

The Word of Truth Ministry Presents
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Matthew 24

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Foreword

by M.B. Hammond

The real or imagined fears about the immediate future of this earth have caused many people to be concerned about the possibility of some great God-provoked, cataclysmic event happening soon. Even many Christians have expressed their conviction that the coming (Gr. - parousia, personal presence) of Christ was imminent and this would bring a terrifying time of the great tribulation, God's vengeance and the battle of Armageddon to cause the destruction of the world. Many prominent theologians, including Dr. John F. Walvoord, Chancellor of the Dallas Theological Seminary, have intensified this fear by publishing books with apocalyptic titles like, *The Second Coming*, *The Rapture*, and *The Road To Armageddon*. They use Scripture to "identify" many of the signs of His coming and then relate some similar current events to "prove" that God's vengeance is near at hand. Many ambiguous signs taken from Matthew 24 and from Revelation are used to prey upon men's doubts and fears. This book asks many of the questions that are on men's minds and proposes answers that are based on a knowledge of God's purposes from Scripture. This work shows clearly that "the end of the world" in Matthew 24:3 (KJV) is badly mistranslated and should be rendered "the consummation of the eon," which is a concept that will delight the believer in Christ.

John C. Ribbens, the author, has been long associated with the Word of Truth Ministry and its founder, the late Otis Q. Sellers. He has written several thought-provoking monographs and short articles on Biblical subjects. In this book, he has written a most interesting and excellent treatise on the events of the consummation of the eon, and provides Biblical proof that the "imminency theories" are groundless, and do not support the claims of the "fear mongers." He also deals with the Preterist philosophies, so prevalent today. These people say "the coming of Christ already happened," and the tribulation was back in 70 AD, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans. He examines their false teachings and puts to rest their theory of "realized eschatology," meaning that all the prophecies of Scripture had been fulfilled.

From the studies in this book, the believer in Jesus Christ will come to appreciate why the prophetic utterances in Scripture are virtually impossible to understand without a clear knowledge of God's present purposes in the dispensation of grace, and the distinguishing of the Acts Period as the blade stage of the Kingdom of God. He supports the case for God's prophesied restoration and reconstitution of the nation of Israel, and the blessing of all mankind, which is His next manifest act in the prophetic chain. This presentation of Christ in His blazing forth (Gr. epiphaneia) will be so awesome and unexpected that unbelievers and Christians alike will be humbled witnessing this event. God's present purpose is to build a record of His grace, and the premillennial kingdom will bring great blessing to all mankind in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, which explains why Bible prophecy defies the best scholars. Without these factors there is little opportunity for a truthful unveiling of God's future work.

Ribbens explains the epiphaneia of Jesus Christ as the "blazing forth" of His great glory, and the divine intervention in the affairs of men, that enlightens all men

about who Christ is and what He is in the sight of God. He explains the government of God and approximately five centuries of peace, health and righteousness the world will enjoy in the Kingdom of God. He develops the new term "Eonian Times" to describe the Kingdom of God, and eliminate the usual mistaken idea of the "kingdom" as the "millennium," so prevalent today in Christian scholarship. He shows how the Holy Spirit will restrain Satan during Eonian Times, and how the restraints are lifted as the consummation of the eon (end of the day of Christ) draws near. The lifting of restraints is designed to test men, proving whether or not they have learned righteousness. He deals with the apocalyptic signs of Matthew 24, showing that Christ's second coming has neither happened already, nor is it imminent. Ribbens covers the controversial subjects of the seven seals of Revelation 6, the abomination of desolation, the great tribulation, the seven trumpets (Rev. 8-11), the battle of Armageddon, and the personal presence (parousia) of Christ. The prophecy shows that the Day of Christ (Eonian Times) is followed by the Day of the Lord, the time when His vengeance will be brought to bear on all who have rebelled against His rule and authority. The millennium, or thousand-year reign of Christ upon earth, is a time of great peace and righteousness, with a "little season" of rebellion, which completes the Day of the Lord. For those believers who are interested in advanced dispensational truth, the studies provide a valuable asset. Additionally, there are many useful translations given for incomplete or troublesome English words or phrases, accompanying various Biblical verses. As one knows, Rome was not built in a day, nor was this book "just" written, but it is a culmination and combination of the author's years of Biblical study, and his examining of many knowledgeable predecessors. Be prepared to read and comprehend with an open mind, as one may always ascertain something worthwhile!

Preface

The next thing on God's prophetic calendar is a period of divine government contrary to the opinions expressed by a number of assumed Biblical scholars. The so-called rapture of the church hails as a myth, and therefore cannot be next; neither, for that matter, is the battle of Armageddon, the Tribulation or the second coming of Christ. Attempts to portray the tribulation as "the worst hour in human history for the world" are at best sadistic tales. God's present activity, marked by the dispensation of grace, will not terminate in a world government of men, but in the divine assumption of sovereignty. This event will usher mankind into the Day of Jesus Christ, not into the Day of the Lord. The hope for mankind is contingent on God breaking His silence and making it plain to all men that He is the Savior of the world.

This study of Matthew 24 and the consummation of the eon is intended to demonstrate that an era of divine government is next in God's plan, which will precede the second coming of Christ bringing with it hope for every inhabitant on planet earth. This will bring God's righteous judgments to all men and be the brightest hour of human history.

MATTHEW 24

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Consummation Of The Eon

By John C. Ribbens

Introduction

Beyond all doubt the most powerful message in Scripture concerns the manifest Kingdom of God, the next event in God's revealed program. Like the mighty Mt. Everest, it dominates the scene of world history yet unwritten. Following approximately 500 years of peaceful divine government, there will come a re-emergence of certain conditions that have been commonplace for most of prior human history, and especially the last 2,000 years. Men will hear of wars and rumors of wars. However, God-fearing men are urged not to be troubled, because all these things must come to pass, but the end of this period of turmoil is not yet come. At this time, nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. This follows several centuries of time, during which nations shall have lived together harmoniously under the constraints of the Kingdom. In a world, which has been void of wars and violence, once again men will hear of conflicts and social distress.

The implementation of divine government will both banish wars and military institutions that instruct men in the art of inflicting destruction on others. Annapolis and West Point as well as all similar training centers over the world will cease to exist. However, as mankind nears the advent of the Day of the Lord, ambitious men will sense the removal of Kingdom restraints leading to agitation and tumults of battle. Luke speaks of wars and commotions. Suddenly, men become unstable, unsettled and in a state of disorder and confusion. This will be in bold contrast to present world conditions in which conflict between nations and peoples are the everyday occurrence. It is the emergence of this scenario that concerned the disciples who asked Jesus, "Tell us, when these things shall be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3). These expressions of anxiety cannot be a sign of our times. Our Lord then added, "Nation shall rise against nations, and kingdom shall rise against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall be from heaven" (Luke 21:10-11). Only a fool would argue that the occurrence of such signs would be significant today.

Want of food has become prevalent in every corner of the earth today, with North Korea and several African nations being a case in point. In our world, men continually fight the ravages of pestilence and infectious disease, and earthquakes are so common today that men all but ignore the most violent shaking of the earth's crust.

Understanding of Matthew 24 is not possible apart from the recognition of the proliferation of these conditions which are now considered all too normal, but will have been eradicated from the earth during the premillennial Kingdom of God, or the Day of Jesus Christ, as it is called. The reoccurrence of these conditions is not a signal of the collapse of divine government or a relapse in nature, but rather a lifting of the divine restraints produced by the Holy Spirit. Men living under divine government will not be permitted to live in defiance of God. The fact that these conditions will once again become manifest will signal to the world that some radical change in the lives of men and nations has occurred. All attempts to superimpose present day world conditions on the interpretation of Matthew 24 are doomed to failure. No chapter in the Word of God has done more to generate discussion questions, opinions and debate than this one. It is important to note that these issues will have profound impact not only upon Israel, but on every individual living on earth in that future day.

Dispensationalists have long been seriously divided over issues concerning the end of the world, the so-called rapture, the great tribulation and the second coming of Jesus Christ. In one sense, Matthew 24 has become the lightning rod for a wide number of diverse opinions being expressed by men of every walk of faith. Hidden within the content of this chapter are literally thousands of questions, which have a profound impact on all of mankind. These are vital issues concerning the expectations of men now living and the future of mankind. It is my conviction that no intelligent understanding of this chapter will ever arise apart from the recognition of a theological framework within which to place these crucial events. I have examined dozens of Biblical charts on future events, and with no exception, none have made provision for a time of divine government preceding the parousia, or second coming of Jesus Christ. The intent of this study is to define and focus on the issues raised by our Lord in response to the questions raised by His disciples. It is also to position them within a framework based on a comprehensive understanding of the Kingdom of God.

For centuries Bible students have postulated their ideas with respect to the response given by the Lord to the questions asked by the disciples. These questions include the issue of when will these events be fulfilled; who will be impacted and

why. The study of Scripture, which is essential to our understanding of these issues, is admittedly complex, but it can yield promising results if men are willing to adopt an open-minded mentality. The Bible is, by definition, its own best expositor. We are reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul who declared that, "We have not been given the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (I Tim 1:7).

Given these spiritual faculties, the progress of understanding God's Word is not only possible but greatly rewarding. Unfortunately many religious men have adopted a rigid mentality and taken positions based on preconceived doctrines, which are not readily subject to change. Views expressed by the Preterists, who maintain an intractable position regarding their doctrine of "realized eschatology," are a classic example. They, and others like them, have become so deeply entrenched in error that any progress in spiritual understanding is virtually impossible.

Even among assumed Dispensationalists there are thousands of varying interpretations of Scripture. Scores of books have been written by men who claim to be scholars and eschatologists, each asserting finality in understanding and interpretation. This type of mentality can become a serious impediment to the unbiased study of the Word of God. I hold that no comprehension of the prophetic word is possible apart from yielding our hearts and minds to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Crucial Questions

Probably the two most important questions raised by our Lord's disciples in Matthew 24 are, "**What shall be the sign of Thy coming? and of the end of the world?**" What did these first-century believers understand regarding the fulfillment of these significant events? Did they believe that these events would occur within their lifetimes? Did they anticipate that within the course of their lifetimes some catastrophic event would occur resulting in the devastation of millions of human lives? Did their concern relating to "the end of the world" contemplate some horrific natural disaster that could conceivably obliterate mankind from the face of the earth? If the end of the world were now imminent, how would it impact the billions of people living on earth today?

Dr. John F. Walvoord, who is acclaimed as one of the world's foremost authorities on Bible prophecy and coming world events, has stated, "In the three and one-half years leading up to the second coming of Christ, much of the earth will be devastated and billions of people will be killed. This will reduce the world's population to a fraction of what it is now."

Is this threat a present reality or a mere supposition? Is this position one that can be supported by Scripture? Is this what God has planned for the future of mankind? Is the warning of a presumed worldwide disaster in accord with the character of a just and loving God?

What is meant by the question, "When will the rapture occur?" Dr. Walvoord believes, "The capstone of prophecy for true believers is the doctrine of the rapture, Christ's coming to take His church from earth to heaven." He is basically saying, when the rapture of the church occurs, every true believer will be removed to heaven. Another author writes, "The rapture is imminent. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His church is presented in the New Testament as an imminent hope, and expectation. That the coming of Christ is imminent simply means that our Lord may come at any time. Nothing needs to happen before He comes." This is the popular opinion held by the vast majority of Christians living today. The question is further compounded by the issue of whether there is to be a pre-tribulation rapture, a mid-tribulation rapture, or a post-tribulation rapture. In response to the one question asked, "Will the church go through the tribulation?", one writer says, "The answer is no. None of the tribulation events will take place prior to the removal of the church; otherwise the rapture would not be imminent."

Obviously there is a great deal of controversy regarding this question. One glaring fact remains that, as of this moment in time, Christ has not returned to earth and the so-called "church" has not been raptured. What did Jesus mean by the Statement, **For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be** (Matt. 24:21) ? Dr. Dwight Pentecost believes, "The tribulation is a period in which God will significantly deal with the nation of Israel to bring it to repentance, thus setting the stage for the fulfillment of the covenanted blessings believers will experience and the establishment of the kingdom after Christ's second advent." Is this the real meaning of the tribulation? Is this the purpose it is intended to serve?

Another question is, "What did Jesus mean when He referred to **'the abomination of desolation, as spoken by Daniel the prophet** ? (Matt. 24:15) The Preterists claim "The armies of Rome which destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple were the abomination of desolation." Is this what Christ taught in that passage? Who is that man of sin, called the "son of perdition" (II Thess. 2:3)? Is the second coming of Christ an imminent reality? Has the second coming of Christ already occurred, as the Preterists allege, or does the actual physical return of Christ still await fulfillment?

We recall that angels standing adjacent to the resurrected and ascending Christ asked, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up to heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in the manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven (Acts 1:9). Has this event actually happened or have men like the Preterists simply deceived themselves? Ward Fenley, in his book, *The Second Coming of Christ Already Happened*, points to Matthew 10:23 as proof that Christ has already come. Here Jesus said, "For verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, til the Son of man be come." Inasmuch as our Lord said "Ye," meaning the twelve disciples, Fenley says, "It becomes obvious that it would be untenable to say that Jesus was referring to Christians two thousand years later." How can we reconcile the fact that these disciples to whom the words were spoken have since died and Christ still remains "seated in the heavens?" In defense of his "past in fulfillment doctrine," Fenley states, "May God in His rich mercy and compassion deliver His sheep from the Christ demeaning doctrine of futurism." Such statements may convince weak men, but they indicate to us the length some men will go to defend their erroneous positions.

Ask yourself the question, "Have the events spoken of in Matthew 24 ever been fulfilled as many men allege?" In 1996, John L. Bray, a prominent Preterist, wrote a book titled *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*. In a parallel passage in Luke 21:7 the disciples asked, "Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" Bray states, "The disciples definitely were not thinking about a future second coming of Christ thousands of years away from those events, but rather they associated these things with an actual coming of Christ in judgment and power at that time." He insists, as most Preterists do, that, Jesus connected the end of the age with the events involved in the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD." He adds, "The end of the age which Jesus and the disciples anticipated, was the end of the Jewish age." How does this false doctrine relate to the yet unfulfilled prophecy of Joel 2:28-32? Joel declared, "And it shall come to pass, afterward (acharyth, the last days) that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh ... and I will show wonders in heavens and in the earth ... and the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible (awe-inspiring) day of the Lord come. Have these last days been fulfilled or do they belong to the future? Is this an indication that these events recorded in Matthew 24:27-31 have ever been fulfilled? What impact will the events of Matthew 24 have on the nation of Israel? Is there a future for the city of Jerusalem? What is the expectation if the now some 15 million Jews living outside of the land of Palestine? when and under what circumstances will they return to the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Will the covenants made with the nation ever be fulfilled? If so, when and under what circumstances? What is God's present purpose? How do the events recorded in Matthew 24 impact people in the

dispensation of grace? What does Scripture mean by the phrase "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6) and "the day of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:12)? Is Satan presently active in the world? In what capacity? Is there a future for mankind?

These questions raised thus far are but the tip of the iceberg. They could be multiplied a thousand times over. Many of these questions have troubled the minds of men for centuries. They are indicative of a broad diversity of opinions being expressed by men in general and believers in Christ in particular. The answers impact the lives of all men living on earth today, as well as billions now in the state of death. Must the solution to these Biblical questions remain an enigma indefinitely? Are we destined to continue to remain in a state of darkness and confusion, or can we find light and instruction from the Word of God? The prophet Isaiah declared. Behold the darkness shall cover the earth and gross (intense) darkness the peoples: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee (Isa. 60:2). I firmly believe, as mankind moves ever closer to the end of the day of man and the brink of the collapse of civilization, the darkness now covering mankind will only intensify. Is there any antidote to this insidious flow of evil, sin and death? Does our powerful and almighty sovereign God provide a solution to the myriad problems facing mankind today? Or will the mindless aggression on innocent men, women, and children continue to flow? Is there an all-encompassing definitive solution to the societal problems impacting the lives of men living in the 21st century? Or is the human race being irrevocably being drawn into the vortex of corruption, despair and destruction?

My conviction remains firm that, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa. 59:19). In a moment of critical need, God will break His present silence and rescue mankind from the brink of global catastrophe.

The Ultimate Solution: World Salvation

The key to unlocking the interpretation of Matthew 24 is the recognition that the next thing in God's plan for the future of mankind is the imposition of divine government. This is the core message of the Bible, the pearl of great price, the day-spring from on High that gives light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (Luke 1:78-79). The message of the Kingdom of God is the catalyst that binds the Word of God together. As Dr. Pentecost correctly observed, "It is the theme that unifies all Scripture." Dr. Alva J. McClain taught that the Kingdom of God is, in a certain sense, the grand central theme of all Scripture, and had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it, "The book of the coming Kingdom of God." It is the Biblical record of the progressive plan and purpose of God to assume sovereign authority over all of mankind. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). When divine government is imposed on all this earth, it will mark the

cessation of the Day of Man, and usher in the glorious Day of Jesus Christ.

The day will surely come when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" {Hab. 2:14). This marvelous work concerns the recognition and esteem due His name, as the result of God going into action. The prophet Isaiah declared. "For when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9). No greater blessing could ever come to mankind. Without a comprehensive knowledge of the Kingdom of God, it would be impossible to grasp an intelligent understanding not only of Matthew 24, but also the totality of Scripture. Lacking a comprehension of this fundamental truth, the plans and purposes of God would forever remain obscure, hidden from view.

The Coming Eon

All attempts to answer the questions we have raised thus far are doomed to failure unless we can come to a more precise meaning of the Hebrew word *olam* and the equivalent Greek word *aion*. A number of years ago, the late Otis Q. Sellers, founder of the Word of Truth Ministry, came to the conviction that the Biblical meaning of these words form a descriptive title for the condition of things, which will become manifest once God's government (the Kingdom of God) becomes a reality. Understand, that the word *aion* (eon) is used in Scripture to express the identical meaning of the Hebrew word *olam*. The basic, intrinsic meaning of the word *aion* contains the fundamental idea of that which flows or is flowing. Paul in Ephesians speaks of those who "in time past walked according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2). This could better be translated as the eon of this world system or arrangement. There exists in the world today a constant stream of senseless violence, moral degeneracy, gross materialism, sickness, disease, and death, which can rightly be attributed to "the prince (ruler) of the power (authority) of the air, the spirit now operating in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). This evil flow has now become a raging torrent of moral pollution contaminating the lives of mankind, young and old alike.

The inception of "this present evil eon" (Gal. 1:4) can be traced back to the time "when sin and death came into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5:12). These conditions have brought in an inconceivable flow of misery and suffering. Evidence of this flow is apparent in the tragedies of wars, broken homes, mounting health issues, and man's general inability to live in peace. Over the next decade, AIDS will kill more people in sub-Saharan Africa than the total number of casualties in all the wars of the 20th century. Each day, 5,500 people die of AIDS related causes. By 2005 AD, it is predicted that the daily death toll will reach 13,000. The recent tragic results of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo underscore this problem. How long will this evil torrent continue to flow? Is there light at the end of the tunnel?

Solomon, the son of David, declared, "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter" (Eccl. 4:1). Sir Robert Anderson, in his book, *The Silence of God*, observed, "A silent heaven is the greatest mystery of our existence." The old Hebrew prophet and bard asked, "How doth God know? and Is there knowledge in the Most High?" (Psa. 73:11). Isaiah the prophet spoke out, "So shall they fear (stand in awe of) the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun, when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him (Isa, 59:19). These words spell hope for mankind and a definite termination to the Day of Man. It has now been almost 2000 years since the Apostle Paul uttered these momentous words found in Acts 28:28, "Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation (bringing message) of God is sent (authorized) to the nations with the guarantee it would get through to them. No sooner had Paul spoken these words when God laid hold of a man "whose name was John, the same came for a witness to bear witness of the light, that all men through it (the witness) might believe" (John 1:6-7). Within a brief span of time, this instrument in God's hand was privileged to pen what we call the Gospel of John. The enormity of the message of this gospel is little appreciated by men today. However, within the scope of 21 chapters, God has provided us with a book written essentially to draw men to Himself. This gospel firmly exudes life.

In the course of writing this gospel, John focused on at least eight of the most positive miracles (signs) to credential the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed, "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). The enormity of these signs are little understood; they attest to the awesome wisdom, power, and skill that God will yet exercise on behalf of mankind. These signs provide evidence of the fact that every need essential to the preservation of mankind will be met. If Jesus could turn water into wine, He could override the laws of time and of nature to benefit every living soul. This He has promised to do when God "opens rivers in high places, and makes the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water" (Isa. 41:18-22). If Christ could heal a man with an infirmity of 38 years (John 5:1-3), He could equally overwhelm mankind with a great flow of health and life. If our Lord could feed 5,000 men and still have "twelve basketsful of the fragments of barley loaves remain," He could just as easily have fed millions of hungry men, women, and children, and in so doing banish hunger and famine from the earth. It is inconceivable to imagine that anything is too hard for God. As the prophet revealed, "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sin smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them (Isa. 49:10-11). These are divine solutions to present day problems which, stagger the imagination.

The cumulative effect of the operation of sin and death now present in the world constitutes a real threat to the very survival of the human race. Not only the physical, moral and spiritual needs of mankind are in jeopardy, but the flood gates of darkness, hypocrisy, error and lies threaten to extinguish the truth of God. In recognition of this grave peril, Paul writes, **"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for (on behalf of) all men"** (I Tim. 2:1). The word men used here is which has reference to the entire human race, not merely individual men. Mass starvation, genocide, and a number of crippling diseases have already inflicted their toll on mankind. Unfortunately, mankind is incapable of solving these social problems. Paul continues, urging men to pray, for kings, and for all that are in authority: that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:2-4). This passage does not teach universal reconciliation, but universal preservation. Simply stated. God has every intention to rescue and preserve mankind, and bring men into a full and accurate knowledge of the truth. This is an awesome responsibility, but "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till He has set judgment in the earth" (Isa. 42:4). Romans 1:18 speaks of "the wrath of God which is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold down (suppress) the truth in unrighteousness." The present proliferation of lies emanating from the pulpit, concerning man's nature, destiny and his relation to God, will cease. Darkness and error will yield to the blazing forth of the light of God's truth.

