

# WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN?

By David Kroll

## PART ONE

### THE TIMING OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST:

We know Jesus Christ came nearly 2000 years ago as the promised Messiah. After His death and resurrection, He returned to his Father in heaven. After His departure, the leadership of the developing Christian community continually taught that Christ was going to return. The return of Christ was seen as an event which was near at hand. The return of Jesus Christ was viewed as an event to occur in their life time.

The expected imminency of Christ's return is clearly shown by the multiple dozens of time frame statements that are found throughout the New Testament narrative. In the letter to the Jewish Christians, the writer makes the following clear and concise statement:

**Hebrews 10:36-37:** You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay.

The Greek here is very emphatic. Bullinger, in the Companion Bible, shows the Greek phrase *mikron hoson hoson* to mean: "in a very, very little while." This statement was made nearly 2000 years ago to Jewish Christians who are being told to persevere so they will receive what was promised at a near to occur return of Jesus Christ. The return of Christ is viewed as an event that will take place in a very little while and without delay. The writer had already told these first century Christians not to abandon meeting together as they saw the day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

Apostle Paul made numerous statements that show an anticipated return of Christ within the generation that he was addressing at the time. To the Corinthian and Philippian Churches, Paul said this:

**1 Corinthians 1:7-8:** Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Philippians 3:20-21:** But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Paul speaks of eagerly awaiting the return of Christ. You don't eagerly await something that isn't going to happen for thousands of years into the future. Paul's use of the word eagerly shows us that there was expectation of a soon to occur return of Christ. Paul provides further attestation of this in two additional statements he made in his letters to these two churches.

**1 Corinthians 7:29:** What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short.

**Philippians 4:5:** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Paul is writing from the viewpoint that the time is short and the return of Christ is near at hand. In his letter to the Thessalonian Church, Paul sees the return of Christ within the context of a judgment that was soon to come upon Israel. He views these Christians as waiting for Christ to come and rescue them from the coming wrath.

**1 Thessalonians 1:8-10:** They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to

wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Paul's continues to show the first century context of the issues he is addressing by telling the Thessalonians' to not only have their spirit and soul but also their body kept blameless at the return of Christ. If the return of Christ was to be thousands of years into the future, the instruction to keep their bodies blameless at His return would have made no sense.

1 Thessalonians 5:23: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Apostle James exhorted his readers to be patient because the coming of Christ was near. Such exhortation would have been meaningless to these first century Christians if Christ's coming was to be thousands of years into the future.

James 5:7-8: Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

Apostle John taught first century Christians that many antichrists had come and it was because of this that they knew they were living in the last hour. John then exhorts his readers to continue in Christ so they will be confident and have nothing to be ashamed of at Christ's coming.

1 John 2:18: Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

1 John 2:28: And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians shows the time they were living in as the "last days" by identifying these days with the appearance of Christ in the first century. Apostle Peter does the same by associating the events on Pentecost with the "last days."

Hebrews 1:1-2: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Acts 2:17: In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

The question we must address is this: How long were these "last days" to be and what do they represent? We must also ask and answer the Question: Did such words as "soon" and "near" mean the same thing to people two thousand years ago as these words mean to us today?

The Revelation given to John by Christ begins and ends with statements that show the events discussed were about to take place. These events included the return of Christ. Remember, this prophesy was written nearly 2000 years ago.

Revelation 1:1: The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

Revelation 1:3: Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation 22:6: The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

Revelation 22:7: "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

Revelation 22:10: Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near."

Revelation 22:12: "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

Revelation 22:20: He who testifies to these says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

It is significant to note that John is told not to seal up the words of this prophecy because the time is near. This is in stark contrast to the prophet Daniel who was told to seal up the words of the prophecies given to him because they are seen as being fulfilled in the distant future.

Daniel 8:26: "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

Daniel 12:9: Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.

Later in this series we will deal with Daniel's prophecies and see how they relate to the Revelation given to John. We will now take a look at words such as soon and near and determine whether such words meant the same to people living in the first century as they do to us living in the twenty-first century

## **THE MEANING OF THE WORD SOON:**

If I were to tell you that I was coming over to visit you soon, you would understand me to mean in a short time I would be coming to see you. You would understand my use of the word soon to mean something that was going to occur in a short period of time. Is this the way people 2000 years ago used and understood the word soon? Let's take a look.

Luke 7:11: Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.

Acts 19:29: Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater.

Acts 25:4-5: Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong."

1 Corinthians 4:19: But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.

Philippians 2:19: I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

1 Peter 1:13-14: I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

It should be clear from the context of the foregoing scriptures that when the writers used the word soon in their language, it was to communicate the idea that what they were writing about was going to take place in a short period of time. When the word soon is used in reference to the return of Jesus Christ, it doesn't suddenly lose its normal meaning of something that is about to occur.

The English word soon is translated from the basic Greek word takos. In its various tenses, ( taku, takeos, takinos, takion, takus, takista) this word appears 39 times in the Greek scriptures and by context can

be seen to always refer to something that is soon to take place. The word always means with speed, quickness, swiftness and haste. Any Greek dictionary will show this. It is these Greek words that are used in the passages cited above, including all the scriptures in Revelation that reference the return of Christ.

