



Sudden Death Overtime

What Lies Ahead?

Phil Enlow



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Author's Note

The articles that make up the material from which *Sudden Death Overtime* was compiled were first published in the *Midnight Cry Messenger* in 2001 and 2002. The reader should bear this in mind as some references — such as the events of September 11 — will seem “dated.” In addition, there are references to Bro. Thomas in the present tense, whereas the Lord called him home in August 2004. While we miss him, the Lord is still here!

From time to time various ones have asked me about the possibility of producing a book out of the article series and I have sort of “put it on the shelf.” More recently, however, I began to feel a renewed desire to share once again the burden that resulted in the series in the first place. To that end the series has been recast into logical chapters and — with some revisions — brought together here. And so, it is commended to the reader’s conscience before God.

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”

NIV.

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Introduction

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” 1 Thess. 5:1-4.

It is very evident from these verses that the Apostle Paul had done quite a bit of teaching regarding the course of the age and the coming of Christ. They knew what to expect. They understood how it would be. They knew that all history was pointing toward a day known as “the day of the Lord,” a day of utter destruction. They knew that, for the people of the world who did not know God, the coming of this day would be sudden and totally unexpected, and that it would be impossible for them at that point to escape. The reason that day would come so unexpectedly is that the people of the world would be “in darkness.” God’s people would have light and not be surprised by the day of the Lord, nor caught up in the sudden destruction it would bring.

I believe it is likewise evident from this passage, and indeed, from the Bible as a whole, that God is very much interested in giving His people light and understanding on the world in which they must live. This includes light regarding particular times and seasons, such as the days immediately preceding the coming of Christ. That is not, of course, to say that anyone but the Father will know the day and hour (Matt. 24:36), but He does desire that we be able to know and recognize “times and seasons.”

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Why?

More and more I hear people express bewilderment at the things taking place in the world. People just cannot understand things like the Columbine High School massacre, or how a woman could suddenly drown her five young children in a bathtub. What's wrong with people? They cannot understand why churches are in the condition they are in. They cannot understand the persistence of wars and other violent conflicts. In general they just cannot quite comprehend why things in this world are the way they are. We should do something! — but what?

And now, since I wrote the above, we have seen the devastating terrorist attack of Sept. 11. Multitudes who felt reasonably safe and complacent have been shocked into a state of fear and uncertainty. Jesus spoke of a time when men's hearts would be "failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Luke 21:26.

Does God want His children to be confused, bewildered, fearful? Of course not! He desires that we have light, that we understand the world around us. We may not be able to fully expound God's purposes for every particular event but the bottom line is that nothing should surprise us or cause us to be dismayed.

If you are one of His, He wants you to have light on your pathway in spite of the prevailing darkness round about. He wants you to have a rest in your soul knowing that He is able to finish what He has started. He wants you to know at all times that He has everything under control and that all is proceeding according to His wise plan. He wants you to find in Him a true hiding place from the dark tempest that is engulfing our world.

For some time now I have had a growing burden to share with my fellow believers such understanding as the Lord has given me of what is happening in our world and where we're headed. I certainly don't profess to have anywhere near all the answers — after all, God has ordained that we walk by faith — but I have lived for many years with

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an inward sense of where we are in the broad picture of things and my burden is to share this.

There is no boasting whatever implied. If any of us truly knows anything at all it is by sovereign grace alone and it must be understood in the context of the Body of Christ — for we are members one of another. Rom. 12:5. We have gifts that differ yet all are given for the benefit of the whole.

The responsibility falls upon you, the reader, to seek God from your heart as to whether this burden is from the Lord or not. If it is not, nothing will come of it. If it is, the Lord will accomplish His purpose in the hearts of those for whom it is intended. If it is, and you reject it, you are not rejecting me, but the Lord and His desire to give you light.

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Chapter One

Deception

The darkness, blindness, deception, and confusion that prevails in our world is the work of Satan and his demon host. He is variously referred to in the Word as a “liar,” “murderer,” “deceiver,” and “destroyer.” It is his nature to oppose God and His truth by every possible means. II Cor. 4:3-4, Paul says, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

The principal means Satan employs is to spew out a veritable flood of ideas that, on the one hand, appeal to the natural man and, on the other, directly oppose and contradict the truth of God. It doesn't matter whether the ideas harmonize with one another or not so long as they capture men's minds and divert them from truth.

And so, we observe mankind. For many, all it takes is a philosophy of self-will and self-pleasing. Such people are easily controlled through their various lusts. Others find their reason for being in some cause — something they firmly believe will “save the world,” or at least improve it. Their hearts are taken up with mankind, his world, and his future.

It should be obvious that the world of religion is some of Satan's most fertile ground when it comes to disseminating falsehood. After all, religion is supposed to be devoted to providing answers leading to the betterment of mankind. Under Satan's inspiration, however, it has become a bedlam of confusion and his greatest weapon in the warfare against God and truth.

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Of course, there is no one Satan is more interested in hindering and deceiving than true Christian believers. He has the world defenseless in his clutches. Christians, on the other hand, are here in part to be the light of the world. Matt. 5:14-16. Satan hates Christ. He hates light. He has spared no effort to confuse, divide, and misdirect God's people.

Naturally, when it comes to misleading God's people it has been necessary for him to carefully disguise his activity and to cause them, by various means, to believe it is from God. Paul warned believers in II Cor. 11 of "another Jesus," "another spirit," "another gospel," "false apostles," "deceitful workers," Satan's "ministers." In verse 14 he warns that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." What the world calls "Christianity" is, for the most part, the fruit of Satan's activity. It is "Christian" in name only. Christ is not the Head of it. It is a Babylon of confusion.

In spite of all this, God has faithfully called and preserved an elect remnant of true believers down through the ages. Even though they have been scattered and, in varying degrees, influenced by the confusion — some to the point of being spoiled and ineffective — yet they are His! He will never abandon His own!

The same God who preserved Noah through the flood also saved Lot from Sodom. Lot was in a bad place and his life didn't count for much, yet he was a righteous man at heart and God wouldn't destroy the wicked sinners of Sodom until He had first gotten Lot out.

The *Introduction* began by referring to Paul's words from I Thess. 5:1-4. Paul said he didn't need to write about the times and seasons with respect to the Day of the Lord because they already had a clear understanding of what was to happen. Generally speaking, today that is not true. Believers in our day, the ones most directly affected by the things of which Paul wrote, understand them far less than did the Thessalonian believers. We have seen the warnings of Jesus come to pass.

Deception

Deception About The End Time

In Matthew 24:3 the disciples asked Jesus, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Jesus had just told them that the temple they found so impressive would be destroyed. Before He even began to answer their questions He first warned of deception.

The deception of which he warned would result from the ministry of men who came claiming to represent Him (“in my name”). The many divergent doctrines we see today concerning the end of the age have all — every one of them — come to us through men who claimed to represent Christ! Think about that! Obviously, most of these doctrines did not originate with Christ at all, however sincere their promoters may have been.

And it’s not just a theological contest — your “studied” interpretation versus mine and other fellow’s. The thing we all need to be most concerned about is, “What saith the Lord?” He knows! He has the wisdom and instruction we need for this hour. We don’t need man’s interpretation of the Word but God’s revelation of it, fresh from the throne, suited to time, place, and need.

I can just hear someone saying, “Well, what makes you think you know any more than the rest? Fair question! I would first have you recall what I said earlier about seeking the Lord. If your heart is to do His will (John 7:17) and you honestly look to Him regarding all this, then I am satisfied.

Beyond that, I am not just a “lone wolf” somewhere spewing out “private interpretations.” The Lord has made me a part of the Body of Christ in a local, practical sense. I am part of a fellowship that looks to Christ for leadership and watches over one another in love. I am confident that wisdom and discernment are available. If other responsible individuals read this and conclude that I have “missed the Lord,” then this will never see the light of day. I have a strong sense of my responsibility, by His grace, to give out His Word and not mine. See Jeremiah 33 for what the Lord had to say of those who falsely claimed to prophesy in His name. So I say with Paul, “Depise

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not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." I Thess. 5:20-21.

Today, just for a few examples of those who are even concerned about the end of the age, we have some who are sitting around waiting for "the rapture"; some have their spiritual eyes glued to Israel and the Middle East; some are desperately pursuing their concept of "revival," or even "revolution"; some are pursuing a dream of achieving immortality, becoming "manifested sons" and going forth to deliver creation.

The burden that I feel is very different. What, truly, is the nature of the hour in which we live? What does the Lord have to say about it? What are the prospects for this world? For God's people?

Chapter Two

What Did Jesus Say?

The “broad picture” begins with a comparison made by Jesus himself. “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.” Luke 17:26-27.

Notice the key points made in this comparison. For the world, life went on as usual. They engaged in their customary daily activities unaware of the terrible judgment that was about to fall upon them. When it came, they were all destroyed, Noah and his family, on the other hand, were safely preserved. Notice how perfectly this harmonizes with Paul’s words in I Thess. 5:1-4. Peter refers to the world before the flood as “the old world” (II Peter 2:5) and that seems as fitting a label for it as any.

The Old World

After Adam and Eve had sinned and been expelled from the garden, they began to have children. From this beginning was the old world populated. Although they had many sons and daughters (Gen. 5:4) the scriptural account focuses on just three sons.

The first two were Cain and Abel and Genesis 4 recounts for us the intense jealousy and hatred in Cain that led to the murder of his brother, Abel. As a result of this, Cain, who was “of that evil one” (I John 3:12), “went out from the presence of the Lord” (Gen. 4:16). There is no record that any of Cain’s descendants ever served God.

After the murder of Abel, Adam and Eve had another son, Seth. Gen. 4:26 tells us that Seth in turn had a son he named Enos: “then

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began men to call upon the name of the Lord.” Chapter 5 of Genesis gives us the generations of Seth’s descendants down to Noah.

This line begun by Seth pretty much constituted God’s people on the earth during the time of the old world. They had a knowledge of God that was transmitted from generation to generation. They were undoubtedly a small minority among the general population as God’s people have always been.

Still, there was little of a spiritual nature said about them with the notable exception of Enoch. His life is summarized for us in four profound words: “Enoch walked with God.” His life was one long intimate personal relationship with God. This walk with God was so unique, so special, that Enoch did not die but was taken directly to be with God. Heb. 11:5 lists him among the heroes of faith.

We can see from the account of what happened in the Garden of Eden something of God’s heart with respect to man. His great desire is to find a place of communion and fellowship with His creation, but sin and rebellion entered in. That spirit of rebellious independence continues to this day to be the very essence of human nature. It has kept the overwhelming majority of mankind marching relentlessly towards destruction. Those who have gone against this tide and desired fellowship with God have been a tiny minority, shining exceptions to the rule in a world of gross darkness.

One thing I find very interesting in Genesis 5 is the amazing amount of overlapping of the generations there was due to the great lengths of their lives. For instance, Lamech, the father of Noah, and the ninth generation, was 56 years old when Adam died! Think about it! Adam was not some long-dead half-forgotten ancestor from the dim distant past. All of those generations had opportunity to hear first-hand about the Garden of Eden and what it was like to be in fellowship with God. I can picture Enoch and Adam having long conversations about these things. The truth is that a knowledge of God was readily available to those who desired it. In spite of this we are brought to Chapter 6.

What Did Jesus Say?

The Time of the Flood

I believe that verses 1 and 2 give us some insight into why it became necessary on God's part to destroy the world with a flood. "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."

Now I am aware of some of the more fanciful and far-out explanations for these verses but I believe that the explanation is pretty simple. The "sons of God" in this context were those from Seth's descendants who represented God's people. The "daughters of men" were just unbelieving women of the world, some, no doubt, even descendants of Cain. With the passing of time from one generation to the next there was a gradual falling away from any real heart faith toward God. Priority was given to earthly desires — in this case, sex.

Young men who had been raised to believe in and serve God put their own will and their own lusts first. It didn't matter whether the young women in question served God or not. The determining factor was their beauty and sex appeal. Notice that "they took them wives of all which *they chose*." They did the choosing. Whatever their tradition regarding God, they were serving self alone. It didn't matter what God thought.

Without question sex is one of man's strongest drives and Satan knows it. From the beginning he has used sex as a means of drawing people away from God. There is nothing evil about sex within the will and purpose of God but that is not what Satan promotes. He wants men and women to pursue sexual gratification of any and all kinds without the least thought of pleasing and honoring God. See Romans 1:20-32.

Separation

The Bible clearly teaches separation for God's people. II Cor. 6:14 says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what

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fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" Verse 17 says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." This principle can easily be demonstrated from one end of scripture to the other.

There is something about this issue that often gets to the very heart of whether someone is truly serving God or themselves. How often do we see young people raised in the church become stubborn and self-willed in this area. They want what they want and no one has any right to tell them different — they think.

Really serving God, as opposed to merely being religious, is a matter of giving up our lives. We do not belong to ourselves but to Him. Our lives are no longer ours to do with as we please but as He pleases. We have no right to choose our mates! That is a critically important matter where, especially in this hour, we need divine wisdom and guidance.

Follow Your Heart?

How often do we hear the modern saying, "Follow your heart"? This supposed wisdom is responsible for the mess the world is in! Proverbs 28:26 says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered." Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" People are willingly brainwashed by the devil's philosophies! It is our nature to love darkness rather than light because our deeds are evil (John 3:19). Real salvation deals with our wicked, deceitful hearts.

If young people — or older people, for that matter — are not willing to trust the Lord in this area rather than their own heart, are they truly trusting Him in any area? Salvation, for instance? I'm glad that sometimes, when young people make a willful mistake they are able to find grace to repent and go on with God. What heartache they often must reap, though. It's so much better to seek God and wait on Him.

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Devil's Food

People don't really know what they are up against in this world. They feel natural earthly desires and pursue the means to fulfill those desires and think that that's all there is to it. But they are ignorant of the spiritual dimension. This world is the province of Satan and all his demon host. As we said earlier, they are enemies to God and righteousness.

Part of God's pronouncement of judgment against Satan in the garden after he had deceived Eve was this: "...and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." Genesis 3:14. That's not talking about snakes eating dirt. It was a symbolic reference to the life to which demons were consigned, a life of preying upon human flesh. Demons are utterly miserable unless they can find some human vessel through whom to express their evil nature. In that manner are their victims "eaten."

Peter warned Christian believers about their adversary the devil who, "as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." I Peter 5:8. Notice the language there: "devour." When men pursue their own earthly lives apart from God, unbeknownst to them their lives are really spent satisfying the lusts of demons. When they are all used up the devils just laugh and move on to another victim. Men and women without God in this world are nothing more than devil's food.

That's what happened to the old world. Demons, working behind the scenes, drew men away from serving God to a life of pursuing their own earthly desires. This reached a point where God looked down to see how many people were actually serving Him and interested at all in righteousness and basically found just one man — Noah.

End of Opportunity

In Genesis 6:3 we read, "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." First of all, it is obvious from this that

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God had reached out to man in an effort to prevent this falling away. He had not just stayed on the sidelines watching it happen. There was a “striving” on His part.

There is something terrible that happens, however, when God reaches out to a man and he says, “No.” That man’s heart grows harder and harder the oftener that happens until there comes a time when he can no longer hear the voice of God at all. When God said what He did in Genesis 6:3 He saw the end approaching. He saw the condition that had developed and knew that most men were basically sealed in their evil condition. He made a sober determination. He declared a period of 120 years after which it would be over. It is evident from the passage as a whole what the end of that period would bring: the flood of destruction.

Overtime

The unusual title of this book is taken from the sports world. When certain types of athletic contests have been played for the prescribed amount of time and the score remains tied, they have what is called a “sudden death overtime.” That means that as soon as someone scores the game is over. It can be an exciting time because no one knows when the contest will end. It can come at any time.

I am using the expression “sudden death overtime,” however, in a very different sense concerning the end of the age. I certainly do not mean to imply in the least that there is a tie score between God and the devil and that the outcome is in doubt. What I do mean can be easily illustrated by the end of the old world.

For a considerable period of time God had dealt with and reached out to the old world. Men had opportunity to know Him and serve Him and some few did. However, this general period of opportunity — the regular “game” — ended. God, in a sense, declared an “overtime” period, in this case, 120 years. Most men were unaware of this. Life went on as usual. But God’s clock started ticking...and ticking...and ticking.

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Every day was one day closer to sudden destruction for the world. It was a period of time, known to God, but unknown to man. Another apt title might have been “Countdown to Judgment.” Even Noah, who knew of the coming destruction and believed and served God did not know exactly when it would happen. His job was just to faithfully walk with God and God promised to save Him from it.

We know from Genesis 6:6 that it was grief of heart at man’s condition that caused God to start the judgment clock ticking, yet we can see the mercy of God demonstrated in the 120 years of delay. I see two principal things that God desired to accomplish during this period. One was to give ample warning to the world about what was to come. No one would have an excuse. No one could say they had not been warned. The other thing was to provide for the safety and preservation of His own. He would not destroy the righteous with the wicked.

God’s Word

Central to both purposes was the need to communicate with man in some way. What could be more important than God’s Word? When I say “God’s Word” I am not referring just to the Bible but to the Word that God speaks — present tense — to convey truth that is desperately needed by the hearers at that particular time. What God had to say to that generation was their only hope. His Word alone stood between them and catastrophe. Do you believe that God speaks to men at such times? I do!

Yet God did not thunder out His Word from the heavens or send a shining angel to speak to man. He used one of their fellowmen, Noah. Genesis 6:8 tells us that “...Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” In verse 13 we read, “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” This declaration was followed by specific instructions for the building of the ark. II Peter 2:5 refers to Noah as a “preacher of righteousness.” That is how God chose to speak to that generation.

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Noah's preaching was God's Word to the old world. His Spirit rested upon Noah to declare the message of coming judgment and of a way of deliverance. That Word produced — as God's Word always does — an eternal separation among those who heard. A very few — Noah's wife, his three sons, and their wives — believed the message. Their faith was demonstrated by helping Noah in the building of the ark. All the rest rejected God speaking through Noah and perished when His Word came to pass.

That is what happens when man persists in rejecting the Word of God. He reaches a place and a condition where he cannot even recognize the voice of God, let alone bow to it. What is left when that happens but certain judgment? Do you think that man can simply ignore God, live as if He didn't exist, and hope to prosper?

Men, no doubt, had their own way of looking at things but in God's eyes everything had become hopelessly corrupted by sin (Genesis 6:12). In that condition man could never fulfill the purpose for which God had created him. What arrogance it is for man to presume that he is the master of his own fate! He is but a breath away from judgment. I wonder what happened to their pride when the rain began to fall? But it was too late. We must hear the voice of God when and how He chooses to speak to us. It is His mercy that He does so at all.

The Message

Notice that God's Word to Noah, and then through Noah to that generation, was a simple one: judgment is coming. There was no hint whatever of any other outcome. God didn't say that if men repented the flood could be avoided. Noah didn't preach "revival" or "renewal." They were beyond that. Judgment was a certainty. The message wasn't, "Believe and we can turn this thing around." It was, "Believe or perish." God drew a "line in the sand." It was his final Word to that generation.

Many of us have seen movies or television dramas in which there is a bomb with some kind of countdown device attached. We are held

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in suspense while the hero braves incredible odds to disarm the device and stop the countdown before the bomb goes off. Part of the suspense is achieved by showing us the timer ticking down — with appropriate sound effects! Noah's generation did not even know that God's timer was ticking down. And who is able to prevent His will? He is God! He made the universe!

