

**THE
JUDGMENTS
OF
GOD**

*Revelation From The Past
To Guide Us Into The Future*

DICKSON

The Judgments Of God

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Preface

Through the inspired letters that the Holy Spirit penned to the early disciples, we cannot discount the fact that the Spirit dealt with many subjects that were relevant concerning the end of times. In revealing encouragement and comfort to the disciples, the Spirit informed the early saints concerning the **final judgment**.

There are key contexts in the Scriptures that deal with final things, or those things that answer our questions about where we are going and what will happen when God finalizes the purpose for the existence of this world. It is our understanding, however, that we must consider the major contexts in the Scriptures that discuss the judgments of God **in time** through the eyes of the first readers to whom they were originally written. Only in doing this will we understand the major concepts that are revealed concerning the **end of time** that are relevant to us who live today.

We want to alert the reader that a **narrative commentary** statement has been placed at the beginning of each verse that is under discussion in the chapters that follow. This narrative commen-

tary material is simply our personal expanded comments of what we believe the inspired writers were saying in the verse under consideration. These readings are not a translation of the original text of the Scriptures, but simply a concise statement to introduce the student to the comments that follow.

It is our prayer that this book will greatly aid your understanding of key contexts of the Scriptures that discuss the end of things, whether in time or at the end of time. Please keep in mind that when we interpret contexts to which reference is made in this book, we must first interpret the contexts in the historical context of the first recipients. They were the ones who would endure the judgments of God in time. The last and final judgment is yet to come.

Christians look forward to the final judgment. By understanding the certainty of God's judgments in time, we have confidence that He will fulfill His promises concerning things at the end of time. In this way, we can be assured that Jesus is coming again in order to take us into a new dwelling wherein there is final peace.

INTRODUCTION

Every human being who has lived on the face of the earth has been appointed two unavoidable destinies. It is appointed that everyone must physically die. It is also appointed that after death, everyone will be judged according to how he or she has lived on this earth. Since the revelation of the gospel through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and coronation of the incarnate Son of God, God has designated that His Son will be the final judge before whom we all must stand. In this dispensation of history, therefore, it is imperative that every person on earth be made aware of the judgment to come. One's knowledge of and response to the gospel will determine the result of his or her destiny. Because every person on earth is facing the destinies of death and judgment, it is imperative that all people who live at any one time in history must be made aware of the saving gospel that was revealed through the incarnate Son of God. All people on earth should be given the opportunity to be motivated to live in obedience to the gospel of God.

A. Prognostications:

We live in a world of wild speculations in the minds of some who are obsessed with the "signs of the times." Some are so obsessed that they search through every source of religious literature for some particle of truth made by some self-proclaimed sage by which they can predict the end of the world. It seems that there is no dearth of prognosticators who are willing to come forth with some prediction of the end of the world on a particular date.

Throughout the years, all sorts of prognosticators have come and gone. Nevertheless, we are often so naive in our ignorance of the word of God

that we impetuously continue our search for another prophetic utterance of some supposed date when the world as it is comes to its final demise.

God created us to be religious beings. Therefore, we cannot help but harbor some speculations in our religious thinking concerning what will be. Because we have this seemingly unquenchable thirst to speculate concerning the future, we must be cautioned. We must be cautioned that if we give up a knowledge of our Creator and His revelation to us through the Bible, we will end up with some very twisted speculations concerning the end of time.

History has proved that there is

no end to the ingenious religious inventions of men in reference to that which is yet to come. As a result, we live with a host of confused proclamations today that are broadcast abroad and bound on the consciences of men. All the diversity that exists among end-of-time theologians have confused people. Some religionists have become so obsessed with their speculations concerning a supposed rapture that such has become their “gospel” message that they proclaim to the lost.

There are those who seek to terrorize their innocent audiences through repeated proclamations of certain doom. When it comes to the confusion surrounding the subject of the end of the world, we cannot use enough superlatives to describe the religious excitement that is promoted by some end-of-time prognosticators. We must confess that our minds overflow with too many Hollywood productions of “end-of-the-world” scenarios. As a result, we look for too many “John Conner” preachers who will deliver us from an age of human annihilation.

In the western world there has been the resurrection in the last century of a vast assortment of mystic religions. The New Age Movement, and a host of other similar humanistically-oriented religious movements have become popular among those

who are searching for something beyond this world. In a secular-oriented world that enslaves our minds to all that is of this world, mystics have simply concluded that enough is enough. There must be something that is greater than this world.

Some of these speculators with mystical inclinations have included the Bible as only one source in their library of religious sources. Since the Bible speaks of things to come, they search around in the pages of the Scriptures for some indication of the end of times. They search for something that might have been taught in the past concerning our present and future destiny. Unfortunately, too many too often look to their own imaginations or adventurous speculations in order to read into the Bible their own imaginations.

Everyone has some speculation concerning the future. For this reason, we all function in the field of eschatology, that is, a study of last things. We wonder about our future and the end of the world. These are serious considerations that pass through the minds of almost everyone, even the materialist who sometimes takes a brief moment to contemplate and wonder about what is next. It is simply natural to consider the future and what will become of all that which we now experience. As Christians, we conclude that there will be

“global warming” that will be the end of all things. But the “global warming” that is coming will surpass “warming.” It will be the heat of fire.

B. Key Contexts:

In this study it has been our purpose to select key texts of Scripture to study in their historical context. We have done this in order to discover God’s revelation concerning “in time,” as well as “end of time” judgments. Everything that God brings to an end in time is a promise, or certainty, that He will do the same at the end of time.

In studying judgment subjects in the Bible, we have discovered that several things influenced the writers and readers in the historical setting in which God brought things to a conclusion. Understanding these historical settings has helped us to understand better the inspired letters of the New Testament that were written to the first readers who experienced social chaos in history when God brought dispensations to a close. The following circumstances that greatly influenced both the writing and the fulfillment of prophecy helps us better understand that finalities are yet to come:

1. *The Jewish persecution of the church continued until the de-*

struction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

This persecution not only influenced the evangelization of the first century world, but it also influenced the content of the letters that were written to the early disciples.

We must not underestimate the influence of this persecution that was unleashed on the early disciples as they went from city to city preaching the gospel of the messiahship of the Son of God. The persecution of the early disciples is illustrated by what Paul said of his own life before he responded to the gospel: “*I persecuted this Way [the church] to the death, binding and delivering both men and women into prisons*” (At 22:4). In Paul’s case, he, the persecutor, went from persecuting to being the persecuted.

Embedded in the thinking of the early persecuted Christians was the hope that God would always deliver the church as a whole, though some individual saints would succumb to death as a result of the persecution. Nevertheless, God gave the church as a whole encouragement to endure through hard times of persecution. For example, John encouraged the saints of the church of Smyrna who were bearing the persecution of the state of Rome:

Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast

some of you into prison so that you may be tested. And you will have tribulations ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life (Rv 2:10).

2. *The imminent end of national Israel was prophesied by Jesus and fulfilled in the first century.* As the early evangelists went forth, the imminent end of national Israel was on their minds and in their message. It was the fullness of time and all prophecies in reference to the purpose for which God established a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai were coming to fulfillment. After His resurrection, and immediately before His ascension and coronation, Jesus reminded His disciples the following:

*These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **all things must be fulfilled** that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, **concerning Me** (Lk 24:44).*

One of these prophecies concerning Jesus was His coronation and reign from the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords. On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, Peter proclaimed that this prophecy was fulfilled, for Jesus was reigning as King on David's throne at the time Peter and the apostles spoke on that day

(See At 2:25-33). The fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Jesus' kingdom reign meant the end of the kings of national Israel on earth. It thus meant the end of national Israel. The apostles took this same message into all the world of the Jews to whom they went to proclaim the gospel. They prepared their fellow Jews for the finality of national Israel. Though they did not know the time of the end, they knew and preached that it was coming.

The early evangelists also took the message of Jesus that was recorded in Matthew 24. Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24 was an encouragement to those who suffered from the persecution of the Jews. The persecuted saints knew that God would eventually bring down judgment on national Israel because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

The end of Israel would also be a sign to the Jews that God had fulfilled His purpose for calling the nation into a special covenant relationship. The purpose for Israel was to preserve a segment of society through which the incarnate Son of God could be introduced into the world. But once the Son came, and completed the atoning sacrifice, then there was no more the need for a special nation of people as Israel. The social vehicle through whom the Savior was introduced into the world passed away.

The Jews only recourse when God completed His purpose through Israel, therefore, was to turn to Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. There was no salvation in Jewish nationalism. They had to accept Jesus as the incarnate Son of God who came into the world to establish a new covenant with everyone who would obey the gospel (See Hb 10:5-10).

Because many Bible students have historically failed to understand the prophesied purpose and end of national Israel in the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning the incarnation of the Son of God, they have failed to do justice to the historical events that surround the fulfillment of God's eternal plan of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Because of this, some Bible students would do well to be cautious about referring to those books that do not emphasize the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The destruction of Jerusalem and national Israel was a major historical event in the history of the world, and particularly in the lives of the Jews.

Those were times in which God intended to terminate forever the nation of Israel through the establishment of a new covenant of grace. Since most of the early Christians were Jews, we would expect that the

New Testament would contain many references, both directly and indirectly, that refer to the finalization of Israel. These are the contexts that need further study, especially in these times when the religious world seems to be burdened with a host of prognosticators with their end-of-times prophecies.

3. *State persecution by the Roman government would rise in the first century from the personal obsessions of Nero, Caesar of Rome.*

By the end of the first century, this persecution would become dominant through other Caesars of the Roman Empire. State persecution in the latter part of the first century would be a major force of evil against the preaching of the gospel throughout the Roman controlled world. In particular, the book of Revelation was written to give comfort to Christians who suffered from state persecution that began the latter part of the first century but extended into the second.

God would eventually bring judgment upon the Roman state for her persecution of the flock of God. The early Christians, therefore, were given comfort in the fact that state persecution would not continue against the church throughout the centuries to come.

Chapter 1

CONSUMMATION OF NATIONAL ISRAEL

Matthew 24

For many years biblical interpreters have placed little emphasis on the consummation of national Israel that was demonstrated by God in A.D. 70. Judgment passages in the New Testament were commonly misinterpreted with emphasis on the end-of-time coming and the final judgment by Jesus rather than the end of national Israel by the coming of Jesus in judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

As a result of our overzealous emphasis on the final coming, we have traditionally approached texts as Matthew 24 with emphasis on the end of time. Rather than a historical interpretation that had direct relevance to the ones to whom Jesus first delivered His message that God's covenant with Israel was coming to a close, we have obsessed over the end of time. Add to this the fact that there have been too many prophecy thieves who have stolen the warning that Jesus gave to the Jewish Christians of His day in order that they prepare themselves for the end of national Israel.

We must always keep in mind three very important points when interpreting Matthew's account of Matthew 24:

A. Mission to the Jews:

Matthew, a Jew, focused on Jesus' ministry to those of His immediate time, specifically the Jews. He came to the "*lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Mt 10:6). He came to choose the twelve apostles and then commission them to a worldwide task that would begin first with the Jews (Mt 28:19; Lk 6:13).

The immediate ministry of Jesus through the apostles was first to the Jews. His ministry then became worldwide and throughout all history when the apostles and other evangelists went into all the world. Until the end of time, Jesus will continue to accomplish His mission through the global ministry of His disciples. In order to accomplish His goal of populating heaven, this historical preaching of the gospel began. In order to accomplish this mission, He initially came to work with His immediate Jewish environment.

B. Jesus as the Messiah:

Secondly, Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience about Jesus as

the Messiah. Matthew's statements, therefore, have direct reference to the Jewish hope of a Redeemer. The Jews had to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They had to do so because God was about to physically close the book on national Israel. Those who would not accept Jesus' messiahship would most likely be caught up in the destruction and close of national Israel in A.D. 70. Through His parables and the direct statements of Matthew 24, Jesus' prophecy of the end of Israel was meant to prepare Jewish Christians who lived during the decade before A.D. 70 that the end was coming.

C. The imminent coming:

The pronouncements of Jesus in Matthew 24 emphasize an **imminent** coming and "end." This imminent coming would be in the lifetime of the disciples to whom Jesus made these statements (See Mt 16:27,28; 23:34-36).

The Holy Spirit inspired no New Testament writer to deceive the first century disciples into believing that Jesus would **personally** return in His final coming in their lifetime. Therefore, the context of Matthew 24 is talking about a "coming" within the lifetime of the immediate disciples.

But the "coming" in Matthew 24 cannot refer to the final coming of Jesus simply because Jesus did not

deceive His disciples that He would personally come in their lifetime. Therefore, we must approach Matthew 24 from the viewpoint that Jesus was giving information to His immediate disciples concerning some traumatic event **that was going to happen in the lifetime of the immediate Jews**. He was going to come in judgment on all those Jews who did not accept Him as the Messiah and Savior of the world. God was going to bring judgment on those who did not recognize the time of His visitation to the house of Israel through His only begotten Son (See Lk 19:43,44).

Many scholarly books in recent years have correctly restored emphasis on the importance of the A.D. 70 consummation of national Israel that is taught throughout the New Testament. This has led to a more consistent interpretation of many passages that deal with God's judgment that He brought on Israel in her final years as a covenanted people. For example, we feel that Jesus was primarily discussing in Matthew 24 a judgment "in time" upon Jerusalem. Therefore, we must question our thinking concerning some of the points Jesus mentioned in the context of Matthew 24 that refer to the personal lives of the disciples who would experience these events.

When studying the text of Matthew 24 one must consult the parallel

accounts of Jesus' words on this occasion that were recorded in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Both Mark and Luke record additional thoughts that Jesus gave in the discourse. However, neither Matthew, Mark nor Luke give the complete discourse of all that Jesus said as it was initially stated on this particular occasion. Each inspired writer only gives that information which emphasizes the theme of his particular book. Matthew, however, gives more complete information, and for this reason, we use Matthew as the guideline text for our interpretive comments that follow.

Also keep in mind the dates of writing for each book. Since the impending destruction was in the near future in relation to the dates of writing, we cannot but feel that the impending destruction that was coming in A.D. 70 was one reason that stimulated the writing of other New Testament books in the first century. At least certain portions of the New Testament letters concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were included in order to forewarn Christians of the coming calamity of Israel.

Mark wrote around A.D. 50-52, Matthew around A.D. 60, and Luke around A.D. 61,62. All three writers give us a sense of social and political turmoil that existed during the era leading up to the consummation of national Israel. The writers of these

epistles wanted the initial readers to know that something was up in reference to the massive rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. As A.D. 70 drew near, the prophetic elements of Jesus' prophecy concerning national Israel were becoming clear. In order to expedite conversions from Judaism, and also encourage the converted not to return to the Sinai covenant that God had set aside at the cross, Matthew, Mark and Luke write both to inform and to warn. Their writings have an air of urgency. There is a sense of a final call to a generation that was seeking for hope in a political environment that was in social upheaval.

With this in mind, we launch into an exciting portion of God's revelation. Matthew 24 is one of the most exciting portions of God's word because it explains what will occur in the disciples' lives concerning national Israel and their homeland of Palestine. The sense of forewarning that is characteristic of the New Testament scriptures in reference to the coming of the Lord on unbelieving Israel leaves us with the same sense of urgency in reference to the final coming of Jesus at the end of time.

Verse 1 **The Nationalistic Pride** **Of The Disciples**

Then Jesus went out [of the city of

Jerusalem] *and departed from the temple [courtyard]. And His disciples came to show Him the buildings of the temple [that were built by Herod the Great].*

Jesus had just pronounced judgment upon the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:38. He had also just stated, “*Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation*” (Mt 23:36). We feel that the disciples were surely stunned by what He had just said. In response to Jesus’ statements, Peter, James, John and Andrew later came to Jesus privately while He was on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24:3; Mk 13:3).

At least these four disciples showed their nationalistic feelings by expressing their pride in the physical structures that Herod the Great had constructed. As loyalist Jews, they were surely thinking that these buildings, and especially the temple, could not be destroyed by the will of God. God would not bring an end to His

covenanted people. Their nationalistic feelings were struggling against Jesus’ prophecy. Nevertheless, their loyalty to Judaism would not preserve that in which Israel had taken so much pride for centuries.

Verse 2

The Imminent Destruction Of The City Of Jerusalem

Jesus said to His disciples, “Do you not see all these things [of Jerusalem and the temple]? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

Jesus had prepared the disciples for this final pronouncement of judgment upon Israel. The parables of 13:3-9,36-43; 21:33-46; 22:1-14, and the definitive proclamation of 23:29-39, prepared the disciples for what He was going to reveal in this context. Jesus had earlier prophesied that the end of national Israel was at hand.

PREPARATION PARABLES

Parable of the Tares
(Mt 13:3-9,36-43)

Parable of Wicked
Vinedressers
(Mt 21:33-46)

Parable of Marriage Feast
(Mt 22:1-14)



Mt 23:29-39
Definitive
Statement



MATTHEW 24

PROPHECY
OF
DESTRUCTION

The “ax was laid at the root” (3:10) and a destructive blow was about to come upon Israel in about forty years from the time Jesus made these pronouncements. “**All these things**” would come to an end.

This last prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 is of the coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem that was initiated by the Roman general Vespasian, who would later be declared Caesar of Rome. Titus, his son, would complete the job. The destruction would signal the termination of national Israel as a covenanted people of God. This would be the fulfillment of Moses’ prophetic curse upon a people who had rejected God (Dt 28:15-68). The destruction would be great and final.

Josephus was a Jewish historian who lived during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and claimed to be among the Roman army at the time of the siege of Jerusalem. He personally witnessed the war and final fall of the city. In his *Wars of the Jews* he estimated that over 1,100,000 Jews died in the destruction; the few 80,000 or so who were left were sold into captivity. Though it is believed that Josephus may have embellished his figures, at least whatever the true figures of death and captivity were when the annihilation was complete, was nothing short of genocide. The temple was burned and the city lev-

elled to the ground. The prophecy of Jesus in Luke 19:43,44 was realized.

For the days will come upon you when your enemies will cast a barricade around you, and encompass you and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you. And they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.

The destruction of the temple would be God’s demonstrated revelation that He was finished with the Jews’ religion, as well as His special covenant relationship with national Israel. The purpose for which Israel was called into a covenant relationship with Him **was fulfilled by the conclusion of Jesus’ time on earth.** What Jesus said in the following statement at the beginning of His earthly ministry explains His mission: “*Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill*” (Mt 5:17). Unless we conclude, as so many do, that He was not talking about doing away with the Sinai law and covenant with Israel, then we must read the context in which Jesus made the preceding statement:

For verily I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one

tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled (Mt 5:18).

Some theologians just cannot connect the dots on this matter. They have a difficult time connecting the statement of Matthew 5:17,18 with what Jesus said in Luke 24:44 at the conclusion of this earthly ministry when He had fulfilled the law. After His resurrection, and before His ascension, He gathered the apostles together and said,

These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me (Lk 24:44).

When the preceding statement was made, the law had been fulfilled. When Jesus fulfilled all that was written in the law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Himself, **then everything was fulfilled.** The Sinai law and covenant could pass away as Jesus brought both Jews and Gentiles into a new relationship with God that was based on the gospel of grace.

The use of the pronoun “your” in Matthew 23:38 is significant. “See,” Jesus said, “**your** house is left to you desolate.” By the time of Jesus’ ministry, it was no longer God’s

house. In the mind of God the Jewish religious leaders had already stolen the inheritance of the vineyard (See Mt 21:38,39). Jesus had said to them, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition*” (Mk 7:9; see Mt 15:1-9). Paul was certainly correct by calling Judaism the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13). They no longer submitted to the word of God as the authority in all matters of faith. By the time Jesus came into the world, the religious heritage of the Jews was their authority in matters of faith. Their religious traditions had supplanted the authority of the word of God. Once again in their history the curse for rejecting God and His word was coming upon them. On a similar occasion in their history before their destruction through captivity, Hosea wrote,

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children (Hs 4:6).

Because Israel had rejected God and His visitation through His Son, judgment was coming upon her.

Verse 3 The Disciples Question Jesus

As He sat on the Mount of Olives [which was east of the city of Jerusalem], the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming [presence] and of the end of the age?”

We can understand the astonishment of the disciples concerning the words of Jesus when He had just pronounced the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. They realized that He was talking about a dreadful event that was to befall national Israel. In view of the fact that they still believed that Jesus would possibly “*restore the kingdom to Israel*” (At 1:6), they were having a difficult time processing His statements here concerning the destruction of all that in which they had taken so much pride throughout their lives.

When we consider the parallel accounts of Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7, the disciples seem to be asking two questions: (1) When will the things of Matthew 23:36 happen? (2) What will be the sign of Jesus’ “coming” (or “presence”) and the end of the age?

The disciples still remembered Jesus’ teaching in the parable of the Sower that the tares should be left with the wheat until the time of judgment (Mt 13:29). “*Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the*

fire, so it will be at the end of this age” (Mt 13:40). Jesus was talking about **the age of His first century disciples**, not some far off event that was beyond the life-span of the immediate disciples. He was certainly not speaking of events that would transpire over two thousand years later.

The Greek word *aionios* in Matthew 13:40 is correctly translated “age” as it is so translated in Matthew 28:20. This Greek word was unfortunately translated by the prejudicial King James translators with the word “world”—the translators believed that Jesus was speaking of the end of the world in Matthew 24. But in the context, Jesus was revealing judgment “in time.” The destruction of Jerusalem **in time** would be an illustration in some way of what would happen at the unique final coming of Jesus at the **end of time**. But in the historical context Jesus was preparing His Jewish disciples for the end of national Israel. The Jews would continue throughout history as a culture of people. However, their existence as a unique people in a covenant with God was terminated at the cross and demonstrated in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

In the context of Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus answered the preceding two questions. He used the word “coming” that is translated from the Greek

word *parousia*. A better translation would be “presence.” In other words, the disciples were asking what the sign of His presence would be. Jesus subsequently revealed two “comings” or “presences” in His teaching concerning the end of Israel. First, there would be a coming (“presence”) **in time** in judgment upon the nation of Israel. He had earlier referred to this event in Matthew 16:27,28.

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels [messengers], and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming [presence] in His kingdom.

Second, by the end of chapter 25, it is possible that Jesus included a coming in judgment at the **end of time**. This would be a final presence, or final judgment of all the world. We are of the opinion, however, that the entire context of Matthew 24 refers to the coming in time in judgment upon national Israel. Only in chapter 25 does Jesus possibly move on in His discourse to the end of time.

All “comings in judgment” of God **in time** are symbolic or typical of His final presence at the **end of time**. However, we must keep in mind that the disciples before His as-

cession did not comprehend Jesus’ previous discussions concerning His death, resurrection and kingdom reign. It is not probable here, therefore, that they would be asking questions about a final coming and judgment of Jesus at the end of time. Jesus possibly included information on the end of time for our sakes only.

The immediate disciples did not understand the end of Israel, let alone ask questions about the final coming of Jesus and judgment at the end of the world. This does not mean, however, that Jesus did not speak concerning final things while He was with the disciples during His earthly ministry. He revealed to them many things they did not fully understand. Only when such things were brought to their remembrance with the revelation of all truth did they fully understand what Jesus had revealed to them during His earthly ministry (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

It is best to understand Matthew 24 as a **type**, or illustration, of the unique destruction of the world at the end of time. An example of this application would be when Jude used Enoch’s prophecy of the judgment of the flood of Noah’s day to refer to the coming judgment upon Israel for “*all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him*” (Jd 14,15). In the context of Matthew 24, Jesus also used “judgment language” in order to prophesy the destruction

of Jerusalem. Such language was also used in other texts in reference to the end of the world. We would not be wrong, therefore, to use the general teaching of God's judgments in time to illustrate His judgment at the end of time.

We are discussing two "ends" in the context of chapters 24 and 25. First, there is the **end of national Israel** that would happen in the lifetime of the immediate disciples of Jesus (Mt 23:36; see Mk 9:1). Reference to **these things** center around Israel's end by destruction (Mt 23:36; 24:2,8,33,34).

Second, there is the **end of the world** that is **illustrated** by the judgment and destruction of the flood in Noah's day and the destruction of Jerusalem. In an illustrative way, therefore, the end of national Israel would demonstrate the end of the world. As the typical Jew could not comprehend the end of Israel, so men today cannot comprehend the end of the world. Unbelievers will speak all sorts of harsh things against Christians because they believe there is no finality to the things of this world.

Verses 4,5 Warning Against Deception

*Jesus answered and said to them,
"Take heed that no one deceives you.
For many will come in My name, say-*

ing, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."

In view of the many modern-day self-proclaimed prophets and seers that exist throughout the world, it is little wonder that Jesus here made the statement, "*Take heed that no one deceives you.*" He knew that at the time of the end of national Israel there would be many self-proclaimed "messiahs" who would lead rebellions against Roman domination and occupation of Palestine. Some false prophets who sought to restore the state of Israel had already come and subsequently been killed by the Roman authorities (See At 5:36). Such messiahs and their nationalistic movements against Rome were what eventually motivated Rome to enact a final solution to the "Jewish problem." That solution came in A.D. 70.

We must also keep in mind that in the decade before the final destruction, there would be zealous Jews who would go throughout the Roman Empire in order to recruit followers who would try to capture the dream of a restored state of Israel. The letters of 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter and Jude were written to Christians who lived in the middle 60s. From the nature of what was written by Paul to both Timothy and Titus, it seems that even among Jewish Christian households there were those young men who were

encouraged to betray their faith and march off to Jerusalem in order to engage against Rome in order to restore the state of national Israel. Jude and Peter addressed their fellow Jews in order to warn them about the impending judgment that God was about to bring upon unbelieving Jews who had for forty years resisted the gospel reign of King Jesus (See 2 Pt 3). The decade of the 60s was a time of recruitment by patriotic Jews who sought to restore the state of Israel to her former glory.

The warning of Jesus in the context of His discourse was that His disciples not be deceived into believing that the coming events signalled the end of time. Therefore, His message was not just to those residents who lived in Palestine. This was a message that was to permeate the church of Jewish parents throughout the Roman Empire in order that Jewish parents not allow their children, especially their sons, to be deceived by the Jewish recruiters of the time. From our studies of the book of Hebrews that was written in the middle 60s, it seems that even some parents were being deceived into returning to Jewish nationalism in order to restore the heritage of an independent Jewish nation.

People today can better understand the sociological turmoil that arose out of the fanaticism that existed

in the decade prior to the fall of national Israel. An effort to establish an Islamic state is the perfect example of what was happening among the Jews throughout the Roman Empire during the 60s. True Islam is theocratic, as was the covenant and law that God established with Israel. In the zeal to establish a true theocratic Islamic state in the Middle East, Muslim Jihadists throughout the world recruited Muslims around the world to join in the struggle to establish an Islamic state. As a result, young people betrayed their parents and ran off to Syria.

During the decade of the 60s, the same was happening among the Jewish families throughout the Roman Empire. We can only imagine the thousands of young men who died because of the failed effort to establish an Islamic state. The same was true in the first century in reference to the failed effort to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of Jews died in the futile effort. We can only imagine how many of these were deceived Jewish Christians who were misled into joining the futile effort to restore a national state of Israel.

Though the effort of the zealot Jews in the first century failed to materialize in their desire to establish a state of Israel in Palestine, those who survived the A.D. 70 ordeal did not

give up their dream. Zionists continued to hope for a state of Israel that would be the homeland of the Jews. Two thousand years later at the conclusion of world hostilities between World War I and II, this dream finally came true in 1948 in the establishment of their present state of Israel in Palestine. But the establishment of this state of Israel had nothing to do with the eternal plan of God. If it had, then why did God wait two thousand years to fulfill a futile hope of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine?

Nevertheless, there are many deceived religionists today who try to be loyal to the state of Israel today as a God-ordained state. At the same time they seek to maintain their commitment to the gospel of King Jesus. But they contradict themselves in reference to the reign of Jesus. They willingly sacrifice the present gospel reign of Jesus who has all authority over all things, and at the same time believe that in some way Jesus will give up His present galactic reign over all things in order to come in the future and reign on this literal earth in Jerusalem. Such hopes are totally contrary to the gospel of the ascension, coronation and final coming of Jesus. It is a reversal of the gospel journey of the incarnate Son of God to the destiny of where He now reigns (See Ph 2:5-11).

Jesus' message to His immedi-

ate disciples, therefore, certainly has a secondary application to Christians of all time. Christians must be warned in every century that there are many who come "in the name of Christ," but are teaching false hopes in order to lead people astray after traditional religion. In the historical context of Timothy's situation, Paul warned Timothy,

*Now the Spirit clearly says that in the latter times [of national Israel] **some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron**" (1 Tm 4:1,2).*

This was happening at the time Paul wrote to Timothy. Timothy was living in the "latter times." There were deceivers moving among Jewish Christians in an effort to recruit "patriots" to join in the struggle to restore the state of Israel.

Throughout history there is the continual threat of those who seek to recruit a following through deceptive teaching. Such deceivers today move among misguided religionists in efforts to raise money to send to Israel. They do so in order to preserve the present state of Israel. These are deceivers who do not understand that God closed the door on Israel when Jesus ascended in order to sit and

reign on David's throne, just as David had prophesied (See At 2:24-36). In this case, it would be wise to heed the warning of Jeremiah to Israel:

Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor hearken to the dreams that they dream. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name. I have not sent them (Jr 29:8).

In Matthew 24:24 Jesus said that in the religious environment prior to the end of national Israel *"false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect."* John possibly wrote 1 John a few years before A.D. 70, near the consummation of national Israel. At least we see in 1 John a sense of finality, for John wrote,

Little children, it is the last hour [of national Israel], *and as you have heard* [from Jesus and the evangelists] *that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists* [who deny that Jesus is the Christ] *have come, by which we know that it is the last hour"* (1 Jn 2:18).

It was the "last hour" at the time John wrote the preceding words. Therefore, he could not have been referring to someone or something that would

transpire over two thousand years later.

Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) is an antichrist. Such a person is against Christ, which is the meaning of the word "antichrist." But to assume that there is a specific individual for whom we are to be looking in order to determine that the end of the world is near, is being deceived.

Among the Jews at the time John wrote there were those who denied that Jesus was the Christ. John wrote an entire document to prove that the man Jesus was the Christ and Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31). In their hope of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, the Jews denied that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah). And because they denied that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), they were the antichrists.

For this reason John warned at that time that Christians *"not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God... every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God"* (1 Jn 4:1-3). Simply because one claims to come "in the name of Christ" and cries out "Lord, Lord" does not mean that he is a Christian. Only those who do the will of the Father in heaven should wear the Christian name (Mt 7:21). Only those who are willing to submit to the gospel of Jesus by immersion into His death,

burial and resurrection can live under the name of Christ. It is for this reason that those who obey the gospel of Christ compose the church (assembly) of Christ on earth (See Rm 16:16).

