

The background of the cover is a vibrant sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with horizontal bands of orange, yellow, and red, with wispy clouds catching the low light. Below the horizon, a dark silhouette of a mountain range is visible. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of palm trees are scattered across the bottom edge.

THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD

Biblical Research Library
Roger E. Dickson

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THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD

All men have been appointed two destinies. It is appointed unto all men that they should physically die. It is also appointed that all men will be judged. God has designated Jesus to be the One by whom all men will be judged. In this dispensation of history, it is imperative that all be made aware of their destiny. All will be held accountable for their behavior on this earth. Therefore, all men should be motivated to live in obedience to the will of God, for it is God who seeks to direct each man toward an eternal dwelling in a new heavens and earth. When we recognize that we will be held accountable for our behavior we are motivated to live in harmony with God's directions for living.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of wild speculation when it comes to matters of religion. God created man a religious being. Therefore, man cannot help but be religious. When men give up a knowledge of the Creator and His revelation, then it is every man for himself. History has proven that there is no end to the ingenious religious inventions of men. As a result, we live with a host of confused religious beliefs today that are bound on the consciences of men. When it comes to the confusion surrounding the subject of this volume, we could not use enough superlatives to describe the religious speculations that are promoted.

In the western world there has been the resurrection of a vast assortment of mystic religions. The New Age Movement and a host of other similar humanistically oriented religious movements of man have become popular among those who are searching for light in secular ori-

ented societies. Those of these mystic religions often run to the Bible, or whatever, not for revelation from God, but for something that might have been taught in the past concerning their present or future situation. Men too often look to their own imaginations in order to invent another religion.

All men have some speculation about the future. In a sense, therefore, everyone has an eschatology, or study of last things. Every man wonders what is going to happen to the soul, the mental-emotional part of man, and his spirit. We also wonder about what will happen to our body. And finally, we wonder what will happen to the physical world. These are considerations that pass through the minds of almost everyone, even the materialists who take little time to slow down and wonder about what is next.

In this book it has been my purpose to study the Scriptures in their historical

context in order to discover God's revelation concerning "in time" and "end of time" judgments and endings that have been and will be the work of God. In studying such subjects in the Scriptures, I have discovered that several things influenced the writers and readers of the first century. Understanding these historical influences has helped us to understand the inspired letters that were written to these first readers.

1. The Jewish persecution prevailed until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This persecution not only influenced the evangelization of the first century world, but it also influenced the content of that which was written to the early disciples.

2. The imminent end of national Israel was prophesied by Jesus. As the early evangelists went forth, the imminent end of Israel was in their minds and on their lips. Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24 was an encouragement to those who suffered from the persecution of the Jews. They knew that God would eventually rain down judgment on national Israel because of their rejection of Jesus. The end of Israel would also be a sign to the Jews that God had rejected them. Their only recourse would be to turn to Jesus as the Messiah.

Because interpreters historically failed to understand the end of national Israel, many commentators failed to do justice to this historical event in their writings. Because of this, the student of the Bible would do well to be cautious about those commentaries that do not

emphasize the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The destruction of Jerusalem and national Israel was a major historical event in the history of national Israel. It was an event in which God intended to terminate forever the nation of Israel. Since most of the early Christians were Jews, we would expect that the New Testament would contain many references, both directly and indirectly, to this event. This is particularly true in reference to the passages that are discussed in this book.

3. State persecution by the Roman government would rise from the personal obsessions of Nero. This persecution would become dominant throughout the Roman Empire by the end of the first century and would be a major force of evil against the movement of the church throughout the Roman controlled world. In particular, the book of Revelation was written to give comfort to Christians who suffered from Rome State persecution. God would eventually rain down judgment upon the Roman State for their persecution of the flock of God.

Through the inspired letters that the Holy Spirit penned to the early disciples we cannot discount the fact that the Spirit dealt with the above subjects. In revealing encouragement and comfort to the disciples, the Spirit talked of the **final judgment**, or final encouragement for the saints. There are key contexts in the Scriptures that deal with final things, or those things that answer our questions about where we are going and what will happen. These major contexts have been

the basis upon which this book has been developed. It is my belief that we must understand the major contexts I have discussed in this volume through the eyes of the first readers. Only in doing this will we understand the major concepts of the contexts.

A **narrative commentary** statement has been placed at the beginning of each verse discussion. This narrative commentary material is simply my personal linear comments of what I believe the inspired writer is meaning in the verse. These comments are not a translation of the Scriptures, but simply a concise statement to introduce the student to the comments that follow.

It is my prayer that this book will greatly aid your understanding of key contexts of the Scriptures that discuss the end of things. Please keep in mind that when we interpret contexts as those in this book, we must first interpret them in the historical context of the first recipients. They were the ones who were going to endure the judgments of God in time. The last and final judgment is yet to come. Christians look forward to the coming judgment. In understanding the surety of God's judgments in time, we have confidence that God will do the same at the end of time. In this way, we can be assured that Jesus is coming again.

Chapter 1

The End Of National Israel

Matthew 24

For many years biblical interpreters placed little emphasis upon the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70. Emphasis was more on the “end of time” coming and final judgment by Jesus rather than the end of the Jewish State by the coming of Jesus in judgment upon Israel in time. As a result of the emphasis on the final coming, biblical interpreters approached texts as Matthew 24 with emphasis on the end of time, rather than a historical interpretation that had direct relevance to the ones to whom Jesus first delivered these words.

We must always keep in mind two very important things when interpreting the book of Matthew: First, Jesus’ ministry was first to those of His

immediate company. He came to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:6). He came to choose the twelve apostles and commission them to a worldwide task (Lk 6:13; Mt 28:20). The immediate ministry of Jesus was worldwide and throughout all history until the end of time in the sense that He would continue and accomplish His task through the global ministry of His disciples. In order to accomplish His goal, Jesus came to work with His immediate Jewish environment.

Secondly, Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience about Jesus as the Messiah. Matthew’s statements, therefore, have direct reference to the Jewish situation. The Jews must accept

Jesus as the Messiah. They must do so because God is about to physically bring the Jewish State to a close. Those who would not accept His messiahship would probably be caught up in the destruction and close of national Israel in A.D. 70.

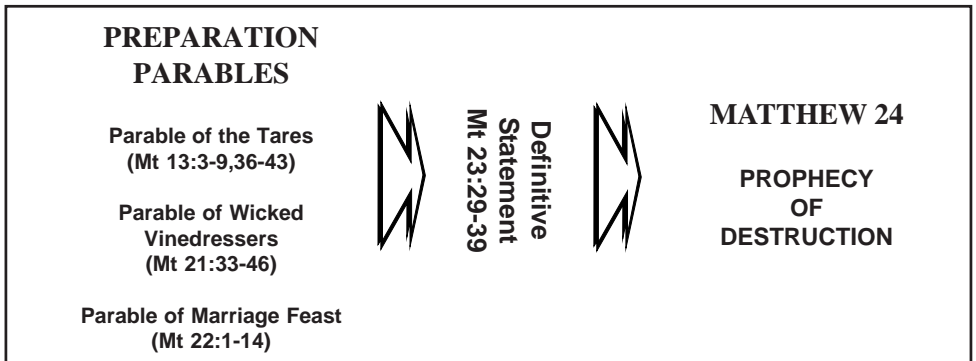
The pronouncements of Jesus in Matthew 24 emphasize an **imminent** coming of Jesus and “end.” This imminent coming would be in the lifetime of the disciples to whom He made these statements (See Mt 16:27,28; 23:34-36). The Holy Spirit inspired no New Testament writer to deceive the first century disciples into believing that Jesus would **personally** return in His final coming in their lifetime. But the context of Matthew 24 is talking about a “coming” within the lifetime of the immediate disciples. This “coming” cannot refer to the final coming of Jesus. Therefore, we approach this chapter of the Scriptures from the viewpoint that Jesus is giving information to His immediate disciples about something traumatic **that was going to happen in their lifetime**. He was going to come in judgment in their lifetime.

Many scholarly commentaries in

recent years have correctly emphasized the importance of the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem in the New Testament. This has led to a more consistent interpretation of many passages. I feel that Jesus is primarily discussing in Matthew 24 a judgment “in time” upon Jerusalem. Therefore, I want to challenge your thinking concerning some of the points He mentions in the context of Matthew 24 that have reference to the personal lives of the disciples.

While studying the text of Matthew 24 one must consult the parallel accounts of Jesus’ words on this occasion that are recorded in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Both Mark and Luke record additional thoughts that Jesus gave in the discourse. However, neither Matthew, Mark or Luke give the complete discourse as it was spoken by Jesus. Each inspir-ed writer only gives that information which emphasizes the theme of his particular book. Matthew, however, gives the most complete information, and for this reason I use Matthew as the guideline text for my interpretive comments.

Also keep in mind the dates of writing of each book. Since the



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

Mark wrote around A.D. 50-52, Matthew around A.D. 60, and Luke around A.D. 61,62. All three writers sensed in the political atmosphere of the times that something was up. As A.D. 70 drew near, the prophetic elements of Jesus' prophecy concerning national Israel were becoming clear. In order to expedite conversion from Judaism, and also, encourage the converted not to return to the religion that God had set aside, Matthew, Mark and Luke write. Their writings have an air of urgency, a sense of a final call to a generation seeking for hope in a political environment that was in upheaval. With this in mind, we launch into an exciting portion of God's revelation. Matthew 24 is one of the most exciting portions of God's word because it explains what will occur in the disciples' lives concerning national Israel and their homeland of Palestine.

Verse 1
NATIONALISTIC PRIDE
OF THE DISCIPLES

And Jesus went out and departed from the temple. And His disciples came to

show Him the buildings of the temple.

Jesus had just pronounced judgment upon the city of Jerusalem in 23:38. He had also just stated, "*Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation*" (Mt 23:36). I feel that the disciples were surely stunned by what He had said. In response to Jesus' statements, Peter, James, John and Andrew later came to Jesus privately while He was on the Mount of Olives (vs 3; Mk 13:3). At least these four disciples showed their nationalistic feelings by expressing their pride in the physical structures that Herod the Great had constructed. Surely, they were thinking that these buildings, and especially the temple, could not be destroyed by the will of God. God would not bring an end to Israel. Their nationalistic feelings were struggling against Jesus' prophecy.

Verse 2
IMMINENT DESTRUCTION
OF JERUSALEM

And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

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

(3:10) and was to come with a destructive blow in about forty years from the time Jesus makes these pronouncements. **“All these things”** would come to an end.

This last prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 is of the coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by Vespasian, Emperor of Rome, through his son Titus. This would be the final fulfillment of Moses’ prophetic curse upon a people that had rejected God (Dt 28:15-68). The destruction would be great and final.

Josephus was a Jewish historian who lived during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. He personally witnessed the war and final fall of the city. In his *Wars of the Jews* he states that over 1,100,000 Jews died in the destruction; the few 80,000 or so who were left were sold into captivity. The temple was burned and the city levelled to the ground. The prophecy of Jesus in Luke 19:43,44 would be fulfilled in A.D. 70. *“For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*

The destruction of the temple would be God’s physical manifestation that He was finished with the Jews’ religion. The use of the pronoun “your” in 23:38 is significant. “See,” Jesus said, **“your house is left to you desolate.”** It was no longer God’s house. In the mind of God the Jewish religious leaders had already

stolen the inheritance of the vineyard (See Mt 21:38,39). Jesus had said to them, *“All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition”* (Mk 7:9; see Mt 15:1-9). Paul was certainly correct by calling Judaism the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13). They no longer submitted to the word of God. Once again in their history the curse for rejecting God was coming upon them. Hosea wrote, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children”* (Hs 4:6). Because Israel had rejected God and His commandment through Jesus, judgment was coming upon her.

Verse 3

THE DISCIPLES QUESTION JESUS

And as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

We can understand the astonishment of the disciples concerning the words of Jesus. They realized that He was talking about a dreadful event that was to befall national Israel. In view of the fact that they still believed that Jesus would *“restore the kingdom to Israel”* (At 1:6), they were having a hard time accepting His statements here concerning the destruction of the temple.

When we consider the parallel accounts of Mark (13:4) and Luke (21:7), the disciples seem to be asking two questions: (1) When shall the things of 23:36 happen? (2) What will be the sign of Jesus' "coming" (or "presence") and the end of the age. They still remembered Jesus' teaching in the parable of the Sower, that the tares should be left with the wheat until the time of judgment (Mt 13:29). *"Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age"* (Mt 13:40). Jesus was talking about **His age**, not some far off event that was beyond the lifespan of the immediate disciples.

The Greek work *aionios* in Matthew 13:40 is correctly translated "age" as it is so translated in Matthew 28:20. This Greek word was unfortunately translated by the King James translators with the word "world." But in the context Jesus is primarily emphasizing judgment "in time." A secondary consideration, or application, of these thoughts is judgment at the "end of time." The destruction of Jerusalem **in time** would only be a figure of what would happen at the unique final coming of Jesus at the **end of time**.

Jesus answers the above two questions in the context of Matthew 24 and 25. He uses the word "coming" which is from the Greek word *parousia*. A better translation would be "presence." In other words, the disciples are asking what the sign of His presence would be. He discusses two "comings" or "presences." (1) There would be a coming ("presence") **in time** in judgment

upon the nation of Israel. He had earlier referred to this event in 16:27,28. *"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels [messengers], and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."*

(2) By the end of chapter 25, Jesus has "thrown in" a coming in judgment at the **end of time**. This would be a final presence, a final judgment upon all the world. I am of the opinion, however, that the entire context of Matthew 24 refers to the coming of judgment upon the city of Jerusalem and national Israel. Only in chapter 25 does Jesus turn in the discourse to final events.

All "comings in judgment" of God **in time** are symbolic or typical of His final judgment at the **end of time**. However, we must keep in mind that the disciples at this time did not comprehend or understand Jesus' previous discussions concerning His death, resurrection and kingdom reign. It is not probable here, therefore, that they would be asking questions about a final coming and judgment of Jesus. They did not understand the end of the Jewish Commonwealth, let alone ask questions about the final coming of Jesus and judgment of the world. This does not mean, however, that Jesus did not speak concerning final things while He was with the disciples on earth. He discussed with them many things they did not fully understand. Only when such things were brought to their remembrance with the

revelation of all truth, did they understand (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

It is best to understand Matthew 24 as a **type**, or illustration, of the unique destruction of the world at the end of time. Jude quoted Enoch and used the judgment of the flood of Noah's day in reference to the coming judgment upon Jerusalem for "*all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him*" (Jd 15,16). In the context of Matthew 24, Jesus also uses "judgment language" in order to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem. Such language is also used in other texts in reference to the end of the world.

We are discussing two "ends" in the context of chapters 24 and 25. (1) There is the **end of the Jewish State** that will happen in the lifetime of the immediate disciples of Jesus (23:36; see Mk 9:1). Reference to **these things** center around this end by destruction (See 23:36; 24:2,8,33,34). (2) There is the **end of the world** that is **illustrated** by the judgment and destruction of the flood in Noah's day and the destruction of Jerusalem. In an illustrative way, therefore, the end of national Israel would illustrate the end of the world. As the typical Jew could not comprehend the end of Israel, so men today cannot comprehend the end of the world.

Verses 4,5 WARNING AGAINST DECEPTION

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

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

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

Jesus' message certainly has a secondary application to Christians of all time. Christians must be warned in every century that there are many who come "*in the name of Christ*" but are teaching false doctrines in order to lead people astray after traditional religion. Paul warned, "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron ...*" (1 Tm 4:1,2). This was happening at the time Paul wrote to Timothy. Such happens continually throughout history. It would be wise to heed the warning of Jeremiah to Israel, "*Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you ...*" (Jr 29:8).

In verse 24 Jesus said that in the religious environment prior to the end of the Jewish State "*false christs and false*

prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” John possibly wrote 1 John in the few years before A.D. 70, near the end of national Israel. At least we see in 1 John a sense of finality, for John wrote, ***“Little children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour”*** (1 Jn 2:18). For this reason John warned at that time – his warning is also good for today – that Christians *“not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God ... every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God”* (1 Jn 4:1-4). Simply because one claims to come “in the name of Christ” and cries out “Lord, Lord” does not mean that he is a Christian. Only those who do the will of the Father in heaven should wear the Christian name (Mt 7:21). Only those who are willing to submit to the gospel of Jesus by immersion into His death, burial and resurrection shall inherit eternal life. This would be the condition for salvation, the condition for deliverance from a world of turmoil and sin. Salvation, therefore, is more than simply “believing on Jesus.” One’s faith must be manifested in obedience. We must not forget that James said we are justified by works, works that are in response to the grace of God (Js 2:14-24; see 2 Co 4:15).

Verse 6 RUMORS OF WARS

“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled, for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.”

When Rome started her campaign against Palestine, she marched down through Asia Minor with skirmishes here and there in order to eradicate from the Empire the “Jewish scourge.” There were also other wars throughout the Roman Empire that evidenced the political instability of the era. These wars would not be the end of the national Israel. They would only indicate the beginning of the end. But such wars would be a warning to Christians who were in Jerusalem to leave the city.

Jesus is here giving pronouncements of prophecy that would be spoken among the disciples throughout the Roman Empire. Jewish Christians were to take heed to these prophetic utterances. If they did not, they might continue to cling to the traditional Jewish Passover and Pentecost journey to Jerusalem. Subsequently, they might possibly be entrapped in the city when the Roman armies came. One reason Jesus is giving these warnings, therefore, is for the sake of the early Jewish Christians. They must take heed to these warnings and stay away from Jerusalem when the hour approached.

Verse 7 THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

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

The internal strife in the Roman Empire only increased its intolerance of any who would cause disorder. In the two year period before the destruction of Jerusalem, Galba, Otho and Vitellius struggled to seized power in order to become caesars of Rome. Insurrectionist movements occurred throughout the Empire. At one time about 50,000 Jews were killed in an insurrectionist movement in Seleucia. Another similar movement led to the death of about 20,000 Jews in Caesarea.

Famines occurred throughout the Empire prior to A.D. 70. Agabus had prophesied of one in Acts 11:28. Paul dealt with another with the “famine contribution” of 1 Corinthians 16:1-3.

In conjunction with the famines, **earthquakes** seemed to have plagued the Mediterranean area in the years prior to A.D. 70. Ancient historians recorded at least eight major earthquakes in the area in the few years before the end of national Israel in A.D. 70.

Luke records that Jesus also said that **pestilence**, or disease and plagues, would prevail. Such pestilence usually accompanies famines. Pestilence would intensify the trauma of the wars.