Noah Stood Alone

Did you ever wonder where Noah's father and grandfather were in all of this? They lived through almost all of the 120 years yet the scripture is silent regarding them. You would think that if they were believers they would have at least been encouraging Noah even if they were too old to help. And Methuselah, Noah's grandfather, was the son of Enoch! How did he get so far from God? The truth is that we are each responsible to God personally. It is a great blessing to have godly relatives but unless we personally repent and believe we will be lost. Even the testimony of Enoch did not save Methuselah. On the other hand Noah had to stand apart, not only from the world in general, but also from his father and grandfather. He could not allow their unbelief to turn him aside from wholly following the Lord.

Look at the one thing that was recorded concerning the life of Lamech, Noah's father. When he fathered a son the scripture records, "And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed." Genesis 5:29. What an epitaph! What was his life about? What was he most concerned about? How would you like your life to be summarized by saying that you produced a son to help with all the work?! What a contrast that is to, "Enoch walked with God."

Provision for God's People

Other than preaching and warning men, Noah's main concern was building the ark. I Peter 3:20 refers in passing to the time, "when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the

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ark was a preparing....” This gives us an insight into why there was a delay between God’s evaluation of man’s condition and the judgment: He was concerned about His people. He was willing to put up with the general wickedness of mankind so that His own could be properly provided for.

I believe that is always God’s priority in what He does in the earth: the welfare and salvation of His people. It flows out of His utter faithfulness to us. No matter how bad things get down here, He will never abandon His own!

Notice too that Noah was not merely given a general warning of what was to come but he was given very specific instruction as to what to do — and when. He didn’t convene a family council to come up with a plan. Their lives became, in one sense, utter simplicity: hearing God’s Word — His instruction — and carrying it out. Do you believe that God wants to lead His people in such an hour? I do!

What a contrast this is with the ways of religion with all its humanly contrived programs and traditions! I wonder how many preachers today actually have the Word of God for this present hour and how many just echo the traditions of their own denomination or movement? It is a late hour, and religion and good sermons won’t save people. We need to have God’s message or be silent.

What is The Word of God?

I feel such a strong need to emphasize this because I fear that few in our day even know what the Word of God is. They equate the Word of God with their own doctrines and traditions or with the scriptures themselves. I thank God for the Bible. It is indeed the inspired written Word of God but the Word I’m talking about is more than the mere letter of the Word recorded in the Bible. Everyone has that!

Those who listened to Jesus noticed a clear difference between his ministry and that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus spoke as one who had authority. Matt. 7:28-29. That was because He did! The Father had sent His Son with His Word for that generation. He spoke only

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what the Father gave him to speak. The Spirit of God rested upon Him in all He did and breathed life and power into his words. When people listened to the scribes they heard the traditions of Jewish religion. When they listened to Jesus they heard the Word of God.

What do people hear in most churches today! Do they truly hear God's message for that particular occasion and need delivered with life and power? Or do they hear someone's sermon? I'm afraid that very few have what Paul referred to as a "ministry of the Spirit," able to impart life. II Cor. 3:5-6.

What if God wanted to speak to the average church? How would He go about it? Would the people hear what He had to say? Look what happened in a good Bible-believing synagogue when Jesus came one day with God's Word. Luke 4:28-29. They were full of wrath and tried to kill him! Do you really think it is any different today? The greatest opposition to the anointed Word of God always comes from the halls of religion. That is because some spirit other than Christ rules there.

How important was it to have access to the Word of God in Noah's day? It is no less so in our day. "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." Rev. 3:22. That is always something that is very present tense and targeted at the needs of the hearers. I believe that God knows everyone that is His and that He is able to get His message to everyone who truly desires to hear it. And that is the key: to truly desire to hear it.

Believers Stuck Together

Notice also that Noah's family labored together to carry out God's instruction. They didn't head off in different directions, doing their own thing while claiming to still "believe." They stuck close to where God could speak to them. When it came near to the time for the flood God spoke to them with specific final instructions. He didn't speak to the world. Walking with God meant walking together with His people.

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What happened in Noah's day stands as a testament to two things. First is the inevitable result of man's living in rebellion against his Maker. Every single man, woman, boy, and girl not in the ark perished — no exceptions. Secondly, what happened reveals the faithful commitment of a loving Heavenly Father to those who love and serve Him. Everyone in the ark was saved from the destruction that befell their world. What a glorious hope we have in the Lord!

Chapter Three

God's Original Intention

God is both a God of salvation and a God of judgment. For man to truly believe that he is the master of his own destiny he must be in a state of great darkness and deception. There will be an end to the sin and rebellion that has, in general, characterized the human race. That end will be sudden and totally unexpected by lost mankind.

One glorious truth has become evident in all that has followed the flood, that God has never given up on His original intention in creating man! We were created in His image, designed to enjoy a beautiful creation and to live lives of intimate fellowship with a pure and holy God. Sin ruined it for this present world. Both human life and creation itself have become hopelessly corrupted. Death and utter destruction became absolutely inevitable the moment sin entered in.

People do not grasp the enormity of what happened in the garden when Adam and Eve sinned. They do not understand the hopelessness of human nature. The real problem is not what we do: it is what we are. We sin because we are sinners. We are beyond mere reform. All our attempts at seeming "righteousness" are a sad delusion, an affront to a holy God. Sin is far worse than any disease known to man. Diseases may kill the body but sin kills the soul. It is terminal. The only way the effects of sin can be fully eliminated is the destruction of this present creation by fire and the death of every sinner.

None of this has taken God by surprise. Before the foundation of the world He had a plan. When His plan is complete there will be a brand new creation free from every taint of sin and rebellion. And He will have sinless sons and daughters to rule over and to enjoy that

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creation. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and He will be their God. The former things will have passed away. Rev. 21:3-4.

The Only Hope

Only God could deal with the human condition. Man is not only unable, but totally unwilling, being naturally inclined to cling to his sin. Rom. 3:10-18. God's solution to sin does not stop with death and destruction. It also opens a doorway to full reconciliation with Himself and to eternal life.

Through His Son Jesus Christ's death on the cross for us, sinners may escape the power of sin and death and be made fit to be citizens of the new creation! When sinners hear the gospel — the good news — proclaimed by someone God has sent and empowered, and when God works with their hearts, and they believe and confess from their hearts Christ as Lord and Savior that miracle of grace begins. Rom. 10:8-17. From that very moment they become a part of the new creation. They are born of the very life of God. Their bodies will perish as part of the old creation but they will live on forever! II Cor. 5:17-21.

This great truth is the key to human history. The destiny of every man rests upon where he stands with respect to God's Son. It is either believe and live or reject and perish. Ultimately there are only two categories of people as was the case in Noah's day: believers and unbelievers, those who bow the knee and those who remain in rebellion.

Many unbelievers are very religious but their religious "faith" is merely a rebellious substitute for the true faith of Christ. Rom. 10:2-3, Matt. 7:21-23. When the true Word of God comes they react to it as did those in Luke 4:18-32.

Only One Plan

I pointed out that before the world came into being God had a plan. I want to emphasize the fact that He has only one plan, not

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several as some popular religion asserts. And He has only one people, His elect, the redeemed of all ages, all saved exactly the same way — by faith. And all stand upon the only true foundation: Christ. There is no other.

God did not waste any time in setting His plan into motion after Adam and Eve had sinned. Two things in particular ought to be noted. The first is the promise to Eve that her seed would bruise the head of the serpent. This promise was fulfilled when “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4) Who, by His death, set into motion the final and inevitable defeat of Satan and the crushing of his rebellion and all of its fruit. Col. 2:15, Rev. 12:7-11, Rev. 20:10.

The second thing that God did was to kill animals in order to provide a covering for the nakedness of Adam and Eve. They had made aprons for themselves out of fig leaves but that wasn't good enough. This prefigured the covering for sin that could only come from the death of God's Son. The “fig leaves” of man's religious efforts would never do the job.

Abraham

A major step in the unfolding of God's plan was the call of Abraham. Abram, as he was known then, lived among his earthly relatives in a place called Ur of the Chaldees somewhere east of Palestine across the Arabian desert. There God spoke to him in the following words recorded in Gen. 12:1-3:

“Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

In the life of Abraham we see exemplified many principles that lie at the heart of God's plan of redemption, principles such as faith, obedience, and separation. God's people have always been commanded to “come out from among them and be ye separate....”

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II Cor. 6:17. Believing and obeying God became the guiding principle of Abraham's life. His faith in God, often tested, was no mere theory. It meant leaving behind family and homeland without knowing his destination. It meant waiting long years for the heir through whom God would fulfill His promises — so long that it took a miracle of God for it to happen. Later it meant demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice that very miracle son. It is one thing for men to say they believe. Abraham proved it by what he did and how he lived.

In Abraham was established forever the only basis upon which man could be declared righteous by God. In Rom. 4:1-3, Paul wrote, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture: Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

Abraham's faith was demonstrated by what he did but what God recognized and received was the heart of genuine faith that lay behind those works. Abraham's works earned him nothing: they simply proved the genuineness of his faith. Unlike Eve in the garden — and man in general — Abraham believed God whatever the cost.

And so Abraham, in process of time, was fully separated from earthly kin, living in tents as a foreigner in the land God had promised to his descendants. Of Abraham — and of Isaac and Jacob who followed — Heb. 11:13 says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Chapter Four

Israel

God's original promise to Abraham included two things I would particularly like to note. The first, "I will make of thee a great nation," seemingly focuses on his physical descendants who would take their place among earthly nations. The second greatly enlarges that focus: "...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Where do these great promises fit into God's overall plan? Is God primarily interested in the Jews or in all peoples? What is the place of the Jews in God's plan?

In time, the Israelites, after centuries of slavery in Egypt, were miraculously brought by God back to Palestine where they were established as a nation. It is beyond question that they were singled out from among all nations to have a special relationship with God. Deut. 4:7, 32-37, 7:6-10.

Moses, whom God anointed and charged with the responsibility of bringing the Israelites from Egyptian bondage to the very gateway of Canaan, made it clear that this special relationship with God was both a blessing and a curse. They had access to the word of God, a great blessing — provided they walked in obedience to that word. If not, they would be cursed. Deuteronomy, chapters 27 and 28.

It is very evident to any honest student of scripture that the history of the nation of Israel was overwhelmingly one of apostasy, unspeakable wickedness, rebellion, and judgment. Here and there a leader would arise and there would be a measure of righteousness and blessing but such was the exception and not the rule.

By the time Jesus came on the scene conditions were as prophesied by Isaiah (60:2): "For behold, the darkness shall cover the

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earth, and gross darkness the people....” Those who sat in Moses’ seat — Jesus called them “serpents” (Matt. 23:33) and children of the devil (John 8:44) — had fashioned for themselves a religion of convenience, blending elements of Moses’ law and their own traditional interpretations with their aspirations for earthly glory.

They believed themselves righteous in God’s eyes through the practice of their religion and looked for the fulfillment of their dreams of a great earthly kingdom in which they would be exalted above the nations. Strange to say, great numbers of religious people today have embraced the millennial dream of apostate Judaism and this belief shapes their ideas of what is to come.

Thankfully, the history of the Israelites is not all black! Never, in their darkest hour, were they without a righteous remnant who walked in the faith of their father, Abraham. God is the One Who faithfully preserved that remnant, encouraging them in the midst of suffocating darkness with the promise of what was to come. Rom. 11:4. Isaiah 54:11-17.

If we are to understand in any measure what the place of Israel was in God’s plan we need to see it through the eyes of the inspired writers of the New Testament. They had a perspective that was lacking up to that time. There was a clarity and breadth of revelation concerning God’s plan much greater than there had been before. Eph. 3:5, I Peter 1:10-12.

Israel and the Promises

Many today struggle to reconcile the promises of God with the spiritual condition in general among the Jews of Jesus’ day. Paul struggled with the same question! He had grown up as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, practicing their religion with intense zeal. Then he had come face to face with Jesus Christ in a blinding revelation and his spiritual eyes had been opened to Who Christ was.

He thought of his former brethren with anguished heart, wondering how they could be so blind in light of God’s promises of old. All of this pours forth from his pen beginning in Romans 9. It is

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evident that, as he considered these questions, no doubt with much agonizing prayer, the Lord began to teach him.

The biggest key to this question is set forth in Rom. 9:6-8. In essence God showed Paul that just because there were large numbers of people descended from Abraham who were called Israelites didn't mean that they were all His children. In fact, most weren't. This harmonizes perfectly with the words of Jesus in John 8:44, spoken to Israelites, "Ye are of your father the devil...." Let me pose a question: Are the devil's children heirs of God's promises?

Paul suddenly understood the difference between those who were begotten of Abraham's flesh and those who were begotten of his faith. The latter were but a remnant out of the whole and it was them alone that God promised to save. Rom. 9:27. Remember the words of John the Baptist to the Jewish religious leaders who came to his baptism: "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Matt. 3:9.

In John 8:39 Jesus said to the same kinds of people, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Obviously Jesus didn't consider them to be Abraham's children though they were, indeed, his physical descendants! (These things are discussed in much greater detail in other writings and I would encourage the interested reader to obtain these for prayerful consideration.)

God's Chosen People

When I was growing up there was a teaching I often heard about the Jews that was pretty much unquestioned. It was almost like, "The sky is blue," and, "The grass is green," and "The Jews are God's chosen people." This belief was considered to be just about that obvious! What about it?

It will no doubt shock some people but it needs to be said. As stated, that doctrine is utterly false! It conveys the idea that now — today — God favors Jews over Gentiles just because they are Jews. Does God make such a difference? Today? Read what Paul said in

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Rom. 10:12, part of the same passage that began in chapter 9, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”

Of course, for many centuries the Jews **were** God’s chosen people. He favored them above all other nations. The prophets were sent to them. They had access to God and salvation. Other nations in general were left in darkness — and also not held responsible for truth they didn’t have (Acts 17:30).

The question is, was this special relationship with God permanent or was it temporary, to fulfill a purpose in God’s larger plan? Is God primarily interested in favoring and saving Jews or in bringing many sons to glory from every nation under heaven? Everything in the scripture makes it plain to me that that special relationship ended when the church was launched. Matt. 21:42-43 says, “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”

In I Peter 2:9-10 we read, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” This was written to the Jewish remnant who had been called out of religious darkness (I Peter 1:18), and had **become** the people of God! Think about that! Think about each thing that was said in those two verses! Even though they had been Jews before coming to Christ, in God’s eyes they had **not** been His people! It was only when they were willing to leave the traditions of their fathers and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ that they **became** God’s people. The true church is the holy nation to which Jesus referred.

The Gentiles

Another related false idea that I have often heard conveyed by religious teachers is the notion that, whereas the law and the old covenant were a “Jewish thing” the church is a “Gentile thing.” That is absolutely false! The true blood-bought church of Jesus Christ, — as opposed to much religion that merely uses His Name — as the earthly expression of His kingdom, transcends every earthly distinction. Gal. 3:28-29 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” This was written by Paul — a Jew — to Gentile believers!

In its beginning the church was composed entirely of members of the Jewish remnant. It was all Jewish for a time! God was faithful to that believing remnant. It was time to proclaim the kingdom for which they had waited so long. His sheep heard his voice (John 10:27). This is why Paul said that the gospel was to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Everywhere he went He was led by God’s Spirit to first seek out the Jews in that place and to give them an opportunity to respond to the gospel.

But God’s plan was a lot bigger than Israel. Jesus said, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” John 10:16. Verse 26 makes it plain that those He was addressing, though Jews, were not his sheep.

The Old Testament prophets in many places spoke about the time when God would reach out to the Gentiles. (Isaiah 40:1-5, 42:1-4, 43:5-6, 45:22, 49:6, 49:13-23, 52:7-10, 54:1-3, 56:6-8, chapter 60, 62:1-2, 66:19, for example!) And so the young church began to reach out beyond those who were Jews, first to the Samaritans, and then to Cornelius and his household.

The truth is that all people, whether Jew or Gentile, occupy exactly the same place of need before God. We all come to God the same way — through the blood of Christ. The kingdom that has

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come into being through Christ is open to all who call upon Him. No one is favored over another just because he is from one nationality or another. That middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was forever broken down. Eph. 2:13-16. It will never be rebuilt!

That is why I said earlier that God has only one plan, a plan that has unfolded ever since the Garden of Eden. He has only one people, true believers of all ages. There is an unbroken line of believers that extends from Abraham to this present day. In the beginning that line was mostly Jewish but never exclusively so. Rahab the harlot and her family were from Jericho; Ruth was a Moabitess and became a physical ancestor of Jesus; Naaman was a Syrian; Uriah was a Hittite. It would not surprise me to find Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, in heaven, considering his confession after God's dealings with him. Dan. 4:34-37. Wherever God's people came into contact with other nations there were those who came to faith in the God of Israel.

Did God's turning away from natural unbelieving Israel mean that He has stopped being interested in Jews? Of course not! His love has continued to reach out to Jew and Gentile alike over the centuries to bring forth a people for His Name. There is no difference!

Anti-Semitism

I want to be absolutely clear about one thing: let no one who happens to read this, who is prejudiced against Jews or anti-Semitic in any way, dare to twist my words to find comfort for your position. You need to repent before God. The true spirit of Christ is best exemplified by Jesus Himself Who wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44) and Who, when He was dying, prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. Both judgment and mercy belong to God. He sees into every heart — including yours.

So why did God single out Israel for so many centuries? I would not presume to suggest that I could even begin to fully answer such a question but I believe that several things are clear. In part, God dealt with them that He might begin anew to reveal Himself to mankind.

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In spite of the general condition of Israel many other nations became acquainted with His words and deeds through contact with His people. As we said above, some of these were even brought to faith.

Preparation

One word that comes to mind when I think of the Old Testament is “preparation.” Everything God did in those days pointed forward to Christ. If the true church is God’s holy temple and Christ is the foundation, perhaps what went before could be characterized as the “excavation.” Just as a building needs a good foundation, so does the foundation require that the building site be properly dug out and prepared. One rather obvious example of that work of preparation is the ministry of John the Baptist who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Isaiah 40:1-5, Mark 1:1-8.

One aspect of preparation concerned the people who would form the nucleus of the church. Paul said, “...the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.” Gal. 3:24. The job of a schoolmaster is to teach. God’s design was to have a people prepared to receive Christ when the time came.

A few were gathered during the earthly ministry of Jesus but the general ingathering began on the day of Pentecost. It was God’s sovereign work of preparation that made possible the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy: “Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.” Isaiah 66:8. God’s holy nation (I Peter 2:9-10) burst forth in life and power on that one day. A major reason for the vigorous growth of the young church was that it was harvest time among the Jews. Seeds planted and nurtured long before sprang to life when the gospel rains fell.

How different it might have been without that preparation. When Paul went into the synagogue of some new city he could simply take the Jews’ own scriptures and preach Christ. Contrast that with his sermon among the heathen of Athens on Mars Hill. Everything about the gospel was new and strange to them. Acts 17:22-31.

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Of course, most of those who lived under the old covenant died long before Christ came. Of these Hebrews 11:39-40 says, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” “Perfect” means “complete.” What God did through the old covenant was part of a whole, the beginning of something that He would complete through the new.