Obedience to the gospel is the condition for one's salvation. This is the only condition for deliverance from a world of turmoil and sin. Salvation, therefore, is more than simply "believing on Jesus." One's faith must be manifested in obedience. We must not forget that James said we are justified by works, works that are in response to the gospel of God's grace (Js 2:14-24; see 2 Co 4:15; Ep 2:10).

We would certainly add here that the deceiving false prophets who were performing "miracles" were not actually working that which was supernatural. If God had allowed the deceivers to work that which was supernatural, then they would not have been deceivers. What they were preaching would have been confirmed true by the miracles, if indeed the miracles were truly supernatural. The fact that Jesus forewarned His disciples not to be deceived proves that the signs and wonders were fake. The deceivers were faking miracles in order to recruit a following to fight against Rome for the establishment of the Jewish state.

Verse 6 Rumors Of Wars

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars [throughout the Roman Empire]. See that you are not troubled, for these things must come to pass, but the end [of national Israel] is not yet."

When Rome started her campaign against insurrectionist Jews, she marched down through Asia Minor with skirmishes here and there in order to eradicate from the Empire the "Jewish scourge." There were also other wars throughout the Roman Empire that revealed the political instability of the time. These wars would not be the end of national Israel. They would only indicate the beginning of the end. But such wars would be a signal to the Christians who were living in Jerusalem to leave the city because the end was imminent.

We might suppose that the Roman army started minor skirmishes with the zealot Jews in order to hasten the radical Jews' flight to Jerusalem. As a military strategy against the insurrectionist Jews, Rome wanted as many radical Jews as possible gathered in Palestine before the Roman army made their final assault against those Jews who wanted to restore a state of Israel as it was before the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. What these loyalist Jews did not realize was that the Assyrian and Baby-

lonian captivities centuries before meant the end of an independent state of Israel in Palestine as a God-ordained possession.

Since the return of the captives from these captivities, Palestine was continually occupied by foreign powers, even to the day of Jesus. So what the radical insurrectionist Jews of the 60s were trying to do was undo what God accomplished through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

There are those today who are doing the same. They are encouraging the same restoration of a God-ordained independent state of Israel. They need to read their Old Testament history in order to understand that Israel's independence in their own homeland came to an end when God drove them from the land. If they cannot discover this fact in Old Testament history, then it is easily discovered in the gospel that all who are in Christ are one body (See Gl 3:26-29). Christians are now the holy nation of God (1 Pt 2:5,9).

The deception of restoring an independent state of Israel, however, is that the proponents cannot separate the right of the Jews as a culture of people to have their own homeland from the fact that such a homeland would not be a God-ordained plan. An effort to establish such a secular state ignores the gospel of the Messiahship and sacrifice of the Son of God

that took place two thousand years ago. The only source that the modern-day state of Israel has in reference to God is that which was explained in Romans 13:1,2. Government of any nation is God-ordained as such, but God no longer ordains any specific government for a nation.

The deception that would come in the latter years of national Israel in A.D. 70 would be that the false prophets of the nationalistic Jews were deceiving people. But in reference to some believers who were false prophets, they were deceiving the people into believing that God wanted to forsake His covenant with the existing holy nation of Christians in order to restore the state of national Israel. If this indeed were the plan of God, then none of the false prophets would have been deceivers. They would have been speaking the truth if God did intend to establish again the state of Israel. But because God was finished with Israel proclaims the fact that any prophet is false if he or she would declare that God wants to again establish the state of Israel in Palestine.

The same is true today. Those who proclaim that God is establishing the Jews in Palestine as a God-ordained nation are deceived, and thus are false prophets who are deceiving others. The wars that surround Israel today have nothing to do with any efforts on the part of God to restore the

nation of Israel within their own land.

When Jesus exhorted *“that you be not troubled,”* He indicated that this message was to those of the first century. Christians should not be troubled by any war, but in this historical context Jesus was specifically encouraging the Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire during the middle 60s to not allow Rome’s wars throughout the Empire to disturb them. The only way that Jewish Christians could do this was that they had to understand that the end of national Israel was in the eternal plan of God. God wanted to usher in His gospel covenant relationship with all men through His only begotten Son. The day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 was the beginning. It was on that day that one could obey the gospel in order to come into Christ. And when in Christ *“there is neither Jew nor Greek”* (Gl 3:28).

The Jewish Christians of the time needed to realize that their Jewish nationality was dissolved when they obeyed the gospel in order to come into Christ. They could remain Jews culturally, but their unique covenant relationship with God was terminated in Christ.

The promise of the new covenant has been fulfilled (See Jr 31:31-33). We need to remember that before creation God had planned that all those who obeyed the gospel would come

into a covenant relationship with Him in Christ (Gl 3:26,27). This was in His plan when He established a national covenant relationship with Israel at Mount Sinai. But even at that time, He had in His eternal plan a new covenant that would be revealed by His Son.

The early Christians were not to be troubled, therefore, when and how God would bring to a close the book on national Israel, though the book on the old Sinai covenant had been closed at the cross (Cl 2:14). Israel’s independent possession of the land of Palestine had been terminated with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Israel will never again enjoy a national covenant relationship with God, and thus have a God-ordained right to possess the land of Palestine.

In the context of Matthew 24, Jesus was giving pronouncements of prophecy that would be spoken among the disciples throughout the Roman Empire. Jewish Christians were to take heed to these prophetic utterances. If they did not, then they might continue to cling to the traditional Jewish Passover and Pentecost journey to Jerusalem. Some would succumb to the nationalistic Judaism of the day and eventually be trapped in Jerusalem when the Roman armies came for the final onslaught against the insurrectionists. We must keep in mind that many Jewish Christians still

had family members living in Palestine.

One reason Jesus gave these warnings, therefore, was primarily for the sake of the early Jewish Christians. They must take heed to these warnings and stay away from Jerusalem when the hour approached. In view of what the historian Josephus wrote concerning the death toll in the final months of war against the city, Jesus' warnings in this text were given to save lives. Some Jewish sons who had been deceived into believing the radical judaizers could be spared if they gave heed to these warnings and stayed away from Palestine.

Verse 7

The Consequences Of War

“For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.”

Because of the many conflicts that existed throughout the Roman Empire in the decade of the 60s, Rome's intolerance toward any who would cause civil disorder, especially those who would promote an insurrectionist movement to break away from the control of Rome, was only intensified. But within the government in Rome there was also internal conflict. In the two-year period that

led up to the destruction of Jerusalem, after Nero committed suicide, Galba, Otho and Vitellius came and went in their efforts to seize power in order to become Caesar of Rome. Jewish insurrectionist movements occurred throughout the Empire. At one time about 50,000 Jews were killed in an insurrectionist movement in Seleucia. Another similar movement led to the death of about 20,000 nationalistic Jews in Caesarea who sought to initiate the establishment of an independent Israel. But all was to no avail. (For a more comprehensive discussion of the civil and political turmoil of the times, download and read the introduction to Book 84, *Gospel Teacher: Times Of Turmoil*, www.africainternational.org)

Famines occurred throughout the Empire prior to A.D. 70. Agabus had prophesied of one in Acts 11:28. Paul dealt with another in Judea for which the church in other areas took up a contribution (See 1 Co 16:1-3).

In conjunction with the famines, **earthquakes** seem to have plagued the Mediterranean area in the years prior to A.D. 70. Ancient historians record at least eight major earthquakes in the Middle East in the few years before A.D. 70. However, though an earthquake is emotionally unsettling, such natural occurrences should never be used as an indication of God supernaturally working in the affairs of

this world. Hundreds of thousands of earthquakes have occurred since Jesus referred to them in the discourse of Matthew 24. But since “*famines and earthquakes in various places*” is a common occurrence in the tectonic movement of geological plates throughout the world, such should never be considered a “sign of the times.” (Sometimes people need to turn off their TVs and radios and live with what is happening within their own regions.)

Luke recorded that Jesus also said in this context that **pestilence**, or disease and plagues, would prevail. Such pestilence and disease usually accompany famines. Pestilence would intensify the trauma of the wars and the harsh circumstances under which some Christians had to live. These would not be “signs of the times,” but suffering that would prevail during the years leading up to the end.

Verse 8

The Beginning Of Sorrows

“All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

The events that are discussed in verses 6 and 7 would be only the **beginning of the sorrows**. They would not be “signs of the time” of the end. The intense sorrows and suffering that

would come from the battles would add to the conflicts of the time. The battles would continue until the fall of Masada in A.D. 73. It would be in that battle that over nine hundred Jews—men, women and children—would commit suicide instead of being captured by the Romans.

Unfortunately, the disciples would have to live in the turmoil of these sorrows. They could not escape their social environment. Christians must often live in hostile environments that are against the message of peace that they preach. The environments are hostile simply because Satan is the prince of this world. He has deceived the masses of humanity.

However, on the positive side of a hostile environment there is the opportunity for Christians to reveal to the unbelievers around them that they truly live the gospel that brings peace of mind. When in the hostile environment of a Roman prison at the beginning of the decade of the 60s, Paul wrote,

Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Ph 4:6,7).

In his account of these matters, Luke also added that “*great signs from heaven*” would be seen (Lk 21:11). This would possibly be the unusual occurrence of terrestrial phenomena that some would interpret as “signs of the end.”

Most of the research speculation concerning terrestrial phenomena during the crucifixion of Jesus assumes that the events of the day of crucifixion took place in the year A.D. 33. However, according to our calendar today, Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30.

We must not forget that Jesus’ statements concerning the termination of national Israel were made in the latter part of His ministry, and before His death. In reference to His teaching through the parables, He spoke of the end of Israel throughout His ministry. All the terrestrial phenomena began to occur on the very day of His crucifixion. On the crucifixion day, the gospel recorders wrote, “*It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour*” (Lk 23:44; see Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33). There was also a great earthquake on that day (Mt 27:54).

We would conclude, therefore, that the natural phenomena that occurred during the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were signs that the end of national Israel was literally coming, though the end was not dem-

onstrated until forty years later. God was patient with the Jews in order to give them every opportunity to believe on Jesus as the Messiah, and thus obey the gospel.

Since Jesus made the statements concerning the end before these events occurred, then we assume that He did not want the disciples to assume that the end of national Israel occurred at the time of His death. In the anxiety of the day, He did not want them to conclude that the end of His earthly ministry was also the end of Israel. The end of national Israel would come forty years later, but the time of the crucifixion and resurrection was the beginning of the gospel dispensation. Throughout the seven weeks between Passover (the crucifixion) and Pentecost (the announcement of His kingdom reign), Jesus focused the disciples’ minds on their mission of preaching the gospel to the world (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16).

The good news included their being set free from the Sinai covenant and law at the cross (Cl 2:14). But there was still the unbelieving Jews who needed a clear signal that God was finished with Israel. He gave the unbelieving Jews a chance to first hear and obey the gospel of the Messiah. But after forty years it was time to bring down the curtain on Judaism and national Israel.

Verse 9

Hated For Jesus' Name Sake

“Then they will deliver you up to be afflicted and will kill you. And you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.”

Luke is more descriptive in his record. Before the finality of “these things”—the destruction of Jerusalem—he wrote,

They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake (Lk 21:12).

The early Christians would be persecuted in their efforts to live and preach the gospel (Mt 10:17). Because of His mention of “synagogues,” Jesus was certainly talking about the persecution of the early disciples by Jewish religious leaders. This is exactly what happened in the early missions of the disciples. There are a number of accounts in the document of Acts that detail the Jews persecution of the early disciples as they went forth to preach the gospel (See Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-40; 8:3,4; 12:1-5; 16:23; 21:33-40; 24:23-27; 28:30).

If the gospel were true, then it meant the end of Israel as a special people in a covenant relationship with

God. The Jews knew enough about the teaching of Christians to realize this. If the gospel were true, then Jesus was the only Messiah that God would send (See At 4:12). An opportunity to consolidate the Jews around the hope of a coming messiah that was yet in the future was hopeless. In fact, according to Josephus, during the final days of the fall of Jerusalem different individuals withdrew into the temple and tried to give the people hope by rallying them around themselves as the messiah. But all was to no avail.

It is worthy of note that Mark recorded that this discourse was delivered privately to Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mk 13:3). James would be the first apostle to be martyred (At 12:1-5). Peter and the others would suffer extensively at the hands of the persecuting Jews in the years to come. John, James’ brother, would possibly have been the last apostle to die after being exiled by Rome to the island of Patmos (Rv 1:9).

All the disciples were **hated** by the persecuting Jews because what the Christians believed meant the end of Israel. They were hated because of the disciples’ preaching that Jesus was the Messiah and that there were no more messiahs to come. If Jesus were the only Messiah, then the nationalistic Jews had no future messiah around whom they could rally the

people against Rome.

Unfortunately, the hate of the nationalistic Jews would not match that which would later be heaped upon Christians by the end of the first century. Rome would eventually unleash its state persecution against the disciples when the Roman state charged that Christians were also insurrections because they would not confess Caesar as lord.

When Nero was Caesar at the beginning of the 60s, he launched in Rome a personal vendetta against those who had submitted to the Lord Jesus only. But this was only the beginning of Roman persecution against Christians. The personal vendetta of Nero eventually grew into state persecution by the end of the first century. This “hate” had been spoken before by the Lord.

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (Jn 15:18,19; see At 7:59; 12:2; 16:23; 18:12; 24:26; 28:17-22).

Persecution of the early Christians would become so prevalent that the early evangelists exhorted and comforted the newly established disciples with the teaching that they

would suffer for their faith. Paul wrote to Timothy during these years of turmoil, “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12). Paul and Barnabas strengthened and exhorted the disciples by saying, “*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” (At 14:22).

The religious world was hostile to Christianity because the gospel nullified the very foundation upon which self-sanctifying religion is based. Since the world is full of religion, then the full strength of misguided religionists will launch all sorts of persecution against those who preach the gospel of God’s grace.

Jesus explained the reason why religious people would do such to those who seek to live according to the gospel message that only in Jesus one can be reconciled to God.

*These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, **the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.** And these things they will do to you because **they have not known the Father nor Me** (Jn 16:1-3).*

A. The first wave of persecution:

There were two forces that led

in the persecution of the early Christians in the first century. The first was Jewish persecution that was instigated by self-righteous religionists as Saul before his obedience to the gospel (At 9:1-30). This persecution eventually extended throughout many cities of the Roman Empire. As a note of explanation, Saul was a part of the religion of the Jews (See Gl 1:13,14). And as a religionist, he viewed Christianity as a sect of people who denied the foundation upon which the Jews' religion was founded.

Religion exists because it is inherently built upon the foundation of religious traditions that identify each unique religion (See Mk 7:1-9). Religion is a system of faith whereby the adherents seek to sanctify themselves of sin through the performance of certain rites and rituals that identify each particular religion.

Gospel, on the other hand, is defined in one statement that makes the gospel totally contrary to that which identifies religion: Christians "*are not under law, but under grace*" (Rm 6:14). The gospel of grace, therefore, sets one free from religion (See Gl 5:1). And since gospel sets one free from religion, those who are the leaders of any particular religion set themselves against those who preach the gospel. This is especially true if the leaders of the religion are fully supported by the adherents of the religion.

Since no one can be justified before God through perfect law-keeping, then religion, which is based on strict adherence to the traditions (laws) of the religion, cannot justify one before God. In the case of the Jews, their strict adherence to the law of God could not justify them before God (See Gl 2:16). Obedience to the many rites and rituals of the Jews' religion could not atone for one's sin. No one through law-keeping can be justified before God because everyone continues to sin (Rm 3:23; 6:23).

In contrast to religion, Christians have been set free from perfect obedience to the assumed rites and rituals of any religion. The justified are set free in their obedience to the gospel of grace. Therefore, that which stirred up the persecution from religionists worldwide was the fact that what identified a religion is totally contrary to the central principle of grace that identifies Christianity. There can never be any harmony between any religion and the gospel. The two are inherently opposed to one another. Religion is essentially man trying to do what Jesus did completely at the cross.

B. The second wave of persecution:

The second wave of persecution that was eventually launched against

Christians was carried out by the head of the Roman Empire. Nero initially launched his personal vendetta against Christians in the middle 60s. However, all historical evidence indicates that this persecution was localized in and around Rome, and was terminated when Nero committed suicide. It was not until the reign of Domitian the latter part of the first century that Roman state persecution was launched against Christians throughout the Empire.

In Rome's early persecutions of Jews, the Roman state made little distinction between Jews of Judaism and Jewish Christians. Jewish Christians were only considered a sect of Judaism. And since Judaism was causing the incessant problems in Palestine, Rome launched reprisals against all Jews, regardless of whether they were Christians.

It is also significant to note from the context of Matthew 24, and the context of John 16:1-3, that persecution would come from those who were religionists, and thus, believed they were serving God by persecuting Christians. Even Rome's persecution that began the latter part of the first century was instituted by religious leaders of the Roman religion.

Persecution of Christians rarely comes from the state alone. It is usually generated by religions within the state that seek to dispel competitive

religions. Sometimes, the false religions of men will use the power of the state in order to persecute the true church of God. When a religion uses the state to persecute Christians, then we know that the religion is false.

In any state that is theocratic, the civil and religious laws of the state are one. There is no separation between state and religion. In such a situation, any religion that would arise that is contrary to the established religious laws of the state is considered treason. The early disciples would eventually move into a somewhat theocratic state that Rome seemed to become.

Since Christians would not call Caesar "lord," they were accused of insurrection, and thus enemies of the state. The book of Revelation would take the early disciples through the onslaught of state persecution. Jesus would not leave the Christians of the second and third centuries without hope of deliverance from Roman state persecution. And because He would not, He called on John to pen the visions of Revelation in order to prepare Christians that they would endure persecution for the next 150 years until Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311.

Verse 10

The Offended And The Betrayed

“And then many will be offended and will betray one another and will hate one another.”

Those of weak faith who were **offended** in being associated with the incarnate Son of God, or who were ashamed of His gospel (See Rm 1:16), would succumb to the intimidation of those who were recruiting for the establishment of an independent nation of Israel. It would be a time when Jewish Christians would be embarrassed about their loyalty to King Jesus, as opposed to giving in to the intimidation of the nationalistic Jews who sought to establish a Jewish state. Even the hate of some nationalistic Jewish Christians would be revealed in their desire to disassociate with fellow Jewish Christians. The faith of Christians would be hated because they did not join in with those Jews who sought to establish a Jewish homeland.

In reference to betrayal, we would rightly conclude that some sons who were recruited by nationalistic Jews would have betrayed their fathers and mothers in order to sneak off to Palestine in order to join the resistance. Friendships would be betrayed as the recruited would turn away from those friends who would not give in to the persuasion of the nationalistic Jewish recruiters who were deceiving young men into join-

ing the ranks of the resistance against Rome.

Jesus said, *“Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me”* (Mt 11:6). Luke records the extent to which some would go in their betrayal of others. *“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will send some of you to your death”* (Lk 21:16). What Jesus here prophesied is that which Paul wrote to Timothy would happen in the decade of the 60s. *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”* (2 Tm 3:12).

When understood in the historical context of the decade that led up to the final conflict in Palestine, the prophecy of Jesus could be understood better in reference to death in the futile effort to establish a Jewish state within Palestine. If a Christian Jew were recruited by a nationalistic Jewish zealot, then it would be the same as sending one to his own death in Jerusalem. If Josephus’ figures are anywhere correct, hundreds of thousands of Jews were sent to their death during the conflicts that prevailed throughout Palestine, and eventually in the final battles that brought down Jerusalem and Masada between A.D. 70 and 73.

It is true that the first disciples were persecuted unto death during the Roman state persecution that began

the latter part of the first century (See Rv 2:10). However, in the following promise Jesus spoke directly to His apostles. He promised that He would through the Holy Spirit reveal to them what to say when on trial.

Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist (Lk 21:14,15).

There is a practical principle here we must not overlook. Those who would take a stand for the truth of the gospel will be persecuted by the deceived. One might say that persecution is a part of the evangelistic package. When one preaches the gospel, Satan will not be silent, for the gospel is totally contrary to his system of religious deception. He will not stand easy as his kingdom is ravaged by the truth of the gospel. The evangelist who goes forth and finds it surprising that there are those religiously misguided people who oppose him, has much to learn about the conflict between good and evil in this world. He or she has a great deal to learn in the fact that the gospel is inherently opposed to religion. Those who would seek to sustain their religion will certainly persecute those who come with a message of freedom from the bond-

age of religion.

But in the historical context of Jesus' prophecies concerning the consummation of national Israel, there was more involved than individual persecution that resulted from preaching the gospel. Jews were being recruited to join the hope of establishing an independent Jewish state in Palestine. If one allowed himself to be deceived into joining this fruitless hope, then it was as a sentence to death.

Verse 11 False Prophets

“And many false prophets will arise and will deceive many.”

This statement does not assume that the false prophets would come from within the fellowship of the saints. On the contrary, Jesus said that false prophets would simply arise. In the historical context it is not difficult to assume who these false prophets would be. They would be those deceivers within Judaism who would eventually arise to call for the establishment of a Jewish state within Palestine. They would deceive the Jews, both believing and unbelieving throughout the Roman Empire to go to Palestine in order to inaugurate the state of national Israel. Nevertheless, from what Paul said in Galatians 2:4

there seem to have been such false Jewish “brethren” early in the history of the church “*who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus.*”

Their call for recruits would be false since God had determined that Israel was forever dissolved in Christ. There would never again be a nation of Israel within Palestine to which Jews should be called. The prophets who proclaim such today are false because they also make such a claim.

The subject of deception is continued by Jesus in the Matthew 24 context since this was paramount to the social chaos that was created by Jews with nationalistic motives. Jesus understood the fickle nature of people who desire to follow after iconic leaders. He knew the “sheep nature” of people to seek for a shepherd (Mk 6:34). In this case, they were seeking for a “messiah” who would lead them to throw off the bondage of Roman rule.

This urge to seek for a shepherd is so strong that innocent, if not gullible people, would follow after any self-proclaimed prophet who might show some religious inclinations and leadership. This would especially be true in reference to nationalistic Jews who believed in the deliverance of Israel from the dominance of Rome.

Jesus knew that there would be those who would take advantage of

the innocence of the sheep. Therefore, He warned His disciples that **false prophets** would come to call the saints back into Judaism. Whenever there are times of social chaos within a nation or society, there are always those who will take advantage of the vulnerabilities of the people. Jesus warned, “*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves*” (Mt 7:15). These imposters would often practice sorcery, astonishing the people with their religious performances, and claim that they were someone great (See At 8:9-11).

In reference to the community of believers, Paul warned that from the leadership of the church “*men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (At 20:30). There would be those who would go about from city to city, deceiving and being deceived. He warned, “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ*” (2 Co 11:13).

Just in case we might assume that such roving propheteers are unique in this gospel era, Peter reminded his readers concerning what happened in Israel centuries before the coming of Christ:

But there were also false prophets among the people [of Israel], even as

there will be false teachers among you [as Christians], *who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord* [Jesus Christ] *who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction* [in the consummation of national Israel]. *And many* [deceived Christian Jews] *will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth* [of the gospel] *will be blasphemed* (2 Pt 2:1,2; see Gl 1:6-9; 1 Tm 4:1-4; 2 Tm 3:1-9; 1 Jn 4:1; Jd 11,16).

The fact that both Jesus and the inspired writers warned of false prophets is enough to alert us to always be on guard against such. The only way to be on guard is to know well that which protects us against erroneous teachings. We must know Jesus. We must believe that He is the incarnate Son of God. John exhorted, *“Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (1 Jn 4:1). Since John wrote these words over two thousand years ago, we must assume that there are still those who are going about as false prophets of religions that they have created after their own traditions. **Biblically ignorant people do not guard against false prophets. If one does not know Jesus through the medium of the word of God, then he or she does not know Him as the**

Son of God.

In these times today, there are many who proclaim “Jesus,” but they have little knowledge of the Bible. They are often led to be ignorant of the word of God because their teachers know little about the Bible.

There are a number of religions throughout the world today. However, we must not forget that religion is not based on the word of God as the foundation of faith. In a religion, the Bible is never the final authority in matters of faith. A religion is based on tradition and some system of self-sanctification that has become the heritage of the adherents’ faith.

We must not forget that unique religious groups are unique because of their unique traditions and beliefs that separate them from one another. The gospel usually has a difficult time penetrating religion because people treasure their religious heritage of traditions more than the authority of the word of God.

Verse 12

Lawless And Loveless Societies

“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”

When people do not submit to the laws of either God or man, human relationships digress to instincts of

survival. There is no love of one's neighbor in a state of social anarchy. For this reason, God ordained the civil law of government.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority [of government] resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves (Rm 13:1,2).

It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit wrote these words directly to Jewish Christians who were living in the seat of the "government authorities" who would, in about fifteen years, sign the decree to squash the aspirations of the Jewish nationalists in Palestine. Romans 13:1,2, therefore, was written as a warning in order to remind the Jewish Christians in Rome to stay away from the Jewish nationalists who were about to rise up in the Roman Empire.

Resistance against God-ordained government is exactly what the nationalistic Jews did, and subsequently brought upon themselves the God-ordained consummation of national Israel. Because the nationalistic Jews continually fought against the control of Rome, Rome eventually unleashed her judgment upon the anarchists.

The nationalistic Jews were anarchist in reference to their submission to the state of Rome, but antichrist in reference to their submission to King Jesus.

In preparing Timothy for the dark days that were coming, Paul reminded the young evangelist, "*The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane*" (1 Tm 1:9). These words were written in the decade of the 60s with the behavior of the anarchists Jews in mind.

We must not think that Rome arbitrarily unleashed her military on the Jews. There was a reason, and that reason was the insurrectionist behavior of the nationalistic zealots of Judaism. The annual Passover and Pentecost feast became the gathering point of these insurrectionists. And thus, it was during the Passover that the Roman army arrived in Palestine in order to put down insurrectionist Jews who permeated the Empire.

Since the nationalistic Jews had been recruiting for an inevitable confrontation with the Romans, the Romans wanted to have as many of the nationalistic Jews as possible gathered in one place before they encircled them in Jerusalem. It was actually a stroke of military genius on the part of the Roman army, specifically Vespasian who was the general of the

army at the time these events were initiated.

In times of social chaos it is easy to fall from loving one's neighbor as himself. Social chaos generates hate, and hate generates disobedience of law. In times of military conflict, the struggles of the time generate a sense of self-preservation. And when self-preservation kicks in, love of one's neighbor is gone. When men refuse to submit to the authority of government, they will not submit to the needs of one another. Love grows cold and lawlessness abounds in times of war.

Verse 13 Endure To The End

*“But he who will endure to the end,
the same will be saved.”*

The commentary on this statement was written by an unknown writer, possibly Paul, who wrote on this subject sometime during the decade of the 60s. The theme of this commentary was based on an exhortation not to turn away from King Jesus as the Christ and Savior of the world.

The Hebrew writer argued persuasively in Hebrews in order to dissuade some Christians from turning from Jesus in order to revert to the Jews' religion. In those days, there was a tremendous amount of nation-

alistic intimidation of Jewish Christians to join the resistance. Nationalistic Jews were intimidating Jewish Christians to return to the religion of their heritage in order to establish again the Jewish state in Palestine. But at the conclusion of all his arguments that turning from Jesus would produce only condemnation in the eyes of God (Hb 2:2,3), the Hebrew writer confidently affirmed, “***We are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul***” (Hb 10:39). Therefore, the Hebrew writer exhorted, “*Let us hold firm to the confession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who promised*” (Hb 10:23).

Those who remained faithful while in the midst of either persecution or nationalistic intimidation would be delivered from the end of national Israel (See Rv 2:10). They would be spared from the genocide of thousands of deaths that took place during the months of conflict in Palestine (Mt 10:22). Jesus even promised faithful Christians, “*But not a hair of your head will be lost*” in the destruction if they stayed away from Palestine in those days (Lk 21:18).

However, the condition for not becoming a victim of the national calamity that was coming was to take heed to Jesus' warning: “*Watch therefore, and pray always that you may*

be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk 21:36). They could only escape if they refrained from joining the resistance. They must stay away from Palestine, and Jerusalem in particular.

We can now see why Jesus was giving these immediate disciples this information. Those who believed these pronouncements would not fall victim to the God-ordained consummation of national Israel. The faithful would save their lives if they heeded these warnings. Those Jewish Christians who were still clinging to their Jewish heritage had to make a decision. They had to decide to relinquish loyalty to Jewish nationalism by clinging to King Jesus. The entire document of Hebrews was written in order to present the gospel journey of the Son of God to those Jewish Christians who were tempted to turn from King Jesus. If they forsook the King and Priest, there was no hope for them.

We can see in the contexts of Jesus' discourse here why Jerusalem and the temple had to go. There was too much Jewish sentimentality connected to both the city and the temple. For forty years from the time of the cross in A.D. 30 until the year A.D. 70, God had been patient with Israel. By A.D. 70 it was time to cut the emotional umbilical cord with Judaism,

Jerusalem, and thus the Sinai covenant. Jewish Christians had to move on. They had to move on to a faith that was neither culturally nor nationally linked.

There had to be a sign from God that He was finished with the Sinai covenant and national Israel. This sign had to be so convincing that the unbelieving Jews of the time would question their own faith, and thus realize that Jesus was truly the Messiah. This would be what Paul defined as the "fullness" (fulfillment) of Israel. It would be at this time when Jesus said, "*Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Mt 13:43). The consummation would prove that God was no longer with the nation of Israel, no matter how patriotic most Jews were to establishing again an independent nation in Palestine.

In the following words, Paul released the following revelation concerning the "fullness" about fifteen years before the events of A.D. 70:

I say then, have they [the Jews] stumbled that they should fall [through unbelief]? Certainly not! But rather through their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to provoke them [the Jews] to jealousy. Now if their transgression [through unbelief] is the riches of the [Gentile] world, and the diminishing

[destruction] of *them* [as a nation of believers] *the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness* [when God finalizes His work through Israel] (Rm 11:11,12)?

The rejection of the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, spurred the early evangelists to move on to the Gentiles. When the Jews “*resisted and blasphemed, he [Paul] shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads. I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’*” (At 18:6; see At 13:46-48; 28:28). And so he and the other evangelists, as they spread out across the world, preached the gospel to the Gentiles.

Verse 14 Preaching To The Empire

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world [of the Roman Empire] for a witness to all nations, and then will the end [of national Israel] come.”

The good news of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coronation of the Son of God would be preached to Gentiles in all parts of the Roman Empire before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

“**All the world**” is here certainly a reference to the Roman Empire as

the phrase is so used in Luke 2:1: “*And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that **all the world** should be registered.*” This was not a registration of the inhabitants of the entire world. The idiomatic expression “all the world” referred only to those of the world who were under Roman jurisdiction. This same meaning is in Romans 1:8: “*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of **throughout the whole world.***” The Roman Christians’ faith was certainly not spoken of throughout the rest of the geographical world. Reference to “the whole world” is again to the perimeters or jurisdiction of the Roman Empire.