Verse 8

THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

“All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

The events of verses 6 and 7 would only be the **beginning of the sorrows**. Such would not constitute the end. Unfortunately, the disciples would have

to live in the midst of these sorrows. They could not escape their environment. Christians must live in a hostile environment that is against that message which they preach. It is hostile simply because Satan is the prince of this world who has deceived the masses of humanity.

Luke also adds that “great signs from heaven” would be seen (Lk 21:11). This would possibly be the unusual occurrence of heavenly phenomena that some would interpret as “signs of the end.”

Verse 9

HATED FOR JESUS’ NAME

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

Luke is more explanatory in his record. Before the finality of “these things” – the destruction of Jerusalem – he writes, “*they [the enemies of the church] will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake*” (Lk 21:12). The apostles would be tormented in their ministry (Mt 10:17). Jesus is certainly talking about the persecution of the early disciples because of the mention of “synagogues.” This is specific and Jewish in context. And this is exactly what happened. (Read the following accounts in the document of *Acts* for a detailed account of how the Jews persecuted the early

church: Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-40; 8:3,4; 12:1-5; 16:23; 21:33-40; 24:23-27; 28:30.)

It is worthy of note that Mark records that this discourse was delivered privately to Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mk 13:3). James would be the first martyred apostle (At 12:1-5). Peter and the others would suffer extensively at the hands of the persecuting Jews.

The disciples were **hated** by the persecuting Jews. But this hate by the Jews would not match that which would be heaped upon the church by the end of the first century. Rome would eventually unleash its power against the disciples. When Nero was caesar at the beginning of the 60's, he launched in Rome a personal persecution against those who claimed the name of Jesus. But this was only the beginning of Roman persecution against Christians. Such "hate" had been spoken before by the Lord. *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (Jn 15:18,19; see Jn 10:17-19; At 3:4; 7:59; 12:2; 16:23; 18:12; 24:26; 28:22).

Persecution of the early church was so prevalent that the early evangelists exhorted and comforted the newly established churches with the teaching that they would suffer. Paul wrote to Timothy, *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tm 3:12). Paul and

Barnabas strengthened and exhorted the churches by saying, *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"* (At 14:22).

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

There were, therefore, two forces that persecuted the early church. The first was Jewish persecution that was first led in the beginning by Saul (At 9:1-3). This persecution eventually extended throughout many places of the Roman Empire. The second persecution was carried out by the head of the Roman Empire. Nero launched this personal vendetta against Christians in the mid 60's. However, all historical evidence indicates that this persecution was localized in and around Rome. It was not until the reign of Domitian that Roman State persecution was launched against the church throughout the Empire.

In Rome's early persecutions of Jews, the Roman State did not make much of a distinction between Jews and Christians. Christians were only considered a sect of Judaism. And since Judaism was causing the incessant problems of Palestine, Rome launched reprisals against both Jews and Christians.

It is also significant to note from this context and the context of John 16:1-3,

that persecution would come from those who are religious, and thus, believed that they were serving God by persecuting the church. Even Rome's persecution was instituted by religious leaders of Roman religion. Persecution of the church rarely comes from the state alone. It is usually generated by religions that seek to dispel competitive religious beliefs within the state. Sometimes, the false religions of men will use the power of the state in order to persecute the true church of God. When a religion uses the state to persecute the church, then we know the religion is false.

Verse 10 **THE OFFENDED** **AND THE BETRAYED**

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

Those of weak faith who were **offended**, or who were ashamed of the gospel (See Rm 1:16), would succumb to the pressure. They would call caesar lord at the demand of Roman soldiers who had the power to kill them. They would inform on fellow brothers and sisters who were Christians. But Jesus said, *“Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me”* (Mt 11:6). Luke records the extent to which some would go in their betrayals. *“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will send some of you to your death”* (Lk 21:16).

Knowing that these first disciples would be in such trial situations,

specifically the Christ-sent apostles, Jesus promised that He would through the Holy Spirit reveal to them what to say when under trial. *“Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist”* (Lk 21:14,15).

There is a practical principle here we must not overlook. Those who would take a stand for truth will be persecuted by the deceived. One might say that it is a natural happening in evangelism. When one preaches truth, Satan will not be silent. He will not stand easy as his kingdom is ravaged by the truth of the gospel. The evangelist who goes forth and finds it surprising that there are those religiously misguided people who oppose him, has much to learn about the conflict between good and evil in this world.

Verse 11 **FALSE PREACHERS**

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

Here again Jesus emphasizes the concept of “deception.” Jesus knew of man’s fickle desire to follow after man. He knew the “sheep nature” of people to seek for a shepherd (Mk 6:34). This urge to seek for a shepherd is so strong that innocent, if not gullible, men would follow after any self-proclaimed prophet who might show some religious inclinations and leadership. Jesus knew that there would be those who would take advantage of the innocence of the

sheep. Therefore, He warned the sheep that **false prophets** would come. Jesus warned, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Mt 7:15). These imposters would often “practice sorcery,” “astonish the people” and claim that they were “someone great” (At 8:9-11).

Paul warned that from the elders of the church *“men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”* (At 20:30). But he warned, *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ”* (2 Co 11:13). Peter also warned, *“But there were also false prophets among the people [of Israel], even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed”* (2 Pt 2:1,2; see Gl 1:6-9; 1 Tm 4:1-4; 2 Tm 3:1-9; 1 Jn 4:1; Jd 11,16).

The fact that both Jesus and the inspired writers warned of false teachers is enough to alert us to always be on guard against such. The only way to be on guard is to know well that which protects us against erroneous teachings. We must know the Bible. **Biblically ignorant people do not guard against false teachers. They only persecute those who preach the truth.**

Verse 12 LAWLESSNESS

AND LOVELESSNESS

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

When men do not submit to the laws of either God or man, human relationships digress to animal instincts. There is no love of one’s neighbors in a state of anarchy. For this reason God ordained governmental law. *“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves”* (Rm 13:1,2). And this is exactly what rebellious Jews would bring upon themselves in A.D. 70. Because the Jews continually fought against the law of Rome, Rome unleashed her judgment upon the anarchists. Paul was right when he said, *“... the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane ...”* (1 Tm 1:9). In times of trial and persecution it is easy for some to fall from the love of the brethren. When men refuse to submit to God they will not submit to one another. Submission to one’s fellow man begins with a humble submission to the will of God.

Verse 13 ENDURE TO THE END

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

Those who remain faithful while in the midst of persecution, apostasy and tribulation will be delivered from the end of national Israel (See Rv 2:10). They will be spared (Mt 10:22). Jesus even promised, “*But not a hair of your head shall be lost*” in the destruction (Lk 21:18). However, the condition to not fall victim to the calamity that was coming was to heed Jesus’ warning. Jesus said, “*Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man*” (Lk 21:36).

We can now see why Jesus was giving these immediate disciples the information of this chapter. Those who believed these pronouncements would not fall victim to the certain destruction of Jerusalem. The faithful would save their lives if they heeded these warnings. Those Jewish Christians who were still clinging to Judaism had to make a decision. They had to relinquish loyalty to Jerusalem and the temple and cling to Jesus. We can see in the contexts here why Jerusalem and the temple had to go. There was too much Jewish sentimentality connected to both the city and the temple. By A.D. 70 God would have been patient with Israel for forty years. It would be time then to cut the emotional umbilical cord. Jewish Christians had to move on, on to a Christianity that was neither culturally or nationalistically linked to Judaism.

Verse 14

PREACHING TO THE EMPIRE

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

The good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection would be preached to all parts of the Roman Empire before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. “**All the world**” is here certainly a reference to the Roman Empire as the phrase is so used in Luke 2:1. “*And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that **all the world** should be registered.*” This was not a registration of inhabitants of the entire world. The idiomatic expression “all the world” referred only to those who were under Roman jurisdiction. This same meaning is in Romans 1:8. “*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of **throughout the whole world.***” The Roman Christians’ faith was certainly not spoken of throughout the rest of the geographical world. Reference to “the whole world” is again to the perimeters or jurisdiction of the Roman Empire.

In Romans 10:18 Paul does use the phrase “all the earth,” or “ends of the world,” to refer to the complete world. He wrote, “*Their sound **has gone out to all the earth**, and their words to the **ends of the world.***” Keep in mind that Romans 10:18 was a quotation from Psalm 19:4. In prophetic language it is stated in the **past tense**. Paul quoted it in the **past tense** as it was written by David. This does not mean, therefore, that at the time Paul quoted Psalm 19 in Romans 10

that it had been **completely fulfilled**. In Romans 15:29,24-28 Paul desired to go to Spain and preach the gospel. The gospel had evidently not yet gone to Spain. Therefore, when he made the statement of Romans 10:18, the gospel at the time of his writing the letter of *Romans* had not yet gone to “all the earth” or “ends of the world.”

In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, we would contend that the meaning of “all the world” refers to the Roman Empire. The practical reason for the preaching of the gospel to the Roman Empire before the destruction of Jerusalem is obvious. During Passover and Pentecost Jews of the Roman Empire would make the long journey to Jerusalem to celebrate these two great Jewish feasts. On the particular Passover and Pentecost of the Acts 2 events, there were Jews in Jerusalem from the eastern extent of the Roman Empire, that is, Parthia and Media. There were Jews from the southern extent of the Roman Empire in North Africa. There were Jews from all Asia and Italy. This journey to Jerusalem on Passover and Pentecost was a very precious thing in the lives of devout Jews.

In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, Jesus is giving a warning to the disciples of the Roman Empire in order to **save their lives**. When the gospel was preached to the Jewish inhabitants of the Roman Empire, they gave up the Old Testament law that stated that Jewish males must be in Jerusalem on Passover and Pentecost

(Ex 12; 23; Nm 9). Those Jews who obeyed the gospel would be taught the prophecy of Matthew 24. They would thus stay away from Jerusalem. When the Roman army did come to Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they came on Passover and Pentecost. Those Jewish Christians who lived outside Judea believed the message of Matthew 24, and thus, **were not there**. Their lives were spared because they believed Jesus and His prophecy concerning national Israel. Since the New Testament contains several exhortations to Jewish Christians, therefore, we must assume that it contains many references to A.D.70.

Verses 15-18 **THE ABOMINATION** **OF DESOLATION**

“Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation that was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place – whoever reads, let him understand – then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. Nor let him who is in the field go back to get his clothes.”

The **abomination of desolation** would be the pagan Roman army in Judea. They would be there to desecrate the temple. Their presence would be an abomination to the Jews. However, it would be the will of God who was by proxy bringing judgment on Israel by the power of the Roman armies. Luke records, *“But when you see Jerusalem*

surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” (Lk 21:20).

Daniel had prophesied of this event in Daniel 9 & 11. Jesus is saying, therefore, that we must understand that the A.D. 70 event is the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy (See Mk 13:14). Daniel said, *“And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined” (Dn 9:26,27).* Forces *“shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the **abomination of desolation**” (Dn 11:31).* *“And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation ...” (Dn 12:1).*

At the beginning of this time of destruction, the resident Christians of Judea must **flee**. They must heed Jesus’ warnings in order to perceive that the end of national Israel was near.

The urgency by which they must flee is here revealed. In the ancient cities one could actually go from house to house on the roof tops of the houses. The houses were joined together so that one could simply go from one roof to another. Jesus says that they must not take the time to return to their houses for coveted possessions when they see the chance to escape the city. They must flee with what they have in hand. Jesus also warned that no one is to go to Judea during these days (Lk 21:21). This warning was possibly to those who might travel to Jerusalem and be caught in the war that was to rage throughout

Judea. Jesus’ warning, therefore, is to save lives, the lives of those Jewish Christians who might still follow after Jewish feasts.

The Roman army of Titus was under the command of Cestius Gallus. For some reason during the battle, he removed his encircling army from the city for a brief period of time. This gave all resident Christians of Jerusalem time to flee. This was possibly the time Jesus said that they must not come down from their roof tops. They must take the window of opportunity and flee from the city.

Verses 19 & 20 PRAY FOR FLIGHT

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

It would be difficult for pregnant women to flee during the war. Those with small nursing babies would also have difficulty in the flight from Judea. The prayers of the saints evidently had some determining factor as to when this destruction would occur, for Jesus asked them to pray that such not happen in winter when the journey of flight would be difficult. They must also pray that their flight not begin on the Sabbath, for fanatical Jews would close the city gates on the Sabbath and hinder any from making preparations to leave. The prayers of the saints would determine much concerning the deliverance of the Christians.

Verse 21
GREAT TRIBULATION

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

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

Verse 22
**WAR SHORTENED
FOR CHRISTIANS’ SAKE**

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

God would shorten **those days** of the war. If the rate of killing the Jews continued that went on during the battle, the slaughter of all Jews throughout the Roman Empire would have resulted in their annihilation. The killing would have spilled over into the community of Christian Jews. But for the sake of the

Christian Jews, God would not allow the killing to continue past the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, the destruction was contained in Judea.

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

Verse 23
FALSE PROCLAMATIONS

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

Jesus again emphasized the concept that believers not be led astray by the deceptions of false messiahs. In time of national trauma He knew that the people would seek for a national savior. There would be those self-proclaimed deliverers who would seek to lead the nation in rebellion against Rome. Jesus tells the disciples not to follow such false guides.

When the disciples later asked in Acts 1:6, *“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel,”* Jesus knew that they still retained nationalistic hopes. In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, He gives teachings upon which they can reflect when the countdown starts toward A.D. 70. They can reflect on what Jesus said in this discussion and know that His intention was not to establish a physical kingdom

reign here on earth. It was never His intention. It will not be His intention to do so when He comes again. Jesus' kingdom reign was always planned to be from heaven.

Veres 24 FALSE MESSIAHS AND PREACHERS

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

False christs and prophets would arise in the time of calamity in order to call people after futile causes. They would **show great signs and wonders**. These magical tricks of wonder would be so good that even believers might by chance believe they were true.

These “signs and wonders” could not be real miracles simply because Jesus says here that the elect might be **deceived** into believing them. The point is that they would not be deceived if the supposed miracles were true. **One is not deceived when he believes that which is true and real.** This context is similar to Paul’s warning in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.”* In the 2 Thes-salonians text the word “lying” would modify power, signs and wonders. All supposed miracles of Satan are false. Those who suppose to work miracles today, are the instruments of Satan. But Paul warns that *“such are false apostles, **deceitful workers,***

transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (2 Co 11:13). They are not instruments of Satan because they work real miracles. They are instruments of Satan because they claim that what they do is the miraculous work of either God or Satan. Jesus says, **“Be not deceived.”**

Verse 25 FOREWARNING

“Behold, I have told you in advance.”

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

The false workers about whom Jesus speaks existed in the times preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. I do not doubt that they have prevailed throughout history. Christians, therefore, who would be disciples of Jesus must heed His warnings concerning such things. Peter stated, *“Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), **that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’”*** (2 Pt 3:1-4). It seems that

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

Jesus “*was manifest in these last times for you*” (1 Pt 1:20). God “*has in these last days spoken to us by His Son*” (Hb 1:2). This was the “fullness of the time,” (Gl 4:4), the “end of the age” (Ep 1:10). It was in these last times of national Israel that God sent forth His Son. The last days does not refer to a dispensation, but to a time of end, the end of national Israel.

It was the “last times,” the last times of national Israel. Jude and James also wrote just a few years before the fall of Jerusalem. Jude stated, “*Beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts*” (Jd 17). Jude’s readers were experiencing these mockers in their own lives. Therefore, Jude’s argument is that his readers were in the **last time**.

The few years preceding A.D. 70 were the last times. These were the last days of national Israel. God was bringing judgment upon the wicked vinedressers (the Jewish religious leadership) who attempted to steal the fruit and inheritance of the vineyard (See Mt 21:33-45). National Israel had rejected God, and thus, God was

rejecting national Israel. National Israel’s persecution of the “Israel by faith” was coming to an end.

James wrote to suffering Jewish Christians of the Roman Empire around A.D. 62 or 63. He comforted the persecuted “Israel by faith” (the church) by saying, “*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.... You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*” (Js 5:7,8). James was not talking about a “coming of the Lord” at the end of time. Discussion concerning a coming at the end of time would not have been an encouragement to his immediate readers. The “coming” in the context here is about judgment **in time** upon the nation of Israel. National Israel was the primary persecutor of Christians before A.D. 70. Jesus’ “coming in judgment” upon Israel was **at hand**, that is, it was near unto happening. In Matthew 24 Jesus is “telling beforehand” of this national calamity that was coming in only a few years.

Verses 26 & 27 MANIFESTED COMING

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

Before the end of national Israel there were those false christs (messiahs) who led gullible Jews into the wilderness

in hope of deliverance from Rome. Jesus is here warning the disciples not to accept anyone who would lead them into believing that the Christ would come **in time** in a manner that would be characteristic of His final coming. When Jesus comes at the **end of time** it will not be a happening that would have to be communicated by people to people. It will be a happening that will be at the **sound** of the last trumpet, with the voice of **an archangel** (1 Th 4:15,16). In other words, Jesus says that if they are told that “the Christ” has come, they should not believe it, for the next personal coming of Jesus will be worldwide and heavenly announced. There will be no necessity to go forth and proclaim this coming, for everyone will know it.

Verse 28 CONSUMPTION OF THE CARCASS

“For wherever the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together.”

The **carcass** is the Jewish nation. The gathering **eagles** (Gr., “vultures”) is the Roman army that has come to consume the nation. When the disciples started seeing the gathering of the Roman army into Palestine, they would know that the destruction was about to happen.

Verse 29 DOWNFALL OF NATIONAL ISRAEL

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened and

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

The great tribulation of verse 21 would precede the final destruction of the city. Therefore, **immediately after the tribulation** of those days, the splendor of the Jewish nation would fall by the destruction of Israel’s pride, the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Jesus uses **apocalyptic** judgment language from the Old Testament to portray the fall of the nation. Such language was commonly used by inspired writers in the Old Testament to symbolize the fall of nations (See Is 13:6-18; 14:12; 24:23; 34:4; Jr 4:23,24; Ez 32:7,8; Dn 8:10; Jl 2:30-32). The **sun** usually represented the king or monarch of the nation. The **heavenly bodies** represented the rest of the government leaders. We must not allow ourselves to become inconsistent in understanding Jesus’ use of this figurative language to be a literal falling of the sun, moon and stars. We consistently interpret such language as it was used in the Old Testament. **Such language referred to the fall of an earthly kingdom.**

When God **shakes the heavens**, there is great change on earth among the nations. This is the meaning of the figure in Haggai 2:6 from which Jesus draws the figure, “shaking the powers of the heavens.” Haggai wrote, *“For thus says the Lord of hosts; ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations ...’”* (Hg 2:6,7). God

was going “to shake” heaven and earth in order to sift out of national Israel those who could not be shaken because they had submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus in their hearts. This is precisely what the Hebrew writer stated when he wrote a few years before A.D. 70, “... *He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.’ Now this ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.*” (Hb 12:26,27). National Israel was being physically removed in order to allow the “Israel by faith” to shine forth. The Hebrew writer continued, “*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (Hb 12:28). At the time of the writing of Hebrews 12:28, the kingdom of Jesus was in the process of being established among the Jews throughout the world.