Old Testament saints are among those referred to as “the spirits of just men made perfect.” Hebrews 12:23. Although the law could never make them complete, Christ did! Hebrews 7:19. He finished the job the law started. No Jew was ever saved through the law! It was the blood of Christ and not the blood of bulls and goats that made salvation possible — for them and also for us! Heb. 10:4. I believe they are an active part of God’s kingdom, a great company of believers redeemed over the many centuries of preparation. Their salvation is part of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham.

The whole theme of the book of Hebrews concerns the superiority of the new covenant and of the work of Christ over the old. The old covenant of laws is presented as something instituted temporarily until that which is permanent came. Hebrews 10:1-17. The law was a mere shadow of what was to come. What Christ did is forever — and the kingdom He has established has nothing to do with earthly distinctions!

The Ministry of the Prophets

Paul speaks of the church as being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, further showing the unity of God’s kingdom throughout the ages. I believe that the role of the prophets in all of this is both amazing and little understood. I Peter 1:10-12 tells us that their ministry was to US and that they themselves didn’t understand much of what they prophesied.

Most people equate “prophecy” with “prediction” as though God was merely trying to convince men to believe in Him by telling about things before they happened. There is much more to it than that!

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“Prophesying” was simply a word that meant “speaking the Word of God by divine inspiration.” This could only be done by those God sovereignly chose. Others who tried to “prophesy” were called “false prophets.” II Peter 1:21-2:1.

The Word of God is, by its nature, creative. Think for a moment about the first creation. How, for example, did “light” come to be? The scripture says simply, “And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.” Gen. 1:3. What, then, caused light to appear? Did God merely command someone to flip a great switch somewhere? Of course not! Everything necessary for light to appear was contained in the very words themselves. God’s Word is full of life and power. Heb. 4:12. What He says happens. It cannot do otherwise. When Jesus said to the corpse of Lazarus, “Come forth,” he came forth! John 11:43-44.

Consider the call of young Jeremiah to be a prophet. He was given an amazing commission: “Behold I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.” Jeremiah 1:9-10. However was he to carry out such a commission? Was he to raise a great army? No! He was to be armed with the greatest force in the universe: the Word of God! How could mere armies stand before the same force that created heaven and earth?

The Word of God that brought forth the first creation was actually spoken by His Son. Hebrews 1:2, Colossians 1:12-19. The kingdom of God ruled over by Christ is in the process of bringing forth the new creation that will forever replace the present corrupted one.

In many places in the New Testament you will find reference to such and such happening that the words of the prophet might be fulfilled. Is this mere prediction? Did the prophets just foretell? No! The ministry of the prophets was much more than prediction of things to come: **it actually caused them to happen!** Chosen men, laboring under great persecution over many centuries, were literally used of God to speak into existence the very realities of the kingdom

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that began to unfold with the ministry of Christ. By the time Jesus came on the scene everything had already been set into motion. He had but to work in cooperation with His Father to see the effects of words uttered centuries before come to pass.

Guided Missiles

One crude illustration of the Word of God is the guided missile. Speaking the Word of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is like firing a missile and the explosion when it hits its target is like the result. Remember what Isaiah said in 55:10-11: “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” What does God do when He wants to “**accomplish**” something? He speaks!

Now, there are smaller short range missiles whose effects are fairly immediate. The one firing the missile can watch as it streaks to its target. Often the Word of God is like that, but not always. Sometimes it is more like a long range missile. The missile is launched out of sight and designed to land far away in another part of the world. Sometimes one missile can even carry multiple warheads so that a single missile launch can hit several targets thousands of miles away. In such cases those handling the launch can only do their part and trust the guidance system. The end result happens far away and out of sight.

Much Old Testament prophecy is like those long range missiles. Inspired words, often little understood by their speakers, were nonetheless “launched” by faith. The God Who inspired them guided those “missiles” unerringly to their intended targets in the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the kingdom that has followed. God used the prophets to handle the launches; He has used His servants throughout this present age in connection with the

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impacts — the fulfillments — of their words. Thus are believers from every age absolutely workers together in the unfolding of God's great plan. The prophets are just as much a part of the work of the gospel as are they who preach it.

A Parallel

Ever since Abraham, God has faithfully saved a remnant of Abraham's natural children as He promised. He did so during the days in which He suffered the apostasy of the nation of Israel and He has continued to do so down to this present day. However, His dealings with the nation as a whole in many ways paralleled what happened in the old world.

For many centuries God made Himself known to Israel. He sent prophet after prophet after prophet to warn them of the consequences of continued rebellion and to offer them hope if they would turn to Him with their whole hearts. The reward of the prophets was persecution and murder. Finally God sent His Son and they crucified Him. Once again, God's Spirit would not forever strive with men. Light walked in leads to salvation. Light rejected leads ultimately to reprobation and death. Reprobation is a state in which God no longer deals with or draws someone to Christ. No one can be saved unless God draws him. John 6:44. It came time for Him to abandon the nation to the darkness it had chosen. Once again, God's judgment clock started ticking. Israel was in "sudden death overtime."

Listen to the language of John the Baptist, addressed to the religious leaders: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Matt. 3:7. Note the reference to "the wrath to come." It was stated as a simple fact. It was not something that might happen but could be avoided if they repented. A terrible judgment lay ahead for them, fixed on God's calendar. Every day was one day closer to a terrible end for them.

A few verses later John referred to Christ: "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into

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the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Matt. 3:12. What was he talking about? Do you think John was talking about literally harvesting a wheat field? Of course not! He was talking about the two kinds of people that made up Israel. The “wheat” represented the true remnant, His sheep, the spiritual children of Abraham among them. The “chaff” represented all the rest. The ministry of Christ signaled a time of harvest in Israel, a great and final separation between believers and unbelievers.

Matthew 23 is devoted to the words of Jesus denouncing the scribes and Pharisees and pronouncing judgment upon them. Verse 38 expresses God’s abandonment of them: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

In Matt. 21:33-44 Jesus portrayed the history and the fate of the Pharisees in a parable. In this parable a householder plants a vineyard and then leaves its care to others called husbandmen. Over time he sends many servants and finally his son to them and all are mistreated and killed. Jesus asked the Pharisees what the householder would do to the husbandmen when he came. They, not recognizing what he was talking about said, “He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” Out of their own mouths!

Jesus responded in verses 42-44: “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

The same truth is expressed in Matt. 22:1-7. Here we have a parable about a king (God) who invited certain people (Israelites) to a wedding for his son (Jesus). But when the time came, not only were they not interested, they actually murdered those who were sent to tell them. Verse 7 says, “But when the king heard thereof, he was

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wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”

The Judgment of Israel

In Luke 19:41-44 Jesus wept over Jerusalem and foretold exactly what was coming in the way of judgment: “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side. And shall lay thee even with the ground and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”

This was fulfilled perfectly approximately 40 years later when the Roman army led by Titus laid siege to Jerusalem, trapping 3 million Jews inside. After a time of unspeakable suffering and death the city was indeed so completely destroyed that not one stone was left upon another. Paul spoke of this terrible judgment when he said of them, “...the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” I Thess. 2:16.

An Opportunity

All during this sudden death overtime there was an opportunity given to escape the coming judgment as was the case in Noah’s day. However, the opportunity was not to the nation — it was too late for that — but to individuals. Notice the language of Peter on the day of Pentecost: “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40. The generation itself could not escape, but anyone who heard and embraced the gospel could!

Throughout the intervening years until judgment actually came there remained a faithful church at Jerusalem bearing testimony to the gospel. As time went on some believers left Jerusalem and those remaining behind lived under persecution and poverty. They watched as their spiritual leader, James, was brutally murdered in the temple courtyard. Paul was touched with their plight and took up

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collections among the Gentile churches for “the poor saints of Jerusalem” — referring to their poverty.

I often hear or read the words of someone who quotes and tries to apply II Chronicles 7:14 to modern day America. Anyone who questions this is subject to being labeled “unspiritual” or “unbelieving.” Is the Bible something we can just take and apply as we please? Or do we perhaps need the Author?!

Let me ask you a question. Where in the words of John the Baptist, or of Jesus, or of any of the apostles is there any suggestion that Israel’s “wrath to come” could be avoided? II Chronicles 7:14 was originally given to Israel! I wonder why none of the above preached it! Not one! Were they ignorant? or unspiritual? What do you think? It was no more in order for them to offer Israel a hope of escaping judgment than it would have been for Noah to have offered the old world a hope of avoiding the flood. That’s how serious it was. That’s how late an hour it was for Israel. It was sudden death overtime.

The only people in Jerusalem who avoided the terrible Roman siege were the small band of beleaguered Christians. God was faithful to warn them when it was time to leave. At that point Jerusalem was left with no witness and no hope although in their blindness they did not realize it. They were probably glad to see the Christians go!

Once again we see an era end with a general judgment and the salvation of a remnant. What about our day? Will history repeat itself? Where are we on God’s calendar?

Chapter Five

The Great Supper

Thus far we have set forth a number of scriptural principles with respect to God's dealings with man. We have shown those principles at work specifically in two groups of people: those who lived from Adam to Noah and also in the nation of Israel. In each case there was an extended day of opportunity followed by a countdown to certain judgment — "sudden death overtime." Each era ended with a very tiny minority saved and judgment falling upon the rest.

The overriding principle at work was declared by God in Gen. 6:3. "My spirit shall not always strive with man." The opportunity that God in His grace has given to rebellious and sinful man is not an unlimited one. There comes a day of reckoning. There comes a time when the door of salvation, once opened wide, is closed and closed forever.

Man cannot be saved when he wants to. He must come when God calls or remain lost. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:44.

Picture lost man as someone in a river moving rapidly towards a waterfall. The man has no hope of avoiding certain death apart from a miracle. Suppose then that a hand is extended to him. He is informed of his predicament and offered rescue. Everything depends on whether or not he commits himself fully and unreservedly to that extended hand. If he fails to do so and that hand is withdrawn then what hope does he have? His fate is sealed. The mercy of God is not to be trifled with. Heb. 2:3 says, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation."

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There came a day when Noah and his family were shut in the ark and the world outside was left to its chosen fate. There came a time when the church was warned to flee Jerusalem and its inhabitants were left to the awful judgment of which Jesus had spoken years before. Luke 21:20-24. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Heb. 10:31.

God's Great Plan

As we indicated earlier, God has been faithfully carrying out His great plan of salvation throughout the ages, in spite of the general darkness and unbelief. It is a plan He will complete. The very center of His plan is "Jesus Christ and him crucified." I Cor. 2:2. What He accomplished through His death is all that is needed to bring many sons to glory, completely fulfilling His Father's plan.

We have shown how God called Abraham and then dealt with the nation of Israel over many centuries for the sake of the tiny remnant of true believers therein. Isaiah 1:9. We saw something of their role in laying the groundwork for the kingdom Jesus established on the Day of Pentecost. The young church grew rapidly as God moved in great power to "harvest" the Jewish remnant.

It was God's intention to establish a kingdom that was neither Jewish nor Gentile but reached out to people of every nation under heaven. This was a difficult thing for some in the early church to grasp. They were accustomed to thinking of God as "Israel's God" and of Moses' law as the key to serving him. As the Lord began to reach out and save Gentiles some of the Jewish believers felt strongly that salvation was not just believing in Christ but also keeping Moses' law.

This issue became such a problem that the apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem to consider it. We find the account of this conference in Acts 15. First, Peter recounted his experience in being sent of God to the household of Cornelius. He told how God had purified their hearts by faith, giving them the Holy Ghost on that basis alone. Then Paul and Barnabas reported their experiences of how God had mightily used them to carry the gospel to the Gentiles.

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Then James took the lead. He referred to what Peter had said in these words: “God...did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” Acts 15:14. Then he referred to the prophets as prophesying that that very thing would happen. Specifically he quotes from Amos 9:11-12. This is only one of many prophetic passages in which God promised that He would reach out to the whole world.

In Amos 9, using the language of type and symbol, God promised to restore the “tabernacle of David” that had fallen into ruin. The purpose of this restoration, as quoted by James, was “that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Acts 15:17-18.

The tabernacle of David had been, for a short time, a center of genuine worship of God. I Chron. 16. However, the worship established by David had long since been abandoned by apostate Israel. They worshipped with their lips while their hearts were far from God. Matt. 15:8. Isaiah 29:13. Christ came to raise up true worshippers who would worship God in spirit and in truth. John 4:24.

All Things Are Now Ready

In Luke 14, Jesus gives us a picture of the gospel outreach in this present age in parable form. In this parable there is a great supper prepared and the focus is on three different groups of people who are invited.

The supper itself is God’s provision for man’s salvation. It is significant that the man said, “Come, for all things are now ready.” Luke 14:17. What a wonderful word! Just before Jesus died he declared, “It is finished.” John 19:30. Nothing is lacking in God’s provision for us. It is perfect! Nothing was left out that was necessary to fully save those who repent and trust Christ. We are complete in him. Col. 2:10.

Notice that the first group mentioned had already been invited **before the feast was ready**. Who do you suppose they were? Israel!

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God's invitation had been extended to them for hundreds of years through the prophets. However, when the days of preparation were over and the time actually came, the nation as a whole wasn't interested. As Jesus put it, "...they all with one consent began to make excuse." Luke 14:18.

Notice God's response: "None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." Obviously this pronouncement was directed at those who had rejected Him and not at the true remnant. The invitation was withdrawn. God was through with Israel as a nation. Notice that in the parable the man never reissued His invitation to this first group. There continued to be a "remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5) who were redeemed from the vain traditions of their fathers, (I Peter 1:18) but Israel's day was past, their opportunity gone forever.

The next instruction to the servants was, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." Luke 14:21. This pictures the preaching of the gospel during an extended day of opportunity during this present age. Notice the kind of people who are invited. Only people who can be made to feel their need of God are candidates for salvation. Matt. 5:3. Luke 4:18-19. Mark 2:17. At the end of this period of time the servants report that they had done as they had been commanded, "and yet there is room."

At that point they were instructed to "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." Luke 14:23. Notice the sense of urgency. Time was short. There was a need to "compel." This invitation takes place during a relatively short period of time following the general invitation and just before the actual feast. It represents God's last call. When the feast day came all opportunity was past.

Notice also that in each phase of invitation the servants were sent to different people. God does not go back on bended knee to those who have rejected Him and beg them to reconsider. He will not always strive with men.

Chapter Six

What About The Devil?

One of the great keys in the kingdom Christ came to establish has to do with the devil and his place in the scheme of things. When Christ came the world was in gross darkness (Isaiah 60:2). This darkness was not just the absence of light, however. It represented the awful power that Satan and all his host wielded over mankind through sin. It resulted from the deliberate effort of the devil to imprison man in a state of blind rebellion against God leading to death.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil during a 40 day fast one of the temptations reveals something of the devil's place. Luke 4:5-7 says, "And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine."

Of course, Jesus was steadfast in resisting the devil and remaining loyal to His Father. However, we do see in this a picture of the dominion Satan exercised over the nations of the earth. He had them pretty much where He wanted them. He could use, abuse, and destroy them as he would. God seldom interfered, except where His people were concerned. Through sin he had the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Had Christ not come, had God not intervened, the situation would have been completely hopeless. Praise God, He did, however!

Jesus revealed a little about the kingdom that was shortly to come during one exchange with some Pharisees. He was widely known for casting out devils. However, their explanation of this was that Jesus could cast out devils because he was in league with the devil!

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God revealed to His Son what the Pharisees were thinking and so He addressed the matter openly in Matt. 12:25-37. In verses 28 and 29 we find these words: “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.”

Jesus directly links his power over devils to the coming of God’s kingdom. Verse 29 gives us a wonderful insight into the gospel age. Christ’s commission was to take something of value — God’s elect — from the “house” of the “strong man” — the devil. In order to do that it was necessary to “first bind the strong man.” Notice that Jesus used the word “first.” This was something that had to be done before the work of the gospel could begin.

Satan Cast Out

In John 12:31-32, shortly before he went to the cross, Jesus spoke these words: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

The “prince” of whom Jesus spoke was the same devil who had earlier offered him the kingdoms of this world. His status was about to change! He was about to be “cast out” of his exalted place. The power of the gospel to draw men to Christ directly flowed out of the great victory that He won over the devil when he was lifted up on the cross.

See Paul’s wonderful words in Colossians 2:15: “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” The “it” mentioned in this verse is the cross. The picture there is of a victory parade in which the conquering general forces his enemies to march down the street in chains for all to see. That is what Christ did for us! That is why Paul was able to write of God in Col. 1:11, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” Satan is powerless to stop God’s plan!

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In Rev. 12 the Lord gave John a wonderful vision in which he saw in very graphic symbolism an overview of God's kingdom in the world. Verses 1 and 2 begin, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." This woman represents the believing Jewish remnant which by faith played such a key role in the coming of Christ, the child about to be born.

In verses 3 and 4 we see the devil portrayed as a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns, symbolically showing both his nature and also the place of power and dominion he enjoyed at the time. This vision even reaches all the way back to the fall of Satan in the beginning when he led one third of the angels in rebellion against God. John saw the dragon stand before the woman with the intention of destroying her child as soon as it was born.

Verse 5 says, "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne." In this verse we see both the destiny of Christ and also his exaltation to the right hand of God following his death and resurrection. Obviously Satan utterly failed in his attempts to destroy Christ. He was also unable to destroy the woman as God provided for her protection and sustenance.

In verses 7-9 we see the great battle that took place between Satan and his evil hosts against God's angels led by Michael. Truly the battle of the ages was fought at Calvary! The result was Satan's defeat. He was "cast out" of heaven just as Jesus had said he would be. "Heaven" here signifies a place of spiritual power and dominion. Paul referred in Ephesians 1:19-21 to God's mighty power "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." It was the beginning of the end for the devil!

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Victory!

Now, take careful note of what this meant to the people of God! “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.” Rev. 12:10.

What a glorious proclamation of victory! The kingdom had come. Christ had ascended to His throne. This made salvation and strength available to God’s people. Does this mean that salvation was not available before this? Yes and no. What our Old Testament brethren had was a promissory note concerning what was to come. Of course, considering Who it was that promised, they were on solid ground! That is why Hebrews 11:13 says, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

In the outworking of God’s great plan it took the death of Christ to provide a perfect and complete salvation. The very best the law could do was to show men their need and point forward to a Savior who was yet to come. Satan always had grounds to accuse men because they were utterly unable in themselves to attain to God’s righteousness. But when Christ came everything changed! He became sin for us “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” II Cor. 5:21.

Satan’s mouth was stopped. As Paul said, “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” Rom. 8:33-34. Here was a message worthy of being proclaimed to the ends of the earth! Men could become righteous before God and enter into eternal life, not by the deeds of the law, but by faith.

Rev. 12:11 sets forth both the means and the process whereby God’s people have been able to overcome their defeated foe. The first thing is the solid foundation of the blood of Christ. Upon no other ground may we stand and hope to overcome. Nothing less will do. All other ground is sinking sand.

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Secondly is “the word of their testimony.” True faith is based on the Word of God being revealed to us. But it doesn’t stop there. When we truly believe from the heart that revealed word becomes the confession of our lips. It has to be personal. “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Rom. 10:10.

And then in our Christian walk the Word of God is the sword we use to defeat the devil when he assaults us with his lies. We have to do as Jesus did when he was tempted and learn to say, “It is written....” Matt. 4:4. When God’s Word is made real to us it becomes a living force, a powerful weapon before which the devil cannot stand. Never debate the devil. Use the Word!