In Romans 10:18 Paul does use the phrase “all the earth,” or “ends of the world,” to refer to the whole world. He wrote, “*Their sound **has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.***” We must keep in mind that Romans 10:18 was a quotation from Psalm 19:4. In prophetic language it is stated in the **past tense**. Paul quoted this passage in the **past tense** as it was written by David. This does not mean, therefore, that at the time Paul quoted Psalm 19 in Romans 10 that it had been **completely fulfilled**. In Romans 15:29, 24-28 Paul desired to go to Spain and preach the gospel. The gospel had

evidently not yet gone to Spain at the time he quoted Psalm 19:4 in Romans 10:18. Therefore, when he made the statement of Romans 10:18, the gospel at the time of his writing the letter of Romans had not yet gone to “all the earth” or “ends of the world.”

In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, we would understand that the meaning of the phrase “all the world” refers to the Roman Empire. The practical reason for the preaching of the gospel to the Roman Empire before the destruction of Jerusalem is obvious. During Passover and Pentecost Jews of the Roman Empire would make the long journey to Jerusalem to celebrate these two great Jewish feasts.

On the particular Passover and Pentecost of the Acts 2 events, there were Jews in Jerusalem from the eastern extent of the Roman Empire, that is, Parthia and Media. There were Jews from the southern extent of the Roman Empire in North Africa. There were Jews from all Asia and Italy. This journey to Jerusalem on Passover and Pentecost was a very precious thing in the lives of devout Jews. For this reason, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem at least ten years after the Pentecost of A.D. 30, for they were still there for the meeting of Acts 15. They stayed in order to receive and evangelize each annual group of Jews who journeyed to the city for the

Passover/Pentecost Feast.

In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, Jesus was warning the disciples of the Roman Empire in order to **save their lives**. When the gospel was preached to the Jewish inhabitants of the Roman Empire, they gave up the Sinai law that stated that Jewish males must be in Jerusalem on Passover and Pentecost (Ex 12; 23:14-19; Nm 9:1-14). Those Jews who obeyed the gospel would be taught the prophecy of Matthew 24. They would thus stay away from Jerusalem in the years to come.

When the Romans did come to Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they came on Passover and Pentecost. Those Jewish Christians who lived outside Judea believed the message of Matthew 24, and thus, **were not there**. Their lives were spared because they believed Jesus and His prophecy concerning the consummation of national Israel.

We could correctly conclude, therefore, that the events that transpired in A.D. 70 were the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy of such, and thus, the final proof that He was the Messiah and Son of God.

Verses 15-18

The Abomination Of Desolation

*“Therefore, when you see **the abomination of desolation** [the Gentile Roman army] that was spoken of by*

Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place—whoever reads, let him understand—then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. Nor let him who is in the field go back to get his clothes.”

The **abomination of desolation** would be the pagan Roman army in Judea. The Gentile army would be there to desecrate the temple. The Gentiles presence would be an abomination to the Jews. However, all this would be the will of God, who was by the proxy of Rome, bringing judgment on Israel by the power of the Roman armies. Luke recorded, *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near”* (Lk 21:20).

Daniel had prophesied of this event in Daniel 9 & 11. Jesus was saying, therefore, that we must understand that the A.D. 70 event was the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy (See Mk 13:14). This fulfillment was **near**, not over two thousand years in the future. Daniel prophesied,

And the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it will be with a flood, and until the end of the war desolations are determined (Dn 9:26).

Daniel continued by prophesying that forces *“will defile the sanctuary fortress; then they will take away the daily sacrifices and place there the **abomination of desolation**”* (Dn 11:31; see Dn 12:7-11). *“And there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation”* (Dn 12:1).

At the beginning of this time of destruction, the resident Jewish Christians of Judea must **flee**. They must take heed to Jesus’ warnings in order to understand that the nationalistic aspirations of the Jews was futile. It was in the final plan of God to openly demonstrate that He had finished with Israel when the unbelieving Jews crucified His Son on the cross.

The urgency by which Judea Christians must flee is here revealed. In the ancient cities one could actually go from house to house on the roof tops of the houses. The houses were joined together so that one could simply go from one roof to another. In order to accentuate the urgency of fleeing, Jesus said that they must not take the time to return to their houses for coveted possessions when they see the chance to escape. They must flee with what they have in hand.

Jesus also warned that no one was to go to Judea during these days (Lk 21:21). This warning was possibly to those who might travel to Judea and Jerusalem to visit friends and

family, and then be caught in the war that was to rage throughout Judea. Jesus' warning, therefore, was to save lives, the lives of those Jewish Christians who might still be tempted to travel to Jerusalem to visit family and friends during the annual Passover/Pentecost feast.

After Vespasian returned to Rome to be Caesar, the Roman army was placed under the control of Titus, his son. For some reason during the final stages of the assault on Jerusalem, Titus removed his encircling army from the city for a brief period of time. This gave all resident Christians of Jerusalem time to flee. This was possibly the time when Jesus said that they must not come down from their roof tops, but flee immediately. They must take this window of opportunity and flee the city. Only the radical insurrectionists Jews would stay in the city. This may have been the reason why Titus allowed an interlude in the assault against the city. We may assume that this was in the plan of God in order to deliver His people from the calamity.

In the prophecy of Matthew 24, Jesus issued every warning possible to keep the Jewish Christians out of Palestine. But then there were those Jewish Christians who lived in Judea and the city of Jerusalem who would probably be reluctant to leave their homes and flee. This would be par-

ticularly true of those Jewish Christians who had unbelieving family members who would not heed the warning of the One they believed was a self-proclaimed Messiah. For this reason, it was very difficult for some Jewish Christians to leave unbelieving family and friends. In His discourse of Matthew 24, Jesus gave some final signs in order that they might save their own lives. When they saw the Roman army outside the walls of the city, then they must conclude that it was all over. Jesus was the rightful Messiah, but the nationalistic Jews had deceived the people into believing that He was not.

Verses 19,20 Pray For An Easy Flight

“And woe to those who are with child and to those who are nursing infants in those days. But pray that your flight not be in the winter or on the Sabbath.”

It would be difficult for pregnant women to flee during a war. In fact, Paul wrote to those throughout Achaia that it would not be wise to even marry during times of distress (1 Co 7:26). He may have given this advice in view of the conflict that was either present or coming in reference to the Jews' efforts to establish an independent state of Israel in Palestine.

Those with small nursing babies would also have difficulty in the flight from Judea. The prayers of the saints evidently were certainly a determining factor as to when this destruction would occur, for Jesus asked them to pray that such not happen in winter when the journey of flight would be more difficult. They must also pray that their flight not begin on the Sabbath, for fanatical nationalistic Jews would close the city gates on the Sabbath and hinder any from making any efforts to leave the city. Some fanatical Jews would possibly confront them in reference to violating the “Sabbath day journey” of Judaism (See Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26; 6:1-5).

The prayers of the saints would determine much concerning the deliverance of the Christians. Though we might not understand how God answered these prayers, the fact that Jesus asked them to pray for these things says that God can work in areas for which Jesus asked His disciples to pray.

Verse 21 Great Tribulation

“For then there will be great tribulation [because of the conflict], such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever will.”

Daniel prophesied that no nation from the beginning of time would have suffered as Israel was about to suffer at the hand of the Roman army. He wrote, *“And there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation”* (Dn 12:1; see Dn 9:26). The siege occurred during Passover/Pentecost feast, the time when the most “faithful,” or at least fanatical Jews were in Jerusalem. These Jews were trapped in the city. Thousands perished. The rest were sold into slavery. It was a time that the Jewish nation suffered more in just a few months than any nation before them in such a short time. The genocide of the time was overwhelming.

The Romans wasted no time in the conquest of Jerusalem. It is believed that the actual battle against Jerusalem lasted only three to five months. During this time hundreds of thousands of nationalistic Jews were slaughtered. No city from the beginning of time suffered such a fate as Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Verse 22 For The Sake Of The Christians

“And except those days [of the conflict] were shortened, no life would be saved. But for the elect’s sake, those days will be shortened.”

God would shorten **those days** of the war for the sake of Christians. If the rate of killing the Jews continued that went on during the battle, the slaughter of all Jews throughout the Roman Empire would have resulted in their annihilation as a race of people. The killing would have spilled over into the community of Christian Jews. But for the sake of the Christian Jews, God would not allow the killing to continue past the genocide of Jerusalem and Masada. Therefore, the destruction was contained within Palestine.

Titus expedited the battle against Jerusalem in order to hurry back to Rome. However, the battle continued for about five months. Josephus records that the Roman army crucified about 30,000 Jews outside the city walls. Titus did such in order to discourage the Jews within the city, and thus, expedite their surrender. But the Jews persisted until he had to destroy the city, even the temple. In the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Jews died.

Verse 23 **False Proclamations**

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Lo, here is Christ,’ or ‘There,’ do not believe it.”

Jesus again emphasized the con-

cept that the Jewish believers not be led astray by the deceptions of false messiahs. In times of national trauma, He knew that the people would seek for a national savior. There would be those nationalistic deliverers who would stand up and seek to lead the Jews of the Roman Empire in an effort to reestablish the nation of Israel. Jesus tells the disciples not to follow such futile calls for the national restitution of the state of Israel. He would say the same today who call for the restoration of a Jewish state within the confines of Palestine.

When the disciples later asked in Acts 1:6, *“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel,”* Jesus knew that they still retained nationalistic hopes. In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, He gave them divine instructions upon which they could reflect when the countdown started toward A.D. 70. They could reflect on what Jesus said in the prophecy of Matthew 24 and know that His intention was not to establish a physical kingdom reign here on earth. This was never His intention. He clearly stated to Pilate, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (Jn 18:36). If His kingdom were of this world, then His disciples would have the right to take up arms against all those who persecuted them (See Jn 18:36).

It will not be Jesus’ intention to establish an earthly kingdom when He

comes again. If it was His intention to establish an earthly kingdom when He comes, then He would contradict what He said to Pilate. Jesus' kingdom reign was always planned to be from heaven. Futile hopes that He will come again in order to use a military to establish an earthly kingdom is totally contrary to the gospel of His present reign as King of kings.

Verse 24 False Messiahs

“For there will arise false christs [messiahs] and false prophets. And they will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

False christs and prophets would arise in the time of calamity in order to call people after futile aspirations to establish a Jewish state. They would **show great signs and wonders**. These deceiving tricks would be so good that even Christians might by chance believe them to be real.

These “signs and wonders” could not be real supernatural events simply because Jesus says here that the elect might be **deceived** into believing them to be real. The point is that they would not be deceived if the supposed miracles were true. **One is not deceived when he believes that**

which is true and real.

This context is similar to Paul's warning in 2 Thessalonians 2:9: *“The presence of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all deceiving power and signs and wonders.”* In the 2 Thessalonians text the word “deceiving” would modify power, signs and wonders. All supposed miracles of Satan are false. Those who presume to control the supernatural today to prove themselves and their message to be true are the instruments of Satan. Paul warns that *“such are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ”* (2 Co 11:13). They are not instruments of Satan because they work real miracles. They are instruments of Satan because they claim that what they do is the miraculous work of either God or Satan. Jesus warned, **“Be not deceived.”**

Some ask how one can determine if the supposed supernatural work of an individual is true. The answer is simple. If one is not preaching the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and final consummation of all things, then he is a false prophet and his signs are fake. If one does not teach that one must obey the gospel of the incarnate Son of God through baptism for remission of sins, then he is a false prophet and his signs are fake. Upon such mas-

quering apostles, King Jesus will come with the following judgment:

... rest with us when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Th 1:7,8).

Verse 25 Forewarning

“Behold, I have told you in advance.”

Jesus told the disciples these things beforehand in order to prepare them to believe in Him when it all happened. He made a similar statement in John 13:18 after quoting Psalm 41:9 in reference to the betrayal of Judas: *“Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He”* (Jn 13:19).

The false prophets about whom Jesus spoke existed in the times preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. We do not doubt that they have existed throughout history unto this day. Christians, therefore, would be wise to take heed to Jesus’ warning concerning such things. In the same historical context of the decade that led up to the conflict between Rome and

the nationalistic Jews, Peter warned,

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words that were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pt 3:1-4).

Peter personally remembered the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24. He stirred his audience to remembrance by reminding them that they were in the last days about which Jesus spoke. He wrote the letter of 2 Peter between A.D. 65 and 67. This was only a short time before the destruction was to begin.

Peter wrote that Jesus *“was manifest in these last times for you”* (1 Pt 1:20). God *“has in these last days spoken to us by His Son”* (Hb 1:2). This was the *“fullness of the time”* (Gl 4:4) and the *“end of the age”* of God’s special covenant with national Israel (Ep 1:10). It was in these last times of national Israel that God sent forth His Son. The last days did not refer to a dispensation, but to a time of ending, the end of national Israel with the revelation of the gos-

pel through the Word who became flesh (See Jn 1:1,2,14).

It was the “last times,” the last times of God’s Sinai covenant He had specifically with Israel. Jude and James also wrote just a few years before the fall of Jerusalem. Both writers inferred the finality of Israel as a covenanted nation with God. Jude stated,

*Beloved, remember the words that were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how they told you that there would be mockers in the **last time** who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts (Jd 17,18).*

Jude’s Christian readers were experiencing these mockers in their own lives at the very time he wrote. Therefore, Jude’s argument is that his Jewish Christian readers were in the **last time** of national Israel. These were not the beginning of the last times, but the last time.

The last times were the years between Pentecost in A.D. 30 to A.D. 70. These were the last days of national Israel. God was bringing judgment upon the wicked vine dressers (the Jewish religious leadership) who attempted to steal the fruit and inheritance of the vineyard by maintaining the religion of Judaism (See Mt 21:33-45). National Israel had rejected God,

and thus, God was in the process of rejecting national Israel. National Israel’s persecution of the “Israel by faith” was coming to an end when national Israel came to an end.

James wrote to suffering Jewish Christians of the Roman Empire around A.D. 62 or 63. He comforted the persecuted “Israel by faith” (the church) by saying, “*Therefore be patient, brethren, until **the coming of the Lord**.... You also be patient. Establish your hearts, **for the coming of the Lord is at hand***” (Js 5:7,8). James was not talking about a “coming of the Lord” more than two thousand years later. Discussion concerning a coming at the end of time would not have been an encouragement to his immediate readers who were suffering under nationalistic Jewish mockers. The “coming” in the context of Matthew 24 is about judgment **in time** upon the nation of Israel.

Nationalistic Jewish mockers were the primary persecutors of Christians before A.D. 70. Jesus’ “coming in judgment” upon these mockers was **at hand**, that is, it was near unto happening. In Matthew 24 Jesus was “telling beforehand” of this deliverance that was coming in only a few years.

Those “end of time” proponents today who would reach into this historical contact and twist the Scriptures for their own fantasies have done a

disservice to the early Christians. They are prophecy thieves who steal away the encouragement of these prophecies that were meant to encourage the initial readers to whom they were addressed. They seek to apply the prophecies to themselves and those they have deceived into following them. Prophecy thieves seek to generate an audience for themselves by stealing in-time prophecies in order to apply the same prophecies to end-of-time events.

Verses 26,27 Manifested Presence

“Therefore, if they say to you, ‘Behold, He [the Messiah] is in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Behold, He is in the secret chambers,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines even to the west, so also will be the coming [presence] of the Son of Man.”

The very fact that Jesus made the prophecy of the end of Israel on the occasion of this discourse is evidence that His prophecy was meant to reveal that He was the Son of God who had all these things under control. After His crucifixion and ascension, He assumed all control over all things when He was seated at the right hand of God, *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion*

and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come” (Ep 1:21). Simply because we do not see all things under His control does not mean that He is not in control (See Hb 2:8).

All things at the time He made the preceding statement were under His control. Immediately before the betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus knew *“that the Father had given all things into His hands”* (Jn 13:3). He knew He had been given all authority over all things before His ascension (Mt 28:18). When He ascended to reign, and this prophecy was fulfilled, many of the unbelieving Jews would come to realize that He was made King of kings and Lord of lords at the time of His coronation. The suppression of the nationalistic Jews in A.D. 70 would reaffirm His existing kingdom reign in the age that followed after A.D. 70. In the consummation of national Israel, the whole world had the opportunity to believe that Jesus was right, and that He would be who He said He was until the consummation of the world.

But before the end of national Israel there were those false christs (messiahs) who led gullible Jews into the wilderness in hope of organizing an independent state of Israel in Palestine. Jesus was here warning the disciples not to accept anyone who would lead them into believing that

the Christ would come **in time** in a manner that would be characteristic of His final coming. When Jesus comes at the **end of time** it will not be a happening that must be communicated by people to people. It will be an event that will happen at the **sound** of the last trumpet, with the voice of **an archangel** (1 Th 4:15,16). In other words, Jesus says that if others come to say that they are “the Christ,” then they should not believe them. The unbelieving Jews may not have been able to connect all the dots, but at least the Christians of the time would have had their message proven true in the fall of national Israel.

The next personal coming of Jesus will be worldwide and heavenly announced with the sound of a trumpet. As lightning is seen when it strikes, so there will be no need to go forth and proclaim that He had come. All the Jews throughout the world would realize that what Christians spoke on these matters in reference to Jesus being the Messiah, had come true.

Verse 28

Gathering Of The Vultures

“For wherever the carcass [of dead national Israel] is, there will the vultures be gathered together [to consume it].”

The **carcass** is the Israelite nation that died forty years before at the cross. When the Jewish religious leaders rejected and crucified the Messiah, they signed their own doom. Therefore, the nation was dead even before the arrival of the vultures (the Roman army). It was a dead carcass awaiting its own consummation.

When the new covenant was bought and paid for by the blood of the incarnate Son of God, the covenant of the blood of bulls and goats passed away (Hb 10:1-4). When this happened, Jesus wiped *“out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”* (Cl 2:14). This revealing statement about this matter was understood in reference to all those who obeyed the gospel:

Therefore, my brethren, you also became dead to the [Sinai] law through the body of Christ, so that you should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, so that we should bring forth fruit to God (Rm 7:4).

The problem with the nationalistic Jews in the decade leading up to the consumption of the carcass in A.D. 70 was that they had missed the opportunity to be married to the Messiah. In their refusal to be married to Christ

through obedience to the gospel, they shunned the King of kings who was in control of all those things that would befall them in A.D. 70.

The gathering “vultures” was the Roman army that came to consume the dead nation. Vultures come when they see death. National Israel, therefore, was dead before the vultures arrived on the scene. When the disciples started seeing the gathering of the Roman army into Palestine, they knew that it was mealtime for vultures.

The unfortunate part of this story is that many Jewish Christians were deceived into believing the recruiting Jewish nationalists, and thus they sent themselves to death in the end. Some Jewish Christians had evidently refused to terminate the Passover/Pentecost journey to Jerusalem to visit family and friends. Jesus was giving everyone warning signs in order to keep themselves away from the area, because the vultures were going to consume the carcass of nationalistic Israel. The vultures showed up over the carcass on the Passover/Pentecost of A.D. 70.

Verse 29 Termination Of Nationalistic Aspirations

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun [of national Is-

rael] will be darkened and the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

The great tribulation of verse 21 would precede the final destruction of the city. Therefore, **immediately after the tribulation** of those days, the splendor of the Jewish nation would fall by the destruction of Israel’s pride, the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

Jesus used **apocalyptic** judgment language from the Old Testament to portray the final doom of Israel. Such language was commonly used by inspired writers in the Old Testament to symbolize the fall of nations (See Is 13:6-18; 14:12; 24:23; 34:4; Jr 4:23,24; Ez 32:7,8; Dn 8:10; Jl 2:30-32). The **sun** usually represented the king or monarch of the nation. The **heavenly bodies** represented the rest of the government leaders.

We must not allow ourselves to become inconsistent in understanding Jesus’ use of metaphorical language in this context to be a literal falling of the sun, moon and stars. We consistently interpret such language as it was used in the Old Testament. **Such language referred to the fall of an earthly kingdom.**

When God **shakes the heavens**, there is great change on earth among the nations. This is the meaning in

Haggai 2:6 from which Jesus brought the figure, “shaking the powers of the heavens” into the context of the fall of national Israel. Haggai wrote, “*For thus says the Lord of hosts; ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations’*” (Hg 2:6,7).

God was going “to shake” heaven and earth again in order to sift out of national Israel those who could not be shaken because they had submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus in their hearts. This is precisely what the Hebrew writer stated when he wrote a few years before A.D. 70:

*He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this “Yet once more,” indicates the **removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things that cannot be shaken** [the gospel] **may remain.** (Hb 12:26,27).*

National Israel would be physically removed in order to allow the “Israel by faith” to shine forth. The catastrophic national event of terminating Israel would allow those who were righteous through their obedience to the gospel to “*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Mt 13:43). The Hebrew writer continued,

*Therefore, since we are receiving a **kingdom that cannot be shaken**, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Hb 12:28).*

At the time of the writing of Hebrews 12:28, the kingdom of Jesus was in the process of being established among the Jews throughout the world as Jews came to believe in Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), and then give witness of their faith through obedience to the gospel. The kingdom reign of King Jesus was being received.

Verse 30 Sign Of The Son

“And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then will all the tribes of the earth mourn. And they will see the Son of Man coming [present] in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

We must be sure to note that some translations use the English word “coming” to translate the Greek word *parousia* in this text. In this context this is an unfortunate translation since the coming of Jesus in person is out of context and not under consideration. His coming at the end of time will be personal (At 1:9-11; 1 Jn 3:2). But the presence of Him having all authority as King of kings would be

revealed through the termination of national Israel, which termination He prophesied.

Jesus had earlier spoken to His disciples on the subject of His coming judgment. He had said that this coming (presence) would be “*in the glory of His Father with His angels [messengers]*” (Mt 16:27). Jesus had said in chapter 16 that some of His immediate disciples would experience this coming (presence). “*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*” (Mt 16:28).

So the **sign** here in Matthew 24:30 refers to what Jesus had previously prophesied. When the Roman army eventually came, such would be God’s final **signal** to believe in King Jesus who foretold these things. The fulfillment would be God’s last proof of Jesus as the Messiah.

The word “see” could be translated “perceive” or “discern.” When all these things happened, people would perceive the judgment of Jesus on Jerusalem. “**Coming in the clouds**” is judgment language from the Old Testament (See Is 19:1; Jr 4:13; Ez 30:3). When Jesus brought down this judgment on national Israel through the Roman army, then people will perceive the judgment power of the Son and His gospel reign as King of kings.

The disciples would witness the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. They would understand that Daniel 7:13,14 was fulfilled. Daniel had prophesied,

I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven. And He came to the Ancient of Days. And they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion and glory and sovereignty, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And His sovereignty will not be destroyed.

This prophecy speaks of the **ascension of Jesus**, for Jesus ascended unto the Ancient of Days who is the Father. However, before Jesus ascended to heaven, all authority in heaven and earth had been given unto Him (Mt 28:18; Jn 13:3; 17:2). Many would not realize this until the physical fulfillment of the prophecy that He made in Matthew 24.

When Jesus came in judgment on Jerusalem, then the Jews would realize that Jesus was “*far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come*” (Ep 1:21; see Ph 2:9-11). Jesus was Lord of lords and King of kings before A.D.

70 (1 Tm 6:15). However, true Israel by faith did not “*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Mt 13:43) until after national Israel was shaken in A.D. 70. When national Israel was taken away, the true Israel (the church), that could not be shaken, shined forth in the kingdom reign of Jesus. This was a marvel, “a sign,” that the disciples would experience in their lifetime.

If reference in Matthew 24:30 is not to the ascension of Jesus to the Father by the coming in the clouds, then the figure is to **coming in judgment**. This is a figure from the Old Testament that signified God’s coming in judgment upon the unrighteous (See Is 19:1; Jr 4:13; Ez 30:2). In the historical context, therefore, this is what Jesus is here signifying. He indicated this same thought during His trial when He stated to the high priest in Jerusalem, “*Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Mt 26:64).

The high priest would not literally see Jesus at the right hand of the Father with all authority. However, he would see this power manifested by proxy through the instrumentality of the Roman army. Those unbelieving Jews who experienced the destruction of Jerusalem certainly wondered why God was judging them. On

the other hand, the disciples before A.D. 70 recognized the kingdom reign of Jesus. This kingdom reign would be demonstrated in A.D. 70 by the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple encouraged many disheartened Jews to turn to Jesus. This is the historical commentary on what Paul revealed in Romans 9-11,

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part [before A.D. 70] has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved [through obedience to the gospel] (Rm 11:25,26).

Israel would be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles, that is through obedience to the gospel. However, because of the stubborn nature of some Jews, these Jews, before they would believe, had to experience an open demonstration by God before they would understand that God was finished with national Israel.

Verse 31 Sending Of The Evangelists

“And He will send His messengers 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.”

The Greek word *angelos* that is translated “angels” in this text should be translated “messengers.” It is so translated in Matthew 11:10: “*Behold, I send My messenger [“angelos”] before Your face.*” It is also translated such in Luke 7:24: “*When the messengers [“angelos”] of John had departed.*” Also, Jesus “*sent messengers [“angelos”] before His face*” to Jerusalem (Lk 9:52; see 2 Co 12:7; Js 2:25).

It seems that because some translators believed that Matthew 24 referred to the end of time, they translated the word *angelos* to refer to heavenly angels. But the context does not warrant this translation. Jesus is not historically jumping in the text from A.D. 70 to some time over two thousand years later.

Before the gospel of His ascension and coronation, Jesus did send His messengers forth into all the world. He said to His disciples, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations*” (Mt 28:19). “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15). “*And they went out and preached everywhere*” (Mk 16:20).

The disciples went forth from Jerusalem in Acts 8:4 in order to take the message of the gospel to all the

world. Those who would believe were **gathered together into the community of gospel-obedient subjects**. Those who recognized that “*all things were fulfilled*” (Mt 5:18), came to Jesus. In their obedience to the gospel, they turned from Jewish nationalism to spiritual revivalism. They were taught the following:

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, **then you are Abraham's seed**, and heirs according to the promise* (Gl 3:28,29).

The messengers (evangelists) went forth with the **gospel sound of a trumpet call**. The trumpet call finds its symbolism in the Old Testament. The trumpet was sounded as a warning of impending danger (See Nm 10:2; Is 27:13; Jl 2). The preaching of the gospel was Jesus' call to all men to believe the gospel (2 Th 2:14). The disciples went forth not only with the message of the gospel, but also the message of Matthew 24. There was a call to King Jesus in response to His atoning sacrifice. The trumpet call of the gospel delivered obedient Jews from sin, as well as from death that would result from the physical destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70.

Verses 32,33

Parable Of The Fig Tree

“Now learn the parable of the fig tree. When its branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So likewise, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”

When the Jewish nationalist began to prepare for their resistance against Rome, then Christians could see that tragedy was coming. They could interpret the rise of Jewish nationalism as a sign of the end.

The meaning of the parable from the fig tree is the nearness of the destruction as indicated by Jesus’ statements of verses 5-29. The fig tree puts forth her tender branches and leaves in the spring. Such indicates that summer is coming. The occurrence of the events of verses 5-29 would indicate the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem because the “maturity” of nationalism was strong throughout the Empire.

The disciples would understand that the *“coming [presence] of the Lord in judgment in time was at hand”* (Jc 5:8). For this reason, Jesus says, *“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”* (Rv 3:20). Through His messengers who

went into all the Roman Empire, there was continual pleas through the gospel to come out of the resistance of Jewish nationalism that would eventually end in war with Rome.

Verse 34

Generational Witness Of Doom

“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.”

Some of those of **this generation**, the generation to whom Jesus was speaking, would not die before all that He had just said had occurred. This verse is certainly parallel with what Jesus had said in Matthew 16:27,28. On that occasion Jesus said in the context of the Son of Man coming in the glory of His Father, *“There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”* They would witness the coronation of Jesus at His ascension. They would also witness His kingdom authority that was demonstrated in His judgment on national Israel.

When they went forth after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples went from city to city in Israel, preaching the gospel of the kingdom reign of King Jesus. This was their message of hope to be delivered from the intimidation of the Jewish nationalist

who were campaigning throughout the Empire in order to recruit followers. While first preaching the gospel of Jesus' atoning death, and His kingdom reign, the messengers continually had a message of doom for national Israel that was relayed on to all Jewish disciples.

In their preaching, the unbelieving Jews would persecute the early messengers from city to city because the message of the messengers meant the end of Israel. If Jesus was the only Lord and Messiah, then there was no messiah in the future to deliver national Israel from Rome. Jesus said to the disciples,

But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Mt 10:23).

Because of the Jews' persecution of the messengers of Jesus, God would bring judgment upon national Israel. Before Jesus arrived at this context of His message to the disciples in Matthew 24, He had stated, "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation" (Mt 23:36). "These things" referred to all things that led up to the final consummation of Israel. These things would come upon the generation to whom He addressed this mes-

sage of warning.

God would bring the punishment of judgment upon the generation to whom Jesus personally ministered because **they had personally rejected Jesus**. Jesus had said to the rejecting Jews,

The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here (Mt 12:41,42).

Jesus' generation of Jews would receive a more harsh judgment because they had personally experienced the presence of the incarnate Son of God. The destruction of Jerusalem, therefore, was not only God's intended time to openly demonstrate His work through Israel, it was also His judgment upon a generation that personally rejected His Son.

Verse 35 The Enduring Word

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

Jesus seems to comfort the disciples at this point in this most terrifying picture of the end. No matter what the national calamity might be, they must trust in the word of God that endures forever. Peter possibly reflected on the thought of this statement of Jesus when he wrote the following just a few years before Jerusalem's destruction: "*All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever*" (1 Pt 1:24,25).

It is doubtful that Peter fully understood this when Jesus first made the pronouncements of Matthew 24 in his presence. Nevertheless, he, as well as the other disciples at hand, would soon realize that they could not put their faith in any nation, even though it had been ordained by God some 1,400 years before.

The only thing that would permeate the destruction of all things would be the word of God. Eventually, the present heaven and earth would pass away (2 Pt 3:10,11). But the word of the Lord endures forever. Therefore, Jesus assumed that they would wholeheartedly trust in His promises regardless of all the calamity that was coming upon those who sought to establish an independent Jewish nation within Palestine.

Verse 36

Time For Destruction

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but My Father only."

"**That day**" is here a generic term as "**the Sabbath**" is in verse 20. In other words, this is the time of destruction. The indication is not in reference to a specific 24-hour day, but to **the time** when the destruction would occur. While on earth, and in His incarnate state, Jesus chose not to know this time. Neither did the angels know.