The Greek scholar, Kurt Aland, in his comments on Revelation 22:12, says: "In the original text, the Greek word used is tachy, and does not mean 'soon,' in the sense of 'sometime,' but rather 'now,' immediately." It would appear that when someone heard the apostles speak the word takos in its various tenses, they understood it to mean something about to occur in a short time.

Where this word is used in reference to the coming of Christ, is there any linguistic reason to believe that it means something other than a soon to occur event in the first century? Is it logical to stretch soon into a period of nearly 2000 years and counting?

Some have suggested that where this word is associated with the return of Christ, it is referring to the manner in which Christ will return and means when Christ comes He will come quickly. "Soon" is felt to be descriptive of the manner in which Christ will return and not the time frame of His return. Translators at times do translate takos as quickly in the New Testament narrative. Does such usage change the meaning of the word to refer to the manner in which an event occurs as opposed to the time frame of its occurrence? Let's look at two such passages in the NIV.

**Matthew 28:7-8: "Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."**

**Luke 14:21: "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' "**

In both these passages we see that someone is being told to go and do something immediately. Is the manner of doing different from the time frame? By context it is clear that what is to be done is expected to be done in a short time frame. There is nothing here to suggest that what is to be done can be done far into the future but that when it is done it must be done quickly. There simply is no credence to the idea that this word can mean the manner in which something occurs irrespective of the time frame. Whether you translate takos and its tenses as "soon" or as "quickly," it means something that is about to occur.

There simply is no grammatical/linguistic/contextual reason to view this word as referring to the manner in which something is done irrespective of the time frame.

If I told you I was coming over to your house quickly, you would not conclude that the manner of my coming over would be different from the time frame of my coming over. You would not conclude that when I came I would come quickly as opposed to slowly. You would simply expect me to arrive in a short period of time.

Some, in their effort to avoid the obvious, have concluded that such terms as soon, short and near are relative terms and can mean one thing to one person and another thing to another person. Is this a reasonable conclusion? Look up every occurrence of the Greek words translated soon, short, and quickly. You will find by context these words mean exactly what they mean in our communication today. They simply mean something that is soon to take place.

To say that "soon" can mean something to occur hundreds or thousands of years into the future is an oxymoron, a contradiction. Therefore, when we see statements made to people living nearly 2000 years ago saying Christ is coming soon, we have to believe that those who heard or read such statements understood them to mean Christ was going to return in a short period of time from when such statements were made.

A careful review of the scriptures speaking of Christ coming soon (quickly in the King James Version) will show that the focus is on the time frame of His return and not on the manner of His return. The context is the determining factor as to how takos, in its various tenses, is to be understood. In the Revelation, Christ

told John that He was coming soon. Christ did not say to John that when He returns He would return in a quick manner. It would go without saying that when Christ returned, His manner of return would be quickly. He wouldn't return slowly. There is no reason to conclude that "soon" is addressing the manner of His return. The manner of His return is addressed in the first chapter of Revelation where Christ is seen coming with the clouds. Christ's coming in the clouds will be discussed later in this series.

Furthermore, it should be noted that in Revelation 1:1-3, Christ says that the revelation given to Him by God was for the purpose of showing His servants what must soon (*takos*) take place. The readers of this revelation are instructed to take it to heart because the time is near. The context should be obvious. Christ is speaking of events that were about to take place. He is not speaking of the manner in which they will take place once they begin to take place.

It must also be noted that the revelation is addressed to seven churches existing in the province of Asia in the first-century. It is these servants of God who are being addressed and asked to take heart. It should be evident that the events spoken of pertained to those first century Christians and therefore "soon" and "near" are time frame statements and not statements dealing with the manner in which events would take place.

## THE MEANING OF THE WORD NEAR:

The English word near is translated from the Greek word *engus*. This word, in its various tenses, generally means near or close and is so translated in many New Testament passages. Here are a few examples of how *engus* is translated:

**Matthew 26:18:** He replied, 'Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'

**John 7:2-3:** But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do.'

**Acts 9:38:** Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, 'Please come at once!'

The context of the above scriptural passages show how the Greek word *engus* was commonly used in the first-century. It should be apparent that this Greek word meant "near" to first century Christians in the same manner as it means near to us today. It simply means something close at hand.

As with the Greek word *takos*, the context will dictate how *engus* is to be understood. In the epistle written by James, the apostle is addressing the twelve tribes scattered among the nations (James 1:1). In chapter 5 he speaks of the last days and exhorts his readers to be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near (James 5:7-9). He concludes this section of his letter by saying "the judge is standing at the door."

Some have suggested that James is saying that the coming of the Lord is certain or guaranteed as certainty is a meaning associated with certain tenses of the Greek *engus*. The context of this letter does not support such a conclusion. The context of this letter is obvious from the start. James is addressing the twelve tribes of Israel. He is not addressing tribes of Israel living thousands of years into the future. He is addressing his contemporaries living in the first century. He is telling first-century Israelites to be patient and stand firm because the coming of the Lord is near (Greek *engus*). James said the judge was standing at the door. How would that be relevant to Israelites living beyond the first century?

