as long as they can deceive us and have their little (or big) victories over us, they can prove to God that we are not qualified to take their places. Although we can be forgiven and are still loved by God, this does not negate the fact that when we sin, we reveal to the watching universe that we are not yet competent to reign in place of the present evil forces. When they are still defeating us, we cannot be thought of as capable of displacing them.

Are you being tempted and tested in your daily life? Are you in some situation which seems

very difficult, if not impossible to bear? Does it seem as if there is no way out, except to sin? Don't do it! God can give you the grace to withstand any and all trials and temptations. You will never be happy outside of God's perfect will. The universe is watching. In fact, the creation itself is groaning in travail, like a woman about to give birth, waiting for the mature, prepared sons of God to be manifested (Rm 8:19).

Babies are nice. Sometimes, they are cute and cuddly. Yet it is the mature sons and daughters who are useful to do work and help the family. So it is in the house of God.

Our Father is looking for those who will be faithful, those who will continue to follow Him through every circumstance and trial, those who will allow Him to demonstrate His victory in their lives. How we live is essential, not only for own benefit, but also for the kingdom of God and even for the whole creation. Our daily choices have many consequences.

God's plan for His children is not just to give them a new birth and then whisk them off to heaven. No, His intentions are much more profound than this. What God is planning requires our complete cooperation and faithfulness. His will is to establish His authority over the earth – over both the inhabitants and the territory. He will do this through His representative, man. The weak, frail vessel whom the devil despised and defeated in the Garden of Eden will, through the grace of God, finally overcome God's enemy and have dominion over the earth.

God is working in and through human beings to defeat His enemy. When His work is accomplished in us, we become mature sons of God who are able to resist the efforts and temptations of the evil one. In I John 2:13 we read about a group of believers who are called "young men." This undoubtedly refers to a stage of spiritual maturity. These ones, John says "have overcome the wicked one."

When Christian men and women submit themselves to God every day and begin to live more and more in Christ's victory, the very gates of hell begin to tremble. The principalities and powers see more and more saints being made ready. They see that their deceptions and temptations are no longer working and that they are being defeated by lowly human beings who are submitted to and full of the living God.

I believe in these days their efforts are becoming ever more desperate as they see the day coming when God's mature sons will be manifested for all the universe to see (Rm 8:19) and then take their place as the rulers of this world.

Can you see from this short explanation why our daily living is so important, both to God and to us? Every little detail of our lives, all our attitudes, words and actions are being carefully monitored by many different beings. There is indeed "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1).

Whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not, we are involved in a battle for the control of the earth. Every child of God is involved in this struggle.

Consequently, it is not sufficient to simply have an appearance of righteousness, perhaps being a “regular” church attender, giving up a few “gross” sins or doing a few things for God. Now we see that it is essential for every child of God to actually allow Jesus Christ to reign over every aspect of their being. He must be Lord of our thoughts, our words, our attitudes and our actions. He must be the One who is being seen in and through every aspect of our lives.

We must enter into the Kingdom of God today. Only by allowing the life of God to dominate and predominate in our whole being will we experience being an “overcomer.”

Hopefully this will help clarify for all readers why we often encounter so much difficulty trying to live a Christian life. The powers of hell are arrayed against us. The forces of the enemy are constantly trying to show that their “place” is secure as the rulers of this world.

Yet our Lord Jesus Christ has overcome them all. He has run the race before us (Heb 6:20) and exhibited God’s victory. Therefore, since He now lives in every one of His children, He can show forth this same victory in our lives.

No one is too weak. No one is unable. Consequently, when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, there will be no acceptable excuses. The most awesome power of the universe lives inside of us. The man Christ Jesus who overcame every temptation of the devil and exhibited God’s life and nature to the world is now living within every believer. All we need to

do is submit our lives to Him completely and allow Him to dominate every aspect of them. In this way, His victory will be manifested through us.

Amazingly, these same trials and tribulations which the devil is trying to use to defeat us are also being used by God. What the devil tries to do to tempt us and discourage us, our Father is using for our good. He is using our difficulties to purify our lives. All the tribulation through which we pass, gaining the victory by the power of Jesus, serves to transform us into the image of Christ.

Our difficulties work to expose the sin within us. Then, as we repent and give ourselves more completely to God so that He can do His work in us, we are changed more into His likeness.

You see, even the devil is being used by God to accomplish His purposes upon the earth. So don't be discouraged, everything is working together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes (Rm 8:28).

THE WOMAN

Since we have discovered together that the "manchild" of Revelation 12 is a group of overcoming believers, how are we to understand the woman who gives birth to him?

While this woman could be a kind of "composite" of various things, such as Israel, new covenant believers, all of creation, etc. it seems plain that the group of God's people whom we know as "the church," must at least be a part of

this “woman” if not the complete woman. It is the church which is cooperating with God to generate overcoming believers. It is through the church that God will display His manifold wisdom (Eph 3:10). And so it is the church that must make up at least the major part of this group.

However, as we examine the church as she is today, we are brought to an unfortunate conclusion. Not all who are part of her are living in spiritual victory. Many Christians are not living in God’s kingdom today – that is they are not permitting Christ to rule over every aspect of their lives.

Although they may be born again, they are not taking advantage of the opportunity to allow the life of God to prevail in them and live through them. Their lives still exhibit much of the old nature. Many of their pursuits are worldly and much sin is still in evidence.

Consequently, they cannot be thought of as being part of the manchild, but merely part of the woman. They are not exhibiting the overcoming life and Jesus’ victory over the devil.

We notice in verse 14 that when this woman is rescued from the dragon and taken to the wilderness, she is in need of nourishment. She needs feeding. Possibly this would be a reference to the fact that many in the “body” today are not getting the food they need. They are not growing to maturity and victory partly because of the lack of proper spiritual food.

It is then in the wilderness that she is “nourished” with some kind of sustenance which will

help her. Probably this will be accomplished through teaching from some who are intimate with the Lord. We cannot know with certainty how God is going to accomplish all these things, but it is interesting to see how He is caring for all of His people, even those who are not yet where they should be in terms of growth and maturity.

This brings us to an interesting observation. A woman who is pregnant is a person who has inside of her another person. There is a body within another body. When the child is male, he has the potential to be stronger than the one who gives him birth. Applying this to the church today, we could begin to suspect that within this "woman" who in many respects does not appear to be fulfilling the purposes of God by overcoming the forces of evil, exists another "body."

Within the woman who might be seen to be somewhat weak, lives a strong, overcoming man-child. This would be true not only of the church of our day, but is a situation which no doubt existed since the early days of the church. An interesting verse in Jeremiah perhaps prophesies just such a thing. We read: "For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth – a woman shall encompass a man" (Jer 31:22).

Consequently, when looking at the church as a whole and the unprepared state in which we find many believers, we should not be discouraged. We can have confidence in God that in the midst of what might seem a mess, He is working to accomplish His purposes. He has some of His own, just as in the days of Elijah (I Kings 19:18)

who are succeeding in overcoming and having the testimony of His victory.

In Matthew 22:14 Jesus teaches us that: “many are called, but few are chosen.” What does this mean? What are these “few” chosen for? Why is it only a few? Since the death and resurrection of Christ, our Lord has been calling many millions of individuals to Himself.

However, as we have already stated, even though many are coming to Christ every day, only a few of these many are entering into the victory which He has purchased for them. Just a very few believers are succeeding in overcoming the forces of evil. It seems that the majority are not exhibiting a righteousness in their daily lives which is qualifying them to substitute for the principalities and powers who are now in control.

Therefore, these are not qualified to reign with Him. It is only those who have a “testimony” (Rev 12:11) before God and the watching universe showing that they have been faithful, who can take over the positions of the satanic legions and reign. Therefore, it is only these that can be “chosen” by God for this task. It is only the overcomers who will be chosen by God to exercise His authority over the planet and eventually over the universe.

A WORD OF WARNING

We cannot continue on here much further without an important word of warning. When we begin understanding these things, there is the

possibility of an error into which many of God's people have fallen. That is that some begin to think of themselves as being "overcomers." Along with this thought comes another similar error which is to believe that others are not as spiritually advanced as they are. Innumerable groups, "churches" and individuals who begin to understand this and similar truths, begin to suppose that because they understand them, then they must actually be what they see.

The truth is that God is revealing to them the goal, not their position in the race. They are seeing what God wants of them but not where they actually are. Here many make a serious mistake. It is not ourselves who will decide whether or not we will be an "overcomer." Simply having a revelation concerning the subject is not enough.

We are not the judges of ourselves or of others. When we begin to think that we are better or more advanced, this is proof that we have then fallen from a humble attitude and thus are no longer living in true submission to God. When we begin to imagine that we and/or our little group who agrees with us are some kind of spiritual elite, we have already become disqualified from being an "overcomer" by our pride and arrogance.

SPECIAL OFFERS

Even though the door to experience the fullness of Jesus Christ is open to all believers, not all choose to do so. For various reasons, many of

God's children refuse His rightful Lordship over their lives and instead live largely for themselves and the pleasures of this world. Perhaps it is for this reason that in the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ issues many calls to the "overcomers."

When speaking to each church, He states their attributes and their shortcomings and then makes some very special offers to those who are willing to overcome – those who have "ears to hear" (Rev 2:7). By the time the book of Revelation was written, it had become apparent that not all believers were going to be obedient. And so, God sends forth a call to those few who would respond to Him and promises them special rewards (See Rev 2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21).

There should be no doubt from reading these verses that many of the rewards which are mentioned here apply to the future. The verses which speak of ruling the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 2:27) and sitting with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21) are obvious references to sharing Christ's authority during His Millennial reign. The passages which mention having the right to eat of the tree of life (Rev 2:7) and eating of the hidden manna (Rev 2:17) point to the feasting aspect of an intimate walk with Jesus.

Another overcomer promise is the one which mentions being clothed in white raiment and the one in which Jesus promises to confess the faithful believers' names before His Father and the angels (Rev 3:5). Jesus is calling to men and women today, to anyone who will listen, to overcome. He is saying: if you overcome you will feast with Me;

if you overcome you will reign with Me; if you overcome I will reward you with more than you can even understand or imagine.

Finally, through these overcomers, God's original commission given to mankind in Genesis, to subdue or "conquer" the earth, is fulfilled. Here is a group of individuals made in the image and likeness of God who have had and will have dominion over the earth. They conquered the hostile forces which were upon it. They did not live according to the rulership of Satan, but according to God; and in so doing, they gave Jesus Christ the right to claim this earth as His own and set up His Kingdom upon it.

These people wanted Jesus Christ more than they wanted the devil or any part of his kingdom and were willing to sacrifice even their lives to see God's kingdom brought to this earth. Praise God for such men and women who were willing to pay any price to see the kingdom of this world transferred to Jesus Christ, thus fulfilling His prayer to the Father, "Thy kingdom come...in earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).

Now let me ask you, will you be one of these? You have the opportunity. Jesus' call to the overcomers has gone forth to all who have ears to hear. The door is closed to no man, but you must be willing, if necessary (and it probably will be), to give all for Jesus' sake.

If you are ready and willing, God is ready and He will enable you to live in this way. His life, living within you, will give you the strength that you need to overcome the world, Satan, "self" and sin

– all the things that are standing in the way. May God by His tender mercy grant you the willingness to live for Him until He comes.

4.

