

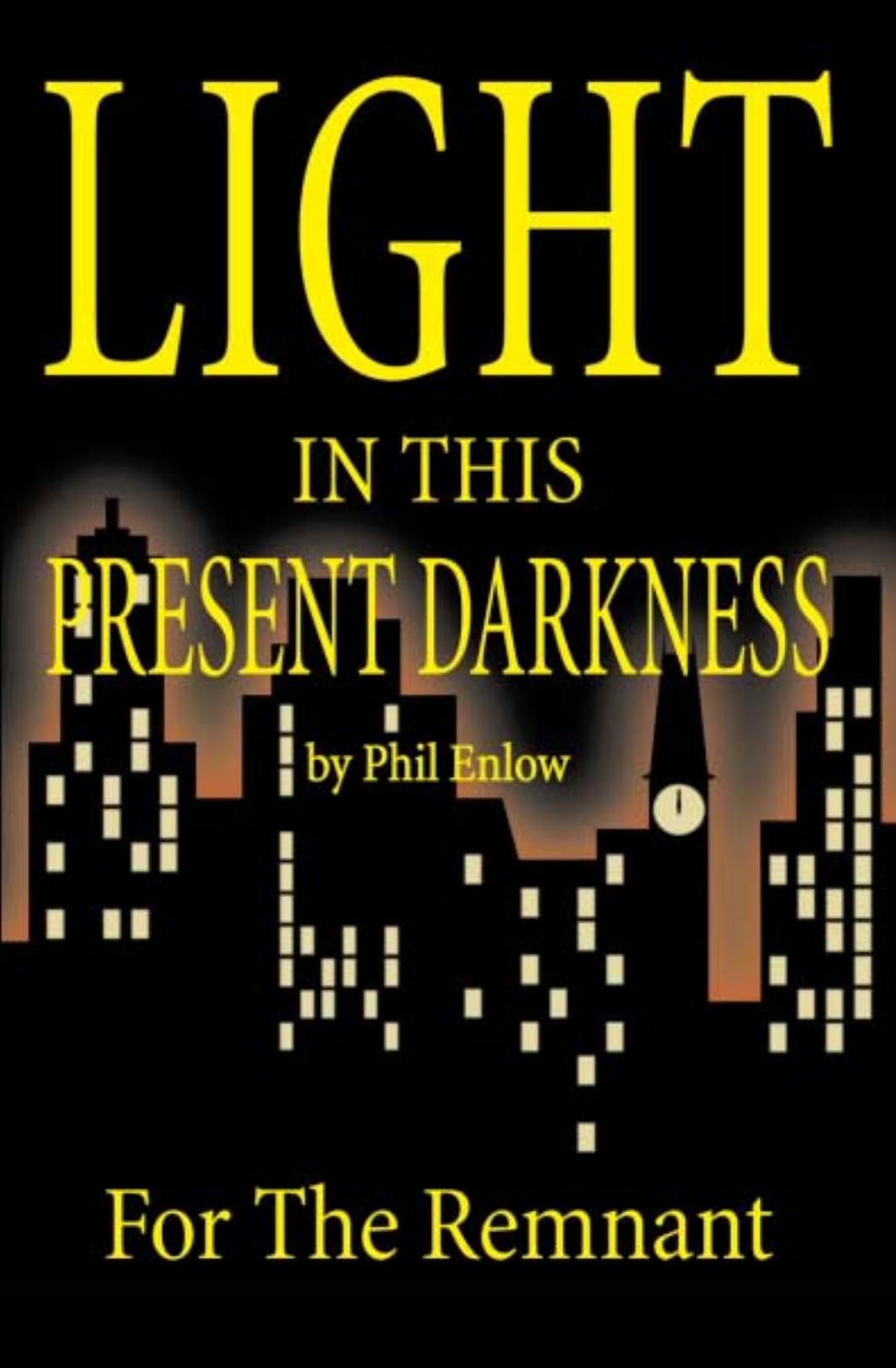
# LIGHT

IN THIS

PRESENT DARKNESS

by Phil Enlow

For The Remnant

A stylized, high-contrast illustration of a city skyline at night. The buildings are represented by black silhouettes with numerous small, glowing white squares representing lit windows. The background is a gradient of dark brown and black, suggesting a night sky. The overall aesthetic is graphic and minimalist.

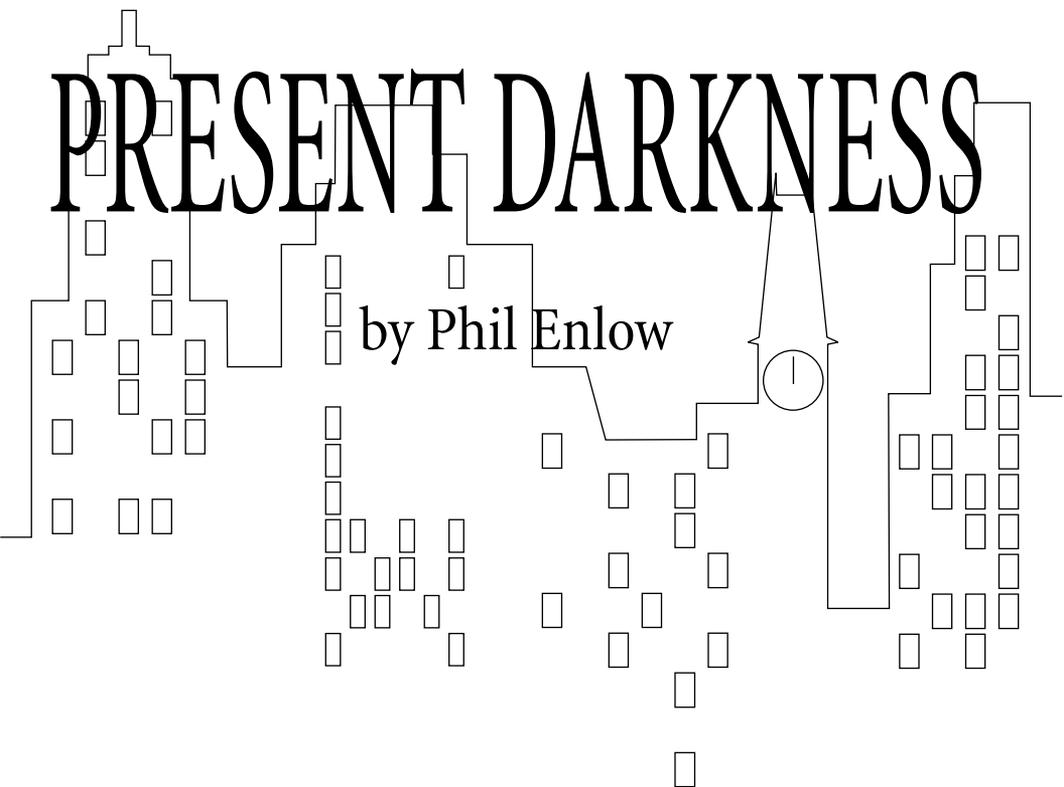
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# PRESENT DARKNESS

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For The Remnant



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# Table of Contents

1.	<a href="#">This Present Darkness</a> . . . . .	1
2.	<a href="#">My Religious Background.</a> . . . . .	19
3.	<a href="#">What About the Jews?</a> . . . . .	30
4.	<a href="#">God's Sheep.</a> . . . . .	43
5.	<a href="#">All Israel.</a> . . . . .	48
6.	<a href="#">The Judgment of the Jewish Nation</a> . . . . .	54
7.	<a href="#">The Abomination of Desolation</a> . . . . .	65
8.	<a href="#">The Kingdom of God</a> . . . . .	73
9.	<a href="#">The True Significance of Pentecost</a> . . . . .	90
10.	<a href="#">God's Kingdom in This World</a> . . . . .	102
11.	<a href="#">A Glimpse of Our Destiny!</a> . . . . .	113
12.	<a href="#">Bringing Many Sons Unto Glory</a> . . . . .	118



# Foreword

I feel greatly privileged to have for many years now been in a place where I have been under the ministry of Christ by way of the anointing. The ministry of Christ is always relevant to the need of the hour — and even of the moment! It sheds needed light on the present darkness.

As a result I, and many others with me, have experienced a degree of understanding that has brought rest to our souls. Of course, we “know nothing as we ought to know it” (I Cor. 8:2), but what is that if He Who is the way, the truth and the life is with us till the end of the age?! He can and will impart whatever knowledge we need. The rest, we can safely leave in His hands!

What we have been so blessed to receive is neither because of us nor for us alone. It is by His grace and it is for His people scattered in many places.

What I desire to do in this book is to share a number of basic truths that have served to anchor my soul and to help me to recognize, at least in a measure, the spiritual deception that is taking place. Most of these truths have been enlarged upon in other articles published in the *Midnight Cry Messenger*, however, I felt it would be of value to gather these truths within the scope of a single book to bring them into greater focus as a source of protection for God’s people.

Most of the religious views people hold have come to them either through intellectual study or through tradition. They are heavily influenced by the opinions of others, particularly of those who have devoted much time to the study of the scriptures, delving into the Hebrew and the Greek. Few have been taught of the Lord.

If these things were simply a matter of intellectual debate I wouldn’t bother. I’m not interested in winning theological debates so I can feel proud of myself. Doctrines matter. Even as truth sets free, so does error bind and imprison. John 8:32. Hosea 4:6, Isaiah 42:22. Col. 2:8. In John 6:45, Jesus quoted a great promise from Isaiah 54:13: “And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”

My desire is to share things that I believe the Lord has taught over the years, things that will help to bless, set free and bring greater peace to my brothers and sisters in the world. It is the reader’s responsibility to seek God with a free and honest heart whether these things are so. His promise to teach applies to you if you are His child.

The material for this book is from a series of articles published in the *Midnight Cry Messenger*. The original articles have been slightly reorganized into a more logical chapter format.

I commend these things to the prayerful reader. The hour is late. Truth matters.

## **Midnight Cry Messenger**

A quarterly tabloid paper published since 1957, the MCM is available free and postpaid to those who desire it. It has been sent, over the years, to many parts of the world and been a means of spiritual strength and encouragement to many Christians. If you would like to subscribe, or to receive samples please write to:

### **Midnight Cry Messenger**

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USA

## — CHAPTER 1 —

# This Present Darkness

Never in the history of this sin-darkened world have God's people faced so great a challenge as they do in this hour. True, the Church has faced terrible seasons of darkness, evil and persecution, but the spiritual darkness of today is on a scale never seen before.

We are witnessing what Paul described in II Thess. 2 and variously translated as: "the falling away," "the apostasy," "the great revolt," the Rebellion, "a definite rejection of God," "the final rebellion against God." It is bad enough to live in heathen darkness, ignorant of God and truth, but to have encountered truth in any measure and to reject that truth in favor of darkness and sin is to invite the wrath of God. II Peter 2:21, Rom. 1:18ff.

The wrath of God that results from rejecting truth takes a particular form: men are turned over to Satan and his hosts with no hope of recovery, no way to escape final judgment and hell. Today, we are witnessing this process on a world-wide scale. Satan cannot act unless God permits it: he is a tool, an instrument of God's purpose. He has been somewhat restrained during the gospel age that the gospel might go forth and reach the elect. Now, in the end of the age the restraint has been removed. The result is "evil's undiluted power to deceive" (Phillips), "strong delusion" (KJV), "a fatal delusion" (Weymouth), "that they all might be damned" (KJV), "who refused credence to the truth" (Knox), "but have preferred disobedience" (Goodspeed).

Satan is doing what he has always done. The difference is that the restraint is gone. In Rev. 12:12 we read, "... Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

### **Not Just The World**

This fatal delusion is not confined to "the world." It has also overrun and largely swallowed up what is called "the church." Religion is Satan's greatest tool to deceive since it is supposed to be a source of spiritual enlightenment. He has, however, used it as a spiritual trap leading to death.

Jesus pictured this in Matthew 7:13-29 where He spoke of two gates and two ways. The thing we need to realize about these two gates and ways is that both are presented to men as ways to heaven. Those entering the wide gate do so in the belief that heaven awaits them at the end of that way. They are shocked to discover

that they are rejected (verse 23) in spite of their “many wonderful works” which they believe are done in Jesus’ name.

“Many” travel that way; “few” the one that truly leads to life. Most religion that appears to be “Christian” is actually a fantasy in which people find out too late that they are bound for hell. Their “table,” that which should be a source of spiritual nourishment, is actually a snare and a trap (Psa. 69:22). See also Isaiah 28:7-8.

In the midst of all of this darkness, God has a remnant! Although they may at present lie scattered abroad throughout the systems of men, wearing many religious brands, they alone, by the grace of a Sovereign God, are capable of hearing the voice of the Son of God and escaping this present darkness. He has reserved them to Himself as He did in Elijah’s day. Rom. 11:2-5.

Rev. 12:15-16 pictures symbolically what is taking place: “the serpent” (Satan and all his evil host) “cast out of his mouth water” (the communication of his spirit, primarily through doctrines and ideas) “as a flood” (a lot of them!) “after the woman” (his primary target is God’s people) “that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth” (the world of natural men incapable of spiritual understanding) “helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood” (received Satan’s lies) “which the dragon cast out of his mouth.”

When we see large numbers of lost religious people drinking up doctrines and ideas, a spiritual alarm should be sounding in our hearts. Satan’s whole approach to man is to appeal in some way to his natural desires and appetites. The word of God, the preaching of the cross, comes not to cater to our natural desires, but to deliver us from them, that He might transform us and fit us for “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness: (II Peter 3:13).

### **A Lack of Knowledge**

In Hosea 4:6 we read, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ....” God’s people are affected in varying degrees by the apostate condition of Christianity and by the flood of darkness in general.

There are many warnings in the word directed to genuine believers. Paul warned of the danger that we could be “spoiled” through “philosophy,” “vain deceit, after the tradition of men” (Col. 2:8). Peter warned believers that “the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8).

The entire book of Galatians was written to counter false teachers who had hindered (5:7) and bewitched (3:1) the young believers with a perversion of the gospel (1:7). Are we immune to this today? Do you suppose that there just might be some genuine believers today, sovereignly brought to true faith in Christ, who nonetheless are “hindered” in their efforts to serve the Lord by false doctrines and experiences?

Paul was very concerned in II Cor. 11:3-4 about the possibility of believers' minds being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" as a result of exposure to "another Jesus," "another gospel," "another spirit."

The truth is that you cannot read very far in the teachings of Jesus or any of the apostles without encountering sobering warnings concerning satanically-inspired deception. Satan cannot touch the salvation of a truly born-again believer, sealed with God's Spirit, but he can sure mess up our lives if we, through ignorance or carelessness, allow him to do so.

### **Grounded and Settled**

Paul spoke in Eph. 4:11-16 of the need of believers to grow up, to get beyond being "children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." His desire (and the Lord's!) for believers was that they be "grounded and settled" (Col. 1:23), "rooted and built up in him and stablished in the faith" (Col. 2:7).

Jesus promised "rest for your souls" to those who would take his yoke and learn of him (Matt. 11:28-30). That surely is the need for the scattered remnant in this hour.

Satan gains entrance to and influence over people through lies. His lies are much like the famous "trojan horse" of history. Like the ancient city that unwittingly brought enemy soldiers inside their gates hidden in a wooden horse, so do men open their lives up to the influence and control of demons by receiving their lies. Of course, those lies are cleverly designed to disguise their true character and to appeal to our nature.

Demons are very skilled at helping us to rationalize when we embrace falsehood. A rationale is basically a bit of reasoning to help us justify something we've already embraced in our hearts. It is a device that helps a man to receive darkness and then to pacify his conscience with a fantasy that it is not really darkness after all. That is why we are warned to cast down "imaginings" (reasonings) "and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:5).

The truth of God sets us free (John 8:32). It breaks the hold of devils and brings peace. Truth does not need a rationale to get past our conscience. It can and does walk in the light of day and simply "tells it like it is." II Cor. 4:1-2.

### **What is Needed**

What is needed in our day is what was needed in Christ's day: someone sent of God who does not speak "as the scribes," but as one having authority (Mark 1:22). If a preacher does not have God's authority and enabling to preach, what does he have? How can he help people? All he can give out is whatever traditions and ideas he has ingested, whether from men or devils, plus any ideas he might come up

with. Usually, though, tradition is a hard taskmaster and its captives know not to stray too far!

What a contrast there is between most of the “ministry” of today and that of Paul who said, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect ....” (I Cor. 1:17)! Did you know that unless the cross is preached by one who is both sent and anointed by Christ, it has no effect? Think about that! How many are there today who sing of the cross and the blood yet have never known their benefits! They may have heard something that was called “the gospel,” but, lacking the present tense anointing of Christ, it was powerless to impart spiritual life to the hearers. I Cor. 2:1-5.

What is needed is men of God, called, anointed, having authority from heaven to simply declare the word of God without fear or compromise. The multitudes will not take heed, but God’s sheep have a God-given spiritual sense that enables them to recognize the Shepherd’s voice.

The call of God concerning Babylon to “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4) has never been more urgent. Babylon is this world system. Much of religious Babylon, however, is religion that uses Christ’s name but rejects His active leadership. As a result, devils rule, all the while supposedly honoring Christ. Only sheep have the capacity to discern the spirit behind a thing, yet even they must be taught and that discernment must develop and mature.

One would almost have to live in a cave to be unaware of some of the great winds of spiritual change sweeping the earth. Multitudes are being swept up by this movement or that, believing that they are caught up in a great move of God. As I hear and read of many of these things, I find myself continually saying, “If only they knew ‘such and such,’ they wouldn’t fall for that.” Even God’s elect are vulnerable to many hurtful things through ignorance.

### **The Purpose of This Book**

I feel greatly privileged to have for many years now been in a place where I have been under the ministry of Christ by way of the anointing. The ministry of Christ is always relevant to the need of the hour — and even of the moment! It sheds needed light on the present darkness.

As a result I, and many others with me, have experienced a degree of understanding that has brought rest to our souls. Of course, we “know nothing as we ought to know it” (I Cor. 8:2), but what is that if He Who is the way, the truth and the life is with us till the end of the age?! He can and will impart whatever knowledge we need. The rest, we can safely leave in His hands!

What we have been so blessed to receive is neither because of us nor for us alone. It is by His grace and it is for His people scattered in many places.

What I desire to do in this book is to share a number of basic truths that have served to anchor my soul and to help me to recognize, at least in a measure, the spiritual deception that is taking place. Most of these truths have been enlarged upon in previous articles, however, I felt it would be of value to gather these truths within the scope of a single book to bring them into greater focus as a source of protection for God's people.

## **This Present World**

One area of truth that has helped me a great deal concerns the nature and destiny of this present world. What lies in the future for this world? How long is that future? What is God's program concerning this world? What is He doing? What should the focus of our thinking be?

The simple truth is that this present world order belongs to Satan and his legions of demons. In Luke 4:5-6, during his temptation of Christ, the devil showed him "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time" and then said, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it." Jesus, using the word, refused the temptation but did not dispute his claim.

Paul called Satan "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). In I John 5:19 we read, "... all the world is under the influence of the evil one" (Twentieth Century New Testament). Other translations agree. See also John 12:31, John 16:11.

In Eph. 6:12, Paul tells us who our true adversaries are. Listen to various translators:

"... against the world-rulers of this darkness" (ASV);

"... the Sovereigns of this present darkness" (Conybeare);

"... the master-spirits of this dark world" (Goodspeed);

"... great evil princes of darkness who rule this world" (Taylor);

"... with the despotisms, the empires, the forces that control and govern this dark world" (Weymouth);

"... the spirits of evil in the heavens" (Conybeare);

"... against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world" (Taylor).

While these hordes of wicked spirits are no match for God nor an obstacle to His purpose, this world is given over to their rule. The real power behind governments, nations, movements, philosophies of every kind is demonic and in opposition to God's Spirit and Kingdom over which Christ rules. Even those movements — religious and otherwise — that appear to stand for righteousness would quickly crucify Christ were He to walk among them as He did almost 2000 years ago. The anointing would expose the true spirit behind them just as it did that of the supposedly Bible-believing, God-fearing Jews of the first century. Luke 4:16-32.

All of the spirits behind all of the wickedness this cursed world has ever known are alive today — and they know their time is short. Nations rise and fall. People

live and die. The spirits who inspire them to do evil don't die with them: they are with us today — and they are angry.

God only interferes in the present world order where His purposes are concerned and His purposes concern His people, the elect, those He delivers from the power of darkness and translates into the kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:13). This world is an arena, a furnace of affliction (Is. 48:10) in which God's elect are born to everlasting life and prepared for another world to come. This world is temporary and in the next it will not even be remembered (Is. 65:17).

In this world, each one of God's children is placed under the care of angels. Heb. 1:14. Psa. 91:11-12. Psa. 34:7. In addition, we have Christ's promise to be with us till the end of the age. Matt. 28:20.

There is a pattern that we can see in the scriptures with respect to sin and judgment. Sin brings death. It is a process much like a crop that produces a harvest. Many a nation has arisen on the world scene with lofty vision and youthful vigor only to crumble and disappear or be radically altered, replaced by a new power.

Man without God is doomed to failure in his attempts to build kingdoms. Beginning with the tower of Babel, we can see the rebellious pursuit of power and glory by man and the intervention of God when that rebellion reaches a certain point.

### **Point of No Return**

When any nation or people arises and pursues its own ends in rebellion against God it ultimately reaches a point of no return. There is nothing left but judgment. This principle applies to individuals, families, towns, cities, nations and to the world as a whole.

At the time of Christ's coming it will apply to the world — all but the tiny remnant of those whose hope lies in His return. Rev. 22:11 says, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Verse 12 begins, "And, behold I come quickly ...." At the time of Christ's coming there will be an uncrossable line drawn between the righteous and the wicked.

There are two direct comparisons made by Jesus between the conditions at the time of His coming and events of history. It would be wise if we were to pay close attention to these examples and learn from them.

The first of these examples is that of Noah and the time of the flood. The general condition that existed is described in Gen. 6:5: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

When we read things like this we are prone to think only of evil as man sees it: riots, murders, atrocities, violence, chaos, immorality, etc. However, Jesus

described it differently. In Matt. 24:38 he said they were "... eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage ...." In other words, life seemed outwardly normal.

What constitutes evil in God's eyes is when man pursues a course of self-will and self-pleasing that effectively says, "Leave me alone, God. I don't need or want you, nor will I listen to anything you have to say." That kind of a heart condition can indeed manifest itself in violence and moral corruption of every sort, but it can also wrap itself in robes of religion and self-righteousness that men esteem very highly. Matthew 23.

Luke 16:15 says, "... Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

One of the factors that produced the condition in Gen. 6:5 involved the breakdown of the separation between those who served God and those who didn't. Gen. 6:2 says, "... the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."

In spite of the spiritual heritage of these young men, pleasing their flesh was more important to them than serving God. Instead of seeking God and submitting to His will, they did the choosing. That principle, in one form or another, has been the basis of Satan's assault against God's people down through the ages. Movement after movement has started out with a measure of life and separation from the world only to succumb and lose any real distinction. Some even evolve into a dead religious form of separation, but in reality they are "of the world and not in it."

What God wants is for us to be "in the world and not of it" (John 17:15-17). What sets us apart from the world and points our feet down a different road is the truth God reveals to our hearts.

It is on the heels of Gen. 6:2 that we read in verse 3, "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."

God had one man who remained true to Him and He revealed to Noah the coming destruction. In addition, He gave very clear, detailed instructions to Noah concerning his preservation during the flood. The result was that not only Noah, but also his family was spared.

Mankind in general did not know that their fate was sealed nor did they pay any attention to Noah when he told them. The flood came as a sudden shocking surprise for which they were completely unprepared.

Remember the words of Jesus comparing that day with this. Remember also the words of Peter (II Pet. 3:5-7) when he warned that while the ancient world perished in a flood by the word of God, our world, by that same word, is "reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

“Perdition” is another word that describes a hopeless state of lostness and separation from God. This passage speaks of the same time and condition that Paul spoke of in II Thess. 2. It points most particularly to our day.

### **Sodom**

The other example Jesus used concerned the deliverance of Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain. Jesus described life in Sodom prior to its destruction (Luke 17:28): “... they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded.” That description paints a picture of men and women living life as usual, planning for a long future.

Thus we can see that although God saw them as wicked enough to destroy, outwardly there was a degree of normalcy. Life went on. The social order functioned. The people were blissfully unaware of the sudden destruction to come.

And sudden it was. Hear the words of Jesus in Luke 17:29-30: “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.”

If that is not a clear warning that sudden destruction will fall when Christ comes, what is it? What purpose was there in Jesus’ words if the popular theologians of today are correct in proclaiming that Christ’s coming will lead to a thousand years of peace for this world? Who will Christ reign over if those who are left behind are all destroyed? What His coming will bring about is a rain of fire that will destroy everything and everyone except the elect.

The outstanding characteristic of the wicked lifestyle of the inhabitants of the cities of the plain was homosexuality. Demons had so perverted their minds that they had totally embraced sexual perversion. The evil seed of that wickedness had reached the point of no return. Destroying that society was akin to cutting out a cancer lest it spread. What of our world today that is being steadily brainwashed to regard homosexuality as a perfectly respectable alternative to normal sexuality? I am not suggesting a spirit of hatred and intolerance toward people, but if we are going to call ourselves Christians, we had better stand for the truth regardless of what the world says.

Homosexuality is simply one form of demonic brainwashing. It is a sinful condition from which people need deliverance. Only Christ through the gospel can deliver anyone from the power of whatever sin stands between them and God. Rom. 1:16-32. I Cor. 6:9-11.

Psalm 105:7 says, “He is the LORD our God: his judgments are in all the earth.” Life in this world is full of trials of every sort — wars, famines, diseases, natural disasters — permitted of God in part to bear witness to man of his condition and need of God. Had he any spiritual understanding, man could be warned by these things and be saved from the wrath to come. The trouble is that men are blind and

unable to see the hand of God in human affairs. Actually they are more than blind. They are willingly ignorant. II Peter 3:5.

### **The Amorites**

There is a significant insight given us in the words of God to Abraham (Abram, at the time) in Gen. 15:16: "... the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." This statement was made as God told Abram of the future of his descendants. He foretold their 400 years of slavery and subsequent deliverance.

The Amorites were one of the Canaanite peoples. They were descendants of Canaan, son of Ham, and heirs of the curse recorded in Gen. 9:25. God saw the principle of sin at work and foresaw the time when their "iniquity" would be "full," requiring judgment.

By that time, the Israelites had become a great nation, delivered from Egyptian slavery, tried in the desert, and ready to fulfill God's promise to Abram that they would inherit the land. Their victory was also God's judgment on the wickedness of the Canaanites. Only God can arrange such things!

This pattern can be seen throughout history as God has used one nation as an instrument of judgment against another. He even used heathen nations to judge the sins of Israel and then judged them in their turn. See Isaiah 10 (and many other chapters in Isaiah) for example.

The judgments witnessed by Noah and Lot, however are most telling. The recipients of those judgments had no future, no opportunity to repent once destruction was underway and no inclination to repent when forewarned. This is a picture of our day and only God knows how close we are. The world is brazenly planning for many a tomorrow that will never come.

God's word concerning the Amorites gives a further insight into our day. The fact that evil flourished among them unchallenged by God was no indication that He was unaware or uninterested. It simply wasn't time. The harvest was not fully ripe. God has allotted to man a space of time and only when that time has expired will He intervene.

He is fully aware of the evil that flourishes in this present hour. Let no one be deceived by His relative silence (II Peter 3:3-7). Though the world is unaware of it, the hour of destruction has been set. God knows exactly when it will be. While we know of the certainty of what is coming (as Noah did) we do not know the day nor the hour (Matt. 24:36).

### **Two Harvests**

There are two processes at work in the earth. each rapidly nearing completion. Both are pictured as harvests in Rev. 14:14-20. In verses 15-16, we see one harvest portrayed symbolically as an angel with a sickle literally reaping a crop from the

earth. The accompanying words include, “the time is come,” and “the harvest of the earth is ripe.” In this harvest we see God’s work in His people completed.

This is followed by a second angel and a second harvest. This one is described differently. The angel was told to “thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.” This harvest was cast into “the great winepress of the wrath of God” (verse 19).

As much as we might long for the coming of Christ and final deliverance, it will not come until precisely the right moment. God will not lose even one of His own (II Pet. 3:9, John 6:37). In the meantime, we walk by faith and not by sight (II Cor. 5:7) depending on God’s grace (II Cor. 12:9) and looking to the Captain of our Salvation, who has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:19).

### **The World’s Future**

The idea that this present world has a fairly lengthy future to look forward to has long been rooted in man’s thinking, including that of the vast majority of professing Christians. Elaborate systems of belief have arisen over the centuries, supposedly based on the Bible, yet differing radically from one another! One thing they possess in common, however, is a sort of Christianized version of the age-old human longing for and belief in an era of peace and prosperity — a golden age — for this world.

The truth is, if a man concludes that a certain belief is true, he can find apparent support in the scriptures for his ideas, no matter how they may differ from those of someone else, equally sincere. Only an honest dependence upon God to reveal His word as He sees fit will rescue us from the Babylon of confusion that exists in our day. God is both able and willing, as He was in Noah’s day, to reveal the truth His people need.

The word most often associated with this “golden age” among professing believers is “millennium.” A millennium is simply a period of 1000 years such as from 1001-2000. In fact, with the rapid approach of the year 2000, it is common to hear people refer to the coming millennium with no religious implications at all. To them it is simply a measurement of the passage of time on the calendar.

Broadly speaking, there are three main positions theologians take with respect to “the millennium,” when used by Bible teachers to refer to a golden age.

The first, and by far the most loudly trumpeted, is premillennialism. With variations, this is essentially the belief in a future literal reign of Christ over the nations of this world lasting 1000 years. Thus the end of the world is believed to be at least 1000 years in the future.

The second, embraced by a significant number of religious groups and teachers, is postmillennialism. In general, this doctrine claims that the church will, through the proclamation of the gospel, gradually conquer the world and bring about an

extended era of peace and righteousness to this world. This era, not necessarily a literal 1000 years is somewhere in the future and it is taught that Christ's return will occur after ("post") this era. He will come to judge and separate and only then will this world order end. Hence, in this view, the coming of Christ and the end of the world could be thousands of years in the future! Although this view is not so loudly trumpeted as is that of the premillennialist, a lot of people believe it.