## CONCLUSION OF PART ONE:

When we read the letters that are found in the New Testament, we are in essence reading someone else's mail. The letters written by the apostles were addressed to first century congregations of the Christian Church. When Paul wrote to the Christians attending the Church at Corinth, and says to them "the time is short," it would be reasonable to conclude Paul meant the time is short. It would also be reasonable to believe that the Corinthian Church members understood Paul to mean the time is short. The question is, what time that is short is Paul referring to? This question will be answered as we proceed with our investigation.

The last book of the Bible contains a revelation of future events. The question that we must ask is how future were these events to be? The apostle John was instructed to write about what he was soon to see, and direct this information to seven churches that Church history shows physically existed at the time this message was given. The instruction given in association with this revelation is that those who read it should take it to heart because the time is near.

Revelation 1:4: John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne.

Revelation 1:10-11: On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.'

Revelation 1:1-3: The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

It should be evident from the context that John was sending the message of the revelation to his contemporaries who made up the congregations of seven different Christian Churches that existed at the time he wrote. It should also be evident from the narrative that the purpose of the revelation was to show the servants of Jesus Christ what was soon to take place and that the time was near for these things to take place. John is not addressing people living in the 2nd, 3rd or 4th centuries. He is not addressing those of us living in the 21st century. John is addressing those living in the first century and instructing them about what would soon take place.

The revelation given to John is filled with a great deal of apocalyptic symbolism. That is why this message is often referred to as the Apocalypse. Apocalyptic language uses symbols to represent the real thing. This method of writing is found throughout the prophetic scriptures. We find Christ using this method of speaking in what is commonly referred to as the Olivet Discourse as found recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. It is here in this discourse that we will discover what time is being referred to in the above quoted passages. In part two of this series we will examine the Olivet Discourse as recorded in the 24th chapter of Matthew.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART TWO

In part one, we reviewed a number of statements made by the writers of the New Testament narrative that show a first century expectation that Jesus Christ was about to return as He had promised. Why did the leadership of the first century Christian community teach an imminent coming of Jesus Christ?

They taught what they taught because of what Christ had taught them. Christ taught his disciples that he would return in their life time. This becomes very clear upon a careful review of what Christ said in the Olivet Discourse and a number of other statements He made during His ministry. Let's begin with the Olivet Discourse as recorded in Matthew 24.

### MATTHEW 24:

In order to establish the context for Matthew 24, we need to begin in Matthew 21:23, where we find Jesus entering the temple courts and beginning to teach the people. Here Christ begins to address the religious leaders who had gathered to hear Him and tells them that tax collectors and prostitutes would enter the Kingdom of God ahead of them (Matthew 21:28-32). We find Christ teaching in parables and showing how the religious leaders of His day were rejecting Him and would kill Him. The result would be that the Kingdom would be given to another people (Matthew 21:33-45). It should be noted that in verse 43, Christ speaks of the Kingdom as presently available, and not something only available way off in the future. He speaks of the Kingdom being taken away from the religious leaders and their followers, and given to someone else.

In Matthew 22, we have the parable of the wedding banquet. In what appears to be another reference to the Jews, Christ shows the religious leaders and their followers rejecting Him and mistreating and killing some of His servants. Christ is then seen as destroying them and burning their city. Others, who were not initially invited, are now invited to replace the Jews (Matthew 22:1-10). Keep these parables in mind as we move through this material.

Christ continues to speak to the people while at the temple and begins to deride the Pharisees because of their attitudes and behavior (Matthew 23:33-34). He tells them plainly, that *upon them* would come all the righteous blood of those who had gone before (Matthew 23:35-36). He also tells them that their house will be left desolate (Matthew 23:37-38). "Their house" was a common designation for the temple standing in Jerusalem.

Christ is addressing the religious leaders of His day and explaining how and when they are going to be judged. When will this judgment take place?

After this discourse with the Pharisees, we find Jesus leaving the temple and walking away. Some of His disciples come up to Him and begin showing Him the magnificent buildings of the temple. The disciples hear Christ say that these buildings will be totally destroyed (Matthew 24:1-2, Mark 13:1-2, Luke 21:5-6). A little later, as Christ is sitting on the Mount of Olives, we hear some of his disciples ask Him when these things will take place and what will be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age (Matthew 24:3).

Remember, just a few hours earlier, Christ was telling the people that judgment would come upon their generation and their house would be left unto them desolate. Now in private He is saying that the temple will be destroyed. When would the temple be destroyed? The things that were to take place that the disciples were asking about, relate back to their discussion about the destruction of the temple. The timing of that destruction is being asked about in the same breath as the timing of Christ's coming and the end of the age.

When was this destruction to take place and what connection does it have to the coming of Christ and the end of the age? What end of what age is being addressed?

## **THE APPEARING OF FALSE CHRISTS:**

When the disciples asked Christ when these things would take place and what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age, He begins His answer by saying “Watch out that no one deceives you” (Matthew 24:4). The “you” Christ is addressing are His disciples He was speaking to at the time. Christ continues, “For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:5). Since He is directing these comments to His disciples, was Christ saying that the appearing of false christs was something they, the disciples, would have to deal with? Was this prophecy about false christs fulfilled during the lifetime of the men Christ was addressing?