God's present administration of grace will come to an end in the single most important act of grace the world has ever experienced by the inauguration of divine government. This act of divine intervention will result in a total transformation of society, mankind and the nations. It represents the ultimate goal of God by achieving His purpose to fully express Himself to mankind. The inception of divine government will mark the culmination of the Day of man and herald the Day of Jesus Christ.

This latter period of time is identified for us in Scripture as "the eon;" a time in which God will flow out to mankind in a tidal wave of physical, material and spiritual blessings, heretofore unheard of. This description of the work of God is consistent with the fact that He is called "the Everlasting God, ...the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isa 40:28). In fact, this unique term "eon" is both a description of God and this majestic array of blessings flowing out of God to mankind. It is described to us in Psalm 36:8, where we read, **"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures."** This flowing out of God is contingent on divine intervention. Once God goes into action, sin and death, the principle now working in the lives of men, will cease to flow. As the result of divine intervention, there

will be an immediate cessation of every act of aggression, deceit and violence.

This incredible work of God will inaugurate a period of time called "life." In the words of John 6:33 it says, "For the bread of life is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world." Psalm 48:14 declares, "For this God is our God forever and ever." This unique expression in the Greek, *eis ton aiona kai eis ton aiona ta aionos*, employs two singular forms of the word *aion*, or *eon*. In this declaration we are told that God is the supreme outflowing source of the *eon*. It is both a reference to the coming Kingdom of God and to God Himself. Attempts to interpret this word to mean "endlessness" or "an age" fail to provide the believer with an intelligent understanding of this magnificent term. The word *aion* (*eon*) used in this sense is a vivid description of the Jehovah Messiah of the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament.

When Scripture speaks of "eternal life" or "eternal punishment," it is a description of and reference to a condition of things, which will prevail on the earth when God flows out in divine government. These conditions will give rise to a time of perfect peace, health and joy. This avalanche of spiritual blessings is totally contingent on the divine assumption of sovereignty. The element of the duration of time is secondary to the intrinsic quality of life flowing out of God to men. The majestic fact is that God will flow out and into the life of the believer in Christ, who then will participate in what He is with respect to His essential being. Men possessed of "eternal (*eonian*) life" will in effect become *eons* in themselves, in that they in turn will flow out to other men. For the first time in history the believers in Christ, whether God-fearing Israelites or men who are part of God's theophany, will become vehicles through whom God will produce a new culture in music, literature, art and hymns of praise. No longer will men's minds be preoccupied with the stock market, producing weapons of mass destruction, sexual perversion, real estate transactions, fighting crime, peace-keeping missions, and a thousand and one social programs, many of which have effectively crowded out the Word of God. The psalmist David declared, "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God, God is not in all his thoughts" (Psa. 10:4).

In place of empty minds and lives, God will fill all peoples with the knowledge of Himself and His righteous judgments. God's written Word will become the basis for study, meditation, and exploration, as the Spirit of God will provide a renewed understanding of every word of this book we call the Bible. Men's total orientation will be redirected toward acquiring an increase in the knowledge of God, And this is life eternal (*eonian* life), that they might know Thee, the only true God, and (even) Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent (John 17:3). As a result of the imposition of divine government, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). The fulfillment of this marvelous word of prophecy will reshape the life and thinking of every being on earth. This incredible experience defies description.

Eonian Times

Radical changes are planned for the future of mankind and the nations on this earth. Life will never again be the same. No greater joy and privilege will grace the hearts of men than the realization that the long-promised Day of Jesus Christ has arrived. All memory of this long and undistinguished Day of Man, with its sorrow and oppression, will fade away. For example, David, speaking of his oppressors, declared, "That He may cut off the memory of them from the earth" (Psa. 109:15). At long last "the glory of the Lord will be revealed, all flesh will see it together: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it" (isa. 40:5). This signifies that Eonian Times have arrived to benefit all people.

These marvelous conditions do not wait on the second coming of Jesus Christ, but on God's injecting Himself into the affairs of men by divine intervention. It has now been nearly 2000 years since God ushered in the present dispensation of grace. During these past two millennia, every man, woman and child has been the recipient of the wholly-undeserved grace of God. The lives of millions have been touched by the salvation-bringing message of God.

During this present time God has produced a company of men who can truly be designated as believers in Jesus Christ, having their sins forgiven, and having righteousness imputed to their account. As a result of the believers' faith in Christ, they have become children of God and are destined to enjoy the "son-place" in the time of divine government. This vast, although hidden, company are personal believers produced by the Word of God (and the Spirit of God), and not part of some religious, secular institution called "the church." These believers are part of a group known as "the church (ekklesia, out-called ones), which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). Our position as part of this group is out of God. All that we are is based on what He is, and our future life of service will be to proclaim the God of every grace to all the world. In the words of the Psalmist, we, "shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness" (Psa. 145:7). As part of God's theophany, our task is, "According to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). This message is not telling us that our position was determined before the act of creation, but rather "before eonian times" as expressed accurately in the Greek phrase, *pro chronion aionion*. These times are yet future, and our future position is to be made manifest through the appearing or *epiphaneia* (blazing forth) of our Savior Jesus Christ. When this takes place, all men will know Christ and that He is God. His favorable intervention will become a reality and we, believers, shall enter into a future life of service to our Savior. This promised blessing of God is based, "In hope (positive expectation) of eternal (eonian) life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began (eonian times)" (Titus 1:2).

This present outflow of grace is part of His goal to proclaim among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ. During this time God has, by means of this present administration, demonstrated unequivocally that grace is one key and intrinsic part of His character. Someday all will be revealed, that every act of God has been consistent with pure and absolute grace, although untraceable today because He is working in secret. This unseen record is now nearing its very completion. Every act of God regarding His present work in grace will stand as a tribute to this attribute of His character. Ever since the Day of Man began, dating back to the days of Noah, God has been actively showing grace to men, but not to all or distributed equally. Not until the declaration of Paul at Acts 28:28, which marked the change of administration, has God dealt solely in grace.

How much longer this day of grace will continue no man knows, but we can say that it will culminate in triumph for God with the single most positive act of grace the world has ever known. It will herald Eonian Times for all the earth. The fact that God will one day put forth His power, to ensure the triumph of good over evil, is in some sense a matter of course. The mystery of revelation is not that He will do this, but that He delays to do it. This supreme act of grace is designated in Scripture as the divine assumption of sovereignty, which some men have foolishly assumed to be the end of the world.

The accompanying **Chart No. 1**, "Eonian Times," exhibits a number of discreet events or activities that will signal to the world that mankind has entered into a new and righteous order of things. Eonian Times will commence with the act of divine intervention into the affairs of men. When in time this will take place is not known to men. We need to make clear that this divine intervention or act of God assuming sovereignty is not synonymous with, or dependent on, the second coming of Christ. At the moment when God begins active government, this long display of grace will come to its conclusion. This time of divine government will initiate the long-awaited fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel's 70 weeks. Of great significance is the fact that seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people (Israel) and upon Thy holy city (Jerusalem) to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring forth everlasting (eonian) righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy (place) (Dan. 9:24). Few will contest that these are weeks of years.

These 70 weeks are, in fact, 490 years. However, with no exception, many-assumed Bible scholars have determined that 69 weeks of this total period have already been fulfilled. This includes the late Dr. E.W. Bullinger, who used it in his dating system (Companion Bible, Appendix 50), and Sir Robert Anderson, author

of The Silence of God, and other books. In his book, The Coming Prince, he states, "I believe that the length of the period between the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, and the public event of 'Messiah the Prince, between the 14th day of Nisan, 445 BC and the 6th of April 32 AD contained exactly 173,880 days or seven times sixty-nine prophetic years of 360 days (lunar years), the first sixty-nine weeks of Gabriel's prophecy." This supposition is seriously flawed on two accounts. We recall from Daniel 9:3-9 the intercessory prayer of Daniel regarding the sins, iniquity and rebellion committed by the people of Israel. The nature of this sin was based on having departed from Thy precepts, and from Thy judgments, and failure to hearken to the word of Thy prophets, which spake in Thy name to our kings, princes, and fathers and to all the people of the land (Dan. 9:5-6). In consideration of their sin, God was implored, Our God, to hear the prayer of His servant, Daniel, and to incline Thine ear, and open Thine eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by Thy name: for we do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousnesses, but for Thy great mercies (Dan. 9:17-18).

In response to this prayer, The man Gabriel spoke to Daniel saying, I am now come to give thee skill and understanding . . . therefore understand the matter and consider the vision (Dan 9:23). What follows are six of the most important blessings and conditions leading up to the anointing of the most holy place or the temple of God. In the interest of proclaiming the truth of God, I am convinced that these six conditions have simply never been fulfilled, and until they are, the whole of "the seventy weeks determined upon thy people" await a future fulfillment. Secondly, and this is crucial to our understanding of the divine order for fulfillment of this prophecy, the reference to "messiah the prince" concerns David, not Christ. Unless men are willing to accept the fact of an illustrious future for David, the understanding of Daniel 9:24-27 will forever remain an enigma. The fact that the patriarch David is still "both dead and buried" (Acts 2:29-35) is ample proof, for the believer in Jesus Christ, that the Davidic covenant must yet be fulfilled. In the reconstitution of the nation of Israel David, the servant of God, will play an exceedingly important role. Let us carefully note Ezekiel 37:24-25, which says, "And My servant David shall be king over them ... and My servant shall be their prince forever" (in relation to the eon). Confirmation of this important prophecy is found in Ezekiel 34:23, which declares. "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David."

The verb "set up" implies the resurrection of David, himself. This Hebrew verb is found in II Samuel 7:26. which says, "And let the house of David be established (set up) before thee." In Jeremiah 30:9 we are told, "But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king whom I will raise up (set up) unto them." Thus, David is not only resurrected from the dead, but is to be established within the

rejoined nation of Israel as their shepherd king upon the earth. To deny a literal resurrection of David would be to violate the explicit terms of the Davidic covenant. To insist upon the fulfillment of this covenant does not diminish the fact that David's greater Son will reign from heaven and impose His government on the whole earth. The divine arrangement for Israel will result in the Shepherd King ruling from His throne in the heavens (Psalms 103:19). As Hosea makes plain, The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince,... Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord and His goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:4-5). This momentous fact will come to pass once God breaks His present silence and ushers in His Eonian Times. Again, it is important to remember that these glorious times are both future and precede the Day of the Lord.

The Epiphaneia of Jesus Christ

The inception of Eonian Times is held out for us in Titus 2:13, where we are told to be "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and (even) our Savior Jesus Christ." A more accurate translation of this verse tells US that, We are to live in this present eon (administration), in expectation of that blessed hope, even the blazing forth of the glory of our great God, even our Savior Jesus Christ. This great truth was first revealed in the days when the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, having rejected the favorable report of the promised land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke Me? How long will it be ere they believe Me for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with pestilence and make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they (Num. 14:11-12). Upon hearing these words, Moses interceded on behalf of this people and said, Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy, and as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word: but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord (Num. 14:19-21). This powerful promise of God provides mankind with the assurance that one day Almighty God will act at the opportune time to rescue mankind from the hour of peril, which even now threatens the survivability of the human race. This important truth tells us that God will yet intervene in an hour of great crises and impose His beneficent and benevolent government over the earth. The universality of this promise is echoed in the words of the prophet Isaiah, And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Isa. 40:5). "All flesh" here means that all of mankind are exposed to His glory at once.

Many Bible scholars have inadvertently assumed that the last quotation has reference to the second coming of Christ, but this is not the case. This declaration is based on divine intervention, and is concerned with God acting to make Himself known in an unlimited number of ways to bring an end to the present calamities facing mankind. In place of sorrow, joy will prevail; instead of death at work, life will abound; in place of war, peace will dominate His rule. God's glory signifies the recognition and exaltation due His name, because of all He can and will do to bring in an infinite array of blessings into the world. What men are powerless to do, God only needs to speak the word and His will shall be done.

There will be no continent or island on earth, where men are living, that will be overlooked, and men will not fail to grasp the impact of God going into action. Abraham asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right (righteousness)?" (Gen. 18:25). The expectation of divine intervention will answer this great need. The Apostle Paul declared in II Timothy 4:1-2, I charge thee before God, even the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge (set the order for) the quick (living) and the dead at His appearing (epiphaneia) and His kingdom; preach (herald) the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove (enlighten), rebuke (admonish), exhort (encourage) with all long-suffering and doctrine (teaching). The idea in "to judge" does not mean to inflict bodily punishment, or impose physical distress, but rather to make a determination establishing His righteous order regarding both the living and those now in the grave.

Jesus said. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29). This has reference to two separate orders of resurrection, one occurring immediately upon His divine intervention, as well as a final company to be raised some 1,500 years later at the Great White Throne Judgment. In the initial act of judgment, the resurrection of millions of people, including the believers and "them that have done good," who have never had the opportunity to hear and receive the message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, will be ushered into a condition of things marked by life, as opposed to death. At that time, death, as a principle, will cease to operate within the lives of men. Never again will men die because of the sin of Adam, that is. with sin and death working in their members. At that time men will say. "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:21. But to all "who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, and honor and immortality, eternal (eonian) life" (Rom. 2:71. Life will permeate those men's existence on earth in the manifest Kingdom of God. The reality of this aspect of Eonian Times will bring an immediate end to the business of all mortuaries; funeral and cremation services will

cease to exist. Since life will prevail, the present necessity of the enormous health care industry, including physicians and surgeons, and supporting medical facilities, will become obsolete. Isaiah said. "And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity" (Isa. 33:24). Imagine a world without HMOs, where universal health will be proclaimed around the world. The psalmist David spoke, God be merciful unto us. and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us; Selah. That Thy way may be known upon the earth, Thy saving health among all nations (Psa. 67:1-2).

What many men have relegated to the millennium will, in fact, become reality in Eonian Times, before the Day of the Lord: Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart (a young deer), and the tongue of the dumb sing (Isa. 35:5-6). Think of the immense joy that men will experience as God flows out to mankind in a perfect gift of health. Imagine a time in which. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old: but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed (Isa. 65:20). Few men are willing to acknowledge this transformation from death to life. It is said of the patriarch. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated (Deut. 34:7). This experience of life dominating all of the people on earth is staggering to us, but the promise is true. It is significant to note that these blessings of life and divine government will commence the moment God intervenes on behalf of mankind. They are not contingent on the second coming of Christ.

The Mission Of Elijah

One of the most influential and powerful men to appear on the world scene, once God begins to govern, will be the man Elijah. It was he, known as the man of God, who was instrumental in defying the wicked king of Israel, Ahab. Scripture says of him, Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him (I Kings 16:33). In a challenge to the king, who promoted idolatry in Israel, Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him, and the people answered him not a word (1 Kings 18:21). At the direction of Elijah in challenging the prophets of Baal, he instructed that an altar be built to sacrifice two bullocks and have wood laid on it, but placed no fire under it. Then he told them, And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God (1 Kings 18:24). When the prophets of Baal obtained no response from Baal, Elijah mocked them and said, **Cry aloud: for he is a god: either he is**

talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked (I Kings 18:27). And all 400 of the priests and prophets of Baal went on from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice imploring his fire. Then Elijah asked all the people to come near and he repaired the altar of God, putting the wood and the bullocks on it. Three times he asked the people to pour four barrels of water on it, and he filled the trench around it. And it came to pass at the time of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word (I Kings 18:36). In an instant, the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord He is God, the Lord, He is God (I Kings 18:38-39).

By means of this powerful demonstration of divine fire, God showed that He was greater than all the gods of men. These things took place about 900 years before the birth of Christ. Also, the record of Elijah's unusual departure from earth is given in II Kings 2:1-11, where it describes Elijah speaking with Elisha as they were standing by the bank of the Jordan river, when suddenly, "there appeared a chariot of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went by a whirlwind into heaven" (II Kings 2:11). Observing the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, we read one of the briefest and greatest promises to Israel to be found in the Scripture. This promise is yet to be carried out by God. In this awesome promise God declared, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5-6).

The late Otis Q. Sellers noted. "That if it were not for this great work, it would be necessary for the Lord to smite the earth with a curse when He comes" (Seed And Bread. No. **SB091**, The Mission of Elijah). With this dire warning comes both a promise of great blessing, coupled with a conditional curse. A number of things command our attention here. First, this coming of Elijah, promised about 2,400 years ago, will be fulfilled before the Day of the Lord. Second, since the second coming of Christ will occur in the Day of the Lord, this great promise must precede the parousia. Third, that means that long before the Day of the Lord comes, God will do a work described as: Behold ye among the heathen (nations), and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe, though it be told you (Hah. 1:5). The impact of that work, in the presence of Israel, will stagger the minds of the nations.

In that day, God will "turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to the fathers." The Hebrew word, translated "turn," is shoov and is equivalent in meaning to the Greek word epistrepheo found in Luke 1:6-7, where we read, And many of the children (sons) of Israel shall he (John the Baptist) turn to

the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him (Jesus Christ) in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah), to turn (epistrepho) the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. This has to do with a vast preparation of a people in heart, mind and thought. It begins with an Elijah who turns about the sons of Israel toward their God.

At this present time the disposition of the "sons of Israel" is preoccupied with political, social and self interests. For the most part, God is simply not a part of their thought process. They simply do not know Him. This attitude stands in bold contrast to the promise of God revealed in Jeremiah 31:34, which says, For they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

These words emphasize the still further, far-reaching, spiritual nature of the work Elijah is to do. The record of Matthew says, And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come and restore all things (Matt. 17:10-11). It must be noted here that Elijah does this great work in the time period and under the conditions brought about by the divine assumption of sovereignty, which inaugurates the government of God upon the earth. He is the one who will indicate the exact boundaries of the land God promised to Abraham, the boundaries of the land allotted to each tribe, the division of the people of Israel according to their tribes, the identification of the Aaronic family, and the restoration of the judges and counselors as promised in Isaiah 1:26. As a result of this enormous work of Elijah, all disputes regarding the distribution of the land will be resolved, and even the current residents will willingly withdraw. Furthermore, no Jew today, living or dead, will fail to understand to which tribe he or she belongs.

Among men, today claiming to be scholars, are those who insist that the future work of Elijah was fulfilled in John the Baptist. This subject has proven to be an embarrassment for these men in that they find no room in their narrow system of eschatology for the orderly fulfillment of this important work of Elijah. In considering the teaching that John the Baptist and his ministry fulfilled the Malachi prophecy of the coming of Elijah, certain facts must be faced. When the priests and the Levites asked John if he were Elijah, his emphatic answer was "I am not" (John 1:21). This statement should settle the question in full for all who are willing to settle matters by the living Word of God. In the Malachi prophecy we have the direct statement of the Lord that He would send "Elijah the prophet." Since John declared that he was not Elijah, he could not have been the one that God promised to send, even though he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. He did not fulfill the Malachi prophecy. Strange as it may seem, the scribes, in their indifferent attitude toward Jesus, insisted that He did not have Elijah as His forerunner. This led His disciples to ask "Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?" (Matt.

17:10). They said this even though John the Baptist had come, had completed his ministry, and had been beheaded. The Lord Jesus said in His answer. "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Matt. 17:11). In saying this, our Lord made the coming of Elijah and the restoration of all things to be future events, even after the death of John the Baptist. However, He added. But I say unto you, that Elijah is come already, and they knew Him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer them. Then the disciples understood that He spoke unto them of John the Baptist (Matt 17:12-13).

Since the scribes were using the fact that Elijah had not yet come as proof that Jesus was not the Messiah, it is evident that His words were directed against them. If they did not recognize John as one sent from God, they would not recognize Elijah if he were sent by God. If Elijah had come, they would have treated him just as they treated John, since John came in the spirit and power of Elijah. In Matthew 11:14, our Lord declared to all who received Him that John represented Elijah, and he would do for them individually what Elijah will do for Israel as a nation. So by the words, "Elijah, who is about to come," our Lord confirmed the fact that Elijah's coming was a future event. This work of Elijah will obviate the necessity to "smite the earth with a curse," because of the promised work he will accomplish and the great spiritual blessing that will flow out to mankind.

The Restoration Of The Davidic Scene

Following a highly successful ministry in the dispersion, Paul and Barnabas returned "to Antioch (in Syria), from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled" (Acts 14:26). Then they journeyed to Jerusalem to speak with the apostles concerning "the conversion of the nations: and they caused great joy to all the brethren" (Acts 15:3). The "conversion" refers to the word *estrepheo*, which is a turning about. After hearing the response to Peter's defense of the preaching of Paul and Barnabas to the nations, All the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles God had wrought among the nations by them (Acts 15:12).

Then James, speaking on behalf of those assembled at the Jerusalem conference, said. Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon (Simon Peter) hath declared how God at the first (initially) did visit the nations to take out of them a people for His name, and to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return (*anastrepho*), and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down: and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the nations, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things (Acts 15:13-17).

This awesome prophecy still awaits a future fulfillment. At that time God has decreed, "I will return." The word "return" is a translation of the Greek word *anastrepho*, signifying that He will turn about His present position regarding the Israel of God and "build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down."