The third position is amillennialism, simply the belief that the Bible does not promise a golden age for this present world. I have heard people mistakenly characterize this position as follows: "Oh, you believe we're in the millennium now!" Of course not! A statement like that simply reveals how deeply the idea of a golden age is rooted in people's thinking. The fact is that a term like "amillennialism" would be totally unnecessary were it not for the widespread belief in a millennium!

This belief, rooted in Judaism, began to be embraced by some Christian teachers after the New Testament era. Had it been an issue at the time of the Apostle Paul, I guarantee he would have had something to say about it, pro or con. His ministry was such that he didn't hesitate to speak out clearly and forcefully about any issue that affected God's people (Acts 20:27).

### **Debate?**

It would be easy to simply make this a matter of theological debate, my ideas and scripture interpretations and reasonings against those who differ. It is this process that has heavily contributed to the present confusion. I don't have the power in myself to search the scriptures and arrive at the truth and neither do you! If the Lord doesn't intervene and reveal His word to us, we wander in darkness.

Noah didn't engage in debate when he preached for 120 years, warning his generation of the coming flood. He simply proclaimed God's revealed message and the hearers either rejected it and perished or embraced it, helped build the ark, and were saved.

For about 50 years now, one conviction has characterized the ministry of Bro. Thomas: the nearness of Christ's coming and the end of the world and the need of God's people to wake up and get ready. Attached to this message has been a growing sense of urgency. Either this conviction is from God or it's not. There is no middle ground.

You, the reader, do not have to be in doubt about this matter. There is a catch, however: you must will to do the will of God (John 7:17). This is the condition we must meet if we expect God to reveal Himself to us concerning doctrines and ministries we encounter.

Most people are unwilling to do this as they are married to a religious system, or a tradition, or their own concepts. They are unwilling to write God a "blank check"

in the matter and thus entertain the possibility of being wrong and having to change.

The truth is, if we are not willing to commit ourselves to do God's will before we know what it is, why should He show us anything? What kind of faith is that? Do you really expect Almighty God to open Himself up to you so you can adapt what you like to fit your own concepts and then discard the rest? Is His Word a mere proposal to be debated subject to our wills?

If we cannot commit ourselves to His will, the only alternative is that we are left to our own resources to walk in darkness and the vanity of our minds. That is where much of Christianity is today. This is the reason for Jesus' warning in Matt. 7:21-23 and John 12:35-50.

### **The Leader of the Church**

God did not ordain that His Son become a figurehead over the church, although that is exactly what He has become to most. They use His name and profess to be His followers yet He has little or no influence over what they believe and do. Their religion has been reduced to a system with a life of its own to be embraced, protected and extended to others. Another word for "system" is "prison." Our world is filled with religious prisons from which the true remnant need to be set free. Isaiah 42:22.

Christ was ordained to be the active leader of His church. We have not been left to choose our own preferred way any more than the Israelites were left to cross the wilderness and conquer Canaan on their own, each as he saw fit. Can you imagine what it would have been like had hundreds or even thousands of competing sects arisen each contending that theirs was the right way?! The only way they could have conquered Canaan would have been if the Canaanites had died laughing at the confusion! Every time they rejected the leadership of Christ through Moses (I Cor. 10:1-11) they got into serious trouble.

One of the main functions of Christ's active leadership is communicating relevant truth. We need more than a body of "orthodox doctrine" (whatever that is) to learn and pass on. While there certainly are timeless truths (such as "Christ and Him crucified"), we need the word of God revealed as it applies to the specific day and hour. Only Christ by the Spirit can do that. Luke 4:21. Rev. 5:9.

### **Not Just Doctrine**

When the Israelites were standing before the Jordan River, they didn't need new recipes for baking manna! They needed the Captain of the LORD's Host to make Himself known with specific instruction as to how to cross the river and conquer the land. To the extent they heard and obeyed, they prospered. Every time they rebelled in some way they failed.

Noah, likewise, didn't need general instruction in serving God: he needed to know about the coming flood and how to prepare. Lot had to hear and obey a very specific and timely word: "Hurry and get out — now! I'm going to destroy this place." The Word of God is not just doctrine, but a living word, relevant to the present need.

There is a principle stated in Amos 3:7 that can be seen throughout the Word: "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." Whenever there is anything God does that affects His people, that they need to know about, He always tells someone about it. When He reveals it to someone, they are responsible to tell His people in general. This kind of revelation doesn't come to any and everyone, but to those God appoints.

The end of the age and the destruction of this world is not a mere academic question to be debated, with one man's opinion as good as another's. If God is speaking, we need to listen. If He is not, then we are truly in a wilderness of confusion. I believe He is speaking and that the sheep will hear.

Satan's purpose in encouraging and inspiring false doctrine is to cause people to miss Christ and be destroyed. It is also to create confusion, to misdirect, hinder and spoil the sheep, those few who actually are God's out of the whole.

Just as was the case in Noah's day when false doctrine caused people to be unprepared and consequently to perish, so it is — and more so — in our day. False doctrine in Noah's day was anything people believed that caused them to reject his message of warning.

## **Obedience**

God does not speak merely to fill up our heads with ideas. While His Word does enlighten our minds with spiritual understanding, it also demands action, obedience. Read Heb. 11. In every case, the emphasis was upon what men did as a result of what they believed. What if their believing had been in error? What if they had heeded a different voice?

In Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3, we find messages directed to seven churches. Each message was specific and designed to meet the need of the local congregation. Each message revealed their condition and commanded appropriate action, coupled with a promise to overcomers. One exhortation was common to all seven churches: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 3:22, for example).

There are far too many voices in our day and eternal issues hang in the balance. What is the Spirit saying? What is our condition? What is coming upon the earth? What should we be doing to prepare? These questions matter!

When the disciples asked Jesus concerning his coming and the end of the world (Matt. 24:3-4), the very first words were, "Take heed that no man deceive you." Ponder that. Wake up and realize that the time of the greatest manifestation of evil

and spiritual darkness the world has ever known will be marked by an unprecedented spirit of deception, religious and otherwise (Matt. 24:23-24, II Thess. 2:9-11). Do not take things at face value. Seek God!

### **A Time Accepted**

If there is one thing Satan wants to destroy above all others, it is the urgency of the gospel. Whereas the word declares, "... I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2), Satan has a thousand ways to say, "There's no hurry; another time will do."

The scripture we just quoted clearly conveys several critical truths. One is that there is a "time accepted" and a "day of salvation." No one can be saved at any other time. In the "day of salvation," God says, "I succoured thee." That is an old word meaning "helped." No one can be saved without God's active "help," and that is only available at a certain time.

Connected to all of this is the key word "now." "Now" for any individual is when God says, "Now." The only opportunity any man has to be saved is when God, by the Spirit draws near, pressing the claims of the gospel upon his heart as a result of an anointed ministry of the word. That is the accepted time. To say, "yes," at such a time — to surrender — is, with God's help, to enter into everlasting life. To say, "no," is to risk damnation. There is no guarantee He will call again.

A lost sinner is like a man drowning in the middle of a raging sea with no hope in himself of surviving. The gospel, anointed, alive with God's power, is His hand reaching out to the sinner. When the sinner, blind to his true condition, thrusts away God's mercy and the hand is withdrawn, what then?

When God ceases to strive, whether with an individual or with humanity as a whole, it is over. Prayer at that point is useless. Consider Esau who despised his opportunity when he had it. Later he sought a place of repentance, realizing only then the value of what he had lost, but was rejected, "though he sought it carefully with tears." Heb. 12:17.

There will be a lot of praying when Christ comes and the world realizes its fate — as was, no doubt, the case in Noah's day — but it will be too late. Just as God closed the door to the ark prior to the flood, so will the door to His kingdom close forever before His Son returns to gather home His own and rain fire on this world.

### **What Source of Wisdom?**

If God is truly warning by the Spirit that this is exactly what is shortly to happen then what source of wisdom is behind these other views? I do not question either the sincerity or the intelligence of their adherents but we need more than sincerity and intelligence. We need to hear from God. When men rely on their own ability

(or that of others) to study and interpret the Bible, confusion is the only possible result.

The most damnable error is the idea conveyed to the sinner that there is no real urgency to the gospel. Obviously there is little urgency in the notion of a “church triumphant” conquering the world sometime in the next few hundred or thousand years. What constitutes “triumph” depends greatly upon God’s purpose for this world and for His people in it. Was Noah a failure because he won only seven converts and the rest perished? Jesus said it would be like that.

What if there had been other voices crying, “Don’t listen to this gloom and doom ‘negative’ message: righteousness will triumph?” It would have sounded nice, but that wasn’t God’s message. What effect would such a doctrine have had on those hearing Noah’s warning? Do you see a different spirit at work? Both cannot be God!

Other spirits in our day are telling the people, “Yes, Christ is coming soon and we’re going to suddenly disappear and be with Him, leaving the world to suffer seven years of terrible trouble before He returns for His second ‘second coming’ to reign for 1000 years. You need to buy my video tape or publication so that when we disappear in ‘the rapture’ your loved ones will know how to be saved.”

Words fail attempting to express how diabolical is the wisdom behind such a teaching! It’s somewhat akin to Noah leaving behind boat-building instructions so people could be saved after the flood began!

While the practice of selling video tapes for loved ones left behind is perhaps one of the more extreme results of popular teaching today, yet, at its best, premillennialism plainly implies a second chance for sinners. The idea is clearly conveyed to sinners that while they ought to “get saved” now and avoid the real trouble, it’s OK to “wait and see.”

This idea is straight from the pit of hell! How dare people call themselves Christians and teach such things?! Wake up! Where in all of the teachings of Jesus or the Apostles do you find such an idea?

## **Preparation**

Central to the message of God to and through Noah was the need to prepare for what was to come. Their safety and preservation depended upon hearing and obeying God’s specific instruction. Knowing the flood was coming was one thing. Building an ark able to withstand it was another!

Most of the teaching one hears today regarding the future of this world shares this characteristic: it leaves people unprepared for what is to come. The postmillennialist says, “There’s no flood coming; we’re going to straighten out this mess!” Most other popular teaching says, “Don’t worry! God’s going to rapture us out before the serious trouble starts.” Then you have those groups, overrun by Humanism, who believe man will solve his own problems, that his future is in his own hands.

Noah walked a lonely road but he turned a deaf ear to other voices, choosing to believe God. His faith was translated into action (Heb. 11:7) and the result of that action was salvation.

What voice are you listening to? What voice are you giving heed to, trusting in to give you understanding of what is taking place and what you need to do? Is it the Great Shepherd's Voice? Is it the water of life and the bread of life that satisfies the thirsty, hungry soul? Or is it one of the many voices of religion that have put people to sleep when there is a desperate need to be awake?

### **God's Voice**

God's voice does not come from the halls of religion. Religion trains its messengers to give out a mixture of dead second-hand truth and error that dulls the people's ears and drugs them into a spiritual stupor. It fixes people's minds so that they are unable to recognize and receive God's voice.

God's voice comes of necessity from "outside the camp" through men who have been separated unto Him and taught by Him. It has a ring of authority about it that disturbs, challenges and awakens. It exalts the Living Christ and proclaims, not the dead creeds and traditions of religion, but the living message of God for the present day and hour. His voice is hated by religion because it exposes religion's true condition.

In Acts 6:8-7:60 we have the account of Stephen, whose ministry was so anointed and effective that false witnesses were paid to stir up the people to bring him before the Council in Jerusalem on charges of blasphemy. Bear in mind that this Council represented the leadership of the "established," "Bible-believing" religion of its day. They claimed Moses and Abraham as fathers and guarded their religious heritage with murderous zeal, believing that they were thereby serving God. John 16:2.

Hear the ringing indictment of Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, in 7:51-53: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

"Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

This was not just Stephen's opinion. He wasn't just getting carried away with zeal. This was God's voice bearing witness through Stephen to the religious leaders of the Jewish nation.

Read also Jesus' indictment in Matt. 23 culminating in verses 37-39: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

“For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Throughout the Old Testament, the voice of God was expressed through prophets who were called, separated and taught of God. Their message to the nation of Israel as a whole was an unbroken litany of indictments against apostasy and warnings of judgment. Their reward was persecution and murder. This demonstrates the true nature of “religion,” regardless of the heritage it claims. It is perhaps the greatest instrument of deception Satan possesses.

Along with causing people to respond to God’s message with hatred and persecution, Satan has always had those he has inspired to directly oppose and counter that message. Speaking of Old Testament days, II Peter 2:1 says, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you ....”

A good example can be seen in Jeremiah 28 where a man named Hananiah directly countered Jeremiah’s prophecy of the coming Babylonian captivity. Hananiah, claiming to speak for God, prophesied that the Babylonian yoke would be broken and the temple treasures returned within two years.

The Lord’s word to Hananiah was, “The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie ... this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD.” He died that year. Jer. 28:15-17.

All of this occurred within the context of the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah, not only to Israel but also to the surrounding nations that they had all been given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:1-11). Those who submitted were promised blessing and safety. Those who rebelled were warned of divine punishment.

It was this unpopular message that caused false prophets to rise up in protest. No doubt some of the heathen nations fared better than rebellious apostate Israel. It is worse for those who have had light and not walked in it (2 Pet. 2:21).

False prophecy actually serves a purpose in the plan of God: it is part of His judgment upon those who refuse to hear His voice. Listen to the Lord’s words in Jer. 27:15 concerning the false prophets: “For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you.”

The message of God today is about as popular as Jeremiah’s message, or Noah’s. Many are the voices saying it isn’t so. I saw an unusually clear example of this several years ago at a time when we were experiencing a fresh visitation of God’s Spirit. There was a renewed emphasis upon the approaching fiery end of the world characterized by a real Spirit of urgency and of the need to serve God in a clearcut way and to not be carried away by the darkness of the world around us.

One picture the Lord gave us was of a place of safety and light and peace while outside a black storm raged, uprooting and destroying. I believe that this is a true picture of what the remnant church faces in these last days and of the Lord's provision for His own.

During that time I remember hearing a world-renowned preacher and religious leader preaching on television. It was evident that he was aware of the growing concern of some that the world would soon end. Right in the middle of his message he paused and with great emphasis said something like, "One thing I want to make very clear: the world is not about to end." He went on to talk about the supposed coming millennium when there would be 1000 years of peace.

Pure tradition! I won't make any personal judgments concerning the man involved: he is in God's hands and the Lord knows them that are His (I Tim. 2:19). Even if he is basically a good man, good men can say bad things (Matt. 16:22-23). Good men can be spoiled by tradition (Col. 2:8).

God has not forgotten about us in this present darkness. He has manna fresh from the throne that can satisfy the hungry soul. He has a place of safety and blessing for us. It is the place of His presence where true believers have been brought into fellowship with one another and with Christ. It is a place where Christ is not a mere figurehead but the actual Head of the body, where His word, relevant to the present need, flows forth in life and power.

You will not find this place in the camp of religion. Religion builds monuments to the blessings of yesterday (Matt. 17:4-5). The word says, "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Heb. 13:13-14.

It is man's way to establish a "continuing city," an institution to organize and contain his religious efforts but you cannot institutionalize God or His Son. We are ever a pilgrim people. The city we seek lies beyond this present world.

## — CHAPTER 2 —

# My Religious Background

Most of the views people hold have come to them either through intellectual study or through tradition. They are heavily influenced by the opinions of others, particularly of those who have devoted much time to the study of the scriptures, delving into the Hebrew and the Greek. Few have been taught of the Lord.

If these things were simply a matter of intellectual debate I wouldn't bother. I'm not interested in winning theological debates so I can feel proud of myself. Doctrines matter. Even as truth sets free, so does error bind and imprison. John 8:32. Hosea 4:6, Isaiah 42:22. Col. 2:8. In John 6:45, Jesus quoted a great promise from Isaiah 54:13: "And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children."

My desire is to share things that I believe the Lord has taught over the years, things that will help to bless, set free and bring greater peace to my brothers and sisters in the world. It is the reader's responsibility to seek God with a free and honest heart whether these things are so. His promise to teach applies to you if you are His child.

One letter I received after chapter one was published has helped to point me in the direction I believe the Lord wants me to go with this series. It came from a lady who expressed appreciation for the article but raised what I felt was a sincere question in her mind: how can I not believe in a millennium when there are so many unfulfilled promises to the Jews?

That's a fair question and I doubt she is alone in wondering. I can readily understand. I hope by God's grace to answer it. As I thought about it, I felt that a little word about my background might be in order first so that the reader might better understand where I'm coming from.

I am not a religious nut from some fringe cult taking blind shots at everyone who disagrees with me. My pen may get sharp at times, but is not directed in a critical spirit at people, but rather at the wicked spirits at work to hurt and hinder my brethren. My desire is to shine the light of the Word upon the enemy that my brethren may go free.

All I can share is what the Lord in His grace has seen fit to share with me over many years. I John 1:3. It has been an extended journey and it is by no means over. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Prov. 4:18.

If I had a dollar for every time the Lord has revealed something that corrected something I thought I had known I'd be a rich man. (I'd rather have the riches of His grace!) The question is: are our ideas and opinions on the altar? Have they been surrendered to the Lord? If not, is He really your Lord? Is your mind so set that God Almighty can't change it?

First of all, I am a member of that dread breed called "preachers' kids!" I was raised in a very active, missionary-minded evangelical denomination that stood for many good and scriptural things. The founder was a man of God who ministered in the anointing. When he passed off the scene, they set out to continue his work through a humanly devised organization.

What he believed and understood — a mixture of revelation and tradition — became the doctrinal standard. As time passed, ministry was more and more judged for its orthodoxy and natural ability than for the active presence of the anointing and the Spirit of revelation of the Word.

I came on the scene a couple of generations later and witnessed the passing of a number of an older generation whose ministry still had a measure of life in it. Even they, however, were confined and hindered by the four walls they had built and had no room to grow and receive greater light. One could sense in them a certain amount of anguish as they witnessed the downward slide but they were unable to stop it.

What is sad is that most of the members of this movement today — and others like it — are unaware that a slide has taken place. It has happened so subtly and gradually over several generations, all the while preserving the outward form, that they are not aware of it. The illustration of the frog is appropriate. If you drop a frog into hot water he will immediately jump out. If, however, you put him in cool water and ever so gradually turn up the heat, he will contentedly sit there till he boils to death.

What we need to realize is that once even true revelation has been received and given out it enters the realm of human knowledge. This allows men of natural ability to skillfully, and even entertainingly, give out the same message, but devoid of life. This is a key element of Satan's attack: to induce men to substitute flesh for the Spirit, form for reality, outward appearance for a changed heart.

### **Religion as Culture**

What emerges is a religious culture. People learn to be "Christians" like they learn to be Americans or Chinese or whatever cultural group they happen to belong to. They learn the beliefs, words, behaviors and activities that go with the particular brand of religion. The result is multitudes of religious people who appear to be Christians, but are complete strangers to the new birth.

Into this growing spiritual void come great numbers of demons, wicked spirits whose specialty is the infiltration and takeover of religious movements. Careful to

preserve the form so as not to raise too much alarm, they shepherd the gradual apostasy along, tightening their grip as they go: their men in places of influence; their wisdom and ideas embraced; and so forth.

When God begets His children, He does so through the incorruptible seed of the Word. The ability to sow this seed in the heart is a special gift and calling of God exercised by way of His anointing. It cannot be learned in a school. It is far more than correct words and sound doctrine.

As is the case in the natural world, everything brings forth after its own kind. Flesh begets flesh, religious or otherwise. Only Spirit can beget Spirit.

Under the best of circumstances there will be both natural and spiritual children produced through ministry. This is illustrated in Abraham, the father of faith. Of all his sons, only Isaac was a son of promise, recognized by God in a covenant relationship. Many followed Christ, at least for a time, who were never saved. John 6.

Some of the “natural” sons, or “followers,” are deliberately planted there by Satan as part of his scheme. His plan involves maneuvering people he controls into places of influence. He will also encourage even some true children whose zeal exceeds their knowledge and call to act outside of the will of God.

What kind of children do you suppose are produced as men minister outside of their calling and without the anointing? It is only a matter of time before talented, zealous, but lost men, skilled in the religious culture, begin to fill pulpits. What then?

And don't forget the religious demons at work, doing everything in their power to keep men religiously busy, yet blind to the reality that Christ is no longer the active Head. “Orthodox” sermons are preached, programs are devised and carried out and churches are filled with lost people. Though there may be a remnant of true children among them, a spiritual tide carries them steadily away from where they need to be. The “system” prevails.

Although I grew up in the system, I thank God for giving me what was necessary in the way of life and knowledge to move me along in the direction He desired me to go. For one thing, my preacher father's primary loyalty was to the Lord and the Word. When asked what he believes, he is fond of saying, “I believe the Bible: I may not understand it all but if it's in there, I believe it!”

I wonder how many preachers can honestly say that! To any preacher who may happen to read this I would say: are you free to preach what the Lord shows you in the Word? Have you never read things that just didn't fit in with your particular doctrinal scheme? What do you do about it? Do you just pass it off, rationalizing that you can't help anyone if you lose your position? Who are you serving? Do you in effect say, “Lord, that's interesting, but it doesn't fit in with our doctrine?” Don't God's sheep need “all the counsel of God?” Acts 20:27. Doesn't the Lord know what His people need?

## Bible College

Let the reader remember that these observations are not theory: I've been there. I graduated from the movement's leading Bible College as well as from a one-year graduate program with every intention of entering into missionary service.

At the time I entered the college it had just undergone a radical change toward intellectual respectability. It had gone through a process of conforming to and being approved by the academic "powers that be." It went in a few years from being a Bible Institute that focused more on the spiritual to a modern college concerned that its students have an education recognized by the academic world.

Into this tide of intellectualism I entered with a clear word of caution from my father not to let my head get ahead of my heart. He was well aware of the tide, having taught there previously for several years. I doubt that many fellow students had received a similar admonition.

The Bible was taught, not by revelation, not with the anointing, but as academic course material. It was sad to observe sincere men, some of whom had a measure of desire that their courses have a spiritual content, confined to a dead intellectual process. You cannot learn about God like you learn about chemistry or history. You may learn about the letter of the Word somewhat but you will be ill-equipped to impart life.

Throughout my college experience it was common for us to ask God's blessing on what we were doing. A majority of the classes I attended were opened with prayer. Acknowledging the Lord is good but that is only half of the equation. The other half is that we had better be moving in the Lord and doing His will!

We are all very prone to acting according to our own natural zeal and wisdom and then expecting God to bless. To illustrate using an extreme example: if you, believing you are able to fly, jump off a cliff, praying a little prayer asking God's blessing won't prevent a sudden, painful conclusion to your journey! Many a religious fantasy will suffer the same fate. Matt. 7:21-23.

Praying and asking God's blessing is not a form of magic. I have heard many a spiritually lifeless sermon preceded by a sincere-sounding prayer asking the Lord's help and anointing. Their prayers went unanswered. Why? Somewhere in their religious past someone who really had something from the Lord to minister also publicly asked God's blessing. In time this became a form. Praying a nicely-worded prayer is one thing. Being called of God and having a fresh word from the throne is something else.

I recently attended a large religious gathering and heard a variety of ministry. I felt fairly neutral in my spirit, not necessarily expecting a lot, yet open. One message was a pleasant surprise, easily exceeding my expectations. I can't even say I completely agreed with every statement the man made, but there was a measure of life and anointing in a number of things he ministered.

Three of the messages stand out in particular for a very different reason. They were preached by men who are basically of my generation, one a little older, one about my age, and one a little younger. Each is considered an outstanding preacher and religious leader and commands a large following.

Each message was scripturally accurate and skillfully and sincerely delivered. Every “t” was crossed and every “i” was dotted. Each used interesting illustrations and spoke clearly. Only one thing was wrong: all three were totally 100% dead! No anointing! No life!

When you are used to ministry that has life in it and then sit through messages like that it’s like trying to drink a glass of sand! I honestly tried to be positive and to get something out of them but my spirit was left dry and empty. Many others around me seemed somewhat bored and listless but I didn’t sense that they really knew why. In all probability it seemed normal to many of them. Is it any wonder that the virgins are asleep? Matt. 25:5. Lifeless orthodoxy is a powerful narcotic.

### **Learning to Preach?**

Why were these messages like they were? I can tell you! I know how they were trained. I was there, not with them in particular, but with others like them.

One of my college courses was called “Homiletics” and basically covered the preparation and delivery of sermons. While the need to be led of the Lord was acknowledged, it was the mechanics of the process that were being taught. In other words, we were taught how to build and carry a “bucket.” That we actually had living water to put in the bucket — or even knew where the well was — was sort of assumed!

Read what Paul wrote of his own ministry in I Cor. 2:1-5. He said, “... I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom,” and “... my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom.” What Paul said he didn’t do — “that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men” — is precisely what we were taught to do!

Despite the verbal acknowledgment of the need of the Lord, Homiletics was essentially a course in public speaking adapted to religion. That is, the subject matter was drawn from the Bible. How the subject matter was organized and presented was very much of human design.

First, you identify your central thought and its purpose — for example, are you trying to inform or to move the hearers to action? Then you devise several main points that help to establish the central thought. Sub points and illustrations that support each main point are also added. Then you devise an introduction designed to capture the attention of the hearers so that their minds will become engaged in considering the main thought.

Finally, a conclusion is added, suited to the subject. If the subject is “Salvation,” the final conclusion might be an “altar call.” If the sermon is more oriented

towards teaching you are careful to summarize, clearly repeating the central thought and the main points. It helps if the main points all begin with the same letter of the alphabet. After all, you want people to remember what you preach!

Attention was paid to such things as proper appearance and demeanor, appropriate gestures that support what you are saying without being distracting and clear diction and sufficient volume so you can be heard and understood.

I am giving you this degree of detail for a reason! I want to pull the cover off of what passes for preaching in our day! The sheep need to know. Most ministry has long ceased to be a ministry of the Spirit and has become a “learned skill.” They have learned man’s way and not God’s.

### **Many “Styles”**

Although what I have described applies in a general sense to a broad spectrum of Evangelical Christianity, each particular group has its own “style” that it uses to measure what it considers to be “sound preaching.” Some styles are more dignified and some are more demonstrative but all outward styles are subject to becoming mere form, judged by appearance and not by genuine spiritual content.

Preachers are great mimics, quick to copy and imitate others, both in style and content. That is how styles come about in the first place. Someone of influence and ability emerges and comes to be recognized as a great preacher and others begin to imitate him. Even if — and that’s a big “if” in many cases — such a man has a genuine ministry from God, his effectiveness does not arise from his “style” but from God’s call and anointing. Every true ministry is an “original” and it is spiritual folly to imitate. How sad it is to see carnal men become sanctimonious when they stand behind a pulpit! When God truly calls a man, he can be himself. Preaching was not meant to be a form of acting!

I vividly remember sitting in fellowship meetings of preachers and listening to them swap sermon outlines! One man had come up with a particularly clever sermon entitled, “Preaching About Nothing.” He had noticed that the word “nothing” was used four times in the Book of Philippians, so naturally each main point was about one of those verses!

A few weeks later I chanced to see a church bulletin from a large church pastored by one of the other ministers who had also been in the meeting. Sure enough, the sermon title was, “Preaching About Nothing!” I’m sure if they had an outdoor sign it probably announced it to the world as well!

When you build four walls around a tradition and train men to preach that body of tradition, what is left but to employ more and more clever and innovative ways of expressing it? It can become almost a game, or a form of entertainment: religious people who enjoy a skillful presentation of their cherished traditions. They swell with pride at the performance of “their” preacher, congratulating themselves on their wise choice — at least until he falls out of favor with the

powers-that-be, or else he receives a “call” to a more prestigious church with a bigger salary and they are forced to begin a new talent search.

What I found both interesting and very sad in the three sermons I referred to above was that each would have received an “A Plus” grade in my Homiletics class. Each was a model of homiletic perfection, never mind that they were lifeless! What has the standard become?!

Most people have heard so little anointed preaching that they don’t know the difference. Instead they look for such things as emotion, sincerity, personal charisma, “doctrinal orthodoxy,” and their accustomed style and manner. It never occurs to anyone that a preacher can have all of those things and not even know God! Worse, the devil can anoint one of his to fit the people’s concepts in order to subtly extend his evil influence. Thus while many preachers have no anointing of any kind, some are indeed anointed — by the devil! II Cor. 11:13-15.

### **Interpreting the Bible**

Leaving aside the question of the employment of human methods and natural skill in conveying the message, where does the message itself come from? Of course, would-be ministers need to know how to interpret the Bible. Another of my college courses was called “Hermeneutics” and was designed to teach exactly that.

We were taught various rules and principles that were intended to serve as guidelines for interpreting a given passage of scripture. For example, it was considered important to know something about the history and culture surrounding a particular scripture. After all, the scriptures were written in the everyday language of the people who penned them. They therefore were meant to be understood. This principle made a knowledge of the languages involved, Greek, Hebrew, and to a lesser extent, Aramaic, of considerable importance. (To that end I did study Greek for two years.)

Since we were not great scholars in all these ancient languages, we were introduced to reference works of those who were. Therefore, gathering information from books by scholars became a definite part of the process.

Another principle was that scripture verses needed to be considered in their context, that is, in the light of the surrounding verses.

It was recognized that the Bible contained things that were not meant to be taken literally: poetry — “Let the floods clap their hands ...” (Psa. 98:8); prophetic symbols — “a beast ... having seven heads and ten horns ...” (Rev. 13:1); parables — “Behold, a sower went forth to sow ...” (Matt. 13:3); and types and shadows (Heb. 10:1).

However, it was stressed that, apart from such obviously symbolic writings, the Bible was indeed meant to be understood literally. One oft-repeated saying was this: “If the simple sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.” That is, we

were definitely discouraged from imagining that there were deep, hidden, mystical meanings in simple scriptures.

By this time the reader is probably wondering, “What’s wrong with these principles?” Very little — and everything! It’s not so much that the principles are entirely wrong in themselves: the problem lies in presenting them as a procedure for understanding the Bible through study. They leave out the most important thing: revelation. If God does not reveal His Word to you, you can study it twenty-four hours a day and know nothing!

This was powerfully made real to me through an incident that occurred following a round of golf shortly after my graduation. Two of my playing partners had formerly been my professors, very intelligent and sincere men. The third had once been my Sunday School teacher. Since that time he had ardently pursued a knowledge of the middle eastern languages of biblical times, receiving at least one doctorate and being recognized as an expert in his field.

Following our round of golf we had gone out to get a soft drink and the conversation evolved into a discussion of the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Jews! I was amazed to hear this brilliant scholar wonder out loud — with some sadness — if God had gone back on His Word!