At the time Jesus was making these pronouncements, it was not necessary that either He or angels be aware of the actual time of the destruction. If He had known the exact year, then we assume that His disciples would have pressed Him for a date. But He knew that when men have a specific date for finalities, they wait until the day before in order to get themselves right with God. For this reason, Jesus made the statement that only the Father knew when these things would transpire about which He spoke. He would later say why He made the statement. Those who believe must be ready at all times.

We must also keep in mind that if Jesus gave a specific date, then He

would have nullified the power of the disciples' prayers that they were to utter so that the coming calamity would not happen in the winter or on a Sabbath. If a specific date was given by Jesus, then any prayer to change the date would have been futile. Or, Jesus would have been a false prophet in reference to the established date if the Father chose to answer the disciples' prayers, and thus change the date that Jesus had given during His earthly ministry.

Luke's account of Jesus' statement helps us to better understand the flow of the text in order to understand "that day" to refer to the context of the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke recorded,

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and **that day** come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **Watch therefore** (Lk 21:33-36).*

Those Jews who were consumed in the affairs of the world would certainly not believe in Jesus or His prophecy, let alone expect the coming judgment upon Jerusalem when many would lose all that they had. In

fact, Peter stated that they would be mocking this belief of Christians.

Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation (2 Pt 3:3,4).

Of course these scoffers had forgotten the flood of Noah's day. They had forgotten Sodom and Gomorrah. Regardless of their forgetfulness, however, God would bring this judgment upon national Israel. About five years before A.D. 70, the Holy Spirit inspired an entire book to be written that would remind the rich Sadducean Jews that their riches were corrupted (Read James).

The key word here is **watch**. Mark records more information that Jesus gave at this point in the discourse.

*Take heed, **watch** and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going on a journey, who left his house and gave authority to his bondservants and to each one his work. And he commanded the door keeper to **watch**. Therefore, you **watch, for you do not know when the master of the house comes, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the***

cock crow, or in the morning—lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch! (Mk 13:33-37).

Verses 37-39 Taking Of The Wicked

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will be the coming [presence] of the Son of Man. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until that day when Noah entered the ark. And they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. So also will be the coming [presence] of the Son of Man.”

The “coming” that Jesus is talking about—the termination of national Israel—will be **as the days of Noah**. Both the flood of Noah’s day and the destruction of Jerusalem were “comings” of the Lord in judgment **in time**. However, the final coming of Jesus in judgment at the end of time will be different. The flood and destruction of Jerusalem may be typical of the final coming. However, we must understand that nothing has ever happened in the history of man that will fully illustrate what will happen at the end of time. Therefore, all illustrations of the “end-of-time” judgment by “in-time” judgments must be

metaphorical.

The New Testament writers took that which was literal, and had actually happened in history, to illustrate that which will happen at the end of time. We must keep in mind, therefore, that these historical events in time that are metaphorically used to illustrate final judgment do not fully explain what will happen when Jesus comes again.

Jerusalem’s destruction would be as it was in the days of Noah (See Gn 7:6-23). God sent the flood because of the wickedness of man. *“Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gn 6:5). Such wickedness would be characteristic of the unbelieving Jews who crucified the Son of God. They were hardened to the message of the gospel of King Jesus, though they personally experienced the miraculous confirmation of God directly from heaven (See Jn 3:2). Men were more concerned about the material advantages of life than spiritual matters. The Pharisees consumed on their own lusts the financial help the children were to give to their parents (Mk 7:9-13). They loved money (Lk 16:14). The rich Sadducean Jews had *“lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury”* (See Js 5:1-6). They had cheated in the wages that were due to their laborers (Js 5:4). As it was in the days of Noah, so it was in the days of Is-

rael before A.D. 70.

In verses 37-40 Jesus is saying that people will be living in their own normal wicked and materialistic manner prior to “that day” of destruction. It was this way in the days of Noah. It would be the same before the destruction of national Israel. And, it will be the same at the end of time. Those who reject the message of the gospel see only those things of this world. They refuse to submit to the “coming of the Lord” in judgment.

Verses 40,41

Wicked Taken - Righteous Left

“Then will two men be in the field, the one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and the other left.”

Here is another similarity between the times of Noah and the destruction of Jerusalem. When the flood came, righteous Noah and his family entered the ark. The flood then came **and took away the wicked. Only the righteous were left safely in the ark.** So it would be in the destruction of Jerusalem. **The wicked would be taken and the righteous would be left.** Those who use this arrangement to refer to the final coming seek to reverse this order.

This is not, therefore, a context

for “rapture theology” that is so prevalent among theologians today. Jesus said, *“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.”* Those who propagate rapture theology **reverse** the illustration of Jesus. In their attempt to force this passage to have some reference to the end of time, they have twisted the order (See 2 Pt 3:15,16). We must keep in mind that Jesus’ use of the flood of Noah’s day to illustrate the events of the destruction of Jerusalem are to show that in the destruction *“the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Mt 13:43). The wicked unbelieving Jews would be taken. The righteous would be left.

At the end of time when Jesus comes, He will take the righteous from the earth (1 Th 4:17). In the context of Matthew 24, however, it is the wicked who are taken. For this reason, we must affirm that Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24 and not the final coming of Jesus.

Verse 42

Watch!

“Therefore, watch, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming.”

The term “**hour**” is here used with a generic meaning. It is not a specific 60-minute hour, as “**the day**”

of verse 36 was not a specific 24-hour solar day. Reference is to **a time** when all the events of Jesus' discourse would take place. Emphasis is on the fact that there would be a specific time in history when all this would happen, though the time will occur over a period of weeks and months.

The point is that those who believed in what Jesus was saying had to continually watch in order to avoid becoming caught up in the affairs of the world. These were not things for which one could prepare. They were things for which those who were living the gospel must be concerned lest they be caught up in the hysteria of the pleas of the nationalistic Jews.

The emphasis of Jesus on the encouragement to "watch" might be good advice for some today who seek to excite people into looking for the "signs of the times" in order to prepare for the final coming of the Lord. Since Jesus' exhortation was to always be prepared, then the coming in judgment on national Israel would not be a surprise on the part of the disciples, but an expectation. Since He gave the warnings, then those who believed in Him would expect that all His prophesied events would come to pass.

The saints did not need to know an exact hour when the carcass would be consumed. They just needed to know that it would happen when the

vultures showed up in Palestine. Jesus gave them all the dots to connect. Once they started to connect all the prophetic dots in the few years before A.D. 70, then they knew that the time had come.

Verses 43,44

The Unexpected Presence

*"But know this, that if the head of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, **you also be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him."*

In this context Jesus has given "generic signs" from which they should deduct the end of national Israel and the fall of Jerusalem. No specific details were given. No names were stated. No calendars were distributed to the disciples. He gave just enough information to generate "watching" on the part of those who believed what He said. Those who believed would need no more information.

After the establishment of the church in A.D. 30, the apostles evidently stayed in Jerusalem for as long as ten years. The reason for this was obvious. Jerusalem was where devoted and nationalistic Jews came to

offer sacrifices at the altar during the Passover/Pentecost feast. It was the prime opportunity to call through the gospel the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In A.D. 58 or 59 Paul made his last trip to Jerusalem in order to make a final plea to Jews who might obey the gospel (At 21). However, their vehement rejection of the gospel and attempted murder of Paul were evidence that at this time (A.D. 58,59) the radical nationalistic Jews were ready for the judgment of God. What Jesus had pronounced in Matthew 23:34-36 was ready to happen. The “**righteous blood**” of all the innocent prophets of God was about to be brought on this generation of defiant Jews.

It was a time when the beloved Israel was coming to a close because the Jews failed to understand that the nation of Israel was only God’s means to an end, but not the end in itself. So Jesus mourned over the nation that had preserved a segment of world society until the Son of God was incarnate in the flesh of the Messiah. It was a time when Jesus was sorrowful for God’s people.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not. Behold,

your house [temple] is left to you desolate (Mt 23:37,38).

In Jesus’ pronouncements of Matthew 24 He wanted to give the faithful adequate indications of when to stay away from Jerusalem and Judea. Jewish Christians must not become trapped in the “traditions of the fathers,” nor in the materialistic vanities of Jewish economics. It would be best that they sell “*their possessions and goods*” and divide them among all believers according to the needs of the people (At 2:45; see At 4:32-37). Residents of Jerusalem were going to lose their possessions anyway in the coming destruction. Why keep that which they would eventually lose? In some way, therefore, the resident Jewish Christians sensed that eventually they were going to lose all investments in national Israel. If not one stone would be left upon another in Jerusalem, then forty years before the event, it was best to sell it all and move on. “*And they sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as everyone had need*” (At 2:45). “*Many as were owners of land or houses sold them*” (At 4:34).

Verses 45-47 **Faithful And Wise Servants**

“*Who then is a faithful and wise*

bondsman whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them food at the proper time? Blessed is that bondsman whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will make him ruler over all his goods."

The faithful and wise servant understood the responsibility of his relationship to the master's household. So it is with those disciples who remained faithful and thus wisely understood their duties to serve the Lord. They were not diverted to the cares of this world, nor drawn away by the politics of the nationalistic Israelites. Their citizenship in heaven was stronger than their connection to the physical "seed of Abraham." Therefore, they took heed and watched for the coming judgment of the master of the household. They were always prepared for his coming in order that they not be caught unprepared.

Verses 48-51 The Evil Servant

"But if that evil bondsman will say in his heart, 'My master delays,' and begins to beat his fellow bondsmen, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that bondsman will come in a day when he is not looking for him and in an hour that he does not know. And he will

cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The **evil servant** will not be spiritually awakened by the imminent coming of the Lord in his lifetime. He puts this thought out of his mind and carries on with the ordinary things of life. In Jesus' personal conversation here with His disciples, He was emphasizing the fact that this **coming** of the Lord would happen "in this generation." He had said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation*" (Mt 23:36). "*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*" (Mt 16:28).

Jesus **was not** leading them to believe that the **final coming and end of the world** would be in their lifetime. The final coming of Jesus was not something about which they thought at the time.

The New Testament **does not** teach the imminent final return of Jesus. That is, the Holy Spirit did not inspire New Testament writers to write that the final coming of Jesus would happen in the lifetime of the first century disciples. However, **Jesus and the inspired writers did teach and write about the imminent coming of Jesus in time in judgment**

upon Jerusalem. It was this return for which Christians in those times were to be looking. This was the return about which James wrote, *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.... Establish your hearts, for the **coming of the Lord is at hand**”* (Js 5:7,8). Therefore, Jesus urged His immediate dis-

ciples to look for this coming. Those who did not heed the warnings of Matthew 24 would inevitably be deceived by the theology of the nationalistic recruiters, and consequently suffer in **weeping and gnashing of teeth** in the destruction of their prized city Jerusalem, the temple and nation.

Chapter 2

CONSUMMATION

2 Peter 3

The first letter Peter wrote was addressed to Jewish Christians of “*the Dispersion [of Jews] in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*” (1 Pt 1:1). There were many Jewish residents who lived in these five Roman provinces. Many of them were very faithful to Jewish nationalism. They were loyal to the Jewish cause to establish an independent state of Israel in Palestine that was free from Roman domination.

In the middle of the rising tension between Rome and Jewish nationalism, Peter wrote to those Jewish Christians who might be considering the call of the recruiting agents of Jewish nationalism who compelled all Jews to be faithful to their Jewish heritage. From the letter, however, there were those faithful Jewish brethren who refused to be recruited. The believing Jews consequently suffered from the mocking of the nationalistic recruiters.

Peter wrote his first letter between A.D. 63 and 65. He wrote the second letter between A.D. 65 and 67, just before Rome decided to terminate the Jewish nationalists efforts to establish an independent state in Palestine. In both letters he wrote to “*stir*

up your pure minds by way of reminder” (2 Pt 3:1).

In view of the fact that he was writing to Jews at the time when the Matthew 24 prophecy of Jesus was drawing near unto fulfillment, we would certainly be just to assume that Peter dwelt on this fulfillment, since the consummation of national Israel was near. The fact that Peter wrote to Jewish Christians near the end of national Israel compels us to consider the context of 2 Peter 3 in view of Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24. Peter wanted to stir the Jewish Christians’ minds to remember the things they had already been told concerning the end of Israel. This would certainly include the imminent coming of judgment that would occur in five or six years after the letter of 2 Peter was written.

We would assume that the metaphorical language of this chapter refers primarily to the destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70. Peter was writing to encourage both Jewish Christians and their unbelieving Jewish relatives and friends not to make their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast. The believing Jews could assume that they

were in the last days of Israel, and thus conclude that the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24 was near. Though the believing Jews could warn their Jewish unbelieving families, we assume that their warnings were met with a great deal of mocking and scoffing.

Since Peter was one of the four disciples to whom Jesus personally delivered the prophecy of Matthew 24 (Mk 13:3), we would assume that he recognized the signs of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. He, as well as all New Testament prophets, proclaimed the message of Matthew 24 throughout the Roman Empire. Friends and families of those who did not heed the warnings would be those Jews of the Empire who would join the resistance and make their way to Palestine. When they were slaughtered in the national calamity of A.D. 70, their friends and families back home would mourn their death (Mt 24:30).

As Jesus did in the prophecy of Matthew 24, in his first letter Peter alerted his readers of an impending end of "all things." Peter wrote, "*The end of all things is at hand*" (1 Pt 4:7). When Peter made this statement, it is certain that he had in mind the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of these things (Mt 24:1,2). James also wrote to Jewish Christians, but in general "*to the twelve tribes that are scattered*

abroad" (Js 1:1). James' warning was the same as Peter's: "*Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord [in judgment] is at hand*" (Js 5:8).

Both James and Peter were forewarning Jewish Christians that there was an imminent judgment of God in the air. The end was in sight. Since the letters of the two writers were specifically written to the Jews who were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, we could also assume that they were writing to warn Jewish Christians to stay away from Palestine. He would also urge them to warn their unbelieving friends not to give in to the appeals of the nationalistic Jews.

The Holy Spirit was not deceiving these inspired writers. They were not, therefore, deceiving the Jewish Christians to whom they wrote. They did not deceive their readers into believing that the "coming" and the "end" that were at hand referred to the final coming of Jesus and the end of the world. In view of the dates the two letters were written, and the historical destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it is difficult not to apply their warnings to the imminent termination of national Israel. The destruction was only three to five years away from the time of their writing. The sound of Roman armies was already in the air. "Rumors of wars" had already begun. The end of national Is-

rael was “at hand.”

Interpreters who do not fully appreciate the historical setting of the epistles of Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude often miss the theme of these books. It would not be reasonable to believe that these Jewish writers who wrote to Jewish audiences three to five years before the Jewish calamity of A.D. 70, would ignore the fulfillment of Jesus’ Matthew 24 prophecy. The fulfillment was near, and thus the Holy Spirit’s purpose was to prepare the Jewish recipients for God’s demonstration in time that He was finished with Israel. He finished His special Sinai covenant with the nation at the cross when the new covenant was implemented. He finished the animal blood sacrifices when His Son poured out His own blood on the cross. Now it was time to finish Israel’s physical heritage through the genocide of A.D. 70. Only when the old was finished would the true and new Israel of God shine forth in the kingdom of the Son.

It is not reasonable to believe that Peter, who personally sat at the feet of Jesus during the Matthew 24 discourse, bypassed the imminent fulfillment of Jesus’ profound prophecy in order to focus on something that would occur over two thousand years later. It is not reasonable to believe that James, Jude or Peter, who directed their letters primarily to Jew-

ish readers, ignored the most traumatic national calamity that would happen in the history of Israel.

With the above thoughts in mind, there is little room for dogmatism in interpreting 2 Peter 3 with reference to the end of time. We are not without valid historical proof that the primary focus of Peter in 2 Peter 3 was on the end of Israel. We must, therefore, first consider this text in the historical context of the first recipients of the letter. There are certainly end-of-time illustrations in the metaphors that Peter used. But we must keep in mind that the recipients of this letter were in the midst of great social turmoil. Nationalistic Jews throughout the Roman empire were causing no little disturbance among the Jews, as well as the Roman government. Rome simply came to the decision that enough was enough.

Verse 1 The Second Letter

This is now, beloved, the second letter I write to you in which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder
...

Peter stated one specific reason for writing. It was to remind his Jewish brethren of things they had already been taught. We would assume, therefore, that the content of this chapter

had already been taught to Christians before it was written in this inspired letter. This leads us to believe that the early apostles and prophets did teach the subject of Matthew 24 when they went throughout the Roman Empire with the gospel messiahship of Jesus. The subject of Jesus' prophecy had direct relevance to the lives of Jewish Christians. Therefore, we would correctly conclude that what Jesus had said was the subject of many midnight discussions among Jewish Christians.

In the first letter Peter had already mentioned the impending end of all things (1 Pt 4:7). He now goes into graphic detail. We conclude, therefore, that this subject was not new to the readers. They had already been taught the content of Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24. The earliest gospel record, Mark, had already been circulated among Christians with the record of Jesus' prophecy (See Mk 13). It is even probable that Luke's record had also been circulated among the churches (See Lk 21). Therefore, we can assume that the early Christians had already been taught the material of Matthew 24 concerning the end of national Israel. It was now time for Peter to say some final words on the matter at a time when the rumors of war were circulating throughout the Roman Empire. Since the time of the end was near, Peter wanted to reas-

sure his Jewish brethren that it was always in the plan of God to bring Israel to a close after He had sent His Son into the world.

Verse 2

Remember The Warnings

... so that you may be mindful of the words that were spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through us your apostles.

The church was built upon the inspired foundation of the message of the gospel that was preached by the apostles and prophets (Ep 2:20). It was so founded upon the apostles and New Testament prophets because God, through them, "*revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets*" the mystery of the gospel (Ep 3:5). The church was not built on the messengers who delivered the message of the gospel, but upon the gospel itself. "*For no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Co 3:11).

It could be argued that Peter here refers to the Old Testament prophets. However, in the chapter he gives credit to the Old Testament prophets for writing concerning the mystery of the gospel, but the gospel was revealed through Jesus, His apostles and prophets.

... of this salvation they [Old Testament prophets] have inquired and **searched diligently** ... searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating ... to them it [the gospel] was revealed that, **not to themselves, but to us**” (1 Pt 1:10-13).

The full revelation of the mystery came only through the New Testament apostles and prophets. It came to the Old Testament prophets through inspired prophecy, which prophecy they did not completely understand. For this reason, it is best to affirm that Peter in the context of 2 Peter 3:2 was referring to the inspired New Testament speakers and writers, not the Old Testament prophets who only prophesied of the mystery (See Ep 3:3-5).

One point is clear regarding the prophecies concerning the end of national Israel. Both the Old and New Testament prophets proclaimed the end. Both Isaiah (Is 10:20-23) and Daniel (Dn 9:24-27) spoke of the end of Israel after God had accomplished His purpose for calling the people unto a covenant relationship. In those end of the days of Israel, the New Testament prophets (evangelists) went forth calling Israel by faith to come out of national Israel, for the end was near.

Verse 3 Scoffers In The Last Days

Knowing this first, that scoffers will come in the last days, walking after their own lusts ...

Peter took his readers through a chronology of both biblical teaching and historical events. His readers must remember that it was previously spoken that **scoffers** would come in the **last days**. The presence of the “scoffers” was a specific signal that they were in the last days.

Those who ridiculed the declaration that Jesus was the Messiah refused to believe the message of the early Christians. In addition to being scoffed at because of their preaching of the gospel, the early disciples were also scoffed because they proclaimed Jesus’s prophecy concerning the end of national Israel. The unbelieving nationalistic Jews vehemently rejected the Christians’ belief that the “*end of all things is at hand*” (1 Pt 4:7). They mocked Christians for believing such a thing.

Paul’s second letter to Timothy around A.D. 67 contains a similar warning. “*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come*” (2 Tm 3:1; see also 1 Tm 4:1-3; 2 Tm 4:3-5). The existence of the scoffers and mockers was evidence that the disciples were in the perilous times of the last days of national Israel.

It would be superfluous to assume that reference here is to the end

of time. Scoffers and mockers of Christians have always been present since the first century. However, in the historical context of the early Christians, the Holy Spirit meant for Christians to conclude that they were living in the last days of national Israel because scoffers and mockers ridiculed them for teaching the specific message that Israel would come to an end. Even today there are those who scoff and mock at those who teach that it is not in the eternal plan of God to establish again a nationalistic state of Israel in the land of Palestine.

Therefore, we see no reason to skip over two thousand years in order to apply the preceding warnings, and the information that follows in this chapter, to the end of the world. This is especially true in view of the fact that the “scoffers” and “perilous times” were present and occurring in the immediate environment of both Paul and Peter. It was the last days of national Israel. Its consummation was at hand.

We must keep in mind that the term “last days” does not refer to long periods of time. The term itself defines the meaning. Reference is to the **last** days of a dispensation of time. In this sense, therefore, Peter was not discussing the “Christian age” as the last days. If he had, then these “last days” would now have lasted more

than two thousand years. In the context of the first century Christians, He was discussing the finality of a dispensation, the Jewish dispensation.

The scoffers would **walk according to their own lusts**. Paul revealed that they would be “*lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers*” (2 Tm 3:2-5). Jude said they would be “*walking after their own ungodly lusts*” (Jd 18).

Paul, Jude, Peter and James all recorded the nature of those who would ignore the last days of Israel and scoff at those who would proclaim the imminent judgment of God. Such is the nature of unbelieving people who refuse to have the knowledge of God in their minds. They are not simply indifferent to the views of the Christian, they are antagonistic to them.

Such is also the nature of the religious materialist. He has economically padded his or her environment with a religion that justifies the consumption of things upon one’s own lust (Js 4:3). Those who are so involved in the world refuse to accept the fact that their material security will eventually be consumed in a fire that will terminate this world.

Verse 4

Mockers Of The Coming

... and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fa-

thers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.

These scoffers would ridicule the message of Christians who believed Jesus' pronouncements against Jerusalem and the temple. The fact that they mocked the teaching of the coming in judgment upon Israel is evidence that Christians had been proclaiming to others their belief of Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24.

In the few years before the time Peter wrote, Jewish radicalism was rife throughout the Roman Empire. We can only imagine how much mockery and ridicule faithful Jewish Christians encountered as they related to unbelieving Jewish audiences that national Israel was coming to an end. This message was totally contrary to the efforts of the nationalistic Jews who were recruiting for the establishment of an independent state that was free from Roman oppression.

Jesus had foretold the nature of those who would reject the impending judgment: *"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"* (Mt 24:38). These scoffers about whom Peter wrote had forgotten past judgments of God **in time** as the flood of Noah's day, Sodom and Gomorrah, and even Jerusalem itself

in the days of the Babylonian conquest of 586 B.C.

Things **had not** continued as they were since the days of creation. God had come in judgment in time upon Israel at different times throughout their history, especially through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. All such judgments were to remind the Israelites of a future coming in judgment, which judgment was coming in only a few years after Peter wrote these words. Nevertheless, those who rejected the prophecy of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel would not take heed to the coming judgment that God would bring upon Israel. *"They willfully forget"* that the earth that existed during the days of Noah *"was destroyed, being overflowed with water"* (2 Pt 3:4,5).

As they went forth throughout the Roman Empire, the disciples proclaimed the coming ("presence") of the Lord in judgment on Israel. The unbelieving Jews never believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and thus they scoffed at Christians for saying that He would be manifested through His coming in judgment on national Israel. These scoffers were mocking the proclamation of the disciples concerning God's judgment on Israel that was proclaimed by Jesus whom they believed was a false messiah.

Jesus, however, had made a **promise**: *"For as the lightning comes*

from the east and flashes to the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Mt 24:27). For the persecuted Christians who believed Jesus’ promise, the fulfillment of the promise would be their worldwide vindication. Jesus would be vindicated as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

In a secondary sense, deliverance from the confines of the material world, and the persecution by the wicked at the **end of time**, will also be a fulfillment of one of Jesus’ promises (See Jn 14:3; 1 Th 4:13-17). In general, therefore, we look forward to a time of deliverance from the harshness that the world delivers to the Christian’s spirit (See 2 Pt 3:12,13). We look forward to a time when this world passes away. We look for the new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness (2 Pt 3:13).

Verses 5,6 Example Of The Flood

For this they willfully forget, that by the word of God the heavens were of old and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, through which the world that then existed was destroyed, being overflowed with water.

These scoffers of the Christian’s hopes willfully forget that God once

destroyed humanity from off the face of the earth by a global flood (Gn 6-8). Only Noah and his faithful family were spared. In referring to the prophet Enoch, Jude also referred to these “*mockers in the **last times** [before the flood] who would walk according to their own lusts*” (Jd 18; see 2 Tm 3:1-5). In its original context, Enoch’s declaration was made in expectation of the flood of Noah’s day. While preparing the ark, Noah preached a message of worldwide destruction, which message was mocked by those of his generation. The same mockery of those who proclaimed the end of Israel prevailed throughout the Roman Empire at the time Peter wrote. The presence of the mockers in the society of both Peter and Enoch’s immediate readers indicated that both men lived in the **last times** of their respective generations.

In the years previous to the flood of Noah’s day, Enoch preached about ungodly characters in Noah’s generation who mocked Noah because of what he preached. Therefore, in the flood God came ...

... to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds that they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jd 14,15).

This is where we would have no problem in keeping Enoch's declaration, and Peter's quotation of Enoch through Jude, in the historical context of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of national Israel. Jude's quotation of Enoch's prophecy is significant. Enoch spoke of the judgment of mockers in Noah's day. The judgment that came upon Noah's generation was destruction by flood waters. Jude used this "coming in judgment" in Noah's day to illustrate the coming in judgment upon Jerusalem in his own day. When judgment came, it would also come upon those who mocked the Jewish Christians.

We would be in the historical context of 2 Peter 3 to use **in-time** judgments of God in the past as the flood and Jerusalem's destruction to give warnings of the final coming in judgment at the end of time. By the time Peter concluded this chapter, he used metaphorical language in order to reveal judgment events. His immediate readers were going to experience an **in-time** illustration of the final judgment at the **end of time**.

Peter emphasized the fact that God can cause catastrophic judgment. The world that existed before the flood was destroyed by the flood. This passage teaches that more than the destruction of humanity by the flood occurred at the time of the flood.

Peter uses the Greek word

kataklustheis that means "to overthrow with water." The earth before the flood was "*standing out of water and in the water*" (See Gn 1:7-10). It was first formed a watery mass (Gn 1:1-3). God then separated the water from the land in order to produce dry land. There were the "waters" or canopy of firmament above and the watery mist that came up from the earth to water vegetation (Gn 2:6).

However, God overthrew the world that existed before the flood with the water of the flood. The physical world that we now experience is far different from the physical appearance of the surface of the earth that existed before the flood. The flood radically changed the surface of the earth. This present earth is also destined for another radical change in the future. We cannot know at this time what will be in the new heavens and earth. But we do know that there will be a radical change in order to produce a dwelling place for us throughout eternity.

Peter's point is clear. Noah's flood was not a local washout that resulted from a local rainstorm. It was global (Gn 7:11,19). The God who created the world can cause such global judgments. And since He can, then He can certainly terminate local elements of persecution and world empires of Peter's present time and ours. He can even terminate the

physical world that He created out of nothing. Peter wants to encourage the faithful that the God they serve is not a limited God who has been created after the image of man. He is the God who can exist apart from the mind of man. Therefore, we must recall the words of the psalmist:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling (Ps 46:1-3).

Verse 7 Preserved For Fire

But the heavens and the earth that are now, are reserved by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

The world that existed before Noah perished by water. Peter now compares that world with the one that now is, which is **stored up** for destruction by **fire**. For this reason, we cannot help but think that the Holy Spirit wants us and his readers to look beyond the historical context of the coming consummation of national Israel. At least we must assume that

there are end-of-time references in the New Testament that are metaphorical illustrations of that which is to come. However, we must keep in mind that the intensity of Jewish nationalism was so strong before the destruction of A.D. 70 that the end of Israel was as the end of the world for the Jews. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple were metaphorical of the end of time.

When Rome terminated the hopes of the Jewish nationalists, it was as if the Jews' world came crashing down. Since most of us are not Jews, and especially Jews who lived in that era, it is quite difficult for us to understand what was going through the minds of the disheartened Jews after A.D. 70. Decades of Jewish nationalism were crushed when Jerusalem and the temple were eventually levelled. Hope of an independent state of Israel was totally smashed as hundreds of thousands of nationalistic Jews were slaughtered in Rome's termination of Jewish nationalism.

In like manner, Noah's world **physically** perished with all its inhabitants. If we look into the future, we must conclude that this present world will also **physically** perish. However, we caution ourselves not to make too close a comparison between any in-time termination with that which will come. Nevertheless, we must understand that the earth's surface as Noah

knew it before the flood, perished. It was overthrown by water. Also, the population of the world that existed before the flood perished from off the face of the earth. In other words, the earth was refaced and repopulated. The wicked were annihilated from the earth. All this reminds us of what happened when hundreds of thousands of Jews perished in A.D. 70. It may be that Peter here still has in mind the imminent destruction and genocide that would happen in only a few years after he wrote these words.

We must keep in mind that God looks at history as we would view a photograph. He can see history in an instant. Thus in His revelation to us, He views all history on earth from beginning to end. This is especially true in Old Testament prophecy, as well as, New Testament prophecy of the things that are to come. God sees the time the prophecy is made simultaneously with the time when the prophecy is fulfilled.

God sees the making of the prophecy and the fulfillment at the same time. In this way, therefore, He sees in-time judgments as illustrations of the final judgment. He seeks to inform us of end-of-time finalities by often mixing in-time judgments with end-of-time judgments. Such was the case in Matthew 24 and 25. This is probably the case in this context.

A different “heavens and earth”

existed after the flood than before the flood of Noah’s day. However, this present heavens and earth as we now experience them are **reserved** for “destruction” by **fire** in the last day of God’s final judgment of **perdition**, or destruction (See 2 Pt 3:10-12). Disobedient angels have been reserved for the destruction of the last day (2 Pt 2:4; Jd 6). Peter reassured his readers that God knows how “to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pt 2:9). Therefore, everything is now in reservation or preservation for the judgment of the last day.

The ungodly of Peter’s readers were being “reserved” for destruction in the fall of Jerusalem. However, Peter would certainly have in mind all the ungodly, whether living or dead, who are presently reserved for judgment for the destruction of the last day (See 2 Th 1:7-9). The significance is that God judges in time, as well as at the end of time.

Verse 8 Insignificance Of Time

But, beloved, do not be ignorant of this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

If we were to create a god after our own imagination, then we would

be tempted to put time restrictions on this god. Every religion on the face of the earth has a concept of an eternal god or spirit. Everyone simply assumes that there need be no proof that God is without end in His existence. Eternality is the definition of the existence of God.