The third thing is, “...and they loved not their lives unto the death.” Salvation may be free in the sense that we cannot earn it, but it is not without cost. No one has the right to claim the benefits of citizenship in the heavenly kingdom without giving up his life and bowing in surrender to the king. If there is anything in your life that is more important to you than God and His kingdom then you are yet in your sins. The rich young ruler found that out to his great sorrow. Luke 18:18-23.

Jesus said in Matt. 16:24-26, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

That is what is so wrong with religion today. So many preach a “gospel” in which there is little or no cost to count (Luke 14:25-33) and for which it is not really necessary to give up one’s life. No one will ever gain eternal life who is not first willing to give up the corrupted life they were born with. Some may be literally called upon to lay down their lives as martyrs but for most it means a life in which we are no longer our own but are bought with a price. We belong

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willingly to another. We live for Him and the world to come and not for ourselves and this world. That is the price of the kingdom.

Verse 12 exhorts those who dwell in the heavens to rejoice. This is a reference to the spiritual realm enjoyed by God's people (Eph. 2:6) as opposed to "the earth and the sea," a reference to the earthly realm under Satan's dominion. Those who remain under Satan's power are warned of his great wrath. Christ's victory signaled the beginning of the end for Satan's kingdom and he has been increasingly angry about it ever since. The closer we get to the end, the worse it will be for the world. Yet they will blindly cooperate in their own destruction.

With respect to God's people who have lived on the earth since the cross, Satan's main activities have been persecution and deceit. Even on the personal level all he can do is oppress and lie. His real power is gone!

While we have seen and continue to see persecution of every sort over the past 2000 years, by far the most effective tactic has been deceit. This is pictured as a flood out of the dragon's mouth in verse 15. He has spewed out every lie he can think of in an attempt to confuse, divide, spoil, and in general deceive God's people, and lost religious people have drunk it up by the millions. While his efforts have filled the earth with counterfeit Christianity he can never steal away the eternal salvation into which God's elect have entered. They are safe in Christ's hands, and He is safely in the Father's hands! John 10:28-29.

Because of Satan's efforts the Christian life is, as Paul described it, a "fight of faith." (I Timothy 6:12). God's people have had to overcome every conceivable obstacle to serve God in this present evil world. Yet they have the very faith of Christ (Gal. 2:20) on the inside and that faith is the victory that overcomes the world. I John 5:4. Whatever Satan is allowed to do he is powerless to stop God's plan from unfolding. His doom is sure!

Chapter Seven

Revelation 20 and the Thousand Years

We are talking about the restraint placed upon Satan during the gospel age. One key passage on this subject is found in Rev. 20:1-6. Satan does not want this passage and truth understood. He hates it. That is why he has worked so hard to propagate the belief in a future “golden age.” It is part of the flood out of his mouth to cause people to miss what God is saying to His people.

In considering anything from the book of Revelation it is necessary to understand some basic things. First, we can never forget that Revelation is highly symbolic. Truth is portrayed in pictures and symbols not meant to be taken literally. For example, no one expects that one day people will turn on their TVs to CNN for live coverage of a beast with seven heads and ten horns emerging from the ocean! It is obvious that this “beast” is meant to portray something — something very real — symbolically. Of course, some symbols are explained. We are directly told that the “dragon” is the devil, for example.

Another thing is that the book of Revelation (and, indeed, the Bible in general) cannot be understood through mere intellectual effort, no matter how sincere or diligent. It is God’s Word and its truths are meant to be concealed from unbelieving humanity. It can only be understood to the extent that it pleases God to reveal it. Deut. 29:29. Much error has resulted from man attempting to pry into things God wasn’t revealing. We are completely dependent upon Him.

Another thing to note is that the book is not necessarily in chronological order. The timeline of each vision stands alone, many spanning the entire age. Rev. 20 is one such vision.

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There are many symbolic elements in this vision including a “key of the bottomless pit,” “a great chain,” “the dragon,” “a thousand years,” “a seal,” “thrones,” and so forth. There are two time periods mentioned: “a thousand years,” and “a little season” to follow.

Widespread popular teaching takes the “thousand years” literally and portrays Christ as one day returning to establish a political and military rule over this present evil world. Many even merge this concept with the golden age dreams of apostate Judaism. If these concepts are so then this passage refers to events of the future, interesting to speculate about, but not particularly relevant to Christians today. I believe, however, that both the thousand years and the little season are highly relevant and very important to understand.

The First Resurrection

One key as to when the thousand years takes place is “the first resurrection.” It is something very special, so special in fact that the second death — the lake of fire — has no power against those who experience it. There is another resurrection mentioned in verse 5, one that specifically occurs after the thousand years. What are these resurrections and how do they help us to unlock this mystery?

Heb. 9:27 tells us, “...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Please take note: it does not say, “judgments,” but “**the** judgment.” There is only one judgment. Since men die it is necessary for them to be raised from the dead in order to be judged.

Rev. 20:11-15 describes this judgment. “The dead, small and great” will stand before God. They are judged according to what is written in books which evidently provide a record of their lives. Remember the words of Jesus in Matt. 12:36, “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” (Once again, it is “**the** day of judgment.”) The book of life will be there and anyone not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire.

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With expressions such as these it should be obvious that all the dead will be there on that occasion, righteous and wicked. There would be little point in looking to see if someone's name were in the book of life if — as some teach — only the wicked will be there!

It should likewise be very obvious that the resurrection that brings men before the judgment is different from the one referred to as “the first resurrection.” The resurrection that leads to the judgment scene includes those whose destiny is the “second death,” the lake of fire. What we might then call “the second resurrection” takes place after the “thousand years” and before the judgment. What, then, is the first resurrection?

Let's go to John 5 where Jesus plainly sets forth both resurrections. In verse 21, Jesus declares that, just like His Father, He has the power to give life to the dead. The expression “whom he will” shows the absolute sovereignty He exercises in resurrection.

In verse 22, Jesus lets us know that all judgment over men has been committed into His hands. This alone lets us know Who it is that will sit on that great white throne in Rev. 20. Is it any wonder that God's declaration concerning His Son will be quite literally fulfilled? Phil. 2:9-11 says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

All humanity will be gathered before the Lord Jesus Christ on that great day, those who gladly and willingly bowed to Him here and those who rejected Him. The fate of all will be completely in His hands. It will be as Paul indicates in 2 Tim. 4:1 where he refers to “Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead.” NIV.

The first resurrection mentioned in John 5 is in verse 25: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

Those who “live” are referred to simply as “the dead.” These are not people who have died and been buried in tombs like Lazarus in

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John 11. Remember that verse 21 declares that “the Son quickeneth whom he will.” It is within the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to cause people who are classified as “dead” to hear His voice and to give life to those who hear.

Notice when this takes place. This is important! Jesus said, “The hour is coming and **now is....**” That’s like saying, “from now on....” This resurrection was not something way off in the future but something that was already happening and would continue to happen. What was Jesus talking about?

We have only to go back to verse 24 to see: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, **hath** everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but **is passed from death unto life.**” Does that remind you of something? What about in Rev. 20:6 where it says, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power....”?

What Jesus is talking about is simply the preaching of the gospel! There are more ways to be “dead” than simply being laid in a grave. The fact is that the entire human race is born dead — dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) — dead to God and righteousness.

The commission of Jesus Christ is literally to raise the dead. When men who have been called and anointed proclaim the message of the gospel it is literally the voice of the Son of God that goes forth. Most listeners hear only the voice of the man through whom the message comes but the elect hear the real Voice. As they hear and embrace the One Who is speaking to them they are literally called out from among the dead and they enter into eternal life. Their bodies may later die and be buried but they themselves — at that moment — are alive with the very life of God.

Look at Eph. 2. After a description in verses 1-3 of what it means to be “dead,” Paul says in verses 4-7: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly

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places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” Paul said, “**hath** raised us up.” The resurrection to which Paul referred was in the past. It had already happened!

That is because this resurrection is simply salvation! Look at Col. 2:12-13: “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are **risen with him** through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

Col. 3:1 says, “If ye then be **risen with Christ**, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” This is not some isolated truth in the Word. What is wrong today is that churches are filled with people who have never been raised from the dead. They have never heard the voice of the Son of God and entered into life. They are no more than religious dead people. And yet there is a remnant!

In John 10:28 Jesus says of His sheep, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish....” In John 11:25-26 He said, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” These and many other scriptures confirm that salvation is nothing less than resurrection from the dead to everlasting life.

All That are in the Graves

In John 5:28-29 Jesus spoke of another resurrection: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

Notice the difference. This resurrection lay in the future. It involved “**all that are in the graves**,” both righteous and wicked. The

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one group will come forth to “the resurrection of life” and the other to “the resurrection of damnation.”

There are actually those who teach that these are two distinct events separated by 1007 years plus a “little season”! This is necessary to fit what Jesus said into their elaborate theological tradition. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus said, “... the hour is coming...” “The hour” can hardly be construed as anything other than something that happens at the same time. There is one general resurrection that leads to one judgment for both righteous and wicked. Remember, the book of life will be consulted. The reason for the two expressions is not because they refer to different events but because the nature and purpose differs. Consider first the righteous.

When they hear and believe they enter into eternal life. They are born of God — on the inside. However, their bodies remain bodies of sin and death — hence the fight of faith that we experience in this world. Full redemption awaits the redemption of our bodies. Rom. 8:23. In Phil. 3:21 Paul speaks of Jesus Christ, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

In I Cor. 15:50-52 Paul teaches about the resurrection of believers in these words: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

What a glorious thing it will be to have brand new bodies, free of sin, sickness, pain, or death, full of the very life of God! I can hardly wait!

For the wicked, however, it will be very different. Though they are summoned from their graves it will not be to divine life but to final judgment and condemnation.

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The Last Day

We have but to look in John 6 for confirmation that these resurrections take place together. In verses 39 and 40 Jesus said, “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Notice the time element. When did Jesus say that the resurrection of believers would take place? The last day! How is it that some teach that the resurrection of the wicked will take place 1007 years and a little season after this “last day”? Is it the last day or isn’t it? How can there be more days after the “last day”?

Lest there be any question Jesus repeats his statement, “...and I will raise him up at the last day” two more times — in verses 44 and 54. But when is this “last day”?

Let’s look at what Paul said in I Cor. 15:23: “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s **at his coming.**” This whole passage is about the resurrection. Notice when “they that are Christ’s” are to be raised from the dead: “at his coming.” The coming of Jesus Christ will be the last day of this earth’s history. His coming will be like the days of Noah — rescue and deliverance for His people and judgment for the rest. It will be like the day when Lot went out of Sodom: “...it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.” Luke 17:26-30.

What we’re seeking to establish is when the “thousand years” of Rev. 20 occurs. It certainly can’t occur after “the last day.” It certainly can’t occur after the coming of Christ and the death of all the wicked! Who would be left for Christ to reign over?

Rev. 20 plainly places the resurrection of the wicked after the “thousand years.” When Christ comes and the dead are raised and it is time for the judgment the “thousand years” will have been history. In fact the period referred to as a “little season” will have come and gone as well. The judgment occurs at the time of the general

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resurrection: “at his coming,” “the hour cometh,” on “the last day,” at “the last trump.” All history is headed for a sudden and shocking climax. But who is preaching this?

Satan Bound

One thing that contributes to people’s confusion about Rev. 20 is the reference to Satan being bound for a thousand years. On the surface this sounds as though he is to be removed from the scene altogether and earth is to be completely free from his evil influence. This is not so at all.

Remember the scriptures we have already pointed out that referred to Satan as having been “cast out,” and the “strong man” having been bound. Rev. 20:3 gives us more detail on the nature of the restraint upon Satan: “...that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled.”

What does this mean? We have but to look at Rev. 20:7-9. If you want to know what the binding is about, simply look at what he does when is loosed. As soon as he is free to do so he immediately sets out to “deceive the nations” — for what purpose? — “to gather them together to battle.” Don’t you think that Satan would have united the world against the kingdom of God long ago had he been able to do so? He has not had the power. Christ ascended to the throne and has limited what Satan has been able to do so that the gospel could go forth and His people be delivered from the power of darkness.

Every empire that has tried to rise and seek to rule the world has been defeated. Rome, the empire that ruled the known world in Christ’s day was brought to ruin. Only eternity will reveal all the ways in which Satan’s plans have been thwarted on the orders of our Lord Who sits on the throne. Angels have influenced the passage of laws; they have whispered in the ears of rulers; they have helped to bring some men to places of power and influence, and to bring others down.

Satan would love to banish Christ and His people from planet earth once and for all. The “little season” is all about him being

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released to pursue that goal for a short period of time before being finally crushed forever at the coming of Christ. In verses 9 and 10 we see the destruction of the wicked by fire and Satan being cast into the lake of fire.

Always remember that no matter what he is allowed to do, the gates of hell will never prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. Matt. 16:18. This does not mean all the institutions we call churches but rather the sum total of all true born-again believers. The proclamation of the gospel represents an invasion of Satan's kingdom. The "gates of hell" are shut fast about his victims but they will never prevail against the true church. Every one of God's elect will be fully rescued from Satan's power.

There is a great promise in John 6:37 — "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Most people gloss over the first part of that verse and focus only on the last part. But what a great promise this is of God's sovereign overshadowing of the process of calling out His own through the gospel and of the faithfulness of Jesus to carry out His Father's will!

Has the world seen great evil since Satan's defeat at the cross? Of course. Don't forget his "great wrath" directed at those who remain under his dominion, the flood of deception out of his mouth, and his war against the saints. Rev. 12. Almost 2000 years is still a "short time" in the overall picture. And how much more is this true as we see the end approaching? Still, what Satan has been able to do is nothing compared to what he would like to have done. This alone should cause anyone who sees it to flee to Christ and His righteous and loving rule. It is either Christ or Satan. There is no middle ground.

And I Saw Thrones

In our discussion of Rev. 20, questions will undoubtedly remain in the minds of some regarding verse 4. This is because of what they have been taught. Verse 4 says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,

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and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

The first thing John mentions is “thrones.” A throne is a symbol of rule and authority. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven following His resurrection it was to a “throne” on the “right hand of God.” This doesn’t mean He is literally sitting on a big chair somewhere in the sky beside God! For one thing God is a Spirit Who fills everything and beyond. He is not some “old man” sitting in a chair somewhere.

These statements about Jesus are meant to convey to us in earthly terms the exalted position He now occupies as a result of His death on the cross. As He told His disciples, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth....” Matt. 28:18.

But in this vision John saw thrones — plural. And he saw someone sitting on those thrones, and judgment, or authority to judge, given to each one. This shows us that the authority of Christ has been shared with others. In one sense, every believer reigns with Christ. In Eph. 2:6, Paul says, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....” That statement was written to believers and was in the past tense: it was something that had already happened.

But the scene in Revelation 20:4 is not an earthly one. At first John refers to those sitting on the thrones as simply “they.” Then he is allowed to know and reveal information about some of those reigning ones. The first group consisted of “the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” Clearly these are people whose earthly life is over and yet they are described as “souls.” Thus their bodily resurrection has not yet taken place. They are in the state described by Paul as, “away from the body and at home with the Lord.” 2 Cor. 5:8.

Notice that in Rev. 20:5, “...the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” What a difference! Those who die without Christ remain in their graves until they are suddenly awakened to judgment. Believers, though they die physically,

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continue to live and reign with Christ. For them, the resurrection means the climax of salvation — brand new immortal bodies! Until that time they are properly referred to as “souls.”

There is nothing about this passage that remotely suggests that the “reign” described is some kind of an earthly, military, political kingdom as so many teach. Such an idea does not come **from** this passage. Rather it is **read into** the passage as a result of prior belief.

In verse 4 we are afforded a glimpse of the current state of believers whose earthly life has come to an end. They are not dead and gone; they are alive and reigning with Christ! This must have been a great comfort to first century believers who witnessed so many of their fellow believers die for their faith — including some who were literally beheaded.

Notice that they reign “with Christ,” that is, Christ reigns and they have a part in that reign. But when is this reign? 1 Cor. 15:25-26 says of Christ, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” But when is that? 1 Cor. 15:50-54 tells us that at the last trumpet, at the resurrection, death will be “swallowed up in victory.” This is when believers receive their glorified bodies and enter into full immortality. The “souls” of Revelation 20:4 hadn’t reached that point yet. This reign of Christ is not **after** the resurrection of believers but **before** it.

Follow the sequence: Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” John 18:37. He is crucified, buried, and raised the third day. He ascends to heaven to a place of authority second only to the Father. 1 Corinthians 15:27. The evidence of this exaltation is the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:33. The day of salvation and victory over Satan has come (Revelation 12:10-11) and Jesus begins, through the apostles, to gather a people to Himself through the gospel. Satan has been bound and cannot prevent this. The cross has taken his power away.

As time goes along believers begin to die physically, some in the natural course of things, and some as martyrs. But, true to Christ’s promise, they continue to live, because they have a life on the inside

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that can never die. When their bodies die, they simply go to be with the Lord and share in His reign. Towards the end of the age, Satan is loosed for a short time. When the age ends, the climax of Christ's reign happens when He comes again, forever conquering death on behalf of every one of God's children. The resurrection occurs followed by the judgment scene.

I believe that those who have gone on to be with the Lord continue to share in His reign even in things pertaining to this earth. We know from the Word that those beings who were created as angels play a key role in the life of every believer. Heb. 1:14, Psalm 34:7. But I believe there are also those of our brethren who have gone before us who undertake missions to earth on behalf of the kingdom. One example is the one who showed John the things he saw in Revelation. See Rev. 22:8-9. See also Hebrews 12:22-24.

Notice what Rev. 20:6 says of those in the first resurrection. It says they will be "priests" and "reign" with him a thousand years. See what John said in Rev. 1:5-6 — "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And **hath made us kings and priests** unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

This was something God had done — past tense — for us — including John himself. Peter refers to believers as "a royal priesthood" in I Pet. 2:9. The thrones of Rev. 20 are not just something from the future but have existed throughout the age. All believers share in this reign but the focus in Revelation 20 is on those who have gone on to be with Christ.

The Mark of the Beast

A few comments are in order regarding some others John saw, those who had "not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands." Popular tradition makes these things very literal and places them in the future, after the so-called "rapture" of the church. If that is so then it

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is totally irrelevant to any believer alive today, not to mention to all who have gone before! Is that all there is to it – a future dictator who will somehow mark all of his followers – literally – on their foreheads or their hands?

I don't believe so. In symbolic language the Lord has given us a picture of what it means to serve Him in every age. "The beast," "his image," the "mark upon their foreheads and in their hands" are all symbols that pertain to Satan and his kingdom. These things may take particular forms at particular times in history but they are not confined to any one time.

Even in Daniel's day ancient empires were portrayed by God as "beasts." Daniel 7. What the Lord is conveying is the true nature of earthly kingdoms. They express the rebellious "beast" nature of fallen humanity that stands in opposition to the rule of heaven. And man in this condition is a willing prey to the power of darkness — the world of Satan and his demons. Eph. 6:12.

One of the chief ways Satan has sought to rule over man is by raising up empires and governments to his liking. And even though he has been restrained from his ultimate goal during the gospel age, all of the principles expressed in verse 4 have still applied. Even the very best of human government falls far short of the kingdom of God. There is too much of the "beast" in it.