Think about it! This man could read the Old Testament in Hebrew and was an expert in the language, culture and history of the time. He had diligently applied his expertise to the study of the scriptures in an effort to grasp their meaning, yet all his study had left him with more questions than answers, even to the point of questioning God! This was not some liberal theologian looking for reasons to disbelieve the Bible: this was a sincere man trying to understand it intellectually.

Could it just be that true spiritual knowledge cannot be gained through study? Has not God “hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and revealed them unto babes?” Matt. 11:25. Read the first two chapters of I Corinthians. The contrast is repeatedly drawn between man’s wisdom and God’s. To paraphrase I Cor. 1:21, “God has wisely placed a true knowledge of Himself beyond the reach of the human mind and chosen to save those who believe as a result of preaching, which seems foolish when measured by human wisdom.”

No one has had any greater tradition of Bible scholarship than have the Jews. This was true of the Jews of Jesus’ day and continues to be so among Orthodox Jews of today. Men who devote their lives to the study of Moses’ law are accorded great honor. Why, if they were such diligent students of the Old Testament scriptures, did they not recognize their Messiah? Yet who knew their language, culture and history better than they? Who was more diligent?

Paul had studied as a young man at the feet of Gamaliel, regarded by Jews as one of their greatest teachers ever. It was Paul, with his full inside knowledge of their scholarly tradition, who spoke in II Cor. 3:14-15 of their blindness: “... for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament;

which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.”

### **Systematic Theology**

Along with these “tools” and principles for understanding and preaching the Bible, we also studied Systematic Theology. This was designed to acquaint us with all the truths that were considered “orthodox” in an organized fashion, effectively setting boundaries of belief for us. These boundaries represented the accumulated wisdom of influential preachers and scholars who had gone before.

It is common, when students are presented with boundaries, to challenge them and we certainly did. I participated in many a lively debate in classroom and dormitory. In the end, however, the weight of tradition generally prevailed. Who were we as intellectual and spiritual novices to challenge the wisdom of our elders and particularly of scholars who had studied the Bible in the original languages? If we thought we saw something in the Bible that appeared to be outside of the theological boundaries, we were undoubtedly mistaken. After all, how could so many who had gone before be wrong? Very easily, I’m afraid!

### **The Sheep Need to Know**

I want to pause and point out something the sheep need to know. It is easy for sheep to be impressed and intimidated by someone who comes to them with lots of education and starts talking about the Greek and the Hebrew. In a word — don’t be impressed by that! I’ve been around a lot of it and they don’t have the answers! A lot of education, far from giving would-be ministers an advantage, most often puts them at great disadvantage since they so easily become proud and come to depend upon it. A humble sheep who honestly seeks God from his heart is far better equipped to come to a knowledge of truth than the greatest scholar on earth!

### **My Witness**

There are many other things I could say about my education, but one thing I especially would like to make clear: I witnessed first-hand a new generation of religious leaders being indoctrinated with the traditions of their movement and sent forth to guard and extend those traditions.

The curious thing about this process of questioning and indoctrination is that when men open the Bible, they no longer see the scriptures as they are: rather, they see what their tradition has taught them is there. This is a form of the same kind of blindness Paul referred to in II Cor. 3. The more religion operates by human methods and with natural ability, the deeper it becomes. This process can span generations, but once “the system” gains control there is no turning back.

I am not aware of any movement that began well, became a “system,” and then returned to the headship of Christ. Think about that! It is a one-way street leading

to greater and greater control by demons. Rev. 18:2. By the grace of God there may be occasions of refreshing and revival and pockets of life, but the trend is ever toward a demon-infested form of what they once had. In terms of spiritual warfare, the sheep become a spoil of the enemy, led away captive. Col. 2:8.

Another effect upon ministers coming into a tradition is that few of them even attempt to do much interpretation of the Bible. After all, the real work of interpretation has all been done and all that is left is to preach it. The result is that most preachers preach on “subjects” drawn from their tradition and use a few scriptures, often very superficially, to support their concepts. For any interpretation they tend to consult commentaries, such as that of Matthew Henry, to see what they had to say.

I am certainly not suggesting we all become private interpreters of the Word, but the notion that any tradition contains all of the truth or that interpretation is best left to scholars is dangerous error. True ministry must be based upon a fresh revelation of the Word to the heart of a God-called preacher and must be conveyed to the hearers with God’s present-tense anointing. On every occasion there must be the flow of living water from the throne to receptive hearts. It is a joint effort of God’s Spirit and one He sovereignly calls to the task. No classroom in the world can teach that!

### **The Jews**

Earlier, I promised to talk about God’s promises to the Jews. As a result of widespread popular teaching today, it is sincerely believed by many that we are nearing the end of a period of time in which God has focused His attention upon the Church, and that He will then focus His attention once again upon the Jews, with Jerusalem as the capital of an earthly kingdom.

I was exposed to much of this teaching as I grew up and still have among my books the Scofield Bible I earned through a Bible memorization program as a boy. I vividly remember as a teenager an afternoon in which I read many Old Testament prophecies of glory and restoration concerning Israel and rushed excitedly into my father’s study to share my “discoveries.” In short, I am very familiar with this teaching and once, in general, embraced it.

Why do I not believe these things today? Throughout the many years since that time, the Lord has made many things very real to me from the Word, things I hope to share in greater detail as this article unfolds. It is one thing to just accept what your religious environment says is so. It is another when the Lord teaches you.

In reality, through what I have shared of my own experiences, I have already been talking about the Jews because Satan’s assault upon God’s true people has long followed similar lines. The parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13 illustrates how Satan sows counterfeit “children” among the true.

The world has its concept of what a “Christian” is and what constitutes “the Church.” Serious Bible believers have a much narrower view. However, the view that truly matters is that of Jesus Christ for He alone will be our judge. It was He who spoke in Matthew 7 of the “many” and the “few.”

World population figures would number “Christians” in excess of one billion. I wonder how many of those are actually in the book of life! Those who are truly Christians in God’s eyes will be fully known on that day.

The world likewise has its concepts of what a “Jew” is and how many there are. Being a Jew in our day is largely a matter of cultural identity. Those who consider themselves Jews share common cultural characteristics with other Jews: religious beliefs, concepts of family and social order, a shared history as a scattered and persecuted people, and so forth. It is this shared culture, with variations, that has caused others to regard them as a distinct and identifiable group known as “Jews.”

The question is, what does God think about all this? Does He regard those the world calls “Jews” as Abraham’s children, heirs of Old Testament promises? How would the New Testament writers have answered this question? No one was any more familiar with Judaism than the Apostle Paul. What does he have to say on the subject?

I challenge the reader to prayerfully consider these questions.

## — CHAPTER 3 —

# What About the Jews?

For the last century or so, much of the Bible-believing church world has been inundated with a novel system of Bible interpretation embodied in the notes of the Scofield Bible. This system focuses heavily on the natural descendents of Abraham while regarding the church as something of a parenthesis in God's main program.

Multitudes of preachers and teachers have embraced this ready-made would-be explanation of the whole Bible, learning from each other's sermons and books. It is easy for anyone with a little ability to study and become an "expert" in prophecy, impressing people with detailed charts and rehashed tradition. The mere fact that so many others are saying the same things gives them instant credibility.

The sheer numbers of those giving expression to this tradition has produced a virtual flood that is very difficult for the sheep to withstand. It is difficult for them even to think in any other terms. In addition to their hearing it nearly everywhere, there is just enough truth and seeming logic woven into it to convince people that it is true.

The result is that certain concepts of events connected with Christ's return — for example: the "rapture," the "tribulation," "antichrist," the "millennium," and the return of the Jews to "center stage" — have been literally burned into people's brains. They have become assumptions, no longer questioned.

Mentioning any of these things is like pushing a button: up pops the concept and you'll get an argument if you say different. For example: mention the word "tribulation" to someone programmed with this belief and they will automatically think in terms of a seven-year time of trouble following the "rapture" during which an evil dictator known as the antichrist will make, and then break, a treaty with the Jews. How do they know this? Well, everybody knows that! All the preachers say so!

Trying to deal with a system like dispensationalism is a lot like trying to dislodge an octopus one arm at a time. The real error involved lies much deeper than the "arms": it is the great presumption of attempting through study and human reasoning to construct a system to explain the whole Bible, putting every passage neatly in its place. That presumption, in turn, rests upon the erroneous belief that the Bible can be understood by study, failing to reckon on our utter need for the Author to reveal His Word to us — everything in its proper time.

Presumptuously attempting to pry into God's secrets and developing strong traditional beliefs have been fatal weaknesses of religious man down through the

ages. His pride will not allow him to kneel before his Maker as an ignorant child, waiting upon Him for the unfolding revelation of His Word. Deut. 29:29. Matt. 11:25-27. I Cor. 2:6-16. Prov. 4:18.

### **A Deadly Substitute**

Consider yet again the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day. No one has ever had a greater zeal toward God and the scriptures than they. Paul, once one of them, acknowledges their zeal in Rom. 10:2 but also points out that their zeal was "not according to knowledge." What they "knew" was not knowledge at all. It was a deadly substitute. It was so deadly that Jesus spoke of one who would be converted to their religion as "twofold more the child of hell" than they themselves were! Matt. 23:15.

What they believed did not come from God but from other men. Matt. 15:1-14. Is. 29:9-14. They thought they were honoring the scriptures. Instead they were honoring traditional interpretations of the scriptures. Their beliefs had become a substitute for the Word that had effectively closed their ears to truth that could have saved them.

This is easily illustrated from John 5:45-47 where Jesus unmasked their supposed belief in Moses and his writings: "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

They were certain that they were Bible-believers, whereas what they actually believed was a diabolically clever substitute embedded in their brains and backed up by centuries of repetition.

Part of that tradition included the belief in a coming Messiah. As a result, this belief was "common knowledge" among the Jews. Even the Samaritan woman (John 4:25) had her own belief concerning the coming Messiah.

This belief of the Jews embodied some truth. For example, when the wise men came to Jerusalem seeking the young "King of the Jews," the chief priests and scribes knew to send them to Bethlehem! Why did they not go themselves? Why did they not recognize Christ later on? For one thing, they may have had the scriptures and their traditions, but God was not communicating with them.

That is the tragic result of walking in tradition. Tradition, by its very nature, excludes the present tense voice of God.

There were, however, a scattered few in Israel that God was communicating with, for example: Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Zacharias, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna (Luke 1, 2). In every case, God revealed something to them concerning His Son. They had true knowledge. What they knew, while firmly anchored in the scriptures, was the direct result of revelation by the Author. Knowing that the

scriptures foretold a Messiah to come was one thing; recognizing him when he came was quite another.

## **Two Kinds of Jews**

The world saw a people living in Palestine, all known as Jews, children of Abraham. God saw among them two very different kinds of people. This is evident throughout the gospels.

Consider the following descriptions recorded in the gospels, bearing in mind those referred to were Jews: “generation of vipers”; “hypocrites”; “wolves”; “wicked and adulterous generation”; “blind leaders of the blind”; “faithless and perverse generation”; “murderers”; “serpents.” Actually the above quotes come from the Gospel of Matthew alone and are merely representative of a long list of similar expressions.

Every one of those described above counted himself a child of Abraham. They fiercely guarded their traditions, believing them to be the spiritual heritage of Abraham and Moses.

Jesus even acknowledged their physical descent from Abraham in John 8:37 where He said, “I know that ye are Abraham’s seed ....” That fact, however, did not make Abraham their father in God’s eyes. In fact, God counted them liars and murderers and said that their father was the devil! John 8:44.

### **Does God have a covenant of blessing with the devil’s children?**

When these same kinds of people came to see what John the Baptist was doing, he first called them a “generation of vipers.” Then he said, “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.

Yet among those known as Jews were a few described in different terms: “lambs”; “little flock”; “daughter of Abraham”; “son of Abraham”; “an Israelite indeed”; “sheep”; “his own”; “my brethren.” What a difference!

Isaiah prophesied of the spiritual conditions at the time of Christ’s coming in these words: “For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.” Is. 60:2.

Matthew in 4:16 quotes the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2, “The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”

How is it that among Abraham’s descendants there were such distinct spiritual kinds, Satan’s children and God’s? How is it that the prevailing condition was “darkness,” even “gross darkness” at Christ’s coming?

Let’s go all the way back to Abraham and briefly trace his descendants, but let us do so in the higher light of the New Testament. One of the major reasons for confusion in this area is that men have tried to understand the Old Testament

through study and natural reasoning. They have then tried to impose their conclusions on the New Testament.

The fact is that the Old Testament writers themselves, inspired as they were, still penned their words by faith, not understanding much of their significance. Read I Peter 1:10-12. Divine truth, which cannot be uncovered by man's natural intellect, must be revealed, and that according to God's schedule, not ours. That is why our Old Testament brethren were unable to understand much of what they wrote. It wasn't time.

That is why, for example, Daniel was told to "shut up the words, and seal the book even to the time of the end." Daniel 12:4. When he continued questioning, he was told in verse 9, "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." What theologian is able to break God's seal?

What a glorious promise he was given in verse 13, first of rest, then of his own place in God's program when it was time: "But go thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

### **Abraham's Call**

When God called Abraham, that call was first one of complete separation: from country, kindred and even from his father's house (Gen. 12:1). That command of separation was coupled with a promise that God would make of him a great nation. (What nation is that?)

There were only two possible responses: either he could believe God and separate himself and go, "not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8) or he could refuse to believe, choosing his own will and way. That is precisely the choice faced by everyone who comes to God. True faith is not "family religion." Abraham believed and his faith was put into action: he packed up and went.

In Gen. 15:6 we find it recorded of Abraham (then known as Abram), "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Thus was established for all time the only principle by which men may become righteous before God. Never, in all of history, has it been any other way. Abram heard the Word of God, and faith, a supernatural ability to rely wholly upon the promise of God, was sown like a seed in his heart. Rom. 10:17.

Paul devoted the fourth chapter of Romans to establishing clearly in the minds of his readers this principle of righteousness by faith. This righteousness, a "blessedness" experienced by believers, is described in verses 7 and 8. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

This is blessedness indeed! Not only is there complete forgiveness for the sins of the past, God will not even charge with sin those so blessed! This completely deals with the guilt of sin all the way to heaven! Hallelujah! True believers can rest their entire hope in the promise of God and not upon anything they do or don't do.

This is not a license to sin. Rather, God deals with His own as sons to be disciplined and not as law-breaking criminals to be condemned.

Circumcision and the law, so important to the Jews, came into the picture after righteousness by faith had been established. Abram was righteous before he was circumcised. Circumcision was added later as a “sign” and “seal” of the righteousness of faith. It is obvious from the New Testament that this institution was temporary and plays no part whatsoever in what we have in Christ (Gal. 5:6).

In fact, circumcision was a type of what happens in the heart of a true believer in Christ. Hear the words of Paul in Phil. 3:3, noting that they were penned to **Gentiles**: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Abraham was “the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.” Rom. 4:12.

The law was likewise temporary, “added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made ....” Gal. 3:19. “... By the law is the knowledge of sin.” Rom. 3:20.

### Abraham’s Children

Paul, in Rom. 4:11, calls Abraham “the father of all them that believe.” This is the fatherhood that matters. Abraham may have been the father of vast multitudes of physical descendants (including Arabs and Jews), but the only children God recognizes are “them that believe.” It is one thing to be begotten of Abraham’s body; it is another to be begotten of his faith.

The basis then is not whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, but whether one believes. After all, “he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” Rom. 2:28-29. Think about that!

Of course, before Abraham could father nations, he had to first have a son! This was quite a trial of his faith, extending well past the time when it was naturally possible for Sarah to have a child, not to mention the fact that he himself was approaching 100!

During this time of waiting Sarah came up with the idea of giving her maid, Hagar, to Abraham to wife as she herself was barren. By this means she could, in a sense, produce a son, an heir. Abraham went along with the plan and Ishmael was the result.

By the time the Lord was ready to do things His way, Abraham had become very attached to his son, Ishmael, saying, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!” Gen. 17:18. God had a different plan, however, one that involved His covenant being

established with Isaac, whose birth was promised the following year. The birth of Isaac was a miracle, a type of the new birth in Christ.

### **Abraham Had Two Sons**

And so, as Paul put it in Gal. 4:22, “Abraham had two sons.” What is the significance of Paul’s statement? What did it mean to him? What can we learn?

There was a world of difference between these two sons. They were two different kinds though Abraham fathered both. One was “born after the flesh” and one was “by promise.” Gal. 4:23.

The one born after the flesh was cast out, sent away from God’s appointed heir. Although he was naturally blessed, he had no claim upon God’s everlasting covenant.

Did that mean that all of Isaac’s descendants were in covenant relationship with God? Certainly not! Notice the whole passage from Gal. 4:21-31. Notice that Paul speaks of two Jerusalems. The world knew only one, the center of the Jews’ religion. Paul called this, “Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.” Furthermore, this Jerusalem and her children were compared to Hagar and Ishmael!

Does that sound like God considered them to be Abraham’s seed, heirs of His promises to Abraham? Of course not! In God’s eyes, the unbelieving Jews were in the same spiritual category as Ishmael. They were enemies, persecuting the true seed.

Who were the true seed? Read verse 28: “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” Bear in mind that Paul was writing to Gentiles. False teachers were telling these Gentiles that, while believing in Christ was fine, they also had to observe the law of Moses to be saved.

Think about what Paul is saying! Let its meaning sink in! One group, though physically descended from Abraham, was the same as Ishmael so far as God’s covenant was concerned; the other group, though it included Gentiles with no physical relationship to Abraham, was “as Isaac was,” “the children of promise.”

The Jews thought that they had a special claim upon God simply by being born Jews. Did they? Consider the following scriptures:

Gal. 3:7: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” Were the Jews, as a whole, “of faith”? Did God then count them “children of Abraham”?

Gal. 3:29: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Think about it! Being considered the seed of Abraham had a very big “if” attached to it.

Is it any wonder that John the Baptist gave the warning that he did? “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.

They were trusting in that. God was looking for fruit. That is why Jesus said in John 8:39, “If ye were Abraham’s children ye would do the works of Abraham.” Another “If”!

Were they Abraham’s children? Consider Romans 9. In this chapter, Paul begins a discussion of the very question I was asked: What about the Jews and God’s promises?

Verse 6 says, “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”

God’s word (His promise) has indeed taken effect. The problem is, we need to understand to whom the promises were made. The key is to grasp what Paul is saying: “they are not all Israel which are of Israel.”

Paul goes on to say, “Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall they seed be called.” What does this mean?

We are not left in doubt! Paul continues, “That is, They which are the children of the flesh, **these are not the children of God**: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Is that not plain?!

## A Remnant

The simple fact is that a great many were begotten of Abraham’s flesh, but very few of his faith. That is exactly what Paul is teaching when he quotes Isaiah in verse 27, “Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved.”

**“A remnant shall be saved!”** — not the whole, but a small fraction thereof. The great promises of the Old Testament were not directed to the nation as a whole but to the tiny believing remnant within. When Christ came to fulfill the law and the prophets, the remnant believed, and the rest rejected Him.

The spiritual conditions Jesus encountered didn’t begin then: they went all the way back to the beginning of the nation. In each generation, a relative handful of Israelites partook of Abraham’s faith and remained true to God. They, in their turn, passed this faith on to a few in the following generation.

It would take a large book to chronicle the unbelief and wickedness that characterized the nation as a whole. In fact, there is a book that does. It is called the Old Testament!

God did, in one sense, become the God of the nation of Israel. His covenant with them was a covenant of law. The intent of the law was to restrain sin and to prepare them for the coming of Christ who would institute an everlasting covenant, this time, a covenant of grace based upon his sacrificial death on the cross.

So far as the nation was concerned, the covenant of law was a covenant of blessing and cursing. So long as they observed the law, they would enjoy peace and health and prosperity in the promised land. God would bless their crops and herds and protect them against their enemies. When they refused to walk in the law they

would be cursed. Their crops would fail. Their enemies would overrun them and destroy their houses and lands and carry them away captive. The promises of blessing upon Abraham's natural children were conditional. Deuteronomy 29 and 30.

Their interests lay in earthly things like peace and prosperity. Like Ishmael and like Esau, they were blind to spiritual reality and ruled by a spirit of unbelief. The unbelieving generation that perished in the wilderness was typical of what was to come.

Blind of heart, it was easy for them to fall into the heathen idolatry of the surrounding nations. **Are you aware that their idolatry included the practice of human sacrifice?!** See Ezek. 23:37-39, for one example.

They persistently persecuted and sometimes murdered the prophets God sent to them over the centuries, all the while using the law to establish their own religion. Their religion gave them a way to outwardly appear to be righteous while hiding utterly wicked and rebellious hearts.

Read Isaiah 1! Verse 4 begins, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters ...."

Notice what they are called: "a seed of evildoers"! It is not physical ancestry that matters to God: it is spiritual ancestry. Their ancestry went back, not to Abraham's faith and obedience, but to Satan's unbelief and rebellion.

Read for yourself the description of their condition in verses 6 and 7: "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers."

Verse 8 refers to the true remnant, "the daughter of Zion," "as a besieged city."

Verse 9 continues, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."

Do you understand the significance of this? Look back to what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16 - 19:29). The wickedness of these ancient cities reached the point of divine judgment. Before acting, God told Abraham about it. There is great significance in this. Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." This is a divine principle. Even in an hour of great darkness, there is someone in the earth with whom God communicates, someone who therefore has understanding of what is going on.

When Abraham learned of the Lord's plans, he immediately thought of his nephew, Lot, who lived in Sodom. He asked the Lord, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Gen. 18:23. He then asked if there were fifty righteous

there, would the Lord destroy it? The Lord said in verse 26, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

Abraham persisted in asking about smaller and smaller numbers until he reached ten. The answer was still that the Lord would not destroy the cities if there were ten righteous people. There were not even ten! Ultimately there were only three who escaped, Lot and his two daughters. Rather than spare the city for their sakes, he first got them out and then rained fire and brimstone upon the cities. Does that tell us something about the end of the age? I believe it does! “As it was in the days of Lot ....” See Luke 17:28-30.

The Lord through Isaiah was saying that without the “very small remnant,” Israel would have been just like Sodom and Gomorrah. Their wickedness was so great that only the remnant stayed the hand of God in judgment.

Isaiah 1:10 begins a passage in which God evaluates their religion with these words: “Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.” Were the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah God’s people? Yet these words were directed to the Jewish nation as a whole! Rev. 11:8 refers to “the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” What men call “Jerusalem,” God calls “Sodom and Egypt”! Shouldn’t we evaluate things as He does?

Isaiah 1:11 and following continues with the Lord’s feelings about their religion. Bear in mind that the practices referred to were prescribed in the law. Outwardly, they were doing many good and right things, but God saw their hearts. That is why He uses such expressions as “vain,” “an abomination,” “iniquity,” “a trouble unto me.” Remember the word “abomination.” It is very significant.

In Isaiah 1:24 the Lord refers to them as “mine adversaries” and “mine enemies.” Judgment is promised in verse 28: “And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.”

This theme of a wicked unbelieving majority facing judgment and a believing remnant looking forward to the day when “... the Redeemer shall come to Zion” (Is. 59:20) fills the writings of the prophets. Thus did the true and false seed continue from one generation to another right down to the time of Christ.

### **Wheat and Tares**

This reminds us of the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43. The kingdom of heaven was pictured as a field sown with good seed, the “children of the kingdom.” However, an enemy, the devil, came in and sowed tares, “the children of the wicked one.” Both wheat and tares were to be allowed to grow together till the time of the harvest when they would be separated, the wheat to the barn, and the tares bound in bundles made ready for the fire.

This is a picture of the church age and we are in the harvest time now. The tares, lost religious people, are being bound into bundles, the many diverse traditions of apostate Christianity, and made ready for the fire. The binding is both mental and spiritual as people embrace strong delusion, believing it to be truth.

The wheat, the true elect, are gradually being awakened and separated from apostate religion. This process of separation will continue as the remnant church is purified, brought under the headship of Christ and made ready for His coming.

Do you see the parallel? Christ brought light into the world and launched what we often refer to as “the church age.” True “wheat” has been produced in His “field,” the world, throughout the age despite adverse conditions. The end of the age is a harvest of separation resulting in glory for some and judgment for most.

This is also a picture of the history of the Jewish nation beginning with God’s dealings with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and later, Moses. The coming of Christ launched the harvest at the end of their “age.”

Listen to the words of John the Baptist concerning the soon-to-begin ministry of Christ: “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.” Luke 3:17.

### **The Harvest**

That is harvest language! God was beginning to intervene to deliver His elect remnant from the religious darkness to which they had been subjected. Light had come to dispel the gross darkness, light that would reach out far beyond the borders of Israel to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 60). God never intended to confine His promises to the Jews.

The launching of the harvest spelled certain doom for the rest, of whom John said, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Luke 3:7.

Jesus, Himself, referred to the harvest on several occasions. For example, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” John 4:35. See also Luke 10:2 and Matt. 9:37-38.

Jesus pictured the history of the Jewish nation in a parable in Matt. 21:33-44. God was pictured as a householder who planted a vineyard and left it in the care of “husbandmen” — the religious leadership of the Jews. Every servant he sent to receive the fruits of his vineyard was rejected and mistreated in some way: “beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.” Finally the householder sent his son who was cast out and killed.

At this point in the parable the chief priests and Pharisees didn’t know that Jesus was talking about them. Therefore, when Jesus asked what the lord of the vineyard would do to the husbandmen, they replied, “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.” How prophetic were their words!

Jesus responded in verses 42-44: “Jesus saith unto them, 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 Holy Nation**

What nation was Jesus referring to? Peter tells us in I Peter 2:9-10: “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 marvellous 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.”

He was writing to Christians, to the elect (1:2), “an holy nation” that was “now the people of God”! This is the same nation that Isaiah prophesied would be “born at once,” and “in one day” (Is. 66:8). His prophecy was fulfilled in the launching of the church on the day of Pentecost.

So we see that Jesus came to bring about a separation of the true seed of Abraham from the false. Matthew 10:34-36 says, “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.”

John 9:39 is a very significant verse: “And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.” Think about that! The same heaven-sent ministry that brought light and hope to some, sealed others in spiritual blindness! In that blindness they plunged ahead, zealously practicing their religion, unaware of the wrath to come.

It was the anointing, the very life of God in Christ and upon Him that produced this peculiar result. John 1:4 says, “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

Preachers can preach all they like and even be scripturally accurate, but if they preach without God’s anointing their preaching will neither feed God’s sheep nor disturb devils in those who are religious. Jesus did both and stirred up religious devils to the point that they killed him — unwittingly cooperating with God’s plan.

The problem was that demons were thoroughly entrenched in the minds and hearts of most of the Jews. These demons were the source of the “gross darkness” that engulfed the people. They had no intention of being dislodged. The real problem was that most men “loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” John 3:19.

The general spiritual darkness brought about conditions in which even some of the remnant were in a state of captivity, needing spirits to be cast out. Only the anointing can dispel the darkness of demon power. Only those who embrace light when it comes will be set free. John 12:35-36.

It is a serious matter when men fall into this condition, having persistently rejected light. There comes a time when God judicially blinds them. This brings about a condition in which they are sealed in sin and darkness, awaiting judgment.

In Rom. 11:8-10, Paul quotes some prophetic words from the Old Testament concerning this judicial blinding of unbelieving Jews: “(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always.”

Notice that it was God who gave them the spirit of slumber, the same God who promised to send “strong delusion” at the end of this present age (II Thess. 2:11).

Notice David’s words, “Let their table be made a snare and a trap ....” “Their table” is where they ate. However, instead of there being nourishing food, whatever they ate from this table would serve to ensnare and entrap them.

This is a picture of their religion. The food is not meat and vegetables, but religious doctrines and experiences. Apostate religion is the greatest trap and snare there is and God has ordained that it be so for those who refuse light.

Notice that David also calls this table a “recompense.” When you work for someone, your wages are your recompense. If you punch someone, your recompense is very likely to be punched in return! Here we are speaking of unbelief. The recompense for religious unbelief is spiritual delusion.

For one example, the Word tells us plainly how God feels about “sign-seeking.” Yet today we see multitudes chasing after signs and religious experiences. There comes a time when God steps back and lets unbelievers have what they want — only it comes in the form of demonic deception. The very thing that appears to them to be a great blessing from God is actually God’s judgment upon their unbelief. Their “table” has become their “snare” and their “recompense.”

### **A Witness**

In John 18:37, when Jesus stood before Pilate, he uttered these words: “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

This further demonstrates the reason for the division that resulted from Jesus’ ministry. Only those who were “of the truth,” the remnant, could “hear his voice.” Obviously, multitudes heard His words, but few understood. As John 1:5 says, “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

Jesus' preaching did not create this division; rather it simply made it manifest. It brought out into the light the spiritual conditions that were already there.

Notice in Jesus' words to Pilate that He came to bear "witness unto the truth." Only a few believed and received His witness. In view of the impending judgment upon the nation, God, nevertheless, faithfully gave witness to the nation as a whole — as He had done down through the centuries.

The same principle can be seen in the gospel age. In Matt. 24:14, Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

Notice that it doesn't say that the nations — or even a significant percentage of men — would believe, only that before the end there would be a witness unto all nations.

## — CHAPTER 4 —

# God's Sheep

Chapter 3 established the difference between Abraham's natural and spiritual seed. Many descendents were begotten of Abraham's flesh, but only a small remnant of his faith. The spiritual father of the great majority of Abraham's physical descendents was actually the devil! John 8:44.

The coming of Christ into the world brought great light into a nation ruled by gross darkness — darkness that was highly religious. The light served to bring deliverance and salvation to the true seed while the rest were blinded, made ready for the judgment soon to follow.

To whom was Christ sent into the world? For what purpose?

In Matthew 15:21-28 we find the account of the Canaanite woman and her great faith. This woman — a Gentile — had a demon-possessed daughter and had obviously heard of the miracles of Jesus. Moving in the wisdom of God, Jesus laid several obstacles before her, obstacles which only served to illuminate the greatness of her faith. Thus has this simple woman become a shining example of humble, persistent faith to believers down through the years.

### The Lost Sheep

Jesus made a revealing comment regarding his mission in verse 24: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Most people, reading that, assume that "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" simply referred to the Jews — all of them. Did it?