THE GREAT APOSTACY

Today, we are living in what is known as the “last days.” That is to say, we are living in the final days of the church age. Although there is still one “age” yet to come on this planet earth, i.e. the kingdom age, what must capture our attention at this moment is the fact that the age in which we are now living is rapidly drawing to an end. This assertion can be easily verified by looking at some well-known scriptures. These passages describe what these “last days” will look like and some of the events which will occur in them.

In II Thessalonians 2:1-3 we read: “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless *the falling away comes first*, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition...”

Here we learn that two important events must occur before the second coming of Jesus. They are: “the falling away” and the revelation of “the man of sin.” Even though there are two signs men-

tioned here, for now we will concentrate our discussion on the first sign, the great “falling away.”

Some have tried to use this verse to justify a “pre-tribulation rapture” by teaching that the Greek word which is translated “falling away” can mean “departure.” Thus they argue that the church will have “departed” before the second coming of Jesus.

But the actual Greek word here is “APOSTASIA” which literally means “apostasy.” This departure is, in fact, a departure from the faith. It is a falling away from both the teachings and the person of Jesus Christ. This apostasy is a turning aside from the true message of the gospel and from a genuine relationship with our Lord. This is certainly not the same thing as the rapture.

TODAY’S CHURCH

It distresses me to embark on the following discussion. It is a continual grief to my heart to speak, write, or even think about this subject. However, it seems to be important to do so in order for the reader to have a clear understanding of where we are on God’s timeline.

The sad fact of the matter is that today’s church already has apostatized. It is right now falling further and further away from the Lord. It is extremely far from His designs and intentions. All evidence points to the fact that we are right now in the middle of the fulfillment of this important prophecy. We are the generation which is actually witnessing exactly what the Bible predicted.

I will not deny that there are a few bright spots in the church today. There are some who still love the Lord. There are a few who are faithfully doing His work. But, in general, the condition of most of today's church is lamentable. She is literally wallowing in sin, darkness and confusion. This condition seems to be only getting worse.

How can I say such a thing? Am I being judgmental? I don't think so. I am merely being observant. I have not been out digging around seeking to find out about these things. The stories which give evidence of this fact simply come to my ears.

What I am going to state here is common knowledge. Yet for those who have not yet understood the situation, it seems needful to present some evidence of this fallen, apostate condition. It is necessary to cite some statistics.

1. The incidence of fornication (sex outside of marriage) among believers today (this is true of the church in most parts of the world) is no different from the world. In other words, promiscuous sex is as rampant among professed "believers" as it is among those who have no faith.

One small evidence of this comes from a man who was an elder in a "renewed" Methodist church. He told me that during his 22 years as an elder, only three couples married there without having had sex with each other before the wedding. Two of these were his own children.

2. Adultery is statistically as common in today's church as outside of her.

3. Divorce, to our shame, is more common

among church goers than among those outside the church.

4. The church is increasingly condoning activities which the Bible says are sin. For example, homosexuality is being accepted as normal and inoffensive. I recently saw on television a ceremony of two gay pastors getting married with the congregation “worshipping” and weeping together. Their wedding bands were tied with ribbons together in an open Bible. This is something which grieves the heart of God.

5. A popular Christian psychologist in the U. S. stated a few years ago that through his experience counseling believers, he found that 50% of the men who sit in the pews on Sunday morning are addicted to online pornography, along with at least 30% of the pastors. These numbers could actually be too low.

6. The number of preachers and other church leaders who are involved in adultery and other sexual sins with members of their congregations is astounding. It came to my attention recently that a church in a nearby town discovered that three of their pastors were involved in adultery with women in the congregation.

One of them was having sex with 14 different women in the group. It is increasingly common for churches to overlook or even justify such actions on the part of leaders instead of condemning them.

Another man, who graduated from a famous conservative theological seminary in Texas, said that every single one of those who studied with

him, with whom he later had contact, admitted to being involved with extramarital lovers in their congregations. Such hypocrisy played a large part in him leaving the ministry. These examples could go on and on.

7. This list of more obvious sins of course does not include such things as lying, hating, greed, gossip, backbiting, jealousy, leaders using their gifts and positions to enrich themselves, taking advantage of others, pride, arrogance, strife, contentions for influence, fame, and/or power, not repaying borrowed money and an almost infinite number of other such sins. These are so common that in the church almost no one takes notice or even considers them sin anymore.

I don't mean to dwell on this disgraceful situation. It is only to show how the church has fallen away – apostasized. She is not holy as her maker has commanded her to be. He said: "Be holy, for I am holy" (I Pet 1:16). We are also warned that without holiness, none of us will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

No doubt many will insist that, although visible holiness is absent, the holiness God is speaking about exists somewhere in His mind. Somehow He thinks or imagines that we are holy even when we are not. If this is the case, then God has lost His mind or perhaps has become senile.

In today's church, sanctification, which really means "being made holy," has been reduced to a mere "being set apart." From my observation, what most seem to be getting ready for and are being "set apart" for is God's judgment.

He warns: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal 6:7). And, "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people" (Heb 10:30). Further we read: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

The sad, inescapable truth is that we are in the middle of the fulfillment of an important, end-time prophecy. We are witnessing the great "falling away" – the apostasy that the Bible predicts.

Since it is clear to any honest person that the church is drowning in sin and uncleanness, the question arises: How did she get this way? Where have we gone wrong? A large part of the answer lies in the fact that the church has been deceived and robbed. She has received false and deficient teaching. She has been misled by many who have perverted and/or misunderstood God's word and will. They have watered down the gospel to make it more palatable and easy. They have twisted it so much that it no longer has any power to change people into Christ's image. It no longer produces holiness and the other results which God is seeking.

Much of this distortion of the gospel has been propagated by today's preachers and teachers who are seeking to produce "results." Many want to fill their churches with members. They wish to be seen as successful. So they tailor their messages to be non-offensive and easy to take. They search

for new techniques, doctrines, ideas, or practices which will attract people to their church or ministry. They pervert the true gospel – if in fact they ever really understood it – to further their own ambitions and feed their own egos. Unpleasant subjects, such as conviction of sin and true holiness, are put aside so that no one feels uncomfortable or is offended.

SEDUCING SPIRITS

One verse which accurately describes today's error is found in I Timothy 4:1 where we read: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons..." Here we have confirmed for us that in the "latter times" there will occur a departure or apostasy from the faith. This error will be promoted by deceiving or "seducing" (KJV) spirits and the teaching of doctrines which have their origin in the realm of spiritual darkness.

Since it is undoubtedly true that this is even now occurring, how can we recognize these errors? How can we know if indeed, these things are happening among those with whom we fellowship today? How can we discern the times correctly and also avoid these same pitfalls?

To begin, perhaps it would be useful to examine what it means to be deceived or seduced. This is something which happens through the power (including thoughts, feelings, and teachings) of evil spirits. When we are seduced, we are enticed

to involve ourselves in something which is not right. Many times we know, in our innermost being, that what we are believing or doing is not correct. But we let ourselves be persuaded because there is something in us which wants it. We secretly desire to do or believe something, so we allow ourselves to be convinced, even though on some level we know it is not exactly right.

As an example, we could consider some man or woman who is seduced to commit adultery. No doubt, they know it is wrong. But they have a carnal craving which is crying out to be satisfied. So they allow their mind to be persuaded, they let their feelings carry them along until they fall into sin.

In the same way, many believers allow themselves to be persuaded to believe certain things or involve themselves in certain practices because it appeals to something carnal within them.

Perhaps they adopt a belief system which excuses them from certain sins which they don't really want to abandon. Possibly they accept certain teachings because they appeal to their intellect. Others embrace certain practices which give them good feelings. Still others follow along some line of teaching which assuages their guilt about things from the past which they have not really made right with God. Yet others simply go along with the beliefs and practices of their church because they want to be accepted by the group and enjoy the company of the others.

In these and many, many other ways, believers are seduced into practices and teachings

which do not reflect the heart or the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Of course, in this writing it will be impossible to identify all the many ways in which men and women have been and are being turned away from the truth today. It is impractical in one writing to enumerate all the many errors. What we will do instead is to try to identify and discuss some of the more serious erroneous belief systems and practices which are common in the church.

Together with this, we will examine what the truth of Jesus Christ really is. The hope and prayer of this author is that through this examination, many will be led out of error and into the truth which will open up for them new levels of intimate relationship with their Savior.

Very few people will be deceived by something blatantly wrong. Therefore, the demonic, seducing spirits, instead of simply trying to invent a completely new false doctrine, will often just subtly modify something which is true. They twist and distort what Jesus and the apostles taught to create a new doctrine that is close to the truth, but not exactly the truth.

When people begin to accept these deviations, they are then on the road to serious error. The further along these incorrect lines a believer goes, the further from the truth he gets.

An analogy of this might be two roads which begin to slightly diverge from one another. In the beginning, they are quite close together, but after they get a thousand miles down the road, they can be very far apart. Small deviations in our under-

standing of the gospel can lead to great errors in our life as we move further along.

Therefore, our discussion of these things may not be easy. I will try my best to put things as clearly as possible. Yet since many of these errors are of long standing and deeply entrenched in today's church, it may take some time, study, meditation, and prayer to return to what the real truth is. This will involve not only reading this message, but also demand that each reader sincerely seek the Lord for himself, so that they can hear from God and consequently understand His truth as He has presented it.

In order to try and simplify our investigation, we will divide our study into two parts. The first part will focus on how today's church has deviated from sound doctrine. The second part will look at how we have strayed from the Person of Jesus Christ. No doubt these two things are intimately related, but in an effort to provide simplicity of understanding we will divide them into these two parts.

ANOTHER GOSPEL

Paul writes: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal 2:6,7). Here we have confirmed that many of the errors in the church are simply perversions of the genuine gospel.

In another place Paul surprisingly affirms that believers are easily duped. They are really gullible. Having little discernment, they put up with false teachers and false doctrines. We read: "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!" (II Cor 11:4).

What then are the aspects of this "other gospel" which seems to be so prevalent in the church today that is causing so many to be misled? Obviously it will be things which have a certain appeal to the natural man. They will be doctrines which remove anything offensive and make the gospel easy to take. They will be teachings which make no serious demands, include everyone, and encourage people to feel good about themselves and others. It is a gospel with little, if any, personal cost and many supposed benefits.

MISCONSTRUING FORGIVENESS

Let us start our investigation by speaking about the only partially true, greatly exaggerated and quite distorted "gospel of forgiveness." Most churches today seem to be preaching this gospel. It goes something like this: If you will simply accept Jesus, all your sins (past, present and future) will be forgiven. You are thusly saved from hell and destined for heaven. Some day, when Jesus returns, your sinful life and nature will be instantly changed and you will get a man-

sion in heaven where you will live forever enjoying all kinds of pleasures.

What could be wrong with this message? Almost the entire church is preaching it. How can it be that such a “good” message is wrong? Is the author of this book some kind of hard-nosed, legalistic, unloving person who is trying to undermine what Jesus did for us?

Please remember as we proceed here that the partial gospel is merely, at the beginning, a small deviation from the true.

Perhaps we should note that the Bible does NOT mention any gospel called “the gospel of forgiveness.” Instead we find the “gospel of the kingdom,” the “gospel of Jesus Christ,” the “gospel of peace,” the “gospel of God,” the “gospel of the grace of God,” the “gospel of the glory of Christ” and, last but not least, the “gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13).

Yet today, what is almost universally preached is a message which focuses upon “accepting Jesus” and then receiving the end result of forgiveness. This seems to be the entire message. Now how and where can this be wrong?