In Acts 8:9-10, we hear about a man called Simon, identified by historians as Simon Magus, a man who developed a great following during the time of the apostles. Simon claimed to be the great power of God and was able to perform miracles and deceive many people. The first-century historian, Josephus, wrote about Theudas, who, twelve years after the death of Christ, claimed to be a great prophet and deceived a great multitude into believing he could divide the Jordan River. Many of his followers were killed and Theudas was beheaded. Both Josephus and the Church historian Eusebius wrote about the messianic Egyptian aspirant who led 30,000 people to the Mount of Olives and the desert, proclaiming that he would cause the walls of Jerusalem to be destroyed. About two years later the Roman authorities appear to have thought that the apostle Paul was this Egyptian (Acts 21: 37-38).

Origen spoke of a certain first-century wonder-worker named Dositheus, who claimed he was the Christ foretold by Moses. In Acts 13:6, we read about the false prophet Bar-Jesus. In his *Antiquities*, Josephus wrote that, “so many false christs began to appear among the Jews of Judea during the time of the early Church that hardly a day went by that the Roman procurator did not put some of them to death.” Josephus further states that, “the country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false messiahs, and impostors who deluded the people with promises of great events.”

The Jews of the first century were expecting the prophesied Messiah to appear at any moment. They knew from their understanding of Old Testament prophecies the time was at hand for the Messiah to appear. Many impostors and opportunists came on the scene in the first century claiming to be the Messiah. The Jewish leadership, by and large, rejected Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah because he didn’t fit their paradigm of a conquering king that would destroy the Romans and restore the Davidic Kingdom.

The apostle Peter spoke about false teachers among the people in 2 Peter 2:1. John, in his first letter, spoke of many false prophets having gone out into the world (1 John 4:1). Paul spoke of false apostles and deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13). Paul, in his letter to Titus, told of whole households turning away from the truth because of the influence of false teachers (Titus 1:10-16).

Remember, what was said here by the apostles was about people that were alive at that time. The context is the first century. The letters from the apostles warning of false prophets were addressed to first-century Christians. There is no reason to believe that people living hundreds or thousands of years into the future are being addressed here. We are reading someone else’s mail when we read these letters. This mail is being addressed to first century Christians regarding first century issues. The particular issue involved here is the matter of false teachers, apostles and false Messiahs appearing in the first century.

Christ addressed the matter of impostors claiming they were the promised Messiah as part of a whole continuum of events that would precede the temple's destruction, His coming and the end of the age. Both scriptural and secular histories of the time show that false Messiahs did appear and did deceive many as Christ said they would.

## **WARS FAMINES AND EARTHQUAKES:**

Christ continued to answer His disciples by saying, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you be not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:6-8). Again, keep in mind that Christ is talking to His disciples and telling them *what they* should be looking for and *what they* should be aware of, as to the questions they had asked him.

There were many wars and rumors of wars during the time between Christ and the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in the war of A.D. 66 to 73. The Roman historian Tacitus instructs concerning these years, that there were three civil wars, and a number of additional foreign wars involving the Roman Empire. Tacitus used such expressions as "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "insurrections in Gaul," "intrigues among the Parthians," "the war in Britain," "war in Armenia," etc. Josephus writes that in A.D. 40 there was a disturbance in Mesopotamia, which caused the deaths of more than 50,000 people. In A.D. 49 a tumult at Jerusalem at the time of the Passover resulted in over 10,000 deaths. In Caesarea, a local altercation resulted in 20,000 Jews being killed. An uprising in Syria led to the death of over 20,000 Jews. At Scythopolis, over 13,000 were killed. A war in Alexandria took 50,000 lives and at Damascus, 10,000 were killed in an hour in a war that broke out there.

A great famine broke out during the reign of Claudius Caesar, A.D. 41 to 54. Both Josephus and Eusebius spoke of this famine in their histories. Agabus prophesied of this famine as recorded in Acts 11:28. Tacitus spoke of a failure in the crops. Eusebius wrote of famines during this time in Rome and Greece. Suetonius wrote of pestilence at Rome in the days of Nero wherein 30,000 persons died. Josephus records that pestilence raged in Babylonia in A.D. 40. Tacitus spoke of pestilences in Italy in A.D. 66.

Christ said there would be earthquakes. Earthquakes did occur in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Rome, Laodicea, Judea, Colosse and a number of other cities. Tacitus writes of twelve populous cities of Asia falling in ruins from an earthquake. Seneca, writing in A.D. 58 spoke of earthquakes in Asia, Achaea, Syria, Macedonia and Cyprus. Pompeii was greatly damaged by an earthquake in A.D. 63.

Remember, all this prophecy about wars, famines and earthquakes is being told to these disciples in answer to their question about "when will these things be?" The specific "these things" that generated their question in the first place was Christ's statement about the destruction of the temple. It is apparent that these disciples understood this destruction to be in the context of the coming of Christ and the end of the age. Christ had, just a few hours earlier; spoke of coming judgement upon Israel and the leaving desolate of their house, the temple. It would appear logical to conclude that the events that Christ is now outlining to His disciples are events that would precede the destruction the disciples were asking about.