What about Jesus' words in John 10:26 to unbelieving Jews? He said, "But ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep ...." Note carefully what Jesus did not say. He did not say that they were not his sheep because they didn't believe. It was the other way around. Their unbelief only demonstrated the fact that they were not his sheep.

In Matthew 10, Jesus instructed his disciples as he prepared to send them out to minister. In verses 5 and 6, he began by saying, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

In verse 16, he warned them, "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." At least some of the Jews were "wolves"! It should be obvious that "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" did not include all Jews.

Understanding the truth concerning “his sheep” makes a great difference in our understanding of the things of God. Sheep are sheep. Goats are goats. Wolves are wolves. Goats do not become sheep, nor sheep, goats. They are different spiritual kinds. Although they are often difficult to distinguish, time and circumstance make the different kinds manifest.

A “lost” sheep is still a sheep. The “finding” and “saving” of a lost sheep is a matter of time and the outworking of God’s sovereign plan. The gospel does not gather goats and magically make sheep out of them.

Consider Jesus’ parable in Luke 15:3-7. He spoke of a man who had 100 sheep, lost one, left the 99 and went after the lost one. The rescue of the lost sheep by the shepherd is compared with a sinner who repents.

One key is this: the man had 100 sheep. Jesus didn’t say that he had 99 and wanted one more, so he went out hunting for a wandering sheep to add to his flock so he’d have 100. That, however, is how a lot of people see this story. They think of all sinners as lost sheep.

The lost sheep in this story, although he was lost and wandering, already belonged to the shepherd! He didn’t know it but the shepherd did! He didn’t seek the shepherd — the shepherd sought him. After finding him the shepherd referred to him as “my sheep which was lost” (verse 6).

Think about it! This is glorious truth! It is a picture not only of Christ’s mission while on earth, but also of his ministry by the anointing down through the church age. Those who are truly converted to Christ were sheep long before they heard the gospel. In fact, God knew them before the foundation of the world! 2 Timothy 1:9-10. Ephesians 1:3-4. I Peter 1:2. Romans 8:28-29. Acts 15:18.

### **The Good Shepherd**

John 10:1-5 records the parable of the Good Shepherd. Note these expressions of the relationship between shepherd and sheep: “... the sheep hear his voice ... he calleth his own sheep by name ... the sheep follow him: for they know his voice ....” In verse 14, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”

Immediately following his words concerning those who were not his sheep (verse 26), Jesus continued, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (27).

Before he ever came to earth, Christ had sheep in the midst of Israel. They were lost and wandering in the spiritual darkness that existed, but they were sheep. There was within them the capacity to hear, recognize and believe the voice of the Shepherd when he came. Like dormant seed in a parched land, waiting for the rain, they sprang to life when it came.

Jesus was specifically sent to them, to rescue them from the darkness and to call them to his kingdom of light. Colossians 1:12-13. Note again the phrase quoted

above: "... he calleth his own sheep by name ...." Now that's specific! If you are his, he knows all about you. Nothing can stand in the way of God's ultimate purpose of saving every sheep. "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32. Romans 8:28-35. Remember that when the devil tries to discourage you through circumstances or your own shortcomings and weaknesses. However things may seem, God is still on His throne!

Peter, in his first epistle, gives us a marvelous confirmation of these things. His ministry was described by Paul (Galatians 2:8) as "the apostleship of the circumcision." His epistle is addressed to "strangers scattered throughout Pontus ..." etc. Over the centuries the Jews had been scattered throughout many countries. This accounts for the many nationalities present on the day of Pentecost. Peter's ministry was primarily to the Jews, dispersed among the nations as they were.

His letter was not addressed to all Jews, however, but to those "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" who had been brought to faith in Christ. Note that they had been redeemed from the vain traditions of their fathers (1:18)! Clearly, Peter is addressing the true remnant who had been delivered and separated from the spiritual darkness of the Jews' religion.

They are described in 2:9-10 as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people," "Which in time past were not a people but are now the people of God."

How is it that so many today count those who refused to abandon the vain traditions of their fathers and who persecuted the true seed as "God's chosen people"?! The idea drummed into people's heads that the unbelieving Jews of today are "God's chosen people" is just another example of vain tradition.

For those to whom Peter wrote, I believe that their lives as Jews living in foreign lands, in a providential way, had been a preparation for their being "strangers and pilgrims" (2:11) as a result of coming to Christ. All of God's elect are "strangers and pilgrims" in this dark and evil world. We are here as people on a journey. Our destination and home is a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. II Peter 3:13.

I Peter 2:25 says, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

See how that confirms what Jesus had said about lost sheep. Remember that this was addressed to God's elect among the Jews. Christ was already the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls even when they were "astray." Coming to a personal knowledge of and faith in Christ was "returning" to him. This is just another glimpse into the sovereign purpose of God and what it means to be a sheep.

### **Other Sheep I Have**

Now return to John 10 and read verse 16: "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."

Jesus' vision and mission extended far beyond the lost sheep of the house of Israel ("this fold"). It reached out to embrace every Gentile who would ever be brought to faith!

Notice that Jesus said, "... other sheep I have ...." He stood there talking to Jews. His death, resurrection, ascension to the throne, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth, all lay in the future. Yet he could say of those who would respond to the gospel, "They are my sheep, and I have them — now"!

They were his because of God's sovereign plan. Remember that Jesus said 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." Ponder that!

John 10:16 continues, "... them also I must bring ...." While human instruments are necessarily involved in the proclamation of the gospel it is only as they are a literal extension of the hand of Christ by the Spirit that anything eternal is accomplished. Anything less is vain. It is not what we do for Christ that matters: it is what he does through us! He does the bringing. We do not even know who the sheep are. He does! They are made manifest by hearing his voice. The sound may come through lips of clay, but the voice of the Shepherd is a communication in the Spirit to the heart of the sheep. Many hear the sound: few hear the Shepherd.

### **Hearing the Shepherd**

"My sheep hear my voice ...." In John 6:45 Jesus said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."

At the end of his discourse, the majority of Jesus' audience, including many who had, for a time, been his disciples, went away. They said, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" John 6:60. Who, indeed?

Jesus answered that question in verse 65: "And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father."

Again we see the sovereign hand of God at work. Those who received Christ, who heard in him God's Shepherd, were only manifesting the inward preparation by God in their hearts. They had been taught of God. They heard the Shepherd. They followed the Shepherd. He led them "outside the camp," away from their vain religion to a place of green pastures and still waters!

The scripture Jesus referred to in John 6:45 is found in Isaiah 54:13. "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."

This great promise is from the same passage Paul refers to in Galatians 4:27. Remember that in that context Paul established the difference between earthly and heavenly Jerusalem and the identity of those who were "the children of promise."

The promises of Isaiah 54 (and many other similar passages) are directed to the believing remnant within Israel, giving them a hope of a time of blessing and

restoration. That hope was fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Though they were seemingly barren at the time there was a great promise of children to come.

The “husband” who would father these children was “thy Maker,” “thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.” Notice that while at that time God was “the Holy One of Israel,” Isaiah 54:5 goes on to say, “The God of the whole earth shall he be called.”

See Isaiah 60 where the promise of a coming time of light is set forth. Verse 3 says, “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” Verse 4 refers to them as “thy sons” and “thy daughters.” If they are “sons and “daughters,” they must belong to the same family!

This is a theme repeated many times in the prophets. The remnant was preserved by God despite centuries of wickedness and its resulting judgment on the nation as a whole. At times they were so insignificant and hidden that even the prophet Elijah thought he was all alone.

Yet over and over came prophecies of a “Redeemer” who would “come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.” Isaiah 59:20. Not only would light and deliverance come to them, but the Redeemer’s influence would reach to the ends of the earth.

### **One Fold**

Notice that John 10:16 continues, “... and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” Paul wrote of the same thing to Gentile believers in Ephesians 2:11-22 concerning the union in Christ of Jew and Gentile. Speaking of Christ in verse 14, Paul says, “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”

Verse 22 speaks of being “builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” How is it that so many have embraced religious teaching that maintains the wall of partition, that teaches that God has one program for the Jews and another for the Gentiles? What spirit is behind this? Will God, after tearing down the middle wall of partition, build it again after the so-called “church dispensation”?

There is one God, one Spirit, one Shepherd, one fold, one faith, one people of God down through the ages — the elect remnant, the spiritual seed of Abraham. Flee from those who wrongly divide the word of truth! They will lull you to sleep at just the time when there is a desperate need to be awake.

## — CHAPTER 5 —

# All Israel

I can just hear someone saying, “But I thought Paul said that all Israel would be saved? Doesn’t that indicate a restoration and national salvation for the Jews?” He did and it doesn’t!

The verse so often referred to is Romans 11:26 where Paul said, “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

Never, ever forget, when you read the scriptures, the key point established in Romans, chapters 9-11: “They are not all Israel which are of Israel.” The central questions to ask concerning Romans 11:26 are: to whom does “all Israel” refer? how are they saved? and when are they saved?

The “who” should be obvious. Paul didn’t spend three chapters establishing the truth that from a spiritual standpoint, so far as God’s purposes were concerned, “Israel” referred to the remnant only to dismiss that truth in one sweeping statement! Remember that in Romans 9:27 he said, “... a remnant shall be saved.”

Romans 11 begins with the question, “Hath God cast away his people?” This is a natural question that might arise in the mind of one who thought of all Jews as God’s people.

Paul began his answer by pointing, not to some future time of blessing, postponed by the Jews’ rejection of Christ, but to himself as being a Jew. He tells us the significance of that statement in verse 2: “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.”

To further explain what he meant by that, he used the time of Elijah as an example. At that time God told Elijah, “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Who were those God “foreknew” in Elijah’s day? the whole nation? Of course not! It was the remnant of seven thousand.

Using that as an example, Paul continues in verse 5, “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

Verse 7 says, “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” Here, Paul is speaking of “Israel” in a natural sense. He is referring back to what he had said in Romans 9:31-32 about Israel’s failure to attain righteousness because they sought it through law and not by faith.

Despite the general failure of the nation, Paul said, “the election hath obtained

it.” What of the rest? “... the rest were blinded.” Does this not make it clear who Paul meant when he later says “all Israel.” Only “his people which he foreknew” were indeed “Israel.”

Verses 11 and 12 say, “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?”

### **Paul’s Hope for the Jews**

The Gentiles had great spiritual riches made available to them through the spiritual fall of the Jews. Then Paul says, “... how much more their fulness?” Is Paul talking about all the Jews being saved? In verse 14 he describes the hope that his ministry to the Gentiles might provoke Jews to also embrace Christ, that his ministry “might save some of them.” Perfect consistency! Paul’s expectation was that God would continue to save a remnant from among the Jews.

He then likens the spiritual heritage of Abraham to an olive tree. The Jews, though they were, naturally speaking, branches, had through unbelief been cut off. The Gentiles, though they were from “a wild olive,” were grafted into this olive tree, partaking of its life.

Speaking again of the Jews in verse 23, Paul says, “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.” Is this not plain? Jews can be saved today through faith in Christ just as Gentiles can.

That is why Paul continues in verse 25, “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

Remember Jesus’ words about the “other sheep” that he must bring? What this verse is saying is that during the entire process of calling his sheep from among the Gentiles (“the fulness of the Gentiles”) there would continue to be “blindness in part” among the Jews. Why in part? Because not all Jews remain blind! Just as was the case in Paul’s day, God has continued right down to our day to call out and save a remnant of Jews.

Paul is just further shedding light on his statement in 11:2 that “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.” He was faithful to the 7000 in Elijah’s day; He was faithful to Paul and others in the first century; He has continued to be faithful to the Jewish remnant to this present day.

Verse 26 immediately follows this! It cannot be separated from it as though Paul were suddenly talking about something else. The verse begins, “And so all Israel shall be saved ....” The word “so” connects the statement with all that precedes it. It makes the statement a conclusion and refers to the manner of salvation and not the time. The expression “all Israel” means all of the remnant and conveys a great

promise that God in his faithfulness will not lose one of them!

The “Deliverer” did come out of Zion: his name is Jesus!

The reason this verse is understood differently by some is because their minds have been programmed to believe that all natural Jews are still God’s chosen people and that they have a glorious future after God finishes the “church age.” When they read, “And so all Israel shall be saved,” it gets turned around in their minds to read, “And then all Israel shall be saved,” as though verse 26 refers to a future time after “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

Of course, Mr. Scofield is very “helpful” here! Lest you miss it he even inserted a subheading between verses 25 and 26. The subheading reads, “Israel is yet to be saved nationally.” Preachers and Bible students needn’t dig any further! Mr. Scofield has explained it all! No need to pray and seek God — just consult the subheadings and notes when you don’t understand something! Remember: Scofield’s subheadings and notes are NOT part of the Bible!

The calling out and saving of the Jewish remnant over the centuries is an expression of God’s love for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (verse 28). “God hath concluded them all” — or “shut them all up together” — “in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all.” Verse 32. This is the same “all” — all of the remnant. Their salvation is by grace through faith just as it is with Gentiles. Jew and Gentile stand upon the same ground!

### **No Difference**

That is why Paul said in Romans 10:12-13, “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. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

That is why he also said in Galatians 3:26-29, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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.”

Is there to be a future time when the Lord will suddenly again make a difference? Will every last natural Jew of a single generation suddenly be saved? What a strange idea! How out of harmony with the rest of scripture where everywhere we see a small remnant saved! What about all of the Jews who have died in unbelief?

When “the fullness of the Gentiles be come in,” history will be over! Wake up! The time is near!

As the Lord reached out beyond the Jewish remnant and Gentiles were more and more being saved, some of the Jews, particularly those who had been Pharisees, found it difficult to leave their traditions behind. A controversy arose in Acts 15 when some of them began preaching that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved.

Paul and Barnabus had “no small dissension and disputation” with them (15:2), so the question was taken to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders. After “much disputing,” Peter, as the one first chosen by God to preach to Gentiles, gave his testimony on the issue:

“And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” Acts 15:8-11.

Barnabus and Paul then recounted their ministry among the Gentiles, including “miracles and wonders” God had done through them.

### **The Tabernacle of David**

James then spoke up, confirming what Peter had said about God visiting the Gentiles, “to take out of them a people for his name.” In verses 15-17 he quotes from the prophets: “And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 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.”

I am drawing attention to this passage for a reason: Scofield’s notes on it begin with the following statement: “Dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the N. T. It gives the divine purpose for this age, and for the beginning of the next.” Does it?

This is a perfect example of how “religious glasses” can cause someone to twist the meaning of scripture. In Scofield’s mind, when James said, “after this” he meant after the church age. He thought of the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David as a future restoration of the Jews. Is that what James meant?

James was quoting the prophets to support what he had said. To make his quotation apply to the distant future makes it totally irrelevant to the discussion they were having! He was talking about Gentiles being saved right then! He said, “... to this agree the words of the prophets ....” How else can we understand his quotation of the prophets except that he was applying their words to that day?

The “after this” refers to a time that was yet future to the prophets, not to James. James was saying that what God was doing right then was the fulfillment. “After this” was then! The establishment of the church was the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David, David’s tabernacle being a type of what was to come through Christ.

The result of this rebuilding was the outreach to the residue of the Gentiles — exactly what the council was discussing! I have a lot more confidence in James’

interpretation of the prophets than I have in Scofield's! James' interpretation was inspired of God. Where did Scofield's come from?

The interpretation by James is in perfect harmony with Peter's words in I Peter 1:10-12. The message of the prophets centered in "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

### **Blindness Today**

Their words were never meant to be unraveled and understood by study. They contain much symbolic and obscure language, their meaning hidden to all but those to whom God chooses to reveal it.

Multitudes of would-be Bible scholars today spend hours at a time poring over obscure Old Testament prophecies trying with natural understanding to relate them to current events. The ink is hardly dry on today's headlines before the religious teachers are jumping up and down with excitement about the latest "fulfillment" of prophecy.

Frequently someone will announce to anyone who will listen that they've studied the prophets and "cracked the code." They've figured out when Christ would return or when the tribulation would begin, etc., etc. One by one their folly is exposed yet others follow in their wake!

Let a "red heifer" be born in Israel and the religious world is all "abuzz" with excitement about the "prophetic significance." All this is more like a "red herring," a diversion, a false scent engineered by Lucifer to occupy and misdirect people's attention away from truth. Religion today is as blind concerning Christ's second coming as the Jews were concerning his first. Satan is the author of this blindness.

Notice some things in James' reference to the tabernacle of David. The purpose of this rebuilt tabernacle was not a political and military empire of some sort although that seems to be what many theologians teach! Rather, it is spiritual in nature, raised up "that the residue of men might seek after the Lord."

When David became king, his priorities were spiritual. He had a great desire to restore the ark, the symbol of God's presence and His covenant, to its proper place at the center of Israel's spiritual life. His first attempt failed because David and his advisors devised their own plan and didn't do things according to the spiritual order God had established (I Chronicles 15:13). (Is this not a picture of much of the religious effort undertaken in our day?)

On the second attempt, when David saw to it that things were done God's way, they succeeded, bringing the ark with much music and rejoicing to Jerusalem. David had previously conquered a fortress in Jerusalem known as Zion (I Chronicles 11:5). Zion became known as the city of David and served as his capitol. There he had prepared a tent to house the ark.

However, David didn't just stick the ark in the tent and forget about it! He went to great lengths to establish a very detailed order of worship that was to be carried out

before the ark. God had put into his heart a great desire that praise and worship should continually arise to the Lord. To that end the Levites were organized and assigned different parts of this spiritual service. Many were assigned, according to their skills, to play certain musical instruments!

The book of the Psalms embodies the worship David established. It expressed not only praise and worship but all of the great truths that were contained in the spiritual heritage of Abraham and Moses. Thus was a beacon of truth set up that, for a little while, gave light and knowledge to Israel.

Ultimately Jesus, David's Son (Acts 2:25-31), came and established a beacon that through the gospel would reach to the ends of the earth.

### **The Residue of Men**

Notice also in what James quoted the explanation of who the "residue of men" actually were: "... all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called ...." Again, this is specific! The Gospel, although it is God's witness to all nations, was not directed to all Gentiles in an absolute sense, but to those Gentiles "upon whom my name is called."

Thus we see the exact same principle involved: a remnant of Jews, a remnant of Gentiles. This agrees perfectly with Jesus' words in John 10:16, "... other sheep I have ...." Truly, there is but one fold and one Shepherd! I refuse to contradict my Lord by proclaiming a separate destiny for natural Jews.

### **Mount Zion**

It should not surprise us that Hebrews 12:22-24, written to believing Jews, says, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

If these Jews to whom this was written were "come" to mount Sion (from the Greek spelling of "Zion"), then they weren't there to begin with! Prophetically, "Zion" has nothing to do with natural Jews, but rather refers to what Christ has established (typified by David's fortress), a spiritual stronghold, a refuge for sinners, a kingdom that will never pass away. He captured it once and for all at the cross. It is a fortress that Satan will never conquer!

Its citizens are the "firstborn" ones, "which are written in heaven." Even as a firstborn in biblical times was his father's heir, so are God's firstborn ones His heirs, "joint-heirs with Christ"! Rom. 8:17.

Although "the daughter of Zion" was once "as a besieged city" (Isaiah 1:8), the Redeemer has come to Zion (Isaiah 59:20). He reigns there today, finishing the work his Father has given him to do.

## — CHAPTER 6 —

# The Judgment of the Jewish Nation

So far in our discussion of the Jews I believe we have firmly established that it is the spiritual children of Abraham alone who are heirs of God's promises. His children include God's elect remnant from among both Jews and Gentiles, one people, united in Christ, being made ready in Him for a glorious and eternal future.

I'd like to turn the discussion now to the things that befell the Jewish nation in the 40 years or so that followed the earthly ministry of Christ and the glorious beginning of the church. This is not simply an historical or theological issue. There are very relevant implications for us today.

In the first place the spiritual eyes of many today are glued to Israel and the things happening in Palestine. What if this is a masterpiece of satanic misdirection designed to distract people from the things that really matter, the things that are truly relevant to God's remnant in this hour?

Another strong reason for considering things that happened so long ago is that history is repeating itself in many ways. I have long believed that there are many parallels between what happened to the Jews and the things that are happening and will happen to the world as a whole today. The principles of sin and judgment still apply as they have throughout history.

### The Harvest

As we pointed out earlier, the period beginning with the ministry of Christ was God's harvest time for the Jews. Matt. 9:37-38, Luke 10:2, John 4:35. We also quoted from Matt. 3:12 — "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

When a man plants wheat, his objective is not to see how much straw and chaff he can produce. He is after wheat. If you were to harvest an acre of wheat, plant and all, it would make a very impressive pile. However, the true yield of an acre of wheat is measured in bushels of wheat kernels. The rest of the plant serves only a temporary purpose.

Until the harvest, the kernels of wheat, the chaff and the straw all continue together, making an impressive sight. But at the harvest a separation takes place. The plants are cut down, beaten and shaken. Then the wheat is tossed into the air repeatedly to separate the chaff, which the wind carries away.

The status quo has to be seriously disturbed before the farmer has bushel baskets containing pure wheat! Is your spiritual world being disturbed? Fear not! God will not lose one kernel of wheat!

Until Christ came, the Jewish religious system prevailed and the nation was enveloped in gross spiritual darkness. The remnant, with the true faith of Abraham in their hearts, could do nothing but wait and hope in God's promises through the prophets.

Until light came it would have been well nigh impossible to distinguish Abraham's true seed from the false. They worshipped side by side in the synagogues; they observed the Jewish feasts; they offered the same sacrifices.

It was much like today as true believers are a dwindling minority scattered through the religious systems of men. Although large numbers profess to be followers of Christ — just as large numbers then professed to be followers of Moses — it would likely shock us if we knew the number of true sheep left in the world. I'm glad the Lord knows them that are His!

### **Peace on Earth?**

It is widely believed that one of the purposes of Christ's coming was to bring "peace on earth." This belief contributes to the expectation of a millennial reign. It is the result of a misreading of Luke 2:14 where angels announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds. Every translation other than the King James clearly indicates that the peace was only for some, men with whom God was pleased.

There will never be peace for the world as a whole because, except for God's own, there is no true peace in the heart. Isaiah 57:20-21 says, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

The peace the angels were talking about is the peace Paul spoke of when he said, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1.

Men may sing with great emotion, "Let there be peace on earth," but this is a pleasant-sounding fantasy. In fact God warns of a time, "...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." I Thessalonians 5:3.

The only true peace available in this sin-cursed earth comes when men from their hearts bow to the Prince of Peace and truly by faith become one with Him and His kingdom. Such men alone have access to the very peace of God in their hearts though they may at times be in the midst of outward strife and turmoil.

Most men are at war with God in their hearts. This includes most professing Christians, who have embraced religion without actually coming to know Christ.

We need to consider once again the words of Christ himself on the subject of peace: "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." Matthew 10:34-37. Sober words.

### **Revival?**

Today, the cry of many is for "revival," either for one they believe is going on or for one they hope to see. Grandiose pictures are painted of God sweeping down, revitalizing churches and transforming the world. "Revival" has become almost a magical word — the answer to virtually everything that ails us.

I wonder why Jesus didn't preach revival? Had you ever thought about that? Why didn't he go around quoting II Chronicles 7:14, stirring up people to pray for revival? Perhaps he could have gone before the Sanhedrin and encouraged them to set up round-the-clock prayer chains.

Jesus preached repentance and the kingdom of God and warned of judgment to come. He had nothing but condemnation for the religious system that prevailed. He offered no hope for it.

Had many of today's preachers been around in Jesus' day they would have accused him of being negative, critical and divisive. They would have instructed Jesus to seek for common ground with the Pharisees, to invite them to sit in prominent places when he preached, to reach out to them by being positive and optimistic.

That wasn't God's message. Coming judgment was an inescapable fact. Revival was not the answer. In order to revive something it must have been "vived" to start with. Most revivalism is nothing more than an attempt to infuse God's life into Babylon. Worse, much that is called God's life is not His at all but is a counterfeit from the realm of darkness. Much that we are seeing in our day is little more than the devil "reviving" his own work.

### **Spiritual Authority**

The scribes and Pharisees may have sat in Moses' seat but they did not have the same spirit Moses had. There are only two realms from which spiritual authority can derive: God's kingdom and the devil's. When the Jews ceased to let God rule over them and set up their own religious system, they fell under the dominion of demons.

Their delusion was such that they could kill God's prophets and believe that they were faithfully serving God. That is the curse of religion. It blinds and deludes its victims.

“Babylon” is a symbolic name for the world system. It is a system of government by men and devils. It is a substitute for the rightful rule of God and of His Son. Psalm 2.

The name comes from what happened when men tried to build the tower of Babel. Genesis 11:4 reveals the motive and spirit behind their effort: “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven: and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

It is easy to see the spirit of pride, self-seeking and self-preservation that was manifest in their words and actions. God was not a part of their plans. He didn’t tell them to build a city and a tower. Their plans reflected a spirit of rebellious independence and self-exaltation.

God intervened by confusing their language so they couldn’t understand one another. As a result they were, in fact, scattered and divided. For this reason, the word “Babylon” also conveys the idea of confusion — an apt picture of religion, especially in our day.

### **The Real Inspiration**

It is easy, in reading Genesis 11, to see only God and the people involved. Did the people conceive the tower of Babel on their own? Was this just a human project? No. The real inspiration for the city and the tower came from the unseen realm of darkness, Lucifer and the wicked spirits who followed him in his rebellion.

In Isaiah 14 we see prophetic words directed to “the king of Babylon” (verse 4). While the prophecy certainly involved the literal city and empire known as Babylon, God inspired the prophet to address the real power behind it, Lucifer. Verses 12-14 say, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”

See the same kind of spirit as that exhibited at Babel. This is what people fail to realize. Whenever man tries to govern his own affairs the real power and inspiration behind his efforts is the devil and his legions. There is no middle ground: if God is not ruling, the devil is!

The devil is only too glad to allow men to think they are running things. It feeds man’s pride and allows the devil freedom to pull his strings and manipulate him like a puppet. Do not be deceived. There are only two kingdoms. If men are not truly serving Christ, they are serving the devil and his world system whether they realize it or not. They may be sincere, but sincerity is no defense.

Remember what Paul said in Colossians 1:13 about true believers: “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom

of his dear Son.” Salvation is not a matter of persuading people to leave “neutral” territory and join Christ. It involves the rescue of people born under Satan’s dominion. He is the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4). When Adam and Eve rebelled against the commandment of God, they ceded their God-given dominion to Satan. The ruling systems of this world flow from the evil mind of Lucifer and are designed to shut God out and to keep man in a state of rebellion and blindness.

Thus “Babylon” is a symbol for the present world order. Its spirit and principles can be seen expressed in every form of human government from nations to small local organizations. Certainly this is true of religion.

Earlier we pointed out the insidious way in which demons invade and take control of religious movements. While they are careful to preserve the outward appearance, a power structure evolves that effectively shuts out Christ and his influence.

### **From Such Turn Away**

A true work of God can be revived but once a religious system of any kind is established and religious spirits have seized control, neither revival nor reformation is the answer. The very power structure itself stands opposed to the rule of Christ. You have the situation described by Paul in II Timothy 3:5 where he refers to those “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof ....” Note that Paul didn’t tell Timothy to try and turn the situation around by preaching revival. He added, “... from such turn away.”

Once religious men acquire power and influence they do not willingly give it up. Some people naively suppose that the ills of their religious system can be cured from within. They see sincere men in power and believe that they can be reasoned with and the system reformed and revived.

What they don’t understand is that the real power behind any religious system is devils and you can’t reason with a devil. Church systems today are full of men who possess power and influence that are not the result of the gifts and callings of God. They plan and build impressive religious works — impressive to the eyes of men, but not to God who looks past the outward appearance.

Impressive religious “houses” have been built by unqualified builders on the wrong foundation, with the wrong blueprint and the wrong materials. Trying to revive and reform such a “house” is like saying, “Let’s remodel!” Remodelling is not the answer. “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it ....” Psalms 127:1.

In Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem, he said, “Behold your house is left unto you desolate.” Matthew 23:38. Notice that Jesus called it, “your house.” It wasn’t his house; it was theirs and they weren’t about to let him mess it up.

Jesus saw clearly the true condition of those who occupied Moses’ seat and fancied themselves guardians of divine truth. Read for yourself what Jesus said

about them in Matthew 23. He did not offer any hope for them or their religion. He foresaw only judgment.

### **Cumulative Judgment**

In fact, Jesus set forth a principle of judgment in Matthew 23 that needs to be understood. I call it cumulative judgment. In verses 29-35 we read, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.”

Remember how earlier we pointed out the principle of sin gradually building until it reached a point where God poured out judgment? The religious fathers of those in that generation had been guilty of great offenses against God, including killing those that God had sent to them. What earlier generations had done was bad enough but what the present generation did was much worse.

It was as though each generation had received a “cup” that contained the evil deeds of all of the preceding generations. By embracing the spirit and religious traditions that had gone before they became custodians of the “cup.” Through continuing in those traditions they added their own evil deeds to the contents of the cup and handed it down to the succeeding generation. Thus did every generation become guilty of every sin that had gone before.

In Jesus’ day the cup was just about full and judgment lay close at hand. That generation was charged with the guilt of the murder of every righteous person going all the way back to Abel. Though they had cloaked themselves with robes of self-righteous religion their true spirit was that of their father, the devil (John 8:44), a liar and murderer from the beginning.

In fact, God specifically intervened to bring their condition to a conclusion. Conceivably, in an absence of light, they could have continued on in their blindness for some time, relatively unchallenged. But God had His own timetable and was determined to expose and judge their condition. To accomplish this He continued right down to their final end to send them “prophets and apostles” to bear witness to their wickedness and to stir them up to exercise it that they might be judged. Luke 11:49-51.

Is it any wonder that John the Baptist said to them, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Matthew 3:7. And Jesus said in Luke 21:23, “... there shall be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.”

### **Save Yourselves**

On the day of Pentecost, Peter warned the people, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40. Other translators used words like “crooked,” “perverse,” and “wicked” generation. It was clearly a generation that was headed in the wrong direction, away from God, toward judgment. With the fresh anointing of Pentecost upon him, Peter preached separation, not revival.

People need to be saved from their sins, to be sure, yet Peter, in his first epistle, said, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” I Peter 1:18-19.

Saving people from their sins is easy compared with saving them from their religion. Why do you suppose Jesus said to the chief priests and elders, “... the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you”? Matthew 21:31.

Let’s take another look at Matthew 23:38. “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” Another key word is “left.” It indicates an abandonment by God.