Verse 30

THE SIGN OF THE SON

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

Jesus had earlier spoken to His disciples on the subject of His coming judgment. He had said that this coming (presence) would be “*in the glory of His Father with His angels [messengers]*”

(Mt 16:27). Jesus had said in chapter 16 that some of His immediate disciples would experience this coming. “*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*” (Mt 16:28). So the **sign** here in verse 30 is discussing what Jesus had previously prophesied. When the Roman army eventually came, such would be God’s final **signal** to believe in this Jesus who foretold such. The fulfillment would be God’s last proof of Jesus as the Messiah.

The word “see” could be translated “perceive” or “discern.” When all these things happen, men would perceive the judgment of Jesus on Jerusalem. “**Coming in the clouds**” is judgment language from the Old Testament (Is 19:1; Jr 4:13; Ez 30:3; Dn 7:13). When Jesus brings this judgment through the Roman army, then people will perceive the judgment power of the Son.

The disciples would thus witness the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. They would understand that Daniel 7:13,14 had been fulfilled. Daniel had prophesied, “*I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away. And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed*” (Dn 7:13,14). This

prophecy speaks of the **ascension of Jesus**, for Jesus ascended unto the Ancient of Days who is the Father. However, before Jesus ascended to heaven, all authority in heaven and earth had been given unto Him (Mt 28:18; Jn 13:3; 17:2). Many would not realize this until the physical fulfillment of the prophecy He was here making in Matthew 24. When Jesus came in judgment on Jerusalem, then men would realize that Jesus was *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come”* (Ep 1:21; see Ph 2:9-11). Jesus was Lord of lords and King of kings before A.D. 70 (1 Tm 6:15). However, true Israel by faith did not *“shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Mt 13:43) until after national Israel was shaken. When national Israel was taken away, the true Israel (the church), that could not be shaken, shined forth in the kingdom. This was a marvel, “a sign”, that the disciples would experience in their lifetime.

If reference in this verse is not to the ascension of Jesus to the Father by the coming in the clouds, then the figure is to **coming in judgment**. It is a figure from the Old Testament that signified God’s coming in judgment upon the unrighteous (Is 19:1; Jr 4:13; Ez 30:2). This could possibly be what Jesus is here signifying. He indicates this same thought during His trial when He stated to the high priest, *“Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man*

sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64). Of course the high priest would not literally see Jesus at the right hand of the Father with all authority. However, he would see this power manifested by proxy in the judgment through the Roman army upon Israel. Those Jews who experienced the destruction of Jerusalem certainly wondered why God was judging them. The disciples before A.D. 70 recognized the kingdom reign of Jesus. This kingdom reign would be manifested after A.D. 70 by the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. I am convinced that the destruction encouraged a lot of disheartened Jews to turn to Jesus. This is possibly what Paul referred to when he said in the context of Romans 9-11, *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved ...”* (Rm 11:25,26). Israel would be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles, through obedience to the gospel. However, because of the stubborn nature of some Jews, they had to experience the destruction of their prize, Jerusalem and the temple, before they could understand that God was finished with national Israel. The Messiah had come.

Verse 31
SENDING FORTH
OF EVANGELISTS

“And He will send His messengers with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

The Greek word *angelos*, here translated “angels”, should be translated “messengers” in this text. It is so translated in Matthew 11:10, *“Behold, I send My messenger [“angelos”] before Your face”* It is so translated in Luke 7:24, *“When the messengers [“angelos”] of John had departed”* Also, Jesus *“sent messengers [“angelos”] before His face”* to Jerusalem (Lk 9:52; see 2 Co 12:7; Js 2:25). I feel that only because some translators have believed that Matthew 24 referred to the end of time, they translated the word *angelos* to refer to heavenly angels. But the context does not warrant this translation. Jesus is not historically jumping in the text from A.D. 70 to some time at least over nineteen hundred years later.

Jesus did send His messengers forth. He said to His disciples, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ...”* (Mt 28:19). *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mk 16:15). *“And they went out and preached everywhere...”* (Mk 16:20). The disciples were dispersed from Jerusalem in Acts 8:4 in order to take the message of the gospel throughout the world. Those who would believe were **gathered together into the church community**. Those who recognized that *“all things were fulfilled”* (Mt 5:18) came to Jesus. They converted from

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

The messengers (evangelists) went forth with the **sound of a trumpet**. This is symbolic language from the Old Testament. The trumpet was sounded as a warning of impending danger (Nm 10:2; Jl 2:1ff; Is 27:13). The disciples went forth not only with the message of hope in the gospel, but also the message of Matthew 24. Those Jews who did not obey the gospel would possibly suffer their own physical destruction in the calamity of A.D. 70.

Verses 32 & 33

PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

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

The meaning of the parable from the fig tree is the nearness of the destruction as indicated by Jesus’ statements of verses 5-29. The fig tree puts forth her tender branches and leaves in the spring. Such indicates that summer is coming. The happening of the events of verses 5-29 would indicate the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem. The disciples would understand that the “coming of

the Lord in judgment in time was at hand” (Jš 5:9). For this reason, Jesus says, *“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”* (Rv 3:20).

Verse 34 FULFILLMENT IN “THIS GENERATION”

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

Some of those of **this generation**, the generation to whom Jesus was speaking, would not die before all that He had just said occurred. This verse is certainly parallel with what Jesus had said in Matthew 16:27,28. Jesus had said in the context of the Son of Man coming in the glory of His Father, *“... there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”* Thus the disciples would go from city to city in Israel, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. This would be their message of hope. However, the messengers would also have on their lips a message of doom for national Israel. In their preaching, the unbelieving Jews would persecute them from city to city. Jesus said to the disciples, *“But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes”* (Mt 10:23).

Because of the Jews’ persecution of

the church, God would bring judgment upon national Israel. Before Jesus arrived at this context of His message to the disciples in Matthew 24, He had stated, *“Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation”* (Mt 23:36). “These things” referred to the coming destruction. These things would “come upon this generation.”

God would bring the punishment of judgment upon the generation to whom Jesus personally ministered because **they had personally rejected Jesus**. Jesus had said to the rejecting Jews, *“The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here”* (Mt 12:41,42). Jesus’ generation would receive a more harsh judgment because they had personally witnessed the presence of the Son of God. The destruction of Jerusalem, therefore, was not only God’s intended time to terminate a dispensation of work through Israel, it was His judgment upon a generation that personally rejected His Son.

Verse 35 THE WORD ENDURES FOREVER

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

Jesus seems to comfort the disciples at this point in this most terrifying proclamation. No matter what the national calamity might be, they must trust in the word of God which endures forever. Peter possibly reflected on the thought of this statement of Jesus when he wrote just a few years before Jerusalem's destruction, "*All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever*" (1 Pt 1:24,25). It is doubtful that nationalistic thinking Peter realized this when Jesus was making the pronouncements of Matthew 24 in his presence. Nevertheless, he, as well as the other disciples at hand, would soon realize that they could not put their faith in any nation, even though it had been ordained by God some 1,400 years before. The only thing that would permeate the destruction of all things would be the word of God. Eventually, the present heaven and earth would pass away (2 Pt 3:10,11). But the word of the Lord endures forever. Therefore, Jesus assumes that they will wholeheartedly trust in His word.

Verse 36

THE TIME OF DESTRUCTION

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

"**That day**" is here a generic term as "**the Sabbath**" is in verse 20. In other words, this is "that day of destruction."

The indication is not in reference to a specific 24-hour day, but to **the time** when the destruction would occur. While on earth, Jesus did not know this time. Neither did the angels know. At the time Jesus was making these pronouncements, it was not necessary that either He or angels be aware of the actual time of the destruction.

Luke's account of Jesus' statement helps us to better understand the flow of the text in order to understand "that day" to refer to the context of the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke recorded, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore ...*" (Lk 21:22-36). Those Jews who were consumed in the affairs of the world would certainly not believe in Jesus or His prophecy, let alone expect the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. In fact, Peter states that they would be mocking this belief of Christians. "... *scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation'*" (2 Pt 3:3,4). Of course these scoffers had forgotten the flood of Noah's day. They had forgotten Sodom and Gomorrah. Regardless of their forgetfulness, however, God would

bring this judgment upon Jerusalem.

The key word here is **watch**. Mark records more information that Jesus gave at this point in the discourse. *“Take heed, **watch** and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to **watch**. **Watch** therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning - lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: **Watch!**”* (Mk 13:33-37).

Verses 37-39

WICKED TAKEN AWAY

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

The “coming” that Jesus is talking about – the destruction of Jerusalem—is as the **days of Noah**. Both the flood of Noah’s day and the destruction of Jerusalem were “comings” of the Lord in judgment **in time**. However, the final coming of Jesus in judgment at the end of time will be different. The flood and destruction of Jerusalem may be typical of the final coming. However, we must

understand that nothing has ever happened in the history of man that will fully explain what will happen at the end of time. Therefore, all illustrations to the “end of time” judgment must be metaphorical. The New Testament writers took that which was literal and had actually happened in history to illustrate that which will happen at the end of time. We must keep in mind, however, that these historical events which are metaphorically used to illustrate final judgment do not fully explain what will happen when Jesus comes again.

Jerusalem’s destruction, though, will be as it was in the days of Noah (See Gn 7:6-23). God sent the flood because of the wickedness of man. *“... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gn 6:5). Such wickedness would be characteristic of the unbelieving Jews who crucified the Son of God. They were hardened to repentance, though they personally experienced the miraculous confirmation of God directly from heaven. Men were more concerned about the material aspects of existence than spiritual matters. The Pharisees consumed on their own lusts that financial help the children were to give to their parents (Mk 7:9-13). The rich Sadducean Jews had *“lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury”* (See Js 5:1-6). They had cheated in the wages that were due to their laborers (Js 5:4). As it was in the days of Noah, so it was in the days of Israel before A.D. 70.

In verses 37-40 Jesus is saying that

people will be living in their own normal wicked and materialistic manner prior to “that day” of destruction. It was this way in the days of Noah. It would be the same in the destruction of national Israel. And, it will be the same at the end of time. Those who reject the pronouncements of the word of God see only those things of this world. They refuse to submit to the “coming of the Lord” in judgment.

Verses 40 & 41

THE RIGHTEOUS ARE LEFT

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

Here is another similarity between the times of Noah and the destruction of Jerusalem. When the flood came, righteous Noah and his family entered the ark. The flood then came **and took away the wicked. Only the righteous were left safely in the ark.** So it would be in the destruction of Jerusalem. **The wicked would be taken and the righteous would be left.**

This is not, therefore, a context for the preposterous “rapture theology” that is so prevalent among misguided theologians today. Jesus said, *“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.”* Those who propagate “rapture theology” **reverse** the illustration of Jesus. In their attempt to force this passage to have reference to the end of time and some misguided premillennial theology, they twist the

Scriptures to their own destruction (See 2 Pt 3:15,16). Simply keep in mind that Jesus’ use of the flood of Noah’s day to illustrate the events of the destruction of Jerusalem are to show that in the destruction *“the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Mt 13:43). The wicked would be taken. The righteous would be left.

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

Verse 42

WATCH

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

The term **“hour”** is here used with a generic meaning. It is not a specific 60-minute hour, as **“the day”** of verse 36 was not a specific 24-hour solar day. Reference is to **a time** when all this would take place. Emphasis is upon the fact that there would be a specific time in history when all this would happen, though the time will occur over a period of days and weeks. The point is that believers in what Jesus is saying must continually **watch**, lest they become caught up in the affairs of this world.

Verses 43 & 44

UNEXPECTED COMING

“But know this, that if the head of the

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

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

After the establishment of the church in A.D. 30, the apostles evidently stayed in Jerusalem for as long as ten years. The reason for this was obvious. Jerusalem was where devoted Jews came to offer sacrifices at the altar. It was the prime opportunity to evangelize the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In A.D. 58 or 59 Paul made a last trip there in order to make a final plea to Jews who might obey the gospel (At 21). Their vehement rejection of the gospel and attempted murder of Paul were evidence that at this time (A.D. 58,59) the Jerusalem Jews were ready for the judgment of God. What Jesus had pronounced in Matthew 23:34-36 was ready to happen. The "**righteous blood**" of all innocent prophets of God was about to be brought on this generation of defiant Jews.

In Jesus' pronouncements of Matthew 24 He wants to give the faithful

adequate indications of when to stay away from Jerusalem and Judea. They must not become trapped in the "traditions of the fathers" nor in the materialistic vanities of Jewish economics. It would be best that they sell "*their possessions and goods*" and divide them among all believers, as anyone had need (At 2:45; see At 4:32-37). Residents of Jerusalem were going to lose their possessions anyway in the coming destruction. Why keep that which they would eventually lose?

Verses 45-47 THE FAITHFUL AND WISE SERVANT

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

The **faithful and wise servant** understands the responsibility of his relationship to the master's household. So it is with those disciples who remain faithful and wisely understand their duties to serve the Lord. They will not be diverted to the cares of this world, nor drawn away by the politics of nationalistic Israelites. Their citizenship in heaven will be stronger than their connection to the physical "seed of Abraham." Therefore, they take heed and watch for the coming of the master of the household. They are always prepared

for his coming in order that they not be caught unprepared.

Verses 48-51

THE EVIL SERVANT

“But if that evil bondservant will say in his heart, ‘My master delays,’ and begins to beat his fellow bondservants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that bondservant will come in a day when he is not looking for him and in an hour that he does not know. And he will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The **evil servant** will not be spiritually awakened by the imminent coming of the Lord in his lifetime. He puts the thought out of his mind and carries on with the ordinary things of life. In Jesus’ personal conversation here with His disciples He is emphasizing the fact that this **coming** of the Lord will happen “in this generation.” He had said, “*Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation*” (Mt 23:36). “*Assuredly, I say to you,*

there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Mt 16:28).

Jesus **was not** leading them to believe that the **final coming and end of the world** would be in their lifetime. The New Testament **does not** teach the imminent final return of Jesus. That is, the Holy Spirit did not inspire New Testament writers to believe that the final coming of Jesus would happen in their lifetime of the first century disciples. However, **Jesus and the inspired writers did teach the imminent coming of Jesus in time in judgment upon Jerusalem.** It was this return for which they were to be looking. This is the return about which James wrote, “*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.... Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*” (Js 5:7,8). Therefore, Jesus urges His disciples to look for this coming. Those who do not heed these warnings of Mt 24 will suffer the **weeping and gnashing of teeth** in the destruction of their prized city Jerusalem.

Chapter 2

Destruction Of The World

2 Peter 3

The first letter Peter wrote was to the Jews of “*the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*” (1 Pt 1:1). There were many Jewish residents in Asia Minor, Jews who were very faithful to Jewish tradition. They were loyal to the Jewish cause of

independence from Roman domination. Peter writes to those Jewish Christians who might still be entrapped in Jewish tradition that compelled them to give some homage to their past religion.

Peter wrote the first letter between A.D. 63 and 65. He writes the second

letter between A.D. 65 and 67. In both letters he wrote to “*stir up your pure minds by way of reminder*” (2 Pt 3:1). In view of the fact that he is writing to Jews at the time when the Matthew 24 prophecy of Jesus is drawing near to fulfillment, we would certainly be just to assume that he dwells on this fulfillment. The fact that Peter writes to Jewish Christians near the end of national Israel compels us to consider the context of 2 Peter 3 in view of the fulfillment of Matthew 24. Peter wants to “stir their minds” to remember things they had already been told. This would certainly include the imminent coming of judgment upon national Israel.

Could the metaphorical language of this chapter have primary reference to the destruction of national Israel? Could Peter be writing to encourage Jewish Christians to urge their non-Christian Jewish relatives and friends not to make their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost in these last days of national Israel?

Since Peter was one of the four disciples to whom Jesus personally delivered the prophecy of Matthew 24 (Mk 13:3), we could assume that he is sensitive to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. He, as well as all New Testament prophets, proclaimed the message of Matthew 24 throughout the Roman Empire. As the letter of Revelation was circulated first in Asia Minor among the Christians in the region of seven cities of Jewish concentration, we could assume that this is another letter sent out to save life and prepare the

minds of yet unconverted Jews to accept the inevitable blow of God’s judgment upon Jerusalem. Friends and family of those who did not heed the warnings would be those of the Empire who would be among the mourning about whom Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24 (Mt 24:30).

In the first letter Peter alerted his readers to an impending end of “all things.” “*But the end of all things is at hand*” (1 Pt 4:7). James also wrote to Jewish Christians, “*to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*” (Js 1:1). James’ warning is the same as Peter’s. “*Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*” (Js 5:8). Both James and Peter are fore-warning Jewish Christians that there is an imminent judgment of God in the air; there is an end in sight.

I do not believe that the Holy Spirit is deceiving these inspired writers to deceive the church into believing that the “coming” and “end” that are at hand have reference to the final coming of Jesus and the end of the world. In view of the dates of the letters, and the historical destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it is difficult not to interpret their warnings in view of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction was only three to five years away from the time of their writing. The sound of Roman armies was already in the air. “Rumors of wars” had already begun. The end of national Israel was “at hand.”

I believe those interpreters who have not recognized the historical setting of the epistles of James, Jude, 1 Peter and 2

Peter have missed the point. How could these Jewish writers who wrote to Jewish audiences three to five years before the Jewish calamity of A.D. 70 ignore the fulfillment of Jesus' Matthew 24 prophecy concerning Jewish history?

Would Peter, who personally sat at the feet of Jesus in the Matthew 24 discourse, bypass the imminent fulfillment of Jesus' profound prophecy in order to discuss something that would occur over 1,900 years later? Would James, Jude or Peter, who directed their letters primarily to Jewish readers, ignore the most traumatic national event that would happen in the history of national Israel? Would they ignore the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus? I think not.

With the above questions in mind, I would ask for less dogmatism in interpreting 2 Peter 3 with reference solely to the end of time. I believe the arguments of those scholars who would interpret 2 Peter 3 in reference to the end of national Israel, are not without merit. Therefore, I challenge you to reconsider this text in the historical context in which it was first written.