## **PERSECUTIONS:**

Christ continues to outline what must happen before the destruction of the temple can come to pass. "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me" (Matthew 24:9). Persecutions against Christians began shortly after Christ ascended to be with the Father. Stephen became the first martyr (Acts 7:59-60). In Acts 8, we find recorded that a great

persecution broke out against the Church at Jerusalem. In Mark 13:9, Christ is recorded as having said to His disciples, “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”

All you have to do is read through the book of Acts to see this fulfilled. Paul received 39 stripes on five separate occasions. The apostle James was killed. Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin and flogged. Peter was thrown into prison. Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. The Jews tried to kill Paul many times. Paul appeared before Governor Felix and Governor Festus of Caesarea, as well as King Agrippa. Indications are that Paul appeared before the Roman Caesar as well. Recall the parable of the wedding banquet, where Christ spoke of His servants being mistreated and killed (Matthew 22:5-7).

In addition to the Jewish persecutions against the Christians, many Christians were put to death by the Roman government under Nero. Many were thrown to animals in the arena while others were made to be human torches to light up Nero’s imperial gardens. This truly was a time of great tribulation for the Church. Many were unable to stand up to the persecution.

**Matthew 24:10-13: At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.**

This was a time of great persecution for the Christians. We see in Matthew 10 that Christ predicted this persecution for His followers. Here He commissions the twelve to go to the lost sheep of Israel and preach that the kingdom of heaven is near. Christ then gives the twelve rather extensive instructions as to what they can expect in carrying out their commission.

**Matthew 10:17-19: Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say.**

**Matthew 10:21-23: Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.**

What end and what coming is Christ referring to in these passages? When did the disciples begin to take the gospel to the cities of Israel? When did they experience the kind of persecutions predicted by Christ? There is no record of this happening to any extent while Christ was still with them. While the twelve, like the 70, were sent out to preach the Kingdom message and heal the sick (Luke 9 and 10), there is no record of the disciples experiencing the persecutions described here until after the ascension. After Christ ascended to be with the Father, the disciples began to preach the gospel throughout Israel, and later on to the known world of that time. They suffered greatly for their efforts as the book of Acts and secular historical documents clearly show. Note how similar language in the Olivet Discourse supports the time frame for when the twelve would be fulfilling the commission Christ gave them.

**Matthew 24:9: Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. Verse 13: but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.**

Mark 13:9: You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

Luke 21:12-13: But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them.

The Olivet Discourse relates to a time after the ascension. It is then that the persecutions described in Matthew 10 and in the Olivet Discourse occurred. When Christ made the profound statement, “I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (Matthew 10:23), He was not talking about coming back to them in some way prior to His ascension. These persecutions happened after His ascension. The coming Christ was referring to had to be at some point after His ascension. It would be a coming that would occur after his followers had experienced the persecutions He described.

Remember that Christ is speaking specifically to His twelve disciples. It is to them that this commission is given. Since many of the dynamics of this commission are related to what the book of Acts clearly shows occurred after the ascension, the coming spoken of here occurred after the ascension but before the twelve would finish going through the cities of Israel. Therefore, this coming would have to occur during the lifetime of these disciples. This is a first-century context. This coming relates to the coming that was to occur at the end of the age spoken of in the Olivet Discourse. Christ said in Matthew 24:13 that those who endured to the end would be saved. What end was He speaking of? Our focus, as we go along here, will be to identify what end Christ was addressing, and what end of the age the disciples were asking about.

## Preaching the Gospel to the Nations:

Christ continues to respond to the disciple’s question about the time of His coming and the end of the age by identifying a specific activity that would have to be completed before these events could take place.

Matthew 24:14: And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Most Christians reading this statement in Matthew assume this preaching of the gospel to the world hasn’t happened yet and, therefore, place “the end” as something to occur in our future. It is vitally important, however, that we stay within the context of Christ’s answer to the disciples’ questions. We have already seen that Christ’s description of false christs, wars, famines, earthquakes and persecutions were all events that did take place during the lifetime of those very disciples Christ was addressing. The three accounts of the Olivet Discourse indicate that what is going to happen to the temple is the primary concern of the disciples. The time frame that Christ is discussing is the time frame of the temple’s destruction. We see this clearly identified in the following scriptures.

Matthew 24:1-3: Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ‘Do you see all these things?’ he asked. ‘I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’

Mark 13:1-4: As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’ ‘Do you see all these great buildings?’ replied Jesus. ‘Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things

happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?

Luke 21:5-7: Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 'As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.' 'Teacher,' they asked, 'when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?'

The writers of the Gospels record the disciple's concern about when the temple would be destroyed and what sign there would be to alert them to this event. Christ gives the disciples a marker as to when the end would occur. Christ says that the gospel would be preached to all the world and then the end would come. Is the end that Christ speaks of going to occur at the same time as the destruction of the temple? Is the coming of Christ associated with the destruction of the temple? Are all three of these events, Christ's coming, the temple's destruction, and the end, to occur at the same time? Or is there a separation of time between them? Is Christ identifying more than one coming in the Olivet Discourse? History shows that the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.