But what of the "mark"? Just as God seals His own unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30), so does Satan seek to seal all he can under the power of sin. He uses every form of religion and philosophy that stands in opposition to Jesus Christ to accomplish this – including much that goes by the name "Christian." Notice where the "mark" is applied: the "forehead" and the "hands." This symbolically represents the mind and works, thoughts and deeds.

Those who are thus "marked" demonstrate by thought and deed their love of this world and their own lives. Their heart is here. They will not submit to the gospel or to Jesus Christ. They have reached that point where God has ceased to strive with them. They worship and serve the creature more than the creator (Rom. 1:25). They are as

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surely bound for hell as a genuinely born-again believer is bound for heaven.

This kind of marking isn't confined to a short period in which people are physically marked in some way (even assuming that ever literally happens). It has occurred since the beginning of the world as men have chosen darkness rather than light. Those in verse 4, however, turn their back on this world and choose Christ. They believe in and confess the word of God.

Is not Rev. 20:4 a marvelous picture of the kingdom Christ has established and of what it means to be a Christian? And — collectively — followers of Christ, partakers of the first resurrection, have reigned with Him throughout the age. We refer to the Romans as having ruled the ancient world for many centuries. We don't mean that every single Roman citizen was alive for that whole period, though, do we?!

The Thousand Years

What then, is the “thousand years”? It is simply a divinely-ordained period of time during which Satan is restrained and the gospel preached. I believe it corresponds to the call in Luke 14:21 to “...go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” A “thousand years” is not literally 1000 of our years but a symbol for this period of time — known to God.

This period is to be followed in God's plan by “a little season,” a relatively short time in which Satan is loosed to pursue his dream of a world without God. During this time of gathering darkness, God's last call goes out (Luke 14:22-23). There is an urgency to this call because time is rapidly running out. It is as Jesus said to His disciples, “Night cometh, when no man can work.” John 9:4.

Following this is simply the end.

This same pattern of restraint, release, and sudden destruction is plainly set forth in 2 Thess. 2:1-12. There is a “mystery of iniquity” — a secret principle of lawlessness — that was already at work in Paul's

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day, yet it was restrained. Paul foresaw the day when that restraint would be removed and the “man of sin” would be revealed. Whether there will be a single man who somehow embodies the spirit described in verse 4 or not is debatable. Mankind was created to be God’s temple but proud rebellious man reigns there instead.

His revolt is somewhat restrained during the gospel age but at the end those with eyes to see will see man for what he truly is in God’s eyes: a hell-bound rebel inspired by Satan. A great last revolt is to be stirred up as a result of the “working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” Verses 9-10. In the end, however, there is a destruction as a result of “the brightness of his [the Lord’s] coming.”

Is any of this sounding familiar? For those who have followed this series do you see the parallels between the gospel age and the ancient world, and also God’s dealings with Israel? Do you see the extended day of opportunity followed by a countdown to judgment — a countdown of which the lost are willingly unaware? Just how close are we to the end? Where are the voices warning of its approach?

Chapter Eight

Why I Believe As I Do

To this point I have endeavored to lay out, at least in part, the scriptural picture of God's dealings with men down through the ages. Since the fall of man into sin and death God has reached out in mercy at various times and in various ways. Although man in his condition would never seek God, God has nonetheless sought him.

In Noah's day God declared, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man," and His judgment clock began ticking. Genesis 6:3. Yet He held off His judgment — in this case, for 120 years — to allow for a final witness and to allow His people to prepare and escape the judgment.

We looked at a number of parallels between the world before the flood and the nation of Israel. Ultimately, the believing remnant out of Israel was delivered and saved and terrible judgment fell on Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Then we looked at an overall picture of the gospel age, from Pentecost to the coming of Christ — and specifically the last period of time at the end of the age. It should be obvious by now to any discerning reader that I believe we are in that last period, the countdown to judgment — sudden death overtime. This is not a theological issue with me. It is a real inward conviction I have lived with literally for decades.

I believe God wants us to know something of the hour we live in and yet, as I look around I mostly see spiritual slumber reinforced by entrenched religious tradition. Some talk about the coming of the Lord yet it so often seems to be more a parroting of traditions they've been exposed to than it does a revelation of the Word.

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And Satan has specially made it his business to promote much deception in this area. His aim is quite naturally to deceive, confuse, divide, put to sleep, and generally cause people to be unaware and unprepared both for this present hour of darkness and for the coming of the Lord. Let me simply share why I believe as I do and then let you prayerfully be the judge.

My Background

I was born into a preacher's home. Most of my childhood occurred in the relatively tranquil 1950s. Of course there were problems and the seeds of what was to come were there, however it seems, particularly looking back, that there was a remarkable measure of restraint upon many of the evil tendencies of human nature compared with today. Our leaders were men who had experienced two world wars and the great depression. They knew what it was to persevere and stand for something in the face of adversity. Authority was generally respected.

I'm sure that my perspective is limited but the world I remember was in many ways the world of "Father Knows Best," and "Leave It To Beaver." At the very least, those two TV programs were popular prime-time entertainment, something the society of that day could relate to and enjoy. The young people of today have no idea of the dramatic changes that have taken place since then. The 1960s changed our world forever.

As the 1960s began the great concern on everyone's mind was the threat of nuclear war. Many people built and stocked "fallout shelters." Communism seemed to be on the march everywhere and Khrushchev promised to "bury" us. Castro took over Cuba and invited the Soviets in to set up missiles aimed at the U.S. Our spy planes caught them at it and precipitated the Cuban missile crisis.

I was one of millions of Americans who sat glued to their TVs to see what President Kennedy was going to do about all this. As a young man, I had a very real concern that I might wind up going off to war.

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Thankfully that particular crisis was defused but the decade seemed to bring one crisis after another. And it wasn't just a matter of problems being addressed and gradual change coming about. It seemed as if the whole fabric of our world was under attack, called into question and rejected by many of my generation. Of course, this included all of its professed moral and spiritual values as well.

I attended a Bible college during much of this period and was no doubt somewhat sheltered but it was impossible to be of college age in that era and not feel the winds of revolution that swirled around our land. I have spoken with those who were in secular colleges at the time who recall the militant spirit of many students. There were underground newspapers circulating on campuses and elsewhere that explicitly called for the overthrow of the government and the rejection of all of our cultural values and moral absolutes.

Everything that represented the “establishment” — government, business, religion — and especially the military — needed to be overthrown and replaced by the hippies' vision of “peace” and “love” — not to mention drugs and sex with no outmoded moral restraint. I can still hear the haunting ballad that called a young generation of empty rebels to a “love-in” in San Francisco. If only they had had eyes to see what it was that pulled and drove them.

All of this took place against the backdrop of the difficult and divisive Vietnam War. I salute the men who did their duty and fought in that terrible conflict. But that war played no small part in creating the climate for dramatic and permanent change.

From a spiritual perspective it was very evident that the changes we were witnessing were in general driving men away from God and not toward Him. Something was definitely happening! But what?

As I mentioned I was in Bible College during the mid 60s. Specifically I was there because I believed God had called me to missionary service and this was the natural course of preparation. That being the case I became generally more serious about spiritual things. I needed to know more about what I was getting into!

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I sought out fellowship with those who seemed more “spiritual-minded.” I read missionary biographies. I listened — and watched — and noticed.

Things I Noticed

I noticed the tide of intellectualism that was rapidly displacing any real emphasis on spiritual power and anointing. Here we were being equipped to do battle with an unbelieving world in the realm of their minds using natural ability when God wanted men through whom He could reach men’s hearts, totally relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.

I noticed the differences in ministries. I guess I had always noticed to some extent but more so at that time. Most “ministry,” though scripturally accurate, was dry and empty. Some men with a natural talent for speaking could hold my attention and tickle my intellect somewhat, but with no real spiritual impact. But here and there I was privileged to hear someone speak by the anointing. What a difference! Those few occasions stand out in my memory like a blazing light in the midst of growing darkness.

I noticed how different the modern evangelical churches were from those portrayed in the pages of the New Testament. There was a simplicity and a power that were missing in all the religious machinery of modern denominationalism. So much was ignored or explained away.

From time to time there came into my hands reports and writings that let me know that there was more. Some of these involved doctrinal matters and each issue drove me prayerfully to the Word for answers. For example, I began to see that the body of Christ was not merely a theoretical picture of the “mystical” church but a practical order of things. I saw in a measure that Christ had established apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers — men taught and anointed by Christ the Head — for the work of the ministry, etc. (Eph. 4:11-16). This order was to continue until we all

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came into the unity of the faith unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. As far as I could see that hadn't happened yet!

It seemed that everywhere I looked men had their own ways of doing things. Men trained other men to perpetuate their traditions. Most "ministry" was little more than human religious effort. God was on the sidelines somewhere — or out of the picture altogether.

Was it all black? Was everyone around me lost? No! God does have a remnant even as He did in Israel, but I sensed things heading in the wrong direction in the churches even as they were in society as a whole. A strong tide was driving both and I had a strong feeling of foreboding.

I mentioned reports. I heard accounts — some of them pretty dramatic — of God mightily moving somewhere with anointed preaching accompanied by miraculous power. Some of these at least rang true and made me hungry for more than I saw around me. While I knew and respected the fact that the devil is very much in the sign and wonder business to deceive, my conviction grew that anything God had ever done was possible today. He hadn't changed!

It was a challenging time, hearing many voices, trying to discriminate among them. Sometimes from the same source I would glean some good things yet others just didn't stand up to the witness of the Spirit or the Word.

Just for one example: I had certainly not been raised as a Pentecostal yet that was a natural direction to explore. I did encounter one particular independent Pentecostal church that had an unusual measure of life. For awhile I attended there on Sunday evenings and found it an oasis. The people worshipped with uplifted hands. I heard some preaching that had some life in it. There was a measure of balance and order in the exercise of spiritual gifts. I witnessed genuine miracles.

I'm thankful for the experience. It came at a dry time. And yet, as hard as I tried, I could never quite reconcile their doctrine of "tongues evidence" with the Word. And I saw — and experienced in a measure — the effect of that false teaching as people tried over and

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over to somehow “get” this experience that was supposed to be the doorway to just about everything of spiritual value.

It was a great blessing later on when I met Bro. Thomas who saw the same things in the Word that I did about the issue — but who nonetheless himself actually had the gift of tongues! But for a time I felt like I was in a strange no-man’s land and that issue was just one example. On the one hand were those who didn’t think much of tongues and on the other were those who thought too much of them! Why not an honest scriptural balance?

Doctrine of Christ’s Coming

One area of doctrine that is particularly relevant to our subject here is that of the coming of Christ. The denomination of which I was a part is unashamedly premillennial. That is, they believe that Christ will return to this present earth to reign over its nations for 1000 years of peace and prosperity. Frankly I never seriously considered the matter until later.

Of course there are differences among those who believe in a coming millennium. Some embrace the dispensational “rapture,” tribulation, Antichrist, millennium scenario made popular by the Scofield Bible. Others teach that believers will be here for “the tribulation” and Christ will return after it to establish an earthly kingdom. The denomination did not take sides in this issue, caring only that its people believed in the so-called “millennial reign” itself.

However, I cared! The more I looked into the issues and the Word the stronger my conviction became that the dispensational rapture teaching was dangerously wrong. In the strictest sense I don’t believe in the rapture at all. That will no doubt shock some but hear me out!

The term “rapture” — a term that appears nowhere in the Bible — refers to the theory that Christ’s coming will be so secret that the only evidence of it for the world is to be the sudden mysterious disappearance of millions of Christians. Only after the Christians have literally vanished into thin air (with pilotless planes crashing, etc.) will the real trouble start. Then after seven years of progressive

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hell on earth Christ is supposed to come again — again — this time openly — and begin His reign.

I definitely believe in the second coming of Christ — just once — and openly! Every eye will see Him! This is one issue I felt very strongly about — and still do. How many careless, sleeping Christians are sitting in dead churches vainly expecting the Lord to “snatch” them out before things get bad? And — worse — how many in those dead churches even know the Lord at all?

Even then I had an inward sense that things would get progressively worse till the end. I saw the Lord using the fires of tribulation to come to purge and purify the true church that she might be a fit bride for the Heavenly Bridegroom.

This is a fairly sketchy overview of my college years. It was a time of learning and changing, listening and evaluating, trying to make sense of all the religion around me, and trying to discover where I fitted in. I sensed that I was going in a different direction than many of my classmates but didn't see any clear alternative to the road I was on at the time.

The Next Step

The next step on that road was to apply to the denomination as missionary candidates so that is what my wife Sue and I did. We were accepted and I spent the following year as a student in their “School of Missions.” The denomination had a sensible policy of “proving” their missionary candidates. Rather than sending them directly overseas they assigned them to some kind of ministry service in the U.S. for two years. Their assignment brought us to central North Carolina in the summer of 1968.

I won't say a lot about my brief pastoral experience except to say that it furthered my “education” in the condition of much of the evangelical church world. Part of that education was a growing realization that I was not equipped to do much about it — certainly not to “turn things around.”

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Just before Christmas of that year I believe the Lord anointed me in a measure to preach a couple of messages that at least served as a witness to that church. One message was directed to those who knew the Lord and one was directed to those who didn't (probably most of the congregation).

A Strange Feeling

After the second message I felt very strange. I had the distinct sense that I had turned some kind of a corner although I couldn't have explained the feeling beyond that. It was as though I could hardly remember things that had just happened. They seemed hazy and distant. I felt that something different lay ahead but didn't know what.

On New Year's Eve Sue and I attended a joint "watch night" service at a church some distance away. It was a Tuesday evening. Unbeknownst to us, Bro. Jen Hartman and his family were also attending a service that evening — at the Bible Tabernacle in Southern Pines, about 50 miles away from where we lived! The next evening was our regular midweek service and Jen excitedly told us about their visit and shared some copies of the Midnight Cry Messenger they had brought back.

As I read the papers I became more and more interested and excited. I recognized in them many of the things I had privately become convinced of during the previous few years. Besides that, the church had been experiencing an amazing phenomenal visitation of God during the previous year and a half especially. I devoured everything Jen had brought back and just thought and prayed about it all.

At the time the Bible Tabernacle was holding 4 services a week — Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and 2 services on Sunday. This made it convenient for me to visit as the midweek services didn't conflict with ours so I determined to visit and see for myself on the following Tuesday. And so we went.

The church building was (at that time) a pretty non-descript block building on Route 1 in Southern Pines. The meeting room held

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maybe 200 or so people. As soon as we stepped in I knew that the Lord was there in an unusual way. There was an electric air of anticipation and every seat was full. The worship was free and real and the preaching of the Word was anointed. I had experienced a measure of these things here and there but nothing like this!

The people warmly received us and before I left I had gathered up a lot more reading material and I'm sure some tapes of services as well. During the following week I devoured these materials and continued to weigh and consider.

Meeting Bro. Thomas

At this time Bro. Thomas and a few others had just moved to Jacksonville, Florida to begin the work there. On the following Tuesday evening we went back for another visit and were overjoyed to find out that Bro. Thomas was back for his first visit since moving! The level of excitement in the air was even greater than it had been on our previous visit and we were in for a treat.

One thing was certainly different: there was a vision that came forth during the service! Bro. Thomas, knowing that I was a visiting minister, spent about ten minutes explaining for our benefit what was going on. He explained that the church had been experiencing visions for more than a year, something they had never sought nor anticipated. He explained that they had carefully examined everything that had come forth by the Word and by the Spirit and had had to conclude that they were of God and honored the Word. He explained that those who had visions had been carefully instructed to resist the devil with all their might anytime a vision began to form lest it be of the devil.

He said that these visions were like the vision Peter had on the rooftop when he went into a trance. Later on I witnessed many of these when the seer would simply become motionless for a period of time. Then they would come out of it and be enabled to write down exactly what they had seen and the words they had heard. They would then recount what they had seen and the body as a whole

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would consider and discern the content. I don't at this time remember the vision that particularly came forth on that occasion but I do remember that it was spiritually edifying and "rang true."

And then Bro. Thomas began to preach! I had heard messages that were anointed before but nothing like this! It was so evident that I was hearing a real living message from God and not just a "sermon." What a difference! As someone who had been trained to construct (prayerfully, of course!) sermon outlines and then follow them I was amazed to observe Bro. Thomas just get up and yield himself to the Lord and literally minister by the hour with no notes whatsoever! And what he said was so engaging, so highly charged with life that after an hour and a half or more it seemed inconceivable that more than 15 minutes had passed!

I can still remember that message. He titled it, "Complete in Him" and it became Tape No. 092 on the old tape series. How wonderful it was to see Christ and what He did at the cross so exalted and set forth in such clarity and power. What light it shed on the "second work of grace" doctrines that put so many into bondage. How full and edified we all felt as we drove home after the service. I was getting a pretty good glimpse of the new direction the Lord was taking us.

A Critical Issue

Over the next few weeks I continued to read and listen all I could. There was very little that I had much of a question about as I believe the Lord had been at work preparing us to receive many of the things that the church believed. One issue, however, was crucial to us in particular: the millennium!

I later learned that Bro. Thomas himself had only recently been led to consider and reject the traditional belief in a future millennium. As I said earlier, I had been brought up in a denomination that believed in it and I had never seriously looked at the doctrine or considered anything else. I was vaguely aware that some of my professors had privately had their doubts about this belief but of course were in no position to say anything about it.

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It didn't take long as I examined some scriptural writings on the subject and examined the scriptures themselves — prayerfully — to conclude for myself that when Christ comes everything will be over. One scripture alone should be enough: “But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” Luke 17:29-30.

If God destroyed them all — and it's going to be like that when Christ returns — who will be left for Christ to reign over?! God didn't come down to set up a kingdom over Sodom (!); He came to rescue Lot and destroy it.

This is certainly the “short version” of my examination of the subject but there was no question that I became thoroughly convinced that my former belief had been in error. At this point things changed. Up to now it had been exciting to learn and grow in the light of the things we were experiencing and learning. But now I had a scripture-based, prayerfully-considered conviction that clearly was at odds with my denomination. What to do?

Here we were, missionary candidates who would be expected to sign a premillennial doctrinal statement. I could not, in good conscience, do that. I don't believe in “blind” loyalty to anyone. I believe that the Lord expects us to seek Him first and foremost and to walk in the light of His Word as He reveals it and to have a good conscience in doing so. For example, I highly respect Bro. Thomas and seriously consider anything he says but my convictions are not the result of closing my eyes and saying, “OK.” They are the result of being a good “Berean” (Acts 17:11) and going to the Lord and to the Word until I am convinced by the Lord.

Obviously something had to give! I'm afraid that too many ministers in this position just swallow their convictions and then rationalize their decision to do so. That is the power of religious tradition and the religious “systems” that hold so many captive. I've had men sincerely tell me that they proposed to stay in the “system” and work to make things better from “inside.” I wish it worked that

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way! People don't understand the real power behind religious systems. It is so much more than merely sincere but misinformed people. Demon power is involved.

And so, in a few weeks there came an opportunity to formally leave the church and the denomination behind and begin the scary and wonderful journey of moving ahead and trusting the Lord to lead and provide. He has never failed!

I wish I could say that it was all easy! Many did not, of course, understand. Some were convinced that we were off following the devil, etc. The devil, himself, wasn't too happy and made it his business to try to inject as much oppression and confusion as he could muster. For the most part I kept to myself over the next few weeks, reading, considering, praying, asking the Lord to teach me and show me what I needed to know.