This anticipates the time when God will "say to them which were not My people, thou art My people: and they shall say Thou art my God" (Hosea 2:23). The phrase "will build again" occurs in Acts 15:16 as a translation of the Greek word *anokodomeo*. It occurs only twice in the New Testament, both in verse 16. I believe that this word means that at some future time God will reconstitute the nation of Israel. This has never yet occurred since the division of the kingdom at the time of Solomon's death. At this present time, the people whom Scripture defines as the Israel of God have no national existence and are scattered abroad over all the nations on earth. The company of people who currently occupy only part of the land of Palestine in no way qualify as the Israel of God. What James spoke of in Acts 15:16 concerns the denationalization, resurrection, regathering and reconstitution of the nation of Israel in the Kingdom.

The word "tabernacle" found in Acts 15:16 is a translation of the Greek word *skeenee*. Originally, this word was used, as Exodus 33:7-10 makes plain, to refer to a provisional tent where the Lord met His people. But this is not what James spoke of in Acts 15:16. Dr. R.C.H. Lenski taught that the word "tabernacle" refers to the tabernacle of David's time, before Solomon was permitted to build the temple. This definition of the word *skeenee* will not satisfy the meaning of the promise spoken of by James. This passage in Acts 15:16 has reference to Amos 9:11-15. The earthly scene, in the days of Amos, saw a nation that had gone into captivity, and in time was dispersed among the nations. This captivity was prompted by a rejection of the prophets whom God, in grace and mercy, had sent to the nation. Jesus reminded them of this fact in Matthew 23:37, where we read, o Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate (Matt. 23:37-38). Because of their national sin, the prophet Amos declared. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it (Amos 8:11-12).

This is precisely the present state of Israel. Compare this to the words of the prophet Jeremiah, After those days, saith the Lord. I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and I will be their God, and they shall be My people Jer. 31:33). It is impossible to read Amos 9:1-15 and fail to perceive a great outflow of God acting favorably on behalf of the people of Israel. These poignant words are clearly established in Jeremiah 30.3, where we are told. For, lo,

the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the Land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. Jeremiah adds. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: but they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them (Jer. 30:8-9).

On May 14, 1948, by a proclamation of the United Nations, Israel was declared to be an independent state. Thousands of preachers seized upon that event to proclaim that finally God had intervened favorably on behalf of the people of Israel. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Now, in the year 2000, nearly fifty years later, the state of Israel lies in disarray. Conflicts with Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization clearly demonstrate that the so-called peace process is in shambles. Not one word of the Abrahamic covenant has yet been fulfilled. For the past two millennia the Jews have remained a people dispersed across the nations. The prayer, "Next Year in Jerusalem," remains an unfulfilled aspiration. The events that have occurred during this half-century deluded the hope of most Israelites. Politically, religiously, and geographically, all have demonstrated that the present state of Israel remains but an insignificant nation compared to the current superpowers, principally the United States. There is absolutely no evidence that the least of the majestic covenants God made with Israel have ever been fulfilled.

Nevertheless the days will come when God "will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness (a place of separation), and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope...and I will sow her unto Me in the earth; and I will have mercy on her that had not obtained mercy: and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art My people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Hosea 2:15-23). The great prophet Ezekiel declared. "For I...will bring you into your own land" (Ezek. 36:24). There are presently over 15 million Jews living around the world, and none have yet heard the call to return to the land God promised to Abraham. Ezekiel added these words of the Lord God, "I will also cause you to dwell in the cities and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled. ...And they shall say. This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the nations that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it" (Ezek. 36:33-36).

I find it absolutely inconceivable that any honest Bible student could possibly construe, that what has happened in Israel in about the past 50 years is, by any stretch of the imagination, the fulfillment of the words of Ezekiel 36. Nevertheless, we have the absolute assurance that God will one day act to demonstrably fulfill every word of prophecy related to Israel's regathering and reconstitution as a nation.

Israel's Restoration

God's great love for Israel is clearly reflected in the words of Moses who asked, For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:7-8). No nation on earth, past or present, has ever been endowed with such spiritual blessings. Men living today desire great recognition, power, strength and increased material wealth. It is not so with God. God has lavished upon the nation of Israel great spiritual wealth. That wealth can be expressed in God's words to Israel when He declared, Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation (Exod. 19:5-6). Confirmation of this majestic promise can be found in I Peter 2:9-10, But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people (destined for possession by God); that ye should show forth the praises of Him, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which hath not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. This declaration affirms the fact that Israel is slated for a royal destiny, instead of the constant fears of anti-Semitism: Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you (Zech. 8:22-23). How few are the men that seem to understand that Israel is yet to become a mediatorial nation. God's purposes for that nation do not end with her priesthood over mankind, but recognize that she is to become a channel of blessing to all the residents of the nations. Moses declared, The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto Himself, as He hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in His ways. And all the peoples shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall all be afraid of thee (Deut. 28:9-10).

There is no fear of Israel today. The people living in Palestine pose no threat to the nations, but under divine government, Israel shall rise out of obscurity to become the most powerful nation on earth. Her greatness will not be measured in terms of military strength, but as a very large number of people serving the God of government in a theocratic capacity. God's presence in her midst will be awe-inspiring. Her past failures will not prove to be an impediment to her future role as she becomes, "the head," as an outflowing source, "not the tail."

The writings of the prophets are replete with definitive truth asserting the fact that God will act pro-actively on behalf of that people now scattered world-wide. Consider Ezekiel 20:30-33; this portion of Scripture begins with the positive assertion, "As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you." No less than ten times in the course of this prophecy God says "I will." This affirmation leaves no doubt as to what God will do on behalf of that nation. The passage makes clear that God's purpose is to denationalize Israel from the nations. The passage goes on to say, And I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out from the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people (a place of separation), and there will I plead with you face to face (Ezek. 20:34-35). This will be a direct confrontation between God and the people of Israel in which He will make the facts known, concerning the promise of restoration. Furthermore, God says, "I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (Ezek. 20:37).

Israel's past failure in breaking the original covenant which God made with her at Mount Sinai, resulted in Moses breaking the tablets of stone containing the word of the covenant, as recorded in Exodus 32:19. Contrast this with the words of Hebrews: Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt: because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people (Heb. 8:8-10). This explicit language in Hebrews and in Jeremiah make it absolutely clear what are God's intentions for the people we designate, the Israel of God.

The very reputation of a covenant-keeping God is contingent upon His irrevocable word, which we have here and is confirmed in Jeremiah 31:31-37. No greater confirmation in favor of a covenant-keeping God can be provided than these words, Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: If these ordinances depart from before Me. saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel will cease from being a nation before Me forever (Jer. 31:35-37). The word "forever" has in it the idea of "in respect to the coming eon," the Kingdom of God. It goes on to say, Thus saith the Lord; if heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord (Jer. 31:37). No man can claim to be a believer in Jesus Christ

and yet deny the literal fulfillment of these words of God. To challenge the veracity of this mighty truth is to impugn the character of our almighty God.

God's Irrevocable Covenants

Scripture has identified four unconditional covenants for us. These are 1) the Abrahamic Covenant found in Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-14, 22:16-18; 2) the Palestinian Covenant of Deuteronomy 30:1-10; 3) The Davidic Covenant revealed in II Samuel 7:10-16; and 4) the New Covenant pronounced in Jeremiah 31:31-34. By virtue of these unconditional covenants, God has obligated Himself to fulfill His prophetic program relative to the nation of Israel. Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost notes that, "in an unconditional covenant, that which is covenanted is sovereignly given to the recipients of the covenant on the authority and integrity of the one making the covenant apart from the merit or response of the receiver." It is a covenant made with men based exclusively on the integrity of God. The fulfillment of these covenants God made with Israel is not contingent on the fidelity of man, but on the integrity of God, whose words are irrevocable since God cannot lie. It should also be observed that an unconditional covenant, which binds the one making the covenant to a certain course of action, may have blessings attached to that covenant that are limited by conditions based on the response of the recipient of that covenant, which grow out of the original covenant. But these conditional blessings do not change the unconditional character of the covenant.

We should recall the rebellion of Israel at Mount Sinai, when they corrupted themselves and made a molten calf of gold, then worshipped it.

This so angered the Lord that He said to Moses. **I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation** (Exod. 32:9-10). God would have been fully justified in destroying that people and begin a new nation with the man Moses. In so doing God would have violated the terms of that covenant. The fulfillment of these covenants therefore are not contingent on the integrity of the people with whom the covenant was made, but on the faithfulness of God. It seems difficult for most men today to grasp these majestic covenants. The literal fulfillment of the promised blessings have yet to be realized, and will, with no exception. Their fulfillment is strictly based on divine intervention. Once God intervenes, the world will be amazed to see God going into action to bring untold blessings on Israel and all of the nations. God's promise to Abraham, to make of him a great nation, will reach

out to the distant future, at which time Israel will become the greatest nation on earth.

Moses expressed God's love for Israel in the words of Deuteronomy 4:7-8, and added, For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee. Since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other whether there hath been any such great thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders and by war, and by a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm, and by great terrors according to all that the Lord did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him (Deut. 4:32-35). No nation, past or present, has ever been able to make claim to such enormous blessings. For centuries past, Israel has been the satanic target for hatred, vilification, and extermination. All this will cease when the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee (Deut. 30:3).

Most existing nations consider "greatness" in terms of gross national product, being a populous people, having a powerful military apparatus, or a land containing great natural resources. God defines greatness in terms of spiritual wealth. Not only is Abraham to be blessed, but out of his loins will proceed a great nation in and through whom God will flow out to the nations. God made that explicit by saying, And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3). Obviously this has never yet happened. This does not mean that every blessing the nations enjoy will come through Israel, but that Israel will become a channel of blessing for the outflow of God. Language could not be more plain with respect to God's ultimate intention to re-gather the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, returning them to the land of promise. The unconditional covenants God made with the nation of Israel will one day come into fruition. This divine action will result in a public-demonstration showing mankind that God has not forgotten His ancient people Israel. This is one of the great blessings which will be fulfilled during Eonian Times, before the second coming of Christ.

The Cessation Of Hostilities

One of the greatest blessings to occur during Eonian Times on behalf of all mankind is the total cessation of hostilities. The imposition of divine government will guarantee every person on earth complete freedom from the threat of war, as well as acts of violence. Following centuries of internecine warfare, peace will prevail. In a great vision of the future the psalmist declared. Come behold the works

of the Lord, what desolations He hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth (Ps. 46:8-10). When God acts to bring an end to wars in the earth, it will bring an end to every conceivable human attempt to destroy the lives of innocent men, women and children. All instruments of modern warfare will be eliminated from the earth. This includes men's capacity to invent new, and remarkable life-threatening devices. Today, the fears of nuclear obliteration are not past. Red China recently launched, what experts believe is a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead about 5,000 miles. Analysts now fear that North Korea could respond within weeks with a new rocket with a range of 4,000 miles, placing Alaska and Hawaii within its reach. For the first time in a century the United States would no longer be immune from a direct nuclear attack, and the implications of this threat are ominous.

In the \$1.7 trillion U.S. Budget for fiscal 2000, \$282 billion is planned for national defense. These staggering numbers indicate the severity of the social and economic impact on our society. Couple this with the ever-increasing threat to the survival of the human race, and we have necessary reason for wanting divine intervention. As a source of great encouragement to all mankind the prophet Micah wrote, **But in the last days (acharyth yom) it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it** (Micah 4:1). These last days are not the "last days" Paul spoke of in II Timothy 3:1, which referred to the last days of this present eon of grace and thus are the last days of the Day of Man. We must be careful not to confuse the two, which most eschatologists automatically do. The term acaryth yam used by Micah, and in Deuteronomy 4:30, Hosea v5. Isaiah 2:2, speaks of the culmination of God's prophetic work regarding the future day of blessing for the nation of Israel. It means the sequel to the Day of Man, which is the Day of Christ, a time when prophetic fulfillment will be understood by men, and which we have called "Eonian Times." We recall that Eonian Times precede the Day of the Lord, which is the time when Christ will return to a righteous, cleansed earth, which He has purified.

It is in the last days, addressed in Micah 4:1, that the mountain of the Lord's house, signifying the government of God, takes rule over all the nations of the earth, in the exalted position of being the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, which symbolize all the governments of the earth, both big and small. It says "the peoples shall flow unto it." and these are streams of all humanity flowing out of all the nations on earth during Eonian Times. They will have representation in Jerusalem for the first time in the history of God's dealing with the nations. Men will come to Jerusalem and the leadership of Israel for blessing, wisdom and knowledge of God that will be dispensed to all.

No such nation exists on this planet today. Men appearing on earth in that day will include the patriarchs, David, the prophets, the apostles, counselors and judges, as well as believers of all the eons. No problem facing nations or world leaders at that time will go unattended or fail to find resolution. The institution called "the United Nations" will be disbanded, and God will make men humble before Him, since "He will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (I Cor. 1:19). In that day, He shall judge among many peoples, and rebuke (Heh. yaw-karh, reprove, correct, enlighten) strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Micah 4:3).

Swords and spears, spoken of symbolically as instruments of warfare, shall be turned into agricultural tools, symbolizing instruments of peaceful survival in a very abundantly-flowing earth. Institutions now training men in sophisticated weapons of warfare will become obsolete and abandoned. Obviously, the direction of men's learning will take on new purpose and meaning. "The knowledge of the glory of the Lord" (Hab. 2:14), will bring closure on the sinful ways of men; Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Psa. 1:5-6). God will not share His Kingdom with ungodly men! A new generation of men will be seen in all the earth. This includes a company of men in Israel who will be resurrected to assume positions of international acclaim in the theocracy of God. Christ, seated in the heavens on all the rights of God, will flow out and into these men, who will be empowered to speak on His behalf. Wisdom, truth and understanding will proceed from the lips of these God-commissioned representatives exceeding even the wisdom of Solomon in the day of His glory.

Not since the days of the apostles (Acts Period) have men appeared on earth with the spiritual capacity to address every conceivable problem facing the heart and mind of world rulers. This includes the apostles, who will exert their power and influence to alter the conduct of men, whether in religious or political positions. The impact of this global scenario, dedicated to peaceful pursuits, will become the standard for success. All this will be possible at such a time that God acts openly to realign the structure of human government. God, acting openly and positively, will finally bring years of absolute peace to this troubled earth.

Earth's Restoration

Genesis 1:1 records the fact that. "In the beginning God (Heb. **elohim**. the God of all) created the heaven and the earth." The word "heaven" in this verse is plural, signifying all the heavenly beings and objects, including Satan, the distant planets of our solar system, and the far-flung stars were all part of this original act of creation. Also, in this verse "earth" is singled out. which becomes the future home of mankind, when, in the Day of God, God will tabernacle with men. This awesome act of creation must have brought God immeasurable joy. The magnitude of this act of creation is revealed by Isaiah, who says, Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor hath taught Him? (Isa. 40:12-13). Likewise, the Lord answered Job saying. **Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched a line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the cornerstone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?** (Job 38:4-7).

Obviously, man is incapable of comprehending this marvelous act of creation. Infinite in beauty and structure, this original work of creation was pre-eminently suited to become the home of mankind. But then disaster struck, and as Genesis reveals, "The earth was (became) without form, and void: and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2). What had been created as "Eden, the garden of God" (Ezek. 28:13), became a scene of devastation and ruin. What was the cause? It was Satan; this was an act of insurrection, recorded in Isaiah 14:12-15. And Ezekiel states. Thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God, and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire (Ezek. 28:16). As a result of Satan's disobedient attempt to thwart the plan and purpose of God, mankind, beginning with the deception of Adam and Eve in the garden, has lived under the curse of sin and death which reigns conspicuously over this earth.

Nevertheless, God, acting in infinite power and wisdom, created "the heavens and the earth which are now" (II Peter 3:7). The record of this act of creation is found in Genesis 1:3-31. Having completed this act of creation, we are told, **Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He rested from all His work which God created and made** (Gen. 2:1-3). As the result of this act of creation, God provided mankind with everything essential for his growth, development and future. Man, however, soon fell prey to the insidious lie of Satan and he succumbed

to the curse God imposed on mankind and the earth. Speaking to Adam, God said. Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shall thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shall eat of the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return (Gen. 3:17-19).

The drastic results of this divinely imposed curse continue to prevail over all mankind and animals to this day. In fact, earth now faces perils unheard of since man was first on this earth. A lack of water essential to the growth of grain and cattle is fast becoming a problem in many arid parts of this planet. Scorched fields of grain in some eastern and mid-western states are reported to be the worst in the last year of our century. Dried lake beds and vast regions of barren desert land would tend to support these anxieties. The rate of precipitation (rainfall) in some parts of the world, like Palestine and Egypt, are only about one inch per year. If you couple this with international concerns regarding water and air pollution, they exacerbate these problems, even as the world's population approaches the six billion mark, where these concerns will only multiply. Pessimists like Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, have concluded that there is little hope for the earth. Many presumed dispensational Bible scholars have discounted any future for mankind here on earth, and now proclaim the "doctrine of imminency." This is embodied in the parallel doctrine of "the rapture," in which believers will allegedly vacate the earth, leaving unbelievers to suffer an uncertain fate, even mass destruction. This current wave of pessimism has caused many men great concern, and little hope breeds little faith.

With a view to the glorious future for this world, the Apostle Paul wrote, For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature (creation) was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope (positive expectation), because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now (Rom. 8:18-22). This great promise of God will bring a vast bundle of hope for the future of this present creation. This plentiful planet will yet experience complete and total deliverance from the ravages of sin and death now prevalent. Earth will triumph in the day of her deliverance. No longer will earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, famine, pollution, and hostilities between men and animals prevail. At that time, Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our

God, shall bless us. God shall bless us and all ends of the earth (people in the most remote places) shall fear Him (Psa. 67:6-7).

This is an example of divine intervention: God going into action to solve the problems of world famine, hunger, pestilence, sickness and deprivation. Speaking to Israel, God declared. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil (Hosea 2:22). The fecundity of the earth will absolutely amaze the nations living on the earth. Isaiah declared. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.... The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes (Isa. 35:1, 6-7). The psalmist David spoke, Let (cause) the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for He cometh to judge the earth (set the righteous order, not punish): He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth (Psa. 96:11-13). This transformation of the earth will cause men to greatly rejoice, knowing that the day of her salvation has finally come. Of greatest importance is the fact that these blessings will come to fruition during the manifest Kingdom of God. that is, they occur during Eonian Times, preceding the coming of Christ and the millennium. The absolute guarantee of these blessings are linked to the future work of Elijah, which will come about "before the great and dreadful (awe-inspiring) day of the Lord ...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

The Enlightenment Of Mankind

The greatest single fact in the universe is that God has spoken. This being true, it is incumbent on every man to become familiar with what God has said. The third epistle of John declares, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). We are now living in a day of almost total darkness regarding a knowledge of what truth is in the sight of God. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). Thus Jesus Christ personifies the truth. To deliberately reject the words of Christ is tantamount to marking one as an unbeliever. Jesus said, He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48). Knowing that His crucifixion was imminent, Jesus called His beloved disciples together and said, If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever (eis ton aiona. in relation to the

eon); even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you (John 14:15-17). This was the promise of the Paraclete, signifying that One called alongside to assist in an advocacy role in the coming 33 years of the Acts Period. Jesus also said, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me" (John 15:26).

These words were of great significance, in view of the night period of heaven's government. From the moment following the ascension of Christ into heaven, these disciples, who became part of this ministry and apostleship (Acts 1:29), became the target of intense suffering and persecution. Shortly following the day of Pentecost. Peter was arrested because he had healed a certain lame man (Acts 3:2-8). Enraged, because of this miraculous gift of healing, and unable to contest, "that indeed a notable miracle had been done by them" (Acts 4:16), the Jewish leaders let them go. After they came back to their company, who praised God: And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said. Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the nations rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and (even) against His Christ (Messiah) (Acts 4:24-26).

This insurrection against God-commissioned heralds was nothing less than a satanic effort to thwart the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told these disciples not to let sorrow fill their hearts, Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter (parakletos) will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you (John 16:7). That promise was literally fulfilled during the Acts Period. But with an eye to the future of Eonian Times, Jesus declared. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged (John 16:7-11). Critical to the understanding of this passage is the meaning of the Greek word *elenko*, translated "reprove." The meaning of this word concerns making the facts known by irrefutable evidence. This is precisely what God has determined to do on behalf of mankind, regarding the matter of sin. Sin has been variously defined as "missing the mark," the overpassing or transgressing of a law, the disobedience to a voice, the falling where one should have stood upright, ignoring of what one ought to have known. I believe the ultimate manifestation of sin is the transgression against Christ and His Word.

Jesus said, If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other men did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father (John 15:22-24).

Men living under divine government will have perfect knowledge regarding their conduct and behavior before God. God will make the fact of sin so plain that it will be indelibly ingrained upon the heart and mind of every man. Paul stated. "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). What men tacitly defined as an act of indiscretion will be exposed as an act of transgression against a thrice-holy God (Isa. 6:3). Paul warns of a time when "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (suppress) the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). The enlightenment of mankind is not restricted to sin, but also includes the issue of righteousness. Again, men, privileged to live under divine government, will be instructed regarding righteousness as defined by a work of the Holy Spirit, with divine standards of righteousness thrust into their minds. There will be no need for attorneys, group counselors, behavior therapy, psychological assistance programs, or conflict resolution. Men failing to heed these divine laws will summarily be removed from the earth. Further, God will "reprove the world of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). Christ, by virtue of His finished work upon the cross of Calvary, has already sat in judgment on Satan. That vile one is described by our Lord as a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father (source) of it (John 8:44).

Isaiah clarifies an important point, saying, "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9). Presently, men have been seriously handicapped by not having direct access to the righteous judgments of God. This does not only pertain to individual conduct, but to the conduct of men holding high positions in government. Nations have long failed to live in peace. The internal and external conflicts between political institutions and human governments will be quickly resolved by accessing God's judgments. The effect of the resolution of social conflicts between men will result in ways of peace and tranquility. All of these majestic blessings will be the direct result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Every attempt on Satan's part to instigate conflict will meet with utter defeat.

Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, declared, Forasmuch then the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also, Himself, likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy (katergeo) him that had the power of death, that is,

the devil (Heb. 2:14). The Greek word *katergeo* means to bring to naught, to abolish and strip of all authority and power. No longer will Satan be privileged to wield power, influence and authority to deprive men of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Christ, in His manifest Kingdom, will achieve great victory. Satan finally will have his head crushed in fulfillment of the promise to the woman in Genesis 3:15. God will yet overwhelm Satan with the force of light, truth, and judgment. The time will surely come when, "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven" (Psa. 25:11). This action will result in mankind being placed in a new position of responsibility and accountability before God. These marvelous conditions will prevail in Eonian Times.

God Lifts The Divine Restraints

Following some 500 years of men living under the manifest kingdom of God, there comes a gradual transition from the Day of Jesus Christ into the Day of the Lord. For centuries men will have experienced the most powerful restraints at the hand of God that the world has ever known. Men will have had every opportunity to know righteousness. The restraints we speak of will not be the bludgeoning acts of some ruthless dictator, but the results of God acting in love and mercy on behalf of all mankind. The imposition of divine restraints will not come about as an uncontrolled torrent of water like a giant waterfall, but instead, He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In His days shall the righteous flourish; and the abundance of peace so long as man endureth (Psa. 72:6-7). Gradually, men will begin to perceive that God has actively become involved in the lives of all the people of the earth. This can best be described in the words of the psalmist David, who declared, How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shall make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures (Psa. 36:7-8). This gracious work is further revealed in the words of the prophet Isaiah, who said, Behold My servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles (nations). He shall not cry, not lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He shall not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench, till He have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law (Isa. 42:1-4).

For the first time in human history, God will reach out to touch the lives of billions of men, living on the earth, with the knowledge of His righteous judgments.

Ignorance, darkness, ill health, deprivation of the most basic needs of mankind will be removed, placing each individual under a new accountability before God. The will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven, as mentioned in the Lord's prayer. Men will be instantly compelled to surrender their lives to God. It will affect men's moral conduct, their behavior toward their fellow men, their attitude toward God, and the form of their worship of the Supreme Being. Any men, caught in the act of lying, cheating, committing perjury, or committing murder, will instantly hear a voice behind them saying to stop, cease and desist, "This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isa. 30:21). Never again will men be able to plead ignorance to lack of knowledge of the law of God. There will be no question in the mind of any man that adultery is morally wrong. Every person involved in prostitution will be exposed to the bright white light of the knowledge of a righteous, sinless and thrice-Holy God.

Think of those men involved in "white collar crime" depriving innocent men of their life-savings. Consider the devious acts of men who "encourage themselves in an evil matter, they commune of laying snares privily (in se-ret): they say, Who shall see them?" (Psa 64:5). What will happen to such men is these? The Biblical answer plainly says. But God shall shoot at them with und arrow (of truth); suddenly shall they he wounded. So shall they make their own tongue to fall upon themselves (Psa. 64:7-xi. This is the direct result of divine intervention and the imposition of God's divine restraints. Think of these presumed Bible teachers and evangelists who stand before audiences of men proclaiming the immortality of the soul, that men will be sent to hell ir suffer eternal damnation because men failed to repent. How will God address these purveyors of lies, blasphemy and errors? Even Billy Graham is not immune, for he teaches that at the moment of death, the believer is immediately escorted by holy angels into the presence of Jesus Christ. This perverts the truth of God, and how will God respond to such blatant perversion? The answer lies in the fact of the imposition of divine restraints. Such leaders with false testimony and the religious institutions that support these lies will suffer total demise, though God may find mercy to let them live. To deny the truth or misrepresent the truth of God will bring to men serious consequences. In that day, "Truth shall spring out of the earth; und righteousness shall look down from heaven" (Psa. 85:1 1).

I recognize that, in many instances, men will be found acting and speaking in sheer ignorance. Others may have so seared their conscience that acts of immoral behavior and violence appear normal. We witness daily the current wave of anti-Semitism and terrorist violence perpetrated against innocent victims. But, Isaiah, we recall, said, "A bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." But we must recognize that any act of men contrary to God's moral law

will be dealt with swiftly. Those failing to respond to God's divine restraints will be removed, and the wicked shall perish, and enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke they shall consume away (Psa. 37:20). Clearly, there is no evidence of this taking place in the world today, but in His kingdom it will. The mere contemplation of this mighty work of God defies all comprehension. No individual, corporation, or nation is capable of dealing with these spiritual or moral issues. However, God can and He will, because, "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth" (Isa. 42:4). For reasons previously stated, the work of the Holy Spirit will meet with enormous success. This is in bold contrast to the work of Satan, which will meet with disastrous failure and defeat.

In Matthew 13 we have the record of a parable of Christ, which says, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way (Matt. 13:24-25). The explanation is given later: The field is the world; the good seed are the children (sons) of the kingdom, but the tares are the children (sons) of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil (Matt, 13:38-39). Few men appreciate the enormous success God will enjoy as the result of the enlightenment of mankind. The proclamation of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will be to produce a people who will indeed come to know God. This work of God is not an offer of salvation, but the gradual dissemination of the knowledge of God that will lead men to righteousness. As the Day of Jesus Christ runs its course, men will be tested as the marvelous restraints God has imposed are removed. This will mark the Day of the Lord, which comes "as a thief in the night" (II Peter 3:10). This time period will become a reality the moment the Lord has removed the last of these restraints, that God had placed on mankind during the period of His government. At that time there will be a series of events that will drastically alter the course of divine government. Once again, all nations are permitted to walk after their own ways, which make possible the divine testing of all those who have lived under and enjoyed the rich blessings of the Kingdom of God, to prove they have learned the way of righteousness. In II Thessalonians Paul says, Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together in Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that day of Christ is at hand (II Thess. 2:1-2). Note that the KJV says the "Day of Christ," but the word in Greek is kuriou, or Lord, and newer versions like the NAS and NIV have corrected it as the "Day of the Lord." The passage goes on to say, Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there be a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the man of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the

temple of God, showing himself that he is God (II Thess. 2:3-4).

For all practical purposes it is impossible for any man living today to sit in expectation of these events. It is extremely difficult to project ourselves forward in time for several hundred years and witness the emergence of the man of sin, whom many men connect with the anti-Christ. Dr. Dwight Pentecost observes, "An anti-Christ can have two emphases from the Greek, anti. It may mean 'one who is opposed to Christ' or it may mean 'one who comes as a substitute for Christ'."

At this point, I ask the reader to observe that it is necessary that all attempts to understand the interpretation of I Thessalonians 4 through II Thessalonians 2, by reading into it the closing days of this present dispensation of grace, are going to fail. The proper conditions have not been established, and since the time around 62 AD (Acts 28:28) the prophetic clock has stood still and will remain so until God speaks from heaven and declares, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee"(Isa. 60:1).

Recently, I reviewed a book titled *The Road To Armageddon*, written by Charles R. Swindoll, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost and faculty members of the Dallas Theological Seminary. In this book these highly educated and respected theologians presented a broad number of both disturbing and dismal views of what mankind can expect in the closing days of this age. Here are some excerpts* "There's not one passage that tells you to look for something happening before the rapture" (Dr. Walvoord). Dr. Mark Bailey quotes Dr. Harold Wilmington, who said, "According to the Bible, there is coming a calamity unlike any which this weary world has ever seen. The estimated toll of lost human life ranges from 750 million to over a billion. An additional 340 million would be seriously injured, and 33 percent of these incapacitated because of radiation, chemical or biological warfare. The terror of that time will be worse than any other holocaust the world has ever known or will know." Speaking of the anti-Christ, Dr. Bailey says, "What I'm suggesting here is that when this one becomes head of a one-world government, he institutes a one-world economy " Dr. Pentecost says, "The anti-Christ's coming cannot be until after the believers of this age are translated into glory." Dr. Charles Dyer states, "Since 1979 Saddam Hussein has been rebuilding the city of Babylon on its original foundations...Ten percent of the book of Revelation is spent on the subject of Babylon. If it's that important to God, we ought to try to understand it." Dr. Ronald Alien claims, "The second coming, what are we looking for? The greatest cataclysm of world history. It's called the Day of the Lord. In a word, we are not looking for the second coming, we're looking for the coming of our Savior, for His own, for the church, to catch us up to be with Him forever."

Here we have the sometimes conflicting views of Biblical scholars, re-carding their own perceptions of Biblical descriptions of events, which in their opinion will characterize the closing days of this present dispensation. It is obvious to me, as a Bible student holding the dispensational premillennialist position, that none of these Christian brethren has any real perception of what God has planned for the future of mankind. They make God to be some kind of punishing ogre, even in part, sadistic in nature, and I find that to be Biblically in error. It is inconsistent with the fact of the Eonian Times (the Kingdom of God) that are to come, and completely out of character with the God of every grace, whose love abounds to His creation. Nowhere in their theology do these men have any explanation of God's present purpose in grace. During, what is almost 2,000 years of human history, not a single line of Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled. This will, undoubtedly, come as a shock to millions of men. who have been led by such Bible teachers, to believe that "the rapture is imminent." and that the second coming of Christ could occur at any moment. What most men have failed to grasp, is that during these past 2,000 years every act and purpose of God relates to His desire to write into the history of His long dealings with mankind a record of His absolute grace. This marvelous display of grace has never been mingled with acts of retribution or judicial action traceable to Him. Simply put, men have been permitted to work and live as they choose.

Since the Divine restraints are lifted, a final scenario of events and conditions will emerge making absolutely plain that the Day of the Lord has come in full force. It is at this time, That the wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy (kutargeo. strip of all authority and power) with the brightness (epiphaneia. blazing forth) of His coming (parousia) (II Thess. 2:8). With God having lifted His restraints on mankind, we arrive at one of the most controversial periods of time in the record of God's dealings with men, known as "Daniel's seventieth week." But before proceeding to grapple with this subject, we need to respond to the question asked by our Lord's disciples, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming (parousia) even the consummation of the eon?" (Matt. 24:3).

The Consummation Of The Eon

Following about 500 years of life during the Day of Jesus Christ, mankind will witness a rapid succession of events, which will bring in the Day of the Lord. Based on the assumption that the hope of divine intervention could come to fruition by the year 2000, we could reasonably expect the Day of the Lord to become a reality about sometime around 2493 AD. This would mark the end of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel's prophecy. It says, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Dan. 9:24). The next thing in God's plan for Israel is Daniel's

seventy weeks, in which an enormous array of events will occur, terminating in the triumphal return of Christ to the earth, and the destruction of His foes. No understanding of the events associated with the consummation of the eon is possible without recognizing that for almost five centuries men will have lived in and under the unprecedented blessings of the manifest Kingdom of God. The chapter titled, "Eonian Times," described these future events. It is during this time that Elijah will have performed his work of the restoration of all things.

The amazing Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and New Covenants will have been fulfilled with the astounding results God promised in Genesis. The people of Israel, who now number about 15 million will have become the greatest nation on earth and will have become as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; (in number) and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice (Gen. 22:17-18). The previous profusion of hostilities will have ceased for the Eonian Times, and men will have been given the gift of perfect health. Nations will be found trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the righteous judgments of God will fill the earth (Matthew 12:21, Isaiah 26:9). At this time, "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed" and all flesh will have experienced the salvation of the world (Isa. 40:5, John 4:47). All the "evildoers shall have been cut-off, and those that wait upon the Lord have inherited, and enjoyed an allotment in the earth" (Psa. 37:9). The earth shall have been "delivered from the bondage of corruption (and made to share) into the liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). Mankind will have been preserved and "come into the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4)

Imagine the impact that the fruition of these blessings will have on mankind, and to realize that all these things come about and find their fulfillment before the Day of the Lord, in Eonian Times, even in the Day of Jesus Christ. The result will be that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11). These are things which characterize the Day of Jesus Christ, and define the character of life for the length of Eonian Times up to the Day of the Lord and the parousia of Jesus Christ. How any man in his right mind can believe that "the rapture of the church" is the next thing on God's calendar is baffling to the true believer, who cannot deny the literal fulfillment of these myriad blessings.

It is the fulfillment of these mighty prophecies that provided the background to the key question asked by our Lord's disciples, "**What shall be the sign of Thy coming (parousia) and of the end of the world (suntelia tou aionos)?**" (Man.

24:3). This was not an ambiguous question, but one predicated on understanding the meaning of "the consummation of Eonian Times." The word "end" we have discussed before, with its occurrences. This word *suntelia* should not be confused with the more commonly used word *telos* which signifies the end, conclusion, or terminal experience beyond which nothing remains to be said or done. Our Lord used the expression "the end" (to *telos*) in His prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24:6, 13, 14. I believe each of these occurrences speak of the identical event described by our Lord in Matthew 24:30-31, which refers to the sign of the Son of Man appearing in heaven, the tribes of the earth mourning and seeing the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. This is what Daniel calls "the end time" by the Hebrew term *kehetz*. In contrast to *telos*, the word *sunteli* means the convergence or confluence of things flowing together. For example, a number of streams flow together to become a river. This concept is of great importance in the context of the meaning of the word *aion*, which we have previously established. The Scriptural meaning of the word *suntelia* will be of no significance in the mind of most men, who cannot envision beyond events which are common to men of today. Today's events are so different from Eonian Times that men, living in the closing days of this present age, cannot perceive the reality of future Biblical events. In fact, Christ said this to Nicodemus. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). To be "born again" (*genao anothen*) means to be generated from above (divine generation, the foundation of our faith in Christ), and the word "to see" (*idea*) means to perceive or understand the implications of.

What we are saying is, the Biblical concept of the phrase "the end of the world" (age), or "the consummation of the eon" as we more accurately define it, will find no solution in the mistaken idea that the word *aion* means "a period of time, rendered age, or epoch." Nor will the meaning of this important phrase yield to the idea that it means the close of human history. The Preterists, in their attempt to define the meaning of this phrase, insist that it means "the end of the Jewish dispensation" or "the impending judgment of Israel." Regardless of what happened in 70 AD, when the Romans under Titus destroyed the temple and Jerusalem, or even the recalcitrant attitude on the part of some in Israel, that invasion and siege did not result in the destruction of the nation of Israel. That nation, though scattered, is solid in the covenants of God. Refer to the booklet titled, *Israel In The Plan And Purpose Of God*, published by the Word of Truth Ministry. This work deals with the future of the Israel of God. Since the Preterist definition of the phrase, "the end of the world (age)" does not constitute sound Biblical teaching, how then are we to understand our Lord's response to this important question? A number of presumed Bible teachers will insist that these words were spoken to a handful of His disciples, who were led to believe that "the end of the world" would

occur during their lifetime. This concept is totally lacking in credibility, and cannot be substantiated by Scripture. The undeniable fact remains that Peter, James and John and Andrew, to whom these words were first spoken, have since died without realization of any of these signs (Mark 13:3-4). Nevertheless I am convinced that each of these men will be raised from the dead to witness the literal fulfillment of our Lord's promise. To those who insist that "the tribulation is past in fulfillment" or that "the second coming of Jesus Christ already happened," I would remind them in the words of the prophet Zechariah, "And His feet shall stand iq that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem" (Zech. 14:4). Other attempts to define "the end of the world" as some horrific nuclear conflagration between the superpowers denies the Scriptural fact that "Jesus is the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

Having this background before us, we are now prepared to consider our Lord's response to the question, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming, even the consummation of the eon?" His response begins with the solemn warning, "Take heed that no man deceive you". A number of sincere Bible students (of Preterist persuasion) will insist that since these words were spoken in the audience of Peter, James, John and Andrew, it also means that everything spoken in Matthew 24:4-31 came to pass by the year 70 AD. It should be noted that our Lord did not respond to the first question asked ("When shall these things be?" Matt. 24:3). Also, regarding the destruction of the temple, which Jesus predicted in Mark 13:2, it is answered in Mark 13:9-13, concerning the conditions required. Also, it is answered in greater detail in Luke 21:12-24. It is also worth noting that our Lord's response to the second question ("What is the sign of Thy coming and the consummation of the eon?") is identical both in Matthew 24:4-8 and in Luke 21:12-24. The answer to the question concerning the temple is found in the parenthetical section of Luke 21:12-24. The reader should note carefully that Luke states, "But before all these things, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you" (Luke 21:12). This parenthetical portion concludes with the statement, "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the nations, until these times of the nations be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). That closing points to a future time when all aggression against the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem will end.

The continuity of the scenario, which is begun in Luke 21:8-11 and resumes and ends in the words found in Luke 21:25-28, corresponds in substance to Matthew 24:29-31. What we find written in Luke 21:12-24 is, in reality, a reference to the initial siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD at the hands of the Roman leader Titus. There is yet to be a future siege of Jerusalem, which will occur in the Day of the Lord, just prior to the parousia of Jesus Christ. In response to our Lord's warning in Matthew 24:4, it should be carefully noted that these words were addressed to men in Israel,

who will be alive at the start of Daniel's seventieth week. This means that the "ye" spoken twice in verse six and the "they" spoken in verse nine is in reference to a company of men, who will be living at that future time. The fact that our Lord's disciples, who were alive when Jesus spoke to them, does not mean that they will be excluded from witnessing this scenario involving the consummation of the eon. That is clearly the result of their resurrection into the Day of Christ.

Our Lord continues in Matthew 24:5 with the statement, "**For many shall come in My name, saying, I am the Christ** (o christos, the Messiah); and shall deceive many." The reader should recognize that this is one of the signs leading up to the parousia of Christ. We need to understand that for five centuries preceding this manifestation, every vestige of human religious institutions and the cult phenomena will have been eradicated from the earth. This system of idolatry can be traced back about 4,500 years to the time when Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord (Gen. 10:2-9). This Nimrod became not only the founder of the city of Babylon (named after the tower of Babel), but the fountain-head of all systems of idolatry, which have since flooded the earth. Babylon was that primary fountain-head of all idolatry, and that is why she is described in Revelation 17:5 as "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." This insidious form of worship was no mere sin into which the people gradually sunk, but it was the creation, by satanic wisdom, of a mighty system which Satan intended to use and to lead up to his own worship. It was the corruption of mankind spoken of in Genesis 6:4-5, that led to abnormal forms of half-human, or super-human beings called in Scripture by the names of the Nephilim, Rephaim and Anakim; all called giants in the KJV.

Since the days of Nimrod, mankind has been witness to a proliferation of religious systems of idolatry. The present system of Roman Catholicism is demonstrative of one of these forms from that source. Since the birth of the so-called Holy Roman Catholic church, thousands of similar religious institutions have appeared on this earth, each claiming some visible contact with and authority from God/the Lord Jesus Christ. As the result of this satanic invasion into the earth, there is not a kingdom or government which does not embody and exhibit some form of the spirit of Nimrod. The very practice of idolatry became the most stringent prohibition God gave to the nation of Israel (first commandment, Exod. 20:2-3). It was the practice of idolatry which led to the corruption and capitulation of that great king Solomon. The continuation of the practice of idolatry, parading under the aegis of the hundreds of religious institutions of our day, will be banished from the earth once God assumes sovereignty. God is not going to share His approved worship or permit the continuation of these religious factions. Speaking to Moses, the Lord

said, Behold I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord: for it is a terrible (awe-inspiring) thing that I will do with thee.... For thou shall worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Exod. 34:10-14).

Once God intervenes.

All the ends of the world shall remember (have the truth imprinted on their minds) and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds (families) of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's: and He is the governor among the nations (Psa 22:27-28). Once the final restraints are removed, God again permits Satan to become active in world events. God will have deliberately distanced Himself from men in a test to determine their attitudes toward Him, and His inheritance, the nation of Israel. At that point in time there will be a number of drastic conditions coming to the surface, like those identified in Matthew 24:4-8. Fearing the sudden appearance of the man of sin, also known as the son of perdition, he demands that he be worshipped. A number of men appear on the world scene insisting that they are the promised Messiah. As the result of the emergence of these men, many will be deceived. Fear and anxiety will grip the heart and mind of the faithful in Israel. Jehovah asks, Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned to paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved (delivered) out of it (Jer. 30:6-7). This certainly is no sign for today, but it will serve to remind Israel that she will not be forgotten or abandoned by God.

Then our Lord proceeds to say, And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet (Matt. 24:6). Now, these men have lived in peace for many centuries, when suddenly they begin to hear of wars and rumors of wars. For them it will be incredible, but how can any men living today claim that these events are a sign of His parousia? These conflicts between men and nations so commonplace today are meaningless as a sign. It would be a most positive sign, marking the imminent return of Christ, if men were living for five centuries in peace and tranquility, then suddenly occurring a general breakup of nations and calling for war. We must not become guilty of reading this future scenario into the last days of this present dispensation. The Lord added an explanation. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows (Matt. 24:7-8).

Again I ask the reader, how can the insurrection of the nations possibly be a sign of His parousia today when they have never yet lived in peace and harmony? To postulate, that the current wave of wars, conflicts and the incidences of earthquakes are indicative of the imminent return of Christ, fraudulently interprets Scripture and represents a blatant disregard of the present reality of world conditions. Since 1930 roughly over 770,000 lives have been lost due to earthquakes. As the result of the recent earthquake in Turkey (August 1999), and deemed the worst of the century, over 18,000 lives have been said to be lost with a possibility of rising to perhaps 40,000.

Given the incontrovertible fact that God will banish hunger and disease among mankind in the Kingdom of God, such current conditions are no sign of His imminent return. If, on the other hand, men have enjoyed freedom from hunger, disease and a stable earth environment, a sudden recurrence of these conditions would provide the most positive sign that His parousia was about to take place. I challenge all these presumed Bible scholars (Preterists and Futurists alike) to re-think their position, regarding the blessings God has planned for the future of mankind before His parousia.