Verse 1

THE SECOND LETTER

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

Peter here states one of his reasons for writing. It is to remind his Jewish readers of things they had already been taught. We would assume, therefore,

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

In the first letter Peter had already mentioned the impending end of all things (1 Pt 4:7). He now goes into graphic detail. I conclude, therefore, that this subject is not new to the readers. They had been taught the context of Matthew 24. The earliest gospel record, Mark, had already been circulated among churches with the record of Jesus' prophecy (See Mk 13). It is even probable that Luke's record had also had some circulation among the churches (See Lk 21). Therefore, we can assume that the early Christians had already been taught the material of Matthew 24 concerning the end of national Israel.

Verse 2

REMEMBER THE WARNINGS

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

The church was built upon the

inspired foundation of the preaching of the apostles and prophets (Ep 2:20). It was so founded upon the apostles and New Testament prophets because God, through them, “*revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets*” the mystery of the gospel (Ep 3:5).

It could be argued that Peter here refers to the Old Testament prophets. However, “*of this salvation they [Old Testament prophets] have inquired and searched diligently ... searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating ... to them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us ...*” (1 Pt 1:10-13). The full revelation of the mystery came only through the New Testament apostles and prophets. It came to the Old Testament prophets through inspired prophecy, which prophecy they did not completely understand. For this reason, it is best to affirm that Peter in the context of 2 Peter 3 is referring to the inspired New Testament speakers and writers, not the Old Testament prophets.

One point is clear concerning the prophecies about the end of the Jewish State. Both the Old Testament and New Testament prophets proclaimed the end of the State. Both Isaiah (Is 10:20-23) and Daniel (Dn 9:24-27) spoke of the end of the State. The New Testament prophets (evangelists) went forth calling Israel by faith to come out of national Israel.

Verse 3

SCOFFERS IN THE LAST DAYS

Knowing this first, that scoffers will

come in the last days, walking after their own lusts ...

Peter now seems to take the readers through a chronology of both biblical teaching and historical events. First, they must remember that it was previously spoken that **scoffers** would come in the **last days**. “Scoffers” here seems to be a specific signal of the presence of the last days. Those who ridiculed the pronouncements of Jesus concerning the fall of national Israel would reject Christians’ belief that the “*end of all things is at hand*” (1 Pt 4:7). Paul’s second letter to Timothy around A.D. 67 contains a similar warning of the times. “*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come*” (2 Tm 3:1; see also 1 Tm 4:1-3; 2 Tm 4:3-5). The existence of the scoffers and mockers was evidence that the disciples were in the perilous times of the last days of national Israel.

I see no reason to skip over more than 1,900 years in order to apply the above warnings to the end of the world. This is especially true in view of the fact that the “scoffers” and “perilous times” were present and occurring in the immediate environment of both Paul and Peter. It was the last days of national Israel. The nation was coming to an end.

We must keep in mind that the term “last days” does not refer to long periods of time. The term itself defines the meaning. Reference is to the **last** days of a dispensation or long period of time. In this sense, therefore, Peter is not discussing the “Christian age” as the last

days. He is discussing the finality of a dispensation, the Jewish dispensation.

The scoffers would **walk according to their own lusts**. Paul said that they would be “*lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers ...*” (2 Tm 3:2-5). Jude said they are “*walking after their own ungodly lusts*” (Jd 18). Paul, Jude and Peter all record the nature of those who would ignore or scoff at the judgments of God. Such is the nature of non-religious people who refuse to have the knowledge of God in their minds. They are not simply indifferent to the views of the Christian. They are antagonistic to them. But such is also the nature of the religious materialist. He has economically padded his or her environment with a religion of “consuming things upon one’s own lust” (Js 4:3). Those who are so involved in the world refuse to accept the fact that their material security will be destroyed.

Verse 4

MOCKERS OF THE COMING

... and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.

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

Jesus had foretold the nature of those who would reject impending judgment. “*For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark*” (Mt 24:38). However, these scoffers had forgotten past judgments of God **in time** as the flood of Noah’s day, Sodom and Gomorrah, and even Jerusalem itself in the days of the Babylonian conquest of 586 B.C. Things **had not** continued as they were since the days of creation. God had come in judgment in time upon Israel. All such judgments were to remind men of future comings in judgment. However, those who refuse to listen, will not heed the in time judgments of God.

The disciples preached the coming (“presence”) of the Lord in judgment on Israel. The unbelieving Jews never believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and thus, are here not scoffing about Him coming again. These scoffers are mocking the preaching of the disciples concerning God’s judgment on Israel that was proclaimed by what they believed was a false messiah.

Jesus, however, had made a **promise**. “*For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man*” (Mt 24:27,37-44). To persecuted Christians who believed Jesus’ promise, the fulfillment of the promise would be their deliverance from Jewish persecution. In a secondary sense, deliverance from the confines of the material world and persecution of the wicked at **the end of**

time would also be a fulfillment of one of Jesus' promises (See Jn 14:3; 2 Th 4:13-17). In general, therefore, we all look forward to a time of deliverance from the harshness that the world delivers to the Christian's spirit (See vs 12,13). We look forward to a time when this world will pass away. We look for the new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness (2 Pt 3:13).

Verses 5 & 6

THE EXAMPLE OF THE FLOOD

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

These scoffers of the Christian's hopes willfully forget that God once destroyed humanity from the face of the earth by a global flood (Gn 6-8). Only Noah and his faithful family were spared. Jude also referred to these "*mockers in the last times who would walk according to their own lusts*" (Jd 18; see 2 Tm 3:1-5). Their presence in the lives of Peter's and Jude's immediate readers indicates that they were in the **last times** of national Israel.

In the years previous to the flood of Noah's day, Enoch preached about such ungodly characters in Noah's generation. In the flood God came "*to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things*

which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jd 14,15).

This is where we would have no problem in keeping the comments of both Jude and Peter in the historical context of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of national Israel. Jude's quotation of Enoch's prophecy is significant. Enoch spoke of the judgment of mockers in Noah's day. Their judgment was their destruction by the flood. Jude uses this "coming in judgment" in Noah's day to illustrate the coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. We would, therefore, not be out of context to use **in time** judgments of God as the flood to warn of the final coming in judgment at the end of time. By the time Peter concludes this chapter, he has progressed to the end of time judgment. His immediate readers were going to experience an **in time** illustration of the final judgment at the **end of time**.

Peter emphasizes the fact that God can cause catastrophic judgment. The world that existed before the flood was destroyed by the flood. This passage teaches that more than the destruction of humanity by the flood occurred at the time of the flood. Peter uses the Greek word *kataklystheis*, which means "to overthrow with water." The earth before the flood was "*standing out of water and in the water*" (See Gn 1:7-10). It was first formed a watery mass (Gn 1:1-3). There were the "waters" or canopy of firmament above and the watery mist that came up from the earth to water vegetation (Gn 2:6). However, by water God overthrew that world. The physical

world that we now experience is far different from the physical appearance of the surface of the earth that existed before the flood. The flood radically changed the surface of the earth. This present earth is also destined for another change in the future. Peter's point is clear. Noah's flood was not a local washout by a local rainstorm. It was global (Gn 7:11). The God that created the world can so cause such global judgments. He could certainly terminate local elements of persecution and world empires of Peter's present time and ours. He can even terminate the physical world which He created out of nothing. Peter wants to encourage the faithful that the God they serve is not a limited God who has been created after the image of man. He is the God who can exist apart from the mind of man.

Verse 7

PRESERVED FOR FIRE

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

The world that existed before Noah perished. Peter now compares that world with the one that now is, which is **stored up** for destruction by **fire**. For this reason, I cannot help but think that Peter is turning in the context to the finality of things at the end of the world. Noah's world **physically** perished. The comparison is with this present world which will also **physically** perish. We

caution ourselves not to make too close a comparison between the two events. However, consider two things. The earth's surface as Noah knew it before the flood, perished. It was overthrown by water. Also, the population of the world that existed before the flood perished from off the face of the earth. In other words, the earth was refaced and repopulated. The wicked were annihilated from the earth.

We must keep in mind that God looks at history as we would view a photograph. He can see history in an instant. Thus in His revelation to us I believe this "view" of our circumstances on earth is often revealed. This is especially true in Old Testament prophecy, as well as, New Testament prophecy of the things that are to come. God sees the making of the prophecy and the fulfillment at the same time. In this way, therefore, He sees in time judgments as illustrations of the final judgment. He seeks to relay this understanding to us by often mixing in time judgments with end of time judgments. Such was the case in Matthew 24 and 25. I believe such is the case in this context.

A different "heavens and earth" existed after the flood than before the flood of Noah's day. However, this present heavens and earth as we now experience them are **reserved** for "destruction" by **fire** in the last day of God's final judgment of **perdition**, or destruction (See vss 10-12). Disobedient angels have been reserved for the destruction of the last day (2 Pt 2:4; Jd 6).

Peter stated that God knows how “to preserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pt 2:9). Therefore, everything is now in reservation or preservation for the judgment of the last day.

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

Verse 8

INSIGNIFICANCE OF TIME

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

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

Peter’s point here is that because we are limited to considering time between promise and fulfillment, we must not

lead ourselves to believe that God either thinks or behaves as men. What God has said, He will do. What we might consider to be slowness on the part of God to fulfill His promise is not such from the viewpoint of God.

Verse 9

THE TIMELESSNESS AND PATIENCE OF GOD

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

God is not **slow** (“slack”, KJV) to bring about His promise. He does not desire that men **perish**. The Greek word here for “perish” is *apollumi*. It means “to loose away,” or “to destroy.” God does not want men to be destroyed in the great destruction that will be coming upon those who do not obey the gospel (See 2 Th 1:7-9).

God desires that men **repent**, that they turn their lives to obedient behavior of the divine will (See Ez 18:32; Jn 3:17; At 17:30; 1 Tm 2:4; Hb 2:9). Thus we do not serve a mean God, one that seeks to eternally destroy man from His presence. We serve a patient God who is timeless in His desire that men turn to serve Him.

Verse 10

THE DAY OF THE LORD

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat. The

earth also and the works that are therein will be burned up.

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

If reference in the context of 2 Peter 3 is to God’s judgment on Jerusalem, then the “day of the Lord” would be the same as “that day” about which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:36. It would be a great day of calamity for national Israel. In the Old Testament the term “day” referred to God’s judgment upon nations (See Is 13:6-9; 28:5; Ez 30:3; Jl 1:15,21). Here reference is to the day of judgment upon Israel. The destruction of Jerusalem was just another “day” of God’s judgment days on Israel for their rejection of His will (See Am 3:2; Ep 3:12; Is 2,3; Hs 4:3; MI 3:2ff).

That day would come as a **thief** to those who had no concern for the fulfillments of God’s promises (See 1 Th 5:1-3). It would come as a thief to those who have allowed the possessions of this world to possess them. Jesus said that disobedient Jews would be “*eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage*” just as those who were destroyed by Noah’s flood (Mt 24:38). To unbelievers, God’s judgments always come as a thief in the night. They are not

expecting His judgment simply because they have no belief in His word. They carry on with life as usual. When God’s judgment comes, then to them the coming is as a thief.

God’s judgment on the unbelieving materialist, as in this passage and others, is also as a thief. The materialist’s mind is on things of this world. He is possessed by possessions, controlled by the carnal. However, when the end comes, both in Jerusalem’s destruction and the world’s destruction, that which the materialist so coveted will be taken from him. As a thief takes away material possessions, so the Lord in judgment takes away the material, that which diverts the minds of those who are not looking for His coming. The last thing the materialist wants is for a thief to come and take away his possessions. The last theology he wants to believe is a teaching that the things for which he has given so much time will ultimately be destroyed.

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

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

If we interpret that the immediate context of 2 Peter 3 refers to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, then we would view this **in-time** judgment to metaphorically illustrate the final coming in judgment at the **end of time**. I say metaphorically because there is no in-time judgment that would literally and accurately portray what will happen at the end of time. The final coming of the Lord and destruction will be unique. It will be different than any coming of the Lord or destruction by the Lord in history.

We commonly use these “coming” and “destruction” passages in the Bible in reference to **end of time** destruction of this present world. However, whether reference in this context is directly to Jerusalem's destruction or earth's destruction, we must recognize that metaphorical figures are being used by Peter. There are no words in human language that would adequately define that which has never happened in human experience. Since the final coming and termination of this present heavens and earth has not yet occurred in human history, then we suppose that Peter has no words in his dictionary to adequately explain things concerning an end-of-time event. I would, therefore, caution us in placing literal meanings upon the words here used by the Holy Spirit to

explain something for which there are no earthly definitions to explain.

If the words in the context refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, then they would still be used in a metaphorical sense. The elements of Jerusalem did not melt. The physical stones of the city did not burn out of existence. We must remember that in the metaphor of prophecy, God wants us to look beyond the metaphor to something that is greater, and often spiritual.

It is possible that as Jesus progressed from in-time judgment to end of time judgment in Matthew 24 and 25, Peter moves from talking about a specific **in-time judgment** on Israel to a general **end-of-time judgment** on all. Assuming that this is true, then notice carefully some of the following words and phrases the Spirit uses to explain this final event.

1. Pass away: The present heavens and earth will be done away. Shall they be terminated completely? Annihilated forever? We wonder. Possibly Peter is saying that the present heavens and earth as we now know them will pass away.

2. Great noise: Noise occurs in the presence of atmosphere. Atmosphere is something of this world. At the end, will there be a sudden explosion or implosion? Certainly, Peter's meaning is that as great noises both startle and make aware, the termination of that which is will be no hidden or secret event. The words Peter is using are certainly meant to excite the believer and terrify the unbeliever.

3. Elements will melt and burn up:

Peter's reference is to those things which now exist. What is perceived through the senses by the physical eyes of man and experienced in daily life will be "melted." Is reference here to termination? Possibly so. But this is if we would place our literal understanding on the metaphor of "burned up." However, I would caution us to at least try to be consistent in our interpretations. In our dictionary, "melted" does not mean annihilation. "Burned up" does not mean annihilation. "Burned up" simply means that what is physical has changed in state of existence.

4. *Fervent heat:* No known fire is able to destroy the elements of the present material world. Intense heat, according to the second law of thermodynamics, can destroy the usefulness of matter. A match can be "burned up," but there still remains the charcoal. The heat of the match has escaped into space where it cannot be recovered. The charcoal cannot be burned again. In a sense, therefore, it has "burned up," but something still exists. Therefore, the matter (the match) has only been transformed into what is less useful.

So what is this "fervent heat" about which Peter illustrates end of time destruction? We must suppose that the words Peter uses are metaphorical. Nevertheless, the metaphor only illustrates what is greater than the metaphor itself. Therefore, the "fervent heat" would be greater than the definition of the words themselves as we understand them. Peter is simply trying

to explain that God has a method of destruction that will get the job done. We must not worry ourselves about the details.

5. *Burned up:* As literal fire consumes the usefulness of that which exists, then we assume that there will be a consumption of this present world by something in the future. Peter identifies the earth as that which will be consumed. That which will consume will be "fire," whatever is meant by this. At least in our understanding, "fire" is a most powerful consuming thing or event. We would assume that this metaphor represents something greater than the literal fire we experience. The meaning is certainly that things will be changed or terminated.

Men use earthly things to generate works that manifest their accomplishments. However, Peter says these **works** will also be terminated. All those precious accomplishments over which men have boasted with pride will be consumed in the great bomb fire to come. All the time spent on such great works will profit nothing toward that which will exist in eternity. I cannot help but think that Peter's real message here is to the materialist who is putting so much time and concern in the material things and accomplishments of this world. After all, it is the materialist in the context who is scoffing, "Where is the promise of His coming?" I believe Peter's message is to the same group of materialistic Jews as those to whom James wrote the following words,

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

Verse 11 HOLY CONDUCT AND GODLINESS

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

Whether Peter is discussing the destruction of Jerusalem or the final coming, the point is the same. Since that which we place so much emphasis upon and time in is going to be done away, then how should believers conduct their lives? Peter mentions two things in life behavior for those who recognize the termination of what presently exists.

1. Holy conduct: “Holy” is from the word that means “to separate.” The believers' conduct should be as one separated or detached from what will be terminated. Christians must not become attached to the material world which in verse 10 will have its end in the consuming fire. Their minds must be on things above, things that will permeate the consummation of all earthly things

(Cl 3:2).

2. Godliness: In maintaining a “detached spirit” from the material things of this world, the Christian must seek after God’s ways. He must conduct his or her life as God would direct.

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

The same lesson would apply to those Jewish Christians who were still trusting in the security of national Israel. If Peter’s context is directed to them, then they must trust only in what will permeate the ashes of Jerusalem. And what would last would be Jesus and His church. There were possibly too many Jewish Christians in Peter’s audience who still gave some allegiance to the hope that national Israel would somehow be restored to national glory. Nevertheless, God, in their lifetime – in just a few years from Peter’s writing – would erase from the earth the objects of their pride and nationalism. The destruction of national Israel would help Jewish Christians get their minds off their past and on Christ.

Verse 12 LOOKING FOR GOD’S JUDGMENT

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

Christians are **looking for** the day of the Lord because it will be a day of deliverance from the confines of this present world and the sufferings of persecution in this environment. We are “**eagerly** waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Co 1:7). Paul compared the agony of suffering in this present state with the glory in that which is to come. “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with that **glory** which shall be revealed to us*” (Rm 8:18). In other words, the glory that will be rewarded to the Christian will far outweigh the most intense suffering one might incur in waiting for it.

Paul wrote, “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal **weight of glory***” (2 Co 4:17). Paul’s argument is that our affliction is only momentary in comparison to the eternity of the glory to come. Therefore, “*we do not look at the things which are seen, **but at the things which are not seen***” (2 Co 4:18). This is precisely Peter’s point in 2 Peter 3:12. We look forward to the passing of the things which are seen in order to enter the glory of that which is presently not seen.

Christians that are spiritually detached from what will pass away will be anxiously **hastening** the coming of that glory which is eternal. That which is eternal will arrive only when what is temporal is dissolved. Therefore, the Christian seeks the termination of this world in order to encounter and partake of the heavenly.

Verse 13 NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

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

The **promise** refers to the new place of dwelling. In the Old Testament era Isaiah looked forward to a “new heavens and a new earth” (Is 65:17; 66:22). The fulfillment of this prophecy was realized in the establishment of a spiritual kingdom reign of Jesus that is within the hearts of people (Lk 17:20,21). This is the church. When the will of the Father is done on earth as it is done in heaven, then kingdom reign is established in the hearts of men (See Mt 6:10; Lk 17:20,21). Those who submit to the kingdom reign of Jesus have their names enrolled in heaven (Ph 4:3). Paul wrote, “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ph 3:20).