We could begin by emphasizing as strongly as possible that Jesus is not craving our acceptance. He is not anxiously waiting up in heaven, wringing His hands, hoping that someone, anyone will accept Him. Then, He will not, if we will only “accept” Him – thus meeting His emotional needs – forgive all of our sins, past present, and future, later rewarding richly in heaven those who recognized His great neediness and accepted Him.

Of course no one states the gospel they are preaching in exactly this way. They use different terms and means of expression. Yet such conclusions are easily inferred from what is being taught today. Just such an understanding is often arrived at by logical, thinking people who hear today's watered down preaching and consequently begin to regard the gospel message as something weak, pathetic, and unattractive.

Next it should be stated clearly and assertively that Jesus' primary purpose in dying on the cross was NOT to forgive us for our sins. That's right. Forgiveness was not His main purpose. Instead, it was to save us FROM our sins!

Although forgiveness is certainly an essential and precious part of the gospel message, it is not the primary focus or intent of the gospel. Instead of merely forgiving us, Jesus died so that we could stop sinning! He was crucified to remove sin from us completely, not merely overlook it and/or forgive us.

God said to Joseph in Matthew 1:21 speaking about his betrothed wife Mary: "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will *save His people from their sins.*" He did not say that Jesus would simply forgive His people for their sins, but actually save them *from* their sins.

Jesus came to create a holy, sanctified people who have been so transformed that they no longer sin! His purpose was not merely to forgive them and then let them go on sinning until He finally whisks them off to heaven.

Today's "gospel of forgiveness" presents an easy, painless way to feel good about your eternal fate and present condition, but it is not entirely true. It is only a partial truth. Therefore, it does little or nothing to actually transform and save those who follow it. It does not set them free from sin.

Instead, it merely excuses them for their sinful condition. It is essentially a license to go on sinning, since it presents no hope of ever really being changed or freed from sin. Many actually believe that once they "accept" Jesus, their sin no longer matters to God or even that He can no longer see it. What darkness this is! Untruths and partial truths will not and, in fact, cannot set you free.

Obviously forgiveness is essential to the gospel message. Without forgiving us, God could not have communion with us. His holy Person could not interact with our sinfulness. Yes, God can and does forgive us when we truly repent. Yet, this is only one step toward His ultimate plan! What He really intends to do is transform us (save us) so completely that we become like He is – holy and sinless (I Pet 1:16).

If you are not being changed, if you are not becoming holy, if you are not being transformed more and more into the image of Christ, then His forgiveness is doing you very little, if any, good.

This may come as a great shock to you, but God cannot forgive sin (singular). That's right. There is no verse in the New Testament that says God will forgive sin. You see, "sin" is a word which describes what we are. Sins (plural) refer to what we do. Yes, Jesus can and will forgive the

wrong things which we do (our sins), but He cannot and will not forgive what we are. He has another solution entirely for that.

Jesus' plan is to call men and women out of this world system, fill them with His own life, and then change them into His image. In order to do that He has to eliminate in us the old sinful life and nature.

Forgiveness is certainly part of that process, but it is only a part. The other part involves the crucifixion of our old man. It involves the death of our sinful life and nature.

When people preach only a part of the gospel message, presenting it as the whole sum and substance, this is an error. It misleads people. It leaves them with a false impression of what God wants and is trying to do.

When we present only the "easy," more palatable parts of the gospel and leave out the ones which will cost us something, the ones which are difficult and the ones which seem "too hard," then we deceive people with a partial truth and lead them into error. By presenting partial truth as the whole truth, we actually impede others from being pleasing to God. This is not the work of God, but has another, darker source.

Most of the time, those who preach the gospel of "forgiveness" leave out the message of the cross. It is just too offensive (Gal 5:11). But the truth is that in order to be saved from our sin (singular) we need to die. Only the dead do not sin. Therefore, the death of Christ must become real in our lives! The cross must genuinely operate in us

every day. We too must be crucified! We must actually *experience* the death and the resurrection of Jesus in order to know what salvation really means. Such dying is neither pleasant or easy.

In Jesus' day, when people saw someone carrying a cross, that person was never alone. Instead, he was always surrounded by Roman soldiers. Furthermore, he was not simply wandering around aimlessly hauling a piece of wood in the shape of a cross. He had a specific destination. He was going to die. He was going to be painfully crucified.

If we are going to follow Jesus and fulfill His will, we too must carry the cross (Mt 10:38, 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23, 14:27). There is no substitute. There is no alternative for the death of our self life. We too must be crucified. We too must die.

When Jesus forgives us, it is so that we can enter into communion with Him. Then, through this communion, His whole plan can work in our lives. This plan includes freedom from sin. This freedom only comes with our death. As long as our old life lives, it will sin. This is a simple fact. Jesus' solution for this is to apply His crucifixion to our natural life and then replace it with His own eternal life. This is the real gospel message.

Such a glorious freedom from sin – which is effected by actually experiencing the death and resurrection of Christ for ourselves – is made possible by forgiveness. Yet, if we only focus on forgiveness and never go on to experience full and complete salvation from what we are through the cross, then we have been robbed and deceived.

Those who follow such a message will never be free from sin, never be transformed, and never be prepared for all that God has to give us in the future. They have been deluded by a partial truth which ends up being a serious error.

MISUNDERSTANDING FAITH

Every Christian should know that we are saved by faith. It is our faith in Jesus which justifies us in God's eyes rather than any work which we could do or behavior which we could generate. Yet faith too has been corrupted in today's church. What is being taught as faith today is a cheap, easy philosophy which is powerless to save anybody.

Today's "faith" seems to be agreeing with some biblical facts or "Christian" ideas. For many, it is a purely mental exercise of trying to convince ourselves or someone else of things which are written in the Bible. Even worse, many try to believe and preach a bunch of nice little "Christian" philosophies which often are not even scriptural. This is a useless activity.

The result of this fallacy is that today's churches are full of people who have only been convinced of something but not truly converted. They have never been convicted of sin, never really repented, and therefore, are not really being saved from who they are and what they do.

True faith, on the other hand, is the human heart's reaction to the revelation of God Himself. When God reveals Himself then, and only then,

we can believe. We read: "...and [Jesus] manifested His glory; and [then] His disciples believed in Him" (Jn 2:11). And also: "These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him" (Jn 12:41). Further we are told concerning Abraham, the father of faith: "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision..." and then: "And he [Abram] believed in the Lord, and he [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:1,6). The order of these things is important. First, God reveals Himself. Then, men believe.

As we see from the above verses, to really believe, we must first have seen something of God Himself. He must have revealed Himself in some way to us. This might be through His word, someone's preaching, or any number of other means. But genuine faith can only occur when we actually perceive some aspect of God Himself. Our heart then responds to this by believing.

There is no doubt that we are justified by faith alone. Yet this must be faith in a living Person and not merely in some facts *about* that Person. If God has never been revealed to you, then there is no way that you can have believed in Him or consider yourself to be one of His children.

No one can ever be justified by believing truths about God. On the other hand, everyone and anyone can be justified by believing in the Person *of* God. This requires that they have perceived Him in some way. He has revealed Himself to them. Then, they have reacted to this revelation by believing in Him.

Believing in information, even if it is very biblical and correct, cannot save us. Only receiving and then believing in the revelation of the living God Himself will save us from who and what we are. To be considered a real believer, we must have had a genuine encounter with Him.

Please do not misunderstand the following affirmation. The real “word of God” is not a book. It is a Person. It is Jesus Christ God’s Son.

I believe and affirm that the Bible we have today is an accurate and true record of God’s speaking and revelation. It was inspired by Him. I am in no way disputing this truth.

Yet believing in a book, even when it is the Bible, cannot save us. We must believe in the Person of Jesus. In order to do this, He Himself must have been revealed to us in some way and we must have responded by believing. Then, and only then, can we be considered to be one of His children. It is all too possible for people to believe in a few biblical truths, but never actually have met Jesus Christ.

Many believers today are trying to believe in something which is not really real to them. They pick and choose some Bible verses which appeal to them and then try to “believe” them.

Some, for example, are imagining that they will soon be wealthy or healed. Others are “believing” they are forgiven for sins which they have not really confessed and for which they have not truly repented. Still others suppose that God does not see when they sin or perhaps doesn’t even really care whether they sin or not.

Let me state as firmly and adamantly as I can. Such “faith” is useless! Mental exercise is NOT faith. Repeating Bible verses – trying to convince yourself of something scriptural or any other kind of intellectual artifice – will do nothing to aid you in your walk with God. It is only by seeing Him through the Holy Spirit that we can have genuine, saving faith.

The kind of “faith” which so many have in the church today is merely imagination. Many talk about and even preach about things which are not real to them. These things may be scriptural and therefore true in an eternal sense, but they are not real in the lives of those speaking about them.

Therefore, much of today’s church is full of a palpable sense of unreality. This is the result of a false, imaginary faith which saves no one.

MISREPRESENTING JUSTIFICATION

The precious truth of our justification by faith is also something which the demons have succeeded in misrepresenting to the church. As we have seen, true faith is not something merely mental. It is our response to God revealing Himself.

When we respond positively, we become justified. But, if and when we refuse to recognize and obey what He is revealing to us, we become disobedient.

The fact is that God is revealing Himself every day, if not every minute of every day, to His children. The question is: How are we responding to

this revelation? Are we recognizing it? Are we receiving it? Are we obeying His instructions and directions? Are we responding in faith? If not, then we are no longer living in faith and are no longer being justified.

Let us try to illustrate this with an example. Let us suppose that someone received Jesus five years ago. God was graciously and marvelously revealed to them and they believed in (“into” Greek) Him. In our example, we will insist that this person was genuinely and truly converted.

Now let us imagine that with the passage of time this individual begins to sin. Perhaps he or she begins engaging in sex outside of marriage.

No doubt, Jesus will be speaking to them about this sin. It is certain that He is not simply ignoring the problem or is unaware of it. It is even more definite that His own precious blood is not blinding His eyes to this offense against His holy nature. Instead, He reveals His displeasure to that disobedient child in various ways.

But let us suppose that this person does not respond positively to Jesus’ speaking. He shuts his spiritual ears and hardens his heart. His desire for sensual pleasure causes him to keep on sinning and resist the Holy Spirit speaking in his heart.

Can it be that God considers such a person just and justified? Is it possible that He still looks upon this child of His as righteous? Obviously not! How could it be possible that the holy God of the universe would not withdraw His presence from such an offense to His Person? Of course,

this sin will cause a separation in the relationship between this individual and his Lord. The more this individual resists and rejects Jesus' admonition to stop this sin, the greater the spiritual distance becomes.

You see, such a person is no longer walking in faith. He is rejecting what God is revealing to him concerning His thoughts and feelings. Instead of faith, his reaction to the Holy Spirit's thoughts is rebellion and disobedience. Therefore, since this person is no longer responding to God in faith, he is no longer being justified.

James makes it very clear that dead faith does not justify us (Js 2:14-36). But what is dead faith? It is faith without the correct, positive response to God. It is a faith merely of the past. It is faith which is not operative today, right now. It is a faith without "works." This word "works" means that we do what the Holy Spirit is directing us to do. We respond by obeying Jesus at this moment.

The "works" about which James speaks does not mean fulfilling some religious duty or engaging in some charitable activities. This does not indicate that we are obeying some Christian regulations, following some Christian leadership, or keeping some Old Testament law. Instead, these works are our response to what Jesus is revealing of Himself to us, right now, today.