Therefore, Christians must not **forget** that God is timeless. He is not bound to determine the occurrence of events by time. Peter's illustration of the timelessness of God brings to mind Psalm 90:4: "*For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past.*" When God makes a promise, man is confined to wait as time passes until the fulfillment of that promise. However, from the viewpoint of an eternal God, when the promise is made it is as if it is already fulfilled. There is no "waiting" with God, for God is not confined to time.

Peter's point here is that because we are limited to consider time between promise and fulfillment, we must not lead ourselves to believe that God either thinks or behaves as men. What God has promised, He will do. What we might consider to be slowness on the part of God to fulfill His promise does not confine God to feel the same as we do concerning time.

Peter's point in his statement in reference to God is to encourage the discouraged. Regardless of the mockery and scoffing, they must be patient.

God is about to deliver the faithful from their persecutors. James said the same thing in reference to the finality of the Jewish mockery that would be taken away with the consummation of national Israel. "*Be patient, brethren, until the coming [presence] of the Lord*" (Js 5:7). James continued, "*Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near*" (Js 5:8). The presence (coming) of the Lord meant that judgment was upon the generation of Peter and James.

Verse 9 Timeless Patience Of God

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness. But He is longsuffering toward you, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Though this principle is relevant throughout history, in the historical context in which it was written we must interpret the statement in reference to the unbelieving Jews. From Pentecost to consummation in A.D. 70, God gave the unbelieving Jews forty years to accept His Son. He was extremely patient with those, who upon first contact with the message of the gospel, did not accept His Son as the Messiah.

Paul expressed this same concern

over the salvation of his fellow Jews. “*For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*” (Rm 9:3). If Paul felt this way about his fellow Jews, then we can only imagine how God felt because He had preserved the heritage of faith since the days of Abraham, almost two thousand years. So until the fullness of the Gentile opportunity was completed, God was patient with the Jews (See Rm 11:11,12). Therefore, in the preceding statement, God is assuming that those who were persecuted by their fellow Jews should also be patient. The judgment of the mockers was near. Relief was coming. The persecuted must be patient until God unleashed judgment.

God is not **slow** (“slack”, KJV) to bring about His promise. He does not desire that men **perish**. In this historical context, perish is a reference to the genocide that was coming in A.D. 70. The Greek word here for “perish” is *apollumi*. It means “to loose away,” or “to destroy.” God does not want people to be banished to destruction in the great judgment that will come upon all those who do not obey the gospel, either in time in reference to Israel, or at the end of time in reference to ourselves (See 2 Th 1:7-9).

God desires that people **repent**. He desires that each person responds

to the gospel of His Son’s atoning sacrifice (See Ez 18:32; Jn 3:17; At 17:30; 1 Tm 2:4; Hb 2:9). Because God is so patient, we can conclude that we do not serve a mean God. We do not seek a God who seeks to eternally destroy man from His presence. We serve a patient God who is timeless in His desire that people turn to Him through obedience to the gospel.

Verse 10

The Day Of The Lord

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat. The earth also and the works that are therein will be burned up.

The “day of the Lord” is a common Old Testament reference to the time of God’s judgment in time. In Old Testament contexts, reference was to judgments **in time** on the enemies of Israel (Is 2:12; 17:6-9; 19:18:23,24; Ez 30:1-4), and also Israel herself (Jr 4:13; Am 5:18-20). It is a day of judgment on the rebellious in order to deliver the righteous (See Jr 46:10; Ez 30:3; Jl 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; MI 4:1,2).

Since the figure of the “day of the Lord” comes from in-time judgments in the Old Testament, then in writing to the Jews, Peter assumed

that his readers would correctly understand what he was saying. The “day of the Lord” would be an event of judgment that would occur in time, not something that would happen at the end of time.

Since the context of 2 Peter 3 is to God’s judgment on Jerusalem, then the “day of the Lord” would be the same as “that day” about which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:36. It would be a great day of calamity for national Israel. In the Old Testament, the term “day” referred to God’s judgment upon nations (See Is 13:6-9; 28:5; Ez 30:3; Jl 1:15,21). In the historical context in which Peter wrote, reference was to the day of judgment upon Israel.

Those to whom Peter wrote were Jews who knew their Old Testament history. They knew, therefore, that when Peter brought up the subject of the “day of the Lord” that there was national calamity coming. The termination of national Israel in A.D. 70 was another “day” of God’s judgments on Israel for her rejection of His word (See Is 2,3; Hs 4:3; Am 3:2; MI 3:1-5; Ep 3:12).

In reference to the times before the captivities, Hosea’s prophecy to Israel then was happening again. Their judgment was justified, not simply because the Jew’s had rejected the word of God, but because they had rejected His Word who became flesh

in our world. So Hosea’s prophecy was appropriate for the times:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of My Son], I will also reject you so that you will be no [nation of] priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children (Hs 4:6).

Not only was Israel brought to a close because of their rejection of the Son of God, they were rejected because they became socially dysfunctional. The prophecy of Malachi, the last prophet of Israel, is significant. In Malachi 3:5, one of the reasons why the “day of the Lord” would come upon Israel would be to bring judgment on those “*who exploit wage earners, the widow and the fatherless.*” It was not a coincidence that James, in writing specifically to the rich Sadducean elite of Israel, that he would mention these social sins of the time that led up to the “day of the Lord.” James explained that at least “*undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of orphans and widows*” (Js 1:27). The social dysfunction of the rich preceding A.D. 70 revealed that they had lost the heart of God.

In reference to business practices, James also identified another

group upon whom judgment was coming in their “day of the Lord.” These greedy businessmen were guilty of exploiting their laborers. *“Behold, the wages of the laborers who have mowed down your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out against you”* (Js 5:4).

The very sins that were prophesied to be the reason for God coming in judgment upon Israel were being committed in the middle 60s as the Roman army was making its way to Palestine to squash the insurrection movement.

Israel’s day of judgment would come as a **thief** to those who had no concern for the fulfillment of God’s promises of judgment (See 1 Th 5:1-3). It would come as a thief to those who allowed the possessions of this world to possess them. Jesus said that disobedient Jews would be *“eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”* just as those who were destroyed by the flood of Noah’s day (Mt 24:38).

To unbelievers, God’s judgments always come as a thief in the night. They are not expecting His judgment simply because they have no respect for the word of God. They carry on with life as usual. When God’s judgment does come, then to them it is as a thief coming in the night to take away that which they possess.

God’s judgment on the unbeliev-

ing materialist, as in this passage and others, is also as a thief. The materialist’s mind is on things of this world. He is possessed by possessions, and controlled by the carnal. However, when the end comes, both in Jerusalem’s destruction and the world’s destruction, that which the materialist so coveted will be taken from him. As a thief takes away material possessions, so the Lord in judgment takes away that which diverts the minds of those who are not looking for His coming.

The last thing the materialist wants is for a thief to come and take away his possessions. The last theology he wants to believe is a teaching that the things for which he has given so much time and attention will ultimately be destroyed.

To the believer, however, the Lord’s coming in judgment is not as a thief. Believers are expecting His coming. They are *“looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God”* (2 Pt 3:12). Both Jesus and Peter’s exhortation are parallel. They are saying that believers must not get caught up in the material things of life, and thus, forget that God has made a promise both to deliver the righteous from the world, as well as, to deliver them from the worries of possessions. The righteous, therefore, must set their *“minds on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Cl 3:2). This

helps us to understand better the tremendous thought behind warnings as John's in 1 John 2:15: *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him."*

If we understand that the immediate context of 2 Peter 3 refers to the imminent consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70, then we would view this **in-time** judgment to in some way be a metaphorical illustration of the final coming in judgment at the **end of time**. We can use the destruction of Jerusalem metaphorically to illustrate that which is coming at the end of time, understanding that there is no in-time judgment that would literally and accurately portray what will happen when Jesus comes again. The final coming of the Lord and destruction will be unique. It will be different than any coming of the Lord or destruction by the Lord in history.

We commonly use these "coming" and "destruction" passages in the Bible to refer to the **end-of-time** destruction of this present world when Jesus comes again. However, whether reference in this context is directly to Jerusalem's destruction or the earth's destruction, we must recognize that metaphorical figures are being used by Peter.

There are no words in the human language that would adequately define that which has never happened

in human experience. Since the final coming and termination of this present heavens and earth has not yet occurred in human history, then we suppose that Peter has no words in his dictionary to adequately explain things concerning an end-of-time event. We would, therefore, caution ourselves in placing literal meanings on the words that here used by the Holy Spirit to explain something for which there are no earthly experiences. Nothing that has happened in history will fully illustrate that which is coming.

Though the words in this context refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, they could be used in a metaphorical sense in reference to all that now exists. The elements of Jerusalem did not melt. The physical stones of the city did not burn out of existence. We must remember that in a metaphor that is used in prophecy, God wants us to look beyond the metaphor to something that is greater, and often spiritual. In this case, the destruction at the end of time will be greater and more horrifying than either the flood of Noah's day or the destruction of national Israel.

It is possible that as Jesus progressed from in-time judgment to end-of-time judgment in Matthew 24 and 25, Peter moves from talking about a specific **in-time judgment** on Israel to a general **end-of-time judgment**

on all. Assuming that this is true, then notice carefully some of the following words and phrases the Spirit used to explain the day of the Lord:

1. *Pass away:* The traditional interpretation of what Peter here stated is usually in reference to the final coming and consummation of all things at the end of time. However, if we assume that Peter remembered what Jesus said on these matters, then the context would initially apply to the consummation of national Israel.

As Jesus in the discourse of Matthew 24, Peter used apocalyptic symbols here to reveal the consummation of national Israel that was coming within five or six years after he wrote these words. As a good Jewish writer, his apocalyptic metaphors were taken from the Old Testament where God used the fall of terrestrial bodies to symbolize the end of kingdoms **in time** (See Is 13:6-18; 24:23; 34:4; Jr 4:23,24; Ez 32:7,8; Dn 8:10; Jl 2:30-32). In particular in the historical context of Isaiah and Jeremiah, both prophets had in mind the imminent captivities that were coming upon the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. Their dwelling in the land was terminated in the captivities. God shook them to the point that they were shaken out of the land of promise.

After the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, the prophet Haggai

took the thinking of the remnant of Israel that had returned from captivity to about five centuries into the future. He looked into the future of Israel and stated the words of the Lord,

Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, and sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations (Hg 2:6,7).

Not only Israel would be shaken again in the future, but many other nations. Reference was to God's proxy of the Roman Empire that conquered nations throughout the Middle East, as well as nations in Europe and Africa. Those nations were shaken as they were brought under the dominance of the Roman Empire. However, the Empire itself would eventually be shaken. John, in Revelation, revealed the shaking of the Roman Empire.

While writing in the middle 60s, the Hebrew writer reminded his Jewish readers that God was going to fulfill the prophecy of Haggai.

*He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this "Yet once more," indicates the **removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things that cannot be shaken** [the gospel] **may remain.*** (Hb 12:26,27).

In the historical context in which Peter wrote in order to encourage his fellow Jews throughout the Roman Empire, he did not want them to think that the consummation of national Israel was something unexpected. They needed to read their Old Testaments and understand that what was about to happen was always in the plan of God. Isaiah, Daniel and Haggai had revealed centuries before that there would be another shaking of nations that would consummate their existence. In reference to Israel, their national “shaking” was to happen in only a few years.

Nevertheless, and in reference to the end of time, there will be another shaking. The present heavens and earth as we now know them will pass away. We do not know what is next after the final coming of Jesus, but we do know that all the heavens, moon and stars of earthly governments will be shaken in order to pass away. In the “shaking” that is to come, something that is suitable for the dwelling of the bride of Christ will come into existence (See Rv 21:1,2).

2. Great noise: Consider this statement in reference to the end of the world. Noise occurs with the presence of atmosphere. Atmosphere is something of this world. At the end, there will be noise of a sudden explosion or implosion. Certainly, Peter’s meaning is that as great noises both

startle and make aware, the termination of that which now is will not be a hidden or secret event. The words Peter used to alert his readers were certainly meant to encourage the believers, but at the same time terrify the unbelievers.

3. Elements will melt and burn up: We can continue to use the destruction of Jerusalem as a metaphor of the end of time. However, we would do so with great caution. Peter’s reference is to those things that now exist. What is perceived through the senses by the physical eyes of man and experienced in daily life will be “melted.” At least melted is a metaphor to change. That which already exists is transformed (melted) into something different.

But if we use a literal understanding on the metaphor “burned up,” then we will have some problems. In our dictionary, “melted” does not mean annihilation. “Burned up” does not mean annihilation. “Burned up” simply means that what is physical has changed to another state of existence. “Melted” symbolizes that something remains, but is transformed (changed) into something different.

4. Fervent heat: No known fire is able to destroy the elements of the present material world. Intense heat, according to the second law of thermodynamics, can destroy the usefulness of matter. A match can be

“burned up,” but there still remains the charcoal. The heat of the match has escaped into space where it cannot be recovered. The charcoal cannot be burned again. In a sense, therefore, it has “burned up,” but something still exists. Therefore, that which initially existed (the match) has only been transformed into something different.

So what is the “fervent heat” about which Peter illustrated the end-of-time destruction? It is easy to understand what he would be saying if reference is to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The nationalism of the Jews was “burned up.” The Jews did not go out of existence. Only their aspirations to establish an independent state of Israel within Palestine was “burned up.”

We must suppose that the words Peter used were metaphorical, as they are used in the historical context of national Israel. We could apply them to the end of the world if we would take his statements out of their historical context. In this case, the metaphor illustrates what is greater than the metaphor itself. Therefore, the “fervent heat” would be greater than the definition of the words themselves as we understand them. Peter was simply trying to explain to his readers that God has a method of destruction that will get the job done. We must not worry ourselves about the

details.

5. Burned up: As literal fire consumes the usefulness of that which exists, then we assume that in the future the aspirations of a national Israel were burned in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. That which was “burned up” was the physical temple and the aspirations of nationalistic Jews. That which will be “burned up” in the future will be the physical world and the ungodly (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

Peter identified the earth as that which will eventually be consumed. That which will consume will be “fire,” whatever is meant by this metaphor. At least in our understanding, “fire” has a very powerful consuming affect on that which exists. We would assume that this metaphor represents something greater than the literal fire we experience. The meaning is certainly that things will be changed or terminated. Regardless of our lack of understanding of the meaning of the metaphor, we all can agree that fire consumes, and thus both in the destruction of Jerusalem and the earth at the end of time, something will be consumed.

We use earthly efforts and social maneuvers to generate works that manifest our accomplishments. However, Peter says these **works** will also be terminated. All those precious ac-

accomplishments over which we have boasted with pride will be consumed in the great fire to come. All the time we spent on such great works will profit nothing toward that which will exist in eternity. Peter wanted his immediate readers to understand that all the efforts that the Jewish leadership placed in preserving their own religion (Judaism) and nationalistic pride would be consumed in the fires that would burn Jerusalem and the temple to the ground. The burning of the capital (Jerusalem) symbolized the consumption of the state of Israel. The burning of the temple symbolized God's consumption of the Jews' religion.

We can conclude that at least some of Peter's real message here is to the religious materialist who put so much time and concern in the material things and accomplishments of his religion. This was the judgment that James identified among the rich Sadducean Jews prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. After all, it was the religious materialists in the context who were scoffing at Christians with the words, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

We can easily connect Peter's message to the same group of materialistic Sadducean Jews about whom James wrote in the following words,

Come now, you rich, weep and howl

for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.... You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter (Js 5:1-3,5).

Verse 11

Holy Conduct And Godliness

Since all these things will be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness

Whether Peter in this statement is discussing the destruction of Jerusalem or the final coming, or both, the point is the same. Since that which we place so much emphasis on and time in is going to be done away, then how should believers conduct their lives? On what should they focus in life (See Cl 3:1,2)? Peter mentions two important points for those who recognize the termination of what presently exists:

1. Holy conduct: "Holy" is from the word that means "to separate." In living the gospel, the believers' conduct should be as one separated or detached from what will be terminated.

In other words, Christians must not become attached to the material world that in verse 10 will have its end in the consuming fire. Their minds must be on things above, things that will permeate the consummation of all earthly things (Cl 3:2).

2. *Godliness:* In maintaining a “detached spirit” from the material things of this world, the Christian must seek after God’s ways. He must conduct his or her life as God would direct. Gospel living assumes that one live after the spirit of the One who gave up heaven in order to come into this world. The incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God should motivate incarnational living on our part. We must live the sacrificial life as the Son of God gave up heaven in order to give to us life (See Ph 2:5-9).

Peter’s lesson is clear. **The more we understand the temporary existence of this world, the more we will focus our attention on that which will last beyond the final consummation of all things.**

The same lesson would apply to those Jewish Christians who were still trusting in the security of national Israel. Since Peter’s words are directed to them, then they must trust only in that which will permeate the ashes of Jerusalem and the temple. What will last beyond A.D. 70 would be Jesus and His gospel.

There were possibly too many

Jewish Christians in Peter’s audience who still gave some allegiance to the hope that national Israel would someday be restored to independent glory in the promise land. Nevertheless, God, in just a few years from Peter’s writing, would erase from the earth the physical objects of their pride and the spirit of their nationalistic religiosity. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would help Jewish Christians to take the focus of their minds off their past and turn to the future with the Son of God as their guiding light.

The reader might be interested in the pictorial inscriptions on the Arch of Titus in Rome. All the instruments and utensil of the temple are pictured being carried back to Rome when Titus made his triumphal entry into the city after the A.D. 70 war. Nothing was left in Jerusalem. All those things in which nationalistic Jews took pride in reference to Judaism were either destroyed or carried away by the Roman army.

Verse 12

Looking For God’s Judgment

... looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire, will be dissolved and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

Since that which exists will be “burned up,” then Peter asks a question that he knows his readers will answer correctly. Christians are **looking for** the day of the Lord because it will be a day of deliverance from the confines of this present world and the persecution in this environment. Therefore, we are “*eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Co 1:7).

Paul compared the agony of suffering in this present environment with the glory of that which is to come: “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with that glory which will be revealed to us*” (Rm 8:18). In other words, the glory that will be rewarded to the Christian will far outweigh the most intense suffering we might incur in this life.

Paul wrote, “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2 Co 4:17). Paul’s argument is that our affliction is only momentary in comparison to the eternity of the glory to come. Therefore, “*we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen*” (2 Co 4:18).

This is precisely Peter’s point in 2 Peter 3:12. We look forward to the passing of the things that are seen in order to enter the glory of that which

is presently not seen. In the immediate context of his statement, the recipients of his letter needed to look beyond A.D. 70, though they had no idea of what was about to transpire. But after the calamity, the Holy Spirit knew that they would understand. When in times of persecution, therefore, Christians must look beyond the immediate present. Because we know that our suffering is confined to this world, we can do as James stated: “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials*” (Js 1:2).

Christians who are spiritually detached from what will pass away will be anxiously **hastening** the coming of the glory that is eternal. That which is eternal will arrive only when that which is temporary is dissolved. Therefore, the Christian seeks the termination of this world in order to encounter and partake of the heavenly. For this reason, both Paul and John looked for the coming of the Lord (See 1 Co 16:22; Rv 22:20).

Verse 13

New Heavens And A New Earth

But we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The **promise** refers to a new social environment of dwelling. In the Old Testament era, Isaiah looked for-

ward to a “new heavens and a new earth” (Is 65:17; 66:22). The fulfillment of this prophecy was realized in the establishment of a spiritual kingdom reign of Jesus that is within the hearts of people (Lk 17:20,21). Those within the universal kingdom reign of Jesus who submit to King Jesus in obedience to the gospel, become His body, the church. When the will of the Father is done on earth in the hearts of the obedient as it is done in heaven, then kingdom reign is established on earth in the hearts of men (See Mt 6:10; Lk 17:20,21). Those who submit to the kingdom reign of Jesus have their names enrolled in heaven (Ph 4:3). Paul wrote, “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ph 3:20). The new heavens and earth for those who are living the gospel is presently in the body of Christ. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. But Peter possibly refers to another new heavens and earth that is yet to come.

As opposed to the kingdom relationship that Israel had with the Father, Christians now enjoy a “new heavens and earth” with Jesus as He reigns in our hearts. The church is a spiritual dwelling, a spiritual environment on earth where the kingdom reign of Jesus is seen in the hearts of men by their gospel living (See Rm

5:17). This was the thought that Jesus tried to communicate to Pilate when he said, “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (Jn 18:36).

In other words, there is no such thing as nationalism in reference to the kingdom of Jesus. The church is the body of obedient subjects of the universal kingdom of Jesus. And contrary to the behavior of the nationalistic Jews among whom his readers lived, the obedient subjects of Jesus must never consider the thought of taking up swords to defend the church (See Jn 18:36; Rm 13:4).

Peter, however, is directing our minds to another dwelling. It is an environment “*in which righteousness dwells.*” Isaiah contrasted the kingdom relationship of Israel with the Father to the present kingdom relationship that Christians have with Jesus through His body. Peter then moves our thinking into the future. He seems to be using the same figure (new heavens and new earth) to compare the present kingdom relationship that Christians now have with Jesus to another new kingdom relationship that is yet to come.

The physical earth is not under consideration in reference to the new heavens and new earth that are to come. As Isaiah did not bring into consideration the physical world when he revealed the new heavens and new earth in the church, so Peter

is not considering the physical world when comparing the present “new heavens and new earth” (the church) of Isaiah’s prophecy with the future new heavens and new earth in eternal glory. Peter was simply directing us to a new environment as opposed to this one of persecution, ridicule, mockery and scoffing by unbelievers. The one to come will be a dwelling place of righteousness.

We must keep in mind that the bodily resurrected Christian will not be a “floating spirit” in an environment of space. In the context, Peter was possibly emphasizing the “location” wherein dwells the “righteous saints.” This interpretation would be affirmed by viewing the new heavens and new earth in contrast to the present heaven and earth that are being “kept in store” by the word of God (See 2 Pt 3:7). Could it be that as the world and heavens were changed by the global flood of Noah’s day, so this present natural environment of the world will be “restructured” by “fire” that will destroy this world as we know it?

As “*the world that then existed perished*” (2 Pt 3:6), so this present world that exists will also perish. The world certainly did not disintegrate after the flood. It was only drastically changed. Peter seems to suggest the same in reference to the present environment in which we now live. How-

ever, we must keep in mind that the flood of Noah’s day is the best illustration of the destruction of this present world that the Holy Spirit could use to help us metaphorically to understand that which is to come. Simply because the world was not completely destroyed in the flood does not necessarily mean that it will not be at the end of time.

However, the heavens and the earth were radically changed by the flood of Noah’s day. The heavens that were a universal covering (firmament) before the flood were brought down to earth in a forty-day rain (Gn 7:4). The face of the earth itself was drastically changed by the hydraulic forces of the waters that went to and fro upon the face of the earth.

When the flood was over, Noah and his family indeed stepped out of the ark into a new heavens and new earth. Imagine being able to see the moon and stars for the first time because they had previously been obscured by the firmament of waters above the earth. Imagine experiencing rain for the first time and seeing a rainbow. Before the flood, rain was not needed because a mist came up from the earth in order to water all vegetation (Gn 2:6). But it was all new and different for Noah and his family after the flood. In like manner it will be all new and different after the consummation of all that we now

experience in this world.

Whatever will transpire in the future, we look forward to a new heavens and earth wherein only the righteous will exist. Therefore, we are “*looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God*” (2 Pt 3:12). What this new environment will be for the righteous, we do not speculate. We simply believe that our resurrected and changed bodies will dwell in an environment that is suitable for a body that has put on incorruption and immortality. These are things about which we wonder. They are things for which we also hope.

Verses 14-18 “These Things”

Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. And regard the longsuffering of our Lord as salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him has written to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable distort to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away

with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

Peter’s reference to “these things” certainly refers to the events about which he had just written. In the historical context of his readers who were faced with constant mockery and scoffing, we assume that “these things” are the same things about which Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Jesus when Jesus had just revealed that not one stone would be left on another in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (See Mt 24:2; Mk 13:3). They were concerned about that which was going to happen in their lifetime (Mk 9:1). Jesus admonished those early disciples not to be deceived, but to look for those things about which He spoke in reference to the end of Israel.

We would not do justice to this context if we were to use “these things” as a reference to the “signs of the time” for which we must be looking in order to anticipate the coming of the Lord at the end of time. We must stay in the historical context of the early Jewish Christians who were about to experience the termination of their Jewish nationhood. They were about to suffer a tremendous attack against their religion through the

destruction of the temple.

On the other hand, Christians today are in the business of populating the new heavens and new earth through the preaching of the gospel. The more God delays the destruction of this present heavens and earth the more opportunity we have to enroll citizens in the world to come.

Because the future events have no parallel in either the present or past, there are those who will “*twist the Scriptures*” about these matters (2 Pt 3:16). They do so because they are **untaught** and **unstable** in the word of God. The result of their twisting will be their own demise. In the immediate historical context in which Peter wrote, Peter here referred to those mockers and scoffers in the lives of the Jewish Christians who were

saying, “*Where is the promise of His coming?*” (2 Pt 3:4). Since this was the case, then surely their destruction would be in the mass genocide that would take place in the wars of Rome against Jewish nationalism. Jesus warned of the same in Matthew 24.

But there are also those today who are twisting the Scriptures concerning future events. No few false proclaimers of the end of time have arisen throughout history. Their erroneous prognostications have led to thousands being deceived into believing all sorts of false doctrines and signs concerning the end of time. Jesus would remind such people with the warning that He gave to the disciples in Matthew 24, “**Be not deceived.**”

Chapter 3

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Revelation 13

In order to correctly understand the book of Revelation, there are two very important principles of interpretation that must be honored as we come to the many visions that are recorded throughout the book.

1. *Revelation is a book of figures of speech.* When studying other books of the Bible, the approach to interpret the contents of a book is to understand the context **literally** unless there is reason to understand the text figuratively. **The reverse of the rule is true when interpreting the book of Revelation.**

In the very first verse of the book, John alerts us as to how we should approach this book. John wrote,

The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave to Him to show to His bondservants, things that must shortly come to pass. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His bondservant John (Rv 1:1).

The content of this book was “sent and **signified.**” In other words, through symbolic language, John recorded various visions that were revealed to him. In order to proclaim

the message of the book, he used **cryptic** symbols to communicate the visions that were revealed to him. These are figures of speech that are often terrifying and unreal. John used such in order to either produce shock or emphasis concerning the message he was seeking to convey to his readers.

He also used such figures in order to conceal the apocalyptic message of judgment that would come upon Rome. If John were found by the authorities to be writing about the doom of the Empire, it would surely have been the end of him. He would not have simply been exiled to the island of Patmos. He would have been executed. Copies of the document of Revelation would have been hunted down and burned. Those who possessed the document would also have suffered the consequences of circulating insurrection “propaganda” concerning the end of the Roman Empire.

The book is **apocalyptic** in the sense that it is talking about future things in relation to the immediate recipients of the book. In this case, it is talking about the deliverance of Christians from the state persecution of the Roman Empire. Therefore,

through many figures of speech the message of this book came to the immediate readers concerning things that were to come to pass shortly in their lives and their children.

It is imperative to understand the content of the book first in a figurative manner, unless there is contextual justification to understand the material literally. If we do not understand this rule of interpretation, we will end up at the end of the book greatly confused. We will twist the message of the book out of its original historical context, and thus fail to understand the book as the first readers understood it.

2. *The visions of Revelation would shortly come to pass.* There are two “bookends” in the book. Each makes the statement “shortly come to pass.” These time limitations are found in 1:1 and 22:6. John was alerting two groups of people concerning the time period of the visions. First, there were his **immediate readers** he sought to comfort by saying that the events of the visions were not something distant from their present. Their persecutors would soon meet their doom. The persecution would be terminated when God judged the persecutors.

Secondly, John also cautioned those of us **who were not of his immediate audience**. He says that the fulfillment of the prophetic visions

were generally not for those **after** the historical context of his immediate audience. The “things” of the visions would **shortly take place**. This does not mean that they would occur over two thousand years later. Since John made this statement—“shortly come to pass”—at the beginning and ending of the book, then we would assume that he wanted the immediate readers to give special heed to what he was saying.

In the historical context of the visions, John wanted to comfort his immediate audience. We must not be “prophecy thieves” by stealing the comfort of the visions of John away from his immediate readers. We must not do so in order to satisfy our idle curiosity of supposed “signs of the times” in our present time. If we do such, we will not correctly understand the comforting message of the book that was first communicated to those early Christians who were going into about one hundred and fifty years of persecution by the Roman state.

As secondary recipients of the revelations, we today draw comfort from the book in that we can see God’s work in the lives of Christians who were enduring persecution. In some sense, therefore, we look at the book of Revelation in the same way as we use the Old Testament. Paul wrote,

For whatever things were written before were written [in the Old Testament] for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Rm 15:4).

We gain comfort from the Old Testament Scriptures because we read of God's deliverance of His persecuted people. We also gain comfort from the book of Revelation because we see God's deliverance of His persecuted people from the worst of times.

We must emphasize, therefore, that the historical events of the book refer primarily to John's readers. However, when the angel concluded a particular vision in the book he often threw in the final fate of the unrighteous, as well as, encouragement concerning the final destination of the righteous. He did so in order to assure the righteous that God always delivers His people: *"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord"* (Rm 12:19).

The primary persecutor of the saints in Revelation was the Roman Empire. After Rome's termination of national Israel in A.D. 70, Rome itself would eventually turn her attention to Christians by making Christianity an illegal faith. Throughout a period of a century and a half Chris-

tians would be tortured and killed by the state of Rome. This government opposition against Christians had its beginnings in the insane behavior of Nero who persecuted Christians in the early sixties. Nero's persecution of Christians was a personal vendetta that he had against Christians. However, what was coming in the lives of those who received the book of Revelation was state persecution.

Nero's persecution, though centered in Rome, would eventually set the pace for a government policy of opposition against Christianity in the years of Domitian. This opposition would periodically arise and last well into the third century. However, one of the severest periods of this persecution would occur during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

Only when Constantine became Emperor of Rome would the dark age of persecution be lifted from the shoulders of Christians. The official lifting of the persecution would occur by the issuing of the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311, and then the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313.

Until the relentless persecution ceased, the saints would go through a time of persecution that has been unparalleled since. For this reason, God saw it necessary to write a special book of inspiration in order to comfort Christians through their years of testing in any situation throughout the

world and history. Regardless of what persecution may arise in the lives of Christians, the book of Revelation is God's comfort that in the end, there will be a final victory of those who live the gospel over all that Satan would do in order to destroy the work of Jesus in the lives of Christians.

By the time John arrives at chapters 12-14, he has completed three of the seven "video visions" of the book. Each of the seven visions is a picture of the forces of evil against the forces of God. The conclusion of each picture is always the same. This conclusion was simply stated in 17:14:

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.