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

Peter, however, is directing our minds to another dwelling. It is an environment “*in which righteousness dwells.*” Isaiah contrasted the kingdom relationship of Israel with the Father to

the coming kingdom relationship of the church with Jesus. Peter seems to be using the same figure (new heavens and new earth) to compare the present kingdom relationship of the church with Jesus to another, a new kingdom relationship that is yet to come. The physical earth is not under consideration in reference to the new heavens and new earth that are to come. As Isaiah did not bring into consideration the physical world when discussing the new heavens and new earth in the church, so Peter is not considering the physical world when comparing the present “new heavens and new earth” (the church) of Isaiah’s prophecy with the future new heavens and new earth in eternal glory. Peter is pointing us to a new environment as opposed to this one of persecution, ridicule, mockery and scoffing by unbelievers. The one to come will be a dwelling place of righteousness.

On the other hand, the resurrected Christian will not be a “floating spirit” in an environment of space. In the context, Peter is possibly emphasizing the “location” wherein dwells the “righteous saints.” This interpretation would be affirmed by viewing the new heavens and new earth in contrast to the present heaven and earth that are being “kept in store” by the word of God (See vs 7). Could it be that as the world and heavens were changed by the global flood of Noah’s day, so this present structure of the world will be “restructured” by “fire” that will destroy this world as we know it. As “*the world that then existed perished*” (vs 6), so this present world

which exists will also perish. The world certainly did not disintegrate after the flood. It was only drastically changed. Can we understand Peter’s words to mean the same? Possibly. However, we must keep in mind that the flood is the best illustration of destruction of this present world the Holy Spirit has to use to metaphorically help us understand that which is to come. Simply because the world was not completely destroyed in the flood does not necessarily mean that it will not be at the end of time.

Whatever the case, we look forward to a new heavens and earth wherein only the righteous will exist. Therefore, we are “*looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God*” (vs 12). What this new environment will be for the righteous we do not speculate. We simply believe that our changed bodies will dwell in an environment that is suitable for a body that has put on incorruption and immortality. Your guess as to the nature of the environment is as good as ours.

Verses 14-18 **“THESE THINGS”**

Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. And regard the longsuffering of our Lord as salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him has written to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable distort to

their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures.

You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

Peter's reference to "these things" certainly has in mind the events he has just explained. Christians are looking forward to the occurrence of these things in order to pass into the new environment.

However, the delay in the occurrence of these things – the termination of this present environment – leads to the salvation of more souls. Christians are in the business of populating the new heavens and new earth by the preaching of the gospel. The more God delays the destruction of this present heaven and earth the more opportunity we have to enroll citizens in the world to come.

Because the future events have no parallel in either present or past experiences, there are those who will "twist the Scriptures" (vs 16). They do so because they are **untaught** and **unstable**. The result of their twisting will be their own destruction. Is Peter here referring to those mockers of his immediate generation who are saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (vs 4). If so, then surely their destruction in this passage will be their refusal to either flee or stay away from Jerusalem as Jesus warned in Matthew 24.

I am also convinced that there are those today who are twisting the Scriptures concerning future events. No few false proclaimers of the end of time have arisen throughout history. Their erroneous prognostications have led to thousands being deceived into believing all sorts of nonsense doctrines concerning the end of time. Concerning such, I would simply state Jesus' warning that He gave to the disciples in Matthew 24, "**Be not deceived.**"

Chapter 3

The Mark Of The Beast Revelation 13

Correctly understanding the book of Revelation depends upon understanding two very important principles of interpretation.

1. Revelation is a book of figures. When studying other books of the Bible, the approach to interpretation is to understand the context **literally** unless

there is reason to understand it figuratively. **The reverse of the rule is true when studying Revelation.**

In the very first verse of the book, John cautions us on how we should approach this book. John wrote, "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place. And He*

sent and **signified** it by His angel to His servant John” (Rv 1:1).

The content of this book was “sent and **signified**.” In other words, through symbolic language, John recorded various visions that were revealed to him. He used **cryptic** symbols. These are those figures of speech that are often terrifying and unreal. John uses such in order to either produce shock or emphasis concerning the message he is conveying. The book is **apocalyptic** in the sense that it is talking about future things in relation to the immediate recipients of the book. Therefore, through many figures of speech this book comes to us. It is imperative to understand the contexts first in a figurative manner, unless there is contextual reason to understand the material literally. Not understanding this one point has caused many biblical interpreters to come to wrong conclusions in an effort to understand the visions of the book of Revelation.

2. The visions of Revelation would shortly come to pass. There are two “bookends” in the book. Each make the statement “shortly take place.” They are 1:1 and 22:6. John is trying to alert two groups of people concerning the time period of the visions. First, there are his **immediate readers** he seeks to comfort by saying that the happenings of the visions are not something distant from their present. Their persecutors would soon meet their end. The persecution will be terminated by the termination of the persecutor.

Secondly, John also cautions those

of us **who were not the immediate audience**. He says that the fulfillment of the prophetic visions were generally not for those **after** the historical context of his immediate audience. The “things” of the visions would **shortly take place**. This does not mean that they would occur over nineteen hundred years later. Since John makes this statement—“shortly take place”—at the beginning and end of the book, we would assume that he wants the immediate readers to give special heed to what he is saying. The major context of the visions is directed to the immediate audience for their comfort.

As secondary recipients of the revelations, we today draw comfort from the book in that we can see God’s work in the lives of men. In some sense, therefore, we look at the book of Revelation in the same way as we use the Old Testament. Paul wrote, “*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Rm 15:4). We gain comfort from the Old Testament Scriptures because we read of God’s deliverance of His persecuted people. We also gain comfort from the book of Revelation because we see God’s deliverance of His persecuted people.

We must emphasize, therefore, that the historical events of the book have primary reference to John’s readers. However, when the angel concludes a particular vision in the book he often throws in the final fate of the

unrighteous, as well as, encouragement concerning the final destination of the righteous. He does so in order to assure the righteous of a very comforting work of God. *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord”* (Rm 12:19).

The primary persecutor of the church in Revelation is the Roman Empire. In the time to come after A.D. 70, this governmental power would eventually make Christianity an illegal religion. During this time Christians would be tortured and killed. This governmental opposition to the church had its beginnings in the insane behavior of Nero who persecuted both Jews and Christians in the early sixties. This persecution, though centered in Rome, would eventually set the pace for a government policy of opposition against Christianity in the years of Domitian. This opposition would periodically arise and last well into the second century. The severest time of this persecution would occur during the reign of Domitian (81-96). Only when Constantine became Emperor of Rome would the dark age of persecution be lifted. The official lifting of the persecution would occur in the issuing of the Edict of Toleration in 311, and then, the Edict of Milan in 313.

Until the relentless persecution ceased, the church would go through a time of persecution which has been unparalleled since. For this reason, God sees it necessary to write a special book

of inspiration in order to comfort the church through these years of great testing.

By the time John gets to chapters 12-14, he has completed three of the seven “video visions” of the book. Each of the seven visions is a picture of the forces of evil against the forces of God. The conclusion of each picture is always the same. This conclusion was simply stated in 17:14. *“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”*

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

Chapter 12 begins the second major division of the seven series of visions. The vision of chapter 12 begins with a pictorial birth of Jesus and concludes with the dragon launching persecution against the church. In 12:17 the dragon became enraged with the woman (God’s people who brought forth the Christ). He then *“went to make war with the rest of her offspring [the church].”* When the vision comes to chapter 13, two beasts (Roman government and imperial religion) now arise by the working of Satan to make war against the church.

The first major persecutor of the church was Judaism. Opposition toward

the “Man Child” (Jesus), the woman (God’s people of the Old Testament) and the woman’s offspring (God’s people of the New Testament) is Satan’s proxy persecution through misguided apostate Judaism. However, in A.D. 70, this persecuting force was essentially eliminated by the destruction of national Israel. After the demise of this persecuting force, a second and more terrible persecutor arose. This was the governmental power of the Roman Empire. In chapter 13 the inspired John pictures this persecutor as two beasts that emerge from the populations of humanity. The sea beast is the **legislative strength of the Roman Empire** that is launched against the church. The land beast is Roman imperial religion that is upheld by the legislative power of the Sea Beast. Roman religion is forced upon all citizens of the Empire in order to stamp out any opposing insurrections against Rome.

It is in the context of Revelation 13 that John pinpoints the persecution of the church by a state government. It is possible that John is receiving this vision in the time of Vespasian, caesar of Rome. This is the “one who is” of chapter 17:10. Nero (54-68) led a **personal** vendetta against Christians during his reign in the 60’s. This persecution of Christians was only a prelude to what was to come under the reign of Domitian. When Domitian came to power, he instituted **governmental** persecution of the church by making Christianity an illegal

religion. Those who would not give total allegiance to Rome were tried on charges of treason. Submission to Rome meant submission to caesar as lord. Those who would not confess caesar as lord, were considered insurrectionist rebels of the Roman State. Therefore, the persecution led by Nero was nothing in comparison to that which was unleashed by Domitian in turning the Roman State against Christianity.

This vision is given to John in order to prepare the church for the coming decades of persecution. The message of the vision is to assure the church of Asia that the persecution is coming. However, it will have an end. It will end when the instrument of Satan – ungodly Roman caesars who use Roman government to satisfy their egos – is taken out of the way. The church, therefore, must be patient and endure, though it might mean their death (Rv 2:10).

Verse 1

OPPRESSION BY ROMAN GOVERNMENT

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

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

population groups. Thus humanity is as a sea that continually gives birth to different governmental powers throughout the ages (See Rv 16:3; 20:13; 21:1).

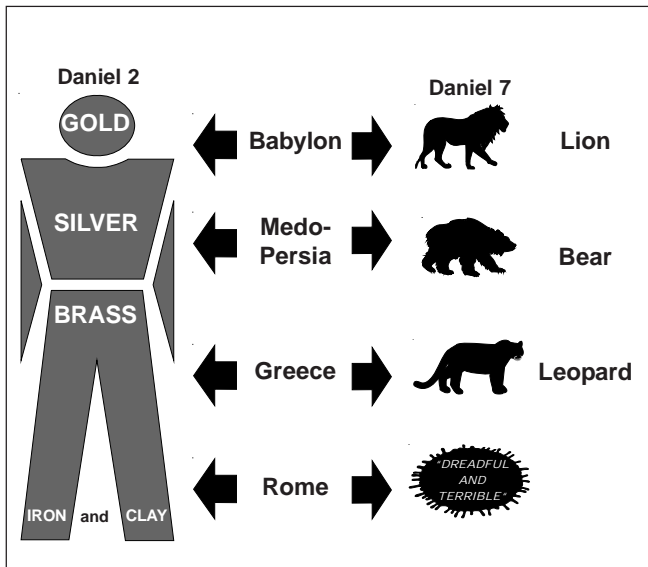
The sea beast had the **seven heads** of great control. Rome was seated upon seven hills and I wonder if John did not take his imagery from this geographical position of the city in order to convey the meaning of Rome’s pompous power. The sea beast has **ten horns**, or ten kings that exercise complete governmental power (See Rv 12:3; 17:3). It had **ten crowns** of complete authority that could be possessed by an earthly government.

John’s vision is in reference to the fourth world kingdom of Daniel’s recorded visions of Daniel 2 and 7. Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezza’s vision of a great image in Daniel 2. The vision was of four kingdoms. The fourth was Rome. It was in the days of this kingdom that had feet part of iron and clay, that God would set up the kingdom reign of the Son (Dn 2:44). The church to which John was writing existed in the days of the Roman kings.

Daniel’s personal vision of Daniel 7 was also of the four world kingdoms. Daniel’s vision portrayed the rise of the Roman Empire. Rome would be the beast that is “dreadful and terrible” (Dn 7:7). It would be the kingdom that would devour and break the other kingdoms to pieces. However, the kingdom glory of the previous three kingdoms would be exemplified in the totalitarian rule of Rome.

Daniel pictured the stirring of the sea as the cause that produced the four governmental powers (Dn 7:2). The origin of all government is from the people of the world. God has ordained that government exist to prevent anarchy

(Rm 13). However, men devise all types of government that come about. The fourth governmental power of the world of Daniel’s vision would unleash its strength against the people of



God. This government would have a **blasphemous name**. It would be known to speak great things against those who represent God. This is the same beast of Revelation 17:3 that is identified with “names of blasphemy.”

The visions of Revelation 13 and 17 have their background in the prophecy of Daniel 7. In view of this, I believe that the vision of Revelation 13 is in reference to the Roman Empire. Therefore, the interpretation of Revelation 13 and 17 must be consistent with the fulfillment of Daniel 7 which is a prophecy of events that would transpire during the days of the Roman kings. The following are a few historical and interpretive thoughts that will enhance our understanding of Revelation 13 and 17:

1. *Rome's totalitarian influence:*

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

2. *God's viewpoint of Rome's history:*

God looks at the beast of the Roman Empire from a “collective time” viewpoint. His omnipresence in time allows Him the privilege of such a view of history. In other words, God sees the whole of the time of the kingdom at one time. He sees time instantaneously. It would be like viewing (“watching”) a video as a photograph. We who are limited to time must “watch” the video in the amount of time it took to first

record it. However, God can push the “fast forward” button in order to see the totality of the events in an instant. He would view the video as we would view a photograph.

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

3. *Rise and fall of Roman caesars:*

As stated before, the “heads” of Revelation 17 refer to mountains (Rv 17:10). Rome was seated on seven mountains. However, the figure is probably a reference to the power that was manifested from the seat of Roman government by the caesars (kings).

In Daniel’s vision, the eleventh horn (“king”) “*shall subdue three kings*” (Dn 7:24). In the vision of Revelation 17, three of the kings are simply **ignored** (Rv 17:10,11). They are ignored because they are of no significance to Rome’s history or persecution of the church. What John is doing is using Daniel 7 as the prophetic historical background for counting the kings (caesars) of Rome. He is ignoring the kings that have no significance on the

persecution of the church.

In view of the preceding thoughts, consider the caesars of the beast (kingdom) that were “dreadful and terrible” (Dn 7:7) as they relate to the early church. The following chart is a list of Roman caesars that were the head of the Roman State at the time the church had its beginnings in the first century. These were not all of the Roman caesars that reigned throughout the history of the Roman Empire. However, these were those caesars that affected the beginning of the church in the first century and the evangelism of the early Christians. When studying the New Testament, it is good to keep in mind those caesars who were reigning at the time the early Christians were preaching throughout the Roman world.

One wonders why Daniel said that Galba, Otho and Vitellius were “subdued,” whereas this statement is not made in reference to the other kings. The reason may lie in the historical fulfillment that these three caesars never really exercised any power or influence during the two years of civil war when

they rose and fell as ceasars. In a space of two years these three became caesar and were quickly removed. **Galba** came to power by the sword. However, he enraged all classes of citizens in Rome. After being in power for only six months, the historian Seutonius says that **Otho** had him murdered by a group of assassins. Otho then siezed power as caesar. However, Otho came into conflict with Vitellius. After **Vitellius** defeated Otho in battle, Otho committed suicide. He had ruled only ninety-five days. The soldiers of Vitellius revolted against him as a result of his cruelty. After less than a year in control of Rome, he was murdered by Vespasian’s guard. His body was thrown into the Tiber River. Because these three kings played no significant part in the history of the Empire, they were ignored as “subdued” (or, “uprooted” in some translations). Daniel and John did not count them as caesars of Rome.

4. The date of Revelation: If the preceding interpretation is true, then the visions of Revelation would have occurred during the reign of Vespasian

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

(69-79). While John was experiencing the visions, he was not necessarily writing of the book during the time when he wrote, “one [king] **is**” (17:10). Five previous kings had fallen (17:10). Those who had fallen would be Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero. Since John ignored the three who were subdued (Galba, Otho and Vitellius), the one that **is** would be Vespasian. Thus, the revelations to John would occur during the reign of Vespasian.

This date of the visions would harmonize with the historical context of the visions. John speaks of the great persecution that is yet to come. “*The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them [the saints]*” (Rv 11:7). The tense of the verb here is **future** in reference to the time the saints lived. The saints to whom John wrote were yet to endure a great persecution. The same future tense is again found in Revelation 17:8 in reference to the beast that “*will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition*”

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

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

Verse 2

COLLECTIVE RESURRECTION OF POWER

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

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

In Daniel’s vision, the “dominion” of the former three kingdoms was terminated (Dn 7:12). However, “*their lives were prolonged for a season and a time*” (Dn 7:12). In other words, the power that is characteristic of governmental rule was continued in the existence of the fourth beast, the Roman kingdom. However, their “lives” were prolonged only for a short season. The wickedness of the three former kings was added to the wickedness of the

fourth. Their punishment would be fulfilled in the destruction of the fourth. Therefore, when God's judgment came upon the fourth, it also symbolically fell upon the first three, Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece.

Satan is working behind the scenes to persecute the offspring of the woman (the church) with the totality of Rome's government. Satan could not directly overthrow the power of God in the heavenly realm (Rv 12:9), therefore, he "resurrected" in an ungodly king his work to lead a pagan government to carry out his mission. Satan is the "god of this age" (2 Co 4:4), the prince of the world (Jn 12:31). He is the one who has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving in order to destroy the work of God in the church.

Verse 3

NERO, THE WOUNDED HEAD

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

Nero launched the first major persecution of the church in the latter part of his reign (54-68). He was caesar of Rome when Paul was beheaded in A.D. 63 or 64. When Nero committed suicide, his personal vendetta against Christians ceased. Thus the wave of persecution that swept through Rome was **wounded**. However, the persecution of the church went from the personal onslaught of one corrupted caesar to the entire legislative government of Rome

through the leadership of Domitian. A statement that was made by the historian Eusebius (260-340) in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 3, Para. 17) is very significant concerning this transition of persecution. Eusebius wrote,

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

The historical significance of Eusebius' statement helps us to understand how the "deadly wound" of the beast was healed. Though Nero did not launch an official government persecution against Christianity, the severity of his persecution would be resurrected by a later caesar. Nero's persecution only gave birth to what would become an official policy of the Roman Empire. This official policy would be born ("resurrected") by Domitian who would launch legislative persecution against Christianity which would be considered an illegal religion. Domitian would resurrect the behavior of Nero in his persecution of Christians. Vespasian and Titus would be indifferent to Christianity. Therefore, we go from the personal persecution of Nero to the resurrected persecution of a governmental force led by Domitian.