If we do not do what Jesus is telling us to do at this moment, including stopping our sinful activity, then we are not walking in faith. Therefore, we are not being justified. Our faith is not living. It has died. Only genuine, up-to-date faith

can justify us before God. The fact that we might have believed in the past, cannot hide or excuse the fact that we are not obeying by faith what He is revealing to us right now.

Yet I imagine that a large part of today's church would not agree with this. Many would argue that since such a person already received Jesus, no matter what he does, he is still justified before God. They think that our actions after receiving Jesus cannot make any difference in our relationship with God or our eternal reward.

My dear brothers and sisters, such a person is in great darkness. It is tremendous deception! Such a belief reveals a total misunderstanding of faith, a complete misinterpretation of justification and, even worse, an enormous deficiency of knowing God personally, i.e. really knowing what kind of Person He is.

Such a doctrine is one which all the demons hope that you will believe. Once you accept such a teaching, you then stop being concerned about sin. You cease to care that much about pleasing your Lord. You imagine that sin doesn't make any difference to Him or you.

Therefore, your life becomes the demons playground. They are "lovin' it." They can therefore induce you to do all kinds of things which hurt both yourself and others. Your life and actions begin to undermine your testimony and the faith of those around you. You become a wonderful tool in the hands of the prince of darkness to damage and mislead others. The very sin which Jesus died to liberate you from becomes your daily practice.

Dear friends, if this is your theology, you are in desperate, profound darkness. You are in serious error. You are in need of a new, face to face encounter with God and a deep thorough repentance.

Please understand that I am not speaking in the above mentioned example about a sinning individual going to heaven or hell. Our discussion here is whether or not a sinning Christian can consider themselves justified (being considered just) before God while committing known sin.

The biblical answer – the true answer – is NO! It is not possible. Such sinful living is not by faith or through faith. Instead it is a rejection of the revelation of God. It is the opposite of faith – disobedience.

Without genuine faith, it is impossible for anyone to be justified. If and when we stop responding to the Holy Spirit, we are no longer walking by faith. Our faith becomes dead. Our “works” (our responses to His revelation) cease. Such faith does not and cannot justify us (Jas 2:17, 26).

MISTAKING TRANSFORMATION

Many in today’s church are also mistaken concerning transformation. Not a few imagine that the transformation of their souls is something which will happen when Jesus returns. They think it is something instantaneous. which will occur in the twinkling of an eye, as mentioned in I Corinthians 15:52.

The truth is that our transformation must be our daily experience right now. Instead of happening when Jesus returns, the transformation of the soul *actually stops* when He comes again. At that moment, our time for transformation is over. The time for salvation to work in our souls is “today” (II Cor 6:2) not tomorrow.

What will be changed “...in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye” (I Cor 15:52) is not our soul, but rather our body. A careful reading of the context of this verse will make this truth very clear.

As mentioned previously, Jesus came to change us in such a dramatic manner that we no longer sin. To accomplish this, the first step is for our sinful, Adamic life to die. This occurs when we actually experience the cross of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit. Our death together with Jesus must become real to us every day. As we cooperate with Him, His Spirit will apply this death to who and what we are.

The next step is to fill us more and more with His life which we receive at the new birth. As His divine, sinless life grows up within us more and more, our own life diminishes. This is a process which takes time and attention. It is not an event. Although receiving Jesus’ life through the new birth is an event, the maturing of this life within us must go on every day.

Many believe that they could never stop sinning. So they give up and search for a doctrine which does not demand true holiness or makes it seem like something which only exists in the mind of God.

It is actually true that a human being cannot stop sinning. The only One who does not sin is God. But this is the whole point. Jesus' plan is to put to death our own, sinful life. Then He intends to fill us to overflowing *with His own sinless life*.

When and if we are full of Him, we do not sin because it is not ourselves who are living any longer. Instead, it is Jesus who is living in and through us. How desperately we all need to be ever more full of the Life of God! This is the only way we can be free from sin.

This is the biblical process called "transformation." In Greek the word is "METAMORPHOÖ" the origin of our word "metamorphosis (Rm 12:2). Metamorphosis refers to the process which a butterfly caterpillar undergoes when it changes from a worm into a butterfly. First, it secretes a substance which forms around it and hardens into a chrysalis. Next, it spends a long time there inside in a dormant, deathlike state. When it emerges, it has changed so completely that it is hard to associate with the original caterpillar.

The first stage, the "worm," is lowly and crawls along the ground or on plants. The second stage is a beautiful creature which flies freely in the heavens.

Our transformation is something which must be happening today. This is effected by our seeing and then reflecting Jesus' glory (II Cor 3:18). If, by faith, we are perceiving, receiving and then reflecting Him day by day, we are being truly transformed and made ready for His second coming.

NO JUDGMENT

One consequence of the “gospel of forgiveness” doctrine is that very few Christians today believe that they will be judged. They do not think that there will ever be any negative consequences for their actions. They imagine that, no matter what they do after they “receive Jesus,” God will not punish them in any way.

Since they suppose that they have already been forgiven for all their sins – past, present, and future – they will only receive blessings from God, both now and in the hereafter. Perhaps some will get a lot of blessings, others perhaps fewer, but only blessings nonetheless.

This, my dear brethren, typifies the definition of what it means to be deceived. We read: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; *for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Gal 6:7). This verse was written to believers! If anyone thinks that they can continue sinning and their heavenly Father will not notice, care, or discipline them for their errors, they are seriously deluded. They have been deceived.

How can we be sure about this? Let us take a look at the Bible together. To have a proper understanding, we must begin by analyzing an important question. This question may seem unrelated at first, but soon you will understand how important it is.

The question is: How many unbelievers will be raptured? How many God rejectors will be

caught up with the church when Jesus returns? Obviously, the answer is none. Not even one person who does not have eternal life will be "...caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (I Thess 4:17). It simply will not and cannot happen.

Therefore, anything and everything which the scripture teaches will occur at that time (the time of our resurrection) will only happen to believers. All Bible verses which refer to this event can ONLY apply to Christians. When we read about what will happen at the "second coming" and when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, these things are, without a shadow of doubt, applicable only to us who have received Jesus and are His children. This is because no unsaved person will be there.

We read: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (II Cor 5:10). This judgment occurs immediately after the "rapture" or resurrection of believers. Here we will all "receive" the consequences of our actions on this earth (while 'in the body'), whether they have been "good or bad."

Again we are taught: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. *But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality*" (Col 3:23-25). No doubt receiving this "inheritance" is

something which will happen when we stand before Jesus on that Day. So also, being judged for doing “wrong” and being “repaid” for this will also occur at that time. Here there is no “partiality.” No one is getting off easy or avoiding their just punishment because of who or what they are or were.

Now we will go on to investigate just what these just rewards or disciplines will be. But before we do, we must remember that these negative consequences will not be the same as those of unbelievers. All unbelievers will be judged later, when they stand before what is called “The Great White Throne” mentioned in (Rev 20:11). This event happens 1,000 years afterwards. Before His Judgement Seat, Jesus will *only* be judging His children, His family.

No Christian will lose his or her eternal life at that time. Please make no mistake about this. There is no room for doubt or discussion here. This is the only simple logical conclusion possible.

For example, if we suppose that someone could have done something to lose their eternal life or “salvation,” then they would not have been raptured and therefore could not be standing before Jesus’ judgment seat.

No non-Christian will be there at this time. No one who does not have eternal life will be there either. This would be impossible. Therefore, *all* events predicted by the Bible which occur at this time refer only to believers.

When we stand before Him to give account of our deeds, there will be both rewards and punish-

ments. One of these punishments which the Jesus Himself predicts is to be "...beaten with many stripes" (Lk 12:47). This chastisement is for the believer who: "...knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will." Verse 43 of this chapter makes it abundantly clear that this is something which occurs when the "Master" comes, i.e. when Jesus returns.

While some try to make the "servants" mentioned here be unbelieving Jews or some other such group, these will not be raptured and therefore cannot be the ones to which this verse refers! These can only be believers.

Furthermore, we are taught that the severity of these chastisements will vary with the degree of rebellion of each individual. It is written: "But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Lk 12:28).

Another negative consequence of sinning against God and not obeying Him while we are on the earth is missing the coming wedding feast and the Millennial Kingdom. Disobedient servants will be left out. Sinning believers will be excluded too.

The parable of the foolish virgins, with which almost everyone is familiar, clearly teaches this truth (see Mt 25:1-13). When the five foolish ones tried to enter in to the wedding feast, they were refused entry.

We can be confident that these virgins represent Christians for several reasons. First, they were “virgins” (II Cor 11:2). Second, they had some “oil” in the lamps which is a type of the Holy Spirit. Third, they were waiting for the Lord, the bridegroom. And finally, because only believers will be resurrected at that time!

Paul explains in his epistles, the fact that disobedient Christians will not inherit the coming kingdom of God. He repeats this truth three times in three different letters.

This is not an obscure or difficult to understand teaching. It is clearly taught by both Jesus, Paul and other apostles. It is “the gospel truth.” Please review I Corinthians 6:9-12, Galatians 5:19-21 and Ephesians 5:1-5 which are a few passages that clearly explain this fact.

Not only will this discipline of missing out on the Millennial Kingdom be severe, it will be long lasting. This chastisement will continue during the kingdom age, or 1,000 years. Such a conclusion is logical, since it is this “Millennial” Kingdom from which they will be excluded.

Still another punishment for unfaithful Christians is explained for us in Matthew 25, verses 14:30. This is the well-known parable about the talents which God’s servants are given to use while He is away.

The foolish servant who did nothing with his talent was punished by being thrown into a place called “outer darkness.” In this place, the anguish of suffering produces “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This place, "outer darkness," cannot be the same as hell, or the lake of fire. Although many think that these two places – outer darkness and hell – are the same, no Bible verse affirms that they are. Instead, outer darkness is a place only for God's rebellious children.

All biblical references point to this fact. Nowhere are we told of an unbeliever being put there. In the Bible *only* believers suffer this punishment.

The word mistranslated in the New King James Version "unbeliever" in Luke 12:46 should read "unfaithful" according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. Obviously, an unbeliever and a believer who is unfaithful are two different things.

The fact is that Jesus will judge, discipline, punish and chastise His disobedient children when He comes. It is written: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins [no more forgiveness], but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries [persistent, resistant sinners]."

"Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of *how much worse punishment*, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine,

I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge *His people*' " (Heb 10:26-30).

It is indisputable from this verse that God will indeed "judge His people." Anyone who chooses to ignore this truth is wilfully being blind and will suffer the consequences of this choice.

In this chapter, there is simply not room to discuss this subject in all the details necessary to answer everyone's questions or doubts. Therefore, for a more detailed and complete discussion of this subject, I would like to urge the reader to refer to the book previously published by this ministry titled: *Thy Kingdom Come*. This book is available, without cost, simply by asking. Visit the website: www.agrainofwheat.com.

JUDGEMENT NOT HAPPENING TODAY

Many become deceived because they don't see Jesus judging His children now, in this age. Consequently, they imagine He never will. Although sinning believers suffer some natural consequences of their unrighteous actions, they don't see the hand of God descending from heaven to discipline them as they might deserve.

Therefore, they begin to imagine that it will never happen. They mistake this lack of apparent punishment for a lack of good sense or justice on God's part.