Regardless of the conflict between good and evil, Christians will always emerge victorious. For this reason, the principal thought of Revelation 2:10 must always be in the minds of persecuted Christians: "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*"

Chapter 12 begins the second major division of the book with a series of seven visions. The vision of chapter 12 begins with a pictorial birth of Jesus and concludes with the dragon launching persecution against

Christians as the body of Christ. In 12:17 the dragon became enraged with the woman (God's people who brought forth the Christ). He then "*went to make war with the rest of her offspring* [the saints]." When the vision comes to chapter 13, two beasts (Roman government and imperial religion) arise through the work of Satan to make war against the saints.

The first major persecutor of Christians were the nationalistic Jews. Opposition toward the "Man Child" (Jesus), the woman (God's people of the Old Testament), and the woman's offspring (God's people of the New Testament) would be made by Satan through the proxy persecution of misguided nationalistic Jews. However, in A.D. 70 this persecuting force was essentially eliminated by the destruction of national Israel and the temple. After the demise of this persecuting force against Christianity, a second and more terrible persecutor arose. This was the government power of the Roman Empire.

In chapter 13 the inspired John pictured this persecutor as two beasts that emerged from the populations of humanity. The sea beast was the **legislative strength of the Roman Empire** that was launched against the saints. The land beast was Roman imperial religion that was upheld by the legislative power of the Sea Beast. Roman religion was forced upon all

citizens of the Empire in order to stamp out any opposing insurrections against Rome. Jewish nationalism had sensitized Rome to always be alert for any insurrectionist movements that might develop throughout the Empire. And since Christians would not proclaim Caesar as lord, then Christians were considered insurrectionists in the Empire.

It is in the context of Revelation 13 that John pinpoints the persecution of the saints by a government. It is possible that John received these visions during the reign of Vespasian, Caesar of Rome. This is the “one who is” of chapter 17:10. Nero (A.D. 54-68) led a personal vendetta against Christians during his reign in the 60s. This persecution of Christians was only a prelude to what was to come under the reign of Domitian and later Caesars.

When Domitian became Caesar, he instituted **state** persecution of Christians by making Christianity an illegal religion. Those who would not give total allegiance to Rome were tried on charges of treason. Submission to Rome meant submission to Caesar as lord. Those who would not confess Caesar as lord, were considered insurrectionist rebels of the Roman state. Therefore, the persecution led by Nero was minimal in comparison to that which was unleashed by Domitian and succeeding Caesars in

turning the Roman state against Christianity.

The visions of Revelation were given to John in order to prepare the saints for the coming decades of persecution. The message of the visions was to assure the Christians of Asia that the persecution was coming. However, it would have an end. It would end when the instrument of Satan—ungodly Roman Caesars who use Roman government to satisfy their political ambitions—was taken out of the way. Christians, therefore, needed to be patient and endure, though doing such might cost them their lives (Rv 2:10).

Verse 1 Oppressed By Rome

*And I stood on the sand of the sea.
And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns and on his heads the names of blasphemy.*

The **sea beast** (Rv 15:2; 16:13), Rome’s legislative power, is here set against the disciples. Rome originates from the **sea**, that is, the restless and always changing populations of humanity (See Is 57:20,21; Jr 49:23). World governments arise out of conflict among world population groups. Humanity is as a sea that continually

gives birth to different government powers throughout the ages (See Rv 16:3; 20:13; 21:1).

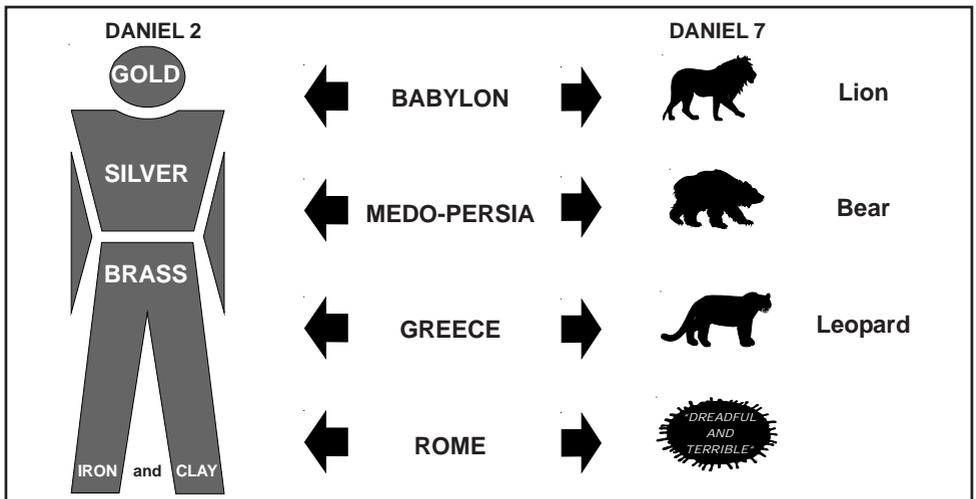
The sea beast had **seven heads** of great control. Rome was seated upon seven hills and we wonder if John did not take his imagery from this geographical position of the city in order to convey the identity of Rome's pompous power. The sea beast has **ten horns**, or ten kings who exercised complete governmental power (See Rv 12:3; 17:3). The sea beast had **ten crowns** of complete authority over other earthly governments.

John's vision refers to the fourth world kingdom of Daniel's recorded visions of Daniel 2 and 7. In the second chapter of Daniel, Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a great image. The vision was of four kingdoms, the first of which was the

Babylonian kingdom. The fourth was Rome. It was in the days of this kingdom that had feet part of iron and clay, that God would set up the kingdom reign of the Son (Dn 2:44). The church to which John was writing would exist in the days of the Roman kings.

Daniel's personal vision of Daniel 7 was also of four world kingdoms. Daniel's vision portrayed the rise of the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom. Rome would be the beast that is "dreadful and terrible" (Dn 7:7). It would be the kingdom that would devour and break the other kingdoms to pieces by conquering them. The kingdom glory of the previous three kingdoms would be exemplified in the totalitarian rule of Rome.

Daniel pictured the stirring of the sea of populations as the cause that



produced throughout history the four government powers (Dn 7:2). The origin of all government is from the people of the world. God has ordained that government exist to prevent anarchy (Rm 13:1-7). However, men devise all types of government that originate from the populations of the world.

The fourth government power of the Middle East of Daniel's vision would unleash its strength against the people of God. This government would have a **blasphemous name**. It would be known to speak great things against those who represent God. This is the same beast of Revelation 17:3 that is identified by "names of blasphemy."

The visions of Revelation 13 and 17 have their background in the prophecy of Daniel 7. In view of this, we must understand that the vision of Revelation 13 refers to the Roman Empire. Therefore, the interpretation of Revelation 13 and 17 must be consistent with the fulfillment of Daniel 7. Daniel prophesied of events that would transpire during the days of the Roman kings. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7, therefore, cannot refer to any government powers that would exist after the fall of the Roman Empire.

The following are a few historical and interpretive thoughts that encourage a better understanding of

Revelation 13 and 17:

1. Rome's totalitarian influence: In Revelation 17:9-12 the "heads" and "horns" refer to kings and their reigning control. Rome was seated upon seven hills. John may have been referring to this geographical fact in order to symbolize the powerful control that radiated from this seat of the Empire. Rome was the seat from which the "horns" exercised their power over the extent of the Empire. Thus, the symbol of "heads" and "horns" could be understood in this way in Daniel 7, Revelation 13 and 17.

2. God's viewpoint of Rome's history: God looks at the beast of the Roman Empire from a "collective time" viewpoint. His omnipresence in time allows Him the privilege of such a view of history. In other words, God sees the whole of the time of the kingdom at one time. He sees the existence of the Empire from beginning to end. He thus sees the beginning and ending simultaneously. It would be like viewing ("watching") a video as one would view a photograph. We who are limited to time must "watch" the video in the amount of time it took to first record it. However, God can push the "fast forward" button in order to see the totality of the events unto the end of the video. He would view the video as we would view a photograph.

Revelation gives us a viewpoint from heaven of the Caesars (kings) of Rome as they lived throughout the history of the Roman Empire. However, God’s view of Rome’s history is from a “photograph” perspective of the video. What we see as unfolding in the early history of the Roman Empire, God has already viewed as a photograph in history. Through John in the visions, He gives us a view of the kings of this kingdom from such a view point. It is important to understand this “view” of the Roman Caesars in order to understand Revelation 17 as it relates to the history of Roman Caesars in chapters 13 and 17.

3. Rise and fall of Roman Caesars: As stated before, the “heads” of Revelation 17 refer to hills (Rv 17:9,10). Rome was seated on seven hills. Therefore, the figure is probably a reference to the power that was manifested from the seat of Roman government by the Caesars

(kings).

In Daniel’s vision, the eleventh horn (“king”) “*will subdue three kings*” (Dn 7:24). In the vision of Revelation 17, three of the kings were simply **ignored** (Rv 17:10,11). They were ignored because they were of no significance to Rome’s history or persecution of Christians. John used Daniel 7 as the prophetic historical background for counting the kings (Caesars) of Rome. He ignored the kings that had no significance in reference to the persecution of Christians.

In view of the preceding thoughts, consider the Caesars of the beast (kingdom) that were “dreadful and terrible” (Dn 7:7) as they relate to the early saints. The chart below is a list of Roman Caesars who were the head of the Roman state at the time the church had its beginnings in the first century. These were not all of the Roman Caesars who reigned throughout the history of the Roman

ROMAN HISTORY	DANIEL'S PROPHECY	JOHN'S REVELATION
1. Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14)	1. Augustus	1. Augustus
2. Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)	2. Tiberius	2. Tiberius
3. Caligula (A.D. 37-41)	3. Caligula	3. Caligula
4. Claudius (A.D. 41-54)	4. Claudius	4. Claudius
5. Nero (A.D. 54-68)	5. Nero	5. Nero
6. (Galba)	"Subdued" <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Galba Otho Vitellius</div>	Ignored <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Galba Otho Vitellius</div>
7. (Otho)		
8. (Vitellius)		
9. Vespasian (A.D. 69-79)	6. Vespasian	6. Vespasian
10. Titus (A.D. 79-81)	7. Titus	7. Titus
11. Domitian (A.D. 81-96)	8. Domitian	8. Domitian

Empire. However, these were those Caesars who affected the beginning of the church in the first century and the evangelism of the early Christians. When studying the New Testament, it is good to keep in mind those Caesars who were reigning at the time the early Christians were preaching throughout the Roman world.

One wonders why Daniel said that Galba, Otho and Vitellius were “subdued,” while at the same time this statement is not made in reference to the other kings. The reason may lie in the historical fact that these three Caesars never really exercised any power or influence during the two years of civil war when they rose and fell as Caesars. In a space of two years these three became Caesar and were quickly removed. **Galba** came to power by the sword. However, he enraged all classes of citizens in Rome. After being in power for only six months, the historian Seutonius says that **Otho** had him murdered by a group of assassins. Otho then seized power as Caesar. However, Otho came into conflict with Vitellius. After **Vitellius** defeated Otho in battle, Otho committed suicide. He had ruled only ninety-five days. The soldiers of Vitellius revolted against him as a result of his cruelty. After less than a year in control of Rome, Vitellius was murdered by Vespasian’s guard. His body was

thrown into the Tiber River. Because these three kings played no significant role in the history of the Empire, they were ignored as “subdued” (or, “uprooted” in some translations). Daniel and John did not count them as Caesars of Rome.

4. *The date of Revelation:* If the preceding interpretation is true, then the visions of Revelation would have occurred during the reign of Vespasian (A.D. 69-79). While John was experiencing the visions, he was not necessarily writing the book during the time he wrote, “one [king] **is**” (17:10). Five previous kings had fallen (17:10). Those who had fallen were Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero. Since John ignored the three who were subdued (Galba, Otho and Vitellius), then the one that **is** would be Vespasian. Thus, the visions of John would have occurred during the reign of Vespasian.

This date of the visions would harmonize with the historical context of the visions.

John speaks of the great persecution that is yet to come. “*The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them [the saints]*” (Rv 11:7). The tense of the verb here is **future** in reference to the time the saints lived. The saints to whom John wrote were yet to endure a great persecution. The same future tense is again found in Revelation

17:8 in reference to the beast that “**will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.**”

5. The persecutions of Nero and Domitian: It is true that Nero launched a limited persecution against Jews and Christians alike. However, this persecution was not an official legislative edict of the Roman government. In fact, there is no evidence that this persecution spread to the rest of the Empire. Imperial Roman persecution of Christianity would come later. Vespasian and Titus, as far as historical records are concerned, were indifferent to Christianity. However, Domitian unleashed an official Roman policy against Christians.

Domitian demanded of all Roman citizens their confession of him to be “god.” Those who would not so recognize the “deity of Caesar” were viewed as insubordinate to Roman rule. In the Roman Empire insubordination was equal to insurrection. Thus, capital punishment was handed down to any who would not submit to “Caesar as lord.”

Verse 2

The Collective Resurrection

The beast that I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great author-

ity.

In Daniel 7, the lion of Daniel’s vision represented the Babylonian kingdom. The bear represented the Medo-Persians, and the leopard represented the Greeks. Their collective power and glory was resurrected in the fierceness of the fourth beast, the Roman government.

In Daniel’s vision, the “dominion” of the former three kingdoms was terminated (Dn 7:12). However, “*their lives were prolonged for a season and a time*” (Dn 7:12). In other words, the power that is characteristic of government rule was continued in the existence of the fourth beast, the Roman kingdom. However, their “lives” were prolonged only for a short season. The wickedness of the three former kings was added to the wickedness of the fourth. Their punishment would be fulfilled in the destruction of the fourth. Therefore, when God’s judgment came upon the fourth, it also symbolically fell upon the first three, Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece.

Satan was working behind the scenes to persecute the offspring of the woman (the saints) with the totality of Rome’s government. Satan could not directly overthrow the power of God in the heavenly realm (Rv 12:9), therefore, he “resurrected” in an ungodly king his work to lead a pagan government to carry out his

mission. Satan is the “*god of this age*” (2 Co 4:4), the prince of the world (Jn 12:31). He is the one who has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving in order to destroy the work of God through the saints.

Verse 3

The Wounded Head: Nero

Then I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded. And his deadly wound was healed. And all the world was amazed and followed the beast.

In his personal vendetta, Nero launched the first major persecution against Christians in the latter part of his reign (A.D. 54-68). He was Caesar of Rome when Paul was beheaded in A.D. 63 or 64. When Nero committed suicide, his personal vendetta against Christians ceased. Thus the wave of persecution that swept throughout the city of Rome was **wounded**. However, persecution went from the personal onslaught of one corrupted Caesar to the entire legislative government of Rome through the leadership of Domitian. A statement that was made by the historian Eusebius (A.D. 260-340) in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 3, Para. 17) is very significant concerning this transition in the focus of persecution. Eusebius wrote,

He [Domitian] finally showed himself the successor of Nero’s campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had planned no evil against us. With this agrees Tertullian, who said; A long time after, Domitian, a limb of the bloody Nero, makes some like attempts against the Christians

The historical significance of Eusebius’ statement helps us to understand how the “deadly wound” of the beast was healed. Though Nero did not launch an official government persecution against Christians, the severity of his persecution would be resurrected and expanded later by other Caesars. Nero’s persecution only gave birth to what would later become an official policy of the Roman Empire. This official policy would be given birth (“resurrected”) by Domitian who would launch legislative persecution against Christianity which would be considered an illegal religion. Domitian would resurrect the behavior of Nero in his persecution of Christians. Vespasian and Titus would be indifferent to Christianity. Therefore, we go from the personal persecution of Nero to the resurrected persecution of state persecution that was initiated by Domitian.

“**All the world**” is a limited figure referring to the world of the Roman Empire. The phrase is interpreted by passages as Luke 2:1 when a decree went out from Augustus that “all the world” of the Roman Empire be registered. The issuing of this decree certainly did not include the entire physical world. Only those who were within the jurisdiction of Rome’s control were to register. The same meaning is in the context of Revelation 13. Everyone in the Roman Empire marvelled at the strength and power of Rome in its conquest of many nations.

Verse 4

Rise Of Imperial Religion

They worshiped the dragon who gave power to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”

The world of unbelievers worshiped Satan in their reverence of Rome. When Domitian became Caesar, Roman imperial religion was propagated throughout the Empire through Caesar worship. Domitian claimed to be deity. The test for allegiance to Rome became one’s submission to “Caesar as lord.” Those who would not so confess Caesar as lord, were accused of insurrection. Such

insurrection carried with it the death penalty. This led to great persecution against Christians who would not confess Caesar to be lord.

In like manner, worship of a man as a god was also given to Herod. The unbelieving world said of Herod, “*The voice of a god and not of a man*” (At 12:22). Herod was subsequently eaten by worms. Those on earth who would profess to be gods, will certainly find their destiny in the place where the “worm does not die” (Mk 9:44-48). We must keep in mind that no man is to receive worship from man as worship that should be given to God alone.

Verses 5,6

Blasphemy Of God & His People

Now there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies. And power was given to him to make war forty-two months. So he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

Rome would set her course against those who would live the gospel according to the lordship of Jesus. Eventually, the Caesars would exalt themselves to the status of god. They would be as “*a mouth speaking pompous words*” against Christians (See

Dn 7:8,20). Daniel prophesied of this in reference to Rome:

Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper until the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done (Dn 11:36).

The government authority that is given to the beast would continue for **forty-two months**. This was the time when the horn of Rome “*was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them*” (Dn 7:21). Domitian’s arrogance as deity would lead him to “*speak pompous words against the Most High*” (Dn 7:25). He “*shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time*” (Dn 7:25).

The “time, times and half a time” is the same period as the forty-two months (Rv 11:27). This is a definite time that was limited in duration. Thus, there would be an end of the persecution. It would not carry on indefinitely. Though Rome would “*tread the holy city [of the church] underfoot for forty-two months,*” God would not allow the persecution to continue on without end. In Revela-

tion 11:2 it is clarified that only the outer courtyard was given over to the Gentiles. The temple (the church) would not be given over to the Gentiles.

The **tabernacle** of God is the church (See Rv 11:1,2). Because the church received her origin from heaven (Mt 16:18), blasphemous words that are spoken against her are spoken against God (See At 9:4,5). If any government or religion of men would accuse the saints of submitting to anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, then they would be accusing the church of originating from man and not God. This would be blasphemy against the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 7

Persecution Of The Disciples

And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. Power was given him over all tribes and peoples and languages and nations.

The deceived of the Roman Empire (Rv 13:14) are led by the pompous behavior of Domitian to launch full persecution (**war**) against the saints. The duration of the persecution is limited (Rv 13:5). Daniel had prophesied, “*I was watching; and the same horn was making war against*

the saints, and prevailing against them” (Dn 7:21). In the heat of any persecution it seems that the enemies of the saints are prevailing. But the saints need to remember that God will never allow His people to succumb to the power of Satan (Rv 17:14).

John’s vision of Revelation 11 revealed that “*the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them*” (Rv 11:7). Any who would persecute the saints will find their origin in the kingdom of darkness.

We must keep in mind that this authority to make war against the saints was “**granted to him.**” Satan would be the immediate source of such wicked behavior. However, God allows Satan to go about as a roaring lion to devour according to the divine historical plan (1 Pt 5:8). Satan is allowed by God to have his way with wicked governments.

God is not responsible for the wicked behavior of unbelieving governments whose dignitaries choose wickedness. It is Satan working in the individuals of government. God has ordained that government exist in this world. However, He does allow Satan to have his way with government officials who reject the will of God.

Verse 8 Reverence Of Rome

And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

All who are under the jurisdiction of the Roman Senate gave their reverential allegiance to Caesar and the Roman state. Those who believe that reference here is to the entire literal earth, miss the hyperbole of the metaphor. John wants us to understand that in view of the fact that most of the citizenship of the Roman Empire paid homage to Caesar and Rome, the believers would be intimidated to do the same.

It would appear that everyone has been deceived by the beast and the false prophet of Roman government and religion. However, John says that those who have been so deceived are not written in the **book of life** (Rv 20:12). The end result of those who are not written in the book of life will be eternal destruction (Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9; Rv 20:12-14). Herein is the comfort of the saints.

The **Lamb** (Jesus) was foreordained before creation to be crucified for the sins of man (See Is 53). Those who choose to submit to the cross, and thus, be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, are written in the book of life. God foreordained that the “recorded saints” (the church) would be destined

to eternal salvation (Ep 1:4-11). The church is predestined to salvation. Those therefore who individually choose to be a part of the church by obedience to the gospel are destined to heaven. They are destined to heaven because they are members of the body of Christ.

Verses 9,10 Captivity Of The Captors

If any man has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity will go into captivity. He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

John now demands that the readers give special attention to what he is saying (See Mt 11:15; Rv 2:7,11,17).

The persecutors would take saints into captivity. However, there is here a turn of events in the war against the saints. The forty-two months (time, times and half a time) are now pictured at a close. The captors themselves will be led into divine captivity. Such is reminiscent of the destiny of the disobedient angels who, because of their rebellion against God, are “*reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*” (Jd 6; See 2 Pt 2:4). And so is Domitian and his host of

persecutors reserved today in the captivity of the hadean world in order to be condemned in the last day. They will eventually go away into punishment and destruction (Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9).

The second death is reserved for those who would launch carnal persecution against the city of God. When Christians know this, then they can maintain **patience** while enduring persecution (Rv 14:12). They can maintain their **faith** in God who will eventually deliver them (See Hb 6:12). The principle was stated by the Hebrew writer: “*But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*” (Hb 10:38).

John’s statement in Revelation 13:10 is an assurance to the persecuted saints that they have victory over the Roman state through faith in Jesus (1 Jn 5:4). Christians must therefore remain faithful (Rv 2:10). They must remain faithful to their calling in view of the fact that they will receive a reward for their faithfulness to the Lord in times of persecution. They must not give in to the temptations of Satan. James, therefore, exhorted, “*Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord*” (Js 5:7). In reference to deliverance from Jewish persecution, James continued, “*You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is*

near” (Jn 5:8). This was the coming of the Lord in judgment on all those who would lay their hands against Christians.

Verse 11 Opposition Of Imperial Religionists

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. And he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon.

John saw **another beast**. Here is imperial religion, or emperor worship, that forces upon all Roman citizens the worship of Caesar. This is the “false prophet” of Revelation 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10. This religion rises **out of the earth**, for it is of human origin. It is a religion created after the desires of men.

This religion has the deceptive appearance of an innocent **lamb**. However, since this book of Revelation was originally directed to the saints in Asia, John possibly had in mind a figure of two powers in the Asian province that worked against the saints. First, the Roman **proconsul** of the area enforced Caesar worship on all citizens according to the law of Rome. Second, a religious **commune** was established in the area to promote the cult of emperor worship. John continues an explanation of what this religious cult did in the

following verse.

Verse 12 Theocratic Religion

He exercises all the power of the first beast in his presence. And he causes the earth and those who dwell on it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Roman religion was forced upon the populace by the authority of the Roman government. Domitian claimed deity. Submission to him as lord signified loyalty to Rome. Those who did not submit were viewed as insubordinate to the Empire. In this theocratic condition of the Roman Empire at this time in history—the time of Domitian’s reign—government and religion were entangled together into a powerful cult that trampled on any who would resist total submission.

Verses 13,14 Great Deceptions

So he performs great wonders, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. He deceives those who dwell on the earth by the signs that he had power to do in the presence of the beast, saying to those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the

beast who had the wound by a sword and lived.

What the Roman religious commune sought to do reminds us of Jesus' warning, "*Be not deceived*" (Mt 24:4,24). John later says that these religionists go out "*performing signs*" (Rv 16:14). This is the false prophet "*who worked signs in his [the beast's] presence, by which he **deceived** those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image*" (Rv 19:20). But these are those who are deceived, and who deceive (2 Tm 3:1-3). They worked great wonders that were false miracles (2 Th 2:9). If the wonders were actually miraculous, then those who followed the false emperor worship would not be deceived by believing the wonders. They would have been believing that which was true. The deceivers' supposed supernatural work, therefore, would validate their being a representative of God on earth.

God did not allow Satan to work miracles through false priests of Caesar worship in order to lead Christians to submit to the beast. We do not serve a God that would cast a stumbling block before the saints at a time when they were under severe persecution, and thus, so vulnerable. God does not allow Satan to have authority over the supernatural in order to

work miracles before men.

Only those who are deceived affirmed that **fire came down out of heaven**. "Fire coming down out of heaven" was a miraculous sign of the presence of God in the Old Testament (See Gn 15:17; Lv 9:24; Jg 13:20; 1 Kg 18). But here John uses the symbol, not to speak of something Roman religious leaders actually performed, but to show metaphorically the strength of deceptive power.

It was "given him to do." God allowed the deceptions by not countering with true fire from heaven. The deceptive works were not true for such would have nullified all the miraculous work that the Holy Spirit had done through the early saints in order to "confirm the word" they preached (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:3,4).

Roman religionists set up busts (images) of Caesar throughout the Empire in order to promote Caesar worship. These **images** were the symbol of Rome's false religion. Those who would not submit to Domitian's image were subject to the penalty of death.

Verse 15 **Living Power Of Rome**

It was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would both speak and cause to be killed as many as

would not worship the image of the beast.

The fact that John is not talking about real miracles in verses 13-15 is seen in the imagery of this verse. The **image** certainly did not become a living thing and literally begin to speak as a man. Naive interpreters who believe Roman religionists actually worked miracles are inconsistent if they do not continue the literality of their interpretation of verses 13 and 14 into verse 15. If real miracles are indicated in verses 13 and 14, then certainly the same would be true of verse 15. But who wants to take the position that these statue images of Caesar actually began to speak like men? John's point with the "speaking image" figure is to show the intensity of belief in false religion by those who refuse to worship the one true God. In fact, if one believes that the images literally spoke, then he is the problem. He is the one who is deceived, and thus preaches that others also must believe in the "speaking images."

Many Jews and Christians did succumb to the heat of Roman persecution. They were intimidated by the common belief of those who affirmed that the Roman religionists were actually working the miracles of some god. They thus confessed Caesar as deity. Those faithful Christians who

did not reverence "lord Caesar" as deity were persecuted unto death. The angel warned in Revelation 14:9,10,

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God ... he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (See Rv 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

We would think that Christians should be very careful when they start believing that false religionists can work real miracles. We must remember that God would not allow Satan to work miracles through false religions in order to entice Christians to believe false teachings. If He did, then all Christians would be confused as to who they should believe. If false prophets can work miracles, then we would be confused as to what is truth.

Verses 16,17 **Mark Of The Beast**

And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond-servant, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell, except the one who has the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Rome commissioned that all citizens give both political and religious allegiance to Rome. In this sense, Rome became to some extent a theocratic system of government. At least from the view point of the Roman priests, one had to submit to the religious laws of Rome in order to be true to Rome itself. The **mark** refers to those who would direct their worship toward Rome (Rv 14:9; See Rv 20:4). The mark, or identification, was both psychological (on their **foreheads**) and physical (on their **hands**).

Domitian wanted total allegiance. He wanted the minds of the people. He also wanted an outward manifestation of allegiance. If one would not submit to confessing Caesar as lord, then he or she was subject to the fury of the Roman government.

There was a boycott against those who would not worship Rome. They would not be able to carry on the normal work of life in buying and selling goods.

Verse 18 Insufficiency Of Man

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding count the number of the beast, for it is the number of man. And his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

John knows that the **number** in

reference to the beast can be understood by his immediate readers. As verse 10 stated the end of the “sea beast” (Roman government), so verse 18 signals the end of the “earth beast” (imperial religion).

John identified the beast by the **number** of man. It is not the number of a man. The Greek indefinite article does not need to be placed in the text before the word “man.” It is simply the “number of man.” The same phrase structure is used in Revelation 21:17 in reference to the measuring of the holy city “*according to the measure of man.*” The absence of the definite article does not signify a specific man. It means only that the calculation was according to man’s numbering rules.

The number is **666**. The most consistent interpretation is to maintain the figurative significance of the numbers as John used them throughout the visions. The number six was used by the Jews as a gematria to signify that which was imperfect or incomplete. It was also the number to signify that which is earthly.

A Hebrew method of communication through numbers was to use the number of letters in words or numbers themselves to signify something other than the numbers. The three sixes used together in a gematria in this text would possibly indicate that which is “triple” imperfect or incom-

plete. It is that which originates “out of the earth,” but tries to claim heavenly origin. However, it is found to be fake and incomplete. And so it is with Caesar worship and the whole system of Roman religion.

Roman government originated from the populations of the world. Roman emperor worship originated from arrogant Caesars who claimed

to be deity. Both government and religion were earthly and totally insufficient. When it came to religion, the beasts had insufficient truth and were incomplete in being acceptable to God. The number 666 emphasizes their incompleteness. They were incomplete in reference to what God would require for acceptance.

Chapter 4

THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION

Revelation 20

Revelation 20 is probably one of the most misunderstood chapters in the Bible. Interpreters often come to these verses with preconceived ideas, especially the theology that Jesus will in the end give up His present gospel reign over the entire universe in order to settle for a minimal reign on this one planet. Unfortunately, those who promote this teaching fail to understand the present reign of King Jesus over all things.

In the apostasy from Christianity that took place during the 60s prior to the destruction of Jewish nationalism in A.D. 70, some early Christians could not understand the totality of Jesus' reign over all things. In opposition to this lack of faith in the totality of the gospel reign of King Jesus, the Hebrew writer, therefore, reminded his readers of a very important point in reference to Jesus' reign:

*You have put **all things** in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, **He left nothing that is not put under Him**. But now we do not yet see all things put under Him (Hb 2:8).*

Though we do not at this time see

all things in submission to King Jesus, we must not allow ourselves to believe that He is not King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). To believe that Jesus is presently reigning over a limited group of people on this earth is to marginalize the present sovereignty of our King. Those who have obeyed the gospel are the body of His church. But Jesus' kingdom reign extends far beyond the fellowship of the saints.

*Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name [authority] that is above every name [authority], that at the name [authority] of Jesus every knee **should** bow, of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth, and that every tongue **should** confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Ph 2:9-11).*

This is precisely what Daniel prophesied of the Son of God in Daniel 7:13,14. When Jesus ascended on high, He was given sovereignty over all things (Mt 20:18). Every knee should now confess to His kingship, but they will not. Nevertheless, the Father exalted the Son ...

... far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name [authority] that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. And **He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church** (Ep 1:21,22).

If one has a difficult time understanding the preceding statements of the Holy Spirit in reference to the present kingdom reign of Jesus, then he has a limited understanding of the present gospel reign of Jesus. His mind is centered on future carnal things of this world, things that are totally contrary to that on which Christians should focus in this life. It would be good to remind ourselves of the following exhortation of the Holy Spirit:

If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set you mind on things above, not on things of the earth (Cl 3:1,2).