I didn't know much! And there was a lot to "unlearn." But the Lord is faithful. The fact is that we'll continue to learn as long as we are here — if we are willing. In process of time we (the Hartmans and Sue and I) moved to the Southern Pines area and became a part of the church there. I'm so thankful! It hasn't always been easy but following the Lord in this world is never without its challenges. But what other way is there?!

Chapter Nine

The Visitation

A lot of this has been to lead up to something. When we became a part of this work there were a few doctrinal issues to work through, but one thing couldn't be sidestepped: the visitation! The greatest concentration of phenomenal manifestations occurred in the fall of 1967 and the spring of 1968. Our first visit was in January of 1969 so these things were pretty fresh! And plenty of things were still occurring almost as a matter of course.

To say that there were visions is a considerable understatement! There were hundreds of them at the very least. It would be impossible to adequately convey all that happened. Although I wasn't there during much of it, I'm pretty well acquainted with those who were and have heard many of the tapes that were made at the time.

Most of the visions were given to children and young people. In particular they were given to those who had very little knowledge of the scriptures and who could not possibly have made up what they related. Many of the earliest visions were exact repetitions of visions that occurred in the scriptures.

Neither Bro. Thomas nor the people knew what to make of it all. On one occasion there seemed to be a particular spirit of unbelief regarding what was happening when one told about seeing four chariots and mountains made of brass. The whole vision was relayed along with the words. Even Bro. Thomas didn't recognize the vision but everyone was amazed as a man in the congregation called their attention to Zechariah 6. There it was in exact detail!

And so for months, vision after vision after vision came forth, some focusing on truth relative to the end of the age, some with

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instructions for the church and the ministry, and some revealing wisdom as they dealt with spiritual needs of every sort. Bro. Thomas was, of course, deeply concerned by all of this and called on everyone to seek the Lord with all their hearts about it. Everything that came forth was examined by the Spirit and by the Word. By every means he knew, Bro. Thomas was determined to be sure that these things were of God and not the devil.

Recently we received an email from someone who knew about all of those things that happened back then and wondered how Bro. Thomas felt now, looking back. Bro. Jimmy Robbins visited with Bro. Thomas and relayed the question. In essence, Bro. Thomas said that he believed that the visitation was of God. However, he also pointed out that they didn't seek nor did they anticipate any of it. Before it all happened he and the people emphasized Christ and the Word and that they have since as well. It was just something God sovereignly did for His own purposes.

Angels

And so, by every means at their disposal, Bro. Thomas and the people had to conclude that God was visiting them in a most unusual way. And then more things began to happen! Suddenly two angels — heavenly messengers — began to visit and it was back to even more serious praying! Again, by every means he could think of, Bro. Thomas put these two messengers to the test almost to the point of being overly skeptical. Again, he could only conclude that they were sent of God. They honored God; they honored the Lord Jesus Christ; they honored the Word of God; they honored the shed blood, and so forth.

Although he was aware of the presence of a supernatural being, Bro. Thomas himself never saw the angels. On a very few occasions, however, he was allowed to “converse” with them briefly. He would ask a question and the angel would speak to the one who was temporarily allowed to operate in that realm and they would repeat the answer. (I would encourage you to read Bro. Thomas's own account of some of these things.)

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One thing in particular Bro. Thomas asked one of the angels on one occasion concerned some of the visions. He wanted to know the reason for there being so many visions that were taken right out of the Bible itself. The answer was two-fold: the first reason was that they might know that the visions were of God and, secondly, that they might know things that were taking place in the earth.

It's one thing to know what the Bible teaches. It's another for the Lord to supernaturally intervene and reveal that something in particular is being fulfilled **right then!** I think of the believing remnant of Israel who eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah. They knew from the scriptures that He was coming, yet when the time came God on several occasions sent angels to announce that the time had actually come.

Why would He visit a small church in North Carolina in such a way? Why did the angels appear to the shepherds near Bethlehem? I believe that in both cases God desired to reveal relevant truth to His people. In the case of the shepherds they told everyone they knew! Luke 2:17-18. God was preparing His people to receive their Messiah. It wasn't just for the shepherds. I believe likewise that there were many things that were made real during the visitation that were meant to be shared with the whole body of Christ. The Lord desires to prepare His people for what lies ahead.

And about the time Bro. Thomas and the people were trying to adjust to the visitation of angels, some of the young people began to be taken on trips in the spirit. Some were taken back in time and allowed to witness Bible events, particularly the crucifixion of Christ. One was allowed on several occasions to visit heaven. Several were taken abroad in the earth and shown many things regarding Satan's kingdom and its activities.

The Center of the Visitation

It was an amazing time and this is only the very sketchiest picture of it. And along with it was the tremendous anointing I later witnessed on Bro. Thomas. It was a manifestation both of great

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power and of great revelation of the Word. If anything was truly at the center of the visitation it was this ministry of the Word. All of the phenomenal things obviously had their place but the revelation of the Word....! It was something of which I don't believe any of us have ever seen the like.

We hear many today convey the idea that preaching is all but "boring" and that what they truly want is a lot of phenomenal feelings and experiences. Well, the preaching that came forth in the midst of all the amazing phenomena was anything but boring! It was full of life and power. Heb. 4:12.

I remember one occasion when Bro. Thomas visited in North Carolina. When he stood up he basically said he didn't have anything and just began to make some general remarks. Then he paused momentarily and said something like, "Well, maybe I'll comment a little." About two hours later we all sat there with our mouths open wondering where the time had gone! The Lord had just taken over and it was like a mighty river had flowed over us — such clarity, such power, such revelation!

With regard to all the phenomenal things that happened, on the one hand, I had no problem with God doing any of those things. The most important question to be considered was simply whether they were, in fact, of God. The fact that I'm still here makes it obvious that I am satisfied that they were. I am well acquainted with the things that happened and the people that were involved. I know something of their seriousness in seeking God lest these things be of the devil. I know that the emphasis has never been upon the phenomenal but upon the Word. I can't find anything that happened out of harmony with the Word.

No one was any more skeptical and concerned than was Bro. Thomas himself. I can't blame anyone for being cautious in this area. On the one hand there are many religious groups in our day who just don't believe in such things at all, that they passed away with the apostles. This is just nonsense and unbelief. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!

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On the other hand, one of the characteristics of the last days is great deception — involving lying signs and wonders — by the devil. And our land is filled with people chasing signs, wonders, feelings, and experiences. I am convinced that much of it is, indeed of the devil. But God is still alive and real! And I believe that He is still among His people to reveal the things they truly need to know.

God Had a Reason

If the visitation was of God — and I believe that it was — it happened for a reason. God wasn't just entertaining us. He certainly didn't do it to exalt us or make us something great. He didn't do it to amaze us and give us wonderful spiritual experiences and feelings. He had a purpose. I would never profess to know His whole purpose. The best thing I can probably do is to give you my perspective on it as the Lord enables. (I believe that there is also a reason that I have a burden at this present time to share these things.)

When I came into contact with these things I truly didn't have a problem actually believing that such things could be. And it wasn't the "wow" factor that got my attention. With my background what got my attention was not the fact of the visitation but the message. Over and over again it was as though the Lord was drawing our attention to things in the scriptures and, with great emphasis, telling us that we were seeing the fulfillment, or that it was just ahead and time was short.

Naturally, the overriding emphasis was on the coming of the Lord and it's nearness. Over and over again the Lord warned of both the nearness and the suddenness of Christ's coming and of the necessity of being awake and ready. Never was there any hope suggested for those who weren't. And it was made very clear that the opportunity for being ready was getting very short. The message of the ten virgins in Matt. 25 is that some will wake up and find out that they don't have what they need and that it's too late.

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Christ's Coming

Very closely related to this — and very central to our subject in general — is the nature of Christ's coming, that is, what will actually happen when He comes. During the visitation, and over the years since from time to time, there has been an absolute consistency in the way God has revealed the coming of Christ to us: WHEN CHRIST COMES THIS WORLD WILL BE DESTROYED BY FIRE. And it is not way off sometime! And it will happen suddenly and without warning.

This is a sobering message to put it mildly. In one vision the Lord pictured the removing of His people and immediately afterwards the person saw the world like a ball of yarn soaked in gasoline completely enveloped in flames. Many other visions have shown the same truth pictured in various ways. Some have seen the people left behind running and screaming in terror but with no place to hide.

This is a dramatic picture but is it according to scripture? Peter thought so. Read II Peter 3:10-12. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?"

That's what he was looking for. It wouldn't make much sense to look for something you don't expect to happen until a later age. He also refers to the world in verse 7 as being "reserved unto fire." He directly compares the fiery judgment to come with what happened in Noah's day. Is this what most church-going people in our day are expecting?

Paul was. In II Thess. 1:7-10 he says, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that

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know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”

The day rest and deliverance come for God’s people is the day destruction comes for the rest of the world.

Jesus certainly was explicit about this as we have pointed out, telling us that His coming would be like the days of Noah and also of Lot. In both cases the deliverance of the righteous took place as the wicked were destroyed.

Noah’s message to his generation was to flee from judgment to come. I believe that that should be our message as well because it is surely coming. One of the first visions that was given was taken directly from Joel 2. It was given to one who was unfamiliar with the passage and the words were quoted exactly. The person both saw the vision and heard the words and related them accurately to the congregation.

Blow Ye The Trumpet

I will quote just the first three verses and encourage you to read through verse 11 at least. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.”

This is just one example of the Lord’s direct warning that judgment was drawing near upon an unprepared world. I do not hear this being preached (other than Bro. Thomas). I am more convinced

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than ever that part of the reason Jesus warned of deception concerning His coming (Matt. 24:4) is that He foresaw the rise of false doctrines like the Rapture-Tribulation-Millennium teaching of dispensationalism.

For 150-200 years or so, Satan has carefully crafted these theories, interweaving them with some true things, having them embodied in the footnotes of a popular edition of the Bible (The Scofield Bible). Many good and sincere people have been spoiled by these ideas. I've heard men I respect minister life and blessing when they talk about Christian living. Yet, when they try to get into their church's teachings on Christ's coming their ministry is suddenly dry and lifeless. There's a reason! There's a difference between ministering by tradition and ministering by revelation. Tradition is a great enemy to God's people: it keeps them from hearing His voice.

As I consider the many things the Lord said during the visitation — and I'll enumerate more of them as I go — I notice a parallel between the revelations then and the revelations at the time of Christ's birth. Many of the things revealed concerned future things but in both cases there was an announcement of something that was happening THEN. With Christ it was His birth. It was true that there were wonderful things to come but God wanted His people to know that HE WAS HERE. Scripture was being fulfilled.

The Loosing of Satan

I believe that along with the future things God revealed to us was also an announcement regarding things that were taking place THEN. The thing that stands out most in my mind is the loosing of Satan. It is one thing to believe theologically that there is a loosing of Satan at the end of the age; it is quite another for God to come down and supernaturally announce that it is taking place. And that is what I believe happened.

The release of demon power that had previously been restrained was a recurring theme. In one key vision, Rev. 9:1-11 was literally and precisely given to one of the young people. This vision pictures an

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angel unlocking the “bottomless pit” and releasing a horde of “locusts” who stream forth to attack men, led by Apollyon, the Destroyer. Other visions complemented this as well, such as the four angels of Rev. 7 holding back the winds. Others, not directly taken from the scriptures, depicted the same theme of restraint and then release of devil power.

On one occasion about this time Bro. Thomas was allowed to converse briefly with one of the heavenly messengers and this messenger said that Satan was loose like never before. This statement, coupled with everything else that had come forth, caused Bro. Thomas and others to wonder where all this fitted in with what the scriptures taught. On a subsequent visit Bro. Thomas asked the angel about this. He asked specifically if this loosing of Satan was the one referred to in the Bible, the last loosing of Satan before the end of all things. The answer was — “Yes.”

I don’t know whether that fits in with your tradition or theology but it’s something to pray about and consider — seriously! For me it was a perfect fit. It laid bare the spiritual side of what I had been seeing, feeling, and observing in the world around me. I saw with great clarity the inspiration behind the revolutionary changes taking place everywhere in the late 1960s.

I should mention a couple of other experiences that bear particularly on this. Two different young people each were taken in the spirit by an angel to see a revelation of these things. Both of them saw great numbers of dark, ugly, wicked beings in a place of confinement. They saw spirits of various rank and power. Then each one saw the release of these spirits upon mankind.

I remember listening to one young lady describing her experience and what she saw. She saw large numbers of these wicked spirits streaming forth and immediately attacking and entering into people. She saw so many spirits go into some that, in her childlike way, she said it seemed like they’d never fill up.

On other occasions they were taken to different places and shown how spirits work on and affect people. I recall two examples. In one

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place two people were having a heated argument while a dark figure ran back and forth between them speaking in their ears. In another scene a man was observed driving angrily and recklessly whenever a demon spirit would come near yet he would drive normally when the spirit would withdraw.

An Announcement

These things, pictured in various ways, were given to teach the people about Satan's kingdom and the reality of demons and how they work, but they were also given, I believe, as an announcement of a critical event on God's prophetic timetable: the final loosing of Satan. It signaled the beginning of the last short period of this world's history. We are well into that period as I write these words. The ongoing and progressive effects of Satan's loosing are obvious to anyone with any spiritual discernment at all.

God's people need to understand what's happening in the world, what they're up against. At the same time they need to see as never before, the cross and the absolute victory that Christ won on behalf of every child of God. The very gates of hell will never prevail against His Church! It's high time we wake up to the reality of these things and, as our Lord instructed us — "Be ready."

Chapter Ten

Man's Final Rebellion

If there is one central theme to “sudden death overtime” it is that it is the time of man’s final rebellion against his Maker. Arrayed on one side are the kingdoms of this world and on the other, God’s kingdom ruled over by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. This rebellion is specifically against Jesus and against the gospel ultimatum. It’s end is certain.

As we have noted before, this period at the end of time is referred to in Rev. 20:3 as “a little season.” Verses 7-10 describe what happens during the little season. With the former restraint gone Satan immediately goes to work to deceive and gather the nations together for battle. It is a last desperate effort on Satan’s part to prevail against the God of heaven, to fulfill his rebellious dream of being like the Most High. Isaiah 14:12-15.

The growing darkness we are witnessing in this hour is the fruit of this behind-the-scenes activity of Satan to prepare for the great final battle ahead. That darkness is rapidly swallowing up the world of unbelieving men, leading them down the road to certain destruction. At this point this deceiving and gathering is an ongoing process. No matter how and for how long it is permitted to unfold there will come a day when God says, “Enough!”

At issue is the great plan of God, conceived before the world was, to bring forth a perfect and eternal creation peopled with a great company of His sons and daughters. They are His sons and daughters not because they have been born merely of flesh and blood but because they have been born of His Spirit. His firstborn Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been given all authority in heaven and earth for the

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express purpose of establishing this kingdom and putting an end to Satan's rebellion.

Yet the world, blinded by sin and by Satan's wicked deceit, remains in rebellion against God and, more specifically, against His Son. Jesus referred to this in Luke 19. He told a parable about a nobleman who travelled to a far country to receive for himself a kingdom. He gave his servants responsibilities, telling them to "occupy till I come." Of course, he was speaking of himself and the time when he would return to heaven to assume his place of exaltation and authority.

Then verse 14 says, "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, we will not have this man to reign over us." That declaration captures the essence of the world's response to God's plan. "God, we won't bow to Your King. We reject Your plan." See also Psalm 2.

The Gospel Ultimatum

As I indicated above, the gospel of Jesus Christ is an ultimatum. It challenges men to choose sides — once and for all. Which will it be? The world, or heaven? God, or the devil? There is no such thing as "accepting Jesus" as Savior, but refusing Him as Lord. Salvation — the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from Satan's power, the hope of heaven — is but one benefit of heavenly citizenship. It is given freely to all who finally and completely cast their lot with heaven's King. Anything less is fatal.

Throughout the age the gospel has been the sword of heaven's army, wielded through the lips of God's servants, chosen from among men to proclaim the heavenly message. Wherever it has gone men and women have been called out from Satan's dominion and made citizens of heaven. Today, a great company of the redeemed line heaven's shores watching, and waiting, as the last chapter unfolds.

But the gospel is a two-edged sword. Wherever the gospel goes men become responsible before God. It exposes the true nature of

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their sin and rebellion. Without its light men just do what it is their nature to do — and die. But when the light of God’s Word shines upon them, their sinful and rebellious nature finds its true Adversary and they must choose. To continue in sin then is to choose damnation. It is to spit on the love of God and to defy His Son.

We have already referred earlier to Paul’s writings in II Thess. 2. His general subject was the coming of Christ. He, by revelation, foresaw many things that were to happen prior to Christ’s coming. One of these things (verse 3) is variously translated as, “a falling away” (KJV), “the rebellion” (NIV), “the apostasy” (NASU), “a time of great rebellion against God” (TLB).

Each of these translations says the same thing in slightly different words. And all convey the revelation of God that enabled Paul to look down the stream of time and foresee a time of great rebellion shortly before the coming of the Lord. There has, of course, been much rebellion against God in the world but Paul isn’t speaking in generalities. He saw a very specific time of rebellion.

The Mystery of Iniquity

This is evident from what he says in verse 7. There he refers to the “mystery of iniquity” which was already at work in his own day. A “mystery” in the Bible is something that natural man is incapable of understanding. It is something that God must reveal, even to His own, if they are to understand. The word “iniquity” means “lawlessness.” A “lawless” man is someone who will not be ruled over. Particularly it refers to a man who will not be ruled over by Christ. Remember the words from Christ’s parable, “We will not have this man to rule over us.”

Please note especially that, although this secret principle of lawlessness was at work in Paul’s day, there was a restraint in place. “For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.” NIV. This is a clear reference to the fact that God has restrained the power of darkness during the gospel age, allowing it to be

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expressed only so much. The full expression of man's wickedness has been reserved for the end of the age. The ending of this restraint corresponds to the "great rebellion."

Religious Rebellion

When we hear words like "rebellion" and "lawlessness" we are inclined to associate them with things that are outwardly and obviously wicked and against Christ such as sin and perversion, war and violence, secularism, paganism, new age teachings, atheism, humanism, and so forth. Of course these things do indeed flow forth from the spirit of antichrist but the most subtle and dangerous expression of the spirit of antichrist is not in overt wickedness: it is in religion. And I don't just mean "heathen" religion. I mean most of what goes by the name "Christian." Christianity has been largely hijacked by the kingdom of darkness to the point that it has become one of Satan's greatest tools for sealing people in their sins and preparing them for the lake of fire.

Jesus spoke of such in Matt. 7:15-23. After warning of false prophets who would come dressed in sheep's clothes he declared in verse 21, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." He then revealed the fact that MANY — not a few! — on the day of judgment would call him "Lord" and point out all they had done in his name but would be rejected as those who "work iniquity." Sobering words, those, words that ought to make us seriously consider.

Remember that the word "iniquity" means "lawlessness." This indicates that although these people had done many impressive religious things so far as they were concerned, they were actually rebels at heart. They had never truly bowed to Jesus Christ as Lord and submitted themselves to His Headship. Jesus was not the author of what they did. Other spirits were at work.

How Many Denominations?