As an example of this seeming absence of judgment, we read: "...but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb 13:4). It is an indisputable fact that today's church is brimming over

with fornicators and adulterers, both in the pews and the pulpits. Yet, we don't see God's judging these people. So, people begin to assume that everything is O.K. Possibly, God has changed His attitude and will never judge them. The problem is that they fail to see the future.

Our Lord has reserved His judgment for when He comes. It is at that time that everyone will receive the just rewards for their actions, whether they were good or evil.

Today is the age of grace. The coming Kingdom Age is the age of judgment. It is then that Jesus will discipline and judge His disobedient children. God will fulfill His word and judge His people. It is simply not possible for Him to do anything else.

Today in this age of grace, Jesus is showing us His undeserved goodness. But we should not deceive ourselves because of this. Instead, we must realize that this period of God's goodness should lead us to repentance.

Paul warns us saying: "And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, *not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*" (Rm 2:3).

So, we must not imagine that God doesn't care about our sin, doesn't see it, or will forgive it without our repentance. Instead, moving in the fear of God, we should give ourselves to Him in humble submission so that He can cleanse and

transform our lives today. In this way, we can be filled with His life and freed from sin. In this way, we will be ready when He comes and escape any punishment.

FALLING AWAY FROM JESUS

Not only has today's church departed from the faith, they have also distanced themselves from their Lord. Many other things have become more important to them than their relationship with Jesus. Surprisingly, many of these things which substitute for Him in the lives of Christians are seemingly "Christian" things.

For example: For many their participation in their church and being accepted by the other members is more important than actually being pleasing to Jesus. For others, their pastor, together with his teachings, instructions and opinions, is more necessary than seeking God for themselves. Still others value studying theology and doctrine more than intimacy with the Lord Himself.

Why do I say such a thing? It is because in hundreds, if not thousands of interactions with professing Christians through the years, these things have become evident.

To begin, it seems that very few diligently and daily seek the Lord for themselves. Most seem to rely on others to do this for them. They don't open their Bible very often or commune with God very much. They don't prayerfully seek Him about things besides their own problems. Their passion is not to serve Him by serving others.

The evidence of this lack is that when you speak with many “believers,” their conversation is not about spiritual things. Their minds are not occupied with or full of revelation and experiences with the Lord. It is difficult to carry on a conversation with them about God or the Bible, since it is not very interesting or relevant to them.

It is completely true that our mouth speaks about what our heart is full of (Mt 12:34). Many, if not most, Christians don’t often converse about the things of God because their hearts are focused on other things.

For many, if they “fulfill their Christian duty” by attending church and being somewhat submissive to their pastor, they feel that they are right with God. Others might also add that “believing the right way” about a certain number of Bible doctrines also is part of this package.

But whatever details are required, many believe that if their group accepts them and considers them to be “good Christians” then they are right with God too. Without maintaining any real intimacy with God to know how *He* feels about the question, they simply rely on the group’s opinion to feel good about themselves.

But the truth is that this is very similar to Catholicism. It is “justification by church.” It is not true Christianity. It is an earthly substitute. It is false justification which is based on external standards and not upon communion with Jesus Himself who is the only One who justifies us.

Justification which results from our group or leader approving of us, is very convenient for our

flesh. The natural man is very happy with such a device. In the minds of many, once they have satisfied the demands of their church, then they are free to pursue their own interests and desires.

Their work, their hobbies, their family and their entertainments can then fill their lives and occupy their minds, without their needing to worry much about what God might desire from them. Thus, a nice “Christian,” religious framework often works to free us to please and serve ourselves without much concern for the kingdom of God and His work on the earth.

In this way, a greater part of today’s church has fallen away from Jesus Himself. They still have an appearance of godliness, but have no power (II Tim 3:5). Their own lives are not radically changed and those around them are also not greatly impacted either.

The form of “Christianity” which they practice has taken the place of Christ in the lives of very many who think of themselves as “good” believers. Their religion has become a subtle substitute for intimacy with Jesus.

This practice of following doctrines, groups, or Christian leaders has become epidemic today. In fact, it is often taught as the good and right thing to do.

But the result is that many believers’ hearts are actually far from God. They are going through the Christian motions but are not loving Him with all their soul, mind, and strength. Their church activities, pastor, etc. have become a substitute for Jesus Himself. The Lord Himself has said it: “This

people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mk 7:6).

The result of this reliance and dependence upon religious props for our justification is that many have strayed very far from the genuine presence of Jesus in their daily lives. He is not their focus. He is not their "first love" (Rev 2:4). He is not their "all in all."

They have fallen away or apostasized from Jesus in a very real way. Yet their religious practices mask this error by giving them an appearance of doing the right thing. They continue to feel right about themselves when, in truth, they are not right with God at all.

The unhappy result of all this error is that today's church is without power. Very few are being freed from sin and transformed. Although in some countries multitudes are being drawn into various congregations, their daily lives continue to, in large measure, reflect the fallen nature.

The watered down, easy gospel might work to attract members to certain groups, even in large numbers, but it does little or nothing to advance the kingdom of God and fulfill His eternal purposes. It does not transform lives into the image of Jesus.

May God have mercy on us that we could repent of these errors before it is too late and find His grace to become pleasing to Him before He comes.

5.

SUDDEN DESTRUCTION

The Bible teaches us that before the second coming of Jesus, certain signs will occur. Among these signs are certain kinds of natural (or even supernatural) disasters, sociopolitical events, and even heavenly spectacles. Although this is true, there is still some confusion about this subject. It seems that there may be some misunderstanding about what Jesus taught.

Many are pointing to current events and natural disasters of our day and proclaiming that they are the signs of the end for which we are looking. Yet this is not exactly what the Bible teaches.

Let us begin our investigation by taking a careful look at what Jesus taught us in Matthew 24, verses 3-8. Please remember as we read that this is only a part of what He taught. It is only the beginning of His discourse.

“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in

My name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, *but the end is not yet*. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.' "

BUT THE END IS NOT YET

As this chapter progresses, we will be discussing some spectacular events which will occur at the end of this age. However, here there seems to be an important point to make first. That is: the many seemingly astounding events which have happened in world history, are occurring today, and will yet happen in the future, are NOT signs of the end. Instead, they are "normal" natural disasters, including wars, earthquakes, tsunamis, plagues, etc. which happen periodically on this planet.

Many believers see these events as indications that the coming of Jesus is near. But He warns us saying: "See that you are not troubled." By this He means to say, don't get worried, upset, or even excited about it. These things will naturally happen. To your mind, they may seem especially spectacular. You might be misled to think they are signs of the end, yet they are not. Jesus clearly said: "...but the end is not yet."

When earthquakes, volcanos, wars, and tidal waves happen today, many believers mistakenly

announce these things as signs of the end. Yet this is not the case. Instead of stating that these things are signs of the end, Jesus warns that we should not be deceived by them. These things have happened and will happen naturally through the course of time, but we shouldn't get too exhilarated or imagine that "this is it." Jesus forewarns us by saying: "...the end is not yet."

Many erroneously believe that the earth exists in a static state in which weather changes, volcanos, floods, wars, etc. are exceptions. But this is not true. Instead, the world is now and has been constantly changing, experiencing throughout its history an almost uninterrupted series of alterations, natural events, and disasters. In fact, the more recent ones which many have hailed as signs of the end, have not been very large compared to things which have happened in the past.

The natural disasters which have occurred in my lifetime have all been minor compared to things which have happened in recorded history. For example, a few years ago there was a tsunami in Asia which had a wave of about 30 feet in height. Yet, there are evidences of tidal waves in the past, in different parts of the world, which have been at least 100 feet high – more than three times larger.

Just recently a volcano erupted in Iceland, interrupting air travel. But there have been volcanos much more powerful than this which have erupted in recent history. The volcano Krakatoa, in the South Pacific, exploded with such violence in 1883 that the blast was heard at least 3,000 miles

away. (Some say even further.) This explosion was equal to about 200 megatons of TNT, 13,000 times more powerful than the nuclear bomb which destroyed Hiroshima. Nothing like this has happened in our lifetime.

In Siberia, on June 30, 2008 a comet or asteroid exploded over the earth. The results I am quoting from Wikipedia. "You can get a sense of the magnitude of this event by comparing observations made at different distances. Seismic vibrations were recorded by sensitive instruments as much as 1000 km (600 mi) away. At 500 km (300 mi), observers reported 'deafening bangs' and a fiery cloud on the horizon.

About 170 km (110 mi) from the explosion, the object was seen in the cloudless, daytime sky as a brilliant, sun-like fireball; thunderous noises were heard. At distances around 60 km, people were thrown to the ground or even knocked unconscious; windows were broken and crockery knocked off shelves. Probably the closest observers were some reindeer herders asleep in their tents in several camps about 30 km (20 mi) from the site. They were blown into the air and knocked unconscious; one man was blown into a tree and later died."

If something like this happened in the middle of New York City or somewhere similar today, everyone would think the end of the world had come, but, "...the end is not yet."

Another example is the "Black death" which hit Europe around 1348. This would perhaps qualify as being a "pestilence" and fit into Jesus'

teaching. Although there are no exact statistics, in three years, this plague killed between 50% to, some estimate, 80% of the population in the affected countries – a large part of Europe.

Just imagine something like that today. Many preachers would have a heyday. Everyone would be proclaiming the end of the world. But it wasn't.

These are just a few examples of the thousands of terrible disasters which have occurred before you and I were even born. The things which we have seen in our generation have been, if anything, somewhat minor compared to those of the past. It is no doubt the mercy of God that nothing so enormously serious has taken place recently in some heavily populated part of the world and therefore taken millions of lives.

This very short list does not even come close to including the thousands of other events of the past which far outstrip anything which has happened in our times in terms of magnitude and destruction.

My point is that many Christians are getting all excited about things which are *not* signs of the end. They are simply natural disasters. I repeat: nothing has happened in my lifetime in terms of wars or natural disasters, which has been nearly as large, impressive, powerful, or awful as things which have happened in the past, some of them hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

The only thing different today is that our communications systems are much, much better. When something happens, the world knows about it within minutes, whereas hundreds of

years ago, probably most of the world would never know what went on. Today, the news commentators oohh and aahhh and say how terrible something is, yet we often forget that all these things have happened before and are “normal” periodic occurrences in our present world. They are not signs of the end. They are at best “...the beginning of sorrows” (Mt 24:8).

Some insist that these disasters which we see today are increasing in frequency or even in power. But it is possible that what appears to be an increase in frequency – especially concerning earthquakes – is simply a result of better testing equipment and reporting. Arguments supporting more or stronger hurricanes, volcanos or plagues cannot be supported. It is simply not true that the events we see today are more frequent or more powerful than in times past.

THE REAL SIGNS

My conclusion is that the real “signs” of the end will be far more dramatic and powerful than anything we, or previous generations, have witnessed. What we have seen so far simply is not it.

The true signs will be so spectacular that they will dwarf the others things which have happened in the past. We read in Luke 21:25: “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, [like] the sea and the waves roaring [in a terrible storm].”

Of course, I cannot predict what these things will be, but one can imagine some pretty horrible

possibilities. As mentioned in another chapter of this book, the “fourth seal” of Revelation chapter 6 could indicate some widespread, nuclear exchange or attack, impacting one fourth of the earth. The judgments of the seven trumpets and seven bowls are also astoundingly severe.

Revelation chapter 8:7-10 speaks about a huge fire which destroys one third of the earth, a possible meteor or underwater volcano which poisons one third of the sea; another meteor, comet or something similar which poisons one third of the fresh water. Chapter 9 mentions what seems to be a universal plague of stinging insects (although they could be something else).