The Seven Seals Opened

The opening of the first of seven seals recorded in Revelation 6 is symbolic of a set of conditions that will prevail in the earth during the first half of Daniel's seventieth week. It is impossible to conclude that even one of these conditions are evidence today of the imminent return of Christ to earth. Even though we currently have famine in some countries and earthquakes in other parts of our world, they offer no proof of the imminent return of Christ. We need to ask ourselves the who, what and why these conditions will reappear in the earth, when they have been absent for at least five centuries. There will be super-human forces at work that will characterize the onset of the divine scenario. In Chart No. 2, "Post-Eonian Times," we point to a significant event revealed in Daniel 9:27. Confirmation of the covenant made with many for one week has reference to the highly important events revealed in Daniel 9:26. There we are told that, After threescore and two weeks (in addition to the 7 weeks spent in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem) shall messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and unto the end of the war desolations are determined (Dan. 9:26).

The understanding of this complex passage is the key to understanding a

succession of events leading to the unveiling of the man of sin, also called the son of perdition, sitting in the temple of God. exalting himself above everything called God or an object of worship, claiming himself to be God. His contemptuous acts of self aggrandizement are evidence that he is acting as an agent of Satan. There can be little doubt that this being is the real antichrist, who will make his presence known during the Day of the Lord. Current attempts to identify the antichrist are foolish in that the unveiling of this sinister being is at least 500 years into the future. Because so many presumed Bible scholars insist that the second coming is the next thing in God's plan, it must be very embarrassing not being able to identify the antichrist today!

Daniel 9:26 makes plain that, **"the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary,"** which provides positive proof that a future, second siege of Jerusalem will occur. This will be the final assault on that magnificent, future city. The psalmist declares, "O God, the nations are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps" (Psa. 79:1). This marvelous Psalm is a divine commentary on the final siege of Jerusalem. Concerning the glory of that city, Isaiah declares, But the glory of the Lord shall arise upon thee; and His glory shall be seen upon thee.... The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee... to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of thy feet glorious (Isa. 60:2, 13). In spite of the glory that shall come to Jerusalem, we recall the words of Luke 21:24, which make clear that, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the nations, until the times of the nations be fulfilled." Also take note, as Daniel 9:26 makes clear, that, "After threescore and two weeks shall messiah be cut off, but not for himself." At some time nearing the end of the initial period of seven weeks (49 years), referred to in Daniel 9:25, David will be crowned as "messiah the Prince." Then following "threescore and two weeks" (or 434 years following the completion of work on the city) messiah the Prince will be cut off (Dan. 9:26). This creates a real problem for those men trying to establish this event in the life of our Lord. This problem ceases to exist when we recognize that the reference to "messiah the Prince" refers to David, the anointed prince, and not Christ.

This problem is further complicated when men try to insist that the 69 weeks ran out during the lifetime of the Messiah at His crucifixion in 29 AD and when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. That is an attempt to explain by circumventing the future cutting-off of David, King of Israel. The Hebrew word for "cut off " is karath, which men attempt to apply to the crucifixion of Christ. They refer to Isaiah 53:8 where it says, "He was cut off from the land of the living," where the Hebrew word for "cut off " is ertzar. This word is used to designate the fact that He, in the providence of God, was snatched out of the land of the living, as a result of His sacrificial work on the cross. This meaning cannot be applied to David, who shall

be "cut off (karath). This word is found in Genesis 9:11, where it speaks of 'Tien who perished in the flood of Noah's day. It occurs again in Jeremiah 11:19 in a reference to those men in Israel, who had walked in their own ways (idol worship) in a conspiracy to kill the prophet. As a result of the manifestation of "the prince that shall come'- (Dan. 9:26), messiah (David the pointed) snail be cut off. This is clearly a satanic effort to remove David from his position of being God's anointed in Jerusalem.

God's answer is revealed in Psalm 2, where we read, Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed (David), saying, let us break their bands asunder, and cast their cords away from us (Psa. 2:1-3). This is a vain and foolish attempt to cut themselves off from the divine restraints. The passage goes on to say, He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: He shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion (Psa 2:4-6). At this time the antichrist makes his presence known as he offers a covenant with Israel to assure the nation that he is really "the Messiah" proclaiming peace. In reality His objective is universal dominion and control.

As the seals (Rev. 6) are opened by the Lamb of God, the insidious nature of the antichrist's ambitions become clear. It is important to note the parallelism between the statements made in Matthew 24:4-30 with the symbolic description of the events each of the seals produces (Rev. 6:1-17). This clearly establishes the fact that the events our Lord described in Matthew 24 find their fulfillment in the Day of the Lord, and not 70 AD. Turning to Revelation 6, we note that, When the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer (Rev. 6:1-2).

C.H. Welch, in his book, This Prophecy (the Apocalypse), suggests it is the antichrist coming to make the world obedient to him. If this is the case, and these seals precede the tribulation and are not part of the end time (parousia), then Satan has done a good job of imitating Christ's coming. Likewise, in Matthew 24:5 Christ says, "many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many." Could this be the antichrist?

With the opening of the second seal, another horse, red in color, went out and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they

should kill one another: and there was given to him a great sword (Rev. 6:3-4). The corresponding account in Matthew 24 says, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars... but the end is not yet" (Matt. 24:6). These words, coupled with the second seal, point to a general break up of the nations in the process of the antichrist seeking to establish universal control of the nations. Using a different figure, the prophetic description of the opening of the second seal, perhaps, is found in Jeremiah 25:15-25. In this portion, Jeremiah is instructed to Take the wine cup of this fury at My hand, and cause all nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them (Jer. 25:15-16). It appears that the nations are symbolically instructed to drink of this cup, because of the persecution and wrath the nations will impose on the nation of Israel. This could refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. which is because of the named nations that follow in verses 19-25. However, there may be a second fulfillment, as in so many prophecies, referring to the time of Jacob's trouble (the tribulation). The final fulfillment of this prophecy can only be explained in the context of a future day, in which Israel will once again be scattered among the nations. This scene is described in Joel 3:1-2 in preparation for a final regathering of Israel and confrontation with the nations in which God fights for them, destroying the armies of the rebellious nations (Rev. 19:19-20, the so-called battle of Armageddon). There is no action taken by the nations against the people of Israel, today, that in any manner fulfills this prophecy.

In the opening of the third seal (Rev. 6:5-6), we have a symbolic parallel account to the sign predicted by our Lord in Matthew 24:7. The opening of this seal seems to suggest that once again famine will be in the earth. Literal famines have been foretold and come to pass, as shown in II Kings 6:25 and in Acts 11:28. Famine occurring in the Day of the Lord will seem strange, since hunger will be totally unheard of during the manifest Kingdom of God. During this brief period of Daniel's seventieth week God permits the recurrence of these conditions. The severity of this world-wide prevalent hunger is evident in the fact that "No man might buy or sell, save that he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:17). With the availability of food in most parts of the world today, no threat of famine exists that would predicate a man having to take the mark of the beast to survive. In that sense, the scarcity of food in some quarters of the world today is not a sign of Christ's imminent return.

As we look into Revelation 6 further, we hear the voice of the fourth beast say, come and see, and I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death and with the beasts of the earth (Rev. 6:7-8). The Greek words here for "death" and "hell" are translated from thanatos and hades. However, the reader should note that

"death" is a figure of speech, in which, by metonymy, "death" is put for the cause producing it, that is "hunger." Now that "hunger" is perceived, it is followed by what is defined as "the grave" (hades) or "the state of death." These two Greek words appear together, because the meaning of the latter depends on that of the former. In Revelation 1, Christ says, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, [am alive forevermore (in relation to the eons of the eons), and have the keys to hell and death (Rev. 1:17-18). Also, in Revelation 6:8 it states, "... and power was given unto them ... to kill with the sword and with hunger and with death." You can see that death is put for hunger, which with severe starvation results in death.

In Matthew 24:7-8 we are told that: "there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places." The meaning of these previous three seals are an expansion of our Lord's own brief statement in Matthew 24:7. which shows that we have here "the beginning of sorrows." The scenario described in Revelation 6:8 appears to be a major assault on mankind during the initial phase of the Day of the Lord. This becomes plain as we note Revelation 12:12, which says, Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. This short time is little more than seven years of Daniel's seventieth week, after which, "that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan is bound for 1000 years" (Rev. 20:2).

What is highly significant and totally lost to the mind of most students is that the recurrence of this triple threat to mankind follows about five centuries of life on earth, during which death and dying will be absent. In other words, at the present time death appears triumphant. Contrast this with the powerful words of our Lord, I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever (that is in relation to the coming eon): and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John 6:51). Think of the impact that the literal fulfillment of this awesome work of Jesus Christ will have on mankind during the manifest kingdom of God. Then, for mankind to once again experience the evil effects revealed in Revelation 6:1-8, it will be a most positive sign of the imminent return (or parousia) of Jesus Christ. Again, I repeat, not one of these seals has yet been opened as of today.

With the open disclosure of the first four seals, our attention is now directed to Revelation 6:9-11. In this record of the opening of the fifth seal, we see the "souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9). These are the martyrs who willingly lay down their lives for the cause of God during the tribulation. The parallel account of this in Matthew 24 is found in verses 8-28. This record begins with the declaration, Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake (Matt. 24:9). It ends with the statement found in verse 28, which reveals: "For

wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles (vultures, birds of prey) be gathered together" (Matt 24:28). Once again the Israel of God will be put into the crucible of suffering. This subject is dealt in greater detail in the section, "The Great Tribulation." Since the record of those who lay down their lives is described here in Revelation, which occurs in the final three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week, it becomes apparent that the opening of the seals covers the whole of the seven-year period of that time. It is during that time that the seven trumpets sound and the vials of the wrath of God are poured out upon mankind, who are rebelling against God. It should be obvious to the student of Scripture that the above event, revealed in the opening of the fifth seal, could not possibly relate to this present eon.

Now, turning to the opening of the sixth seal, we note that, "there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood" (Rev. 6:12). This event is concerned with a great convulsion in nature. In spite of all the great earthquakes recorded in the past centuries, none have been accompanied with the celestial phenomena associated with this particular time. This event occurs in a time when the nations are in seething rebellion against God. We find a strong illusion to the interpretation of the opening of the sixth seal in Haggai 2:6-7, which says, For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake ail nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. A parallel passage is found in II Peter 3:7-10, which is connected with the Day of the Lord. This language is not symbolical, but a revelation of what will occur in the heavens and on earth, just prior to the actual pampusia of the Lord Jesus Christ. The timing of this event is positively linked to the events described in Matthew 24:29-30. If men insist that the pampusia of the Son of Man is imminent, then they must, in all honesty, deal with this physical phenomena. But even of greater significance is the fact that this "shaking of the nations" will serve as strong reminder that God, who is still seated in the heavens, is yet in control of the destiny of men and the nations. This comes after a prolonged period of time, in which the nations have enjoyed unequalled blessings, during the Kingdom of God. This rebellion and uprising of the nations is satanic in origin, and is a final attempt on his part to exert his power and influence over the governments of the nations in that day.

We are reminded of a prior satanic attempt to impose his authority. When Jesus was being tempted by Satan, it says, Again, the Devil taketh Him up to an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he saith unto Him, all these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me (Matt. 4:8-9). This futile attempt to gain superior control

of the governments of men is met with stinging rebukes, where He says, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, that thou shall worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shall thou serve" (Matt. 4:9-10). Following this final attempt to circumvent his impending doom, Satan is bound in chains. And cast into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, til the thousand years should be fulfilled (Rev. 20:3).

The sixth seal closes with the coming of the "great day of wrath," and takes up the subject of the signs immediately preceding the coming of Christ in glory, as seen in Revelation 19:11-16. After the closure of the sixth seal, "And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (Rev. 8:1). During the time these seals were being broken, this world has passed through the great tribulation. The 144,000, who go with Christ, have been taken out of the tribes of Israel. Included with this group is the great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues (languages), who stood before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10).

This vast number of men, who successfully pass through the Great Tribulation, should dispel the notion that the Great Tribulation is a time of sadistic torture and diabolical inventions. Furthermore, it should be plain that the literal fulfillment of this important segment of the prophetic word remains unfulfilled and precedes both what men call the "rapture" and the second coming of Christ. We leave the discussion of the intervening activity between the closure of the events linked to the sixth seal and the opening of the seventh seal for a later section in this work. It is sufficient to say these events occur within the very brief time frame of about 1,290 days (Dan. 12:1-13). This would include the 30 days of the indignation spoken of in Isaiah 26:20-21, Isaiah 66:4 and in Revelation 14:10.

The Abomination Of Desolation

No interpretation of Matthew 24:15, regarding "the abomination of desolation," is possible without recognition that this sinister being will one day "stand in the holy place." Two undeniable facts stand out regarding our understanding of this passage. First, there is no such structure standing today as the temple of God (Thess. 2:4). And second, the appearance of this being on the scene of world history must precede the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This latter fact is a source of embarrassment to presumed Bible teachers who insist that the second coming of

Christ is imminent. What they fail to observe is that the unveiling of the "abomination" is not possible without acknowledging that this event occurs during Daniel's seventieth week. They also fail to admit to the fact that the construction of this temple requires the fulfillment of Isaiah 44:28. This concerns the work of Cyrus, who will say to Jerusalem, "Thou shall be built; and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid." The question remains as to the Scriptural identity of this seemingly supernatural being. In a desperate attempt to deny the reality of this being, the Preterist, John L. Bray claims, "The armies of ancient Rome themselves were the abomination of desolation." He adds, "This very event has already happened and there is no prediction of any future, either of the temple or any abomination of desolation occupying such a temple. This sort of teaching is simply dispensational, futuristic and Scriptural nonsense." False statements, such as Bray has made, are at best a desperate attempt to distance themselves from the reality of the future presence of this satanic monstrosity.

The reference to the "abomination of desolation" is first found in the message spoken by Daniel the prophet, according to Matthew 24:15. This being is described in Daniel 9:26 as "the prince of this world who is yet to come to destroy the city and the sanctuary;" also, "He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week. He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease" (Dan. 9:27) This action is confirmed in Daniel 11:31, where we are told that: "He shall take away the daily sacrifice and then shall place the abomination that maketh desolate." This passage would have no significance were it not for the fact that God makes the restitution of the priesthood and the sacrifice a very sure thing in the Old Testament. The prophet Jeremiah declared, For thus saith the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually (Jer.33:17-18). This occurs in a time when David will function as "the servant of God; a prince among the people of Israel."

Once again, during the future Kingdom of God. there apparently will be a reconstitution of the Levitical priesthood administered by "the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok." While the offering of blood sacrifices will be reinstated, it will not negate in any way the fact that Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28). It appears that after several centuries of this priesthood functioning on behalf of the people of Israel, the observance will take on great meaning again. They will have symbolized God's complete identity with that ancient people, and will focus on the worship of God in the temple. It is during the middle of the seventieth week of Daniel that "the daily sacrifices shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand

two hundred and ninety days" (Dan 12:11). These numbered days of Scripture belong to the future and have never yet been fulfilled.

It is during the Day of the Lord that the abomination makes his presence known. This time is marked by a falling away first, and that the man of sin be revealed, (apokalupsis. unveiled), the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (II Thess. 2:3-4). This sinister being is further described as the one to whom "the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (Rev. 13:2). He is identified in Revelation 13:1 as the beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns with ten crowns, and on his heads reads the name of blasphemy. Many desperate attempts have been made by the Preterists to identify the persecution of the Jews, between 67 AD to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, with The Roman persecution of the Israel of God. There is no foundation for their allegations inasmuch as the unique power given to the beast will extend "over all families, and tongues, and nations" during the future Great Tribulation. This beast is followed by another beast coming up out of the earth: and he had two horns like a iamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast (Rev. 13:11-12). The wild supposition by some Preterists, that the first beast was the Roman emperor Nero, seems absolutely preposterous; I can find no support for this position anywhere in Scripture.

With regard to the second beast, we have every reason to believe that (his satanic being is none other than the antichrist, or the abomination that makes all desolate. His extraordinary power is revealed in Revelation 13: He had the power to give life to the image of the beast (lifelike idol of the beast), that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads: and that no man may buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name (Rev. 13:13-17). Two things stand out regarding this future scenario. First, these conditions leading up to a time when no man might either "buy or sell" presumes the existence of a worldwide economy, in which great poverty and deprivation will be experienced in the earth. And second, this satanic being would have to be present in the earth exercising this great power and authority over the nations. The inescapable fact is that in spite of selected pockets of food deprivation, there does not now exist a world-wide condition that would compel a man to accept a mark on his hand or forehead to either buy or sell. And obviously, who and where is this satanic tyrant loose in the world today? The

answers speak for themselves: he is not in this world today.

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that then shall that wicked (or lawless) one be revealed, whom the Lord will consume (anaireo, to destroy, kill, put to death) by the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy (katargeo, strip of all his power and authority) with (by) the brightness of His coming (by the epiphaneia of his parousia) (II Thess. 2:8). His ultimate destruction is taught in Revelation 19:20, where we read, \nd the beast and the false prophet that wrought miracles before him with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. It, as some men believe, this evil being is somewhere in our midst today, where on earth is this "lake burning with fire and brimstone?" There is absolutely no evidence that at this present moment either the "abomination that maketh desolate" or the "lake of fire" have any existence. Nevertheless we can be assured that this divine scenario will be played out literally on the world scene, but not until at least 500 years into the future.

The Great Tribulation

The key to understanding Matthew 24:21, concerning "the Great Tribulation," is based on the fact that Scripture reveals two sieges of Jerusalem. The interpretation of this important event has been greatly maligned by men like the Preterist John L. Bray, who has said. "The most tragic time in the history of the nation of Israel was in 67-70 AD during the siege and destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman armies." He goes on to say, "The great tribulation of Matthew 24:21, 29-30, does not relate to our end time, but both of these events relate to the events at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD (at the end of their age not ours). The great tribulation and the parousia of Matthew 24 have nothing to do with a future tribulation and second coming of Christ at the end of our church age." This is typical of the erroneous conclusions drawn by men who fail to grasp any understanding of the signs that point to the "sign of the parousia. even the consummation of the eon." A proof of the 70 AD version of Matthew 24:21 is claimed to be found in the words of our Lord in Luke 21:22, which says, "For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." John Bray claims that this includes "all prophecy which had been written concerning the final end of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation in 70 AD according to Daniel 9:24-27. And we know of no other prophecy concerning the future of Israel yet to be fulfilled." It is obvious that Bray appears to be totally ignorant of the majestic prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which speak of the glorious reconstitution of the nation of Israel in "the

last days." I detect, in the writings of most Preterists, a strongly anti-Semitic attitude toward the Israel of God. Bray also says. "No other event in the whole world ever did or ever could equal in importance what happened to the Jewish nation in 67-70 AD. Their temple, their nation, their cities, their worship, their rituals, their genealogists, their everything, and almost their race were gone with no promise of ever being in existence again!"

This is typical of the satanic lies being foisted on innocent men today by the Preterist movement. If these statements of Bray's were true, it would constitute abject failure on the part of God to fulfill His unconditional promises to the nation of Israel. This is not possible, for GOD CANNOT LIE. The demise of the temple, the priesthood and the identity of the tribes in Israel in 70 AD is no barrier to the ultimate reconstitution of the nation of Israel. This fact is based in part on God's irrevocable commitment to send Elijah "who will restore all things." What then is meant by our Lord's Statement in Matthew 24:21, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time"? We must note, that the phrase "since the beginning of the world" does not refer back to the original creation, but to the founding of the future order of things to come. The term "great tribulation" is a descriptive term, which has been lifted out of its context to embellish every possible crude form of sadistic torture to support the wild statements made by present day prophets of doom.

Dr. Mark Bailey, vice president, dean of the faculty, Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote in his book, *The Road To Armageddon*, "The terror of that time will be worse than any other holocaust the world has ever known. It will be the worst hour in human history for the world." If this is the best that mankind can expect, there is little hope for the future. Then Dr. Bailey adds, "It is the worst hour of human history and it's the worst hour for Israel." In support of his statement he makes reference to Isaiah 24:3-6. This passage reads. The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word.... The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned and few left. This statement in verse six has been construed to mean, according to Dr. Harold Wilmington, that "the estimated toll of human life lost, ranges from 750 million to one billion. An additional 340 million persons would be seriously injured, and 33% of those incapacitated because of radiation, chemical or biological waste." While I would agree the potential for mass destruction of human life exists today, I cannot accept as fact that God has planned the decimation of mankind, or how else could He claim to be the Savior of the world?

Isaiah 24:1-6 seems to address the fact that there is yet to be a time, when the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold (that is suppress) the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). I believe this time is linked to the time of the indignation spoken of in Isaiah 26:20-21. At that time "the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" (Isa 26:21). That such a time will come I do not disagree, but to insist that this time of His indignation is in the immediate future of mankind is inconsistent with the fact that we are living in the last days of the dispensation of grace. We are not living in the Day of the Lord or in the Consummation of the Eon. There can be little doubt that Isaiah 24:1-6 speaks of a future time when once again the wrath of God will be poured out. Verse one says, "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof." This seems to suggest that in the earliest time in the history of creation that "the world that then was being overflowed with water perished" (II Peter 3:6). That event points to the time of the insurrection by none other than Satan, who is called "the prince of Tyrus" (Ezek. 28:2) As a result of that Satanic uprising, God said, I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God; and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire (Ezek. 28:17). Obviously this has not yet happened, and appears to be the first manifestation of "the wrath of God."