Consider the beginning of the church. Christ ascended to the throne and at the appointed time sent forth the Spirit upon the apostles, His chosen vessels. They proclaimed the gospel message and some 3000 people believed, were baptized, and then continued in fellowship together. How many denominations were there? Of course there were none! There is no such thing in God's kingdom! There were only two kinds of people: those who believed in Christ and those who didn't. And I don't mean a superficial "belief." I mean the kind that caused people to wholly cast their lot with Jesus Christ for time and eternity, that caused them to remain steadfast even when it cost them their lives.

The lines were clear. At the center of things was Jesus Christ, God's Son. People were either with Him or they were against Him. And things stayed that way for a time. But "fast forward" a few years and you can see the "mystery of iniquity" at work — in the Name of Christ! The New Testament is full of warnings about this corruption of Christ's Church that showed itself in such things as strife and division, false doctrine, false ministries, and sin and rebellion of every kind. One church leader named Diotrephes (3 John 9-10) wouldn't even receive John the Apostle himself, and if anyone was in fellowship with John, Diotrephes threw him out of his church! I wonder what kind of a spirit was behind that!

This same "mystery of iniquity" has continued at work in Christianity down through the centuries, corrupting and dividing, using and abusing everyone it could. The miracle is that God has carried out His plan in spite of Christianity! I'm glad! But what has this to do with our subject? Everything! The great rebellion unfolding in our day is not limited to the secular arena. It is evident everywhere in churches. God's remnant needs to be aware of the fact that very little that goes by the name "Christian" actually operates under the headship of Christ. Some other spirit is in control.

I believe that anyone with any spiritual discernment is aware of this. In one sense you could say that we don't need a vision or an angel

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to make us aware of spiritual conditions in churches, yet during the visitation we experienced in the late 1960s the Lord didn't leave this subject out. We were repeatedly shown the awful apostate conditions that prevail in most places. Visions would be given that showed a few scattered points of light in what was otherwise great darkness. This lent special emphasis to the ministry of the Word on the subject as well as confirmation of what we knew as a matter of spiritual discernment.

The Same Religious Spirits

The rebellion against the Lordship of Christ is just as great in Christendom as a whole in our day as it was against Jesus Christ when He was on earth. The same religious spirits are at work. Real Christian believers, as they become aware of this, really need to seek God from their hearts for His leading and provision. There is a great famine in the land. It makes no sense for believers to continue to pour time and money into religion that honors Christ in name only. It greatly saddens me as people write to us telling how they've gone here and there to church and been abused, intimidated, brought into great bondage, and spiritually starved. That is all there is in many places yet God does have a people in the earth! We need Him to lead us.

No Other Name

God never called anyone to gather people under the name "Baptist," or "Methodist," or "Pentecostal," or any other name other than Jesus Christ. His is the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:12. In spite of the fact that there have been some real believers who have worn these "brands" such names are devices of Lucifer to divide and hinder the work of Christ in the earth.

We have a name. It is Midnight Cry Ministries. But we have no interest whatsoever in promoting, or in bringing people under that name. It is simply a legal entity so that we can own property and enter into agreements with broadcast outlets and so forth. But the only Name that is to be lifted up is the Name of Jesus!

No More Baptists!

Spurgeon was a great preacher who happened to be Baptist. But I like what he said about that: “I say of the Baptist name, let it perish, but let Christ’s name last forever. I look forward with pleasure, to the day when there will not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ’s name endure forever.” I wonder how that would go over in most Baptist churches today! Yet, could not the same be said of any denomination?

One vision I particularly remember regarding churches depicted a large church full of people. Then a giant fist began to beat on the roof of the church and to cause it to crumble. The people, of course, came running out. But the interesting thing was that dark figures took most of them by the left hand and led them off in one direction while bright figures took a very few by the right hand and led them off in the other! Most of those church members belonged to the devil!

No one is more aware of the apostate condition of churches than God Himself and He was letting us know that He would be bringing about conditions that would uproot His elect and separate them from religious houses of darkness and slumber. Drastic measures are sometimes needed to awaken His children to the great need of the hour.

A Time for Separation

In fact, separation was a great theme of the visitation. Over and over we were shown through vision and in the scriptures both light and darkness each gathered to its own kind. The true gospel of Jesus Christ has always brought about separation — oftentimes within families.

We have witnessed this in a number of ways. Some will go along for awhile and then at some point rebel against the light and go out. I John 2:19 is fulfilled which says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have

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continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

Other times we have seen the Lord reach out to bring someone into the light, into the fellowship of the body of Christ, yet their earthly family remain in darkness — sometimes religious darkness. Remember the words of Jesus (Matt 10:34-37): “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

These things have always occurred wherever Christ has established His church, gathering people in His Name. Yet the conditions to be expected as the darkness intensifies mean we will see more and more separation take place. I believe that before the end the line between those who serve Christ and those who remain in the enemy's camp will become far more clear than it is now. Things were pretty clear in Noah's day. They were likewise clear in Jerusalem in the days before judgment fell in 70 A.D.

The gathering darkness will make it more and more necessary for true believers to seek out fellowship with their own kind. God Himself will dry up the “pools” and do whatever is necessary to bring His children out of religious prison houses. Isaiah 42.

Desolate!

Even as God would not forever strive with men in Noah's day, so it is today. There is a line men cross where they are abandoned to the darkness they have chosen. Jesus gave a scathing indictment in Matt. 23 of the religion of the scribes and Pharisees. Verse 38 sums up God's response to their persistent unbelief and wickedness: “Behold your house is left unto you desolate.”

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Desolate! What a sobering word. I wonder how many places are in that condition today. I fully believe that people cannot even be saved in many churches. God has abandoned them. People must leave if they are to get help and find God.

We can see this in the ministry of Jesus. Over the course of his ministry Jesus travelled the cities and villages of Israel preaching God's word and performing mighty miracles. Yet over and over he was met with a deeply entrenched religious unbelief. What it really was was demon power. Satan had clothed himself in a religion that outwardly honored God and Moses. But Jesus knew their hearts. That's why he said, "Ye are of your father, the devil." John 8:44. In His own hometown of Nazareth the good folks of the synagogue tried to kill him on one occasion! Luke 4:16-30.

Worse Than Sodom!

On another occasion Jesus pronounced woe on several cities by name — Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matt. 11:20-24). They were specially guilty because God had given them so much light. In fact Jesus said that Sodom would fare better on the judgment day than they would! Think about that! Bible-believing, synagogue-attending Israelites ranked lower on God's scale than did the wicked sinners of Sodom! Is it really so different in the Christendom of our day?

There is a revealing incident that occurred in Bethsaida, one of the cities censured by Jesus. It is recorded for us in Mark 8:22-26. Jesus came to Bethsaida where some people brought a blind man to him, asking that he be healed. However, instead of just praying for him then and there, Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the town. Now this was unusual!

After they had left the town Jesus prayed for the man — twice! This is the only recorded incident in all of the ministry of Jesus where it was necessary for him to pray for someone twice. I believe it was a symptom, a symptom of the awful darkness of unbelief in that place.

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Don't Tell Anyone!

But what follows is even more revealing! After the man's eyes were finally opened Jesus told him not to go into the town and furthermore not even to tell anyone who was going there! What does this mean? Doesn't God want everyone to know? Hadn't Jesus himself ministered openly in Bethsaida on other occasions? What was going on?

"My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Bethsaida had had their opportunity. God had shown a brilliant light in their midst and they had said no. God was through with that place. There was to be no more witness there. People had to leave if they got help — and not go back!

More and more we are seeing these kinds of conditions in our day and God's people need to be aware of it. "Churchianity" will not do. Satan has been loosed as never before and some of his cleverest traps are religious. We need God as we've never needed Him before to lead us, to open our eyes and to give wisdom and discernment.

One of the things the Word of God specifically warns us of regarding the last days is religious deception — including lying signs and wonders. Matt. 24:24, II Thess. 2:8-10. Don't believe everything that looks impressive, feels good, and they say is from God — even if something truly supernatural is involved. Seek God!

Strong Delusion

One thing God's people need to understand about some of these things: when people go so far in rejecting truth and rejecting the Spirit of God, God sends them strong delusion. II Thess. 2:11-12. And what's more He does it for the express purpose that they might believe a lie and be damned!

I am fully persuaded that we are seeing and will continue to see the fruits of this kind of strong delusion. It is nothing less than Divine judgment upon rebellion and unbelief when God steps back and allows the devil to powerfully convince sign-seeking unbelievers of his lie.

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God is our only hope in such an hour. Judgment hangs over our world. It draws closer every day. And more and more people every day are being sealed in darkness and unaware of what is coming. If there is any capacity at all for hearing the voice of God it is time to act — before it is too late. And the lost will not know it is too late until the day of the Lord arrives. They'll cry; they'll scream; they'll pray but it won't do any good then. It's "Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts...." Heb. 3:7. Today is all we ever have.

The Eleventh Hour

One theme that surfaced during the visitation was "The Eleventh Hour." There were several visions given that in one way or another showed that we were entering the last hour. One showed a clock at 11 o'clock. Another showed the words, "The Eleventh Hour." Bro. Thomas was greatly anointed to preach a message with that as the title. He also preached a message about the same time entitled "The Last Hour For Sinners." He later wrote the recently reprinted article, "God's Last Call."

All had the same general theme, that the opportunity to be saved was getting shorter and shorter, that there was one more "hour" in which God would reach out. It was also emphasized — relating this to the last invitation in the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:22-23) that God's principal outreach would be to the unreached. He would not necessarily be going back where the message had been rejected but would go beyond the symbolic "streets and lanes of the city" to the "highways and hedges." I believe that much of what God is doing today is happening in remote corners of the globe among those who have never before heard.

I firmly believe that in the end God's "house" will be full. Every single man, woman, boy, or girl that the Father has given to His Son will come to Him and not be refused. John 6:37. I cannot tell you who, or how, or where. Only God can show us that. I am convinced, however, that we are in the period of God's last call to mankind — and time is getting shorter and shorter.

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Another clear emphasis of the Spirit was upon the word “compel” in that parable. It signified the sense of urgency in the message. Time was running out. The Lord emphasized the “short work” that the Lord would do upon the earth from Rom. 9:28. Only the Lord knows how short “short” is. He has His own Divine schedule for things. Everything will happen according to His plan. But we were made to know that it is not a time for “neglecting” so great a salvation. Heb. 2:3.

Chapter Eleven

What Now?

A number of times since I began to write this series the question has come up in my mind as to how to finish it. It is one thing to set forth the fact that we are in “sudden death overtime.” It is another to answer the inevitable questions that arise: “OK, what do we do, then?” “What exactly is going to happen, and when?” It is our nature to want answers to such questions. That’s one reason why so many religious teachers of our day are so popular. They will gladly pull out their big charts and show you in great detail all that they believe is going to happen. But I am persuaded that they are as deceived about many of these things as were the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. The Pharisees knew about Messiah’s coming but failed to recognize Him when He actually came.

We’d love to have a nice clear “road map” that would unveil God’s full plan for His own in the last days — where to go to church, what to believe, how to tell truth from deception, His plan for protecting us from the growing darkness, and so on. But God has declared, “Now the just shall live by faith.” Heb. 10:38. Paul said, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” II Cor. 5:7. That is God’s way.

The Answer

The simple answer to the above question, What now? can be stated in two words: Trust God. Yet that sounds overly simplistic, almost trite. What do you mean, trust God? Doesn’t every Christian trust God? Yes — and no. It is true that every genuine born-again Christian has trusted the salvation of their soul into the faithful hands of Jesus Christ. But there is a great deal more than that that

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God had in mind when He told us to “live by faith,” and “walk by faith.”

When I say, “Trust God,” I mean that God desires in us a practical, active faith that touches every area of our lives. Too much of our “trust” in God is theoretical. We say that we are trusting in Him — as long as we are healthy, have a nice house, a steady job, the ability to work and make a living, money in the bank, and so forth. Yet how quickly we panic on the inside when God in His infinite wisdom chooses to knock out some of these props from under us! Where is our real trust?

As I look into my own heart as well as round about I can understand why Jesus posed the rhetorical question: “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8. It is not nearly so plentiful as we might suppose.

The Wilderness

Perhaps the best way to illustrate God’s plan for us is to recall something that was often emphasized during and following the visitation: the wilderness. The Lord often drew lessons and gave instructions to us from his dealings with Israel when He called them into the wilderness. There are prophetic scriptures such as Ezekiel 20:33-38 and Hosea 2:14-23 that at once look back to Israel’s earlier experience in the wilderness yet also looked ahead to God’s future dealings with His people. On numerous occasions the Lord greatly anointed Bro. Thomas to apply the truths in these scriptures and others to us in our day.

Egypt is a type of the world. God’s elect are slaves there, spending their lives for things that can never last, eking out an often miserable and impoverished existence. God knows who they are and how to help them. But until He moves in, all they can do is struggle on and perhaps cry out to God. Be assured that He hears! Though He tarry in answering, yet He is never one day late.

Canaan is, in one sense, a type of the next world that God has planned for His own. It is a land of fruitfulness and plenty, a land

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abounding in peace and fellowship with God. It is a place where God's sons and daughters will be able to enjoy Him forever. (I am aware that, in another sense, Canaan is also a type of the full rest of faith into which true believers enter when they completely cast their lot with Christ. However, the fullest expression of all that Canaan means awaits the new creation after Christ returns and destroys this present one.)

The wilderness is a place of transition, a place where God tries and proves His own and prepares them for Canaan. In Egypt His people are in no condition to inherit Canaan. There is too much of Egypt in them, too much they need to both unlearn and learn. In Egypt they believed in what they could see and touch. Canaan is a place of perfect rest and trust in God. The wilderness is where those lessons are learned, where we are changed, conformed to the image of His Son. Rom. 8:29.

A Place of Separation

The wilderness is first of all a place of separation. In Ezekiel 20:34-35 God promised to bring us "out from the people," and "into the wilderness of the people." There He promised to plead with us "face to face." Remember how it was in Egypt. Moses went to Pharaoh repeatedly to deliver God's message to "Let my people go." Pharaoh just as repeatedly hardened his heart against the Lord. Notice particularly how he tried to get Moses to compromise. He first agreed that all the men could go (Exodus 10:11). Of course, he knew they would return to their wives and families!

Later Pharaoh said that they could all go but to leave their flocks and herds behind. Moses stood uncompromisingly on God's Word and told Pharaoh, "There shall not an hoof be left behind." Exodus 10:26. That's what God is looking for in this hour — those willing to make a complete break with the world, to embrace His kingdom without compromise. He desires a people who want Him alone, who are willing to "sell all" (Matt. 13:46) to follow Him, believing His promise.

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This separation has to happen first in our hearts. That was the problem for so many who physically left Egypt yet remained in unbelief. There is nothing external that anyone can do that is a substitute for real heart faith. It doesn't matter where you are or what church you go to. Jesus Himself could be the pastor but if you have an evil heart of unbelief God will see to it that it comes out. Nothing short of faith will do.

Separation from our own lives in the world and unto God may have many practical ramifications, yet if God has our hearts He can lead us step by step. Abraham is the great Bible example. He is called the "father of all them that believe," by the Apostle Paul in Rom. 4:11.

God spoke to Abraham and told him to leave his country and his relatives and to journey to a land that He would show him. That took faith! God didn't show him the full plan; He didn't show him the land in advance. All Abraham had to go on was confidence in the One Who had called him. That was enough to enable him to do just what God said. He packed up and left. Over a period of time he was unerringly led to the land God later gave to his descendants.

There he was taught many great lessons of faith. God had promised to make of him a great nation yet he had to wait for many years before he even had an heir. By that time having a child was out of the question for Sarah but he kept on believing in God. Later on God proved his faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac, the very son of promise. I'm sure that Abraham battled many fears and many questions, yet he set out to do what God had said. God waited until he had the knife raised before intervening. Abraham passed the test!

Abraham saw something beyond this world. God was real to him, more real than everything else. He was willing to follow and believe in God even when it meant turning his back on everything other men hold dear. He lived his life as a pilgrim and a stranger and died believing in the promises of God. There was no turning back. Heb. 11:8-19.

That's what "trusting God" is really all about. Are you willing to put God ahead of family, friends, home, a particular church, plans,

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possessions, career, your own life? If not then you can't be Jesus' disciple (Luke 14:26-33). If so, then He can begin to teach you and lead you and provide every necessary thing for your earthly journey.

"Trusting God" almost sounds like a passive attitude, a sort of acquiescence to whatever happens. But it is really an active faith that calls on God, that bombards heaven in times of need, that continually and steadfastly looks to Him for the answers we need.

Yet there is a patience involved in real trust that is willing to await God's timing. Abraham had to wait 25 years for Isaac. During that time he took some detours, one of which resulted in Ishmael who could never be his heir. Yet, because his faith was real, God was always able to work with him and to bring him back on track. I'm glad that God continues to be faithful to His plan even when we get off course. He looks at the bottom line: Abraham believed God. Even though he failed here and there, God saw the end result and declared him to be "strong in faith." Rom. 4:20. That gives me hope!

Is there something in your life that holds you captive, something you can't really trust God with, or let go? If so, then that thing is actually your true God. It's just another form of idolatry. You don't have to bow down to gods of wood and stone to be an idolater. Clinging to your own life in unbelief is the same thing. He will have no other gods before Him.

God wants to truly be God to His people. That might mean separation from loved ones. It might mean leaving your church. It might mean leaving home and friends. It might mean leaving job and career. I certainly can't say in any individual case, but I know that we can't put anything ahead of Him. His plan is infinitely better than ours! He just wants our hearts and our trust.

Clinging to anything ahead of Him is like staying in Egypt. That won't do. Moses wouldn't leave a hoof there. God has to bring our hearts to a place where He can begin to work in us according to His plan and our need. There is a lot of changing that has to take place before we're fit for Canaan. Our inward attitude must become the same as that of Jesus: "Not my will, but thine be done." Luke 22:42.

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Then God can touch anything in our lives that needs touching and deliver us.

Many of God's people have been put to sleep by the religion they are a part of. They are unaware of their need and of the dangers of the hour. Their church is just a part of Egypt and they don't know it. They are led more by tradition than by God. They do things their way and not God's way. What should you do if you wake up and find that this is the case? Seek God. With all your heart. Daily let Him know you desire to be led of Him and then do what He says — when He says it. Don't run ahead and try to figure things out. Let Him set the pace. It is a walk of faith. I don't know what His plan for you is precisely. He does!

A Place of Dependence

The wilderness is a place of total dependence on God. It means leaving the place where we feel safe because we feel in control for a place where God is the only answer, the only source of help. As Isaiah prophesied in 42:16, "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." What a glorious promise! Yet how scary it can seem when God actually calls upon us to trust Him.

I was thinking the other day about how it might have been if a group of men had tried to lead and provide for a nation of people who were going to live in the desert for what turned out to be 40 years! What a staggering task! Scouting out trails and campsites, printing and distributing maps and guide books, establishing warehouses of supplies and supporting supply lines — no doubt depending upon the heathen nations of the area! Only God could do such a thing. And He did it without relying on any of the things men would have relied on!

Life in Egypt was hard but at least they lived in houses and had gardens. Out in the desert, what were they to eat? Where would they find water? Talk about the impossible!

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God did everything He could do to prove Himself faithful. He led them to a militarily indefensible spot beside the Red Sea and then stirred up Pharaoh's heart to pursue the Israelites. There they were, trapped and helpless. They cried out in unbelief. Was God worried? Struggling to come up with a plan? No! He had everything well in hand. He just wanted to secure their trust.