Further in Revelation chapter 16, we read about malignant sores, the sea and the waters turning to “blood,” an out of control, scorching sun followed by darkness, huge earthquakes, etc.

It seems possible that the earth will even be knocked off its axis – possibly by a collision with a meteor – and, as a consequence of this: “The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut” (Is 24:20).

These are only a few of the events which the Bible predicts will happen in the near future. What is coming on this earth will make today’s disasters look very small and insignificant, even the most spectacular ones.

SUDDEN DESTRUCTION

Here we come to a very important point. These genuine signs – the larger, more far reach-

ing ones which truly signal the end – will begin suddenly. Instead of a steady increase in natural disasters which will warn the population, the true signs will commence very abruptly, without warning, at a certain point in time which only God knows. This suddenness of the “end,” including the events and plagues which will come, is very biblical. We read: “For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then *sudden destruction* comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (I Thess 5:3).

Please notice three important things about this passage. First, everyone is clamoring for “peace and safety” or even proclaiming that they have finally achieved it. This shows us that the world is going to be taken by surprise. They have no idea of what is coming and may even imagine that things are getting better.

Here is a real “sign” for us to look for. This is a clear indication that we are near the end. When the world thinks that it has its problems solved, when many presume things are coming under control, when the leaders imagine that they have finally sorted things out, it is then that these enormous, unprecedented catastrophes will begin. It is when they least expect it that these calamities will come.

Second, as already mentioned, this destruction will be “sudden.” It will come without warning. No one will be expecting it except those few who have an intimate communion with Jesus. This time is coming “...as a thief in the night” for which no one is looking (I Thess 5:2). It will take

the inhabitants of the world “unawares” (Lk 21:34). It does not seem that there will be a gradual build up of natural calamities which will warn and prepare the world for what is coming. Instead, it will begin “suddenly” and without warning, except for those who have spiritual eyes.

Thirdly, there will be no escape. Once these events begin to unfold, there will be no turning back. There will be no stopping. There will be nowhere to run or hide. When God begins to pour out His judgment, it will be time for the inhabitants of this earth to make their peace with God.

Another verse which teaches us that the coming divine judgments and disasters will begin at a time of “normalcy” and peace are found in Matthew 24:38,39 where we read: “For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

We also read: “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (Lk 17:26-30).

These passages do not convey the idea of a series of ever increasing catastrophes and natural disasters which warn the inhabitants of the earth of impending judgment. It seems these people are living normal lives. They are doing the things people always do in time of peace and prosperity.

Instead of being increasingly troubled by various "signs" warning them of the coming judgment, they seem to be oblivious to what is about to occur. This confirms that the coming judgment at the time of the end will be both sudden and completely unexpected.

Jesus Himself says: "Behold, I come as a thief" (Rev 16:15). Thieves do not announce their arrival. They come at the exact time when the fewest people are watching for them. It will be the same way with Jesus' coming. God's word will be fulfilled.

FAILING HEARTS

Before the catastrophes of the end times begin, the men and women of the earth, including especially those in government and authority, might imagine that they are ready for whatever might happen. They may believe that they can cope with whatever comes along, be it hurricane, flood, earthquake, famine, or war.

Due to today's technology and resources, they may suppose that they can deal with almost anything. Of course they will acknowledge there might be some loss of life, but they may expect that they, along with the rest of the world, will be able to deal with anything which arises.

However, this will not be the case. The events which will signal the end of this age will be far larger than anyone will be able to cope with. They will be catastrophes which will outstrip anything which the world has seen since the second verse of Genesis. They will be so far out of human control, so much greater than anyone could imagine, that no one will know what to do. "And there will be...on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, [like] the sea and the waves roaring [in a terrible storm]" (Lk 21:25).

The leaders of the nations will not have a clue what to do. People will simply be freaking out. They will be totally at a loss for answers and in profound fear and perplexity. Jesus seems to describe this as what it would be like being caught in a tremendous storm at sea where a ship is beyond human control and is at the mercy of the wind and waves. It is possible that many will die of heart failure just because of the news of these catastrophes.

No doubt, in the beginning, many will have ideas and opinions, but when wave upon wave of disasters begin to strike, everyone will be powerless to do anything. The time of God's judgment will have begun.

DO NOT TRUST

At this time, conditions will become perilous. In the resulting confusion, many will do things which under normal circumstances they would never think of doing. The pressure of their situa-

tions will push them to drastic, desperate actions as they try to save themselves from suffering and loss. Societal norms will break down. Law and order may disappear. In such stressful situations, the evil which is hidden in the hearts of men and women will come to the fore. Their flesh will bloom and become evident.

The pressure of what is coming will bring out the worst in mankind. The sudden presence of Satan and his hordes on the earth as they are cast out of heaven will exacerbate this situation (Rev 12:12). This state will reach such a point that people will think nothing of killing or betraying others if it means their own safety and/or security.

In Mark 13:12,13, we are warned: "Now brother will betray brother to death [this could be natural brother or Christian brother], and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all men for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

Matthew echoes this sentiment saying: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake " (Mt 24:9).

During such a time of trial, believers will need to modify their behavior and thinking. Those who suffered during many years of Soviet domination and persecution, or under the past Nazi occupation of Europe could teach us many lessons.

One thing we must quickly discover is how to depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When everything is in confusion, including a good part

of the church, we must lean on Jesus. We must let Him govern every thought and action. He, and He alone, must become our guide so that we can walk through such times in His peace.

Another thing we must learn is not to trust others. That's right. In such perilous times, you can't talk too much. Information you share with others may be extracted from them by betrayal, loose talk or even torture. The Bible teaches us that in such extreme tribulation, even your spouse should not be trusted with everything. The prophet Micah warns us: "Do not trust in a friend; do not put your confidence in a companion; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom" (Micah 7:5).

I would like to recommend that all believers read some books by others who have gone through such difficult times. Books such as *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom and others give important insights as to what may happen in such extreme situations of persecution and war.

HOW CAN WE KNOW?

If, as this author is suggesting, the occurrences of earthquakes, famines, wars, plagues, etc. in various parts of the world are not the signs which we should expect, what signs should believers look for to be aware of where we are on God's timetable?

A few of the true signs have already been mentioned such as everyone clamoring for "peace and safety." This is a reliable sign. Also, earlier in

this book we discussed what is known as the great “falling away” or apostasy. This too is a certain and clear sign of the end.

In another place, Paul describes what the people of the end times will be like. Here is another solid clue. He details the attitudes and actions of those who are alive just before the end. If, while reading this passage, we recognize ourselves and this present generation, then can have one more sure sign that we are near the end.

We read: “But know this, that *in the last days* perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors [covenant breakers], headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts...” (II Tim 3:1-6).

Wow, what an evil bunch of people! Unfortunately, this describes accurately the very generation in which we live. Even worse, these attitudes and actions are very much like what we find in the church today.

In fact, it may be that Paul was not trying to describe the condition of worldly folks at the time of the end, since they are and always have been a fallen and sinful race. Instead, it seems that these people mentioned here have “a form of godli-

ness.” They appear to be people who proclaim themselves to be Christians.

How then does this compare with what we find in the churches today? Is self-love (vs 1) not only practiced but even taught as being desirable and right?

Are there those in the ministry who not only are amassing money for themselves but also inducing others to chase after riches? Are any of today’s Christian leaders proud, arrogant, and boastful about what they have done or even about what “God has done through them?” Are any of them dripping with an air of self-importance?

How about finding some church members who are unholy, who are defiled with sin and yet justifying themselves? Or, can we identify some who are unloving? Could it be that members of the church today don’t forgive others when they are misused or offended?

Is it possible that we could find “traitors” or “covenant breakers?” (This means those who break their vows or don’t keep their word and could easily apply to the subject of divorce.)

How about backbiting and slander? Can it be found among those who claim to be God’s people? Are some headstrong or stubborn? Is it possible that some are pursuing their own entertainment and pleasure rather than the will and kingdom of God?

Are the young people involved in extramarital sex with one another, disgracing the name of Jesus and their own testimony? Are many leaders luring married and/or single women in the con-

gregations into their beds to satisfy their own lusts?

If all this and much more is rampant in the church of our day, then it is certain that we have arrived at the fulfillment of prophecy, both of the above verses and those which we discussed at length in the last chapter, concerning the great “falling away” or apostasy.

Paul admonished us to “turn away” from such “believers.” It is not that we should not love them or minister to them when time and chance permit, but it is unhealthy for our spiritual lives to become involved with them. It is not prudent for us to maintain relationships and have communion with them as if there were nothing wrong.

This is because such ungodly activity easily influences us. When we are constantly with others who do not live by God’s life, it is easy for our flesh to rise up and demand gratification also. When our companions are backslidden and living in sin, it undermines our commitment to Jesus and our desire to live only for Him. Paul admonishes us: “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’ ” (I Cor 15:33).

This is an inalterable spiritual truth. Don’t play around with it. Don’t fool yourself. If you choose the rebellious for your companions, you too will be influenced.

If you associate with those who have compromised their consciences by indulging in the things of the world and are playing around with sin, you will soon fall into it yourself. This is exactly what Jesus predicted will happen toward the end of the

age. In Matthew 24:12, Jesus, prophesying about what conditions will be like in those days, says: "And because lawlessness [sin] will abound, the love of many will grow cold." What love is this? It is our love for Jesus and our love for one another.

When others, who profess to be Christians, are allowing sin to dominate them, it is a contagious situation.

All of us still live in a fallen body and have carnal desires against which we war. So when we see others indulging in the things which our own flesh desires, this easily weakens our resolve. We readily begin to justify sins in ourselves when we see others practicing them.

Such activity destroys our fellowship with Jesus. It begins to trouble our conscience and make it hard for us to enter into and remain in the presence of God. Little by little, we fall away from the only relationship which can change us into Christ's image.

In the above verse we learned that the last days will be "perilous times." Why is it that they will be so perilous, especially for believers? One reason is just exactly the situations about which we have been speaking.

One danger or peril is that the backsliding of others will suck you too into darkness and sin. It will induce you also to do things which you know are wrong, but which your flesh is longing to do. It will rob you of your transformation and ongoing salvation by deviating your heart from God and damaging your relationship with Him. It will result in your being ashamed when He comes.

MORE SIGNS

As we studied in the last chapter, two important signs precede the end of this age. The first was the great apostasy. The second was the revealing of the man of sin (II Thess 2:3). This means that the Antichrist will be seen and known for what he is before the day of Jesus' return.

It is not clear from the word of God exactly when the Antichrist will be "revealed." Some think it will be at the beginning of a seven year period known as the tribulation. Others speculate that it will be in the middle of this time, three and one half years before the end.

But there is no verse which demands either of these two interpretations. It is possible that the identity of the Beast will be clear to those who are intimate with God many years before the events which will mark the beginning of the tribulation. Those with spiritual eyes should be able to recognize him before he assumes power or begins his persecution of the saints.

It is extremely probable that the vast majority of Christians will not recognize the man of sin until it's too late. Due to erroneous teaching and perhaps just plain indifference, many are not looking in the right direction for the rising up of this "beast" or are simply not looking at all. Therefore, the persecution and slaughter of millions of believers will take them by surprise.

I would like to urge the readers to read or review my previous book *Antichrist* for more

information about this relevant and important subject.