Up until this time, the nation as a whole had, for the sake of the small preserved remnant, enjoyed a measure of divine favour and protection. When they sinned, they were judged, but when they called on God, deliverance was available. An example was the Babylonian captivity which was God’s judgment on centuries of wickedness. Yet there was a restoration and a rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

But the judgment Jesus predicted was not like what had happened previously. The divine protection was being removed and the devil was going to have a free rein. The whole nation was being turned over to the power of Satan. That is why Jesus wept.

There is a time to preach and pray and there is a time to leave.

I remind you again of the city of Bethsaida. In Mark 8:22-26 we find the account of a blind man being brought to Jesus for healing. Jesus first led him out of the town, had to pray for him twice, and then told him not to go back into the town or even to tell anyone who was going there! Each fact points to the spiritual state of that city. Despite its outward piety, in God’s eyes Bethsaida was more wicked than the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon, cities God had judged. The city of Capernaum was ranked below Sodom! Matthew 11:20-24. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. I Samuel 16:7.

The severest judgment will fall upon those who have had the greatest light. The greatest darkness lies in the hearts of those who have had light and turned away from it, choosing rather their own way. Remember, Jesus said, "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you ...." John 12:35. A great factor in this present darkness is the rejection of light.

Hebrews 10:26-27 describes the consequences of deliberately rejecting the grace of God: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

### **Judgment on the Jewish Nation**

When the Jewish nation as a whole rejected God's overture to them through His Son and through the church after Pentecost, they embarked on a rapid descent into total darkness. After instigating the murder of God's own Son, they persecuted the church without mercy, killing Stephen and James and scattering the church. The saints left in Jerusalem were a beleaguered few living in poverty amidst enemies. Romans 15:25-26.

Some of the things that happened in Jerusalem are recorded in the Bible and others in the 4th century book by Eusebius entitled, "The History of the Church." Eusebius gathered up the early church writings together with the writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus to paint a chilling portrait of a city and nation abandoned by God.

James, the brother of Jesus and author of the Book of James, became the leader of the Jerusalem church and was considered, even by most of the Jews, to be the most righteous man in Jerusalem. Yet, to still his witness, they threw him off a parapet of the temple and clubbed him to death in the temple courtyard. As James was being murdered, he was observed even by some of the Jews to be praying for his murderers.

In Luke 19:41-44 we find the account of Jesus' words, precisely predicting the fate of Jerusalem: "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, 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."

About forty years later the Romans, tiring of the rebellious Jews, sent Titus and his legions to put an end to their rebellion. As the war progressed and Jews began to be slaughtered throughout the land some three million fled to the city of Jerusalem for safety. Jerusalem was a walled fortress that in fact became a walled prison as the Roman armies surrounded them. With great irony it was during the

Passover feast that they fled to Jerusalem for refuge. Some 40 years previously it was during the Passover feast that Christ had been crucified.

There was no refuge in Jerusalem but only unspeakable horrors as the Roman siege continued for months and then years. Whereas God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah had been fiery and quick, the judgment on Jerusalem was agonizingly slow. If you want to read the gory details, read from the writings of Josephus and Eusebius.

Perhaps the most famous incident concerned a young mother of noble birth who, as the terrible famine wore on, killed her infant son and roasted his flesh for food. There were armed gangs roving the city who would kill without mercy for the slightest morsel of food. When they, smelling the roasting meat, burst in on her, even they were taken aback at the horror of what she had done.

In the end, the city was destroyed and not one stone of the temple was left upon another as Jesus had foretold. Of those who survived the siege many were sent into exile and slavery and many others were sent to fight and perish in the Roman arenas.

Listen to the words of Paul in I Thessalonians 2:14-16: "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

Do you wonder why I don't get excited by events in the Middle East? God's purpose for the rebellious Jewish nation was fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the launching of His Kingdom. The righteous seed was preserved and the inspired words of the prophets laid the foundation for the Kingdom, a Kingdom that was established almost two thousand years ago. Ephesians 2:19-22.

We should pause and point out that none of these truths can in any way be used as a basis for any form of hatred or prejudice against Jews. We need to ever remember the Spirit of Jesus who wept over Jerusalem, and that of Paul who expressed a willingness to go to hell in their place if that were possible. Romans 9:3. Jews should not see anything in true Christians but the love and compassion of Christ. Judgment is God's business. And there still is a remnant among the Jews who by the election of God are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Escape!**

There is one key fact in our account of the destruction of Jerusalem that we have not yet pointed out. Immediately prior to the war there was a church at Jerusalem. When judgment fell, they were not there! Why not? Eusebius tells us that they were specifically warned of God as the time drew near and every single Christian moved

to the city of Pella and escaped. Wouldn't it be a good thing to be in a place where you could hear God's voice at such a time? Noah was. So was the Jerusalem church.

Suppose they had been like the churches of our day, divided into many denominations and sects, each walking in their own traditions, listening to ministers trained by man to uphold those traditions instead of their being called and taught by God? Would they have known what was going on? Tradition is tradition whether it is labeled Jewish or Christian.

So God saw to it that His sheep were separated from a people about to be judged. However, the real separation had taken place long before: it was a spiritual separation of heart and mind. It caused believers to be joined in fellowship with other believers under the leadership of Christ, they having left behind the vain traditions of their fathers.

Their faith was such that they were willing to endure whatever it cost to be a part of Christ's kingdom. For many it meant leaving behind family and natural friends; some no doubt gave up position and prestige; they were willing to endure poverty and all manner of persecution and even to risk death for Christ.

Today we see literally thousands of religious systems that use Christ's name to give them credibility, yet are just as deadly as the Jewish system that killed the Christ they profess. They give people the illusion of serving Christ while trapping them in Babylon. These are not good places for God's sheep to be.

### **A Time of Proving**

God uses times of great darkness to prove what is in people's hearts. There is something in the heart of a sheep that can never truly agree on the inside with that darkness. I often think of a scripture found in the Book of Malachi. Malachi prophesied, as did so many others, in a time of great apostasy. Read for yourself his description of how God saw the people in general.

However, in Malachi 3:16-18, we see a different kind of people: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

As religious unbelievers gave vent to their unbelief (3:14) and believers sought out fellow believers and communicated with them, God was listening. The very darkness itself helped to make the difference manifest. God had a book of remembrance in which He made note of those "that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." That would be a good book to be in! Let the people of the world seek to be in "Who's Who" and be considered "somebody" by the world. It's what God thinks that matters.

God saw the judgment that was coming and during the gathering darkness that came before He made note of those who would be spared. Malachi 4:1-3.

Jesus warned of a time when “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” Matthew 24:12. Does your faith depend on external conditions or does it come from within and motivate you to serve God regardless of conditions?

The Israelites who escaped Egypt were quite ready to dance and praise God after He brought them through the Red Sea. However, most of those same Israelites perished in unbelief as a result of the trials of the wilderness.

God is using this present darkness to help bring about a spiritual separation between His sheep and those headed for destruction. The need is not for the excitement of “revival” but for genuine faith in the heart that will cause men to stand fast when there is no excitement. True faith will anchor us when all others are swept away by the tide of the moment. True faith will cause us to stand in this present darkness even when it appears that the devil is winning. Faith rests its hope solely in the faithfulness of a Sovereign God.

Notice something else about the people of whom Malachi spoke. It doesn't say that they prayed to God about the deteriorating spiritual conditions, although I'm sure they did. It says that they spoke often one to another. Relationships were established among believers who felt the need of fellowship and strength. Their communication was not random or occasional but was said to be “often.”

God never meant for His children to be spiritual islands in this world, disconnected from one another. His plan for us includes regular spiritual fellowship and mutual care with those of like mind and spirit.

The religious systems that bear Christ's name today are headed down one road and God's remnant are headed down another. The professing church is ripe for judgment and one by one the true sheep are waking up and realizing the dry and desolate place they are in.

## The Abomination of Desolation

In Matthew 24:15, Jesus referred to something called the “abomination of desolation,” also spoken of by Daniel. Most of the preaching and teaching I’ve ever encountered on the subject has treated the abomination of desolation as some singular event that could be clearly identified, the sort of event that would make for a news headline. Some teach that this refers to an individual known as the antichrist who, having made a treaty with the Jews, will suddenly break it and proclaim himself to be deity, ushering in a period of 3 -1/2 years known as the great tribulation. Others see it as referring to the encirclement of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in the first century.

Another example often referred to as a type of what would happen later occurred in the period between Malachi and Matthew. An evil heathen king named Antiochus Epiphanes hated the Jews and their God and was determined to crush them. As a part of his effort he deliberately desecrated the temple, sacrificing a hog on the altar and turning the temple for a time into a place of heathen sacrifice.

I distinctly remember a time, many years ago now, when I was reading Matthew 24 and meditating on how to sort out the things Jesus said in relation to the questions he was asked. The disciples had asked him about the destruction of the temple, his coming, and the end of the world. Some things seem to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and some to the end of the age — all mixed up together. Scholars have debated about these things ever since. One thing I am convinced of is that Jesus never intended for these things to be unraveled by scholars!

As I sat reading and pondering this, a very distinct feeling came to me that many of the things Jesus said were meant to apply to both, each in their own way. As the Jewish nation ended with only a remnant escaping its apostasy and judgment, so it was to be for the “Christian” world at the end of the age.

In particular my attention was drawn to the expression, “the abomination of desolation.” Jesus was speaking to his followers when he said, “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation ....” Only believers are able to see things that have spiritual and prophetic significance. This “seeing” is not with natural eyes, but with spiritual eyes opened by the revelation of God’s Word.

Religious teachers think they have these things all figured out with their complicated charts. The Jewish scribes believed in the coming Messiah and were diligent students of the scriptures, yet when Christ came their eyes were totally blind. I am convinced that history is repeating itself and that today’s religious

generation is similarly blind regarding the second coming of Christ and events surrounding it.

The “abomination of desolation” involves principles that can be seen at work in virtually every judgment of God meted out against human rebellion. Those principles are no doubt expressed in particular events connected with judgment but something on the inside tells me to be more concerned with the conditions involved.

An example of this is the way people have focused over the years on who the antichrist might be. They speculate about this individual or that dictator, etc., yet all the while, the spirit of antichrist is taking over the world and overrunning even “Christian” religion. The way things are going, if some individual were to arise who merited the title “The Antichrist” they wouldn’t recognize him as such anyway! The irony is that while many theologians are looking for some evil dictator to commit a particular wicked deed, they themselves may actually be caught up in the abomination of desolation and be totally unaware of it!

What do we mean by the “abomination of desolation?” Let’s look at the words involved, one at a time, particularly as they are used in the scriptures.

### **The Meaning of “Abomination”**

The first word is “abomination.” An abomination is something that is totally disgusting, utterly sickening and contemptible. Of course the scriptures are concerned about things that God finds abominable, that He hates and loathes. We must always remember that God’s values, and thus His evaluation of things, are totally different from those of sin-darkened man. That is why Jesus, in Luke 16:15, said, “... that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

If you do a study of the word “abomination” in the Old Testament you will discover that the primary use of the word concerns idolatry. The connection is often so close that “abomination” is actually used as a synonym for “idol.” For example, if you said that someone had an abomination in his house, everyone knew (at least among the Jews) that you meant he had an idol.

The ancient world was totally dominated by idolatry. Every tribe and nation had its gods, represented by statues or images of some kind. In every aspect of life from planting crops to fighting wars, men looked to their gods for help and bowed to their demands even when it meant human sacrifice.

In the process of God separating a people for Himself, idolatry was a major issue. Listen to the beginning of the ten commandments. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the

children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”

Idolatry, in its essence, provided men with a religious substitute for the one true God. The same applies to the word “abomination.” An abomination is anything that people give themselves to that displaces God. Certainly that includes gross sins of every kind, but the thing God finds most abominable is that which is religious. Religion is sinful man pretending he is righteous. It is open rebellion against God, yet it often appears under the guise of goodness and truth.

### **Devil Power**

One point that cannot be emphasized too much is that idolatry is not just ignorant but harmless superstition. It has devil power behind it. Listen to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:16-17 concerning idolatry: “They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.” See also Leviticus 17:7.

Psalm 106:34-40 says, “They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them: But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.”

Paul, in I Corinthians 10:19-20 said, “What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.”

Fellowship with devils! That is the real issue in religion. That is what God desires to deliver His children from in this present darkness.

Religion is Satan’s greatest tool for ruling over lost mankind. In the case of idolatry, the real power behind their religion was the demon spirits who hid behind the facade of the actual images. Make no mistake: there is real supernatural power behind false religion. And I’m not just talking about what we consider to be “heathen” religion: I’m including most of what is called Christianity yet is actually infested with devils.

When Moses first went before Pharaoh and turned his staff into a serpent to demonstrate God’s power, the heathen magicians were able to duplicate his feat. However, Moses’ “serpent” swallowed those of the magicians, demonstrating that God’s power is greater than that of devils! We must never forget that!

Satan always tries his best to corrupt and hinder anything God does in the earth. By the time Moses came along with a commission from God to deliver the Israelites

from Egypt, approximately 400 years had passed since the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### **Israel's True Bondage**

The greatest bondage into which they had fallen was not slavery but the idolatrous beliefs and practices that they had absorbed from their heathen surroundings. It did not take long for their idolatry to surface during the wilderness journey.

Their exodus from Egypt was attended by great signs and wonders including the crossing of the Red Sea on dry land. They experienced the miracle of manna for food (Exodus 16). They saw and heard the awesome display of God's power at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19). Yet when Moses delayed coming down from the mount (Exodus 32) their unbelief of heart took over.

The mentality of people was such in those days that they needed gods they could see and touch in order to have something to believe in and be motivated by. Therefore the instinct of those who felt they had to do something since it appeared that Moses had abandoned them was to pressure Aaron into making a golden calf and to proclaim, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Exodus 32:4.

That spirit of impatient unbelief and unwillingness to wait on God and do things His way persists in our day as well and is the hallmark of apostate Christianity.

The results of their rebellion were disastrous. After offering the people the opportunity to choose sides, Moses ordered those who remained true to the Lord to execute judgment against the rebels with the sword. Three thousand Israelites died. Additionally, Exodus 32:35 tells us, "And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made."

Idolatry was a very persistent problem among the Israelites for many centuries to come and the Lord treated it with deadly seriousness, judging them repeatedly, yet with no lasting effect.

The nation reached its zenith in the time of David and Solomon, however Solomon's reign ended badly. Solomon had a problem with women and married 700 of them besides keeping 300 concubines. Many of these were heathen women and Solomon accommodated their religions in his old age.

In I Kings 11:7-8 we read, "Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods."

Part of the resulting judgment was the revolt of ten tribes which never again served God. The remaining kingdom, known as Judah, consisted of Judah and Benjamin together with the Levites who were thrown out of their priestly duties by

the revolting tribes. II Chronicles 11:13-14. Besides the Levites, all who still wanted to serve God left the new kingdom and went to Judah.

Even in Judah, where God preserved the remnant, the spiritual trend was downhill with revivals few and far between. One positive example was Josiah of whom it was said, “And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. And all his days they departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers.”

However the overall trend continued until God used Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and the temple and to carry the people away captive. The cause of this judgment is summarized in II Chronicles 36:14-16: “Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

Do you see the abomination of desolation involved here? The abominations of the nation reached a point of no return, where judgment was the only answer. God had prophets who saw what was happening and warned against it, but the people plunged ahead in their blindness. Still there was a remnant that God preserved even in Babylon, Daniel being the most famous among them.

## **Desolation**

The word “desolation” is well illustrated by what happened to Jerusalem both under Babylon and later under Rome. While it refers to great defeat and destruction we must never forget the spiritual dimension: although forces ruled over by the devil carried out the desolations, in each case they represented the deliberate judgment of God.

Even in “desolation” we can see a process at work. Long before the actual destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” Matthew 23:38.

Here the idea conveyed is more one of abandonment. We are reminded of Genesis 6:3 where God said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man ....” One of the marks of coming judgment is the withdrawal of God’s restraint against man’s headlong rush towards destruction — exactly what we are seeing in our day.

However, there is another side to “abomination” that must be understood. If abominations were only connected with overt idolatry, they would be easy to spot.

## Empty Orthodoxy

Following the Babylonian captivity, there was a restoration of sorts under men like Ezra and Nehemiah. The city and temple were rebuilt and the worship of God restored. Overt idolatry didn't seem to be the primary problem from that point on. For those who returned to Jerusalem, the primary problem became empty orthodoxy (see Malachi), an outward service toward God that hid a wicked and unchanged heart. This was what Jesus lashed out against.

Even in Isaiah's day, before the Babylonian captivity we are afforded a picture of how God saw their religion. Isaiah 66:3-4 says, "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not."

Killing an ox, sacrificing a lamb, offering an oblation, and burning incense were all part of the law. Yet their spiritual condition was such that they might as well have been practicing idolatry! The real spirit that was operating in them was exactly the same. The only differences were outward.

Take note of the word "abominations" being applied to things that were outwardly right! I wonder how many things in our day that religious men glory in are actually abominations in God's eyes! Is the abomination of desolation an event or a general condition? When the Christians left Jerusalem there was no particular event that occurred: they left when God warned them to leave. Conditions had reached that point. The rest of the population remained blind.

What about our day? What is the true spirit behind religion? To what degree are we witnessing lost religious people who have "chosen their own ways" and whose soul "delighteth in their abominations"?

Did you know that devils can "praise God," talk about the blood of Christ, give life-changing experiences, perform miracles, "cast out devils," preach, pray, prophesy and speak in tongues, and love every minute of it? The outward form of those things doesn't bother them in the least. It is only where God is present by the anointing and through truth that they are disturbed.

The devil is a great promoter of the idea that devils could not or would not do such things. It affords his evil operatives the perfect cover to deceive millions with false religion. People will say, "Why would the devil praise God?" or "How could demons say that Jesus is Lord and talk about the blood of Christ?" No demon could say those things from the heart when Christ is present, but giving lip-service to religious concepts people have come to believe in is no problem for them. The words have no magical power in themselves.

Really praising God is far more than mere words. Do you really believe that God is pleased with the “praise” of those whose hearts are far from Him, let alone the deceitful “praise” by devils? Matthew 15:7-9.

### **“Come Out of Her, My People”**

There is a passage of scripture the Lord has emphasized in our midst many times over the years. It is found in Rev. 18:1-4. “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

Verse 2 portrays what happens when religious man operates apart from the headship of Christ: devils find a spiritual home and take over. The expression “is fallen and is become” shows us that this is a process. That is why it is so deadly. The true condition develops undetected by most. It is like a country slowly undermined by foreign agents and collaborators until the citizens wake up one day and realize they are under enemy control. Unfortunately, with the exception of the sheep, the citizens of “religion” will find out the same way the Sodomites or those in Noah’s day did — when judgment is falling and it is eternally too late.

Whenever passages such as this are applied to contemporary Christianity, people are naturally inclined to resent it. They may agree that it applies to certain other groups but certainly not to theirs! Their minds go to people they believe to be good and sincere and you are accused of being negative and critical.

I agree that some of God’s people are in Babylon. That’s why the Lord says, “Come out of her, my people ....”! When Jesus condemned the religious system that operated among the Jews, He was not condemning or criticizing the sheep! He simply spoke the truth, motivated by God’s Spirit, to the end that the sheep might be delivered.

Most of God’s people are asleep. They do not know the danger they are in. As the darkness swallows up outwardly Christian religious systems, God warns of plagues that are the lot of religious Babylon.

It is the time of judgment, of harvest, of separation. I see only judgment ahead for the houses of religion that use Christ’s name but operate apart from His authority. If everyone that claims God told them to do what they are doing has actually heard from God, then He is mightily confused! And “... God is not the author of confusion ....” I Cor. 14:33.

Based both on the witness of God's Spirit concerning contemporary Christianity and on the witness of God's Word in Matthew 7, I believe that the vast majority of those supposedly acting in Christ's name have no authority from Christ to do what they are doing. Will their work stand before the darkness? What of their followers? Do not the sheep need the great Shepherd? Has He not provided for such an hour as this? Is there no ark of safety from the judgment that looms over our world?

God will never forget His own, but it is not an hour for slumber or for staying where Christ does not rule. He is our only safety, our only light, our only knowledge, our only protection from the powers of darkness that have been turned loose on a doomed, sin-blinded world.

One by one, the sheep are waking up to the reality of what is taking place. Are you like those in Malachi? Do you fear the Lord? Does the darkness cause you to seek the light? to speak often with others of like spirit? Are you in a place of spiritual safety or a place of spiritual danger?

God has the answers we need. It is a time to pray and seek Him as never before, both for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters still in this world. We are a tiny minority here. Most of our family is on the other side. It will not be long! Praise God!

## — CHAPTER 8 —

# The Kingdom of God

That the Bible portrays a God who rules over all and whose kingdom will last forever is unquestioned. That His Son has been granted all authority in heaven and earth and been made Lord over this kingdom is likewise evident in the scriptures. It is also plain that the devil exercises a dominion over the kingdoms of this world at present that is destined to be finally overthrown, evil forever banished. The end of the story is that God's people will enjoy an everlasting new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

The manner in which God's kingdom relates to this present world is, however, a matter of considerable debate and disagreement. As this book began with a discussion of people's differing expectations regarding the future, it seems most appropriate to look into the Word and to see what the Lord will give us concerning His kingdom that would shed light in this present darkness. It is after all, His kingdom. It does not belong to the theologians!

### The Highest Authority

All authority, whether in heaven or on earth, ultimately flows from one source: God. This God has no equal, no rival. He answers to no one. He gives authority to others. No one had to give God His authority: it was His to begin with. He stands alone, above all others, a great invisible Spirit.

Greater than the universe He has created, He has knowledge and wisdom without limit, power that cannot be challenged and presence from which there is no escape. Simply put, His will and purpose will prevail. Consider just a few scriptures:

Psalm 103:19 "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."

Psalm 145:13 "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations."

Psalm 22:28 "For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations."

As "governor among the nations" God is no mere figurehead. He takes an active role in the affairs of men, working out the fulfillment of His own eternal purpose, conceived before the world began.

Nebuchadnezzar was a great king over the ancient empire known as Babylon, full of pride in his power and accomplishments. Most such men live and die with little

or no knowledge of the one true God from whom their power comes. They blindly use that power to serve their own ends. However, God singled out Nebuchadnezzar that He might reveal to him the truth of the matter.

Daniel 4 records for us a letter from Nebuchadnezzar to “all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth.” It is his testimony of how God humbled and taught him.

### **Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream**

He tells of a disturbing dream about a great tree that was to be cut down and about a man’s heart that was for a time to be changed to that of a beast. There were words in the dream declaring the purpose involved, “... that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.”

God enabled Daniel to interpret the dream as applying to the king. About a year later Nebuchadnezzar was walking in the palace, his heart lifted up with ignorant pride, and said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” Immediately a voice came from heaven saying, “The kingdom is departed from thee ....” It also said that he would live as a beast among the beasts for seven years.

Verses 34-35 record the return of his understanding and his realization of who God was: “And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

Verse 37 concludes the amazing testimony of this highly favored ancient king: “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

It is very evident that Nebuchadnezzar came to an awareness of a kingdom that went far beyond anything of this earth. The dominion of this kingdom included not only the “inhabitants of the earth” but also “the army of heaven.” Did you know that God has an army in heaven? Though the greatness of God’s heavenly kingdom could not be seen by natural eyes nor was it understood by natural men, yet the visible kingdoms of this world were all under its absolute dominion. Psalm 66:7. Psalm 46:8-10. Psalm 33:10-16.

We get another glimpse into this truth in Isaiah’s prophecy in Chapter 45 concerning a then future king named Cyrus. Verse 5 says, “I am the Lord, and

there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me.”

God had a purpose relating to the believing remnant of His people that involved raising up this heathen king named Cyrus. Jeremiah had prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years (Jer. 29:10). II Chronicles 36:22-23 records the contribution of Cyrus to God’s will and purpose: “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me: and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.”

God’s people today need to never forget that what was true of old is still true: God is in control. Regardless of how things may look to us, nothing happens that He does not in His infinite wisdom permit. Although iniquity abounds as Jesus said in Matt. 24 that it would, God’s promises to His own remain sure and steadfast. There is not a devil in hell able to prevent God from saving every one of His elect with a perfect and complete salvation. “... Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” Luke 21:28.

### **Prophecies of a Messiah**

The prophecies of the Old Testament are full of references to a future day (future to them, at least) in which God would bring salvation and deliverance to His people through a Messiah, a King. It is that day and what the Word says about it that we wish to consider.

Isaiah 9:6-7 says, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

Jeremiah 23:5-6 says, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Isaiah 32:1-2 says, “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert

from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

These and many other prophecies resulted in a great body of traditional belief regarding the promised Messiah and his kingdom. Their messianic expectations were very much shaped as well by their spiritual condition and by their experiences as a nation.

### **Religious Factions Develop**

As we have already indicated, except for the true remnant, the spiritual course of the Jews was downhill and away from God. Following the return from Babylonian captivity, though they never returned to the wicked idolatry that had brought the judgment of God upon them, they turned instead to various forms of dead orthodoxy. It was during the period between Malachi and Matthew, some 400 years, that the various religious factions developed.

The Pharisees, zealous for converts and for their conception of the law, went more by their traditions than they did by the scriptures themselves. The Sadducees were more worldly-minded, accepting as their moral guide only the five books of Moses — the Torah — and not even believing in life after death. The Essenes were more mystical and tended to live in religious communities outside of normal society, seeking spiritual purity through physical separation.

Nationally, the Jews spent most of their time under the thumb of one foreign power or another. Following the breakup of the Empire of Alexander the Great into four factions after his death, the Jews often found themselves caught in the middle of an ongoing conflict between the Seleucids to the north and Ptolemies of Egypt to the south.

One of the Seleucid rulers, Antiochus Epiphanes, tried to brutally stamp out the Jews’ religion and culture through murder, terror, and desecration of their temple. He went as far as slaughtering a hog on the altar of the temple and erecting heathen shrines in various places. This provoked a revolt led by the Maccabees, who, in the process of briefly freeing the Jews from foreign domination, also took over the priesthood and established a dynasty that became very corrupt.

When Rome came on the scene the Jews found themselves ruled by the whim of yet another brutal foreign power, paying taxes at the point of a sword. To make the situation even more galling, the Romans recruited Jews who became known as Publicans to carry out their tax collections for them. These Publicans abused their authority in order to enrich themselves and earned the understandable hatred of their fellow Jews. The Romans didn’t care as long as they got what they wanted.

### **Messianic Expectations in Christ’s Day**

Just as there were various religious and political factions, so did the details vary as to what they expected in a Messiah. Some, like the Zealots, were political

revolutionaries whose main concern was throwing off the Roman yoke. Others emphasized the spiritual side of the Messiah — a prophet and teacher of righteousness.

Although the beliefs varied in detail and emphasis, here are some of the elements of belief that would have been commonly present at the time of Jesus' birth: — The Messiah was to be a physical descendent of David. — He would reestablish the Jewish Monarchy, freeing them from Rome. — He would regather the Jews who had been dispersed among the nations over the centuries. — Israel would be elevated to a place of prominence over the other nations of the earth. — Jerusalem would become not only the political but also the moral and spiritual center of the world. — God's law would be established throughout the world, which would thus be turned to God and righteousness.

### **Belief in a Golden Age**

There were many religious writings during the period between the Old and New Testaments. Many came from obscure writers who attached the names of famous people — Solomon, Enoch, Moses, Baruch, etc. — to give them credibility. Some of these writings reflect a messianic expectation that included a “golden age,” a “paradise on earth.” Some taught this would last a thousand years and others that the world would be gradually transformed and ultimately become a righteous, everlasting kingdom under God.

One oft-quoted passage is from 2 Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 29:4-6. “The earth will yield its fruit ten-thousand-fold, and on one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine; and those that have hungered will rejoice.”

Here are just a few key phrases from a passage in a book known as the Psalms of Solomon (17:23-51): “Behold, O Lord, and raise up among them a king, the Son of David ... Gird him with strength to crush the unrighteous rulers. Purge Jerusalem of the heathen who oppress ... at his rebuke the nations shall flee from before his face...he will have the heathen to serve him beneath his yoke ... he will subdue the earth by his word for ever ... May God bring it to pass.”

There is among the Jews even in our day a strong messianic movement that vigorously promotes these same expectations. They are as firm in expecting a Messiah at any time as are those among Christians who look for the second coming of Christ and a millennium to follow.

There is one common thread in all these ideas — they center in the transformation of this present world through an earthly political kingdom. There is a “worldly-mindedness” involved. This is not surprising.

## **The Carnal Religious Mind**

Romans 8:5-7 warns us about the “carnal mind” which is “enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” What many people fail to take into account is the “carnal religious mind.” This is man trying to understand the things of God through his own ability apart from revelation — an impossibility.

In I Corinthians 2:9-10, Paul wrote, “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

Many people think Paul was talking about heaven in these verses, but consider this: whatever it was that the eye, ear and heart had failed to grasp God had revealed by His Spirit. Read the context! What Paul is talking about is the inability of the natural man to know the things of God, things that can only be known and understood as God reveals them.

This fact does not stop religious man from thinking and reasoning and believing, however, even though arriving at truth by such means is impossible! This is why the religious world is filled with such confusion and difference of opinion. The blind are attempting to lead the blind. A terrible ditch awaits.

The carnal mind, by its very nature is concerned with fleshly, earthly things — how man may please himself and satisfy his natural desires. Man would dearly love, through his own efforts, to find a way to enjoy earth’s pleasures while eliminating its sorrows. His dream is of a paradise on earth. This is because he is totally governed by the nature he inherited from Adam. He is not interested in the things of God or in pleasing God.

Paul spoke in Philippians 3:18-19 of those he described as “enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

In I John 2:15-17 we read, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

This love of the flesh and of the world is also characteristic of religious man. Though these loves may be artfully concealed by spiritual-sounding language, the true spirit involved is not the Spirit of God.

## **Genuine Brothers and Sisters**

I must point out that I am fully aware of the fact I have genuine brothers and sisters in Christ who love the Lord and who, as a result of their religious exposure, hold to a belief in a visible earthly kingdom. If you occupy this place I receive you

just as the Lord does. These remarks are not intended to set you at nought or to put you into the category of those who are religious but lost. My desire is to shine the light of the Word on the origins of many ideas that are widely taught in our day. I believe that the sheep will, as they seek God, find this edifying and liberating.