Could the gospel have been preached to the whole world by A.D. 70? What did the whole world mean to Christ and the apostles? The civilized world was the Roman Empire of the first century. Is there evidence that the gospel was preached to the known world of the first century? On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, three thousand were converted and the indication is that many were from foreign lands. Acts 2:5 clearly reveals there were staying at Jerusalem, Jews from every nation under heaven. It would naturally follow that these people would take the good news back with them to every nation under heaven. When the persecution came against the church as a result of the stoning of Stephen, it is written that the believers were scattered and preached the word wherever they went (Acts 8:4). Philip baptized the Ethiopian official who most likely returned to Africa and took the gospel with him. Peter took the gospel to the Gentiles, starting with the conversion of Cornelius. Paul took the gospel to much of the Gentile world.

Paul opens his letter to the Romans by declaring that their faith was being spoken of all over the world (Rom. 1:8). By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, he was saying that the gospel was known all over the world (Col. 1:6), and had been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (Col. 1:23). In writing about England, the historian Neuton wrote, "There is absolute certainty that Christianity was planted in this country in the days of the apostles, before the destruction of Jerusalem." Eusebius and Theodoret wrote that the apostles preached the gospel to the entire world including the Britannic Isles. It must be remembered that the world of the apostles was not the world of today. Their world was the Roman Empire and all that it controlled.

The biblical scriptures and secular history give attestation to the gospel being preached to the known world of the first century. Christ said the end would come when this was accomplished. What end is Christ speaking of? We see Christ speaking of the end of the age just before His ascension. Matthew 28:19-20: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Here we see Christ instructing His disciples to make disciples of all nations. This would be akin to preaching the gospel to all nations. We see the gospel reaching the whole world in the first century as Paul confirms. This was accomplished before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. The end of the age was about to arrive.

## **THE END OF THE AGE:**

The Greek word translated as "age" in the above quoted passages is *aion*. This Greek word appears 165 times in the New Testament and is variously translated as "world," "age" and "ever." The Greek word for

age in Matthew 24:3, is *aion*. This Greek word has as its basic meaning, a segment of time. It can relate to a long period of time or a short period of time. Context must determine which. (See, Arndt, Gingrich, Bauer's *Greek - English Lexicon*). Context is critical to understanding the meaning of this word in any one particular scriptural narrative.

The world as created (Greek, *kosmos*), or the world as inhabited (Greek, *oikoumene*), is not being addressed here (See Appendix 129 of Bullinger's *Companion Bible* for an explanation of *aion*, *kosmos* and *oikoumene*). The Greek *aion* does not define the physical world or that which makes up the physical world. *Aion* defines time frames and in the New Testament this word is seen to define different time frames. For example, "this age" is sometimes contrasted with the "age to come."

Mark 10:29-30: I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much *in this present age* (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields and with them, persecutions) and *in the age to come*, eternal life.

The phrase "end of the age," where *aion* is translated as age, appears six times in the NIV translation of the New Testament Scripture. It appears three times in Matthew 13. It appears once in Matthew 24 and 28 as quoted above. It also appears once in Hebrews 9. Some translations, such as the KJV, translate *aion* as world in these passages. Such translation is misleading as it can lead the reader to think in terms of the physical world coming to an end. *Aion* does not define the physical world. *Aion* defines time frames.

Matthew 13:36-43: His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.' He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, (Greek for world is *kosmos*) and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age,(aion ) and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age (aion). The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Matthew 13:47-50: Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age (*aion*) The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Hebrews 9:26: Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world (Greek *kosmos*). But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Christ, in Matthew's narrative, identifies the "end of the age" as a time when the righteous are separated from the wicked and the righteous will "shine like the sun." The wicked, on the other hand, are shown to be weeping and gnashing their teeth. The writer of Hebrews identifies the end of the ages as the time of Christ's sacrifice to do away with sin. We know that was in the first century. In Daniel 12, the prophet Daniel speaks of the time of the end when the righteous and wicked are judged and the righteous shine like the brightness of the heavens. This is the same language that Christ used in Matthew 13. Daniel shows this to be a time of great distress. Daniel also speaks of these things happening when the power of the holy people is broken and when the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up.

Daniel 12:1: At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.

Daniel 12:5-7: Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, 'How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?' The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, 'It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.'

Daniel 12:11: From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

When do we find this time of great distress occurring? When is the power of the holy people finally broken? When is the daily sacrifice abolished and the abomination that causes desolation set up? Let's return to the Olivet Discourse for the answers to these questions. We will see that the end of the age spoken of by Christ is the same as the time of the end spoken of by Daniel.

After saying the gospel would be preached in all the world and then the end would come, Christ continues in verse 15 and 16 of Matthew 24, to say, "So when you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Mark's gospel says it this way: "When you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Mark 13:14). Luke says, "When you see *Jerusalem surrounded by armies*, you will know that its *desolation* is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Luke 21:20-21). Keep in mind that all this talk about the abomination that causes desolation, armies surrounding Jerusalem, the inhabitants being told to flee to the mountains, is all in the context of Christ's answering the disciple's original question. When will the temple be destroyed? What will be the sign of this happening? When will Christ come and the end of the age occur?