Going to Genesis 6, we take note of the time when God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5)... And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth (Gen. 6:12). And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before Me: for the earth is filled with violence through them (Gen. 6:13)... And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die (Gen. 6:17). The history of that tragic event, which occurred in the days of Noah, cannot be denied. As the result of the flood, only eight persons survived, including two of every sort of living thing of all flesh (Gen. 6:19). Following the flood, the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living as I have done (Gen. 8:21). Then God acting in wisdom said, And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth (Gen. 9:11). By means of His providential symbol of the "bow in the cloud," God has assured mankind that they will be preserved, and although God had displayed His wrath, once again His grace prevailed.

When we direct our thoughts to Isaiah 24:1-6, we are once again made aware of a time when Satan will direct his animosity toward the nation of Israel. God, having lifted His divine restraints, permits Satan to once more surface on the scene of world history. He becomes very active out of desperation, and it is about this time that we read in Revelation 12. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down to you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he has but a short time (Rev. 12:12). This short time is at most seven years. Beginning with the events that signify "the midst of the week" in Daniel 9:27, a scenario begins to unfold, as described in Revelation 12:13-16. This marks the time of the Great Tribulation, when Israel will be carried on eagle's wings, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent (Rev. 12:14). During this time Satan acts in a violent and desperate manner in an attempt to destroy the people of God. However, the woman, symbolizing the people of Israel, fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand three hundred and sixty days (Rev. 12:5).

At this time the wrath of God is unleashed against the wrath of Satan. Earth's punishment is swift and sure as Isaiah 24:5-6 makes clear. Earth, spoken of here, seems to refer to its inhabitants, who have transgressed the ordinance and broken the everlasting covenant. F.C. Jennings has defined this everlasting covenant as one of grace. The symbol of that covenant, first given to Noah, is the rainbow in the clouds (Gen. 9:12). In spite of what men, nations, or Satan may do, God has made the determination to preserve the human race. What Matthew 24:21 calls "the great tribulation," is also called in Jeremiah 30:7 as "the time of Jacob's trouble", and in Hosea 2:15 as the "valley of Achor." In Revelation 3:10, this short period of time is called the "the hour of temptation (trial), which shall come upon the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." These descriptions of this juncture in Israel's history are marked with concurrent blessings that most "prophets of doom" today, seem to conveniently ignore. In Jeremiah 30:7, the promise concerning Jacob is that "He shall be saved out of it," and in Hosea, the valley of Achor is cited as "a door of hope," wherein Israel, in passing through, shall sing "as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (Hosea 2:15). Likewise in Revelation 3:10, there is the promise to those who have "kept the word of His endurance" that He will be keeping them out of "the hour of trial which shall come upon all the earth."

Scripture makes it clear that there will be saints innumerable in the Great Tribulation, and that it will be a glorious experience for them, because of the manifest divine help and safekeeping, which will surely be their portion. I personally have absolutely no fear should I be required to pass through the

tribulation. I frankly have little sympathy for those who are so cravenly fearful of the tribulation that they joyfully hold on to the false promise of a so-called pre-tribulation rapture to take them out of it. The declaration concerning "the hour of temptation (testing), which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev 3:10), tells US that this experience of Israel is in reality a method of testing all men upon earth to see if they have learned righteousness. It should be very obvious to any sincere Bible student that there would be no value in God testing Israel, the nations, or men upon the earth as long as they are in their present state, that is. ignorant about God. However, if a divine testing of mankind should follow a long period of enlightenment, instruction, discipline and blessing, it would be proper, reasonable and of great value. If we insist on making the words "trouble" and "tribulation" to mean "torture", "torment," and "punishment," as most men seem to be doing, then there is little hope of ever coming to a true understanding of what the Lord Jesus meant when He spoke of the "great tribulation."

It is interesting to note that our word "tribulation" is derived from the Latin **tribulum**, which meant a threshing sled, which was a heavy wooden platform used to separate the wheat from the chaff. The straw was thrown to one side while the grain fell into a golden pile. This process of the separation of the wheat from the chaff will not only apply to Israel, but to all men living on the earth at that time. The Greek words that have to do with this time are thlibo and thlipsis. The first word is usually translated "trouble," but its meaning is "to press," or "to constrict." The second term is usually translated "tribulation," but it means "pressure" or "constriction." Thus, the tribulation is a time of universal testing of men, after several hundred years of righteousness and God restraining evil. God's testing is by peer pressure, and the evil pressure of Satan to deceive men. The result of this testing is a righteous earth, which can accommodate the parousia of Jesus Christ, the Righteous King.

When God's government comes upon the earth, and mankind is raised and restored to the world, it will embrace all living men under it, because God has assumed sovereignty. It is not by the choice of men that Jehovah will be their king and will govern. He will deal severely with anyone who violates His judgments or resists His will in any manner. Thus, after several centuries of God's blessings and discipline, the world will draw near to the time of the personal presence of Christ, who will reign on earth for a thousand years. At this point, everything and everyone will come under scrutiny, for none who are unworthy are going to advance into the millennium. Thus, God has planned this time of testing to prepare the way before He comes. As the days of testing approach, God removes the restraints He has used to govern, control and teach men righteousness. When the Holy Spirit is removed as the restrainer, men are at liberty to express their true character, whether it is good

or bad. Never in all human history have men faced a time of testing such as this. They will be under pressure from Satan and his followers, and God will be silent and seemingly uncaring. But this is what Jesus meant by calling it the great tribulation; there has been nothing like it before. While the little season (Rev. 20:3) may be a similar time of testing at the end of the Day of the Lord, we know that those people, whom Satan is able to deceive, are not really committed to God's righteous order.

It is my belief that while some will fail and be deceived by Satan, the overwhelming majority of the billions of people on earth in that day will go on to live and reign with Him for a thousand years. A further thought here is, that this time of tribulation will have no impact on those, who are described by the apostle Paul, as being, "Holy and without blame before Him" (Eph. 1:4). We are meeting the supreme test by believing now. There will be no further testing of those whose faith has been conquered in this dispensation of the grace of God. May God help you comprehend this vital truth.

The Rapture

We have now come to the fork in the road: on the left is the so-called rapture and on the right is the road of divine intervention. In the chapter, Crucial Questions, I asked, "When will the rapture occur?" and "Is the rapture an imminent event?" Having read the books of these presumed Bible scholars, it has become apparent that in the mind of most writers is that this event they call "the rapture of the church" is not only imminent, but it will cause enormous disruption in the lives of those remaining on earth. One writer poses the question as to the fate of a 747 airliner, loaded with several hundred passengers: if the pilot, who is a believer, is raptured, then he will be leaving his passengers to the almost certain fate of death. Another writer pictures a doctor, about to deliver a young mother's baby, when suddenly he is raptured, leaving her in peril for her life and that of the baby. These imaginary events are not only ludicrous, but a sad commentary on a loving God who, they allege, would leave millions of innocent people here on earth to face a precarious doom. These preposterous events not only discredit a just and righteous God, but are totally lacking in any Biblical foundation. I never cease to be amazed at these prophets of doom who allow their imagination to run wild and call it "scholarship." Beloved, this is not what God has planned for the future of mankind. As the result of the proclamation of this false doctrine, tens of thousands of men have been deceived.

Even more disconcerting is the fact that an entire scenario has emerged, making the so-called rapture to be the most prominent doctrine in Scripture. If these presumed Bible scholars allege that the rapture is imminent, what will be the fate of the billions of men left behind? How will God deal with these men who have never had a clear cut opportunity to hear and respond to a message of salvation? It appears to me that this teaching of the instantaneous rapture of believers is at best a self-preservation theory providing an exclusive remedy to the saved, while the untold masses of unredeemed will face a bleak and uncertain future. This doctrine is coupled with the idea that the believer is immediately taken to heaven, along with the companion notion that there is no passage in the Bible that predicts any specific event or events that must be fulfilled before it takes place. I find this doctrine to be a wholly untenable position in light of the thousands of unfulfilled prophecies of future things that relate to Israel and the nations.

I believe it would be prudent for every man proclaiming this corrupt doctrine to set aside prejudice and frame an honest interpretation of the event in the Scripture from which it is derived, based on factual Biblical evidence. One of the foremost false aspects of this teaching is the assumption that when a believer dies, his "soul" leaves his body; "He is away from his body but at home with the Lord" as II Corinthians 5:8 seems to say. They say that his soul goes immediately to heaven, where he is in the presence of the Lord Jesus, rejoicing in the wonder of his rapture. At the rapture, they also say, when Christ comes back, God will bring with Him those who have died so that their souls can enter their resurrection bodies. Such is the belief of men who have no concept of the nature of man, nor his destiny. This is the popular teaching heralded by Dr. John F. Walvoord, chancellor, Dallas Theological Seminary. Obviously, Dr. Walvoord knows little of the body, soul or the spirit of man. Scripture says that men do not have souls—they ARE souls. "And the Lord formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man BECAME a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). And another Scripture says at the moment of death. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). Simply put, death is "a return." This experience applies to all men, whether a believer or an unbeliever. To assume, as Dr. Walvoord believes, in the separation of body and spirit is plainly unscriptural. The idea that death is "body sleep" is clearly not true. When some of the disciples heard Jesus say "our friend Lazarus sleepeth," they said that was good; "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (John 11:11-14). To assume that men can survive the experience of death is to fall into the trap of Satan, first told to the woman, "ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). This was a lie then and men still want to believe it. Furthermore, if men could somehow survive death and retain their senses, they would be immortal, but this, too, is a bald-faced lie. For the Lord Jesus Christ is the one "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto..." (I Tim. 6:16). The Bible knows nothing of "the bodies of those who have died to be resurrected and united with their souls, which have been

in heaven from the time of their death," as Dr. Walvoord proclaims. Scripture says it is men who die and will be raised from the state of death (hades and sheol), in resurrection. Scripture says, "For in death there is no remembrance of Thee, in the grave (sheol) who shall give thanks?" (Psa. 6:5).

The cornerstone of this issue of the rapture is based on II Thessalonians 4:13-18. Many believe that this single passage is intrinsic to the belief that the rapture is an imminent event. The passage reads: But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep (dead), that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain until the coming (parousia) of the Lord will not prevent (precede) them which are asleep (the divine figure of death). For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (II Thess. 4:13-18).

It would be prudent for every one reading this passage to quietly meditate on the significance of this portion. The reader should recall the fact that this epistle was written about 52 AD, during the Acts Period. This was the night period of the Kingdom of God. A number of men, like Stephen, had already died as a result of their witness for Christ. Others would soon follow. Peter alludes to this suffering in I Peter 4:12-13. Now Paul offers these words of encouragement to the living believers, on behalf of those who had died and suffered for the testimony of Jesus Christ. He makes clear that "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again" with those having "slept (died) through or on behalf of Jesus, God will bring them forth with Him."

The English word "**bring**" is the Greek *ago* signifying the triumph of every Acts-Period believer in the day when God Himself will triumph over sin and death. At this point, Paul clarifies that This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain until the parousia of the Lord shall not precede them which are dead. How are we to understand this statement in light of the fact that Paul and all of these believers have since died? They are not in heaven, neither are they in some fictitious place called "hell." But considering the future resurrection of the dead and that Christ rose again, this sheds new light on the interpretation of this verse and those that follow.

What is generally not conceded by supporters of the rapture, is that between verse 14 and verse 15 lies 500 years of the manifest Kingdom of God. We have every reason to believe that these men will be raised from the dead as part of a company called the "first-fruits anointed" (aparche christos in I Cor. 15:23). This company includes all the patriarchs of Israel, their progeny, and even the present-day believers in Christ. Looking again to I Corinthians 15:23, our attention is drawn to the next great company to be raised, "they that are Christ's at His parousia" This company of men may well include all that are born and live their entire lives under God's government. It can be shown that this company includes the faithful martyrs, who will willingly lay down their lives in the Day of the Lord, even the tribulation. They are the ones who refuse to accept the mark of the beast, even with the threat of death. John writes of them, And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13). This company of martyrs is referred to again in Revelation 17, "And I saw the woman (Babylon) drunken with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. 17:6). This awesome company of men are "They which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). They are also identified for us in Revelation 6 as The souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

In dealing with the issue of the rapture, it is important to note that the term is nowhere to be found in the Bible. The actual word translated "caught up together" is the Greek word *arpazo*, which means "to forcibly seize upon" or "to take to oneself with force." Acts 8:38-39 speaks of both Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, whom Philip baptized (identified as a believer), "And when they were come up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord caught away (*arpazo*) Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and went his way rejoicing." Here was an actual physical departure of Philip by the agency of the Holy Spirit. This word occurs again in II Corinthians 12:2-4 to describe a supernatural experience of Paul. He States, "such an one was caught up (*arpazo*) to the third heaven." Here Paul was witnessing to the glories of paradise he had shared. An important occurrence of this word is found in John 12:28-29 in the discussion of the security of the believer. Christ says, I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck (*arpazo*) them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them to Me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck (*arpazo*, to seize, capture, or lay hold upon them) them out of the hand of the Father. This is the absolute guarantee of the security of the believer in Christ. The idea of being seized upon, or laid hold of, is intrinsic to the word *arpazo*.

This message is inherent to Paul's statement in I Thessalonians 4:16-17, where we read, For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout (an authoritative command), with the voice of the archangel (Michael. Jude 1:9) and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ (martyrs) shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (arpazo) together with them in the cloud to meet the Lord in the air. So shall we ever (always) be with the Lord. There can be absolutely no doubt as to whom Paul referred. I am convinced this refers to the future generations of millions of God-fearing men in Israel, including the Apostle Paul. An unknown number of these men can be classified as martyrs, who will be willing to lay down their lives in defense of the testimony of Christ, rather than yield to the insidious demands of the man of sin. Even if they are called upon to die, they can rest assured that their death will be very brief, at most three and one-half years.

This global extravaganza will be seen and heard world-wide. It will mark a supreme moment of triumph for Christ, when He descends from heaven to be personally present upon earth for 1000 years. This majestic scenario occurs after the tribulation when at the time. Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt. 24:30). These martyred dead are part of Christ's honored escort to meet the Lord as He descends to the earth to take up His earthly reign in the Millennium. This glorious event, which involves the resurrection of the saints from the dead to join in the triumphant return of Christ to the earth, belongs to the future—it is NOT imminent at this time.

It stands to reason that since this event will occur in the Day of the Lord and at the parousia of Christ, it cannot be imminent as most of these presumed Bible scholars proclaim. What they fail to grasp is that God's next move is to assume sovereignty over this earth, with all men upon it (the living) and all men in it (the dead). I believe this position is scriptural, logical and true. I urge all men who think otherwise to subscribe to Paul's admonition to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves" (II Cor. 13:5).

The Seven Trumpets Sound

Numerous attempts have been made to understand the sounding of the seven trumpets. Dr. E.W. Bullinger identified at least seven different scenarios in which the sounding of the trumpets signified events related to the religious/geo-political systems, which were prevalent in the earth several centuries ago. Obviously, many of these interpretations were nothing more than grasping at straws. As mankind moves into the dawn of a new millennium, many Bible scholars have attempted to relate several obscure happenings to a list of cataclysmic events that they allege are

about to unfold, thus striking fear into the hearts of men. It should be apparent to the careful Bible student that the sounding of these seven trumpets is in concert with and following the Great Tribulation, and in the future Day of the Lord. As these trumpets sound, we will be witnesses to a succession or order of events predicated on the fact that Satan knows that "He hath but a short time" (Rev. 12:12).

In addition, we should note that the myriads of Israelites, who will constitute that immense future nation, will have passed through that three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation by refusing to yield to the satanic demands of the man of sin, that all men receive "a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads" (Rev. 13:16). What we will observe in the course of the sounding of these trumpets will be a final ferocious satanic attack on the people of Israel. This satanic plan is not only directed against the nation of Israel, but also the nations that rise up in her defense. The man of sin will try to inflict great physical harm and mental distress on those people. This confrontation leads to the battle of Armageddon and the "Day of the vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:1-2). As part of this book, we include Chart No. 2 titled, "Post-Eonian Times." The reader is asked to take note of the fact that the chart identifies a number of specific events, which will characterize Daniel's seventieth week, leading up to the parousia of Jesus Christ. That single event in one sense is the essence of the book of Revelation. That book is better known as "the apocalypse," which means "the unveiling," and at that time our Lord Jesus Christ will demonstrate to all mankind, and Satan as well, that He alone is indeed "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16).

The parousia of Jesus Christ, I believe, marks the successful "consummation of the eon." Indeed, the battle of Armageddon completes the pouring out of the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. This time is noted on Chart No. 2 between symbols "D" and "F," and is also synonymous with the time of the indignation; note Isaiah 26:20-21. God's fury at that time is clear from the fact that "The Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" (Isa. 26:21). This event is followed by the sheep and goat judgment referred to in Matthew 25:31-46. All attempts to superimpose these explicit events upon mankind at this current time are fruitless, in that they relate to the future consummation of the eon.

With these thoughts before us, we turn our attention to Revelation 8:2, where John says, "And I saw seven angels which stood before God: and to them were given seven trumpets." The actual sounding of the trumpets was preceded by another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which

came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightning, and an earthquake (Rev. 8:3-5). By means of this symbolic action, we observe that God is about to go into action. We will recall from Exodus 20 how that God, when He had just given the ten terms of the covenant to the people of Israel, followed this by "thunderings, and lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking" (Exod. 20:18). Now, once again., God will cause the sounding of a succession of trumpets to signal the commencement of a scenario of events involving major calamities. As the first trumpet sounds, there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up (Rev, 8:7).

The parallelism between Revelation 8:7 and the plagues God inflicted upon the land of Egypt is highly significant. Exodus 9:22-25 speaks of the seventh judgment, which says: So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt, since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field (Exod. 9:24-25). The Lord had told Moses to stretch forth his rod toward heaven, and when he did this, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground, and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt (Exod 9:23). I believe that there will be a literal fulfillment of this physical calamity against every nation and people who rebel against the Lord and seek to destroy Israel in the Day of the Lord.

In the sounding of the second trumpet John saw, as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and a third part of the sea became blood; and a third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and a third part of the ships were destroyed (Rev. 8:8-9). Some presumed Bible scholars have resorted to a number of ludicrous conclusions to explain this catastrophic event. Psalm 105 reminds US that, "He turned their waters into blood and also slew their fish" (Psa. 105:29). We also note that in Psalm 78 it says, and (He) had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs which destroyed them (Psa. 78:44-45). These miracles that God allowed Moses to use on the Egyptians do not require an education in theology to believe and understand. All it requires is a spiritual understanding and a child-like mind. The reference to "a great mountain burning with fire" seems to parallel Jeremiah 51:25 which says, Behold I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord, which destroyest all the earth, I will stretch out Mine hand upon thee... and make thee a burnt mountain. This "destroying mountain" is defined in Jeremiah 51:7. as Babylon ... a golden cup in

the Lord's hand, that hath made all the earth drunken, the nations have drunken her wine, therefore the nations are mad. Babylon has long been associated with the ancient practice of idolatry.

The Rev. Alexander Hislop, author of *The Two Babylons, Or The Papal Worship*, wrote, "The seven hills of Rome might most appropriately be called Babylon, inasmuch as it is the chief seat of idolatry under the Old Testament." It was this practice of idolatry in the name of religion that brought disgrace on Solomon. God will yet bring down this harlot Rome, the symbol of all false worship under divine government. Once God lifts the divine restraints, idolatry, or Babylon conceived of as the satanic image of all false religion, will again rear its ugly head to meet its ultimate destruction in the symbolic representation of the second trumpet.

As the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters: and the name of the star is Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood, and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter (Rev. 8:10-11). An early reference to wormwood is found in Deuteronomy 29:18 which reads. Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood. Now wormwood is a bitter, intoxicating and poisonous herb. Used freely, it produces convulsions, paralysis, and death. The alarming thing about this paralytic herb is that those who drink of these tainted waters die. The only way to understand this symbolic use of wormwood is to recognize that it finds its source in the star bearing its name. Revelation 8:10 speaks of, "a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp." This star is a clear reference to Satan. This is a reference to Revelation 12, which says, And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Rev. 12:7-9). When Satan is cast down to earth, he is enraged against Israel and uses every ploy to destroy them. As Jesus said to the returning 70 disciples, who had carried His message all over Israel, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18). It is clear that the time is coming when Satan, in a desperate attempt to deceive the nations, will finally be cast out of heaven. F.C. Jennings, in his book *Studies In Revelation*, draws an analogy to the "modern theological seminaries, with pretension to greater keenness of intelligence, are very clearly fountains of waters

whence streams of teachers, with their established doc-Tines, are avariciously pumped into the arteries of the ecclesiastical body." When Christ comes in His parousia, all lies and deceit will be eliminated from the earth.

As the trumpets go on sounding, this is what is noted: And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice. Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound! (Rev. 8:12-13). This celestial activity seems to correlate well with Luke 21:25-27, where we read, And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after (anxiously waiting for) those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven (the satanic host of Ephesians 6:10) shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. It appears that every part of God's creation is awaiting the actual parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ with great anticipation.

As we turn our attention to Revelation 9, we read. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit: and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit (Rev. 9:1-2). This can only have reference to the fallen "star" who is none other than the Devil, himself. This action fulfills Luke 10:18, mentioned before, and this angel is given the key to the bottomless pit. This description "the bottomless pit" is a translation of the Greek word abyssos (the abyss). It is also found in Revelation 20:1 and 3, where it is also called "the bottomless pit," and probably involves the same angel. Some men deny that this is a literal prison, but that it is used solely in a figurative manner. However, when we make a comparison with Revelation 19:20, where we read, "these both (the beast and the false prophet) were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone," it becomes more difficult to believe this is not a literal situation. On the other hand, it could refer symbolically (in Revelation 9:1 -2) to the opening of the abyss, where these malignant satanic spirit beings reside, and where the fall of Lucifer has been instrumental in the deception and delusion of innocent men. We see these beings in Ephesians, where it speaks of our warfare with them. It says, For we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). This represents some of Satan's angels, the evil spirit-being host, formerly among the most exalted of God's creation. These beings are exerting their evil influence,

power and authority, presently, and we need the armor of God to protect us. These also include those described in Jude: And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation (sphere of influence), He hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness unto the judgment of the great day (Jude 1:6). I believe the ultimate destruction of this satanic host will be the lake of fire and brimstone. Jude 1:13 says, "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." The word 'forever' is eis aiona, which means "in respect to the eon."