There is no question what Jesus thought of the religious system that prevailed among the Jews of his day. He counted the religious leaders as enemies of God and children of the devil even as he reached out to the remnant of sheep among them.

The messianic expectations we have indicated above were part of that apostate religious system — not much of a recommendation! Though they were expressed in spiritual-sounding phrases and embodied some elements of truth yet love of the flesh and of this world lay at the center. “The Messiah will exalt us and turn this world into Paradise.”

Motivated by his deep-down love of this present world, religious man focuses much of his attention on attempting to reshape the world according to his conception of God’s kingdom. When Jesus came on the scene he didn’t fit the messianic expectations of contemporary religion and so they blindly rejected the very One foretold by their own prophets — prophets they had likewise persecuted and rejected.

### **“Our Place”**

Their motivation was revealed in incidents like the council they convened after Lazarus was raised from the dead (John 11:47-53). In spite of the miracles Jesus had performed they were filled with unbelief and more concerned with “our place and nation.” They feared that the influence of Jesus over the masses due to his miracles would eventually bring the wrath of Rome down upon the nation. Therefore they began to plot his death to prevent that from happening! It certainly was evident by then that Jesus showed no interest in raising an army and being the earthly king many were looking for.

Notice that their concern was for “OUR place.” One of the most basic of human instincts and drives is self-preservation, the desperate need to survive. This drive involves more than simply the drive to live when faced with death. It also may be seen when anything of “self” is threatened. Are you aware that these self-appointed guardians of righteousness even considered murdering Lazarus to silence his testimony?! John 12:10.

Religion apart from God is nothing more than a form of self-righteousness no matter how noble its tenets may sound. It is a powerful form of delusion built both on human need and on human pride. It builds a sense of self-esteem that is greatly strengthened by others who share in its beliefs and practices. Yet, in spite of the outward appearance of righteousness, see how readily the religious may be driven even to murder when they feel threatened!

The natural man is very impressed with the products of religion whether they be good works, fine buildings, impressive ceremony, talent, large numbers of adherents or whatever is valued by the particular religion. The Pharisees were as proud of their religious heritage and of their beautiful temple as are many religious people of our day proud of their heritage and the trappings of their religion.

Religion builds communities of men and women who share feelings of enlightenment, divine favor and spiritual self-confidence. Such communities, whether small and local or large and worldwide, constitute spiritual prisons from which escape is the miraculous exception. Although it is true that men may “change prisons,” the kind of escape I’m talking about involves deliverance FROM religion of whatever form to a true knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ.

The prison house of the Pharisees was the worst kind. God really had spoken to Abraham and Moses, men the Pharisees supposedly honored and followed. However, the devil had subtly taught them how to pervert the genuine faith of Abraham and Moses and to build a religion of pride and self-righteousness in its place. How many in our day have done the same thing with their heritage?

To make things worse, the Pharisees were not mere adherents of their religion; they were its leaders. They enjoyed positions of power and prestige before others. They did not feel any spiritual need. Their religion gave them an unshakable feeling of confidence in God’s favor toward them. However, Jesus didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Luke 5:32.

The Pharisees couldn’t conceive of a Messiah who would disapprove of them and their religion. They knew they were right! They knew they were serving God and standing up for His laws! Any religious teacher or would-be Messiah who disapproved of them and their ways and didn’t agree with their ideas and expectations could only earn their enmity.

Their religion, far from being something of God needing a little help and redirection, was in reality a stronghold of Satan. Jesus was well aware that he was not merely confronting men, but hordes of devils who would try with every fiber of their wicked beings to hold on to their victims. He came on a Divine rescue mission to save his sheep, to open for them a way of escape.

Had the Pharisees been godly men who were sincerely mistaken, there would have been in them the capacity to repent and to have their understanding enlightened with truth. This is, in fact, what happened with the remnant. When Jesus came on the scene, they shared many of the common ideas about the Messiah who was to come.

### **The Kingdom They Expected**

The thinking of the Pharisees is further illustrated by two incidents recorded in the gospels. When Jesus came on the scene, his message was “the kingdom of God.” In Luke 17:20-21 we find the Pharisees demanding to know when this

kingdom would come. Jesus, knowing their concept of the kingdom, said, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Where they expected an outward kingdom that men could point to and say, “There in Jerusalem is the kingdom of God,” Jesus told them that it wasn’t like that. His kingdom was within — or “among” — them. Indeed, it takes a different kind of eyes to see the kingdom Jesus preached.

In John 3:3-5 he told Nicodemus that unless a man is born again he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. Simply being born naturally into the world is not enough. Natural men are blind and ignorant concerning God’s eternal kingdom. It takes the new birth, being born of God’s Spirit to see and enter that. As Paul said in I Corinthians 15:50, “... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ...”

The other incident is in John 18 where the Jews had delivered Jesus to Pilate accusing him of claiming to be the King of the Jews. They took advantage of their ideas about the Messiah being an earthly king to enlist the help of the civil authority against Jesus. Pilate had no interest in their theology, but recall how Herod had slaughtered all the children two years of age and under after the wise men inquired about the birth of the King of the Jews. Anyone making such a claim would have been regarded as a threat by someone with political power.

When Pilate questioned Jesus about being the King of the Jews, he answered, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” Verse 36.

Pilate quickly realized that Jesus was no political threat, that he had no ambitions to establish a visible empire through the power of an earthly army. His conclusion is stated in verse 38: “I find in him no fault at all.” The crucifixion was then carried out based, not on the calm determination of guilt, but on the persistent shouts of a demon-inspired mob, determined to destroy him.

## **God Was Silent**

For some 400 years from Malachi until John the Baptist, God sent no prophet to Israel. He was silent, allowing religious men to speculate as they would about the coming kingdom. The prophetic utterances upon which the kingdom was to be established and built were complete. A faithful remnant, preserved by God, continued to pray and wait for its arrival. The rest blindly practiced their religion, drifting farther and farther from God.

As the time approached for Jesus to be born God communicated with certain ones among the remnant about it. He sent Gabriel to Zacharias to tell him of the coming birth of a son named John who would carry out a ministry of preparation “in the spirit and power of Elias” — or Elijah. Luke 1:13-19.

Verse 16 is significant: “And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.” The word “turn” tells us that the children of Israel as a whole had not, in spite of their religion, been serving God at all but needed to be “turned” to Him. The word “many” signifies that although some would be affected, many others were beyond the reach of even the mightily anointed ministry that God was granting them through John.

Then Gabriel was sent to Mary to tell her that, though she was a virgin, God would overshadow her and she would bear a child she was to call Jesus who would be the Son of God. Of him, Gabriel said, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

Then there were the prophetic utterances of Elizabeth, the mother of John, and Mary in Luke 1:39-56. Mary, in particular, spoke of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham and his seed. Remember our earlier discussions concerning Abraham’s seed.

Following the birth of John we have the prophecy of Zacharias which gained special attention throughout the hill country of Judaea as they were the first words he had been able to utter since the encounter with Gabriel! The prophecy included such phrases as, “... the Lord God of Israel ... hath visited and redeemed his people ... hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets ... that we should be saved from our enemies ... to perform the mercy promised to our fathers ... to give the knowledge of salvation unto his people ... to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:68-79.

When Jesus was born there was the message of the angels to the shepherds, “Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

When Joseph and Mary brought Jesus, still a baby, to Jerusalem “to present him to the Lord” they encountered a man named Simeon. Simeon was one of the faithful remnant and was described as, “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.” What a contrast with the self-righteous Pharisees! Here was someone whose heart was toward God, with whom God could and did communicate.

He certainly possessed knowledge that the Pharisees did not. They may have been diligent students of the scriptures but Simeon knew the Author! Luke 2:26 says, “And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”

The Lord enabled him by revelation to come to the temple at just the right time and to take Jesus in his arms and to say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart

in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”

Verses 36-38 introduce us to another of the remnant, a very aged woman named Anna, described as a prophetess, who served God night and day in the temple with fastings and prayers. Following the words of Simeon she arrived on the scene and “spoke of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

### **How Much Did They Understand?**

The question may certainly be raised at this point concerning the degree to which these privileged few understood what they heard. It is one thing for God to speak; it is another for those who hear to fully comprehend His meaning and purpose.

We are far too earthbound, far too conditioned by our religious exposure to instantly and fully understand when God speaks. It usually takes much time and patient repetition to overcome these conditions even where there is a capacity for them to be overcome.

Consider the prophets themselves, faithful men of God who, against deadly opposition, spoke His word. To what degree did they themselves understand what they were saying by God’s inspiration?

Remember the words of Peter in I Peter 1:10-12 concerning the salvation we have in Christ: “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.”

Peter says that the prophets “inquired and searched diligently.” That means that they wondered about the things they were inspired to prophesy. They had questions that they would have loved for the Lord to have answered. Remember the questions Daniel asked in Daniel 12. In the end the Lord told him, “Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.” Daniel 12:9.

Their job was to faithfully speak the word God gave them. Fully comprehending the meaning of their words and the time for their fulfillment was not part of the deal. Even the angels have to walk by faith. God Himself alone has the whole plan; He sees from beginning to end. All others who serve Him walk by faith and understand what He in His eternal wisdom pleases to reveal. Deuteronomy 29:29.

## **Truth Concealed**

The message of the prophets was couched in such language as to deliberately conceal the true meaning from man and to make man totally dependent upon the promised Messiah to reveal it. Matthew 11:25-27. This truth, not understood by religious man, has never stopped him from trying with his own resources to pry into God's secrets. What utter folly! The nationalistic hopes and dreams of natural Jews, supposedly based on the prophets, were the results of their own presumptuous attempts to intrude into God's mysteries and not the result of divine revelation.

When Peter wrote in I Peter 1:18 of believers having been redeemed from their vain manner of life received by tradition from their fathers, he meant the whole body of tradition, including what the Jews expected prophetically. Peter knew what he was talking about. He and the other disciples had walked with Jesus for over three years, heard his words, including much private instruction, yet were very slow to shed their traditional ideas.

## **The Gospel of the Kingdom**

The ministry of Jesus began after his baptism and anointing and the subsequent forty day wilderness temptation. Mark characterized his message as "the gospel of the kingdom of God." Mark 1:14. Verse 15 quotes Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel."

The gospel Jesus preached was far more than just one of personal salvation, forgiveness of sins, and going to heaven; it was the good news about a kingdom, a kingdom God was establishing that would last forever. Personal salvation was only one of the benefits of citizenship in that kingdom! We need our vision and understanding enlarged that we might begin to grasp the big picture of God's plan. The whole book of Ephesians deals with this, but particularly chapter three. Read it!

During their entire time with Jesus, his followers heard him teach many things concerning the kingdom, its characteristics, its citizens. Particularly in Matthew 13 we find Jesus referring to the "mysteries of the kingdom." A mystery is divinely hidden truth that can only be known by revelation. The things Jesus taught in the hearing of the multitudes were in parable form while he explained them to the disciples privately.

They heard Jesus tell the Pharisees that the kingdom was not coming with observation, that is, outward show. There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus that should have given them any reason to expect an earthly political kingdom. In fact, he told them plainly on several occasions that he would be put to death and rise again. Did they understand? No! Luke 18:34 says, "And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken."

## **A Parable of the Kingdom**

As Jesus drew near to Jerusalem for the last time he knew that some of his followers thought that they were arriving to take over and to establish God's kingdom (Luke 19:11). This was in spite of all his teaching! To counter their misunderstanding, he told a parable that painted a different picture.

The parable began, "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." Verse 12. Who do you suppose the nobleman represented? Jesus, himself, of course!

His servants were told to "occupy till I come." However, "his citizens" said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." In verse 15 he returns "having received the kingdom" and we see the judgment, both of his servants and of those who had refused his rule. Those who had refused his rule were killed.

The nobleman received the kingdom when he went away. The servants were those left behind who acted as stewards of his property. They were expected to actively pursue his interests. "His citizens" who refused his reign indicates that the reign was taking place then but they would not submit to it. Thus the nobleman's reign took place in his physical absence. All that was left when he returned was to judge how men had responded to it.

What about the cities the faithful servants were promised? Well, there weren't any of the nobleman's enemies in them! They were dead. The kingdom will one day be visible but not in this world as we know it. Citizenship in that kingdom is being determined now!

This broad pattern, although veiled in the form of a parable in this particular passage, is the one that emerges everywhere in the Word once you see it. Blindness occurs, as was the case with the disciples, when our minds are already programmed by the traditions of men to believe something else.

## **On the Road to Emmaus**

A key passage illustrating this is in Luke 24:13-35. The scene is shortly after the resurrection as two of Jesus' followers were returning from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus, a distance of about seven miles. The time was Sunday, about midday. They had heard the reports from the women who had gone early to Jesus' tomb, but at this point no doubt didn't know what to think. As they walked along they were discussing the shocking events of the previous few days and trying to make sense of them. Their sadness was evident.

The risen Christ drew near although "their eyes were holden that they should not know him" (verse 16). Jesus made inquiry as to what they were discussing and why they were sad. They began to tell about a mighty prophet named Jesus who had three days earlier been condemned and crucified and of the first reports that he might be alive.

One thing they said was very revealing: “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel ....” Verse 21. Do you see their problem? Their vision and thinking were hindered by the popular ideas about the Messiah. They couldn’t conceive of a Messiah who wouldn’t reestablish the Jewish monarchy and end the domination of Rome or of a kingdom that would be launched through suffering and death. And when they thought of Israel, they thought of the nation as a whole.

Jesus’ response to all this is recorded in verses 25-27 (at this point they still didn’t recognize him): “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

### **Time For Revelation**

Does it sound to you as though they had understood the prophets? Why not? In the absence of revelation, tradition had taken root. Only now was it time for the true message of the prophets to be unveiled. Remember the words of Paul, written later on of the Jews as a whole: “But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.”

A vail upon the heart means they couldn’t see or understand. It means that their concepts were the result of human reasoning and imagination and could not be relied upon for a true knowledge of the things of God. I wonder how many concepts there are in our day of which the same could be said?

Notice the central truth that Jesus emphasized — the suffering of Christ and the entering into of his glory. These things are directly related. The one follows the other. There is no age-long delay between them. The fact that natural men are unaware of the glory into which Christ has entered does not mean it is not so.

I’ll guarantee you that devils know about it! In trying to destroy Christ they unwittingly cooperated in their own defeat! As Paul says in I Corinthians 2:8, “... had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” He was the Lord of glory then! Remember again the words of Peter, “... the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.” I Peter 1:11. The glory has followed!

### **Why Truth Was Hidden**

I am persuaded that one reason for the Old Testament being so veiled up to this point was to conceal truth from the devil. Pride and self-delusion have been his downfall from the beginning. God let the devil and lost religious men think whatever they would and revealed to the remnant everything they needed to know for the time in which they lived.

That is an important principle we all need to understand. What is needed is not doctrinal systems that attempt to answer everything but real communication from the Head of the Church suited to the time and the need.

As Jesus talked with Cleopas and his companion he didn't just refer to a handful of isolated scriptures: he began at Moses and went through all the prophets! In other words, he covered the Old Testament from one end to the other. Jesus was saying in effect, "Let me enlighten you and tell you what the Old Testament is really about, what the words of the prophets really foretold."

Later on, after the eyes of the two were opened and they realized to whom they had been listening they said that "... he opened to us the scriptures." Verse 32. What did they mean? Up to this point those scriptures had been closed to them, their meaning hidden. The book had been sealed by God as He had said — "... shut up the words and seal the book ..." — Daniel 12:4.

When they realized all that had happened they returned immediately to Jerusalem to see the disciples. As they were relating their experience, Jesus himself suddenly appeared in their midst. After calming their understandable fear he showed them his hands and feet, still bearing the wounds of crucifixion, and then ate a little broiled fish and some honey to show that he wasn't a ghost but a truly resurrected man.

Luke 24:44-48 says, "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

Do you see the picture? Jesus perfectly fulfilled the words of the prophets yet even those closest to him did not grasp what was happening before their eyes.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that the disciples asked him in Acts 1:6, "... Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Even at this late date they still thought in terms of an earthly Jewish kingdom!

Let's set the scene. It was now forty days since the resurrection. Jesus had appeared to them numerous times, including one occasion on which he had appeared to over 500 of his followers (I Corinthians 15:6). During this forty day period the main thing Jesus talked about was the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

The current occasion was the very last time on earth that Jesus gathered them together. The central thing he wanted to convey to them was to remain in Jerusalem until they had received power from the Holy Ghost to be his witnesses — to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Acts 1:6 makes it sound as though the disciples had been discussing these things among themselves, trying to reason and understand. Their thinking was still contaminated by popular ideas. The question asked was not merely an idle

question asked in passing by one curious disciple. The Word says, "... they asked ...."

This was very much a side issue considering the reason Jesus had called them together. Nor was this the time for lengthy explanations. In fact, after making only two more statements in which he refocused their attention on the coming of the Holy Ghost, Jesus ascended up to heaven while they watched.

His answer at the time didn't really answer them one way or the other but merely called to their attention the fact that "times" and "seasons" were God's business.

### **God's Plan for Revealing Truth**

We need to back off a bit from this scene and consider the larger picture. God had a plan for leading the disciples into an accurate understanding of truth. At this point their grasp of truth was very limited at best.

Go back to John, chapters 14-16, which record a lengthy discourse of Jesus with his disciples shortly before the cross. John 14:26 says, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

John 16:12-14 says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."

Do you see where the disciples were at? Though Jesus had spoken so many things to them in three and a half years they understood — and even remembered — very little. It wasn't time and they weren't able ("ye cannot bear them now").

The coming of the Holy Ghost was necessary not only to give them the power they needed but also to help them to remember and to guide them into all truth. That meant that they didn't know the things they needed to know pertaining to the kingdom that was about to be launched. They lacked both power and knowledge.

### **Spirit and Truth**

Jesus said in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Truth and Spirit must always remain in balance. Had the disciples received only power they would have charged around making a mess, not knowing what they were doing. Power plus ignorance is a dangerous thing. On the other hand if they had received a knowledge of truth but no power what good would that have done? They would have been helpless to deliver souls held captive by sin and Satan's kingdom, helpless to impart the very life of God that men might be born into His

eternal kingdom. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” I Corinthians 15:50.

It is pretty evident that the understanding of the disciples concerning God’s kingdom was very limited prior to Pentecost. In view of God’s timetable and method for leading them into all truth, the question to ask is this: What was their teaching about the kingdom after Pentecost? Think about it!

What they learned after Pentecost was really a continuation of the teaching of Jesus — “... he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you.” John 16:15. After Pentecost the disciples were finally equipped to understand the Kingdom of God. No one, prior to this was so equipped!

Even Paul, who was not a believer until later on, was taught by Jesus. Galatians 1:11-12 says, “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

If we want an accurate picture of God’s kingdom we don’t need to try to unravel the Old Testament through study and reasoning: we need to prayerfully consider the teachings in the New Testament of those God ordained and equipped to convey His revealed truth about it. The Old Testament can only be understood in the higher and clearer light of the New Testament, and then only as God opens our understanding. What if our minds are closed, made captive by tradition?

You will search the writings of the New Testament apostles in vain for any expectation of an earthly Jewish kingdom. They preached a Christ who reigned then at the Father’s right hand above all other authority and who commanded men everywhere to repent and obey the gospel. They preached that he would one day return and bring about a fiery end to this present world, judge both righteous and wicked and bring forth new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Is this your hope? Ephesians 1:15-23, Acts 17:30-31, II Thessalonians 1:7-10, II Peter 3:10-14.

## — CHAPTER 9 —

# The True Significance of Pentecost

I believe that we cannot overstate what a major turning point Pentecost represented in the history of God's dealings with man. All that went before was preparation, anticipation; all that has followed has been fulfillment, action. God's people passed from mystery to revelation, from looking forward to the kingdom to living in it.

Our eternal redemption had been accomplished through Christ and He had been elevated to the throne. The devil had forever lost his ground to accuse God's sheep. The battle of the ages had been fought at the cross unseen by natural eyes. As John later wrote of this in Revelation 12 he said, "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. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." Rev. 12:10-11. Notice that John included "the Kingdom of our God" in his list of things that are come.

Pentecost was one of the major Jewish feasts, taking place fifty days after the Sabbath of Passover week. It was therefore one of those times when Jews who had been scattered throughout many foreign nations over the centuries would travel to Jerusalem to join in the observance.

With so many Jews gathered together in one place it was the perfect occasion for God to speak to them. He had a spiritual harvest to gather. There was a remnant to call out and separate to Himself before judgment fell.

### In the Temple

Tradition places the outpouring of the Spirit in the upper room mentioned in Acts 1:13. However, although the disciples may have lodged there, this is not the setting for Acts 2. In Luke's first account of the ascension of Jesus to heaven (Luke 24:50-53) we read these words: "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

Notice where they spent their time — in the temple. If they were there "continually," where else would they have been at nine o'clock on the morning of a

major Jewish feast? And where would the Jews, to whom God wished to speak, have been at that hour?

The first thing that got the people's attention was "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind" that "filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). The word "house" is used by Stephen in Acts 7:47 to refer to the temple that Solomon built.

The next thing that occurred was the appearance of a fire that separated and settled upon each of them. Verse 4 tells us what accompanied these manifestations: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

## **The Twelve**

Another tradition about Pentecost is that verse 4 involved the 120 disciples of Acts 1:15. This is not so. Although there was a total of 120 disciples in Jerusalem at that time, the whole focus at this point was upon the apostles.

Acts 1:2 refers to the commandments Christ had given "unto the apostles whom he had chosen." In the following verses we read, "To whom also he shewed himself alive ... being seen of them ... being assembled together with them, commanded them ... ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." This clear focus on the apostles continues with only the one passing reference to the 120.

Chapter one ends with a reference to the apostles. Notice the personal references in the following verses: "... they were all with one accord in one place ... the house where they were sitting ... there appeared unto them ... it sat upon each of them ... they were all filled with the Holy Ghost ..."

In Acts 2:14, who stood with Peter? The 120? No! "But Peter, standing up with the eleven ...." Is this not plain! Although this may seem like a technicality, I believe it is an example of tradition clouding truth.

## **God's Order**

There is an order to the way God does things. In establishing His kingdom He first anointed His Son, the King and Head of the Church. Then, at the appropriate time the anointing fell upon the apostles, specially chosen with a unique calling to be part of the foundation of the Church. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul refers to the household of God as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone."

There is a spirit in man that wants to believe that all men are the same, that anyone who has enough faith and dedication can be anointed to go forth and do great things. It is almost as though God has written us a "blank check" and we are in charge. This is not so. God is in charge and no man can be what he is not.

John 15:16 — Jesus speaking to the disciples — says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit,

and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

The outpouring of Pentecost belonged as uniquely to the apostles as did the anointing at the Jordan river belong uniquely to Jesus. God meant to exalt them before the people not because of who they were as men or to honor them for their spiritual dedication but to fulfill His own sovereign purpose in calling them.

Man cannot alter the gifts and callings of God and he is foolish to try. The reason Christianity is in the condition it is in today is that men have brushed these things aside and walked in the vain imaginations of their own hearts all the while retaining Christ as a figurehead.

The sober warning of Matt. 7:21-23 was directed to zealous and sincere religious people who called Jesus Lord but refused to actually do the will of his Father. All of the religious efforts of such men will perish with them. Jesus is Lord. Everything that does not flow directly from His Lordship comes from some other source and is headed for the fire.

Even genuine believers may build out of wood, hay and stubble and suffer loss, yet be saved themselves. I Cor. 3:12-15. What we do must be directed from heaven or it will not last. Our zealous efforts, plans, ideas and innovations are a poor substitute for God’s will and direction. Imagine if each of the various parts of your body were to act independently of each other and, most importantly, apart from the brain: there might be a lot of movement but it would be pretty useless!

With the outpouring of the Spirit upon the apostles, everything changed! Peter, who had so recently denied the Lord in weakness and fear, now preached boldly to the very people who had killed Christ.

### **Prophecy Fulfilled**

It is very noteworthy that Peter portrayed all that was happening as a direct fulfillment of the words of the prophets. The outpouring of God’s Spirit was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2.

He quotes David’s prophetic words about the resurrection of Christ and of God’s oath to David “that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne,” Acts 2:30. He then adds the eyewitness testimony of the apostles that Christ had indeed been raised from the dead.

What was taking place on that very occasion was directly related to the ascension of Christ to the throne. It represented the first earthly exercise of the high authority now granted to Him by the Father (Matt. 28:18). Acts 2:33 says, “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”

The centerpiece of Peter’s message was the bold proclamation of the Lordship of Christ. He did not portray this Lordship as a mere theological doctrine but as a practical reality. It was not a rule confined to heaven but one that extended to earth

as well. Christ had acted to interrupt an important Jewish feast, to seize their attention with the reality of who He was.

By the Spirit He anointed Peter as His earthly mouthpiece while simultaneously convicting the hearers of their sinfulness before God and of their rebellion against the One He had set upon David's throne. All of their religious preconceptions were swept away by spiritual reality. The throne of David had been reestablished — in heaven and not on earth as they had expected. David's Son ruled and this kingdom would never end!

### **What Shall We Do?**

This is one gospel message in which the sinners gave the “invitation!” Convicted by the Spirit that Peter's words were true, they asked what they should do. Listen to Peter's inspired instruction. He gave them two things to do which would lead to two specific results.

First, they were to repent. True repentance is a total change of direction in thought, desire and action. It is something that can happen only when a sovereign God works directly with the heart (Acts 11:18). It is a change of mind and heart about the past that forever alters one's future course. It is the unconditional surrender of a rebel cornered by a conquering King. It is abandoning the devil's kingdom for God's. It is a willingness to give up your life to the rightful rule of Christ that you might possess His life instead.

### **In the Name of Jesus Christ**

The second thing they were to do was to be baptized every one in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a large subject in its own right but in essence it is the outward expression of true faith and repentance. It is laying down one's life in death. It is as though a sinner, standing before the cross, were to cast his lot with Christ, literally joining Him on the cross, turning his back on the world, dying, being buried and raised again with Him to a new life. Rom. 6:3-5. Being put under the water is a picture of burial and being lifted out of the water is a picture of resurrection. This must become a personal reality. Peter said, “... every one of you ....”

Baptism is “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This is plain in every single New Testament example from Pentecost on. Many readers will immediately object and say, “What about Matt. 28:19?” Consider this: either the apostles were wrong, disregarding Christ's command 100% of the time, or else many today have misunderstood Matt. 28:19, using it as a kind of formula. Which is it? Were the apostles wrong? I don't think so!

“In the name of” someone means “by his authority.” Jesus Christ, by the Father given a “name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9), is the highest authority in the kingdom of God. The sceptre is in His hands and it is to Him we must bow.

The very heart of Christ's commission from the Father was the salvation of those chosen in Him from the foundation of the world. John 17 records the prayer of Jesus as he prepared for the last leg of his earthly journey — the cross, the grave, the resurrection, the throne. His prayer began with these words: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." John 17:1-2.

The process that translates men and women from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son is absolutely heaven-directed. Men cannot make it happen any other way no matter how zealous they may be. The Father, the ultimate authority, has given His Son both the knowledge of His will and the means to get it done.

The Son in turn carries out the Father's will by granting various commissions to chosen men, giving to each the measure of the gift of Christ needed to fulfill their commission (John 15:16, Acts 9:15, Eph. 4:7, II Tim. 4:7). When Jesus was on earth, He yielded His vessel to the Father within, who empowered His words and actions. This joint effort — Jesus, and the Father who dwelt in Him — resulted in a genuine expression of the Father on earth, not only in word, but also in life and power.

This is why it was observed early in Christ's ministry that "he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes." Mark 1:22. The scribes learned their religion from other men; Jesus was sent by the Father with all the authority of heaven behind him. Demons weren't bothered in the least by the religion of the scribes but they knew who Jesus was!

For men to be saved today, someone must be sent to them just as Jesus was sent by the Father. That is why Jesus said to his disciples in John 20:21, "... Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Though individual gifts and callings vary according to the measure of the gift of Christ, the principle is ever the same.

### **No Volunteers**

Suppose I were to decide one day that I would go to the United Nations and volunteer to represent the United States. Do you suppose they would pay any attention to me? Of course not! I might be very sincere and patriotic but the fact remains that I have not been given the authority to do that!

How much more is this true of God's kingdom! His servants are not volunteers: they are chosen. Yet how many who are busily engaged in their religion actually have a commission from heaven? That is the central picture of Pentecost: the enthroned Christ empowering chosen men to call the elect from darkness to light by imparting to them the Spirit of truth, faith and repentance and finally the very

life of the kingdom itself. In submitting to the hands of the apostles in baptism they were submitting to the hands of Christ Himself extended from the throne.

About three thousand people on that great day did the two things Peter told them to do: they repented, and they put their repentance and faith into action through baptism. What was the result? Was their baptism just something symbolic, a mere testimony, a religious ceremony?

Not according to Peter! He told them to repent and be baptized “for the forgiveness of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Acts 2:38. Think of the occasion! This was the birthday of the church. Was Peter carried away with carnal enthusiasm when he gave these instructions or did Christ mean for him to say what he did? I believe he got it right!

### **Forgiveness**

In Isaiah 33:24, we find a prophecy concerning Zion that says, “... the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.” Forgiveness of sins is a benefit of citizenship in the kingdom of God. It is not available any other way. Man loves to delude himself that he can be forgiven by God and escape his sins without truly repenting and giving up his life in total surrender.

Religion today is full of various forms of “easy-believism,” a so-called “belief” in Jesus that sidesteps true repentance and surrender. What kind of “belief” is it that stops short of that? Do you imagine that you can reach over into God’s kingdom and claim some of the benefits of heavenly citizenship while remaining a citizen of this present world in your heart? Do not be deceived!

You are either a citizen of heaven or a citizen of this world. There is no middle ground. Either Christ is your Lord and His people your eternal family or you are yet in your sins. It is 100 percent or nothing. And citizenship in heaven is not something you try for 30 days to see how it works out. It is forever.

Peter certainly didn’t water down the gospel. Christ was on the throne. Either men surrendered to Him unconditionally or they remained in rebellion. It was a “package deal.” Forgiveness of sins was part of that package.

### **In Us!**

So was the gift of the Holy Ghost. In John 7:37-39 we read, “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)” Notice the clear connection between the giving of the Holy Ghost and Jesus being glorified.

Through Isaiah the Lord prophesied, “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” Isaiah 12:3.