JERUSALEM RESTORED

Another important sign is the restoration of Jerusalem to the Jews after many years of Gentile domination. We will begin our investigation in Luke chapter 21. Here Jesus is teaching His disciples about the signs of the times and the end of the age. As part of this dissertation He says: "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled" (Lk 21:32).

This verse has been the subject of much debate. Just what Jesus meant by "this generation" is often disputed. However, it seems clear that this must include the generation which sees certain signs. Among these signs is that: "...Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles [remain in the possession of the Gentiles] until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk 21:24).

In 70 A.D. the Roman general, Titus, conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. Beginning at that time until recently, it has been under "Gentile," rather than Jewish domination. But in 1967 the older, historic part of the city of Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Jews again, after almost 2,000 years had passed. This event is without a doubt the fulfillment of the above mentioned pronouncement of Jesus.

This then would tell us that the end will be within one generation of this event. (Some have

mistakenly begun their calculations from the time when Israel became a nation, ie. 1948. But the verse here specifically says "Jerusalem," not Israel.)

But just how long might this be? The exact words which we have read in Luke are "this generation will by no means pass away." If we take the approximate world average, today a man lives about seventy years.

So we must be looking at a period of years which is less than this, let us say about 60 years. If we begin at the year 1967 and add 60 years, this leads to the date of 2027. Using this calculation, we would expect the fulfillment of all these things and the return of the Lord before that year.

Please remember, we are not trying to give an exact date here. We do not presume to know the day or the hour (Mt 24:36). These thoughts only give us some possibilities.

The only reliable source we have to confide in is Jesus Christ. He is the One who will be showing us what we need to know. It is only if we are walking in intimacy with Him, that that day will not "come on you unexpectedly" (Lk 21:34).

FALSE PROPHETS

Another clear prediction which Jesus taught us is that in the last times, there will be false Christs and false prophets. Although we do not, at this moment, see great numbers of false Christs, we are witnessing a profusion of false prophets.

What then constitutes a false prophet and how are we to recognize such a person?

One of the clearest indications of a false prophet is that this individual is preaching things which people want to hear. He or she is not speaking anything which might convict of sin or cause the hearer discomfort. They are always saying smooth and convincing words to make those who hear them feel more positive, more hopeful, and better about themselves.

The false prophet is not necessarily saying anything which could be clearly demonstrated as anti-biblical. It is not that what they say is completely wrong. The problem is that they simply pick and choose texts and verses to prove what they want to say and what they hope to be true and leave out those things which might indicate something different or difficult.

You see, a false prophet is not speaking words which come from the heart of God. He has not been in intimate communion with Him, heard His word, and then transmitted it to His people. Instead he is speaking out of his own heart. He is saying things which he wants to be true and which he believes others will appreciate too.

God warns us about such prophets saying: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord' " (Jer 23:16).

We also read: "And the Lord said to me, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a

worthless thing, and the deceit of their [own] heart' " (Jer 14:14).

Many who are preaching or prophesying today are not speaking the word of the Lord. Their words do not reflect what is on His heart. Instead they speak what they and others want to hear and hope will happen. "They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says the Lord!' But the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed" (Ezek 13:6).

Every false prophet has a motive. He has strayed from the truth because, in his heart, he wants something. He desires to be seen and heard. He longs for fame. He is yearning for recognition, accolades, followers, and even money.

Therefore he modifies his words and tailors his messages to appeal to those who hear him. Such a person has left off hearing from God (if indeed he ever had heard from Him) and began using his or her prophetic gift for their own purposes, to gratify their own desires. This, dear friends, is the essence of a false prophet.

Unfortunately, today's church is full of such prophets. They are pursuing their own ends and using the Bible and the church of God to achieve them. There are, among today's popular preachers, some who carefully craft their messages to attract followers. They tout prosperity, healing, success, etc. to attract those who long for such things, often adding in some spurious "manifestations" and pseudo miracles.

Although these messages may contain some truth, they leave out the "whole counsel of God."

They omit suffering, the cross, perseverance, self-denial, becoming a servant of others and not yourself, and many other essential ingredients of the true gospel. Thus, taking only a minor part of Jesus' message and presenting it as the whole, they distort the truth and mislead others.

Incredibly, great numbers of believers will be taken in by these prophets. Jesus has already predicted that they shall "deceive many" (Mt 24:11). They often become popular, wealthy, and acquire large followings. Yet, you don't need worry too much about this. It is bound to happen. It is simply another sign of the end.

ORDER OF EVENTS

The book of Revelation begins with the revelation of Jesus Christ in His glory. Next He dictates to John some letters to be sent to seven churches. Some have understood these letters to refer to the church's spiritual condition down through the centuries since the death of Christ. They see a progression of seven stages or phases through which the church has passed.

Although this may be the case, it is also true that all of these letters apply to the condition of the church around the world right now. It is easy to find groups which display any and all of these conditions today.

Consequently, these letters, including their warnings, admonitions and promises are all for us in this generation. All of us would do well to read them carefully and receive what our Lord is speaking to us through them.

Next, we have described for us a series of events which are provoked by the breaking of seven seals. These seals are on a scroll which no one can open except Jesus Christ. It is my view that this scroll is full of judgments. No one can open the scroll because none of us is worthy to judge others. Since we are all sinners, we are not qualified to judge.

However, since Jesus lived a pure and righteous life – a life without even one sin – He is worthy to open the scroll and set in motion the judgments of God on this earth.

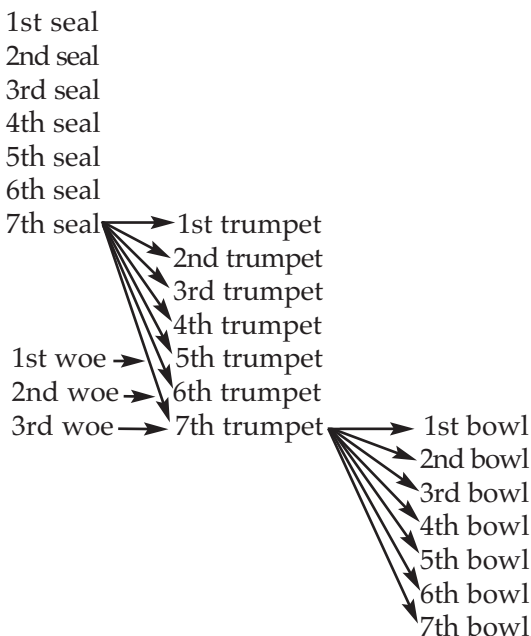
As the seals are opened, one by one, a series of events begins on the earth. However, here we encounter an interesting thing. The last, or seventh seal does not appear to be any specific event, but rather seems to precipitate another series of events. The final seal becomes, or gives rise to, seven trumpets. Here we understand that the seventh seal actually *is* the seven trumpets.

These trumpets in their turn each signal some judgment or catastrophe. Yet the seventh trumpet also has no specific event associated with it. Instead, it unfolds as being the beginning of another series of seven events, i.e. the seven bowls of God's wrath. So we see that the seventh trumpet actually *is* the seven bowls.

The final three trumpets also have another name. They are called "woes." Perhaps they are called "woes" because it is then that the judgments of God begin to become extremely severe.

I am including a little graphic here to help the reader understand this better.

TRUMPETS, SEALS AND BOWLS



These three series of events seem to accelerate as we progress from the seals to the trumpets and then to the bowls. That is to say, the times between the first few seals seems to be a question of years but getting shorter as the last seals are broken.

The timing of the trumpets is much faster. These events seem to be separated by months instead of many years.

Next the bowls are poured out in rapid succession. There is not time enough between these

judgments for the population of the earth to recover from the last one before the next is on its way. The Bible compares this series of events to “birth pangs” (I Thess 5:3) which start slowly and then increase in frequency and intensity until the baby is finally born.

During the descriptions of the judgments and events precipitated by the seals, trumpets, and bowls, we occasionally encounter what could be thought of as “asides” or intervals. The ongoing series of seals, trumpets and bowls are periodical-ly interrupted by the narration of other important revelations.

For example, some of our earlier chapters are examinations of these kind of visions. The revelation of two witnesses and the man-child are sort of sandwiched in between the series of judgments about which we have been speaking. Also included in these “intervals” are: the tribes sealed (ch 7), an angel with a scroll (ch 10), the beasts from the land and the sea (ch 13), the Lamb and the 144,000 (ch 14), the harvest of the earth (ch 14), the multitude on the sea of glass (ch 15) and Babylon (ch 17,18). Some of the most interesting and important revelations of John’s vision are transmitted to us by the things described in these “intervals.”

It does not seem that events included in these “intervals” are given in chronological order. That is to say that they do not seem to fit in time exactly with where they appear among the trumpets, bowls, etc. I don’t believe that we need to understand these events as occurring exactly at the time they are mentioned relative to the other judgments.

THE CHURCH AND THE TRIBULATION

Many people wonder whether or not the church will go through the “great tribulation.” The answer is: “Of course it will.” The Bible plainly states this truth. We are taught that the rapture or “resurrection of believers” will occur at a specific time. This time is at the sounding of something called “the last trumpet.” We read: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Cor 15:51,52).

Here we have a clear and indisputable fact. The rapture will occur at the sounding of the last trumpet. But wait. There are seven trumpets which sound *during* the “tribulation.”

Therefore, without becoming totally illogical and willfully blind, we must understand that the “last” trumpet is either the same as the seventh trumpet of Revelation or a later eighth trumpet which is after the seventh. This would place the time of the rapture very near the end of the tribulation (the seventh trumpet) or at the very end (a later, eighth trumpet which is not mentioned).

To try and put the “last trumpet” before the seven in the book of Revelation is to violate all reason and proper use of language. If you put it before, it cannot be the “last.” Instead it would appear to be the first. In order to be the last, it has to indeed be the last. It cannot be before the others.

Although there are those who, using some desperate theological juggling, try to make this “last trumpet” part of another group of trumpets which do not relate to the end times, this is a vain attempt to try and make the Bible say something which they wish it said and not simply taking it at face value.

Another clear passage which tells us the exact time of the rapture is found in Matthew 4:29,31 where we are told: “Immediately *after the tribulation of those days*...He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Please notice the trumpet sounding here. This must be the same as the “last” trumpet mentioned earlier. Consequently, this can only refer to the rapture of the church and the resurrection of the dead believers.

Although some insist that the “elect” here must be only Jews, there is no scriptural basis for this. This word “elect” is used in the New Testament many times to refer to all believers including Gentiles, not specifically Jews.

The main argument which many seem to use to insist that the church will not go through the tribulation goes something like this: God would never pour out His wrath upon His children. Therefore, they can’t be on earth during this time.

This assertion has some biblical basis. We read: “For God did not appoint us to wrath...” (I Thess 5:9). See also I Thessalonians 1:10 and Romans 5:9. Of course the Bible does not contra-

dict itself, so we must find in its pages solutions which harmonize all verses which relate to this topic. In order to do so, there are a few things we must take into account.

First, God does not pour out what is actually called His “wrath” until the very last part of the tribulation. This wrath is contained in the “bowls” (Rev 15:7; 16:1-21). As we have seen before, these seven bowls of wrath are the same as the seventh trumpet. As we have mentioned, this trumpet could be, and very likely is, the “last trumpet” which signals the rapture. If this is so, then the church is caught up, not before the tribulation, but before the wrath of God is poured out.

Second, in Revelation 7:2 we told that the servants of God will receive a seal on their foreheads. This seems to occur just after the sixth seal is broken. The purpose of this sealing is to protect God’s servants from the coming judgments.