Next, let us address our attention to the beings of the black cloud that came out of the abyss. These are called "locusts" and to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; hut only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented for five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he strikes a man. and in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them (Rev. 9:2-6). We must remember that at the time these locusts appear on earth, the people of Israel will have been scattered once again across the length and breadth of the earth. These people have the seal of God in their forehead, as will the people protecting and providing for them. For the rest of mankind, those who do not have the seal of God in their foreheads will encounter the limited destructive power of these locusts, even as Satan was not allowed to touch Job's life. Also, these creatures will be forbidden to kill men. The extent of their power is only to deliver pain or torment, and to horrify the men who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads. They have power "as the scorpions of the earth have power," but are supernatural beings. Although the pain of a scorpion's sting is strong, it is not usually fatal, though it is perhaps the most painful of any insect. The intensity of the suffering in those days is such that "men will desire to die, and death shall flee from them." Their sting is in their tails and their power is to hurt men for five months.

This is a form of Satan's cruelty that will be inflicted on the nation of Israel, just prior to Christ's coming back to earth. Since this five-month period of torment has never yet happened, it must find its fulfillment in the future Day of the Lord. Solomon tells us that, "The locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands" (Prov. 30:27). In the Strictest sense, with the apocalyptic veil removed, we see that the power, which binds these locusts together, is satanic. Ruled and guided by Satan, they all have but one purpose, which is to destroy and dishonor all that is God's on this earth. And that is precisely the meaning of the Hebrew word abaddon and the Greek word apollyon in Revelation 9:11. Both are the strongest terms in either tongue for the English word "destruction" Now, "one woe is past; and behold

there come two woes more here after" (Rev. 9:12).

Revelation 9:13-21 provides a symbolic presentation of events, which follow the sounding of the second trumpet. It is important to note that this is followed by specific events described in Revelation 10 and 11:1-14. These events occur during the last half of Daniel's seventieth week. Many expositors have seized upon the events in Revelation 9:18 to suggest that men can expect mass destruction of the human race in the near future. They point to Revelation 9:18, which reads, By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. The earth's population is estimated to reach 7 billion people around 2023 AD. Some men believe the number of men who could die may be as high as 50 percent, meaning the loss of life could exceed three and a half billion souls. This devastation is said to be caused by some two hundred million horsemen (Rev. 9:16). There is no indication that these horsemen are a description of human beings of any kind. Dr. E.W. Bullinger suggests that this is a description of "supernatural beings." They may even be "wicked spirits whose number are legion" (Luke 8:30). I make no pretense of understanding the significance of this event, except to say that at this time, meaning the day of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, there will be a global effort on Satan's part to use every conceivable means to deceive men by interposing "that wicked one" between the mass of humanity and God. Himself.

This comes at a time described by the Apostle Paul as a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped ... (II Thess. 2:3-4). This being is described by Paul as one whose coming or presence is according to, or in harmony with, the operation of Satan with all power signs and lying wonders (II Thess. 2:9). This monstrosity is a master of grand deceit. It appears that at this time a large segment of mankind becomes gullible and falls victim to this satanic being. They become part of these people, about which Paul says, And with all deceivableness of our unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved (preserved). And for this cause (reason) God shall show them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie (II Thess. 2:10-11). We are not told the number of men that succumb to the lie of Satan. Neither do we know whom these men are; they could include many in Israel born in the time of divine government, as well as many more of the nations.

It is during this time of spiritual decline that God says. I will give power to My two witnesses and they shall prophecy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth

out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy; and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will (Rev 11:3-6). After three and one-half years, they are killed by the beast who ascends out of the bottomless pit to make war with them: And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified (Jerusalem). And they of the people and kindred and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be buried, and they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts to one another; because these prophets tormented them that dwell upon the earth (Rev. 11:8-10). What follows is that after three days and a half the spirit of life from God enters their bodies, resulting in great fear upon them which saw them: And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them. Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and her enemies beheld them (Rev, 11:12). In that self- same hour, there was a real earthquake in which seven thousand people were slain. In view of these supernatural events, which will occur in the Day of the Lord, how many serious Bible students claim that the second coming of Christ is imminent?

We now converge on what must be the most apocalyptic event in all history, for as the seventh angel sounded, there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world (the governments of that current system) are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever (with respect to the eons of the eons) (Rev. 11:15). This does not concern the continuity of Christ's reign, but it does reflect the fact that our Lord, even His anointed, shall reign in Israel and among the nations, governing with respect to all the people who flow out to the rest of mankind in positions of God's government. This includes David and the twelve apostles, who are part of the great theocracy. In that day truly, He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision. Then He will speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet I have set My king upon my holy hill of Zion (Psa. 24-6). Every Satanic attempt to depose God's anointed (David) will meet with absolute failure.

Upon hearing the sounding of the seventh angel's trumpet, the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give Thee thanks. O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because Thou hast taken unto Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned (you do reign) (Rev. 11:16-17). From that future moment in time, God will again proactively assume the reigns of governing His creation. The writer, John then records: And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and Thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, both small and

great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail (Rev 11:18-19). The next thing John hears is a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night (with great intensity) (Rev. 12:10).

It is important here to recall that this sinister being, Satan, once enjoyed a position of great power and authority among the mighty ones of God (in leaven) (Ezek. 28:1-19). But at this point in the Day of the Lord, he has been cast down to the earth, and stripped of his authority by God. He is at that time possessed of great wrath, because he knows that his time is short. His incarceration in the "bottomless pit" is imminent, and once he is bound and jailed, mankind will rejoice being freed from the shackles of satanic influence and domination to enjoy the perfect liberty that we have in Christ. (Luke 4:17-18)

The Battle of Armageddon

Recently a book was published, entitled *The Road to Armageddon*, which claims to combine the knowledge and thinking of the "six greatest scholars" on Bible prophecy and coming world events. This book is authored by Drs Charles Swindoll, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, Charles Dyer, Ronald Alien, and Mark Bailey. Each of these men are associated with the Dallas Theological Seminary. In this book, they deal with their understanding of the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Anti-Christ, Babylon and the Second Coming of Christ.

With no exception, these men are knowledgeable of the Scriptures. and claim to have solutions to the complex array of world events which now characterize the last days. According to Dr. John Walvoord. *the Road to Armageddon* is one that leads to destruction, in which "Christ just speaks the word, the sword out of his mouth. All these millions of men with their beasts are instantly killed. Resulting in the most awful judgment of which the Bible has spoken up to that time!"

Dr. Ronald Alien decries those who insist that Armageddon describes a nuclear holocaust of nation against nation. He agrees that would be horrific. It would be a world war, but not Armageddon. He claims: "Armageddon is the nations gathered together at the end of the Tribulation Period to withstand God the Father putting his son Jesus Christ on the throne of David in Jerusalem."

While I would agree that nations are involved in this conflict, I do not believe this definition can be supported by Scripture; Psalm 2 notwithstanding. Dr. Walvoord believes that "According to Revelation 16:16. armies will be marshaled at Armageddon, The Hill of Megiddo, in Northern Israel. The gigantic world war that follows will rage right up to the day of the second coming of Christ (Zech. 14:1-3), when armies will gather also at Jerusalem." He holds that "the judgments described in Revelation 6-18, interpreted literally, indicate that in the three and one-half years leading up to the second coming of Christ, much of the earth will be devastated and billions of people will be killed. As previously shown, this will reduce the world's population to a fraction of what it is now. The destruction of millions of soldiers in the battle of Armageddon is the first of a series of judgments in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom."

I find this position to be pure fiction and totally lacking in credibility. If these views were to be taken literally, it would spell out a scene of mass destruction of human life never before proclaimed.

At this point in this study, it would do well to point out several key facts that cannot be disputed. First of all, it needs to be recognized that this so-called battle of Armageddon occurs in the Day of the Lord, just immediately preceding the Parousia of Christ. I refer the reader to Charts I and II to note the occurrence of this event.

It is extremely important to observe that the Day of the Lord is at least 500 years into the future. It follows the future Day of Jesus Christ, an era defined as "Eonian Times."

Equally important is the fact that at this present time, mankind is living in the Dispensation of Grace. Nothing will deter God from his present purposes until he sees fit to intervene in the affairs of mankind.

Some men, especially among unschooled dispensationalists, insist that at any time God could rain death and destruction upon mankind. They picture God as though He were some angry tyrant, ready to inflict His wrath upon men because of their unbelief. In so doing, they heap shame upon a just and gracious God.

Let me make absolutely clear that I believe that a time will come at which "The spirits of devils (demons) working miracles go forth unto the kings of the Earth and of the whole world to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty and unto a place called in the Hebrew tongue (language) Armageddon." (Revelation 16:14-16).

Exactly what is the nature of this confrontation? What precipitates this action? How will it end? It is important to understand that this event is a strategic confrontation between the Lord, the Lamb and "the Host of the high ones that are

on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth." (Isaiah 24-21). I believe this battle concerns a Satanic confrontation in which the nations in their representation are assembled in the plains of Megiddo. This place called Armageddon is none other than the Ancient City called Megiddo in the Old Testament. It is now identified as the modern site of Tell-el-Mutesellim. It is at the ancient site of Megiddo where Ahaziah, the King of Judah, fled and died. II Kings 9:27. It was there in the days of the Children of Israel in Joshua's time that "The king of Taanach, The king of Megiddo" (Joshua 12:21) was slain.

Its geographical location was about 150 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea, where it commanded a strategic location since it controlled the pass through the mountains between the plains of Sharon and Esdraelon. This event, identified in Revelation 16:14-16, occurs at the time that the "Seventh angel poured out his vial into the air and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done." (Revelation 16:17).

This marks the event recorded in Revelation 19:11-18 in which the one "called Faithful and True" comes with "the armies which were in heaven and out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations and rule them with a rod of iron, and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

There is nothing in Revelation 16 or 19 to suggest that this event occurring at the Parousia of Christ is synonymous with a major horrific confrontation between God and the nations, in which, some men allege, millions of lives will be destroyed.

This confrontation between God and the nations is described in Joel 3:9-16. It is at that time in the day of the Lord that God speaks and says, "Proclaim ye this among the nations: prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near. Beat your swords into plowshares, and your pruning hooks and spears, let the heathen (nation) be wakened and come to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there will I sit to judge (set the order for) all the nations round about." In highly symbolic language, men are urged to put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great, multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision. At this time, "The sun and the moon shall be darkened and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth (symbolic of the vast company of the host of heaven and the exalted rulers of the earth), but the Lord will be the hope of his people and the strength of the children of Israel."

Nothing in this divine scenario could possibly relate to the nations upon the earth today. Nor could it possibly relate to the existing nation of Israel as nations converge upon the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. "Then shall the Lord go forth and light against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle." (Zech. 14:1-3). In that hour, Christ will triumph and those rebellious nations that

have determined to destroy the nation of Israel will suffer great defeat. In that day, "The Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day, there shall be one Lord, and his Name One. Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited and it shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, even upon them shall be no rain." (Zech 14:9, 11, 16, 17).

This marks the concluding conditions that will obtain in the earth immediately following the battle of Armageddon and preceding the imminent return of Christ to earth. All attempts to suggest that this event is imminent or relates to existing conditions upon the earth at this present time are absolutely false. The only viable interpretation of Revelation 16:14-16 is to understand that these events belong to the future Day of the Lord, not the concluding days of this Dispensation of Grace.

The Parousia of Jesus Christ

The most spectacular event in the history of God's dealings with mankind concerns the Parousia of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years ago, there was born in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. Finding no room for them in the inn, Mary, his mother, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. Here lay "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the Earth." Isaiah 40:28. As an infant, He was carried into the Temple by His parents, "To do for Him after the custom of the law." There it was revealed to the aged Simon that he should not see death because he had seen the Lord's Christ. It was on that momentous occasion that Simon "took Him up in his arms and blessed God, saying, Lord, now lettest Thy servant depart in peace, according to thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation bringing Christ." (Luke 2:25-30).

Within the space of about thirty-three years, our Lord suffered his cruel death upon the cross of Calvary at the hands of a small company of implacable Pharisees. With the consent of the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate, and at the insistence of these Jews, He was crucified. John 19:14-19. It was there on the cross of His suffering that God "made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (II Corinthians 5:21).

When "certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees demanded a sign from Thee," He answered and said unto them: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a Sign, and there shall no Sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man

be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:38-40).

Within a matter of three days, Christ rose victorious over sin and death. At that time, certain men came to the sepulchre where Jesus had been laid and were met by two angels who asked, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:4,5). Triumphant over death, Jesus, standing before the eleven disciples, declared, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the City of Jerusalem, until ye be endowed with power from on high." Luke 24:49).

Turning to Acts 1:10, 11, we are told that while they looked steadfastly toward Heaven, two men stood by them in white apparel and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into Heaven."

This majestic event took place some 2000 years ago. Nevertheless, the time will come in the distant future when He who willingly laid down His life, and rose from the dead, will literally descend from Heaven to be present upon the Earth to usher in the 1,000 Year Reign of Christ. Speaking to His brethren in Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul declared, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming (Parousia) of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep (or, those who have died), for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (Thessalonians 4:15-17).

This will be the most majestic event the world has ever witnessed. At this time, a shout shall be heard accompanied with the trump of God. This trumpet will be heard world wide. Instead of the King, coming with a great multitude riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of" an ass. (Zechariah 9:9), proclaimed "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." (Matthew 21:9), this spectacular event will be witnessed world wide.

Possibly millions of redeemed men will literally leave this planet earth to be joined by those raised from the dead, "at His coming (Parousia)" (I Corinthians 15:23) to meet the descending Lord from Heaven. In that moment, "in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Even though this trumpet will initially be sounded at the inception of Divine Government, it may well be heard again as that martyred company of men in Israel join the living to meet the Lord in the air.

It is widely believed among thousands of sincere Christians that what they describe as "The Second Coming of Christ," is an imminent experience. But this is at best a false hope based on the assumption that we are now approaching the Day of the Lord. But this is not the divine scenario. For the "Second Coming," or the Parousia of Jesus Christ, does not portray Christ coming to an Earth in its present condition. As I have previously shown, it cannot and it will not happen until God in Christ has accomplished His goals as portrayed in "Eonian Times."

Psalm 110:1 makes clear that "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand (in the rights of God) until I make thine enemies thy footstool." At this very moment in time, Christ remains seated in Heaven, prepared to bring every enemy of Christ into submission. This work of God belongs to the future Day of Jesus Christ. As the result of five centuries of men having been taught by God and living to enjoy the judgments of God, we will witness a vast company of redeemed men living upon the Earth. Every purpose of God as it relates to the manifest Kingdom of God will be a fait accompli, or an accomplished goal. In the course of men having lived upon the earth under ideal conditions, we will see the vast majority of mankind bearing the imprint of the knowledge of God, as the late Otis Q. Sellers made plain in issue No. **SB133** of "Seed and Bread," all the divine actions of the Kingdom of God consummate in the Parousia. As he pointed out, the word Parousia, which was a technical term, meant a personal presence when one was officially present to perform official duties.

It is my present conviction that when, at long last, He leaves His place in Heaven and is on His way to the Earth, it will result in a Parousia that will last for a thousand years. Just immediately upon the commencement of His 1,000 year Parousia, He will initiate the Day of Vengeance. This total period of time will include the time of His Indignation spoken of in Isaiah 26:20, 21 and again in Revelation 14:9-11. This brief period will only last 30 days. It will be followed by the "Sheep and Goat Judgment," and last a mere 45 days based upon the truth revealed in Daniel 12:12 and in Matthew 25:31-46.

Although these events only total 75 days, they will lead into the 1,000 year Reign of Christ upon Earth. They await the future Parousia of Jesus Christ. They will have no impact on the lives of the present day believers in Jesus Christ who belong to Him. His triumphant Parousia will bring with it an enormous array of spiritual blessings.

The Day of Vengeance

The great Prophet Isaiah, speaking about 700 years before the birth of Christ, declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord announced me to preach (herald) good things to the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives. And the opening of the prison where they are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of ven-

geance of our God, to comfort all that mourn." (Isaiah 61:1-2).

There can be absolutely no doubt but that the public ministry performed by Jesus Christ fulfilled this proclamation to those held captive and men of broken heart. A careful reading of Matthew 4:23-24 makes plain that this ministry performed by Jesus Christ brought with it great deliverance, for those men in Israel of every form of sickness, including demon possession. This awesome work of God continued unabated throughout the three years of his public ministry. This ministry continued for an additional thirty-three years at the hand of the Apostles.

But beginning with God's present Dispensation of Grace, now some 2000 years ago, all of these majestic blessings ceased to flow in any open and manifest manner. As one looks back at the public ministry performed by our Lord and the Apostolic ministry which characterized the Acts Period, it is plain that not one act of our Lord or His commissioned men could possibly be considered to have been an act of vengeance upon men, including His most implacable enemies, the Pharisees.

How, then, are we to understand what the Prophet meant by "the Day of Vengeance of our God"? Is there possibly some act of God today that in some way could be considered to be an act of vengeance? Looking forward to the Day of the manifest kingdom of God, Moses spoke of God acting openly to avenge the lives of His people Israel. In Deuteronomy 32 we read "...I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. Rejoice, o ye nations, with His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries, and will be merciful unto His land, and to His people." (Deut. 32:41, 43).

Clearly, this is not God's predisposition toward the nations today. Neither is there an indication that "The Day of Vengeance" is imminent today. Over the past 2000 years of the history of the people we call Israel, we have witnessed a never ending attack upon the people designated by Paul as the "Israel of God." These expressions of anti-Semitism continue until this present day. Nevertheless, the time will come when God will act in vengeance against those nations who have inflicted great harm against that nation.

In the course of God's future dealings with the nations, it is important to observe that next for them is a time of universal blessing. This fact is implicit in the words of Matthew 12:18-21. As we have previously stated, the time is coming in which the nations will put their trust in God. This great truth which our Lord spoke of in Matthew 12 is directly related to the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who declared, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon Him; He shall bring forth judgment to the nations." (Isaiah 42:1). This clearly implies that God will exercise His great intelligence to guide, instruct and give positive direction to the nations. The initial impact of this work of God will drastically alter the conduct of the nations, not only toward God Himself but also

toward the nation of Israel.

This favorable attitude toward Israel will continue for about five hundred years, or until the Day of the Lord. It seems that in Satan's final act of rebellion, he once again takes action against that nation. The seven year covenant made between the future nation of Israel and the Man of Sin is broken during the middle of Daniel's seventieth week. I refer you to Chart No. 2 to provide a pictorial description of this awesome event. No sooner is this Man of Sin revealed but that God imposes upon the nations the most severe test they have ever endured.

Referring to that time, the Prophet Jeremiah declared, "For this is the Day of the Lord of Hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge His adversaries, and the sword shall devour and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood, for the Lord God of Hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates."

"But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed. O Israel; for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return and be at rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. Fear not, O Jacob, my servant, saith the Lord; for I am with thee, and I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee; but correct thee in measure, yet will I not leave thee wholly, unpunished." (Jeremiah 46:10, 27, 28).

The Prophet Micah describes this scenario as a time when, "also many nations are gathered against thee that say let her (Israel) be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." (Micah 4:11). These nations look with contempt upon the city of Jerusalem. But God does not permit them to enter or usurp their power over the City of Zion. In symbolic language, we read in Micah 5:15, "And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen (nations) such as they have not heard."

This Day of Vengeance leads into "the indignation," in which God will "punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." In view of this hour of peril, God will speak and say, "Come, my people. Enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee. Hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpassed." (Isaiah 26:20, 21).

This time of "The Vengeance of God" clearly belongs to the future Day of the Lord and is subsequent to the Purousui of Jesus Christ. It comes after mankind has lived long upon the earth and benefited from the enlightenment of all mankind. The message of Matthew 24 alludes to that time when "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who will be punished with everlasting (Eonian) destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the Glory of His Power." (II Thess. 1:7-9). Clearly, this mind-boggling event belongs to the future Day of the Lord and in the context of "The Day of Vengeance" first spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah.

The Sheep and Goat Judgment

Probably one of the most intriguing events in the history of God's dealings with the nations is that concerning the so-called Sheep and Goat judgment. The record of this highly important event is not found in any of the other three gospels.

Our understanding of Matthew 25:31-46 will be greatly impeded unless we recognize that this event cannot possibly be fulfilled until the Day of the Lord. Enclosed with this study is Chart No. 2, in which we exhibit a vast array of prophetic events that belong to the distant future. In fact, if God should intervene in the affairs of the nations by the year 2000, it would be safe to say that this judgment could not possibly occur before the year 2500 or beyond.

Furthermore, the condition of things in the Earth will be so strange that it is virtually impossible to understand the status of the nation of Israel or the nations at that time. In order to comprehend the significance of this scene, imagine yourself living in the year 1500 A.D. In fact, it was in the year 1492 that Columbus discovered the New World. This is when the Reformation began which produced the man Luther (1483-1546) and men like Calvin (1509-1564). Newton (1642-1727) developed a mechanics that unified cosmic and earthly phenomena. World population in 1650 was a mere 550,000. Today it stands at over 6.0 billion.