Jesus spoke to the woman at the well in John 4:14 and said, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

In John 14:17 where Jesus spoke of the Spirit of Truth to the disciples he said, “... he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” Notice the distinction! During the years in which the disciples walked with Jesus, God’s Spirit was with them, overshadowing, setting them apart, and, as the need arose, even anointing them to perform miracles. Yet, at this point, the Spirit did not live in them. They were natural men, chosen, overshadowed and helped by God’s Spirit in preparation for what was to come. Ezekiel had prophesied, “... I will put my Spirit within you ....” Ez. 36:26.

### **A New Era**

This is at the heart of what made Pentecost such a tremendously significant occasion. It marked the dawn of a brand new era. Now, instead of believers looking forward to a promised day of salvation, that day had come! Individual believers could now be recipients of God’s Spirit, being begotten of His very life, a life that could never die! What a promise!

The Holy Spirit is the very life and fabric of the kingdom of God, the binding and unifying factor that joins its citizens to one another and sets them apart from the kingdom of darkness. The Spirit is heaven’s seal upon the heart of every one of God’s elect, the promise that what He has begun He will finish! Eph. 1:13-14. Phil. 1:6. Heb. 12:2.

I Cor. 6:17 says, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” Eph. 4:4 says, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”

The religious world is largely the product of many other spirits at work to deceive, confuse, divide and generally to counterfeit the work of God’s Spirit. In spite of this, Christ has faithfully called and imparted the one true Spirit to the elect remnant from Pentecost until now, as Peter said: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

Men may bind religious movements together with doctrines and creeds, with traditions, with organizations, with a thousand and one humanly devised instruments. However, the fact remains that “... if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Rom. 8:9. Religious conversion and salvation are two very different things.

What sets the true children of the kingdom apart from the merely religious is the reality of Christ on the inside. Men may appear righteous to other men but God looks on the heart. What we are really speaking about is the new birth, that heavenly birth that makes us new creatures in Christ Jesus. II Cor. 5:17.

The baptism Peter preached was not a private thing leading to an independent relationship with Christ in the sky. The Christ who reigned on high had now, by the Spirit, inhabited His body, the Church, and baptism vitally joined them to that body. I Cor. 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” That is why Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

### **The Sign of Spirit Baptism**

This is the true sign of the baptism of the Spirit: it makes you one with God’s people. If you mention “Pentecost” to most in our day their mind immediately goes to “tongues.” Pentecost is not about tongues! Let me repeat that. Pentecost is not about tongues!

God used a special miracle to capture the attention of the Jews so He could speak to them. The apostles were enabled by the Spirit to speak in languages they did not know, languages that those present understood. There is no record that those who were baptised on that day spoke in tongues. Rather, the baptism of the Spirit resulted in a community of believers that enjoyed the greatest spirit of unity the world has ever seen. Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-33.

Years later when a controversy arose over Peter preaching to the household of Cornelius, a Gentile, Peter said, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.” Acts 11:15.

Why do you suppose Peter said, “as on us at the beginning?” Simply this: the manifestation of speaking in tongues was not the norm. Peter had to go all the way back to Pentecost to find a comparable experience. The reason for tongues at the house of Cornelius was that this marked a turning point in the life of the young church. It was a radical idea for Jews to embrace Gentiles as spiritual brethren and God simply bore witness in an unusual way.

Speaking in tongues is a legitimate spiritual gift, albeit a relatively minor and largely private one. I Cor. 12:14. The emphasis upon tongues in the twentieth century, an emphasis all out of proportion to the witness of scripture, has been, I am persuaded, a great device of Satan to misdirect the church. It has been a part of the flood out of the dragon’s mouth designed to carry away the “woman” — the true church. Rev. 12:15.

It has produced generations of religious sign-seekers who have no real faith, who are strangers to the new birth. It has opened up countless opportunities for religious spirits — demons — to counterfeit the true Spirit of God and to bring people into spiritual captivity.

Thank God there is also a remnant among those with this teaching, in spite of it, that really know Him, who have genuine faith towards Him that He has honored.

However, God only knows how many counterfeit experiences there have been for every true one! May God help us to seek Him from the heart and be honest with the Word!

### **The Birthday of the Kingdom**

Pentecost was the birthday of the church and the birthday of the kingdom of God for they are one and the same. God moved supernaturally to establish a community, a fellowship, based, not on culture or tradition or creed, but on a Spirit that lived in every individual member. This produced a relationship unlike any other in human history, the sharing of the very life of God Himself.

This relationship which men began to experience at Pentecost began first between the Father and His Son. Jesus said many things about his relationship with the Father during his time on earth. One of the clearest and simplest is his answer to Philip's desire to see the Father. In John 14:9-11 he said: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet has thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."

The essence of what he said is contained in the expression, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me." I would not pretend to be able to begin to plumb the depths of such an expression but I believe that we can see in their relationship something of what is meant. Words flowed from the mouth of Jesus of Nazareth, yet they were the words of His Father. Deeds flowed from the hands of Jesus, yet they were the deeds of His Father who lived inside of Him. Although they remained Father and Son, they were one in every way that mattered.

We see in them a union of two beings, one greater than the other (John 14:28, John 10:29). This union is much deeper than a mere partnership as we know it. In a human partnership two or more people join themselves together in some common cause. Each contributes something and each expects something in return. Each one retains his individuality and has a private independent life outside of the partnership.

Human nature is centered in self and what self wants. Partnerships are temporary arrangements whose purpose is to gratify self more effectively than the partners could do separately. The same self that joins men together also drives them apart as the needs of self dictate.

There is nothing temporary about the relationship between the Father and His Son. It is eternal. The common cause is the outworking of God's eternal purpose. To that end there is a total union between Father and Son of heart, mind, will and action.

We can never say, “I had an encounter with the Father, but not with the Son,” or “with the Son, but not the Father.” There is but one Spirit. If you encounter God at all, you encounter both Father and Son in Spirit form.

Consider Romans 8:9-11. Verse 9 speaks of the “Spirit of God” dwelling in us then immediately expresses it as “having ... the Spirit of Christ.” In verse 10 it is “Christ ... in you” and “the Spirit is life.” In verse 11 it is “the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead” and, again, “his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” All of these expressions refer to the same thing — being born of God and having His Spirit residing on the inside. Remember — there is one Spirit.

In John 14:23 Jesus speaks of the Comforter that would come in these terms: “... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” We will come! Two Persons, one Spirit, the same life, eternally joined together in a living union. This is the essence of God’s kingdom.

### **Fellowship**

Properly understood, “fellowship” is a wonderful word to describe this union. We often use the word “fellowship” very casually as though fellowship were just a certain kind of activity as in, “We got together and had some fellowship.” Activity may indeed be an expression of fellowship, but fellowship is much more: it is a relationship that exists without regard to activity or the lack thereof. Proper activity between those in fellowship is certainly important to the nurture and strengthening of that relationship but the relationship exists whether they are in the same room or on opposite sides of the world!

When the Day of Pentecost dawned, a perfect fellowship existed between the Father and His Son. At about nine o’clock in the morning that fellowship was extended to embrace the apostles! They were brought in that they in turn might become instruments in its further extension.

Listen to the words of John — one who was involved that day — recorded in I John 1:3: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Do you see their role? “We’ve been brought into union with the Father and His Son and now we want you to join us!”

And so the very life of God flowed out through Peter and into the hearts of about 3000 others and by the end of the Day of Pentecost, the Kingdom had been launched with great power. Truly a nation — the “holy nation” of I Peter 2:9, the nation bringing forth the fruits of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 21:43) — had been born “at once” as Isaiah had foreseen (Isaiah 66:8) — “... as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children.”

This fellowship, this spiritual union that is the essence of the Kingdom is illustrated by Jesus himself in John 15:1-8 in terms of a vine and its branches. In

this parable Jesus is the vine and his disciples are branches. A vine and its branches form a living union, sharing a common life. No part is complete and sufficient in itself. Together, the various parts form a whole greater than the mere sum of the parts.

Yet, merely gathering the parts together in one place is not enough. Only in union can the ultimate purpose be achieved — bearing fruit. The vine cannot do this by itself and neither can the branches. Independence will not do. There is an interdependence among all parts of the vine that alone produces fruit. It is the life that is in the vine flowing freely and continually into the branches that does the job.

Suppose Jesus had begun to act independently of the Father, relying on his own wisdom, working out his own plans? Suppose the disciples had ignored Christ's instruction to wait for the Holy Spirit and had instead returned to Jerusalem to plan a campaign to “win the world for Jesus”?! Thank God they all understood where their wisdom, power, purpose and life came from and Who the Planner was and yielded their vessels accordingly. Jesus could do nothing of himself. Neither could the disciples. Neither can we!

### **The Body**

The most prominent scriptural illustration of spiritual union is, of course, the human body. It is obvious that the various parts of our bodies — the eyes, ears, hands, feet, etc. — are not designed by our Creator to function independently of each other. Neither are they designed to be directly connected to the head yet not to each other. The function of each part of the body is unique and necessary to the completeness of the whole.

The various parts do not choose their roles: they are born to be what they are and need only maturity and exercise. An ear does not one day decide it would rather be an eye and start trying to “see”! Nor is there any school where it can take “eye” lessons.

The eye cannot get mad at the ear and say, “You go your way and I’ll go mine!” Neither can it say, “I don’t need you.” I Cor. 12:21. Nor does the ear say, “Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body.” I Cor. 12:16.

The fact is that none of the members of the body chose either to be what they are or the other members with which they have become associated. The various abilities are designed to complement each other and to make a whole functioning body.

These are simple and obvious things, yet trying to relate what the Word teaches about the Body of Christ to the way religion actually functions in practice is a pretty sad thing. The reality is that the “concept” of the Body of Christ is generally treated as a mere theological principle, a principle that has little bearing on how things are done in “real life.”

Was Paul's teaching concerning the Body of Christ meant to be only a vague picture of the "invisible" or "universal" church with no practical implications or have the churches of today departed far far away from the religion of the apostles? What would happen in your church if the Lord dealt with hypocrisy as He did in the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? Would anyone be left alive?

I believe that God mightily overshadowed the young church in its very earliest years in part as a continuation of the special witness to Israel begun through the earthly ministry of His Son. Thousands were "harvested" as a result of the anointing upon the apostles' preaching and the miracles that were done. Perfect selfless unity prevailed. It was a special time, part of God's sovereign purpose.

However, most of the remaining pages of the New Testament paint a very different picture of a church beset with problems. The apostles had to contend with sins of every kind, strife and division, false doctrine, false ministries and in general with a church rapidly falling away from its initial purity. What was happening?

## — CHAPTER 10 —

# God's Kingdom in This World

Pentecost was the beginning of an amazing period of power, growth, and perfect unity that is unique in history. So pure was the church during this period that the first hint of sin — the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 — resulted in God striking them dead.

Yet within the pages of the New Testament we find the church in decline, coping with serious problems of every kind. “The New Testament Church” is, in many minds today, a great ideal to be lifted up and sought after. “If we could just be like the New Testament Church,” they say. Some even use the phrase of themselves as if to say, “We’re not like the other churches: we’re a ‘New Testament’ church!”

The question is: which New Testament Church do you desire to be like? Corinth? While it is true that they came behind in no gift (I Cor. 1:7), it is also true that they were very carnal with envying and strife and divisions. They were guilty of tolerating a very grievous case of fornication that was common knowledge. Some of them took their disputes against brethren before civil authorities. They struggled with questions about sex and marriage. They exercised their liberty with no concern for weaker brethren. Some had turned the Lord’s Supper into a self-centered drunken picnic. There was a good deal of ignorance and confusion in their use of spiritual gifts. Some of them were teaching that there was no resurrection!

This was a “New Testament Church”! Is this what you desire? Read the Word! You will find a long list of problems the apostles had to cope with. Converted Jews had a hard time leaving their traditions behind. Converted Gentiles were fresh out of heathen darkness and certainly didn’t become instant “spiritual giants.”

We do indeed need to recover the understanding of truth the apostles had, leaping over all the centuries of tradition and error. However, “New Testament churches” were far from ideal. In fact John the apostle wrote of one church whose leader, Diotrophes, wouldn’t even receive him! III John 9. Can you imagine being part of a church whose preacher wouldn’t let one of the original apostles through the door!

### **The Real Question**

The truth is that the people in New Testament churches were just people — like us — with plenty of needs. The real question to ask is this: how is it that the church

immediately following Pentecost was so pure, filled as it was with new converts? Had you ever thought about it before from that standpoint?

I believe that the answer lies in the prophecy of 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24-27. This prophecy occurred during the 70 year Babylonian captivity of the Jews and contains the words of Gabriel, an angel sent to give Daniel “skill and understanding” (verse 22). I am including a discussion of this in part because of a widespread and very odd interpretation of this passage. Many readers will be familiar with this teaching and will, I hope, profit from this discussion. If this doesn’t include you, don’t get too bogged down with it!

The prophecy concerned a period of “70 weeks” that were “determined” upon Daniel’s people and upon “thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy” (verse 24).

There is general agreement that these were not weeks of days but rather weeks of years. This period was to begin with “the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.” The time frame from that commandment to “the Messiah the Prince” was to be a total of 69 weeks (7 weeks and 62 weeks) or 483 years.

A little over 100 years ago a very novel interpretation of this passage arose regarding the remaining week of Gabriel’s prophecy — the 70th. According to this interpretation there was to be a gap — almost 2000 years so far! — between the 69th and 70th weeks. In other words God started a “prophetic clock” when the rebuilding of Jerusalem was commanded, stopped it after 483 years, and the clock still hasn’t restarted! Yet the period of time measured by this clock is supposed to be 490 years. So far over 2400 years have elapsed!

In the United States many households have a common measuring device called a yardstick. A yard is slightly less than a meter and is divided into 36 inches. Years ago I read a wonderful illustration of this novel understanding of Daniel’s 70th week that involved a yardstick.

Suppose that we were to saw the yardstick into two pieces at the 35th inch, then connect the two pieces with a very flexible elastic band. We could then go around measuring things with our special “yardstick.” We could place one end of it at the beginning of whatever we were measuring and stretch it out to the other end. Thus everything we “measured” would be one yard! We would all be 36 inches tall! There would also be 36 inches in a mile! Do you see the problem?

A yard is a fixed measure of 36 inches from beginning to end. By placing a highly stretchable gap in it we have totally destroyed the meaning of the measurement, one yard or 36 inches. God declared a period of 490 years. I believe He meant 490 years, not 2400 plus and still counting!

This strange teaching concerning the 70th week is so widespread in our day that great numbers of professing Christians have come to believe it without question.

The 70th week is supposed to be a seven year period known as the tribulation in which a world ruler, the Antichrist is to make a treaty with Israel and then break it after 3 1/2 years. Are you aware that this highly questionable interpretation of Daniel 9:27 is the sole basis for the belief in a 7 year tribulation? Yet “everyone knows” that the Bible teaches a 7 year tribulation! Why? They’ve heard it so often that it must be true!

We have already quoted above from Daniel 9:24 which states what God had declared He would accomplish in the 70 weeks. His purpose had to do with dealing decisively with sin, establishing everlasting righteousness, sealing up or “fulfilling” the vision of the prophets, and anointing the most Holy — at least one translation says “the holy of holies.”

This is a perfect description of what Christ accomplished through His death on the cross and His ascension to the right hand of the Father. Hebrews 8:1-10:22 goes into this in great detail. Christ established a new covenant that did what no Old Testament sacrifice could ever do. In a single act He offered “one sacrifice for sins forever.” Heb. 10:12.

His blood was not carried into an earthly tabernacle but into heaven itself where it forever stands between us and the wrath of God. Heb. 9:24 says, “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” See also Heb. 9:12.

The first 69 weeks brings us “unto the Messiah the Prince” — that is, to the beginning of Christ’s ministry. At this point verse 24 had not been fulfilled. That would come in the 70th week.

Daniel 9:26 states several things that happen “after” the 62 weeks (which follows the 7 weeks for a total of 69). The verse does not say how long after, just “after.” The first thing is that Messiah was to be “cut off, but not for himself.” This is a clear reference to the death of Christ and the fact that He died for us and not for Himself.

Then the verse speaks of “the people of the prince” that would destroy the city and sanctuary and the fact that “desolations” were “determined.” We have already discussed God’s judgment of Jerusalem carried out by a Roman army under Titus culminating in the total destruction of Jerusalem — including the temple — in 70 A.D. Jesus Himself had graphically warned that the time would come when an army would encircle Jerusalem and lay it even with the ground (Luke 21:20-24). He even referred to this as Jerusalem’s “desolation.”

Daniel 9:27 is a key: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

Now we return specifically to the last of the 70 weeks. The “he” referred to is Messiah. The first thing he was to do was to “confirm the covenant.”

Notice that Gabriel said “the” covenant, not “a” covenant. What is the significance of this? According to popular teaching this covenant is to be a treaty between Antichrist and Israel. Nothing had been said about any such treaty up to this point. If popular teaching were true he would have said something like “and he will make ‘a’ covenant ....”

By calling it “the” covenant Gabriel was letting us know that he was referring back to something he had already said — verse 24! Verse 24 describes perfectly the new covenant promised by the prophets and revealed everywhere in the pages of the New Testament.

This covenant is the foundation of the Kingdom of God. It forms the only basis upon which sinners could be set free from sin, and enter into righteousness and life — forever! The blood of bulls and goats could never do that. That is why Daniel 9:27 also says, “... he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease.” There was no further need for the types and shadows of old testament sacrifices once Christ had offered the sacrifice that was “once for all.”

Are you aware that according to popular teaching Jews will once again offer animal sacrifices in a rebuilt temple?! This will supposedly occur not only during a tribulation period but also in a yet-to-come kingdom age with Jesus ruling from the same temple! Can you imagine Jesus, in the light of the Book of Hebrews, presiding over a system of animal sacrifices in a future kingdom age? Yet this bizarre concept cannot be divorced from the idea of a Jewish future so widely taught! Think about it! Picture a lion lying down with a lamb and someone coming to lead the lamb away to sacrifice! If you happened to be a lamb, such a millennium would be more like the great tribulation!

Verses 26 and 27 of Daniel 9 cover the same period of time. Verse 26 gives a general overview of this period whereas verse 27 focuses first upon the 70th week.

### **The Covenant Confirmed**

During the 70th week all of the purposes declared in Daniel 9:24 were fulfilled. This seven year period began with the baptism of Jesus and John’s declaration: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). It continued through the three and a half years of Christ’s ministry to the cross (the “midst of the week”). Then it continued for the first three and a half years of the early church.

During this unique seven year period the new covenant was confirmed with great signs and wonders as God mightily overshadowed first His Son and then the church. So great was God’s presence in the young church that no taint of sin was allowed to corrupt it. Acts 4:33 says, “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”

It was that “great grace” that enabled them to give such a powerful witness and to be so perfectly one. Satan would love to have gotten in. He tried by influencing

Ananias and Sapphira to “lie to the Holy Ghost” (Acts 5:3) but his attempt was unsuccessful as God struck them dead.

Following this judgment and the widespread fear of God that resulted, God magnified the apostles before the people and multitudes more believed. People brought those who were sick into the streets hoping Peter’s shadow would pass over them. Others brought sick and demon-possessed people from other cities and they were healed every one.

When the Sadducees were upset by all of this and put the apostles in prison an angel came, let them out, and sent them back to the temple and said, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20).

Nothing Satan did could either stop or corrupt what was happening. For seven special years, beginning with Christ, God bore a mighty witness to Israel. The remnant was called out and brought to faith. However, in spite of this witness and in fulfillment of Gabriel’s words, we see the spiritual condition of the nation as a whole characterized by “the overspreading of abominations.” They were unaware that they were heading straight for a desolation that God had “determined.” Our world today is on the same road and the end is near at hand.

### **The Kingdom in This World**

And so we see that the kingdom of God came with power as Jesus had promised (Mark 9:1). What was to be the future course of the kingdom in this world? What was its relationship with this world to be? What lies in the future for the kingdom? for the world?

When Jesus went about preaching the gospel — the good news of the kingdom — he generally employed parables. As someone has said, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. When the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke to the people in parables, he said, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Matt. 13:11). In this we see the Sovereignty of God, revealing His mysteries according to His own will, His own timetable. Truly we are dependent upon Him!

A number of these parables are contained in Matt. 13. They portray many truths concerning the kingdom that was shortly to come. No doubt later on, as the apostles faced the challenges of a young growing church, they said, “Well, Jesus said it would be like this.”

For example, from the parable of the sower, they knew that the “word of the kingdom” was like a seed that fell on different kinds of ground. Of the four types of people spoken of by Jesus, only one was “good ground.” The other three types represented people who heard, but never truly entered the kingdom.

Two of these types, however, seemingly responded and became believers. In both types their basic unbelief of heart later became apparent, the one through lack of endurance and the other through love of earthly things.

The disciples had certainly had opportunity to witness this principle in action during the ministry of Jesus. At certain times there were crowds who followed him but in John 6 we find many being offended at his teaching. John 6:66 says, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

We also see Judas, one of the twelve, who aroused no suspicion in his fellow disciples as they followed Jesus and even went out preaching and healing the sick. Yet, at heart, Judas was an unbeliever who loved money.

Jesus was never fooled by the unbelief around him. He knew that people were drawn to him for many reasons other than God-given faith. John 6:64 records the last comment Jesus made to those who went back and an observation by John: "But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him."

Yet Jesus didn't hastily act to rid himself of unbelievers. There were periods of time in which many of those around him were unbelievers and he knew it. In process of time and by various means the unbelief became evident, yet it was obviously within the will and purpose of God at times to have a "mixed multitude" following Jesus. The disciples themselves were "mixed" right up until the last supper when Judas went out to betray Jesus.

### **Every Kind**

This mixture foreshadowed what was to happen in the church later on. One parable that illustrates this is in Matt. 13:47-48: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."

Note that this parable describes the kingdom during the course of this present world. The net cast into the sea describes the preaching of the gospel throughout the world. At best it gathers of "every kind." When the gathering was done there was to be a separation, the good gathered "into vessels" and the bad discarded.

The explanation by Jesus is in verses 49-50: "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

We see here the kingdom encompassing a mixture in this present world. The separation takes place "at the end of the world." Angels do the separating. The wicked who are removed are cast into a furnace of fire. The "wailing and gnashing of teeth" certainly conveys to us the sense of anguish and regret among the lost but also reveals their deception. Only when it is too late do they realize the truth.

The popular concept of a future "Kingdom Age" on this earth does not fit in with what Jesus said at all. This, along with other parables, portrays a very different picture.

Scofield was aware of these difficulties and his answer was to attempt to draw a distinction between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God.” This allowed him to acknowledge the church as the “kingdom of God” — supposedly a mystery unknown to the prophets — and yet maintains his belief in a future Jewish kingdom. I only mention this because some readers may have been exposed to this teaching.

It does not take very much for the honest reader of the Word to see that this is a false distinction. There is but one kingdom composed of believing Jews and Gentiles. Never will the “middle wall of partition” be re-established. Eph. 2:14-15.

For those who may wish to look further into this, compare the following scriptures. Matt. 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 5:3 and Luke 6:20; Matt. 8:11 and Luke 13:29; Matt. 10:7 and Luke 9:2; Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16; Matt. 13:11, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10; Matt. 13:24 and Mark 4:26; Matt. 13:31 and Mark 4:30; Matt. 13:33 and Luke 13:20. Matt. 19:23-24 uses the two expressions interchangeably within the scope of two verses! See also Mark 10:23-25 and Luke 18:24-25. Obviously the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God” are interchangeable expressions for the one kingdom.

The parable that most clearly portrays the mixture of believers and unbelievers is the parable of the wheat and the tares. This parable contains a wealth of truth and paints a wonderful overall picture of the age in which we live. We shall try, as the Lord enables, to bring into focus some of the truths which bear on our present discussion. The parable itself is contained in Matt. 13:24-30 and is well worth reproducing here:

“Another parable put he forth unto them saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay: lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers. Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

One of the best things about this particular parable is that we have the explanation of it given to us by Jesus himself. This is recorded for us in Matt. 13:37-43:

“He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the

tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

There is so much in this parable that it is difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps a good place to begin is to note once again that this is a parable of the kingdom — that is, it is meant to teach us about God’s kingdom in this world.

The kingdom is portrayed as the planting and harvesting of a crop. The crop is planted in this present world and grows up amidst the wicked. At the end of the world a separation takes place and each kind is harvested, the wicked for the fire and the righteous for glory.

We see then a kingdom beginning here somewhat insignificant and indistinct, growing, then bursting forth into full glory following the end of the world. From that point on we know from the scriptures that it will continue forever, nevermore to be corrupted or hindered by this present darkness.

### **The Reign of Christ**

A kingdom is ruled by a king. The king is clearly “the Son of Man,” an expression Jesus repeatedly used of himself. This world is described as “his field,” that is, He is the legal owner. Remember, Christ has been given all authority “in heaven and in earth.” Matt. 28:18. Note that His authority includes earth.

The devil may be the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), that is, over this present evil world order, but Christ is far above him. Remember that God “... 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: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” Eph. 1:20-23.

Christ’s authority over all things is “to the church,” that is, God’s people and their welfare are the focus of His rule. That is the same focus in the parable: He is raising a crop of wheat. He even refrains from prematurely separating the wheat from the tares lest the wheat be uprooted.

When a farmer buys land for farming he is not interested merely in owning pretty fields. His interest is in the crops he will be able to raise in those fields. Christ has no interest in this present world, especially in the condition it is in, other than to fulfill the sovereign commission of His Father: there is a crop to plant and raise.

This parable encompasses a time frame from the beginning of the preaching of the gospel all the way to the beginning of eternity to come. It describes in simple terms the nature, purpose, and result of the reign of Christ with respect to this

earth. When the parable ends, the wicked are gone and only a glorious kingdom remains.

Multitudes today have been taught a concept of a future Messianic age — a concept borrowed from apostate Judaism — in which Christ will reign bodily from Jerusalem over the nations of this world. Wicked men will be forced by various means to live in peace and righteousness. A world that has refused the gospel will supposedly then be given the opportunity to “believe” in a Christ they can see and touch who reigns in manifest glory. Don’t believe it!

The only opportunity men will ever have is to repent and believe the gospel during this present age. Men must bow the knee to Christ here and now if they are to have any hope of the world to come. And what a hope it is: “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ”! Rom. 8:17.

It is difficult for one who has much exposure to the Messianic Age doctrine to conceive of the reign of Christ in any terms other than a visible and bodily reign. Consider the devil: the Bible calls him the god of this world. As such he reigns over the kingdom of darkness, yet he lives in no earthly palace and can neither be seen nor touched. He indeed rules, yet he rules from the unseen realm. His kingdom consists of the demonic host — evil angels who fell from heaven with him — and the world of lost mankind who blindly cooperate with and submit to his rule.

Christ’s rule is just as real. He has at his disposal “an innumerable company of angels,” “the spirits of just men made perfect,” as well as “the church which is his body.” Heb. 12:22-23, Eph. 1:22-23. The kingdom Christ is building is not for the purpose of reigning politically over the nations of this world but of gathering God’s elect out of this world and preparing them for eternity. Part of the process is, at the appointed time, the defeat and utter destruction of the kingdom of darkness but the focus of his reign is on the elect.

### **The Climax of Christ’s Reign**

I Cor. 15:24-26, which immediately follows a passage referring to the resurrection and Christ’s coming, says, “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” See the end of I Cor. 15 for the wonderful passage on the resurrection, the change, the entering into full immortality of God’s people and the triumph over death! It all fits beautifully! Both the “kingdom” and the “reign” precede the victorious climax that takes place when Christ returns.

The reign spoken of in verse 25 is taking place right now although sin-blinded man is unaware of it. When the purpose of His reign with respect to the elect is fulfilled, this world will end. Its destruction will be sudden, without warning. I Thess. 5:1-3. The devil knows his time is short: that is why things are accelerating

as they are. The world is being lulled into a deep spiritual sleep. Believers need to be awake as never before.

### **What is the Crop?**

We have mentioned the fact that the parable above focuses upon a crop that is planted in and harvested from this world. Let's examine that crop more closely. Matt. 13:38 tells us that "... the good seed are the children of the kingdom ...." Contrast this with the earlier parable in which Jesus used seeds as a type of the word of God sown in human hearts. This parable is different. Here the seed is people. In fact there are two distinct kinds of people described, "children of the kingdom" and "children of the wicked one."

Our perspective on God's kingdom is very limited. Many things are unclear, indistinct. Often we are in doubt as to who is really a part of the kingdom and who is not. "We walk by faith and not by sight." II Cor. 5:7. As Paul said, "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face ...." I Cor. 13:12.

The parable of the wheat and the tares gives us just a little glimpse of the kingdom from God's perspective. We see the process from beginning to end set forth in simple terms. I believe that God means for His children to have some understanding in these things to better help us cope with our lives in this world.

### **The Sovereignty of God**

One thing that stands out in this picture is how sovereign, how heaven-directed it is. Although the focus may be on the crop of wheat, that crop is the object rather than the subject of the parable. That is, it is not the will of the wheat we see at work: it is the will of the farmer.

The wheat does not choose to be wheat: it is what it is. Nor does the wheat plant itself: that is the farmer's job. In this picture the wheat is acted upon by the farmer and simply does what is in its nature to do: it grows.

This parable also confirms what we said earlier about sheep and goats. We see again two distinct kinds: wheat and tares. Both kinds are what they are. Wheat does not become tares nor do tares become wheat. The tares are only left alone for the sake of the wheat till it is time for the harvest.

Man, by nature, hates the truth of God's sovereignty. He wants to be the subject, not the object. He wants to direct his own destiny — and take full credit for it. The idea that he is helpless before the mercy of God, that he is dead in trespasses and sins, is utterly abhorrent to his proud rebellious nature. There is only one problem: it is the truth.

Read Eph. 2:1-10. If that is not a picture of the sovereign grace of God what is it? Every expression describes God graciously intervening in the lives of helpless sinners to bring them all the way from spiritual death to everlasting blessedness. Nowhere is there even a hint of human merit of any kind playing a part. It is by

grace and grace alone that we are saved. Good works are the result of God's grace, not the cause of it.

II Thess. 2:13-14 says, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In II Tim. 1:9-10 Paul wrote of God, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

The scriptures are full of this. Acts 13 records the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch. After first bearing witness to the local Jews they began to reach out to the Gentiles. The results were described in this manner in verse 48: "... as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Did Luke make a mistake in his record? Why did he choose those words? I believe God inspired him to write as he did to give us a glimpse of how things really happen.