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

Verse 4 **THE RISE OF** **IMPERIAL RELIGION**

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

The world of unbelievers worshiped Satan in their reverence of Rome. When Domitian became caesar, Roman imperial religion was propagated throughout the Empire through caesar worship. Domitian claimed to be deity. The test for allegiance to Rome became one’s submission to “caesar as lord.” Those who would not so confess caesar as lord, were accused of insurrection. Such insurrection carried with it the death penalty. And thus came the great persecution against Christians who would not confess caesar to be lord.

Worship of a man as a god was also given to Herod. The unbelieving world said of Herod, “*The voice of a god and*

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

Verses 5 & 6 **BLASPHEMY OF GOD** **AND HIS CHURCH**

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

Rome would set her course against the church. Eventually, caesars would exalt themselves to the status of god. They would be as “*a mouth speaking pompous words*” against the church (See Dn 7:8,20). Daniel prophesied of Rome, “*Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done*” (Dn 11:36).

The governmental authority that is given to the beast would continue for **forty-two months**. This was the time when the horn of Rome “*was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them*” (Dn 7:21). Domitian’s

arrogance as deity would led him to “*speak pompous words against the Most High*” (Dn 7:25). He “*shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time*” (Dn 7:25).

The “time, times and half a time” is the same as the forty-two months (Rv 11:27). This is a definite time of limited duration. Thus, there would be an end of the persecution. Though Rome would “*tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months,*” God would not allow the persecution to continue indefinitely.

The **tabernacle** of God is the church (See Rv 11:1,2). Because the church receives her origin and authority from heaven (Mt 16:18), blasphemous words that are spoken against her are spoken against God (See At 9:4,5).

Verse 7

PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

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

The deceived of the Roman Empire (vs 14) are led by the pompous behavior of Domitian to launch full persecution (**war**) against the church. The duration of the persecution is limited (vs 5). Daniel had prophesied, “*I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them*” (Dn 7:21). John’s vision

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

Keep in mind that this authority to make war against the church was “**granted to him.**” Satan would be the immediate source of such wicked behavior. However, God allows Satan to go about as a roaring lion to devour according to the divine historical plan (1 Pt 5:8). Satan is allowed by God to have his will with wicked governments. God is not responsible for the wicked behavior of unbelieving governments whose dignitaries choose wickedness. It is Satan working in the individuals of government. God has ordained that government exist in this world. However, He does allow Satan to have his way with government officials who reject the will of God.

Verse 8

REVERENCE OF ROME

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

All who are under the jurisdiction of the Roman Senate gave their reverential allegiance to caesar and the Roman State. Those who believe that reference here is to the entire literal earth, miss the hyperbole of the metaphor. John wants us to understand that in view of the fact that all the citizenship of the Roman

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

The **Lamb** (Jesus) was foreordained before creation to be crucified for the sins of man (See Is 53). Those who choose to submit to the cross, and thus, be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, are written in the book of life. God foreordained that the “recorded saints” (the church) would be destined to eternal salvation (Ep 1:4-11). The church is predestined to salvation. Those therefore who choose to be a part of the church by obedience to the gospel are destined to heaven. They are destined to heaven because they are members of the church.

Verses 9 & 10

CAPTIVITY OF THE CAPTORS

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

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

The persecutors would take saints

into captivity. However, there is here a turn of events in the war against the saints. The forty-two months (time, times and half a time) are now pictured at a close. The captors themselves will be led into divine captivity. Such is reminiscent of the destiny of the disobedient angels who, because of their rebellion against God, are “*reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*” (Jd 6; See 2 Pt 2:4). And so is Domitian and his host of persecutors reserved today in the captivity of the hadean world in order to be condemned in the last day. They shall eventually go away into punishment and destruction (Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9).

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

John’s statement in verse 10 is an assurance to the persecuted church that she has victory over the Roman State by faith in Jesus (1 Jn 5:4). Christians must therefore remain faithful (Rv 2:10). They must remain faithful to their calling in view of the fact that they will receive a reward for their faithfulness to the Lord in times of persecution. They must not give in to the temptations of Satan.

Verse 11
OPPOSITION BY
IMPERIAL RELIGIONISTS

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

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

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

Verse 12
GOVERNMENT
BACKED RELIGION

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

Roman religion was forced upon the

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

Verses 13 & 14
GREAT DECEPTIONS

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

What the Roman religious commune sought to do reminds us of Jesus’ warning, “*Be not deceived*” (Mt 24:4,24). John later says that these religionists go out “*performing signs*” (Rv 16:14). This is the false prophet “*who worked signs in his [the beast’s] presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image*” (Rv 19:20). But these are those who are deceived, and who deceive (2 Tm 3:3). They worked great wonders that are false (2 Th 2:9). If the wonders were actually miraculous, then those who followed the false emperor worship

would not be deceived by believing the wonders. They would have been believing that which was true.

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

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

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

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

Verse 15

LIVING POWER OF ROME

It was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would both speak and cause to be killed as many as would not worship the image of the beast.

The fact that John is not talking about real miracles in verses 13-15 is seen in the imagery of this verse. The **image** certainly did not become a living thing and literally begin to speak as a man. Naïve interpreters who believe Roman religionists actually worked miracles are inconsistent if they do not continue the literality of their interpretation of verses 13 and 14 into verse 15. If real miracles are indicated in verses 13 and 14, then certainly the same would be true of verse 15. But who wants to take the position that these images of caesar actually began to speak like men. John’s point with the “speaking image” figure is to show the intensity of belief in false religion of those who refused to worship the one true God.

Many Jews and Christians did succumb to the heat of persecution. They were intimidated by the mass belief of those who affirmed that the Roman religionists were working miracles of some god. They thus confessed caesar as deity. Those faithful Christians who did not reverence “lord caesar” as deity were persecuted unto death. The angel warned in 14:9,10, “*If anyone worships the beast*

and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God ... he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (See Rv 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). I would think that Christians should be very careful when they start believing that false religionists can work real miracles. Remember that God would not allow Satan to work miracles through false religions in order to entice Christians to believe false teachings.

Verses 16 & 17

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

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

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

manifestation of allegiance. If one would not submit to confessing caesar as lord, he or she was subject to the fury of Roman government.

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

Verse 18

INSUFFICIENCY OF MAN

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

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

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

The number is **666**. The most consistent interpretation is to maintain the figurative significance of the numbers as John uses them throughout the revelation. The number six was used

by the Jews as a gematria to signify that which was imperfect or incomplete. It is also the number to signify that which is earthly. A Hebrew method of communication through numbers was to use the number of letters in words or numbers themselves to signify something other than the numbers. The three sixes used together in a gematria in this text would possibly indicate that which is “triple” imperfect or incomplete. It is that which originates “out of the earth”, but tries to claim heavenly origin. It is found to be fake and incomplete. And so

it is with caesar worship and the whole system of Roman religion.

Roman government originated from the populations of the world. Roman emperor worship originated from arrogant caesars who claimed to be deity. Both government and religion were earthly and totally insufficient. When it came to religion they had insufficient truth and were incomplete in being acceptable to God. The number emphasises their incompleteness. They were incomplete in reference to what God would require for acceptance.

Chapter 4

The Gospel Dispensation Revelation 20

John uses in Revelation 20 prophetic figurative language in order to rehearse the effect the gospel has upon the work of the kingdom of darkness. This seventh and last symbolic vision of John is given to manifest the final victory of good over the spiritual powers of darkness. The vision begins with the revelation of the gospel. It concludes with the final judgment and eternity. In one chapter, John is given a truly splendid picture of what this dispensation of the gospel is all about. It is a thrilling vision and revelation of what the early Christians experienced through the preaching of the gospel. It is a comforting vision because of the revelation of what will be the end of those who persecute the church.

In Revelation 12-14 John has given an expanded picture of the beginning of

the gospel dispensation to the time that the Son of Man was told, “*Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe*” (Rv 14:15). In chapter 20 we begin with the coming of the binding message of the gospel. The vision ends with the time when those who were “*not found written in the Book of Life*” were cast into the lake of fire (Rv 20:15).

Verse 1

MESSENGER WITH AUTHORITY

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

The **angel** is simply a messenger of God. He comes with the power to confine. That which will confine the work of Satan

is the gospel of Jesus. As the woman brought forth the Man Child (Jesus) in chapter 12, so the result of Jesus' coming (the gospel) is emphasized here.

The **key** is symbolic of authority. This figure is taken from the Old Testament in passages as Isaiah 22:20-22. Eliakim was given the "key" of the house of David. He "*shall open and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open*" (Compare also Mt 16:18,19; Rv 1:18; 3:7,8). This messenger, therefore, has the authority to bind the works of Satan with the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16).

The **bottomless pit** of the *King James Version* would literally be translated "abyss" (2:11; 9:1; 11:7; 17:8; Lk 8:31). The abyss is confinement. It is the confinement of the power of Satan. The *King James Version* translators wanted to interpret the abyss with a meaning that illustrated the endless confinement of Satan. The pit thus has no bottom. Satan is thrown in and never hits the bottom. His confinement is sure.

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

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

Verse 2

BINDING OF SATAN

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

The **dragon** was that fictitious creator that was to cause fear in the hearts of men. The **serpent** was a cunning deceiver. The **devil** is the accuser. All such metaphors portray a grim picture of Satan as the perfect enemy of humanity. Nevertheless, Satan is bound with the power of the gospel. Jesus died for sins that cause spiritual death in the lives of men (Rm 6:23; 1 Co 15:3). However, He was resurrected that "*He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" (Hb 2:14,15; see 1 Co 15:20-22).

Satan is **bound**. In chapter 7:1-9 the dragon, Satan, is cast out of his place of authority. He is cast down. The same picture is stated here. Jesus said, "*Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast down*" (Jn 12:31). The word "now" referred to Jesus' ministry. He was in the process of beginning the casting down of the prince

of the world. He visually manifested such by His giving of supernatural power to the disciples, who in turn, manifested their power over Satan by casting out demons. After Jesus had sent them out on a preaching tour, they returned and said, *“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name”* (Lk 10:17). Jesus then said, *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”* (Lk 10:18,19).

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

Since it is by the gospel that Satan is bound, **then we conclude that the binding began when the gospel was first made effective in the lives of men.** That time was when the first official announcement of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was publicly made in Acts 2. The binding will continue while the gospel is continually preached. It will be preached until Jesus comes again. Therefore, we would conclude that the **one thousand years** of binding began in Acts

2 and will continue until Jesus returns. This is the definite, but indeterminate time, of the one thousand years.

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

Verse 3

CONFINEMENT OF SATAN

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

Satan was **shut up**. His binding was thus effective. He was also **sealed**, that is, authoritatively consigned to the abyss. He would no longer have the freedom to lead masses of people into darkness by deception. The influence of the gospel would permeate the very constitutions of nations with values that would preserve societies. The whole earth would not be led astray in mass as in the days of Noah when every imagination of man’s heart was continually evil (Gn 6:5). Before the preaching of the gospel there was a time when men gave up the knowledge of God in order to worship the creation (Rm 1:18-32). But the gospel brought life and immortality to light (2 Tm 1:10).

The binding of Satan by the gospel does not mean the cessation of the

activity of Satan. Within that realm of the preaching of the gospel, however, he is bound. He goes about outside that realm—the area of the knowledge of and preaching of the gospel—as a devouring lion (1 Pt 5:8). Wherever the gospel is preached, he is confined. Where it is not preached, he deceives and devours.

In the church, God will not allow Satan to tempt the saints beyond what they are able to endure (1 Co 10:13). In this sense, Satan is bound. However, he goes about as a devouring lion among those to whom the gospel is not yet preached. Nevertheless, his work is bound in reference to the saints.

If Satan is bound within the area where the gospel is preached, the church, then he is unleashed in the church when members cease standing upon the foundation of the gospel. This is certainly in the meaning of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian church when he wrote concerning their **belief in the gospel**, “... *by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you ...*” (1 Co 15:3). The Corinthians had to continue believing the testimony of the gospel if they were to continue in a saved relationship with God. John seems to indicate that there would be a brief time when his audience would cease believing in the power of the gospel. When the church ceases believing in the gospel, Satan is unleashed.

A second understanding of this “loosing” would be in reference to the end of time. Satan would be loosed for a **little season**. If he is bound by the

preaching of the gospel, then at the end of the gospel dispensation, he would be loosed when the gospel is not preached. Could this be a brief time before the end when the church has lost its purpose or is suppressed in persecution to the point that they cease preaching the gospel?

Verse 4

REIGN OF THE SAINTS

And I saw thrones and those sat on them. Judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast nor his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads nor on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

The **thrones** were kingly seats of power or authority. This is a place of royalty. In this verse, such authority and royalty is given to two groups of the saints. First, there were the martyrs who had given their lives to the preaching of the gospel. They continued to live and reign in the world through their testimony. They were as Abel who continues to speak though he is dead (Hb 11:4). Secondly, there were the living saints who refused to be identified with the worship of the Roman Empire. These were those of Revelation 13:16-19 who received great persecution because of their stand for the faith. They overcame the beast “*by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death*” (Rv 12:11).

Those who did not submit to the worship promoted by Rome, **lived** because of their obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:4,5). They reigned with Jesus (Rm 5:17). Paul wrote, “*For if we died with Him, we shall also **live** with Him. If we endure, we shall also **reign** with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us*” (2 Tm 2:11,12). Christians have both died with Jesus (Rm 6:6), and thus, endure with Him in this life (At 14:22).

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

Verse 5

THE FIRST RESURRECTION

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

This is the key verse that helps us understand the meaning of the entire chapter. We assume from the **first resurrection** that there was a first death. This would be spiritual death in sin (Rm 5:12; 6:23; Is 59:1,2). When Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, he

spiritually died (Gn 2:17). When every man reaches the age at which he can determine rebellion against God, and chooses rebellion, he sins and dies spiritually (Rm 5:12). This is the one who “lives in pleasure” but is dead while he lives (1 Tm 5:6; see Mt 8:22). The first resurrection, therefore, is a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death (Rm 6:3-6; Ep 2:5,6; Cl 2:12,13). The one who partakes of the spiritual resurrection has “passed from death to life” (1 Jn 3:14).

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

John said that the **rest of the dead**, that is, the spiritually dead, did not live until the end of the one thousand years. This would be the time explained by Jesus in John 5:28,29. The spiritually dead would be resurrected to go away into eternal destruction (Mt 25:46; 2 Th 1:9). Those who do not partake of the

spiritual resurrection will be raised to face the judgment of destruction (2 Th 1:7-9).

Verse 6

THE SECOND DEATH

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

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

Those who partake of the first resurrection (obedience to the gospel), **reign** in life by their victory over sin. They have victory over death (Hb 2:14,15). They are thus reigning on this earth **with Jesus** at the time John writes this vision (2 Tm 2:12). This is what John had earlier written in chapter 5:10. Jesus has “*made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.*”

Verses 7 & 8

RELEASE OF SATAN

And when the thousand years have

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

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

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

Verse 9

DELIVERANCE OF THE BELOVED CITY

So they went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the

saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

The **beloved city** is the church of saints who have not submitted to the oppression of the beast, Roman government. The end of the gospel dispensation will be a time when it seems that the church will be oppressed out of existence. However, **fire**, or God's judgment will come upon those who oppress and persecute the people of God (2 Th 1:7-9; compare Jd 14,15). As God intervened in the days of Noah with the global flood (Gn 6), and in the case of delivering righteous Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 18,19), so He will deliver those who remain faithful.

In the historical context of John's readers, reference is surely made here to their persecution by Rome. The enemies of God went throughout all their world (the Roman Empire) to encompass the church. However, in a secondary sense, this has happened to the church among wicked governments since the days of the first century. In numerous places of the world the church has been suppressed out of existence. This has happened in most of the Islam nations and much of China. Will this vast deception of the world spread to all inhabitants of the world before the end?

Verse 10

JUDGMENT OF SATAN

Then the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also are the beast and the false

prophet. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

All the wicked will hear the words of Jesus, "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Mt 25:41). Hell is the intended place of punishment for Satan. All those who would be messengers of his cause will end up in the same place and suffer the same punishment. The severity of the punishment is manifested in the metaphor **fire and brimstone**. We do not make the mistake as some biblical interpreters by literalizing the metaphor. The metaphor "fire and brimstone" is something literal and of this world. That which is signified in the heavenly realm is always greater and above this world. Therefore, I would assume that hell is more horrible than literal fire and brimstone.

The **beast** (Roman government) and the **false prophet** (Roman religion) will also be cast into the place that is reserved for the Devil. John's comfort to the righteous is that those who have tormented them shall be tormented in the end.

The duration of the torment is indefinite, though certain. It is **everlasting** in the sense that God has appointed it to happen, therefore, it will not be taken away. As in the Old Testament, "everlasting" and "forever" carry with them the Jewish understanding that the torment will last throughout God's intended time of duration. Emphasis is not on the length of time,

but on the certainty of the punishment's existence. (See the use of these words in Ex 12:24; 29:9; 40:15; Lv 3:17; Dt 15:17; Ja 14:9; 1 Kg 8:12,13; 2 Kg 5:27.)

Verse 11

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

The Father has given all judgment into the hands of the Son. *“He has appointed a day on which He [the Father] will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained”* (At 17:31). *“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son”* (Jn 5:22). Since Jesus will *“judge the living and the dead at His appearing”* (2 Tm 4:1), all men must submit to His word, for Jesus said of those who reject Him, *“the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (Jn 12:48).

Though men seek to **flee** from the judgment to come, there will be no escape. All must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, *“for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Co 5:10; see Rv 6:14; 16:20; 18:21; 19:20).

Verse 12

JUDGMENT OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Then I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. And the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works.

This verse possibly refers to the resurrection and final consignment of the saints to the eternal dwelling of the new heavens and earth (See 2 Pt 3:13). The following verse 13 probably refers to the final judgment of the wicked. Regardless of this interpretation, both verses and the entire Scriptures state that everyone will be raised from the dead for the final judgment (Ec 13:14; Jn 5:28,29; 2 Co 5:10). John records that **books** were opened. Such is possibly a reference to Daniel's vision of the judgment in Daniel 7:10. *“The court was seated, and the books were opened.”* The metaphor here could be from the “book of remembrance” in the Old Testament which referred to a record of the righteous (Mt 3:16). It could also have reference to a metaphorical record of the deeds and character of the unrighteous, as spoken by Isaiah (Is 30:8,9). Reference could also include the Old Testament (Jn 5:36; 10:35; Lk 24:25) or the New Testament (Jn 12:48).