Think of the enormous geopolitical and social changes which have since happened in the past 500 years. Nuclear power generation, telephones, and television were unheard of in 1492. Men have prided themselves in their great achievements, yet in spite of all of their accomplishments, sin and misery have seriously eroded the quality of life upon the Earth. In fact, were it not for the promise of divine intervention, the prospects for solutions to man's physical and spiritual needs would further diminish.

How does this all relate to the sheep and goat judgment?⁷ What is the context which explains the reason and significance of this critical judgment? When will it occur? Who are involved? Why the necessity for this judgment at all? According to Dr. John F. Walvoord, Matthew 25:31-46 refers to sheep and goats, representing the saved and the unsaved. He contends that "believing gentiles are likened to sheep, and unsaved gentiles are called goats." He adds, "At the beginning of the millennium, all adults will be believers. This is supported by the judgment of the gentiles in which the unsaved ("goats") will be purged out and the saved ("sheep") will be allowed to enter the Kingdom.

With all due respect to this dispensationalist, I believe this position is not even remotely connected to the facts revealed in this passage. Dr. Mark Bailey, Vice President of Academics at the Dallas Theological Seminary, believes this Judgment of the sheep and goats of Matthew, Chapter 25, takes place at "The End of the

Age," which he defines as the end of this present age. No mention is made by this man as to the identity of these "sheep and goats." As I have clearly indicated in Chart No. 2. this event occurs shortly after the actual Parousia or the Second Coming of Christ. For this reason alone, whatever these men allege to be the purpose of this judgment, they are off by at least 500 years. This may shock some of my readers, but as I will demonstrate the fulfillment of this scenario is drastically different from that proposed by these so-called Biblical scholars.

Matthew 25:31-33 declares that "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them (nations), one from another as a shepherd divided his sheep from the goats, and He shall set the sheep on the right hand, but the goats on the left."

Two facts are immediately obvious. One is that this event will occur "when the son of man shall come in His glory." In this highly figurative language we are witness to a judicial scene in which Christ, accompanied by His holy angels (messengers) is seated upon the Throne of His Glory. To be seated simply means that God is prepared to take action and render His judgments with respect to those who are gathered before Him. Where and how this judgment will occur is irrelevant. What is important to observe is the fact that before Him, nations will stand in their representation. Conceptually, this is not unlike a convocation of the existing nations today, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. If this assembly is to physically take place, it could well be at Jerusalem. I recognize, however, that every nation in existence in that day could be dealt with directly regardless of where on earth they may be located.

Secondly, as I believe Scripture makes plain, is that those who are gathered or assembled before Him are nations. There is absolutely no justification to conclude, as some Bible teachers have done, that those assembled are individual gentiles, either saved or unsaved. This judgment is not concerned in the least with the matter of salvation. At this time of this separation process, billions of men will be living upon the entire region of this planet Earth.

At issue is a more fundamental concern which relates to the then future nation of Israel. As of the year 1999, there are almost 175 separate nations in existence upon planet earth. We pride ourselves on being a "Christian Nation," when in fact there are many other nations on the earth today whose standards of morality are equal if not higher than our own. Once God intervenes, He will make a determination as to those nations which, in His judgment, will qualify for continued existence into the Kingdom of God. It is entirely conceivable that many nations in existence today will simply cease from enjoying a national existence under the government of God. In fact, new nations may emerge upon the earth because of their willingness to put their complete trust and dependency upon the Messiah. While it may be inconceivable, the fact remains that, at that time, "He shall show judgment to the

nations He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear His Voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory, and in His name (His Reputation) shall the nations trust." (Matthew 12:18-21).

The literal fulfillment of this covenant will have a direct bearing upon the nations who will stand assembled before the Son of Man in the day when "Then shall He sit upon the throne of His Glory." (Matthew 25:31).

Recognize that at that time in God's dealings with the nation of Israel and the nations, that there will have come to pass what Matthew 24:21 describes as a "great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world."

This phrase has been interpreted to mean that this great affliction (a time of universal testing) will exceed any since the time of Creation. But this is not the meaning of the Greek phrase "ap katabolee kosmos" It has reference to a time of intense personal testing of the nations, unknown of since the founding of the order; a reference to the future kingdom of God. I refer you to my previous work in Chapter 17.

What is highly significant is that the result of this time of universal testing (not punishment), Israel becomes the target of intense personal suffering and hatred. As Matthew 24:9 makes plain, "And ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." The suffering Israel will endure at that future time is predicated upon the fact that she will have enjoyed a position of enormous physical, material and spiritual prosperity. This is certainly not the reason why the people of Israel living in the land of Palestine today are the target of bombing and terrorism.

This future scenario will occur just immediately before the Parousia of Jesus Christ. Those living in Judea at that time are instructed to "flee into the mountains." (Matthew 24:16). But how about those sons of Israel who will be found living in other countries of the world. Joel 3:2 makes plain that God will "...gather all nations and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for My people and for My heritage. Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations." This process of scattering Israel is a Satanic effort to drive that people out of their land, and in large measure it will succeed, but only for a short period of time.

At the time spoken of in Matthew 25:31-46, envision God-fearing Israelites who have been once again scattered across the nations then in existence. Christ, speaking to those sheep on His right hand (symbolic of their favoured position), says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit (a Greek word meaning to — possession or enjoy an allotment) the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation (the founding of the order)" It is these sheep who will enjoy a place of privilege as nations under

God during the millennium.

The rationale employed by the Son of Man to accord these nations such great blessing is based on the fact of their treatment of God's heritage. Israel, during this time of great tribulation. He explains this by saying. "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat (food). I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me in (you gave me a place of shelter), naked (scantly dressed), and ye clothed me. I was in prison, and ye came unto me." These nations then ask. "when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in (entertained thee)? or naked, and clothed thee?"

The answer comes directly from the lips of the King who says. "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." (Matthew 25:40). Obviously, this is no formula for receiving a blessing for nations today including the United States who provides massive foreign aid to Israel. But because those in Israel who have been accorded these basic blessings essential to life in that future day, these nations will receive a treasured position in the 1000 Year Reign of Christ.

But to those nations, who have by virtue of their national policy, in that day refused to render to these brethren of our Lord these basic blessings, they are told, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepare for the devil and his angels." This phrase "everlasting fire" is the Greek phrase, and clearly speaks of eonian destruction, or destruction flowing out of God upon these recalcitrant nations. This punishment may seem severe, but recognize that their hatred of these, "his brethren" is tantamount to their hatred of Christ. Obviously, no situation on earth today can possibly parallel this divine scenario.

To those whom are deemed righteous by God, "life eonian." No such rewards are being given to the nations upon the Earth today. We who believe today will be rewarded by eternal life, because we have believed "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name." (John 20:51). Recognition of this important truth will enable the student of the Word of God to distinguish between the future Judgment of the sheep and goats, and we who are privileged to believe in Christ in this present Dispensation of Grace.

The Doom of Satan

If there is one truth in Scripture that cannot be denied, it is the fact that Satan will one day be destroyed in the lake of fire and brimstone. From the day of his rebellion against the Most High. Satan has determined to deceive, destroy, and overthrow every institution created by God. The Prophet Ezekiel records the fact that "Thou was perfect in thy ways from the day that thou was created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise, you were filled with violence, and you sinned. Therefore I will cast thee out as profane out of the mountain of God,

and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire." (Ezekiel 28:15-16).

Who is this vile and contemptuous being other than Lucifer, who "said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds. I will be like the most high God." (Isaiah 14:12-14).

There can be no doubt but what this arrogant being determined to usurp every position and prerogative which belongs to the Son of God. This was no idle threat. From the day that "the serpent said unto woman, ye shall not surely die." (Genesis 3:4), innocent men and women have fallen prey to the devil. Jesus exposed the true character of this being by declaring, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father (source) of it." (John 8:44).

Nevertheless, the time will come when God, "will bring forth a fire from the midst of Thee, and it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee; thou shalt be a terror, and never shall thou be no more." (Ezekiel 28:18, 19). This bombastic being shall one day be destroyed and his identity forever be removed from the mind of man. Recognize that while much of this is still future, it is therefore referred to as though it were past.

We recall from Job 1:6 that "there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." It is apparent that from the days of Job that Satan was free to go and come in the earth. From this Scripture, we may conclude that Satan still had unchallenged access to the presence of God in the day when this was spoken.

This should serve as a caution to us living today, to "put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles (strategies) of the devil," even throughout this present age of grace, the believer must be prepared to war against a "spiritual host of wickedness among the heavenless." (Ephesians 6:12). Let no man be deceived; this evil being will stop at nothing to destroy the believer and the work of truth.

Recall the words from Peter, who declared, "Be sober, be watchful; your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom withstand steadfast in the faith." (I Peter 5:8, 9). From these passages, it may be concluded that the position of Satan in heaven and his freedom to move about on the earth has not changed since the days of Job. Nevertheless, we look forward to the time of the Parousia of Christ, when "There was war in heaven, and Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was there place found any more in heaven and the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth

the whole world. He was cast out and the earth and his angels were cast out with him." (Revelation 12:7-9).

That this time will surely come is clearly revealed in Luke 10:18. where we read, "And He (Jesus) said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." It must be concluded that this was a prophetic utterance on the part of Christ, rather than a statement of history. One of the most positive signs of the Parousia of Christ is seen when God will take action to stop this evil being of influence, power and authority. As promised in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." While in the Garden of Eden, Satan had enjoyed great privilege and responsibility. Owing to his great sin by setting his heart as the heart of God (Ezek. 28:6), He was effectively dethroned.

God in His infinite wisdom created Adam to whom the earth was given authority. From that day forward, Satan stopped at no end to circumvent the eventual coming of Messiah, who would deal Satan a crushing blow. In tracing the line of the seed from Eden to Calvary, we discern the constant attack of Satan upon this line of seed. This hatred became manifest when, as mentioned in I John 3:12, "Cain, who was of the wicked one, slew his brother." This act of murder is precisely what Christ referred to in John 8:44. "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father (source) of it."

However victorious Satan may have been over the first Adam, it is certain that he will meet his final sentence in the last Adam. Speaking of his triumphant work on the cross, Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of the world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out." (John 12:31). In a further testimony to the ultimate defeat of Satan, Paul says in Colossians 2:13-15, "Having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross, and having spoiled principalities, and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

Upon the divine assumption of sovereignty, Christ will score victory upon victory in annulling all those evil effects which came upon mankind because of the principle of sin and death.

As Paul declared, "By one man sin entered into the world, and so death passed upon all men, in which all have sinned." (Romans 5:12). Under divine government, the curse which came in through Adam will be removed. Every act of God will overturn every condition brought in because of the operation of the principle of sin and death.

At this present time, during God's dealings with mankind, Satan continues to be extremely active. We read in Ephesians 2:2 of those who "in time past walked according to (in harmony with) the course of this world (i.e.. the Eon of this present system), according to the prince of the power of the air, and the spirit that now worketh (operates) in the children (sons) of disobedience." This is Satan's present method of operation in this Dispensation of Grace.

In the manifest Kingdom of God, that spirit will be totally restrained. In the words of Hebrews 2:14, we read how that Jesus Christ, "Also Himself took part of the same (i.e., flesh and blood) that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

The Greek word for "destroy" is the word *katergeo*, which simply means to spoil, make useless, void, abolish and make of none effect. Think of the enormous impact this will have upon the quality of life for men privileged to live in the Kingdom of God. At that time, though Satan will remain active. He will be constantly overwhelmed by the work of God, resulting in his head (the source of all evil) being crushed.

As we come into Daniel's seventieth week, a succession of events will occur in which it becomes obvious that Satan will again become desperately active, however, not for long. At this time there will appear the Man of Sin whose nefarious activity will cause major disruption in the world. This will be possible because God will have lifted His restraints, however, it is at the conclusion of this seven year period, that, "that wicked (one) will be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His Mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His Commg (Pamnsia) is after (according) to the working of Satan with all signs and lying wonders." (II Thess. 2:8, 9).

This crushing Satanic defeat, or his doom, will be marked by the Parousia of Jesus Christ. According to Revelation 20:2, 3, the time comes, after the victorious Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19:11-16) that, "an angel comes down from heaven and he laid hold of the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and set a seal upon him, that he should receive the nations and more till the thousand years should be fulfilled and after he must be loosed a little season." (Revelation 20:23).

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I hold that this can only refer to a divine scenario in which the doom of Satan is met by the powerful Parousia of Jesus Christ. According to Revelation 20:7, 8, "Satan shall be loosed out of his prison to go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, (nations small and great) to gather them to battle the number of whom is as the sand of the sea." This vast company of men, "compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city, and fire came down from God out of Heaven and devoured them." (Revelation 20:9).

This event is quickly followed by, "the devil that deceived them being cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophets were cast and (the nations who had been deceived) shall be tormented (subjected to a severe test) to determine whether or not they should be allowed to continue or live for ever and ever" or in relation to "the eons of the eons." (Revelation 20:10).

The finality of this judicial action marks the doom of Satan. Never again will this pernicious being be allowed to corrupt or deceive mankind.

The 1,000 Year Reign of Christ

"They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4) It is my firm belief that no man can claim to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and deny the fact of a literal 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ upon the earth. This 1,000 year reign of Christ will begin with the most spectacular sign the world has ever witnessed. Matthew 24:29, 30 declares that "immediately after the Tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

This majestic event will usher in the Parousia of Jesus Christ in which He will be present upon the earth because of who He is and what He will accomplish in relation to the manifestation of the knowledge of the glory of God. At this time of his Parousia, every believer on Earth and those martyrs who have been raised from the dead will physically ascend from the earth to meet the Lord as He descends from Heaven in a moment of great honour and glory.

This fact is universally denied by those men claiming to be millennialists who reject a literal interpretation of Scripture. They insist Revelation 20:1-10 is simply a symbolic representation of the facts. Those who reject a literal interpretation of these clear statements fall generally into two broad groups. The first of these are postmillennialists. The second group are Amillennialists, who categorically deny that the one thousand year reign of Christ will ever become a reality.

The popular post-millennial view asserts that through the preaching of the Gospel, the whole world will be "Christianized" and brought to submission to the gospel before the return of Christ. They proclaim that the Kingdom of God is presently being extended in the world by the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individual men. The result, they claim, will produce a world that will be transformed, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace called the "Millennium." They contend that as the result of their preaching the character of individuals will be reflected in an uplifted social, economic, political and cultural life of mankind. They further believe that evil in all of its many forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly "Christianized" world. This is sheer fallacy.

Having now lived upon the earth for over seventy-eight years, and witnessed the horrors of World War II and the proliferation of violent men and acts of terrorism, I find absolutely no support for this false doctrine. In fact, within the past several decades all the benchmarks of a so-called improved civilization have evaporated into thin air. No man can honestly and objectively read II Timothy 3:1-5 and fail to see that we are now living in a time of great ferocity, immorality, and spiritual declination.

In fact, I believe that men, irrespective of their sincerity have fallen prey to the Satanic lie

that somehow man is capable of resolving these fundamental flaws in the nature of man. It would draw men away from the Biblical fact that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. I John 4:14. These Post-Millennialists are of the opinion that they have been charged to carry out the directives of the great commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. No believer living today can justifiably claim that he or she has received the authority from God to "make disciples of all the nations."

What Amillennialists and Post-Millennialists alike have failed to recognize is that the salvation of the world is contingent upon God assuming sovereignty in the earth. Furthermore, those majestic conditions which will prevail upon the earth during the 1,000 Year Reign of Christ are preceded in time by 500 years of universal physical, material and spiritual blessings. What many sincere men have done is to ascribe these majestic blessings which will be fulfilled during the time of divine government to the Millennium. The literal fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-8 belongs to the pre-Millennial Kingdom of God. My studies in God's Word have led me to perceive of a time in which the transcendent glories which belong to the Son of God will even excel all previous revelations which we have described as "Eonian Times." The glory of the Lord will continue to be revealed, resulting in an enormous advance in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

At the inception of the 1,000 Year Reign of Christ, billions of men living on the earth, including men who have yet to be born, will be taught by a great work of the Lord. "As it is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God." (John 6:45). Isaiah the prophet declared, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." (Isaiah 54:13).

This great advance in learning about God will continue unabated for a thousand years. The result of this great learning experience will ultimately produce a people with whom God will tabernacle here on the earth. Revelation 21:1-5. This means the center of God's activity, currently in heaven, will transfer to the earth. The Parousia of Jesus Christ, which initiates the 1,000 Year Reign of Christ, will result in a gigantic step forward in achievement of that goal. Failure to believe that God will reign upon the earth and produce a vast company of believers in Jesus Christ is tantamount to rejecting faith in the Parousia of Christ. Failure on the part of men living today to believe that God will consummate the Eon with a period of time of universal peace is a complete lack of faith. "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever." (Isaiah 9:7).

No man will be permitted to enter the millennium who "does not know God or refuses to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." II Thess. 1:8, 9. During the millennium, Satan will be bound. This clearly implies that men will be privileged to live upon the earth void of every vestige of Satanic influence and control. This does not abrogate man's responsibility to conform to the knowledge of God.

At the conclusion of the 1,000 Year Reign of Christ, Satan will be loosed (Revelation 20:7). This leads to a revolt against the Kingdom. Satan goes forth to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth. Gog and Magog (nations great and small), to gather them to battle. This leads to a final confrontation between Satan and Almighty God. **"and fire came down from God out of Heaven, and devoured them."** (Revelation 20:7-9)

This will be followed by the Great White Throne Judgment. **"The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished."** (Revelation 20:5). It marks out for us the final group to be raised.

This company should not be referred to as "the wicked dead," although all wicked men will be raised in this company. There will be many in this group who cannot be classified as having "done good," nor having "done evil," By this we mean that they have done nothing that would mark them out for the "first fruit company." I Corinthians 15:25, neither have they been guilty of those capital sins for which men will be sentenced to the second death. The fact that a man is not raised until this final resurrection does not indicate that he will be cast into the lake of fire. This is a "resurrection unto judgment," and it is not unto doom. The facts that are brought out before God's great white throne will determine the destiny of those who stand there.

Jesus said, **"Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His Voice, and they shall come forth, and they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."** (John 5:22,20). The resurrection of these two companies are separated in time by at least 1,500 years. Even if those who are raised in the final resurrection should escape the penalty of the second death, they will have failed to enjoy the blessings of "Eonian Times," and life upon the earth during the 1,000 Year Reign of Jesus Christ.

Beyond the Millennium and the Great White Throne judgment lies "The Day of God.

Peter speaks of this great day in II Peter 3:12, 13: in that glorious day mankind will enjoy **"A new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."**

The Day of God is the new heavens and new earth. It is a new world, a whole new order of life which is so far removed from anything we have ever known or experienced that we have no basis for comprehending it. At that time, God will fill the expectation, **"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."** (I Corinthians 2:9).

To Him be praise now and for evermore. Amen.

Concluding Commentary

In the course of preparing this book, I have diligently sought to present an honest Scriptural message that truly gives honour and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Chapter One, I posed a number of questions which I hold to be critical in our understanding of what God has planned for the future of mankind. We have attempted as the result of applying the Biblical principle of right division, to demonstrate that the next major program in God's dealings with mankind is a 500 year period of Divine Government.

While most men today believe that there will be a future literal Millennium, it will not begin until the Second Coming of Christ. This position is categorically denied by Amillennialists who reject a millennial kingdom in its entirety. Among men claiming to be premillennial, there is the firmly held opinion that the "Rapture of the Church" is imminent. They allege that this event will occur before the Great Tribulation, and that God's next step in dealing with the future of mankind is a time of mass destruction of human life. Even planet earth, they claim, will be caught up in a global catastrophe, rendering earth an unfit place for the dwelling place of man.

As I have sought to make plain, each of these widely diverse positions are totally in error and have created a completely false concept of what God holds out for the future of mankind. The position I have proclaimed is based on the incontrovertible fact that next on God's prophetic calendar is a period of Divine Government in which He will proactively demonstrate that He is the Savior of the World. This enormously important truth has, for centuries, been buried under a mountain of religious prejudice. As we approach the next Millennium, we are seeing a proliferation of books being written by men claiming that the Battle of Armageddon is next. This is at best a false and misleading message. The end of the world as these doomsayers proclaim is not the destruction of mankind nor is it the collapse of civilization.

The so-called "Rapture of the Church" is a mythical doctrine based on a false interpretation of I Thessalonians 4:15-17. It assumes that a select company of men, called "The Church," will be raptured, leaving the balance of mankind to face an uncertain future.

This event is not next on God's prophetic calendar. The Hope of mankind lies in the Divine Assumption of Sovereignty; not in Armageddon. Having read the works of these pro-destruction advocates, I believe that God's inerrant Word is filled with a message of positive hope for every child living in malnutrition, for every family whose lives have been destroyed by drug traffic and acts of terrorism. God's Word provides a positive message of life and world salvation.

I recognize that many of the views I have expressed in this book may sound radical and unorthodox, but I believe they are based upon the bedrock of truth. I offer this challenge to every man, woman or young person: "**Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves.**" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

The future of mankind is glorious beyond our present power of comprehension. Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live in relation to the Eon, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

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David, Milton and I are all firm believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have no church affiliation. We share in the belief that God's next step for mankind is the divine assumption of sovereignty. We believe that this Dispensation of Grace may soon end, leading mankind into the glorious era of "Eonian Times."

For the measure of the spirit of God given me in the preparation of this book, I am profoundly grateful. His Grace has proven sufficient for my need. "Now unto him that is able to go exceeding above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church (among the out-called) by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen." (In respect to all the Generations of the Eon of the Eons.) (Ephesians 3:20, 21).

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Charts

* Chart #1, Eonian Times

* Chart #2, Post-Eonian Times

[Charts prepared in collaboration with Mr. Ribbens by Valentine Design of Lompoc, California.]