Finally Moses told them, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD which he will shew to you today." He said that this was the last time they would see the Egyptians and that God would fight for them. Exodus 14:13-14.

A Promise and a Stick

What did Moses have going for him? The promise of an unseen God and a stick! But he'd already seen God do some wonderful things through that "stick" as he moved in faith. And so we know the account of how God told Moses to stretch forth his rod over the sea and the waters parted. Then after the Israelites had crossed, the same waters destroyed Pharaoh's army as they tried to pursue. What's really amazing is that so many could experience things like this and still have no real faith!

As they journeyed on God miraculously provided water, and manna for food. Their clothes didn't wear out. Except for times when God judged some, they didn't even get sick. His presence was made known by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. As long as they moved in harmony with Him, He took care of everything. They were to move when the cloud moved and stay when it stayed.

And it was just as much a walk of faith for Moses as it was for the people. They looked to him and all he could do was to look to God for the wisdom and direction he needed — as he needed it. He didn't have a map and a detailed itinerary in his tent. He needed God every day. No program. No five-year plan. Just God. And He was more than enough!

God was showing them that they didn't need the things that men depend upon. They only needed Him in their midst. They needed to

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simply trust in what He promised and live lives of daily dependence on Him. This was, as Moses later recounted in Deut. 8:3, the major lesson of the wilderness: “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.”

There is something very “present tense” about that principle that we often forget. Now that we have the Bible, we think that’s all we need. We do need it, of course, but it’s no good without the Author! We need Him as the present tense, active Leader. When we come together, we need Him to lead us and show us what to do. All of our plans and schemes, all of our programs are a poor substitute for having God in the midst.

A Place of Humbling

One of the key phrases of Deut. 8:3 is, “And he humbled thee....” This is something that we by nature hate above all things. Yet it is absolutely necessary to God’s plan. Even His own Son, our Creator, “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Phil. 2:8.

Heb. 5:7-8 says, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” Notice the connection between obedience, suffering, and the fulfilling of God’s purpose for Him. It is the same for all of God’s children. Notice also that eternal salvation is for those that obey him.

We don’t like to be humbled, to be dependent, to feel like we’re in over our heads. But the fact is that the life we’ve been called to is not natural, but supernatural. We can’t do anything at all unless God helps us. It is both humbling and wonderful to realize that anything at all spiritually good that we are involved in comes not from us, but from God.

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In the wilderness we learn that we are nothing and He is everything. It is as Ezek. 20:38 concludes, "... And ye shall know that I am the LORD." And we learn that He is all we need.

A Place of Proving

The wilderness is a place of testing and proving. So much that is called faith is not really faith at all. After God said in Ezek. 20:33-38 that He intended to "bring you into the wilderness," He promised to "purge out from among you the rebels and them that transgress against me."

So many that are apparent followers of God are actually unbelievers at heart. It just takes the right circumstance to bring that unbelief boiling to the surface. Korah and the others in Numbers 15 resented Moses' authority and rebelled, not against Moses, but against the God Who had called him. The ten spies (Numbers 13) believed more in the giants than they did in the faithfulness of God to keep His promise. Others were more interested in grumbling and complaining than they were in being thankful to God for feeding them in the middle of the desert (Numbers 21). A multitude made and worshipped a golden calf and were ready to return to Egypt rather than wait on God (Exodus 32). And on it went until a whole generation — except for Caleb and Joshua — died in the wilderness.

God knows just how to touch that one thing that is truly the center of our affections. When He does, there is a choice to be made: rebel or surrender. He will not have any other gods before Him.

There will be no stubbornness, no self-will, religious or otherwise, in the new earth. By nature we serve self and believe that obeying its dictates and desires is the key to our happiness. But in God's kingdom it is the opposite. Happiness, joy, peace — and utter fulfillment — come from God's loving will alone.

God's true children experience the same trials, the same tests, that eliminate the rebels. But the trials God sends upon His own, however fiery, are sent only to purify and strengthen faith, never to

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destroy it. In fact, true faith cannot be destroyed because it is not really our faith at all, but Christ's Who lives within. Gal. 2:20.

In I Cor. 10:1-14, Paul draws upon the wilderness experience of Israel in exhorting Christian believers to flee idolatry, to not be careless or presumptuous in following God. He enumerates the failures of many who died in the wilderness because of sin and unbelief.

A Way Out

It is in this context that Paul gave us verse 13, one of the most oft-quoted promises in the Bible: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." NIV.

What a wonderful testament to God's faithfulness! We often come short, but He is always faithful! Notice, also, how it is that He helps us. His interest — and promise — is to help us to be able to stand up under the trial, not to run away in unbelief, or to somehow make the trial go away.

So much of what is called faith in our day is devoted to making the trials of life disappear. What God is looking for is faith that is able to patiently endure when that is in order. For that He calls upon us to draw, not from our own strength, but from His. Every trial is carefully balanced with whatever grace is needed. In short, He is able to finish what He has started. He just wants our trust!

God wants to prove Himself to us and that cannot happen except He bring us into situations in which all we have to lean on is His promise. He wants us to know the same lesson He endeavored to teach the Israelites so long ago: "Man doth not live by bread only but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God doth man live." Deut. 8:3.

Under the Rod

Ezek. 20:37 says, “And I will cause you to pass under the rod...” The rod is a shepherd’s rod. God is determined to be a Shepherd to His people. He knows how desperately we need one! His heart is to gather, to nurture, to protect, and to lead us safely through. The rod is a symbol of His loving rule over His people. Rebels hate authority but God’s sheep see things differently. They can say with David, “Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4. They know that the Shepherd uses the rod to help His sheep and not to hurt them.

There was a rod in the wilderness that God used to lead and provide for His people. It was Moses’ rod. It represented both divine authority and divine enabling. It wasn’t Moses’ choice or ambition that led him to do what He did. In fact he tried to talk God out of it! Gen. 3 & 4. But in the end he submitted himself to God’s plan. It wasn’t natural ability or schooling that enabled him to lead God’s people: it was God’s anointing upon him. That principle has never changed in spite of all that man has tried to employ as substitutes for the anointing.

Everywhere he went Moses lived in utter dependence on the God Who had called him. God showed Him what to do and how and when to do it. He just obeyed — and God backed him up. When he stood before the Red Sea, unbelievers crying out in fear, God told him to stretch forth his rod over the sea and it parted. When the people were so thirsty they were about ready to stone Moses, he cried to the Lord and the Lord told him to strike the rock and water came out. Exodus 17:6.

Aaron had a rod, too. Later on when the people were in a complaining and rebellious mood God had their leaders place their rods together with Aaron’s in the tabernacle overnight. Numbers 17. In the morning when they looked, Aaron’s rod had blossoms and almonds on it! God wanted them to know that there was a difference that they needed to recognize and respect. There was no way to follow and respect the LORD without following and respecting

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Moses and Aaron. Why? Because they were naturally superior? More dedicated? No! Because it was God's plan.

It is the same today. God is a shepherd to His people by calling and anointing men to watch over and lead them. He wants His people to be able to tell the difference between His servants and the self-appointed, or those sent of men — or even of demons. You can know if you really want to do his will. John 7:17. Those who desired God's will in Jesus' day were enabled to recognize Him as the One sent of the Father.

In I Thess. 2:13 Paul commends the Thessalonian believers with these words: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." That sounds pretty important to me, to be able to recognize men who truly have God's word — not just the words of the Bible — but God's message for right now! God used words that passed through Paul's lips to bring them into His eternal kingdom! But they were His words, inspired by His Spirit, full of life and power.

Chapter Twelve

God's Plan for the Church

I don't believe we can improve upon God's plan for His Church. In Eph. 4 we find that there is one Spirit and one body. We find that Christ has given various ministry gifts "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Eph. 4:12-13.

And beyond the ministry itself, all the members of Christ's body are to be "joined together" and brought to a place where each member functions effectively by drawing strength and ability from Christ the Head. And every member needs every other member. No one is complete in Himself. Completeness happens when every member functions in his or her proper place for the benefit of the whole. This is the order God honors and that will get the job done.

God gave us a picture in the way the Israelites camped in the wilderness. Think of the chaos there would have been had they rushed helter-skelter for the best spots every time they made camp! It wasn't like that at all. At the center of everything was the tabernacle with the cloud over it. The Levites took care of the priestly duties with respect to the tabernacle and they did it in an orderly fashion. The rest of the Israelites were instructed to pitch their tents in careful order, by tribes, by families, and by rank within tribes and families. Everything and everyone had a place with God's presence at the center.

God's Plan for the Church

The Bond of the Covenant

And God's presence was over the holiest place of the tabernacle, the place where the ark of the covenant rested. Notice that in Ezekiel 20:37 God promises to bring us "into the bond of the covenant." The covenant we enjoy through what Jesus did at Calvary is an eternal one, far greater than anything known or understood in Old Testament days. What we have is what believers of that day looked forward to.

God desires to bring us into every aspect of that covenant. All that we have been speaking of — His drawing us out of the world and unto Himself together with our brethren, walking together by faith, learning His ways — all these things are necessary if we are to enjoy all that Christ has given us. No matter what the devil does in these last days, there is no safer place than walking with the Lord and His people under that cloud.

One deception the devil loves to use is to cause people to become independent, a law unto themselves, subject to nothing but their own judgment. It is one thing to be alone, yet actively looking to God to find one's place among His people and under the ministry He has provided. It is another to actually believe that the Christian life is just you and Jesus "on the Jericho road." The Spirit of God always brings His people together, causing them to become subject to Christ as He expresses Himself through the various members of the body.

God's people are scattered and in all kinds of circumstances. Many are unable even to find a place where they can be fed spiritually. We hear from them all the time. Yet every one in this position should be actively seeking God to lead them. He has a place for you. He knows how to provide spiritual fellowship and food. Don't be in a hurry. If God answered all your prayers in a day, you might stop seeking Him!

A Word of Warning

Be aware that the devil will do all he can to discourage and sidetrack you if you set out to seek God. Don't let him do either. Keep

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right on looking to God, asking Him for courage and wisdom according to your need. If he should begin to provide you with someone of like spirit to meet and pray with — or perhaps a small group — just keep on seeking the Lord. Don't be in any hurry to “start something” or to “get organized.” He is all the organization we need. Just pray and worship and encourage one another in the Lord.

Often when small groups are meeting informally for worship and prayer, someone with a lot of zeal and perhaps an aspiring spirit will begin to assert himself or herself as a leader, moving according to their own religious ideas. Part of looking to the Lord is looking to Him that you might be able to discern such things — and to make that discernment known. God can bear witness and help us with these things. Even basically good people need the discernment and wisdom that God makes known through the body to help them to find their proper place. I believe that God's people know it when someone tries to do something God hasn't called them to do. It just doesn't bear witness. And many are so zealous that they don't realize it unless they are told.

The thing we need to prize above all is for the Lord to be at the center of things, leading and in control. He alone knows what we need. We haven't been this way before! What we've learned in religion won't do. We need to learn His ways. He is more than willing to teach us if we are willing to learn. And He has the ministries his people need.

I've tried basically to simply enumerate a number of principles that God has emphasized in our midst over the years, principles that He honors. Certainly high on His list are such things as brotherly love and unity. All of this may sound “spiritual” and vague and impractical but I believe that God is calling His people to just such a relationship — with each other and with Him.

You will, of course, notice that I haven't given you a nice neat chronology of endtime events that lie in our future. I haven't given you a detailed “manual” on how to “set up” the body of Christ. What I have endeavored to give you is something much better than that! It is

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exactly what Noah had — and also what the saints in Jerusalem had. They made it their one business in life to cultivate a practical relationship with God and He took care of them! What could be better than that? I just don't know any better way than trusting God and believing that He will lead and provide for His own.

Precious Promises!

Earlier I said that all Moses had when he faced the Red Sea was the promise of an unseen God and a stick. What I want to do now is to give just a little sampling of what we have to go on. I pray that He will quicken His Word and cause it to become more than just words in a book, but rather something we can rest our very souls upon. Did not Jesus say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"?

Heb. 13:5. "...he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." KJV.

Prov. 3:5-6. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." NIV.

Psalms 23:1. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." KJV. (And the rest of Psalm 23!)

Isa. 40:11. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." KJV.

Isa. 42:16. "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them." NIV.

Isa. 52:12. "But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard." NIV.

Psalms 68:6. "God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land." NIV.

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Heb. 10:35-39. "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." NIV.

Psalms 91:1-4. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." NIV.

Isa. 4:5-6. "And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." KJV.

Titus 2:11-14. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." NIV.

1 Thess. 4:16-18. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." NIV.

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2 Thess. 1:6-10. "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you." NIV.

2 Peter 3:9-13. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." NIV.

Matt. 28:20. "...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." KJV.

2 Tim. 1:12. "...I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." NIV.

Phil. 1:6. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." NIV.

I believe with all my heart that we are in the last hour of this world's history. God desires that we be aware of this and of the conditions that will exist on planet earth. Within the limits of the plan of God, Satan will be allowed to have his way among men. It may

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well appear, before it's over, that he has won, but his end is sure! Christ is coming to crush Satan's rebellion once and for all. "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Heb. 9:28.

Chapter Thirteen

Be Ready

The coming of Christ looms over all that happens in our world. It is the devil's greatest fear and the believer's greatest hope. Jesus had a lot to say on the subject but his instruction to us can be summed up by what he said in Matt. 24:44 — "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." When he concluded the parable of the ten virgins in Matt. 25:13 he said in a similar vein, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

What does it mean to "be ready"? First of all, readiness is based on knowledge. If you don't know about something you cannot be ready for it. But beyond mere knowledge readiness is also based on belief. Many in the world know of the doctrine of Christ's coming but they don't believe it themselves. In fact, many openly scoff at the idea as Peter said they would. II Peter 3:3-4. But true readiness treats the coming of the Lord as the fact that it is — and acts accordingly.

Obviously, someone who has never been born again of God's Spirit is not ready. If Christ came today they would be left to suffer the world's fate. If you fall into that category I urge you in Christ's name to give your life unreservedly to Him. Bow before Him in your heart. Call upon Him to save you for time and eternity. Believe His promise! Rom. 10:9-13.

Yet I've met many people who think that because they went forward and "accepted Jesus" somewhere way back there that's all there is to it. They continue to live their own lives, attending some lifeless church, just waiting for "the rapture." I'm afraid that in many of these cases such people are not really Christians at all. They've

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been begotten by the lifeless gospel of “easy-believism.” They are just lost church members.

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” II Cor. 13:5. In light of the eternal stakes, that sounds like good advice. What other issue is more important? Every other issue affects only our life in this world. God’s kingdom is eternal. Don’t be among those who scream and cry and gnash their teeth over their lost opportunity to be saved.

I believe that readiness implies a basic knowledge of what it means to serve Christ, to be His follower — and a willingness, by His grace, to do it. It means that we are ready to serve Him in the light of what He has revealed about conditions on earth as His coming approaches. And, since we don’t know the day nor the hour, it means that we are ready should he come today; it also means that we are ready to endure by faith however long He may tarry His coming.

Jesus gave us a warning in Matt. 24:45-51 concerning some who, when His coming seemed to be delayed, became careless and began to “eat and drink with the drunken.” That’s a picture of someone whose faith is superficial and whose real inner desire is to live to the lusts of their flesh along with the rest of the world. There are some that can be aroused to a state of excitement in their carnal emotions about the prospect of Christ’s return, yet when that seems to be delayed and it comes down to practical Christian living, they’re not really interested in that.

As we have said, being ready means ready if He comes back today; it means ready to walk with Him and look for Him if His coming is delayed for 50 years; it means ready to live for Him; ready to suffer for Him if need be; ready to die for Him. It simply means that our lot is 100% cast with Him no matter what comes — or when. Like Abraham, we look for “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Heb. 11:10. We are willing to die in faith if necessary.

B e R e a d y

Are you ready?

Luke 21:36 says, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

OTHER BOOKS

Delivered From Demons, *by C. Parker Thomas*

The story of a young girl's deliverance from demon possession and also a collection of a number of other articles relating to Satan's kingdom and activity, specially as it relates to the end of this present age. Suggested Price - \$4.00.

Examine Yourselves *by Phil Enlow*

Paul told us in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to "examine yourselves." There must be a way to do that. An examination of modern Christianity in the light of true biblical salvation designed to lead the reader to genuine spiritual rest. Suggested Price - \$5.00.

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From a series of articles covering a whole range of scriptural and practical truth designed to help God's people in this important area. Suggested Price - \$4.00.

The Sure Foundation, by C. Parker Thomas

A collection of four articles published in the early 1980's on the important subject of the foundation believers have in Christ. Suggested Price - \$3.00.

Tongues: My Testimony, by C. Parker Thomas

Contains the article by the same name as well as an article entitled "Tongues Should be Tested" by Gerald McGraw in which he recounts lessons learned from testing to discover the spirit enabling someone to speak in tongues. Startling! Suggested price - \$2.00.

Your Adversary, by C. Parker Thomas

Recently, while looking through some of our oldest issues of the MCM, we uncovered this timely gem, published in about 1960! Originally published in two parts, it is reprinted here in its entirety. There is a simple directness and clarity in this teaching that will help anyone who desires to walk with the Lord and overcome in this hour. I believe that many of you will be amazed at how something written that long ago could be so perfectly relevant to the present need of God's people! Suggested Price - \$1.00.

***Note:** The prices listed above are suggested with the thought in mind of simply covering the costs of printing and mailing these materials. It is not our intention to become a "book-seller," selling books for profit. Our desire is to get out truth that can help set God's people free in this critical hour. Please write to us at:*

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The *Midnight Cry Messenger*, a quarterly tabloid publication, has been published since the 1950s. The articles printed in this book were first printed in the *Midnight Cry Messenger*. The paper has gone to many parts of the world and been the means of sharing God's blessings with many of our brothers and sisters over the years. It is sent free to all who desire to receive it.

The Midnight Cry Broadcast

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The articles that make up the material from which *Sudden Death Overtime* was compiled were first published in the *Midnight Cry Messenger* in 2001 and 2002. The reader should bear this in mind as some references — such as the events of September 11 — will seem “dated.” The following quote is from the introduction:

“More and more I hear people express bewilderment at the things taking place in the world. People just cannot understand things like the Columbine High School massacre, or how a woman could suddenly drown her five young children in a bathtub. What’s wrong with people? They cannot understand why churches are in the condition they are in. They cannot understand the persistence of wars and other violent conflicts. In general they just cannot quite comprehend why things in this world are the way they are. We should do something! — but what?”

And now, since I wrote the above, we have seen the devastating terrorist attack of Sept. 11. Multitudes who felt reasonably safe and complacent have been shocked into a state of fear and uncertainty. Jesus spoke of a time when men’s hearts would be “failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” Luke 21:26.

Does God want His children to be confused, bewildered, fearful? Of course not! He desires that we have light, that we understand the world around us. We may not be able to fully expound God’s purposes for every particular event but the bottom line is that nothing should surprise us or cause us to be dismayed.

If you are one of His, He wants you to have light on your pathway in spite of the prevailing darkness round about. He wants you to have a rest in your soul knowing that He is able to finish what He has started. He wants you to know at all times that He has everything under control and that all is proceeding according to His wise plan. He wants you to find in Him a true hiding place from the dark tempest that is engulfing our world.”