In Matthew 24, Christ told the disciples to flee when they see the abomination that causes desolation. History shows that they did exactly this. The Christians left Jerusalem and fled to Pella between A.D. 66 and 70. Let's continue in Luke's account of this event. Christ said, "Let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written" (Luke 21:21-22). What an all-inclusive statement that is. Continuing with this passage, Christ said,

Luke 21:23-24: How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers. There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken prisoners to all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled.

In Matthew's account of this event, Christ is quoted as saying,

Matthew 24:17-22: Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of his house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers. Pray that your flight will not take place in the winter or on the Sabbath day. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

Remember, Daniel spoke of a great distress at the time of the end and of the abomination that causes desolation. We see Christ referring to these same events relative to Jerusalem. Unless we are willing to completely ignore the context of the Olivet Discourse and to whom it was addressed, it should be evident that the great distress mentioned here is that which was to shortly come upon the people of Jerusalem and Judea. This distress resulted in the destruction of the temple, the city of Jerusalem; much of Judea, and great suffering and loss of life for over a million people.

In part three of this series we will provide the details as to how this prophecy of Jesus Christ was fulfilled in the first century.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART THREE

In part two of this series, we saw that several of Christ's disciples were very concerned about the statements Jesus made in regard to the temple being destroyed. It is evident by their questioning about when this destruction would take place that they were seeing this destruction within a time frame that also included Christ coming and the end of the age. Christ answers their concerns by providing an overview of events that would take place leading up to what He revealed as "the time of punishment in fulfillment of *all that has been written*" (Luke 21:21-22).

History shows that the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. This was a catastrophic destruction that resulted in Jerusalem and much of the land of Israel being leveled. It was truly a time of great tribulation and judgement as had been prophesied by Christ and the Old Testament prophets. The war with Rome began in October of A.D. 66 and ended in June of A. D. 73.

The historian Josephus was an eyewitness to the events that led to the destruction of the temple and the Jewish society. Josephus, who was a Jew, was taken prisoner in the battle of Jotapata and then gave himself up to the Romans. He predicted that Vespasian and Titus would become emperors of Rome after Nero. Vespasian took a liking to him and Josephus later became a translator for Titus. After the war, Josephus spent five years writing his history of the Jewish people.

It would take many pages of narrative to describe the events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. I will try to cite enough highlights to fully demonstrate the historical evidence for fulfillment of Christ's Olivet prophecy in the events of the Roman-Jewish War from A.D. 66 to 73.

### **THE ROMAN-JEWISH WAR:**

The first stage of the war directly involving Jerusalem was when Jewish Zealots rebelled against the Romans and Nero sent Cestius Gallus against the city in October of A. D. 66. Several hundred thousand Jews had already been killed in battle with the Romans in Alexandria, Egypt, Caesarea and a number of other locations within the Roman Empire. In Jerusalem the various political/religious parties were doing battle with each other with many thousands being killed. Many Jews were killed by fellow Jews before the Romans ever entered Judea and the city of Jerusalem. Josephus writes that, "it was common to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied. The terror that was upon all the people was so great, that no one had courage enough to weep openly for the dead man that was related to him, or bury him." Josephus relates how the Jews, who were fighting each other, "omitted no method of torment or barbarity." Josephus says that the Jews did not suffer from the Romans anything worse than they made each other to suffer. In Matthew 12:43-45, Christ had likened that generation to a man possessed of demons. In Luke 23:28-31, Christ told the women who were weeping for Him, as He was being led to be crucified, not to weep for Him but to weep for themselves because of what was to come upon them.

Cestius Gallus attacked Jerusalem and got as far as the walls of the city. Then for some unknown reason he withdrew, suffering heavy losses in retreat. In the lull between his retreat and the next Roman attack, the Jewish zealots dug in, thinking that their messiah would come to save them. It was during this time the Christian community escaped Jerusalem by crossing the Jordan

and fleeing to the mountain region of Pella in Decapolis. Christ had told the disciples to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath or in the winter. On the Sabbath the gates of the city would have been closed making it difficult to escape and Jewish zealots would have prevented their escape with armed force. Winter weather would also have made their flight more difficult. Winter is the rainy season in Israel, and it even snows at times.

In February of A.D. 67, Nero sent General Vespasian to Judea and by October, Galilee is subdued. Vespasian continues to drive toward Jerusalem when he receives word of Nero's suicide, whereupon he temporarily suspends operations in Judea, waiting for word from Rome. A man named Galba becomes emperor but is soon murdered by Otho who proclaims himself emperor, but in short order commits suicide and is replaced as emperor by his rival Vitellius. Vitellius gets himself beheaded, and at this point, General Vespasian returns to Rome and is declared emperor.