It is true that they believed, yet behind their belief we see the sovereign hand of God. No man would ever believe if God did not first work with his heart. It is the grace of God that calls forth sinners from the dead and gives them eternal life. We can take no credit for that. We can, however, bow before Him in thankfulness and praise and endeavor by His Spirit to walk worthy of such a calling! Eph. 4:1.

We see the sovereignty of God at work in the ministry of angels. Hebrews 1:14 tells us that they are "... ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

Notice the timing. It doesn't say that God waits till sinners are saved and then assigns angels to watch over them. Angels are sent forth to watch over them who **SHALL BE** heirs of salvation! That is long before they actually hear the gospel and come to faith!

I believe God's elect are watched over from birth. I believe they are watched over from their conception. If God would pull back the veil I believe we could see His faithful hand at work in every circumstance necessary, extending back before the foundation of the world, to bring His elect into, and safely through, this present world. We serve a great God!

## — CHAPTER 11 —

# A Glimpse of Our Destiny!

And His elect are not being saved and delivered from this present darkness to sit around heaven on clouds plucking harps! His purposes are much greater than that — far beyond our power to imagine!

Hebrews, chapter 2, gives us a wonderful glimpse into the purposes of God. Verses 3 and 4 refer to the greatness of our salvation and the fact that God had confirmed it through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Notice that added to this is the phrase, “according to his own will.” Always we see God’s sovereignty lifted up!

Verse 5 begins to hint at the ultimate goal of our salvation: “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.” Here we see that there is a world that is yet to come and that God intends for someone to rule over it. Ruling over the world to come is not the destiny of angels. God has someone else in mind.

We know from Heb. 1:2 & 10-11 that the earth and the heavens were created by God’s Son and that this creation will perish. There is a day and an hour already set on God’s calendar when He will utterly destroy this sin-corrupted creation by fire. He intends to replace it with “... new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.” II Pet. 3:13. That new earth will not be empty and uninhabited: someone will be there to enjoy it!

In Heb. 2:6-8 the writer quotes from Psalm 8 where God gave David a glimpse of His purpose in creating man. Verse 7 and the first part of verse 8 get to the heart of the matter: “Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownest him with glory and honour and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.”

The expression, “a little lower than the angels,” would be better translated, “for a little while lower than the angels.” It is a question of time. God’s intention for man was to subject him temporarily to a place below that of the angels but ultimately that man should rule not only over the physical creation but even over the angels! Paul makes reference to this in I Cor. 6:3 where he says, “Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” Don’t ask me to explain that but it certainly is part of a pattern in the scriptures that points to the great destiny God had in mind in creating man.

Heb. 2:8 confirms this as the writer draws our attention to the word “all”: “For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.”

He continues with the observation, “But now we see not yet all things put under him.”

Obviously, man has not fulfilled his destiny. Despite his scientific achievements which point to his creation in the image of God, he has fallen under the dominion of sin and death and lives as a pawn in Satan’s hands awaiting destruction. Is that to be the end of it? Has God’s plan been set aside, thwarted? Never!

It is true that as we look around, man has missed God’s purpose and this creation is far from under his control. In fact, everything man touches, he corrupts. What, then, gave the writer hope? His hope came, not from what he saw in man, but from the fact that he saw Jesus! This kind of seeing is only possible by Divine revelation.

Verse 9 says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

For the purpose of God to be fulfilled it was necessary for His Son to leave behind the glories of heaven and to come and live as a man, to take upon himself the sorrows and sufferings, and ultimately the sin, of this present world. He became, in a real sense, the embodiment of a corrupted creation. Yet within Him was the very life, the seed, of the new creation God had purposed to bring forth.

That is why, in John 12:23-24 Jesus compares his approaching death to planting a “corn of wheat.” If you don’t plant wheat all you have is that wheat. If you plant it, however, the outward part dies, but the life within springs up resulting in a multiplied harvest of that life. This is where the “wheat” from the Matt. 13 parable comes from — Christ!

That is the principle we see at work throughout God’s kingdom in this world: life out of death. When God judged the sin of the world in the person of His Son He passed sentence upon this world — a sentence that will shortly be carried out. Christ, for His part, willingly gave up His life, in effect joining His Father’s condemnation of this world. But He gave up His life in the knowledge of what it meant to have God’s life within. That life could never die and its fruit would be eternal! Through His death we live! A way of escape from the fate of this world has been opened.

### **Many Sons**

Verse 10 is a key: “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

What a tremendous scripture! How full of meaning!

The “him” in the verse is the Father. The “captain of their salvation” is Christ. We see the Father putting His Son through a process that included “sufferings” to serve a larger purpose. That purpose is wonderfully captured in the phrase, “bringing many sons unto glory.”

Let that phrase sink in! It is at the heart of God's purposes for the eternal future: to have, not just one Son, but many! Who are these "sons"? They are the redeemed of all ages, saved out of a world of sin and death, sovereignly prepared to rule over and enjoy a brand new creation!

Once we begin to grasp the significance of God's "bringing many sons unto glory" our perspective changes dramatically. For one thing it removes the focus from this world. We are able to see this present world order as something very temporary that serves a larger purpose. God's focus is not on reforming this world but on His sons who sojourn here. This world with all its darkness is necessary to the development and preparation of His sons for eternity.

### **Perfect Through Sufferings**

We can see this principle being applied to our Captain in this very verse. The verse begins with the phrase, "For it became him ...." What does that mean? It means, "It was appropriate for him ...." It means, "In view of who He is and what His purpose was, it was the right thing for Him to do."

What was that right and appropriate thing? — "... to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Think about that! Listen to some of the definitions of the Greek word translated "to make perfect": "to perfect"; "to advance (a person to) final completeness (of character)"; "to be brought to the goal"; "to reach the end of one's course"; "to be fully developed."

Do you realize what this is saying?! We're talking about the very Son of God who was with the Father before the foundation of the world, the "appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." Heb. 1:2. Yet God's vision and purpose looked far beyond this present world. Even though His Son was the appointed heir, He was incomplete! Something was lacking, something that made it necessary for Him to live as a man in this evil world and suffer! His course was not finished, His race not run. He was not ready to fulfill His place in the Father's great plan.

This same truth is touched on in Heb. 5:8-9. "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."

At least one of the things our Savior learned through His sufferings was "obedience." Does that mean that He had been a disobedient and rebellious son? Of course not! But there is more to obedience than what He had known before coming to earth.

In coming to earth, He didn't take on "the nature of angels" but "the seed of Abraham." In all things He was "made like unto his brethren." Heb. 2:16-17. His very being, as ours does, cried out to live! The prospect of the cross brought forth three hours of agonizing prayer. If there had been any other way, he would have loved to have avoided the horror He faced. Yet he found grace to pray, "Not my will but thine be done." Luke 22:42.

Heb. 4:15 tells us that He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

Phil. 2:8 says, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

That is the obedience the Father seeks, not only from His Son, but also from all of His sons. It is a part of the development of our character for what lies ahead. Notice in Rev. 12:11 that one of the things it says of those who overcame the devil is, “... and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

That death is more than physical death, the end of our lives here. It is the lifelong process of choosing God’s will over our own, as Paul said in I Cor. 15:31, “... I die daily.” It is obeying God in the face of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Such obedience can only be learned in the arena of life.

Those who know the Lord long for the day of final deliverance from the warfare we experience in this world. We live with two natures in constant conflict with each other. The “flesh,” or the “outward man,” born of Adam and corrupted by the fall, loves sin and hates God. He is a rebel and cannot be reformed and made righteous before God. The only solution is for him to be put to death. That is why the law is powerless to save. All it can do is to show us our desperate need. Forcing a rebel to behave and conform to some righteous standard does not alter his heart. He must die.

The great miracle of the new birth is that there is a way to die and yet live! Paul wrote in Gal. 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

That is what Christ Himself experienced. He died, yet lived! Having lived a life in which He denied self and chose the Father’s will, He made the ultimate sacrifice, laying down His life in death. He received the full penalty of God’s law, not for His own sins, for He had none, but for ours. Yet death had no power over the life He had on the inside. At the appointed time He burst the bonds of death — forever!

When a man truly comes to Christ in saving faith, he willingly bows to the demands of God’s law, giving up his life. The result is that he receives the same life that brought Christ forth from the grave in triumph!

In the new birth Christ’s death becomes our death — and His life becomes our life: That which is born within us is of the very life of God Himself! The “new man” is very much a “baby” and then a young child needing to develop and grow.

I John 3:1-2 says, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

The meaning of these verses is made clearer when we realize that the word translated “sons” actually means “children” and not grown-up sons. The life of a believer during this present age is actually his childhood, a time of growing and maturing in preparation for eternity. The inward man is being made like Christ. It is only when He returns that that likeness will be complete. Only then will we be full-grown sons of God, manifest for all to see.

That is not to say that there are not degrees of spiritual maturity in this life. Certainly there are and the Lord desires that we grow up and become established in Him. However, the highest degree of spirituality believers experience here pales beside the glory yet to come. Even John the Apostle had to say of that, “... it doth not yet appear what we shall be.”

## — CHAPTER 12 —

# Bringing Many Sons Unto Glory

For God to bring many sons unto glory it was first necessary for His Son to live as a man in this world and to suffer. By this means was Christ Himself brought to full development and prepared for His role in the Father's plan. Heb. 2:10, 5:8-9.

Heb. 5:9 says of Him, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." He was the "corn of wheat" that died in order to bring forth much fruit. John 12:24. Consider the obstacles that Christ had to overcome in order to bring about a salvation that was eternal.

First is the immutability of God's law: God's law is an expression of His holy and righteous nature. He does not alter it to suit us. He does not lower the standard so that it is within our reach. Its demands are absolute, its penalty certain. There is no way around it. Somehow those unyielding demands must be met and satisfied. God's eternal kingdom will have nothing in it but perfect righteousness and holiness.

Second is the utter sinfulness of our nature. As it has been so often said, we are not sinners because we sin: we sin because we are, by nature, sinners. We are born sinners, rebels against God and His righteousness. Like Adam and Eve, we may try to hide our sinfulness under a cloak of religion as they hid their nakedness with fig leaves, yet it is all in vain. We are what we are.

Third is the weakness of man's flesh. Paul deals with this in Rom. 7. Even if a man becomes convinced of the rightness of God's law and is somehow motivated to conform his life to it, his efforts are doomed to failure because of the weakness of flesh. Sin is too strong for us. We are its slaves. It is the master. Left to our own strength we find ourselves in a hopeless situation. God's law serves one purpose: to show us our utter sinfulness before a holy God, and thus to strip us of any shred of hope in ourselves.

### **No Answer in Religion**

All of the religions of the world put together have no answer for these obstacles. The most religious man in the world will stand spiritually naked before God one day if he does not have Christ. Nor will the Christ of tradition, or the Christ of dogma, or the Christ of sentiment or imagination do. Nothing short of the living, reigning Son of God is sufficient to save us.

If you truly have Him, you have life. If you do not have Him you are under God's wrath (John 5:24). If you go to the judgment without Him you are doomed. There is no eternal salvation apart from the Author.

He did not sidestep God's law. After he had personally met its demands, he took upon Himself all of our sin and guilt and was condemned in our place. Yet, even though his flesh suffered pain and death on our behalf, the grave could never hold him because of the divine life within. The power of that life was so great that not only did he burst the bonds of death, but even his flesh was transformed into a "glorious body" (Phil. 3:21), fully fitted for the new creation. He became the firstfruits of that new creation, the living hope and promise of what lies ahead for every child of God.

Truly coming to Christ involves laying down our arms of rebellion, fully embracing the penalty of God's law met for us by Christ, and bowing to Him as Lord and Savior. No more illusions of self-righteousness. No more striving to make ourselves acceptable to God. It is the end of all self-effort in the revealed light of His perfect and all-sufficient provision for us.

The obstacles to God's kingdom, so utterly insurmountable to us and to religion, are met and overcome in Christ. The law is met and satisfied; we are made partakers of the divine nature; by His Spirit we are given strength to serve God.

Serving God in this world is not a matter of laws and commandments to be righteous: it is learning to cooperate with and give expression to a new nature within, a new heart that loves God and desires to please Him. When Christ comes in, we enter God's kingdom then and there as we simultaneously leave Satan's kingdom. Col. 1:13, speaking of the Father says, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

When Christ comes in everything changes. Our feet are set irrevocably on the pathway to heaven. We are not our own for we are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). God's grace has arrested undeserving sinners for the express purpose of bringing us to glory.

### **Sealed by God**

When Christ comes in by His Spirit and takes up residence we are forever set apart from this world — including multitudes of professed followers of Christ. Paul, in Eph. 4:30, speaks of our being sealed by the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption (see also Eph. 1:13-14). This sealing is something God does. It signifies ownership. When He seals someone it reflects His sovereign purpose and plan not only to begin, but also to finish the job! We may indeed grieve His Spirit at times but His seal cannot be broken.

Many are they who seemingly run well for awhile. They profess to believe in Christ. Their lives exhibit many changes. Yet the time comes when they depart. Such people have never experienced what we have been talking about. They stop

short (Heb. 4:1). They have an evil heart of unbelief deep down on the inside that sooner or later manifests itself (Heb. 3:12). See also I John 2:19.

Heb. 10:39 describes two different kinds of people: “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

What is the difference? One has faith and the other doesn't. Faith is not something natural human beings are capable of, at least not saving faith. As Eph. 2:8 points out, “It is the gift of God.”

From time to time we have heard someone refer to the exhortation in Jude 3 that we should “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” Usually this is said in reference to religious tradition, that we ought, rather than clinging to tradition, to seek to recapture those bedrock truths understood by the New Testament Church.

This is certainly true. However, the faith once delivered to the saints is more than a set of doctrines. One could embrace all of the right doctrines and still be a stranger to that faith. It is far more a personal spiritual reality than a mere head full of ideas.

### **The Faith of Christ**

The faith of Christ is supernatural: it is the actual faith of Jesus Christ that becomes resident in the hearts of God's elect. That faith is rooted in a revealed expression of the wisdom and knowledge of God concerning His sovereign will and purpose for us. The faith once delivered to the saints is the faith of Jesus Christ imparted to His brethren here below.

At its heart it is the conviction in our innermost being that we are the children of God. Rom. 8:15-16 says, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

I remember an experience I went through in my college days that, I believe, illustrates this witness. At the time, I was around people who emphasized “experiences” and it seemed to me that those around me were living in a realm of joy and blessing and I was being left out. Of course the devil had plenty to say about it! In fact, I'm sure he was responsible for the way I was looking at things and how I perceived them!

He told me things like, “God is blessing them and not you; there must be something terribly wrong with you. Maybe you're not even saved.” He painted a very negative discouraging picture all the while it seemed that my prayers didn't get past the ceiling.

One particular weekend this reached a climax and I basically quit. I threw up my hands, discouraged, and more than a little bit mad at God for blessing others and not me, for hearing their prayers and not mine (or so it seemed!). I stopped praying. I had no positive feelings toward God. For several days I was in a state of

depression, just going through the motions. As far as my Christianity was concerned, emotionally, I had quit trying and let go.

### **The Witness of the Spirit**

During those days no one came to me and told me, “You shouldn’t be like this.” No angel came, no voice from heaven, no great experience. But in spite of how I felt and how I was behaving there was a quiet persistent witness, not from outside, but from deep on the inside.

It didn’t condemn or demand but very patiently intruded into my discouragement. Deep down I knew that there was no other way to go, nothing to do but trust God and go on.

What was it? Notice that Paul said the Spirit bears witness **with** our spirit. It is a joint thing. When I let go I found out that God didn’t! And I also found that deep in my innermost being my spirit agreed with Him. No matter how I felt and what I experienced, turning back was simply not an option.

I can’t take any credit for that. It is simply God’s grace. He had supernaturally placed a hope within me that truly had become an anchor for my soul. (Heb. 6:19).

Many people struggle with this witness of the Spirit, imagining it as some kind of a feeling or experience. If their emotions are “up,” they are OK, but if their emotions are “down” they struggle to put their finger on that “witness” and wonder where God is and why He doesn’t reassure them by making them feel something — whatever “something” is.

When I finally surrendered and repented for being mad at God there was no great surge of emotion, no bells rang, no lights flashed, no electricity ran up and down my spine. There was just a measure of peace and rest and the lifting of a weight deep inside. Once again I was in harmony with my Father, cooperating with His plan, not struggling to follow one of my own.

I was brought to the place where I had to say, “Lord, even if I never have a feeling, I’m going to serve you and believe Your Word.” Nothing great and dramatic.

I had made the mistake of letting myself be blown off course by those who placed great stock in feelings and experiences. There is even the distinct possibility that some I so jealously regarded were actually moving in a religious spirit and not in God at all! And even if some of the experiences were of God there were at least two other mistakes. One was the misplaced emphasis upon feelings and experiences. At best, they come and go, but if we have Christ on the inside, He stays!

The other mistake was comparing myself with others. I am an individual work of God’s grace. It might have been in order in someone else’s journey to experience the joy of the Lord in a manifest way. Perhaps they had just come through a great trial. I was in a different place. The Lord saw me getting off track and was faithful to bring me up short and point me back to simple faith and the Word.

It is evident in our day that many religious people regard their religion almost as a spiritual narcotic. Getting and staying “high” is the objective. They are addicted to their need for “seeing” and “feeling” and “getting excited.” Services are geared to getting the people in a high emotional state. Whenever the feelings begin to wear off, the people anxiously seek something that will restore them. People can be just as addicted to religious demons as an alcoholic is to his bottle.

This is not a picture of the faith once delivered to the saints, the faith of Christ. Was Christ’s earthly life characterized by the constant pursuit of an emotional high? Did He have to “feel something” to know that He was His Father’s Son? What was it He quoted to the devil during the wilderness temptation? “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

People have that turned around today. They try to live by every feeling that (they believe) comes from the hand of God. They have no anchor.

Jesus was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” His faith is what enabled Him to suffer and endure all that it took to fulfill His Father’s will and plan. Because He did, we have hope!

Did the Apostle Paul live on a spiritual mountaintop all the time? You don’t have to read very far in his epistles to know that he didn’t. In fact, much of the time he was anywhere but on the mountaintop. Read his words in II Cor. 11:23-30 for just one example.

Paul certainly had great experiences, yet the Lord taught him to glory, not in those experiences, but in the very things that brought him down and made him weak! Why? As long as we feel strong the Lord can’t use us much. Human strength can’t help anybody spiritually.

For a time, Paul struggled with one particularly distressing thing he was experiencing — the Word doesn’t tell us what it was. He prayed about it. He wanted that thing gone! He regarded it as a hindrance to his ministry.

What the Lord taught him is summarized in II Cor. 12:9-10. “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

### **The Joy of the Lord**

Does this mean that Christian faith is a life of unrelenting misery? Of course not! But the joy of the Lord is not pleasing and pampering the flesh, eliminating all its obstacles and problems and keeping it “high” all the time. Christ didn’t come to fulfill the desires of our flesh but to deliver us from them. He has something much better for us.

Listen to the words of David in Psalm 16:11. “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

Our joy in this life comes not from pleasing the flesh but from His peace in our hearts, the fellowship of His presence with us in every circumstance, being able to see His faithful hand at work to fulfill His Word, the eternal hope of His Word that He has put in our hearts, fellowship with believers, the joy of worship, and so on. Believers have something incredibly wonderful the world knows nothing about!

In I Peter 1:2 Peter addresses his readers in these words: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

Then in verses 3-9 he says this: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

See how many of the themes we have been discussing are present in this passage. We see God’s sovereignty in salvation: “elect according to the foreknowledge of God,” and “according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us,” and “kept by the power of God.” We see the great hope of the believer for eternity to come and its direct relationship to the resurrection of Christ.

We see great joy in the midst of trials. We see that the express purpose of these trials is to purify and prepare us for the coming of Christ and what lies beyond. It is the understanding of these things that enables us to rejoice “with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Verse 9 is very significant: “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” This describes salvation as a lifelong process directly related to the trial of our faith referred to above. It is as we exercise God-given faith in the midst of whatever trials He sends our way that we actually enter into ever-increasing measures of salvation. “Salvation” describes the whole process God carries out to bring us all the way from being lost sinners with no hope to being full-grown sons of God, ready for the new creation! That is something to rejoice about!

What a wonderful privilege it is to truly be a child of God! It is an infinitely higher calling than anything of this earth. It is far greater to be a child of God than to be a mere king! Kings rise and fall, live and die. Children of God live forever!

Listen to Paul's words in Rom. 8:17: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

Here we see the incomparable destiny we have of standing beside our Lord and Savior as heirs of God Himself! We also see that the pathway to glory lies through the sufferings of this world.

Yet, how can you compare the two? Verses 18-19 continue, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

The word "creature" is "creation" and Paul refers to creation as though it were a person waiting for something. At present it suffers the effects of the curse (verses 20-22 — "the bondage of corruption") yet the creation God has planned will be free from the curse — no more pain and suffering, no more death, only glorious freedom!

All of this is waiting for something, however. It is waiting till God finishes what He is doing in His sons. That is the present order of business. The foundation has been laid for it all in Christ, his Firstborn. The next step is to fully prepare the rest of His sons for their place in the eternal kingdom. When that is complete, the curse will be forever lifted from creation itself. All will be beautiful and glorious. There will be perfect harmony and endless opportunity for pure enjoyment. Eph. 2:7, Rev. 21:1-5, II Peter 3:13, Psa. 16:11.

What is creation specifically waiting for? Rom. 8:19 tells us: "the manifestation of the sons of God." What does this mean? The key word is "manifestation." To manifest something is to openly display it for all to see.

A simple example is the work of art that remains hidden while it is being produced. No one but the artist is allowed to see it. There comes a time when the work of art is complete and yet still hidden from view. At exactly the right time the covering is removed and everyone is allowed to see it. They are able to enjoy it and appreciate the labor and talent that produced it.

Paul referred in Rom. 8:18 to "the glory that shall be revealed in us." The greatest shock this world will ever receive will be when Christ comes and the believing remnant are changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor. 15:52). One moment, we will look like ordinary human beings, the next, we will radiate the glory of God. We will have brand new bodies, eternally young, glorious bodies like that of our Savior (Phil. 3:21, Rom. 8:23). Everyone will see it.

The citizens of this world will be full of shock and unimaginable terror. There will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The sons of God will be filled with joy and the glory of God.

That is what God's kingdom in this world is about; preparing for that day! The moment Christ comes again, all will be brought to a swift conclusion. All of man's proud plans will be suddenly interrupted. God's plan will prevail — as it always has!

### All Things!

Rom. 8:28 is rightly one of the most beloved verses in the Bible: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

In the first place this covers “all things,” literally everything that happens to God's elect. Though many things seem bad at the time, yet in the wise and loving hand of God they fit perfectly into His great plan for us.

Paul expresses the same thought in II Cor. 4:17 in these words: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Notice he calls it “our light affliction.” I imagine that most of us would consider many of Paul's afflictions to be anything but light! After all, he was beaten with rods three times, imprisoned, shipwrecked, stoned and left for dead, and a long list of similar difficulties, yet he referred to it all as “light affliction!”

How is that possible? Paul saw all these things in a very different light than most people. He saw them in the light of God's overall wisdom and purpose. For one thing he knew that his affliction, compared with eternity was indeed “but for a moment.”

Also, he didn't see these things as enemies, as something that was working against him. He said, “... our light affliction ... worketh for us ...” Not against us, but **for us!** It is a necessary part of God's plan to bring about “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Verse 18 is an important part of the picture: “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

How differently we're often inclined to react to trials and afflictions. Instead of seeing God's loving hand in everything and looking at eternal things we're inclined to focus all of our attention on the trial. We complain and question.

The devil tells us that we're being singled out and that our trials are different and much worse than those of others. We become full of self-pity.

We forget Peter's admonition concerning the devil: “Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” I Peter 5:9.

We forget God's great promise in I Cor. 10:13, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

We forget Heb. 12:1-3 where we are told to "... run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

### **Christ, the Finisher**

We see Jesus as the author of our faith, but let us never forget that He is also the finisher as well. He has all of the resources of heaven at His disposal to finish what He has started!

Is it any wonder that Paul said, in Phil. 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

See how Paul encouraged Timothy in II Tim. 1:7-12: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Let's go back to Romans 8:28. The "all things" Paul spoke of "work together for good," that is, the end result is "good." This "good" is defined for us in verse 29: "to be conformed to the image of his son." The child of this world has no power to appreciate this. He lives for self and pleasing the flesh. Christ came to deliver us from self and the sin that reigns in our flesh.

### **God's Purpose**

But Romans 8:28 was not written to everyone. It was directed "to them that love God, to them who are the called according to God's purpose." This describes a people in whose lives God has sovereignly intervened to separate them from the

rest of humanity, to turn their feet onto a different path, one that leads to eternal life.

Verse 29 expresses God's purpose: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

This says he knew about us ahead of time. How much "ahead of time" is that? From the foundation of the world! II Tim. 1:9, Eph. 1:4. God planned for us in the very beginning, before the first star was created! His plan was to make us like His Son.

This was to be done "that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." See how perfectly this fits in with the reference in Heb. 2:10 to "bringing many sons unto glory." In Romans, Christ is referred to as "the firstborn among many brethren," while in Hebrews He is referred to as "the captain of their salvation." In both cases He occupies the place of pre-eminence among God's sons. Col. 1:18.

Now, notice verse 30: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Does that sound like the issue is in doubt? Is there any hint of "maybe" or "hope it all works out"? No! In fact, the issue is so certain that the whole process is spoken of in the past tense, as something that has already happened! In the mind of God it has! Who can say otherwise?

That is the foundation for Paul's wonderfully encouraging words in verses 31-39, such a favorite passage for believers. There are many things we encounter in our earthly journey that seem to loom up before us as great obstacles to God's purpose. We sometimes entertain thoughts of doubt and discouragement. Satan is quick to inject thoughts of condemnation every time we come short. We are made to feel our own weakness and inadequacy in the face of seemingly overwhelming circumstances.

But can any of the things enumerated in this passage thwart God's plan? Can Satan step in and say, "No, God, you can't do that"? The answer is an unequivocal "No!"

### **The Greatest Obstacle**

Our human nature is infected with a spirit of self and self-preservation. We struggle to be strong, self-reliant, to feel in control. The way of the cross to which we have been called is very different.

Verse 36 of Romans 8 says, "As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

God's "accounting" system is in sharp contrast to ours. Human nature accounts "self" as something to be preserved at all costs. To man, "self" is a great asset; to God, it is a great liability. "Self" is the greatest obstacle we face in serving God.

Left to ourselves, we would choose the pathway of ease, of convenience. How many of our prayers revolve around trying to get God to remove every difficulty from our lives? We imagine that serving a great loving all-powerful God should be like a pleasant walk along a garden pathway. When it isn't, we think something is wrong!

And there are plenty of religious people around to tell us that something is indeed wrong, that if we only had enough faith every difficulty would simply melt away and life would be one unbroken triumphal march to heaven! It is teaching like that that keeps people chasing in vain for the "magic experience" or the "secret formula" to make it all happen.

If it was necessary for the very Son of God to go through sufferings to become what He is are we exempt? The reality is that the Christian life is an "obstacle course" designed by an all-wise Heavenly Father to bring about the exercise of our God-given faith that we might become what He has purposed. Within His will some obstacles can indeed be made to go away while others are meant to be endured. Christ made the storm cease but endured the cross — unto death. Both were forms of overcoming.

Consider the heroes of faith in Heb. 11. Read verses 32-40 for a summary of the many examples of overcoming faith. Those who suffered persecution and even death are honored equally with those who won great battles or walked around in a fiery furnace. The real obstacle is not the circumstance but self and what self wants. There is a lifelong conflict between what self wants and what God wants. Every time we find the grace to say, "Not my will, but thine be done," self dies a little and the inward man grows stronger. That is what Paul meant when he spoke in II Cor. 4:16 of the "outward man" perishing and the "inward man" being renewed. Note also that Paul says, "day by day."

### **Christ, Our Example**

Christ is our great example. Do not imagine that He breezed His way through His earthly life on the strength of personal divine power. Although He had been with the Father before the foundation of the world and all things had been created by Him (John 1:3, Heb. 1:2, Col. 1:16), yet He lived in this world as a man.

When He needed wisdom and knowledge, He prayed, sometimes all night! Luke 6:12-13. Was He just putting on a show, pretending to need the Father's help? No! He needed to pray just as we do! The ultimate example is the three hours of agonizing prayer that preceded the cross. That agony was real. He lived as a man! He needed God's help!

The wonderful things He did, the miracles, were not a demonstration of His divinity but of His Father's indwelling presence. He is indeed the divine Son of God but on earth He was a Spirit-filled man, as completely dependent on the Father as

we are on Him! Think about it! That is why He is in such a unique position to understand and to help us. Heb. 2:16-18.

In John 5:30, He said, "I can of myself do nothing..." John 14:10 says, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but **the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.**"

The Sovereign plan of Almighty God that we see at work in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son continues today in the lives of His elect in the earth. This evil world is but an instrument in God's hands to prepare His sons for eternal glory. His kingdom is not about changing the world, it is about changing us!

And we have what we need: the blood of Christ that has eternally blotted out our sins; the Word of God as both our light and our chief weapon against the devil; the indwelling Spirit of God; the faith of Christ; the prayers of our enthroned Lord on our behalf; the shouts of encouragement from the very ramparts of glory from the lips of our brethren who have gone before us; the ministry of angels ....

We are but sojourners here: heaven is our home. We are to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. Col. 3:2. As we read in Luke 12:34-37a, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching."

The darkness around us is forcing men to choose once and for all which side they are on, Christ's or Satan's. They face the same choice they had in Noah's day — with eternal consequences. For God's people the day of final deliverance is at hand!

Do not fear this present darkness; it cannot withstand God. "Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world." I John 4:4. Though there is indeed ongoing conflict, not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, yet eternal victory was won at the cross. The devil and all his hosts will not be around one minute longer than is necessary to fulfill God's will.

In the words of Martin Luther, "The Prince of Darkness grim — We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him." That great hymn — "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" — ends with this simple declaration: "His kingdom is forever."

His kingdom begins here in the midst of great darkness but it is destined to burst forth with divine glory on a day appointed of our Father. I don't believe it will be long!

## OTHER BOOKS AVAILABLE

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From the series of five articles: Do you recognize the ways in which Lucifer is actively working to take complete control of the minds of men? This book will open your eyes and make you think. Suggested Price - \$3.00

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### **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.

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