It is difficult to understand why some seek to reverse this admonition. Instead of keeping our minds focused on that which is above, some would have us set our minds on things of this earth when Jesus comes again.

If one has carnal hopes, then his

or her mind is not focused on heavenly things, but on earthly things. Such is contrary to the focus about which the Spirit encouraged us to have in the preceding statement. In having our minds focused on those things that are above, we must bring this focus into our interpretation of the text of Revelation 20.

John used in Revelation 20 prophetic figurative language in order to rehearse the impact the gospel had on the work of the kingdom of darkness. This seventh and last symbolic vision of John is given to manifest the final victory of good over the spiritual powers of darkness.

This vision begins with the revelation of the gospel. It concludes with the final judgment, consummation of all things, and our journey unto eternity. In one chapter, John gives a truly splendid picture of what this dispensation of the gospel is all about. It is a thrilling vision and revelation of what the early Christians experienced because of the preaching of the gospel. It is a comforting vision because of the revelation of what will be the end of those who set themselves against the gospel.

In Revelation 12–14 John gave an expanded picture of the beginning of the gospel dispensation. He continued to the end of each vision unto the time that the Son of Man was told, *“Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for*

the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (Rv 14:15). In chapter 20 we begin with the binding power of the gospel when it was first introduced into the world. The vision ends with the time when those who were “not found written in the Book of Life” were cast into the lake of fire (Rv 20:15). Revelation 20 is a marvelous picture in figurative language of the power of the gospel in this world from beginning to end. If we would assign the events of this chapter to a time that is yet to come, then we cheat ourselves of one of the greatest texts of revelation in the Scriptures that comforts those who now seek to live the gospel in this world.

Verse 1

Messenger With Authority

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

The **angel** is simply a messenger of God. He comes with the power to confine. That which confines the work of Satan is the gospel of Jesus. As the woman brought forth the Man Child (Jesus) in chapter 12, so the result of Jesus’ coming (the gospel) is emphasized here. In view of what Jesus said during His earthly ministry in preparation for the cross, it is

not difficult to understand what John meant in this verse: “*Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out*” (Jn 12:31).

The **key** is symbolic of authority. This figure is taken from the Old Testament in passages as Isaiah 22:20-22. Eliakim was given the “key” of the house of David. He “*will open and no one will shut; and he will shut, and no one will open*” (Compare also Mt 16:18,19; Rv 1:18; 3:7,8). This messenger, therefore, has the authority to bind the works of Satan with the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16). Jesus was the messenger from heaven who journeyed into this world with the gospel of salvation (See Ph 2:5-8). He then sent His messengers into all the world to reap the harvest of receptive souls (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). This was the meaning of Jesus sending His messengers into all the world with the sound of the gospel (See Mt 24:31).

The **bottomless pit** of the *King James Version* would literally be translated “abyss” (Lk 8:31; Rv 9:1; 11:7; 17:8). The abyss is confinement. It is the confinement of the power of Satan. The *King James Version* translators wanted to interpret the abyss with a meaning that illustrated the endless confinement of Satan. The pit thus has no bottom. Satan is thrown in and never hits the bottom. His confinement is sure. The “ruler

of this world” was cast down by the power of the gospel (Jn 12:31).

Satan is restrained with a **chain**. Here is that which confines him to his limits. Angels who kept not their original habitation, but were disobedient, have been “*reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*” (Jd 6; see 2 Pt 2:4). Jesus said, “*Or else how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house*” (Mt 12:29).

During His ministry, Jesus began the binding of the strong man, Satan, and plundering his house. By His miraculous works and preaching of the good news, Jesus was confining the work of Satan in this world. In this sense, therefore, Satan was being cast down in a world that he formerly controlled by deception.

Satan can now only go about as a roaring lion seeking those who would submit to the temptation of his pleas (1 Pt 5:8). However, for all those who heard and obeyed the gospel, he has been bound from touching them.

Verse 2 Binding Of Satan

And he laid hold of the dragon, that old serpent who is the Devil and Satan. And he bound him for a thou-

sand years.

The **dragon** was that fictitious creature that was to cause fear in the hearts of men. The **serpent** was a cunning deceiver. The **devil** is the accuser. All such metaphors portray a grim picture of Satan as the perfect enemy of humanity. Nevertheless, Satan is bound with the power of the truth of the gospel.

Jesus died for sin that causes spiritual death in the lives of men (Rm 6:23; 1 Co 15:3). However, He was resurrected in order that ...

... He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hb 2:14,15; see 1 Co 15:20-22).

Satan is **bound**. In chapter 12:1-9, the dragon, Satan, was cast out of his place of authority. He was cast down. The same picture is stated here. Jesus said, “*Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast down*” (Jn 12:31). The word “now” referred to the work of Jesus’ ministry. While in His incarnate state in this world, Jesus was in the process of beginning the casting down of the prince of the world. He visually manifested such by giving to His disciples control over the super-

natural. His disciples in turn manifested their power over Satan by also casting out demons. After Jesus had sent them out on a particular preaching tour, they returned and said, “*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name*” (Lk 10:17). Such was a demonstration of greater things to come in the lives of the disciples when Jesus ascended on high. Jesus then said,

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will by any means hurt you (Lk 10:18,19).

Through the cross, people can be delivered from sin. Through the resurrection, they can be delivered from death, and thus, live forever. Therefore, Jesus “*disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [the cross]*” (Cl 2:15). King Jesus now has sovereignty over all the works of Satan (Ep 1:20-23). Through one’s obedience to the gospel, he or she too can “*reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ*” (Rm 5:17).

Since it is by the gospel that Satan is bound, **then we conclude that the binding began when the gospel was first made effective in the lives**

of men. That time was when the first official announcement of the atoning death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was publicly made in Acts 2. The binding will continue as long as the gospel is preached and obeyed. It will be preached until Jesus comes again. Therefore, we would conclude that the **one thousand years** of binding began in Acts 2 and will continue until Jesus returns. This is the definite, but indeterminate time, of the one thousand years.

The number “one thousand” is only figurative of this period of confinement of the power of Satan. This figure is taken from the Old Testament where such referred to a definite time, but not determined by a specific number of years (Ps 90:4; 105:8; Dn 7:10).

Verse 3 Confinement Of Satan

Then he cast him into the abyss and shut him up, and set a seal on him so that he should not deceive the nations anymore until the thousand years were finished. And after that he must be released for a little time.

Satan was **shut up**. Jesus’ binding was thus effective. Satan was also **sealed**, that is, authoritatively consigned to the abyss. He would no longer have the freedom to lead masses of people into darkness by

deception. The influence of the gospel would permeate the very constitutions of nations with values that would preserve societies. The whole earth would not be led astray in mass deception as in the days of Noah when every imagination of man's heart was continually evil (Gn 6:5). Before the preaching of the gospel, there was a time when men gave up the knowledge of God in order to worship the creation (Rm 1:18-32). But the gospel brought life and immortality to light (2 Tm 1:10).

The binding of Satan by the gospel does not mean the cessation of the activity of Satan. Within the realm of those who have obeyed the gospel, however, he is bound. He goes about outside that realm—the area of the knowledge of and preaching of the gospel—as a devouring lion (1 Pt 5:8). However, wherever the gospel is preached, he is confined. Where it is not preached, he deceives and devours.

God will not allow Satan to tempt the saints beyond what they are able to endure (1 Co 10:13). In this sense, Satan is bound. However, he goes about as a devouring lion among those to whom the gospel is not yet preached. John wanted his readers to be comforted, however, that Satan's work is bound by the gospel that they had obeyed and in which they lived.

If Satan is bound within the area

where the gospel is preached and lived, then he is unleashed in the lives of those who are not standing upon the foundation of the gospel. This is certainly in the meaning of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian saints when he wrote concerning their **belief in the gospel**, "*by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you*" (1 Co 15:3). The Corinthians had to continue believing the testimony of the gospel if they were to continue in a saved relationship with God.

John seems to indicate that there would be a brief time when some in his audience would cease believing in the power of the gospel. When the saints cease believing in the gospel, Satan is unleashed. This would be the context of the letter of Hebrews in which the Holy Spirit sought to convince some saints not to turn from the gospel reign and priesthood of King Jesus. He warned, "*How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation*" (Hb 2:3). If some "*crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame,*" then Satan is allowed back into their lives (Hb 6:6). So the Hebrew writer exhorted, "*Let us hold firm to the confession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who promised*" (Hb 10:23). He then warned, "*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth [of the gospel], there no*

longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Hb 10:26).

A second understanding of this “loosening” would be in reference to the end of time. Satan would be loosed for a **little season**. If he is bound by the preaching of the gospel, then at the end of the gospel dispensation he would be loosed when the gospel is not preached. Could this be a brief time before the end when the saints have lost their mission of preaching the gospel, or the gospel is suppressed in persecution to the point that the saints cease preaching the gospel?

We do know that the purpose for the existence of this world is to produce souls for eternal dwelling in a heavenly environment. So when this world ceases to produce gospel obedient people for heavenly dwelling, then it has ceased in its purpose for existence. It is certainly then that God will take away this world of ungodliness.

Verse 4 **Reign Of The Saints**

And I saw thrones and those who sat on them. Judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast nor his image, and had not received

his mark on their foreheads nor on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

The **thrones** were kingly seats upon which the saints sat and reigned with the power of the gospel. This is a place of royalty. In this verse, such authority and royalty was given to two groups of the saints. First, there were the martyrs who had given their lives to the preaching the gospel. They continued to live and reign in the world through the testimony of their legacy. They were as Abel who continues to speak though he is dead (Hb 11:4).

Second, there were the living saints who refused to be identified with the worship of the Roman Empire. These were those of Revelation 13:16-19 who received great persecution because of their stand for the truth of the gospel. They overcame the beast “*by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death*” (Rv 12:11).

Those who did not submit to the religion of emperor worship that was promoted by Rome, **lived** because of their gospel living (Rm 6:4,5). They reigned with Jesus in this gospel dispensation (Rm 5:17). Paul wrote, “*For if we died with Him, we will also **live** with Him. If we endure, we will also **reign** with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us*” (2 Tm 2:11,12). Christians have both died with Jesus

(Rm 6:6), and thus, they endure with Him in this life (At 14:22).

While on earth Jesus said to the apostles, *“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Mt 19:28). The “time of regeneration” is the same as the “one thousand years.” It is the time when the apostles rule through the power of the gospel. This gospel brings judgment to those who do not receive and obey it (See 2 Th 1:6-9). Through the preaching of the gospel, Christians bring judgment to those who reject it.

Verse 5

The First Resurrection

But the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

This is the key verse that helps us understand the meaning of the entire chapter. We assume from the **first resurrection** that there was a first death. This would be spiritual death in sin (Is 59:1,2; Rm 5:12; 6:23). When Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, he spiritually died (Gn 2:17). When every person reaches the age at which he or she can determine that which is rebellion against God, and

subsequently chooses rebellion, he or she sins, and thus dies spiritually (Rm 5:12). This is the one who “lives in pleasure,” but is dead while he lives (1 Tm 5:6; see Mt 8:22). The first resurrection, therefore, is a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death (Rm 6:3-6; Ep 2:5,6; Cl 2:12,13). The one who partakes of the spiritual resurrection has “passed from death to life” (1 Jn 3:14).

The first resurrection implies a second. Though the first is spiritual, it is the condition for the second to be bodily. Jesus passed from talking about the spiritual resurrection to the bodily resurrection in the context of John 5:24-29. In verse 24 he stated that the one who believes has “*passed from death to life.*” He explained, *“I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live”* (Jn 5:25). In this context, Jesus was discussing a spiritual resurrection. However, in John 5:28,29, He turned to the bodily resurrection at the end of time. He stated, *“The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”* (See also At 24:15; Rm 8:11; 1 Co 15).

John said that the **rest of the dead**, that is, the spiritually dead, did not live until the end of the one thousand years. This would be the time explained by Jesus in John 5:28,29.

The spiritually dead would be resurrected to go away into eternal destruction (Mt 25:46; 2 Th 1:9). Those who do not partake of the spiritual resurrection will be raised to face the judgment of destruction (2 Th 1:7-9).

Verse 6 The Second Death

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power. But they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him a thousand years.

John speaks of the coming **second death** (Rv 2:11; 20:14; 21:8). It is a destruction after due punishment for those who are presently dead spiritually because they refuse to obey the gospel. The second death will end in their destruction that has eternal consequences (2 Th 1:9). However, those who are obedient to the gospel, are made spiritually alive. They are priests of God and Christ (1 Pt 2:5,9; Rv 1:6; 5:10). They are reigning with Christ during this gospel dispensation (Rv 1:6; 5:10; Rm 5:17).

Those who partake of the first resurrection (obedience to the gospel), **reign** in life by their victory over sin. They have victory over death (Hb 2:14,15). They were thus reigning on this earth **with Jesus** at the time John

wrote this vision (2 Tm 2:12). This is what John had earlier written in Revelation 5:10. Jesus has “*made us kings and priests to our God; and we will reign on the earth.*” This is not a future carnal reign on this earth, but a present spiritual reign through the power of the gospel.

Verses 7,8 Release Of Satan

And when the thousand years have ended, Satan will be released from his prison. And he will go out to deceive the nations who are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle. The number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

The beast, or Roman government, oppressed the saints. The period of oppression was earlier identified by John to be three and a half years in duration, though this time is not a specific three and a half years (Rv 12:12; 13:5). This was a “short time.” So, will Satan’s release be at the end of the one thousand years, or gospel dispensation? He will be released from confinement by the lack of the preaching of the gospel, or the suppression of preaching by government powers. The majority of the inhabitants of the world will thus be deceived as they were during Roman op-

pression in the first century.

Satan will go forth to the **four corners of the earth**, that is, the entire world. **Gog** and **Magog** are references to God's enemies (See Ez 35-40). The battle is parallel with Armageddon of Revelation 16:16. At the end of the gospel dispensation the number of the deceived will be as the **sand of the sea**. In other words, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the world will be opposed to the truth of the gospel.

This may be a dim picture of the future. Nevertheless, most people today do not give heed to the gospel. This is especially true in the religious world today wherein the gospel is neither known nor preached. The gospel has a hard time penetrating those who are religiously self-righteous.

Verse 9

Deliverance Of The Beloved City

So they went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

The **beloved city** is the church of saints who have not submitted to the oppression of the beast of Roman government and religion. The end of the gospel dispensation will be a time when it seems that the saints will be

oppressed out of existence. However, **fire**, or God's judgment will come upon those who oppress and persecute the people of God (2 Th 1:7-9; compare Jd 14,15). As God intervened in the days of Noah with the global flood (Gn 6), and in the case of delivering righteous Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 18,19), so He will deliver those who remain faithful.

In the historical context of John's readers, reference is surely made here to their persecution by Rome. The enemies of God went throughout all their world (the Roman Empire) to encompass the saints. However, in a secondary sense, this has happened to the saints who have lived within the boundaries of theocratic governments since the days of the first century. In numerous places of the world, the saints have been suppressed out of existence. This has happened in most of the Islamic nations and much of China.

The imagery of John surely comes from the event of Sennacherib's threat against Jerusalem during the days of King Hezekiah (See Is 36; 37). The Assyrian army of Sennacherib had surrounded Jerusalem, the holy city. But in one night God destroyed the army of Sennacherib. The people of God were saved when God sent His angel to destroy the army of the Assyrians in one night.

In the case of the insurrectionist Jews in A.D. 70, the opposite was true. God did not deliver the Jews when the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands of the residents of the “holy city” were slaughtered, not delivered. Those to whom John wrote knew this. He knew that they knew that those who were held up in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 were those who had rejected the Son of God. They were those who had refused to hear and obey the gospel. But now John’s readers have concluded that they are the obedient, and as God delivered the “holy city” during the days of Hezekiah, they too would be delivered.

Verse 10 Judgment Of Satan

Then the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also are the beast and the false prophet. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

All the wicked will eventually hear the words of Jesus, “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Mt 25:41). Hell is the intended place of punishment for Satan. All those who would be messengers

of his cause will end up in the same place and suffer the same punishment.

The severity of the punishment is manifested in the metaphor **fire and brimstone**. We do not make the mistake as some biblical interpreters by literalizing the metaphor. The metaphor “fire and brimstone” is something literal and of this world. In a metaphor, that which is signified in the heavenly realm is always greater and above this world. Therefore, we would assume that hell is more horrible than literal fire and brimstone.

The **beast** (Roman government) and the **false prophet** (Roman religion) will also be cast into the place that is reserved for the Devil. John’s comfort to the righteous is that those who have tormented them will eventually be tormented in the end.

The duration of the torment is indefinite, though certain. It is **everlasting** in the sense that God has appointed it to happen. It will not be taken away. As in the Old Testament, the words “everlasting” and “forever” carry with them the Jewish understanding that the torment will last throughout God’s intended time of duration. Emphasis is not on the length of time, but on the certainty of the punishment’s existence (See the use of these words in Ex 12:24; 29:9; 40:15; Lv 3:17; Dt 15:17; Ja 14:9; I Kg 8:12,13; 2 Kg 5:27).

Verse 11

The Great White Throne

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

The Father has given all judgment into the hands of the Son. “*He has appointed a day on which He [the Father] will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained*” (At 17:31). “*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son*” (Jn 5:22).

Since Jesus will “*judge the living and the dead at His appearing*” (2 Tm 4:1), all men must submit to the truth of His gospel, for Jesus said of those who reject Him, “*the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*” (Jn 12:48).

Though men seek to **flee** from the judgment to come, there will be no escape. All must stand before the judgment seat of Christ in order “*that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Co 5:10; see Rv 6:14; 16:20; 18:21; 19:20).

Verse 12

Judgment Of The Righteous

Then I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. And the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works.

This verse possibly refers to the resurrection and final consignment of the saints to the eternal dwelling of the new heavens and earth (See 2 Pt 3:13). The following verse 13 undoubtedly refers to the final judgment of the wicked. Regardless of this interpretation, both verses confirm what is taught throughout the New Testament. Everyone will be raised from the dead for the final judgment (Ec 3:14-17; Jn 5:28,29; 2 Co 5:10).

John records that **books** were opened. Such is possibly a reference to Daniel’s vision of the judgment in Daniel 7:10: “*The court was seated, and the books were opened.*” The metaphor here could be from the “book of remembrance” in the Old Testament that was a record of the righteous (MI 3:16). It could also refer to a metaphorical record of the deeds and character of the unrighteous spoken by Isaiah (Is 30:8,9). Reference could also include the Old Testament (Lk 24:25; Jn 5:39; 10:35) or the New Testament (Jn 12:48).

The names of citizens of Roman

cities were inscribed in a “book of life.” John used this book in a metaphorical manner in order to indicate the listing of the saved who were destined for heaven (See Ps 69:28; Is 4:3; Lk 10:20; Ph 4:3; Rv 3:5; 13:8; 21:27). God certainly does not need a literal book in which to write a list of the saved. The One who knows every hair of our head can certainly call each of us by name. The metaphor, therefore, signifies that God knows exactly those who are His.

The elect will be saved by grace (Ep 2:8,9). Christians are not saved as the result of perfect keeping of law. However, “*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Ep 2:10). We would say, therefore, that it is by these works that we will be judged. Christians must respond to the grace of God in their lives by walking in the light of the gospel of Jesus. James warned, “*Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17; see Ec 3:17; Hb 4:13).

Verse 13 Judgment Of The Wicked

Then the sea gave up the dead who were in it. And Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged every one according to their works.

John emphasizes that no one of the wicked masses of the world will escape the final judgment. The beast (the wicked of Rome) and the false prophet (Roman religion) will all be judged. The **sea** refers to the masses of humanity from which the wicked persecutors of the saints have come (See Rv 13:1; 16:3; 21:1). They will all face the judgment.

Death and **hades** will deliver up those who are in them. Death and hades go together because hades is the abode of the souls and spirits of the dead. Even if the wicked have died, they will be resurrected in order to stand in judgment before God. In this “end of time” picture, John also wants us to know that the termination of physical death is coming.

Verse 14 End Of Physical Death

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

When Jesus comes again, physical death will be no more. Therefore, there will be no more need for a place to reserve the souls and spirits of the dead. Physical death and the abode of the dead will be cast into the **lake of fire**, or place of termination. This is the **second death**, or second time in the life of the wicked that they have

been separated from God. In physical death, one's physical life stops. In the second death, one's spiritual existence stops in hell after just punishment has been carried out. The wicked on earth will be sentenced to their just punishment that was incurred by their disobedience.

Verse 15 **Destiny Of The Wicked**

And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

This statement certainly emphasizes the point that one has his or her name recorded among the saved. Jesus will eventually say to the dis-

obedient, *"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Mt 7:23; see Mt 25:41). It will certainly be a sad day when the unrighteous hear these words of departure from the One they resisted throughout their lives.

John's visionary picture of the gospel dispensation is complete. He has taken us in vision from the time the gospel was first announced on Pentecost in A.D. 30, to the termination of all things. In this particular picture he wants the righteous to know that the wicked persecutors of the saints will not escape the final judgment. Therefore, the saints must be patient, for vengeance belongs to God who will repay (Rm 12:19; see Rv 13:10).

Chapter 5

GOING HOME

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

From various contexts in the Bible it would be safe to assume that spirits seek to be embodied, that is, they seek a body in which they can dwell. This seems to answer some of the reasons why demons sought to indwell people in the first century. That spirits seek this embodiment is indicated in the following four contexts concerning embodiment:

1. *The Gadarene demons sought to dwell in swine:* When Jesus confronted the demon possessed man of Gadara, the demons that dwelt in him “*begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss*” (Lk 8:31). They knew that dwelling within the one called Legion was much better than the confinement of the abyss (See Rv 20:1-3). In fact, their knowledge that embodiment was better than the abyss is indicated in their request to indwell pigs. Luke recorded, “*Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. And they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them*” (Lk 8:32).

Because these spirits feared the abyss, they sought embodiment. This would be one reason why they wanted to indwell a body. Indwelling swine

was better than the oblivion of the abyss.

2. *Spirits seek a place of dwelling:* Though we cannot understand all of what Jesus was saying in the context of Luke 11:24-26, one thing is clear. When the unclean spirit went out from the one in whom he dwelt, he said, “*I will return to my house from which I came*” (Lk 11:24). The spirit was thus saying that dwelling in the body of someone was better than wandering around in the void of “dry places.”

Jesus said that this spirit would go “*through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none*” (Mt 12:43). Evidently, in a disembodied state, such spirits have no rest. They seek a place of rest through embodiment. When the spirit does return to the one he formerly indwelt, Jesus said, “*He goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there*” (Lk 11:26). The point is that this “wandering spirit” sought to dwell within someone. Such indwelling was better than wandering through the void of dry places with no rest.

3. *Spirits are reserved in darkness:* When Jesus ascended on high,

“*He led captivity captive*” (Ep 4:8). He “*disarmed principalities and powers*” (Cl 2:15). The power of Satan through demons has been confined. Satan’s angels have been cast down to Tartarus and “*reserved for judgment*” (2 Pt 2:4). These spirits have been “*reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*” (Jd 6).

The point is that these spirits, Satan’s angels, have been **reserved** for judgment. They have been reserved in order that they not “wander” in seeking someone in whom to dwell. If God had not reserved them, then they would at will be seeking to possess people today. Since disembodied spirits seek to possess, therefore, God has reserved them in confinement in order that they not have their freedom to possess people at will.

4. We will be “clothed”: In 2 Corinthians 5:1-3 Paul wrote,

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we will not be found naked.

Paul considered not being clothed with a body as a state of be-

ing “naked.” When Christians die, they are in a state of being “naked,” for their body has returned to the dust of the earth. The spirit of the Christian is with Jesus, kept for the resurrection of the great day when we all will “*be clothed with our habitation that is from heaven.*” According to Paul’s statements in this context it is better to be clothed with a body than to be naked. It is better to have a body than to exist in spirit apart from a body.

There are many things we do not understand about the disembodied state of the spirit. However, we can conclude from what statements are made in Scripture that a disembodied spirit does seek to be clothed with a body. When we come to the contexts of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul answered questions concerning the future state of the Christian and the resurrected body.

The background of Paul’s comments in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** is the correction of the usual misunderstandings concerning future things. Some brethren in Thessalonica had evidently worried over the whereabouts or destiny of those faithful saints who had passed on and were in a disembodied state. There were also some who possibly had misunderstandings concerning what events would actually transpire when Jesus personally appeared at His final com-

ing. Regardless of the Thessalonians' misunderstandings, the occasion stimulated Paul to reveal the "*word of the Lord*" concerning some most interesting details that will occur when Jesus comes again (1 Th 4:15).

The text discusses the events that will occur at Jesus' final coming and the ascension of two groups at the time of this most significant event in our eternal existence. The first group is the "we." These are those Christians who would be living when Jesus comes. This group would be present in their physical bodies, with both soul and spirit. He explained this group in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "*May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Here is that group of Christians who, in their physical body, are possessed with the mental and psychological nature called soul and that God-created spirit that is from the Father (Ec 12:7; Zc 12:1).

The second group is composed of those saints who have "fallen asleep." They are "*with the Lord*" (See Lk 23:43; Ph 1:23) and waiting in Paradise in order to come with Jesus at the time of His final coming. These were "absent from the body" at the time Paul wrote these words. They were in soul and spirit in the comfort of Abraham's bosom. They too were in expectation of the last day when the Father sends them with

Jesus to be united with their resurrected, but changed, bodies.

With the above two groups clearly in mind, we approach this context. The living saints **in Christ** are concerned about the dead saints **with Christ**. Both are headed toward heaven with changed bodies. They will enter the new heavens and the new earth with Jesus at the last day after the sound of the last trumpet. This will be the beginning of a new existence for the faithful. In this context, therefore, Paul sought to give encouragement to all those who would put their faith in Jesus as the Son of God and obey the gospel by immersion into His death, burial and resurrection. Because of Paul's revelation of events in reference to the final coming of Jesus, this is one of the most encouraging passages of scripture in the Bible.

Verse 13 Do Not Worry

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, so that you do not grieve as others who have no hope.

Paul does not want the first group—the living saints—to be ignorant of the situation and destiny of the second group—those saints who have died. Those who have died have sim-

ply **fallen asleep**. With this tender metaphor Paul wants to teach us that with Christians, death is not a termination, but simply a change in state of existence. It is only a state of transfer, a state through which the faithful must pass as a result of not being able to eat of the tree of life (See Gn 3:22-24; Hb 9:27).

The unbelieving, on the other hand, stand at the grave of their loved ones and shed hopeless tears. The righteous shed tears of hope for one who has only gone on a journey to be with Jesus. Christians have an endless hope; the unbeliever has a hopeless end.

The phrase “fallen asleep” may also reveal God’s viewpoint of death. As we fall asleep with hope of rising in the morning to a new day, so God views our death as simply a “falling asleep” to arise to a new existence. Certainly, we must capture the mind of God in this view of death. It is a “falling asleep” in order to arise to experience a new existence.

It must also be clearly understood that in the context Paul is discussing the resurrection of those who have fallen asleep. Therefore, he is talking about their bodies, not their soul and spirit. The spirit, at death, returns to God (Ec 12:7). We will remain conscious after death in the care of God. However, our bodies will sleep until we are resurrected with a spiritual body from God (2 Co 5:1-8).

Some have suggested that from God’s point of existence, the moment the saint falls asleep, it could be that he or she immediately awakens to a new existence with no realization that time has passed on earth. From our point of view in reference to time, our faithful friends who fell asleep many years ago are still abiding in the arms of Jesus until He comes again. But they are “awake” in the presence of Jesus. In the case of Lazarus, however, there is consciousness after death, for the rich man realized that he was in torments until the end of time (See Lk 16:19-31).

Verse 14 Coming Of The Saints

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

Paul used the subjunctive “if” in this passage in order to place our belief in Jesus’ resurrection as a guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus was bodily raised. Therefore, we will be bodily raised. If we believe in Jesus’ bodily resurrection, then it is only natural that we believe in our own. Those religions that have given up a belief in the resurrection of Jesus have forsaken the very foundational proof of their hope.

The Son of God will “*bring with Him*” the souls and spirits of those who have died in Christ. This fact is so central in Christian eschatology that Paul says that God would establish our hearts “*at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints*” (1 Th 3:13). Jesus will not come alone. He will be “*revealed from heaven with His mighty angels*” (2 Th 1:7). However, with Him will also be all past saints who have faithfully served God since the beginning of time. What a joy it will be to experience the revelation of so many loved ones as they come with Jesus at the sound of the last trumpet.

Verse 15

Living Follow The Departed

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord will not go before those who have fallen asleep.

In this text, Paul speaks from direct revelation. He has received this information as it was directly “spoken by the Lord.” He wants to assure his readers that what he is about to say is the “word of the Lord” and not some personal opinion that he may have on the matter.

Christians who are alive on the last day, the day of His coming, will

not go into the new heavens and new earth before those who have died in the Lord. The order here is significant in bringing comfort to those who are still alive.

The context of verses 15 and 16 must be understood on the foundation of 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Paul’s commentary in 1 Corinthians 15 enlightens us concerning what he briefly states here.

The following are important things that will happen on the last great day. Though we cannot fully understand what will transpire on that last day, the inspired writers give us enough information to settle our anxiety. God will be in control of all things. Therefore, there is no need for Christians to trouble themselves about what will happen or where they are going. We must have faith in God to take care of all things that are to come. We walk by faith in the all-caring God who is working all things according to His purpose and for the good of His people (Rm 8:28).

Events Of The Last Day

1. The Lord will descend from heaven with a great shout and with the company of departed saints will rise first (1 Th 4:16).
2. The voice of an archangel will sound (1 Th 4:16).
3. The last trumpet will sound (1 Co 15:52; 1 Th 4:16).

4. The dead in Christ will first be raised and reunited with their resurrection bodies (1 Co 15:52; 1 Th 4:16).
5. Living saints will be bodily changed and caught up together with the resurrected saints (1 Co 15:51,53,54; 1 Th 4:17).
6. The present heavens and earth will pass away with a great noise (2 Pt 3:10).
7. Judgment will instantaneously occur in the sense that those who are ungodly will be barred from the new heavens and earth (2 Co 5:10; Rv 20:11-15).
8. The unrighteous will meet their end in the just punishment of destruction that has eternal consequences (2 Th 1:9; Rv 20:13-15).
9. The righteous will go away with the Lord to enjoy eternal existence with Jesus in the presence of God (Mt 25:46; 1 Th 4:17).

Verse 16

Resurrection Of Dead Saints

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

The fact that the Lord will “*descend from heaven*” with those who have fallen asleep in Jesus indicates

that in some way Christians are **with the Lord** in a heavenly state when they die. They are reserved in a heavenly state in the comfort of Abraham’s bosom in Paradise (Lk 16:22; 23:43). However, we must keep in mind that they are in a **disembodied** heavenly state with Jesus. In the eternal dwelling of the new heavens and the new earth, saints will dwell with their resurrected and changed bodies. This will in some way make a difference between the present heavenly dwelling of disembodied saints in Paradise from the eternal dwelling in an embodied state in heaven in eternity.