The names of citizens of Roman cities were inscribed in a “book of life.” John uses this book in a metaphorical manner to indicate the listing of the saved in heaven (See Ps 69:28; Is 4:3; Lk 10:20; Ph 4:3; Rv 3:15; 13:8; 21:27).

God certainly does not need a literal book in which to write a list of the saved. The One who knows every hair of our head can certainly call each of us by name. The metaphor, therefore, signifies that God knows exactly who the saved are.

The elect will be saved by grace (Ep 2:8,9). Christians are not saved as the result of legally keeping law. However, *“we are His workman-ship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ep 2:10). We would say, therefore, that it is by these works that we will be judged. Christians must respond to the grace of God in their lives by a working faith. James warned, *“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* (Js 2:17; see Ec 13:17; Hb 4:13).

Verse 13

JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED

Then the sea gave up the dead who were in it. And Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged every one according to their works.

John emphasizes that no one of the wicked masses of the world will escape the final judgment. The beast (the wicked of Rome) and the false prophet (Roman religion) will all be judged. The **sea** refers to the masses of humanity from which the wicked persecutors of the church have come (See 13:1; 16:3; 21:1). They will all face the judgment.

Death and **hades** will deliver up

those who are in them. Death and hades go together because hades is the abode of the souls and spirits of the dead. Even if the wicked have died, they shall be resurrected in order to stand in judgment before God. In this “end of time” picture, John also wants us to know that the termination of physical death is coming.

Verse 14

THE END OF PHYSICAL DEATH

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

When Jesus comes again, physical death will be no more. Therefore, there will be no more need for a place to reserve the souls and spirits of the dead. Physical death and the abode of the dead will be cast into the **lake of fire**, or place of termination. This is the **second death**, or second time in the life of the wicked that they have been separated from God. In physical death, one’s physical life stops. In the second death, one’s spiritual existence stops in hell after just punishment has been carried out. The wicked on earth will be sentenced to their just punishment that was incurred by their disobedience.

Verse 15

DESTINY OF THE WICKED

And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

This statement certainly emphasizes

the point that one have his or her name recorded among the saved. Jesus will eventually say to the disobedient, *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”* (Mt 7:23; see Mt 25:41). It will certainly be a sad day when the unrighteous hear these words of departure from the One they resisted throughout their lives.

John’s visionary picture of the gospel dispensation is complete. He has

taken us in vision from the time the gospel was first announced on Pentecost in A.D. 30 to the termination of all things. In this particular picture he wants the righteous to know that the wicked persecutors of Christians will not escape the final judgment. Therefore, the saints must be patient, for vengeance belongs to God who will repay (Rm 12:19; see Rv 13:10).

Chapter 5

The Final Coming

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

From various contexts in the Bible it would be safe to assume that spirits seek to be embodied, that is, they seek a body in which to dwell. This seems to answer some of the reasons why demons sought to indwell people in the first century. That spirits seek this embodiment is indicated in the following four points:

1. *The Gadarene demons sought to dwell in swine:* When Jesus confronted the demon possessed man of Gadara, the demons that dwelt in him *“begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss”* (Lk 8:31). They knew that dwelling within the one called Legion was much better than the confinement of the abyss (See Rv 20:1-3). In fact, their knowledge that embodiment was better than the abyss is indicated in their request to indwell pigs. Luke recorded, *“Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. And they begged Him that*

He would permit them to enter them” (Lk 8:32). Because these spirits feared the abyss, they sought embodiment. This would be one reason why they wanted to indwell a body. Indwelling swine was better than the confinement of the abyss.

2. *Spirits seek a place of dwelling:* Though we cannot understand all of what Jesus is saying in the context of Luke 11:24-26, one thing is clear. When the unclean spirit went out from the one in whom he dwelt, he said, *“I will return to my house from which I came”* (Lk 11:24). The spirit was thus saying that dwelling in the house, or body of someone was better than wandering around in the “dry places.” Jesus said that this spirit would go *“through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none”* (Mt 12:43). Evidently, in a disembodied state, such spirits have no rest. They seek a place of rest. When the spirit does return to the one he formerly indwelt,

Jesus said, *“he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there ...”* (Lk 11:26). The point is that this “wandering spirit” sought to dwell within someone. Such indwelling was better than wandering through the dry places with no rest.

3. Spirits are reserved in darkness: When Jesus ascended on high, *“He led captivity captive”* (Ep 4:8). He *“disarmed principalities and powers”* (Cl 2:15). The power of Satan through demons has been confined. Satan’s angels have been cast down to Tartarus and *“reserved for judgment”* (2 Pt 2:4). These spirits have been *“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day”* (Jd 6). The point is that these spirits, Satan’s angels, have been **reserved** for judgment. They have been reserved in order that they not “wander,” seeking someone in whom to dwell. If God had not reserved them, then they would at will be seeking to possess people. Disembodied spirits seek to possess, therefore, God has reserved them in confinement in order that they not have their freedom to possess people at will.

4. We shall be “clothed”: In 2 Corinthians 5:1-3 Paul wrote, *“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.”* Paul

considered not being clothed with a body as a state of being “naked.” When Christians die, they are in a state of being “naked,” for their body has returned to the dust of the earth. The spirit of the Christian is with Jesus, kept for the resurrection of the great day when we all shall *“be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.”* According to Paul’s statements in this context it is better to be clothed with a body than to be naked, that is, it is better to have a body than to exist in spirit apart from a body.

There are many things we do not and cannot understand about the disembodied state of the spirit. However, we could conclude from what statements are made in Scripture that a disembodied spirit does seek to be clothed with a body. When we come to the contexts of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul answers questions concerning the future state of the Christian and the resurrected body.

The background of Paul’s comments in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** is the correction of the usual misunderstandings concerning future things. Some brethren in Thessalonica had evidently worried over the whereabouts or destiny of those faithful saints who had passed on and were in a disembodied state. There were also some who possibly had misunderstandings about what events would actually transpire when Jesus would personally appear at His final coming. Regardless of the Thessalonians’ misunderstandings, the occasion has stimulated Paul to record

the “*word of the Lord*” (vs 15) concerning some most interesting details that will occur at the Second Advent.

The text discusses the happenings at Jesus’ final coming and the ascension of two groups at the time of this most magnificent event. The first group is the “we.” These are those Christians who would be living when Jesus comes. This group would be present in their physical bodies, with both soul and spirit. He explained this group in 5:23. “... *may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Here is that group of Christians who, in their physical body, are possessed with the mental and psychological nature called soul and that God-created spirit that is from the Father (Ec 12:7; Zc 12:1).

The second group is composed of those saints who have “fallen asleep.” They are “*with the Lord*” (Ph 1:23) and waiting in Paradise in order to come with Jesus at the time of His final coming. These were “absent from the body” at the time of Paul’s writing. They are in soul and spirit waiting in the comfort of Abraham’s bosom for the last day when the Father sends them with Jesus to be united with their resurrected, but changed, bodies.

With the above two groups clearly in mind, we approach this context. The living saints **in Christ** are concerned about the dead saints **with Christ**. Both are headed toward heaven with changed bodies. They will enter the new heavens and the new earth with Jesus at the last day after the sound of the last trumpet.

This will be the beginning of a new existence for the faithful. In this context, therefore, Paul seeks to give encouragement to all who would put their faith in Jesus as the Son of God and obey the gospel by immersion into His death, burial and resurrection. Because of Paul’s purpose in this text, this is one of the most encouraging passages of scripture in the Bible.

Verse 13

DO NOT WORRY

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, so that you do not grieve as others who have no hope.

Paul does not want the first group (the living saints) to be ignorant of the situation and destiny of the second group (those saints who have died). Those who have died have simply **fallen asleep**. With this tender metaphor Paul wants to teach us that with Christians, death is not a terminal state. It is only a state of transfer, a state through which the faithful must pass as a result of not being able to eat of the tree of life (See Gn 3:22-24; Hb 9:27). The unbelieving stand at the grave of their loved ones and shed hopeless tears. The righteous shed tears of hope for one who has only gone on a journey that they will soon make. Christians have an endless hope; the unbeliever has a hopeless end.

The phrase “fallen asleep” may also reveal God’s viewpoint of death. As we fall asleep with hope of rising in the morning to a new day, so God views our

death as simply a “falling asleep” to arise to a new existence. Certainly, we must capture the mind of God in this view of death. It is a “falling asleep” in order to arise to experience a new existence.

It must also be clearly understood that in the context Paul is discussing the resurrection of those who have fallen asleep. Therefore, he is talking about their bodies, not their soul and spirit. The spirit, at death, returns to God (Ec 12:7). We will remain conscious after death in the care of God. However, our bodies will sleep until we are resurrected with a spiritual body from God (2 Co 5:1-8).

Verse 14

COMING OF THE SAINTS

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

Paul uses the subjunctive “if” in this passage in order to place our belief in Jesus’ resurrection as a guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus was bodily raised. Therefore, we shall be bodily raised. If we believe in Jesus’ bodily resurrection it is only natural that we believe in our own. Those religions that have given up a belief in the resurrection of Jesus have forsaken the very foundation proof of their hope.

The Father will “bring with Him [Jesus]” the souls and spirits of those who have died in Christ. This fact is so central in Christian eschatology that Paul says the Father would establish our

hearts “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ **with all His saints**” (3:13). Jesus will not come alone. He will be “revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Th 1:7). However, with Him will also be all past saints who have faithfully served God since the beginning of time. What a joy it will be to experience the revelation of so many loved ones as they come with Jesus at the sound of the last trumpet.

Verse 15

LIVING SAINTS WILL FOLLOW

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord will not go before those who have fallen asleep.

Paul speaks from direct revelation. He has received this information as it was directly “spoken by the Lord.” He wants to assure his readers that what he is about to say is the “word of the Lord” and not some opinion of man.

Christians who are alive on the last day, the day of His presence, will not go into the new heavens and new earth before those who have died in Christ.

The context of verses 15 and 16 must be understood on the foundation of 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Paul’s commentary in 1 Corinthians 15 enlightens us concerning what he briefly states here. (See the following chapter.) The following would seem to be important things that will happen on that last great day. Though we do not and cannot fully understand what will transpire on that last day, the inspired

writers give us enough information to settle our anxiety. God will be in control of all things. Therefore, there is no need for Christians to trouble themselves about what will happen or where they are going. We must have faith in God to take care of all things that are to come. We walk by faith in the all-caring God who is working all things according to His purpose.

EVENTS OF THE END

1. The Lord will descend from heaven with a great shout and with the company of departed saints (1 Th 4:16).
2. The voice of an archangel will sound (1 Th 4:16).
3. The last trumpet will sound (1 Th 4:16; 1 Co 15:52).
4. The dead in Christ will first be raised and changed (1 Th 4:16; 1 Co 15:52).
5. Living saints will be changed and caught up together with the resurrected saints (1 Th 4:17; 1 Co 15:53,54).
6. The present heavens and earth will pass away with a great noise (2 Pt 3:10).
7. Final judgment will instantaneously occur (2 Co 5:10; Rv 20:11-15).
8. The unrighteous will meet their end in the just punishment of destruction that has eternal consequences (2 Th 1:9; Rv 20:13-15).
9. The righteous will go away with the Lord to enjoy eternal existence with Jesus (Mt 25:46; 1 Th 4:17).

Verse 16

DEAD SAINTS WILL RISE FIRST

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

The fact that the Lord will “*descend from heaven*” with those who have fallen asleep in Jesus indicates that in some way Christians are **with the Lord** in a heavenly state when they die. They are reserved in a heavenly state in the comfort of Abraham’s bosom in Paradise (Lk 16:22; 23:43). However, we must keep in mind that they are in a **disembodied** heavenly state with Jesus. In the eternal dwelling of the new heavens and the new earth, saints will dwell with their resurrected and changed bodies. This would in some way make a difference between the present heavenly dwelling of disembodied saints in Paradise from the eternal dwelling in an embodied state in heaven in eternity.

Paul affirms that those dead **in Christ** will precede the resurrection of those dead **outside** Christ. Those who have died outside Christ in sin, will be resurrected. Their resurrection, however, will be unto judgment (Jn 5:28,29), punishment and destruction (2 Th 1:7-9).

Concerning those who are dead in Christ, Paul reveals a different destiny than those outside Christ. He reveals a bodily resurrection of Christians. It is the Creator who will perform this act. Therefore, all the nonsense postulations about how this can happen to a body that has rotted away to dust is answered in the fact that the One who created all things is carrying out the deed of bringing together and changing the bodies of all saints. If we believe in the God who is the creator of all life, then we can believe in the God who can resurrect

all life. If your belief is in an evolutionary philosophy of life from slime to the sublime, then you might have some problem with belief in a God who can “re-create” life out of a body that has long since decayed away.

We see now why it is so important for Christians to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Though Jesus’ body did not undergo corruption (decay), it was raised a changed body (At 2:31). John, who experienced Jesus after His resurrection, assures us that when Jesus comes again, we will have a body as Jesus (Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2; see Rm 8:18-23). We shall see Him as He is and be as He is.

Verse 17
CAUGHT UP TOGETHER
IN THE CLOUDS

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

This verse indicates that the resurrected saints will already be on their way in the clouds to meet the Lord before the living righteous ascend. We see the importance of this order only in the sense of being a present encouragement to living Christians who have lost loved ones to death. Those saints who are asleep will not tag along behind in the ascension. They will lead the way home!

“In the clouds” and “in the air” are certainly metaphorical with the meaning that we shall be detached from this

physical nature of a terrestrial (physical) world. We will be changed. The mortal body will put on immortality; the corruptible, incorruption (1 Co 15:52-54). Therefore, the new heavens and new earth, as opposed to the “old heaven and old earth,” will be a dwelling place for the immortal, incorruptible, resurrected and reunited saints. In this state we shall **always be with the Lord**. It will not be an environment as this physical world, but one that is prepared for the dwelling of the spiritual body that will dwell with the Lord in eternity in the presence of God. This is the hope of the Christian who seeks to be with Jesus for eternity.

Verse 18
COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

The world view that Paul presents in this context should comfort those who hold it. Christians should talk about these things. There can be no comfort in this world view if this topic is not regularly communicated to one another. We certainly wonder about the details of what will happen in the last day. However, Paul gives us enough information that we not be ignorant about what will happen. We now know the general facts about the event. We have faith in the One who can carry it out. Therefore, with these words we comfort one another. We comfort one another because we know that all things are under the control of Jesus.

Chapter 6

Resurrection Of The Body

1 Corinthians 15

There were those in Corinth who had questions about the resurrection of the body at the end of time. There were those who denied this resurrection. The questions, or arguments, were so intense that Paul dedicates an entire chapter of inspired material to the matter.

Paul will not be able to answer all our questions concerning the final great event that personally touches every Christian. He will convey to us those things that are necessary to answer questions for those who walk by faith. John, the apostle, personally experienced Jesus' resurrected body. However, he confessed that he did not completely understand what we shall be like when Jesus returns. He wrote, "*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 Jn 3:2). John wrote these words **after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians**. Therefore, John's reflection on what Paul reveals in 1 Corinthians 15 is not a complete picture of "what we shall be." We question those who dogmatically affirm that they have all the answers concerning the resurrected body. Since John did not, then neither do we.

However, Paul wants us to understand some things that were definitely twisted by false teachers in

Corinth. His primary thrust in the chapter is to affirm the resurrection of Christ, and thus, use this thrust to affirm the resurrection of those who have been buried with Him. For this reason, Paul starts the discourse with the importance of the gospel event, that it was a historical happening.

Verses 1 & 2

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL EVENT

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast to that word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

The **gospel** is the good news of the crucifixion of Jesus for our sins, His death and resurrection. Paul's emphasis in this chapter is upon the good news of the resurrection event. The gospel means nothing unless Jesus was raised from the dead.

When Paul went to Corinth on his initial visit (See At 18), he **declared** the gospel to the Corinthians. He **preached** it to them, and they accepted it as true (See Gl 1:11). They **stood** in the conviction that the event had actually taken place in Palestine. Therefore,

their emotional and spiritual well-being rested in their continued belief in this event.

They would be eternally **saved** if they continued to believe the word by which Paul communicated the message of the gospel event to them. God ordained that “*through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe*” (1 Co 1:21). They had no New Testaments to read. They were left with the report of Paul. He had affirmed the event of the cross and the resurrection. If their belief in his preached word failed, the gospel would profit them nothing. Herein Paul is reaffirming his report that the event of Jesus' death and resurrection actually took place. We also must believe this report. It is upon this report that our faith stands. It is the foundation of our hope for eternal dwelling in the presence of God.

Verses 3 & 4

THE GOSPEL EVENT

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures ...

The **first thing** Paul preached when he arrived in Corinth was the gospel event (See At 18:8). He preached “Christ crucified” (1 Co 1:23). Paul wrote, “*I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Co 2:2). He had

accepted the gospel event as true, and thus, declared it to others as true. What was true was that **Christ died for our sins according to prophecy**. He was buried. And **He rose again the third day** according to prophecy of the Old Testament Scriptures. The central event of the gospel, therefore, is the death of Jesus for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection for our hope. Christians must maintain their belief in this event in order to stand firm. Those denominational groups that have given up their belief in the resurrection of Jesus, have no right to claim His name. They have given up the most fundamental teaching of the New Testament. In giving up the foundation of the resurrection there is no basis upon which to ground their faith.

The resurrection is what makes Christianity different from other beliefs. Mohammed is dead and still in the grave. Buddha is dead and in the grave. But Jesus is alive and in heaven. The fact that He lives is evidence that Christianity has a living founder, not a dead founder. Without the resurrection, Christianity would be just another religion among those that men have created after their own desires and traditions. Those religions whose founders are in the grave must deal with this concept of Bible teaching. The foundation of Christianity is in the fact that its Founder lives. And because the Founder of Christianity lives, the church is alive.

Verses 5-11

THE APPEARANCES

... and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. And last of all He was seen by me also, as to one born out of due time.

For I am the least of the apostles, and not worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Therefore, whether it was me or them, so we preach and so you believed.

As proof of the resurrection, Paul now discusses the witnesses who saw Jesus after the event. The appearances of Jesus prove that He did not wander off to some desert and die alone. Men actually witnessed His death. They also witnessed Him living again after His resurrection.

He was seen by **Peter**, and then by the **eleven other apostles** (Mt 28:9,10; Lk 24:34). He was seen by **the twelve**. Reference is to those who remained in the office of the apostles, for Judas was dead at the time of the appearances (See At 1:16-19). However, Matthias, who would be later added as an apostle, was also there (See At 1:23-26). Jesus even appeared before **five hundred** brethren at once. At the time Paul wrote these words, many of these brethren were still

alive. They could verify what Paul was writing. Paul's defense here is in the number of people to whom Jesus appeared. In the heat of persecution, and if Jesus had not actually been raised, then we would expect that some of these five hundred brethren would deny the resurrection. The fact that there were no denials from such a great number of witnesses is proof that He was raised.