We learn this in Revelation 9:4 where we read: “They [the locusts] were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree; but only those men who *do not have the seal of God* on their foreheads.”

Although it is stated that those who are sealed are from the tribes of Israel, this is not our point. What is clear here is that God seals some of His own for the express purpose of protecting them from His judgments. He does not remove them from the earth, but seals them and protects them through these trials.

It is beyond doubt that our Lord is able to protect His own, even in the midst of great judg-

ments. The story of the children of Israel in Egypt is a good example of this. It seems that after the third plague, God did not allow His judgments to fall on His people. We read in Exodus 8:22: "And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there..." Here we have a clear example of how God can safeguard His own, even the middle of severe plagues.

Therefore, it is logical and biblical to assume that God has other ways of protecting His children from His wrath which will be poured out besides simply whisking them away beforehand.

Therefore we must conclude that the argument which insists the church must be gone before the tribulation begins, has two serious flaws. Firstly, it violates the two previous passages which tell us the exact time of the rapture. Secondly, the logic behind it does not take into account God's great power and ability to shield His people, even in the middle of judgment.

GOD'S PROTECTION

Although we have established that God's wrath will not be poured out on His children even in midst of the Great Tribulation, there is another side to this coin. It is abundantly clear that God has not in the past and does not today, protect His children from every kind of suffering. Countless believers have suffered in the past and are still suffering today every kind of pain, torture, deprivation, and temptation known to man.

Stephen, one of the early disciples was stoned. Since that time, men and women of God have experienced every imaginable kind abuse and suffering. Some have been burned to death. Others have been skinned alive. Some have been raped, beaten, starved, humiliated, decapitated, buried alive, and undergone every conceivable kind of torture and agony. If you have the courage to read it, in *Fox's Book of Martyrs* you will find the details of many of these incidents.

God did not protect these people. Instead He allowed them to suffer. Yet no one should be surprised by this. The fact that God's children can and do suffer is something which He has predicted. He says: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. *In the world you will have tribulation*; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

In another place He says: "Then [at the time of end] they *will deliver you up to tribulation* and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Mt 24:9).

So we see that tribulation is something which Jesus warns us will come. Every believer should be prepared for this. We must not imagine that God will protect us from every kind of persecution, tribulation, and death. This is simply not so.

Nothing could be done to you before or during the coming great tribulation which has not already happened to many other believers who have gone before. Certainly God does not love us who live in this age any more than He loved those of the past whom He allowed to suffer such things.

Consequently, the argument that the church will avoid the coming great tribulation because God would never allow His children to suffer tribulation or persecution is not valid. As previously stated, He will not pour out His wrath on them. But that does not mean that He will not allow them to suffer in the great tribulation or undergo extremely severe persecution.

WAR ON THE SAINTS

It is perhaps beyond many believers' conception, but the Bible teaches us that God will actually give special permission to the coming Man of Sin to persecute the church. It is written: "It was granted to him [the Beast] to make war with the saints and to overcome them" (Rev 13:7).

Who then "granted" him this power? It is God Himself. He is the only One in a position to grant such a thing. This is something that will occur during the coming great tribulation. The "saints" mentioned here must be believers since this very word is used no less than 60 times in the New Testament to refer to Christians.

Why would God do such a thing? Perhaps an illustration would help here. My wife loves to cook, so it's not surprising that we often have people over for dinner. It is also not infrequent that, when the dinner hour is drawing near, the roast in the oven is not yet done. So what does she do? She goes over to the oven and turns up the heat.

It is clear that the hour of Jesus' return is coming nearer. It is perhaps even more clear that the

church is not ready for this event. She is not without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27). In fact, she is in a very poor spiritual state, lacking holiness and many other godly virtues. So what is God going to do? He is going to turn up the heat. He going to use the world and the coming Beast to help perfect His bride and get her ready.

We read: "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that *tribulation produces perseverance*; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rm 5:3,4). And also: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the *testing of your faith produces patience*. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (Js 1:2-4).

So you see that tribulation, suffering and testing produce rapid spiritual growth and the changes in our character which God is desiring to see. These are the means which our Father is going to use to help those who are today serving themselves and not getting ready for His coming. Persecution and tribulation will motivate them to seek Him desperately, which will accelerate their growth and preparedness.

Dear brothers, it is difficult for me to write these things, but we must be ready for what is coming. We must adjust our thinking to face the rapidly approaching events of the end times. We cannot just live in an imaginary world like a fairy tale where everyone lives happily ever after. Tribulation, suffering, and martyrdom is imminent. You can count on it. Therefore, seek the face

of the Lord for His grace to prepare your heart to get ready for what is about to occur. Also, we must be willing to take any physical and practical steps which He might direct.

Peter admonishes us: “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves also with the same mind*, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...” (I Pet 4:1). Oh dear believers! You must “arm” yourselves spiritually. We are admonished to prepare ourselves emotionally and mentally so that we are ready for what is coming upon the earth.

I would like to include in this section a story I heard about some of the believers in China. That is a part of the world where believers are today suffering tribulation and persecution. In one group, upon hearing that a fellow brother had been martyred for his faith, many of the brothers and sisters were found weeping.

A visitor tried to console them saying something like: “Don’t worry, you’ll see him again with the Lord, etc.” The weeping ones responded: “Look, you don’t understand. We aren’t crying for him. We are weeping because we were not thought worthy to have lost our lives for our Savior as this brother did.” How does this compare with the attitude of your heart today?

VERY FEW SURVIVORS

As we study the Bible, we are led to an astounding conclusion. Very few people, including both believers and unbelievers, will survive the coming end times. It is possible that as few as

2% or less will be left. If today the total number of people in the world is about 7 billion, this would leave only about 140 million, or fewer, alive on the whole earth after everything is finished. These survivors will probably be found in small scattered pockets here and there with perhaps some individuals also dispersed around the globe.

This is truly a shocking statement. How could a person arrive at such a drastic conclusion?

Let us look at some verses which appear to teach this. In Isaiah chapter 24, we find some startling clues. From the context of this passage, especially verses 1-6, it seems clear that this describes the earth at the time of the end after experiencing great judgments and destruction.

Verses 13 reads: "When it shall be thus in the midst of the land among the people, it shall be like the shaking of an olive tree, like the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done." Then verse 6: "...And few men are left."

In the days when this passage was written, olive oil was an important staple, as was wine. The olives were harvested by sending boys or small men up into the branches of the trees to shake them as hard as they could. The ripe olives fell to the ground where they were collected. Very few olives were left hanging on the branches since these represented both survival and money for those harvesting. Only a few hidden and/or unripe ones remained.

The grape vines too were carefully searched for grape clusters which represented the coming year's supply of wine for the region. Even so,

there were always a few grapes which remained hidden behind a leaf or other obstruction. This is the analogy which God gives us to explain the magnitude of the coming loss of human life. Very, very few will remain.

It is clear that these harvesters would leave as few fruits as possible. They would collect all they could. If they missed ten percent of the harvest, it would be a lot. A more reasonable number is about two per cent. Remember God's warning. He says: "And they shall not escape" (I Thess 5:3). We also read: "For by fire and by His sword the Lord will judge all flesh; and *the slain of the Lord shall be many*" (Is 66:16).

Another passage also speaks about this time. God says that so many will be slain that a human being will be as scarce as gold and a male human being even more rare. We read: "I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir" (Is 13:12).

The reason that more women will survive than men is undoubtedly related to the fact that men more often serve in armies, many of which will be destroyed.

So dear brothers and sisters, with all this in mind, let me ask you: Where is your heart right now? Are you clinging desperately to this life here on earth and the things of this world? Are possessions, family, entertainments, and wealth more important to you than the kingdom of God? Is your mind "set on things above" (Col 3:2) or on things here below? What captivates you right now, the invisible things or the visible (II Cor 4:18)?

These are serious considerations. The time is at hand. There is no time left to play around with the things of God and our relationship with Him. I believe it is time, right now, in view of all these things, for believers to examine their hearts before God.

Let us allow Him to search us and try us. Then let us repent for anything and everything which He shows us that is not prepared for and longing for His coming. Only in this way will we be able to remain faithful during the coming perilous times and stand before Him clothed in white (Rev 7:14).

It is conceivable that during at least part of the coming tribulation, some believers will be protected by God. We read that the “woman” who gives birth to the manchild (discussed in chapter three of this book) has a “place prepared by God” (Rev 12:6). There she is fed and kept from the great “flood” of persecution with which the devil tries to destroy her.

However, this number cannot include all believers everywhere since we later read that the dragon “went to make war *with the rest of her offspring*, who keep the commands of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17). These can only be Christians.

Even in the case of the fleeing woman, it is obvious that her life will not be easy or comfortable. She has fled from all familiar surroundings and normal comfort. She is far from friends and family. She finds herself in the “wilderness” which is certainly not a five star hotel.

It is probable that this group of God's fleeing people will also experience great hardship, difficulty, fear, and suffering, even if for a season they are spared from death.

WHAT MANNER OF MEN?

From our study, it seems inevitable that a large number of believers will be martyred or die of other causes in the coming perilous times. There is just no way around this conclusion. Yet there remain some questions.

How will we face these things when our turn comes? What will our attitudes and actions be? Will we deny Jesus? Will we betray others? Will we scream and whine when things get scary and hard? Will all this pressure cause our carnal nature to bulge out in all directions?

Many believers who have gone before us have faced death and hardship with faith, peace, and Christ's victory. They have overcome the devil and their own fleshly reactions, even when faced with death. Their actions have glorified their Savior who selflessly gave His life for them.

Of course such fearless acts are not natural. They do not belong to the flesh or this world. Only the life of Jesus in us can overcome in this way.

Some may think the suggestion that we need to face the possibility of death, persecution, or martyrdom is un-Christian or even just wrong. They may see it as harsh, frightening, and not normal. They may be offended and imagine that a loving God would never have such a future for us.

Yet what these folks overlook is that Jesus Himself warns us of just such persecution. He alerts us to the fact that our faith may well cost us our lives. He says: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and shall kill you..." (Mt 24:9). And also: "...yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" (Jn 16:2).

In fact, there are many places in the world today, where choosing to believe in Jesus is a question of life or death. There are those who, when they believe, must face this very choice. If and when they are baptized or otherwise declare their faith in Christ, they are subject to assassination, even by members of their own family.

The fact is that for believers to face paying this kind of price for their faith may be more normal than the present state of affairs in much of the "western" world. It could be that the easy, comfortable, safe Christianity which so many take for granted is an anomaly and that facing persecution and death has been more the norm for believers for most of church history. Perhaps we are the ones who are wrong.

The time of the end is at hand. It will be a time of severe testing and trial of our faith. It will be a time of deep heart searching and important decision making for many who have been coasting along in their Christian life. It will be a time of looking death and suffering in the face.

Therefore brethren, it is time to seek Him with all of our hearts. It is time to put away every and all distractions. It is time to give ourselves to Him

totally and without reserve so that He can transform us, filling us with all that He is. Only in this way will we be ready for what is coming.

Brethren, with all these things in mind, let us meditate together on the following passages which speak directly and clearly to us who live at the end of this age:

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...Therefore... *what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...*” (II Pet 3:9-12,14).

On one hand, the coming events of the end times are frightening. On the other hand, they are encouraging because we know that the consummation of God’s plans is soon to be accomplished. We will soon be glorified together with Him and reign with Him in His kingdom. Consequently: “...when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Lk 21:28).

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:1-2).

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