Paul affirms that those dead **in Christ** will precede the resurrection of those dead **outside** Christ. Those who have died outside Christ in sin, will be resurrected. Their resurrection, however, will be unto condemnation (Jn 5:28,29), punishment and destruction (2 Th 1:7-9).

Concerning those who are dead in Christ, Paul reveals a different destiny than those outside Christ. He reveals a bodily resurrection of Christians. It is the Creator who will perform this transformation. Therefore, all the postulations about how this can happen to a body that has decayed away to dust is answered in the fact that the One who created all things is carrying out the deed of bringing together and changing the bodies of all saints. If we believe in the God who

is the Creator of all life, then we can believe in the God who can resurrect all life. If our belief is in an evolutionary philosophy of life from slime to the sublime, then we might have some problem with belief in a God who can “recreate” life out of a body that has long since decayed away.

We see now why it is so important for Christians to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Though Jesus’ body did not undergo corruption (decay), it was raised a changed body (At 2:31). John, who experienced Jesus after His resurrection, assures us that when Jesus comes again, we will have a body as Jesus (Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2; see Rm 8:18-23). We will see Him as He is and be as He is. The two angels who stood beside the apostles as they witnessed the ascension of Jesus, reassured them with the words, “*This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in like manner as you have watched Him go into heaven*” (At 1:11).

Verse 17 **Caught Up Together**

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

This verse indicates that the res-

urrected saints will already be on their way in the clouds to meet the Lord before the living righteous ascend. We see the importance of this order only in the sense of being a present encouragement to living Christians who have lost loved ones to death. Those saints who are asleep will not tag along behind in the ascension. They will lead the way home!

“In the clouds” and “in the air” are certainly metaphorical with the meaning that we will be detached from the physical nature of a terrestrial (physical) world. We will be changed. The mortal body will put on immortality; the corruptible, incorruption (1 Co 15:52-54). Therefore, the new heavens and new earth, as opposed to the “old heaven and old earth,” will be a dwelling place for the immortal, incorruptible, resurrected and reunited saints. In this state we will **always be with the Lord**.

It will not be an environment as this physical world, but one that is prepared for the dwelling of the spiritual body that will dwell with the Lord in eternity in the presence of God. This is the hope of the Christian who seeks to be with Jesus for eternity.

Verse 18 **Comfort One Another**

Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

The world view that Paul presents in this context should comfort those who hold on to it. Christians should talk about these things. There can be no comfort in this world view if this topic is not regularly discussed. We certainly wonder about the details of what will happen in the last day. However, Paul gives us enough infor-

mation in order that we not be ignorant about what will happen. We now know the general facts about the event. We have faith in the One who can carry it out. Therefore, with these words we comfort one another. We comfort one another because we know that all things are under the control of Jesus.

Chapter 6

ETERNAL EMBODIMENT

1 Corinthians 15

There were those in the province of Achaia, specifically in the city of Corinth, who had questions concerning the final resurrection. There were those who denied the bodily resurrection. The questions, or arguments, were so intense among the saints that Paul dedicated an entire chapter of inspired material to the matter. Since the resurrection is a vital part of the gospel, he wanted them and us to understand as much as possible what the Holy Spirit could reveal concerning this subject.

Paul could answer all their questions concerning the final great event that would personally touch every Christian. However, he revealed in this chapter those things that are necessary in order to answer questions for those who walk by faith. John, the apostle, personally experienced Jesus' resurrected body. However, he confessed that he did not completely understand what we will be like when Jesus returns, though we will be as the resurrected body of Jesus. He wrote,

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we will be, but we know that when He

is revealed, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is" (1 Jn 3:2).

John wrote these words **after** Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15. Therefore, John's reflection on what Paul revealed in 1 Corinthians 15 was not a complete picture of "what we will be." Since John did not have all the answers concerning the resurrected body, then we will refrain from being too dogmatic on this subject. However, we will be dogmatic on the subject that there will be a final resurrection of the dead. If the resurrection does not stand against the scrutiny of unbelievers, then there is no purpose for the gospel. If we are not to be raised, then why would the Son of God commit Himself to incarnation and the cross?

In his revelation concerning this final gospel event, Paul wants us to understand some things that were definitely twisted by some false teachers in Corinth. His primary thrust in the chapter was to affirm the resurrection of Christ, and thus, use this thrust to affirm the resurrection of those who have been buried with Jesus in obedience to the gospel. For this reason, Paul started the discourse

of the chapter with the importance of the gospel event that is inseparably connected to the future resurrection.

Verses 1,2

Proclamation Of The Gospel

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast to that word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

The **gospel** is the good news of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and coronation of Jesus. The central event of the gospel was the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. Paul's emphasis in this chapter is upon the good news of the resurrection event of the gospel. The gospel means nothing unless Jesus was raised from the dead.

On his initial visit to Corinth, Paul first **declared** the gospel to the Corinthians (See At 18). He **preached** the gospel to them. They accepted it as true (See Gl 1:11). They **stood** in their conviction that the gospel event had actually taken place in Palestine outside Jerusalem. Therefore, their emotional and spiritual well-being rested on their continued belief in this historical event.

The Corinthians would be eternally **saved** if they continued to believe the word by which Paul communicated the message of the gospel event to them. God ordained that *“through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”* (1 Co 1:21). They had no New Testaments to read.

They were left only with the report of Paul. He had affirmed the atoning event of the cross and the resurrection. If their belief in his preached message failed, the gospel would profit them nothing. Herein Paul reaffirms that his report of the event of Jesus' death and resurrection actually took place. We also must believe this report. It is upon this report that our faith stands. It is the foundation of our hope for eternal dwelling in the presence of God.

Verses 3,4

The Gospel Connection

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures

The **first thing** Paul preached when he arrived in Corinth was the gospel event (See At 18:8). He preached “Christ crucified” (1 Co

1:23). Paul wrote, “*I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Co 2:2).

In his own life, Paul had accepted the gospel event as true, and thus, declared it to others as true. What was true was that **Christ died for our sins according to prophecy**. He was buried. And **He rose again the third day** according to prophecy of the Old Testament Scriptures. The central event of the gospel, therefore, is the atoning death of the incarnate Son of God for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection for our hope.

Christians must maintain their faith in the gospel event in order to stand firm. Those religious groups who have given up their belief in the resurrection of Jesus, have no claim to the name of Jesus Christ. They have given up the most fundamental teaching of the New Testament in reference to the purpose of the gospel. In giving up the foundation of the resurrection, there is no basis upon which to ground their faith.

The resurrection is what makes Christianity different from other beliefs. Muhammad is dead and still in the grave. Buddha is dead and in a grave somewhere. But Jesus is alive and in heaven. The fact that He lives is evidence that Christianity has a living founder, not a dead founder. It is as Peter wrote,

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*** (1 Pt 1:3).

Without the resurrection, Christianity would be just another religion among those who have created religions after their own desires and traditions. Those religions whose founders are in the grave must deal with this concept of Bible teaching. The foundation of Christianity is in the fact that its Founder lives. And because the Founder of Christianity lives, we look forward to the day when He will be revealed from heaven.

Verses 5-11 **The Appearances**

... and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. And last of all He was seen by me also, as to one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, and not worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was

not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Therefore, whether it was me or them, so we preach and so you believed.

As proof of the resurrection, Paul discusses the source of the testimony of those who saw Jesus after the event. The appearances of Jesus prove that He did not wander off to some desert and die alone. Men actually witnessed His death. They also witnessed Him living again after His resurrection.

He was seen by **Peter**, and then by the **eleven apostles** (Mt 28:9,10,17; Lk 24:34,38). Reference here is to the Christ-sent apostles who remained in the mission of the apostles, for Judas was dead at the time of the appearances (See At 1:16-19). However, Matthias, who would be added later as an apostle, was also there (See At 1:23-26).

Jesus even appeared before **five hundred** brethren at once. At the time Paul wrote these words, many of these brethren were still alive. They could verify what Paul was writing. Paul's defense here is in the number of people to whom Jesus personally appeared. In the heat of persecution, and if Jesus had not actually been raised, then we would suppose that some of these five hundred brethren would have denied the resurrection. The fact that there were no denials from such

a great number of witnesses is proof that Jesus was actually raised.

Last of all, Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus road (At 9:4; 22:14,18; 26:15). Paul was the "*one born out of due time*," that is, he was as a child untimely born when Jesus personally called the apostles during His earthly ministry (See Lk 6:13).

Paul defended his apostleship before the Corinthians. However, in this context he simply humbled himself to the original Twelve, among whom he never classified himself (See Ep 3:8). He felt such because of his great persecution of the saints. Though he was a persecutor of the saints, God's **grace** came to him after the Damascus road experienced when he obeyed the gospel (At 22:16).

Because Paul recognized the tremendous grace of God in his life, he "**labored more abundantly**." When one does recognize the saving grace of God in his life, he works because of his salvation. He walks in gratitude of the gospel that he or she has obeyed. The more one appreciates the grace of God, the more one labors in thanksgiving to God for the great gift of grace (See Ep 3:7,8).

Both Paul and the Twelve preached the same gospel (Gl 2:2). Paul's argument to the Corinthians, and especially to those who were denying the resurrection, was that all the apostles were proclaiming the same

fact of the gospel event. Jesus was raised! If one denies such, then he sets himself against the testimony of Paul and the other witnesses who experienced the resurrected Jesus.

Verses 12-19

Necessity Of Jesus' Resurrection

*Now if Christ is preached that He rose from the dead, how can some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. **And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. Moreover, we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise, if it is that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is vain. You are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hope in Christ only in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied.***

After reading the above statement of Paul, it goes without saying that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then we should simply give up on Christ and Christianity. If we are inclined to be religious, then we can

form any religion that we so choose.

There were evidently some saints in Corinth who were teaching that Jesus was raised from the dead, but denying that Christians would be raised as Jesus. Paul made a reasonable statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 to answer the inconsistency of this reasoning. *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”*

Our personal belief that Jesus rose from the dead is evidence that those who die in Christ will also be raised from the dead. The hour *“is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”* (Jn 5:28,29).

In 1 Corinthians 15:13 Paul answered the erroneous and contradictory reasoning of those who denied the saints' resurrection, but affirmed Jesus' resurrection. He reverses the argument. If there is no resurrection of the righteous in the last hour, then neither has Christ been raised. His argument is that the resurrection of Christ and the righteous stand or fall together. They cannot be separated.

But if Jesus has not risen, Paul continues, then he and the apostles have been involved in **preaching lies**. Not only this, but the Corinthians have a useless faith. There is no reason for the existence of the church if Jesus is not raised or if the righteous will not

be raised. The church is built upon the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God (Mt 16:16-18). Jesus was proved to be the Son of God by the power of the resurrection (Rm 1:4). But if He is not raised, then the total foundation for the existence of the church is erased. There is no church of Christ without the resurrection. In this context, therefore, Paul is placing the entire existence of Christianity upon the fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is such a profound and fundamental fact of the truth of the gospel.

If Jesus were not raised, then Paul and the other apostles were **persecuted for nothing**. They were **false witnesses**. They suffered while knowing that what they preached was a lie. Add to this the fact that they were thus the most deceived men alive at the time if there were no resurrection. Or, if they knew that there was no resurrection, but preached it anyway, then they were the most dishonest men alive at the time. And if we believe their supposed lies concerning the resurrection, then we are the most deceived people alive today.

If Jesus has not been raised, then there is **no remission** of sins. Jesus was “*delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification*” (Rm 4:25). But if He were not raised, then this whole plan

of salvation is based on a lie.

If Jesus has not been raised, then those Christians who have died, **have perished**. They are gone forever. And thus, we would sorrow at the grave of Christians as unbelievers who have no hope (1 Th 4:13).

If Jesus has not been raised, then Christians are certainly to be **pitied**. In fact, they could be considered foolish for believing something that is false. They should be pitied for believing a book that teaches the resurrection of both Jesus and the dead.

No person can claim any relationship with Jesus if he or she does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Those religious groups who have given up the resurrection are empty shells of vain worshipers. They cling to a traditional religion that has long since removed the very foundation for the existence of the faith. They cannot, therefore, believe in the resurrection of dead saints because they have given up the resurrection of the Founder of Christianity.

Verses 20-22 Resurrection In Christ

But now Christ has been raised from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even

so **in Christ** all will be made alive.

The metaphor “**firstfruits**” is taken from the Old Testament. The firstfruits of the Jewish harvest were offered in the feast of the firstfruits (Lv 23:9-11; Nm 15:20,21). **The firstfruits was an indication of the greater harvest to come.** So is Jesus’ resurrection concerning the resurrection of the dead saints in the final day. Jesus’ resurrection is a guarantee of the resurrection to come. It is an evidence of the coming resurrection (See 1 Th 4:14).

Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead. He had previously raised Lazarus (Jn 11:38-44). However, Jesus’ resurrection was different from the resurrection of Lazarus in two ways. First, Lazarus was raised to die again. Secondly, Lazarus’ body was resurrected, but it was still of its original earthly nature. His mortal body did not put on immortality. The corruptible had not put on incorruption. It was a body that was still subject to the physical environment in which it had to live and die again.

On the other hand, Jesus’ body was **changed**. His was a body as the one we will have when He comes again (1 Jn 3:2). John did not understand the nature of this resurrected body, though he experienced it (1 Jn 1:1). Neither did Paul. But the statement “*we do not know what we will be*” in 1 John 3:2 indicates that what-

ever we will be when Jesus comes will be different than what we are now. Therefore, Paul was challenged by the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 15 to give us some idea of what we will be.

What Paul revealed in the context of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is a commentary on 1 John 3:2. John said that we will be like Jesus in His resurrected body. Though John said that we do not know what we will be, at least we somewhat understand through Paul’s description of our resurrection bodies how Jesus will be when He comes again. Jesus is coming again in bodily form like we will be as Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus is as we will be, which Paul explains as a mystery. Nevertheless, since Jesus in His final coming is as we will be, then we take note of what Paul explains in this chapter concerning the nature of our future resurrected bodies.

As a result of Adam’s disobedience, all mankind **in Adam** was driven from the Tree of Life (Gn 3:22-24). Therefore, it is appointed unto all men to physically die (Hb 9:27). All men suffer from the consequences of Adam’s sin. However, as a result of Jesus’ obedience and resurrection, all will be raised (Jn 5:28,29). At least in this text, all those **in Christ** will be made alive in some bodily form. All Christians will be raised. They will be raised to a new life. We be-

lieve that in this context Paul's concern is with those "in Christ" (Jn 11:25). The resurrection of the unrighteous is argued in other texts (See Jn 5:28,29).

Verses 23-28

Relinquishing Kingdom Reign

But everyone in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For He has put all things under His feet. But when He says all things have been subjected, it is evident that He is excluded who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then will the Son also Himself be subject to Him who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all.

The **order** of the resurrections under discussion is Jesus first, then the righteous second. There is a space of at least 2,000 years between the event of Paul's readers' resurrection and the resurrection of Jesus. **Those who belong to Christ** will rise at the final coming of Jesus. We keep in

mind that in this context, as well as the context of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul was discussing the resurrection of the righteous, not the wicked.

The **end** is the final coming of Jesus, the consummation of earth history (2 Pt 3:10-13). When Jesus comes He will put an end to all government authority. He will end the power of Satan by putting an end to Satan (Mt 25:41). He will also end His kingdom reign by delivering kingdom reign to the Father who gave it. The last enemy, death, will be no more.

Jesus must presently **reign** until the end comes. His present reign is with all authority (Mt 28:18). It is over all principalities and powers of this world and the spirit world (Ep 1:21-23; Ph 2:9-11). All angels and authorities have been made subject to Him (1 Pt 3:22). But when He comes again, He will return all kingdom reign to the Father. This will be done in order that the Godhead exists as it has existed in all eternity.

The last enemy of man is **physical death**. The end of physical death will occur when "death and hades" are cast into eternal destruction on the last day (Rv 20:14). Paul wrote that these things have "*now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" (2 Tm 1:10). We

would affirm that this “appearing” refers to Jesus’ appearing **after the cross**. Jesus’ resurrection is the proof that death had been brought to naught by His resurrection. Through His death and resurrection, He released “those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hb 2:14,15). His resurrection is a revelation that we will be raised never to die again.

Jesus must presently **reign** until He “has put all things under His feet” (See Ps 8:6; 110:1; At 2:34; Hb 2:5-9; 1 Pt 3:22). But when all things have been subjected to Him, then all things will come to an end. When Jesus’ present kingdom reign has accomplished that for which it was established, then He will have terminated the purpose for His reign. Therefore, we would correctly conclude that Jesus is not coming again in order to continue His reign over all things. He is coming in order to consummate His reign. There is simply no statement of Scripture that portrays Jesus coming again in order to reign on this earth. After the accomplished purpose of Jesus’ present kingdom reign has been realized, then kingdom reign will be returned to the Godhead who gave it to the Son at the time of His coronation (See Mt 28:18; Jn 13:3; 17:2).

Verses 29-34

Baptism Of The Dead

*Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? **Why then are they baptized for the dead?** And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If according to men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? **If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.** Be not deceived, evil company corrupts good morals. Awake to righteousness and do not sin, for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*

In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul asked two questions. First, he asked, “If the physically dead are not raised, then why did you obey the gospel (baptized) on behalf of your own spiritually dead selves?” In other words, why be baptized in order to be joined to Christ, if Christ’s resurrection did not occur?

In Romans 6:5 Paul had stated, “*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also will be in the likeness of His resurrection.*” But if Jesus has not been raised, then there is no resurrection of the Christian in the likeness of His resurrection. Why then would one be baptized for remission of sins since there is no remission in a dead Savior?

Paul's second question reflected on his experience on the Damascus road. He asked, "If Jesus is not raised from the dead, then why am I suffering in order to proclaim His resurrection?"

Those in Corinth who denied the resurrection were essentially calling Paul a false witness. However, his suffering in order to proclaim the resurrection was evidence of His Damascus road experience (See 2 Co 11:23-28; Gl 5:11). He had actually seen the resurrected Jesus. His testimony was true. Therefore, if we deny the resurrection, then we say that he was a false witness. But the extent of his suffering can be answered only in the fact that he actually experienced the resurrected Jesus.

Paul **died daily** (See Rm 8:36; 2 Co 4:11; Gl 2:20). Would one do such for a hallucination on a desert road? We believe that the extent of his suffering to preach the gospel of the resurrection is proof that the Damascus road experience was true. No man in his right mind would suffer as he did for a delusion.

Would a man willingly be thrown to **beasts** for a delusion? If there were no resurrection, then certainly, Christians are to be pitied for their faith in the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, then "*let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*"

Those who denied the resurrec-

tion in Corinth were intimidating those who continued to believe in it. For this reason Paul said, "*Evil company corrupts good morals.*" No greater statement could have been made concerning the keeping of close company with those who deny fundamental teachings of the gospel. John said, "*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house nor greet him*" (2 Jn 10).

Neither Paul nor John's statements concern those matters over which brethren disagree in the area of opinion. The context of both statements (1 Co 15 & 2 Jn) surrounds a denial of fundamental teaching. The context of the statements, therefore, help us define fundamental teaching concerning the truth of the gospel. Paul's statement is in the context of those who were denying the resurrection, and thus denying the gospel of Jesus' ascension and present reign. Thus the resurrection is one of those fundamental teachings that is central to Christian faith. John's statement is in the context of those "*who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh*" (2 Jn 7). Therefore, belief in the incarnation of Jesus is another fundamental teaching. Jesus could not be coming in the flesh if He were not raised in the flesh. These are major teachings of the New Testament. They are not trivial matters of opinion.

Paul's exhortation, therefore, is to **awake** to righteousness (Ep 4:24; 1 Jn 2:29). If we deny the coming resurrection, then we deny life after death. If we are not raised in the end, then we should just eat, drink and be merry. Those who believe that this life is all there is, will involve themselves in all sorts of sin to please the carnal nature of the flesh. However, belief in the resurrection encourages gospel living. It is important, therefore, to have the **knowledge of God** on this matter in order to guard ourselves against living a life of sin.

Verses 35-37 Change

But some will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what body do they come?" Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

Some in Corinth were arguing against the resurrection on the basis that they could not understand the concept of a resurrected body. Because they could not understand that which was beyond their experience, they thought such could not happen. Such thinking is the fallacy of those whose minds cannot imagine beyond the physical world. Such is the think-

ing of the **foolish one** who creates religious dogma after the thinking of man, not God. However, if we believe in God, then we must believe in God as a creator. If God can create, then certainly He can resurrect. The fact that there is a God who can create is evidence that He can also resurrect.

Paul used an earthly wonder to illustrate an end-of-time phenomenon. As a seed is sown in the ground and is transformed into something different when it grows, so it is with the body. Paul's analogy illustrates that change in the body must take place after it is sown in death. The point is that it must first be sown before it has the opportunity to change. Without the sowing, there is no possibility of changing. Christians look at death, therefore, as an opportunity to change into the spiritual body that is yet in the future when Jesus comes again.

Verses 38-41 Different Flesh

But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh. But there is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, another of birds. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. But the glory of the heavenly is one and the glory of the earthly is another.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for one star differs from another star in glory.

Since God created different kinds of flesh, it is not difficult to understand that He could create another. There exists different kinds of **flesh** that we witness today. We believe that each kind came from the Creator. Paul reasons, “What would be the difficulty in believing that God could create another kind of body, the resurrected body?”

Those who were denying the resurrection, therefore, were actually denying the ability of God to create the resurrected body. This is Paul’s argument to those who were denying the bodily resurrection because they could not understand that which is beyond their experiential environment.

Therefore, Paul does not accept denial that is based on the lack of experience. In other words, that which will exist in the future is not dependent on what we experience in the present. If it did, then no such thing as a heavenly realm or resurrected body could exist, for we would reason that only that which can exist must be limited to our experiential environment. Therefore, Paul’s argument is against the naturalist who claims that nothing exists outside his natural environment of experience.

Verses 42-45 The New Body

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown perishable. It is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul.” The last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving spirit.

The resurrected body will not be subject to **corruption**, that is, decay. It will not be subject to disease and death. Our present body dies and will return to the dust. However, the **incorruptible** body will not die or decay. This present body will be raised a **glorious** body. It will be raised with **power** over physical death.

Paul states that the new body will be a **spiritual body**. Though he explained that this present body will be changed, he is not able to define the nature of this changed body. It will be a body that has no definition by our earthly words. Through revelation, therefore, Paul states the fact of a new and changed body. However, this “spiritual body” is still beyond our earthly understanding. Therefore, we must not frustrate ourselves by argu-

ing over the nature of this glorious body that is yet to come.

The reason the body must be changed to a spiritual body is in the fact that it will dwell in a changed environment from what we now experience. When God breathed into Adam the breath of life (Gn 2:7), Adam became a being with a body created for this physical environment. However, Jesus has breathed into the obedient believer the right to be resurrected with a spiritual body for an environment that is beyond this world (See Rm 5:14,21; Jn 5:21; Ph 3:21; Cl 3:4).

Verses 46-49

Image Of The Heavenly Man

However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly. The second man is from heaven. As was the earthly, so also are those who are earthly; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, let us also bear the image of the heavenly.

Adam came **before** Jesus. Therefore, the physical body must come before the spiritual body. The body of Adam was **of the earth** (Gn 2:7; 3:19; 5:5). However, the body that will come as a result of being in

Christ, will be **from heaven**. Jesus came from heaven (Jn 3:13,31; 8:23,42). He thus came with the authority to give us a body from heaven.

All men are presently confined to an earthly body of dust as Adam. But Christians will be changed into a heavenly body at the resurrection. We are physically born in the physical **image** of Adam's body. Those who are spiritually born, will be resurrected with a **heavenly** body like that of Jesus (See Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2). We all seek this heavenly body.

Verses 50-53

The Mystery

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

It is not possible that this body of **flesh and blood** can dwell in an environment wherein only incorruptible bodies can dwell. Therefore, this body must be changed. It must be

changed to a spiritual body that is not subject to the elements of this environment.

Paul revealed a **mystery**. The mystery is the changing of this body that is subject to a physical environment into a body that is eternal in nature. Therefore, we will not remain in the grave. We will be **changed**. The change will take place in a **moment**. It will be as fast as blinking one's eye. It will happen at the last trumpet when the dead in Christ are raised (1 Th 4:13-17). When the last trumpet is sounded, dead saints will be raised with a changed body (Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2). The corruptible body will be changed to an incorruptible body. The mortal body will be changed to an immortal body (See 2 Co 5:1-8).

Some have difficulty in understanding any harmony between "same" and "changed." It will be the same body, according to Paul's mystery. However, this same body will be a changed body. It will be different, for it will be heavenly or spiritual in nature. These words may confuse us. However, we must understand that Paul was revealing something that is beyond our physical experience. Therefore, we do not pretend to understand the nature of this resurrected body. We must simply content ourselves with the few words Paul used to convey the fact that we will be changed. Our present body

will be the seed from which the changed and imperishable body will come.

Verses 54-57 **End Of Physical Death**

So when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Death is swallowed up because it will be terminated. After the final resurrection, physical death will exist no more (See Rv 20:13,14). Isaiah had prophesied this: "*He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces*" (Is 25:8). Paul referred to Hosea 13:14 in asking a personified **death** where his victory over man is after the final resurrection. His victory is gone forever because physical death will no longer exist after the resurrection.

Physical death came into the world when Adam sinned. Because of his sin, Adam was driven from the tree of life, "*lest he put out his hand*

and take also of the tree of life, and eat, **and live forever**" (Gn 3:22-24). Therefore, in Adam all men physically die (1 Co 15:20-22). Since Adam, it has been appointed unto all men to physically die (Hb 9:27), for no one can now eat of the tree of life.

The power of sin is **law**. All men sin (Rm 3:23). It is impossible for men to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Lest we accuse Adam of ruining our chance to "live forever" on earth, we must think of the words of Paul in Romans 5:12: "*Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, **because all sinned.***" Paul's argument is that none has a right to accuse Adam for introducing both spiritual and physical death into the world. The reason no one can make such an accusation against Adam is that all have sinned.

Our victory over law has come through God's grace that was revealed through Jesus. "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Ti 2:11). Jesus came that "*He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people*" (Ti 2:14). Here is the victory. Paul explains.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead

*in trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), and **raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus** (Ep 2:4-7).*

Because the Christian has been raised up with Jesus in obedience to the gospel in baptism (See Rm 6:3-5), he will also be raised up in the final day. It will be then that we will understand the exceeding riches of the Father. It will be then that we will understand the reward of being saved by grace and not by law keeping.

Law brings death because no man can keep law perfectly. Therefore, in order for us to be saved, we need grace. God's grace came through Jesus (Rm 5:15; Ti 2:11). And because of this grace, we will be raised with an incorruptible body to live eternally with the Father.

Verse 58 **The Immovable**

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

“**Therefore**” is Paul’s conclusion and emphasis. Since his preceding remarks are true, then Christians must be **immovable** in their convictions. He reaffirms the necessity for believing in the resurrection. Since we so believe, then we know that what happens to our physical body in this life is of no consequence in reference to eternity. Because we believe, we stand fast in the Lord, trusting in the resurrection to come (Ep 6:10,14; 2 Pt 3:14).

Because we will be raised “in the Lord” we know that all our labors for the Lord are not useless. We are saddened by those who are not “in the Lord” in this life who do good deeds. Though their good works are beneficial to the community, their works do not profit toward eternal life. There are many good religious people who do good things in the “name of the Lord.” However, they have not obeyed the Lord in obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-5; Gl 3:26,27). They are outside Christ, outside a covenant relationship with God. Therefore, their labors will not profit toward eternity. Only those who are **in the Lord** are producing labors that profit toward eternity (Rv 14:13).

Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 15 is complete. The centrality of his preaching was the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation, and finally, the consummation of all things. One major event of the gospel was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As proof of the resurrection, Jesus was seen by many witnesses. These witnesses could testify to the fact of His resurrection. Therefore, since Jesus is the firstfruits of all those who have died, then we know that there is another resurrection to come. This resurrection will be bodily.

Our physical body dies as a natural body. However, the time is coming when it will be raised. In the twinkling of an eye it will be changed to immortality. Our corruptible body will put on incorruption. We will be raised with a spiritual body that will dwell in an eternal habitation.

Physical death will be put to death by the resurrection to come. This last enemy of man will be cast into the lake of fire as resurrected saints go away into eternity. We will have victory over death by our resurrection to come.

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20px;"><i>Gospel Leadership</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Equipping The Saints</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Developing Character</i></p> <p><i>The Function Of Discipleship</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Gospel Evangelism</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Authentic Church</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Existence Of God</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Bible And Science</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Bible And Faith</i></p> <p><i>Luke's Historical Defense Of Christianity</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Sectarian Denominationalism</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Roman Catholicism</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Justified By Works</i></p> <p><i>Making Disciples In A Global Community</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>21st Century Restoration</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Restoration!</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Worship God</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Worship Freely</i></p> <p><i>One Lord With All Authority Over All Things</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Christ-Centered Faith</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>The Lord's Supper</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Fundamental Messages</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Obedience To The Gospel</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Music Of The Church</i></p> <p><i>Exercising Sobriety And Self-Control</i></p> | <p><i>Experiential Religion Versus Word-Based Faith</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Grace Response Versus Tithing By Law</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>The Religious Sectarian</i></p> <p><i>Fellowship And Unity Of The Organic Body</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Cross-Centered Faith</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Escape From Bondage</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Perceptions And Postulations</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Our Faith – Our Salvation</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>His Grace – Our Faith</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>The Living Sacrifice</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Committed To World Evangelism</i></p> <p><i>Organic Function Of The Body Of Christ</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>The World As It Is</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>The Godly Giver</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Thirsting For Word From God</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Following Jesus Into Glory</i></p> <p><i>The Seven Flickering Flames Of Asia</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>The Giants Among Us</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Dead Preachers</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>New Creation</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Character For Christ</i></p> <p><i>The Power Of Many As One</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Last High Priest</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Survivors</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Change For Growth</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Building Eternal Relationships</i></p> <p><i>Inscriptions: Living The Word Of God</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Disciples Of Divinity</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Fasting</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Gospel Of God's Heart</i></p> <p><i>Implementing Gospel Living</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>It's All About Jesus</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Escape From Religion</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Rise And Fall Of Civilizations</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>In Search Of The First Love</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Gospel Restoration</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Solutions To The Problem</i></p> <p><i>Tethered To Christ Through The Gospel</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Gospel According To Hebrews</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Gospel Teacher</i></p> <p><i>Gospel Teacher In Times Of Turmoil</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>The Incarnational Journey Of God</i></p> |
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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**