Last of all, Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus road (At 9:4; 22:14,18; 26:15). Paul was the "*one born out of due time*", that is, he was called to be an apostle out of the time when Jesus personally called apostles during His earthly ministry (See Lk 6:13).

Paul defended his apostleship before the Corinthians. However, in this context he simply humbles himself to the original Twelve, among whom he never classified himself (See Ep 3:8). He felt such because of his great persecution of the church. Though he was a persecutor of the church, God's **grace** came to him after the Damascus road experience and when he was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins (At 22:16). Because he recognized the tremendous grace of God in his life, he "**labored more abundantly.**" When one does recognize the saving grace of God in his life, he works because of his salvation. And the more one appreciates the grace of God, the more one labors to repay God for the great gift of salvation by grace (See Ep 3:7,8).

Both Paul and the Twelve preached the same gospel (Gl 2:2). Paul's argument to the Corinthians, and

especially to those who were denying the resurrection, was that all the apostles were proclaiming the same fact of the gospel event. Jesus was raised! If one denies such, then he sets himself against the message of Paul and the other apostles.

Verses 12-19 NECESSITY OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

Now if Christ is preached that He rose from the dead, how can some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. Moreover, we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise, if it is that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is vain. You are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hope in Christ only in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied.

There were some brethren in the church of Corinth who were teaching that Jesus was raised from the dead, but denying that Christians would be raised as Jesus. Paul made a reasonable statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 to answer the inconsistency of this reasoning. *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will*

bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” Our personal belief that Jesus rose from the dead is evidence that those who die in Christ will also be raised from the dead. The hour *“is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth ...”* (Jn 5:28,29).

In verse 13 Paul counters the erroneous and contradictory reasoning of those who deny the Christian's resurrection but affirmed Jesus' resurrection. He reverses the argument. If there is no resurrection of the righteous in the last hour, then neither has Christ been raised. His argument is that the resurrection of Christ and the righteous stand or fall together. They cannot be separated.

But if Jesus is not risen, Paul continues, then he and the apostles have been involved in **useless preaching**. Not only this, but the Corinthians have a useless faith. There is no cause for the church if Jesus is not raised or if the righteous will not be raised. The church is built upon the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God (Mt 16:16-18). Jesus was proved to be the Son of God by the power of the resurrection (Rm 1:4). But if He is not raised, then the total foundation for the existence of the church is erased. There is no church of Christ without the resurrection. In this context, therefore, Paul is placing the entire existence of Christianity upon the fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is such a profound and fundamental belief to Christianity.

If Jesus has not been raised, then

Paul and the other apostles were **persecuted for nothing**. They are **false witnesses**. They suffered while knowing that what they preached was a lie.

If Jesus has not been raised, there is **no remission** of sins. Jesus was “*delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification*” (Rm 4:25). But if He has not been raised, then this whole plan of salvation has been destroyed.

If Jesus has not been raised, then those Christians who have died, **have perished**. They are gone forever. And thus, we sorrow at the grave of Christians as those who have no hope (1 Th 4:13).

If Jesus has not been raised, then Christians are certainly to be **pitied**. In fact, they could be considered foolish for believing something that is false. They should be pitied for believing a book that teaches the resurrection of both Jesus and the dead.

No person can claim any relationship with Jesus if he or she does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Those denominational groups who have given up the resurrection are empty shells of vain worshipers. They cling to a traditional religion that has long since removed their very foundation for existence. They cannot, therefore, believe in the resurrection of dead saints because they have given up the resurrection of the Founder of Christianity.

Verses 20-22

RESURRECTION IN CHRIST

But now Christ has been raised from the

dead and has become the firstfruits of those who are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive.

The metaphor “**firstfruits**” is taken from the Old Testament. The firstfruits of the Jewish harvest were offered in the feast of the firstfruits (Lv 23:9-11; Nm 15:18,19). **The firstfruits was an indication of the greater harvest to come.** So is Jesus’ resurrection concerning the resurrection of all dead in the final day. Jesus’ resurrection is a guarantee of the resurrection to come. It is an evidence of the coming resurrection (See 1 Th 4:14).

Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead. He had previously raised Lazarus (Jn 11:38-44). However, Jesus’ resurrection was different from the resurrection of Lazarus in two ways. First, Lazarus was raised to die again. Secondly, Lazarus’ body was resurrected, but it was still of its original earthly nature. His mortal body did not put on immortality. The corruptible had not put on incorruption. It was a body that was still subject to the physical environment in which it had to live and die again. On the other hand, Jesus’ body was **changed**. It was a body as the one we shall have when He comes again (1 Jn 3:2). John did not understand the nature of this resurrected body. Neither did Paul. But the statement “*we do not know what we shall be*” in 1 John 3:2 indicates that whatever we shall be when Jesus

comes will be different than what we are now. Therefore, Paul is challenged by the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 15 to give us some idea of what we shall be.

As a result of Adam's disobedience, all mankind **in Adam** was driven from the Tree of Life (Gn 3:22-24). Therefore, it is appointed unto all men to physically die (Hb 9:27). All men suffer from the consequences of Adam's sin. However, as a result of Jesus' obedience and resurrection, all will be raised (Jn 5:28,29). At least in this text, all those **in Christ** will be made alive. All Christians will be raised. They will be raised to a new life. We believe that in this context Paul's concern is with those "in Christ" (Jn 11:25). The resurrection of the unrighteous is argued in other texts (See Jn 5:28,29).

Verses 23-28

EVENTS OF THE END

But everyone in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For He has put all things under His feet. But when He says all things have been subjected, it is evident that He is excluded who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then will the Son also Himself be subject to Him who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all.

The **order** of the resurrections under discussion is Jesus first, then the righteous second. There is a space of at least 1,900 years between these two events. **Those who belong to Christ** will rise at the final coming of Jesus. We keep in mind that in this context, as well as, the context of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is discussing the resurrection of the righteous, not the wicked.

The **end** is the final coming of Jesus, the end of earth history (2 Pt 3:10-13). When Jesus comes He will put an end to all government authority. He will end the power of Satan by putting an end to Satan (Mt 25:41). He will also end His kingdom reign by delivering kingdom reign to the Father who gave it.

Jesus must presently **reign** until the end comes. His present reign is with all authority (Mt 28:18). It is over all principalities and powers of this world and the spirit world (Ep 1:21-23; Ph 2:9-11). But when He comes again, He will return all kingdom reign to the Father. This will be done that the Godhead exist as it has existed in all eternity.

The last enemy of man is **physical death**. The end of physical death will occur when "death and hades" are cast into eternal destruction on the last day (Rv 20:13). Paul wrote that these things have "*now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" (2 Tm 1:10). We would affirm that this "appearing" refers to Jesus' appearing **after the cross**. Jesus' resurrection is the proof that death had

been brought to nought by His resurrection. Through His death and resurrection, He released *“those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Hb 2:14,15). His resurrection is a revelation that we shall be raised never to die again.

Jesus must presently **reign** until He *“has put all things under His feet”* (See Ps 8:6; 110:1; At 2:34; Hb 2:5-9; 1 Pt 3:22). But when all things have been subjected to Him, then all things will come to an end. When Jesus’ present kingdom reign has been accomplished, then He will have terminated the purpose for His reign.

After the accomplished purpose of Jesus’ kingdom reign has been realized, then kingdom reign will be returned to the Father who gave it to the Son (See Jn 13:3; 17:2; Mt 28:18).

Verses 29-34

BAPTISM OF THE DEAD

Otherwise, what will those do who are immersed for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they immersed for the dead? And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If according to men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Be not deceived, evil company corrupts good morals. Awake to righteousness and do not sin, for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul now asks two questions. First, he asks, *“If the physically dead are not raised, then why were you baptized on behalf of your own spiritually dead selves?”* In other words, why be baptized to be joined to Christ, if Christ’s resurrection will profit nothing. In Romans 6:5 Paul had stated, *“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”* But if Jesus has not been raised, then there is no resurrection of the Christian in the likeness of His resurrection.

Paul’s second question reflects on his experience on the Damascus road. He asks, *“If Jesus is not raised from the dead, then why am I suffering in order to proclaim His resurrection?”* Those in Corinth who denied the resurrection are essentially calling Paul a false witness. The suffering of Paul in proclaiming the resurrection is evidence of His Damascus road experience (See 2 Co 11:23-28; Gl 5:11). He had actually seen the resurrected Jesus. His testimony was true. If we deny the resurrection, then we say that he is a false witness. The extent of his suffering can be answered only in the fact that he actually experienced the resurrected Jesus.

Paul **died daily** (See Rm 8:36; 2 Co 4:10; Gl 2:20). Would one do such for a hallucination on a desert road? I believe that the extent of his suffering to preach the resurrection is proof that the Damascus road experience was true. No man would sanely suffer as he did for a delusion.

Would a man be willingly thrown to **beasts** for a delusion? If there is no resurrection, then certainly, Christians are to be pitied for their Christian efforts. If there is no resurrection, then *“let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”*

Those who denied the resurrection in Corinth were intimidating those who believed in it. For this reason Paul said, *“Evil company corrupts good habits.”* No greater statement could have been made concerning the keeping of close company with those who deny fundamental doctrines. John said, *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him”* (2 Jn 10). Neither Paul’s nor John’s statement concerns those matters over which brethren disagree in the area of opinion. The context of both statements (1 Co 15 & 2 John) surrounds a denial of “fundamental doctrine.” And the context of the statements helps us define fundamental doctrine. Paul’s statement is in the context of those who were denying the resurrection. Thus, the resurrection is one of those fundamental doctrines that is essential to Christian belief. John’s statement is in the context of those *“who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh”* (2 Jn 7). Therefore, belief in the incarnation of Jesus is another fundamental doctrine. These are major teachings of the New Testament. They are not trivial matters of opinion.

Paul’s exhortation, therefore, is to **awake**. If we deny the coming

resurrection, then we deny life after death. “Let us therefore eat, drink and be merry.” Those who believe that this life is all there is, will involve themselves in all sorts of sin to please the carnal nature of man. However, belief in the resurrection encourages righteous living. It is important, therefore, to have the **knowledge of God** on this matter in order to guard ourselves from sin.

Verses 35-37 CHANGE

But some will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what body do they come?” Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body which will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

Some in Corinth were arguing against the resurrection on the basis that they could not understand the concept of a resurrected body. Because they could not understand that which was beyond their experience, they thought such could not happen. Such thinking is the fallacy of those whose minds cannot imagine beyond the physical world. Such is the thinking of the **foolish one** who creates religious dogma after the thinking of man, not God. However, if we believe in God, then we must believe in God as a creator. If God can create, then certainly He can resurrect. The fact that there is a God who can create is evidence that He can also resurrect.

Paul uses an earthly wonder to illustrate an end of time phenomenon.

As a seed is sown in the ground and is transformed into something different when it grows, so it is with the body. Paul's analogy illustrates that change in the body must take place after it is sown in death. The point is that it must first be sown before it has the opportunity to change. Without the sowing, there is not possibility of changing. Christians look at death, therefore, as an opportunity to change into the spiritual body that is yet in the future when Jesus comes again.

.Verses 38-41

DIFFERENT FLESH

But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh. But there is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, another of birds. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. But the glory of the heavenly is one and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for one star differs from another star in glory.

Since God created different kinds of flesh, it is not difficult to understand that He could create another. There exist different kinds of **flesh** that we witness today. We believe that each kind came from the Creator. Paul reasons, "What would be the difficulty in believing that God could create another kind of body, the resurrected body?" Those who were denying the resurrection, therefore, were actually denying the creative ability of God to create the resurrected body. This is Paul's argument to those

who are denying the bodily resurrection because they cannot understand that which is beyond their experiential environment.

Therefore, Paul does not accept denial based upon non- experience. In other words, that which will exist in the future is not dependent upon what I experience in the present. If it was, then no such thing as a heavenly realm or resurrected body could exist, for I would reason that only that which can exist must be limited to my experiential environment. Therefore, Paul's argument is against the naturalist who claims that nothing exists outside his natural environment of experience.

Verses 42-45

THE NEW BODY

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown perishable. It is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

The resurrected body will not be subject to **corruption**, that is, decay. It will not be subject to disease and death. Our present body dies and will return to the dust. However, the **incorruptible** body will not die or decay. This present body will be raised a **glorious** body. It will be raised with **power** over physical death.

Paul states that the new body will be a **spiritual body**. Though he has explained that this present body will be changed, he is not able to define the nature of this changed body. It will be a body that has no definition with our earthly words. Through revelation, therefore, Paul is stating the fact of a new and changed body. However, this “spiritual body” is still beyond our earthly understanding. We must not frustrate ourselves by arguing over the nature of this glorious body that is yet to come.

The reason the body must be changed to a spiritual body is in the fact that it will dwell in a changed environment from what we now experience. When God breathed into Adam the breath of life (Gn 2:7), he became a being with a body created for this physical environment. However, Jesus has breathed into the obedient believer the right to be resurrected with a spiritual body for a spiritual environment beyond this world (See Rm 5:14,21; Jn 5:21; Ph 3:21; Cl 3:4).

Verses 46-49

IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY MAN

However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly. The second man is from heaven. As was the earthly, so also are those who are earthly; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, let us also bear the image of the heavenly.

Adam came **before** Jesus. Therefore, the physical body must come before the spiritual body. The body of Adam was **of the earth** (Gn 2:7; 3:19; 5:3). However, the body that will come as a result of being in Christ, will be **from heaven**. Jesus came from heaven (Jn 3:13,31; 8:23,42). He thus came with the authority to give us a body from heaven.

All men are presently confined to an earthly body of dust as Adam. But Christians will be changed into a heavenly body at the resurrection. We are physically born in the physical **image** of Adam’s body. Those who are spiritually born, will be resurrected with a **heavenly** body like that of Jesus (See Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2). For this heavenly body we all seek.

Verses 50-53

THE MYSTERY

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

It is not possible that this body of **flesh and blood** be able to dwell in the eternal kingdom of the incorruptible body. Therefore, this body must be changed. It must be changed to a spiritual body that is not subject to the

elements of a physical environment.

Paul reveals a **mystery**. The mystery is the changing of this body that is subject to a physical environment, to a body that is eternal in nature. Therefore, we shall not remain in the grave. We shall be **changed**. The change will take place in a **moment**. It will be as fast as blinking one's eye. It will happen at the last trumpet when the dead in Christ are raised (1 Th 4:13-17). When the last trumpet is sounded, dead Christians will be raised with a changed body (Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2). The corruptible body will be changed to an incorruptible body. The mortal body will be changed to an immortal body (See 2 Co 5:1-8).

Some have difficulty in understanding any harmony between "same" and "changed." It will be the same body, according to Paul's mystery. However, this same body will be a changed body. It will be different, for it will be heavenly or spiritual in nature. These words may confuse us. However, we must understand that Paul is revealing something that is beyond our physical experience. Therefore, we do not pretend to understand the nature of this resurrected body. We are simply content with the few words Paul uses to convey the fact that we will be changed.

Verses 54-57 END OF DEATH

So when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Death is swallowed up because it will be terminated. After the final resurrection, physical death will exist no more (See Rv 20:13,14). Isaiah had prophesied this. *"He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces ..."* (Is 25:8). Paul's reference is to Hosea 13:14 in asking a personified **death** where his victory over man is after the final resurrection. His victory is gone forever because physical death will no longer exist after the resurrection (See *BRL* vol. 11, ch. 8).

Physical death came into the world when Adam sinned. Because of his sin, he was driven from the tree of life, *"lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"* (Gn 3:22-24). Therefore, in Adam all men do physically die (1 Co 15:20-22). Since Adam it has been appointed unto all men to physically die (Hb 9:27), for no one can now eat of the tree of life.

The power of sin is **law**. All men sin (Rm 3:23). It is impossible for men to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Lest we accuse Adam of ruining our chance to "live forever" on earth, we must think of the words of Paul in Romans 5:12. *"Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all*

men, because all sinned.” Paul’s argument is that none have a right to accuse Adam for introducing both spiritual or physical death into the world. The reason none can is that all have sinned against God’s law.

Our victory over law has come through God’s grace that was revealed through Jesus. *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men”* (Ti 2:11). Jesus came that *“He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people ...”* (Ti 2:14). Here is the victory. Paul explains. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”* (Ep 2:4-7). Because the Christian has been raised up with Jesus in baptism (See Rm 6:3-5), he will also be raised up in the final day. It will be then that we will understand the exceeding riches of the Father. It will be then that we will understand the consequences of being saved by grace and not by law-keeping.

Law brings death because no man can keep law perfectly. Therefore, there is the necessity for grace. God’s grace came through Jesus (Rm 5:15; Ti 2:11). And because of this grace, we will be raised with an incorruptible body to live eternally with the Father.

Verse 58

BE IMMOVABLE

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

“**Therefore**” is Paul’s conclusion and emphasis. Since his preceding remarks are true, then Christians must be **immovable** in their convictions. He reaffirms the necessity for believing in the resurrection. Since we so believe, then we know that what happens to our physical body in this life is of no consequence to eternity. Because we believe, we stand fast in the Lord (Ep 6:10,14; 2 Pt 3:14).

Because we will be raised “in the Lord” we know that all our labors for the Lord are not useless. We are saddened by those who are not “in the Lord” in this life who do good deeds. Though their good works are beneficial to the community, they do not profit toward eternal life. There are many good religious people who do good things in the “name of the Lord.” However, they have not been immersed into the Lord (Rm 6:3-5; Gl 3:26,27). They are outside Christ, outside a covenant relationship with God. Therefore, their labors will not profit toward eternity. Only those who are **in the Lord** are producing labors that profit toward eternity.

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 is now complete. The centrality of his preaching was the gospel. One major

event of the gospel was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As proof of the resurrection, Jesus was seen by many witnesses. These witnesses could testify to the fact of His resurrection. Therefore, since Jesus is the firstfruits of all those who have died, then we know that there is another resurrection to come. This resurrection will be bodily.

Our physical body dies as a natural body. However, the time is coming when it will be raised, and in the

twinkling of an eye, will be changed to immortality. Our corruptible body will put on incorruption. We will be raised with a spiritual body that will dwell in an eternal habitation.

Physical death will be put to death by the resurrection to come. This last enemy of man will be cast into the lake of fire as resurrected saints go away into eternity. We will have victory over death by our resurrection to come.