Because of the events in Rome, there is a respite for the Jews during which time they shore up their forces and further conclude that their messiah will come to save them. It is also during this period of time that many false messiahs appear on the scene claiming to be a savior to the Jews. And so it was that Christ warned of this very thing as he continues in the Olivet prophecy by saying,

**Matthew 24:23-25: At that time if anyone says to you, look, here is Christ, or, there He is, do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. See I have told you ahead of time.**

Remember that Christ is addressing his disciples that were there with Him at the time. He is telling them ahead of time what was soon to occur. Christ goes on to say,

**Matthew 24:26-28: So if anyone tells you, 'There he is,' out in the desert, do not go out; or 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lighting comes from the east and flashes to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.**

Christ makes the point that His coming will not be in secret but very obvious. In *An exposition of the New Testament*, John Gill refers to false christs, "It was usual for these imposters to lead their followers into deserts, pretending to work wonders in such solitary places." Gill then goes on to tell about Simon, the son of Giora, who collected together many thousands in the mountains and deserts of Judea and one named Jonathan who led great multitudes into the desert. Josephus tells of many false messiahs that appeared on the scene during this period of time. The Jews felt that the messiah would appear to save them from the Roman armies. Therefore, many opportunists appeared, claiming to be that messiah who would save the people.

Christ now says something very interesting, "Immediately" after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give her light. The stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29). Here Christ dates the period he is talking about by saying, "Immediately (Greek *enteos*, which means "at once," or "soon," "forthwith," etc.) after the distress of those days." What days? If we are to follow the flow of His prophecy and the history of the time, the days Christ is talking about are those days he has just described. The days Christ is talking about would be when armies would come against Jerusalem. These same days would include false prophets arriving on the scene. These same days would be days of famine and

accompanying pestilence and the virtual dissolution of Jewish society. All these events happened in Judea in the first century leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. It would be immediately after these events that the heavenly signs would appear.

In a book written in 1838 entitled, *The Pilgrim Soul*, the author, John Philip Schabalie, wrote; “Though corpses lay so thick in the street, the besieged had for some time thrown them over the walls in such numbers, as filled the ditches, to breed a pestilence in the Roman army. Out of only one gate were carried 115,000 corpses, exclusive of those thrown over the walls, of which every day saw a great number.”

These were the days that Christ was referring to in Matthew 24:21 when He said, “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.” Daniel speaks of such a distress in his prophecy dealing with the time of the end. What end is being referred to and what does Christ mean by the various signs in the sun, moon and stars? Is this to be taken literally or is this typical apocalyptic language that is so commonly used by the prophets? How did the Old Testament prophets use such phraseology? Let’s take a look! In Isaiah 13:9-10, in prophesying the destruction against Babylon, Isaiah writes,

"See, the day of the Lord is coming, a cruel day with fierce anger, to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.”

In prophesying against Egypt, Ezekiel makes the following statements,

**Ezekiel 32:7-8: When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars. I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you. I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign Lord.**

In a prophecy against Edom, Isaiah says the following: “all the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll. All the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine” (Isaiah 34:4).

Did the entire starry host actually fall? Was the sky actually rolled up like a scroll? Of course not. This is a sample of the hundreds of these types of apocalyptic utterances found throughout the scriptures. There is every scriptural reason to believe that Christ is using the same apocalyptic language so common to the prophets. Apocalyptic language uses a lot of hyperbole (rhetorical exaggeration) in describing the actions of God’s intervention in the affairs of men. Christ was just continuing this prophetic method of expression. This is not different from saying, “It’s raining cats and dogs.” Obviously it doesn’t rain cats and dogs. This is just an expression to emphasize that it is raining hard. We use these kinds of expressions all the time. Now let’s see what happens next.

**Matthew 24:30: At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.**

Is the coming of Christ on clouds to be taken literally? How is this expression used in scripture? In Isaiah 19:1, in a prophecy concerning Egypt, it is written, "See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt." In Psalm 18:9, David, in a psalm of praise to God for deliverance from his enemies, writes, "He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under His feet." In another psalm of praise, David speaks of God in this manner: "He makes the clouds His chariot and rides on the wings of the wind" (Psalm 104:3). Coming in the clouds, riding on the wings of the wind, like many other expressions concerning the activity of God in the scriptures, are simply expressions of God's magnitude of power and presence as He intervenes in the affairs of men. These are not literal expressions of how God appears.

Let's now return to the actual history of what transpired in Judea to see how history corresponds to the Olivet prophecy. After being named Emperor, Vespasian turned the war in Judea over to his son, Titus, who entered Jerusalem in the spring of A.D. 70. The Roman army breached the first and second walls of the city and mass executions of escapees began with up to 500 crucifixions per day outside the city walls. As the siege continued, famine set in and hundreds of thousands die of starvation, pestilence and disease. Cannibalism was reported throughout the city. There was now no way of escape, as the Romans built an earthen wall around the city as prophesied by Christ:

**Luke 19:43-44: The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.**

In August of A.D. 70 the Romans entered the temple grounds and set fire to the temple and totally destroyed it. Josephus wrote, "While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain." Nearly 100,000 Jews were taken captive and sold into slavery and over one million people perished during the siege of Jerusalem. This number included many thousands who had come to Jerusalem from other areas and nations to keep the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread.

It is interesting to note that in all the wars that our nation has been involved in, beginning with the revolutionary war and going through all the Indian wars, civil war, world wars, Korea, Vietnam, etc., it is estimated that between one and one-half million and two million Americans have been killed. This spans a period of over 200 years. In just a period of four to five years a million people perished in the siege of Jerusalem. In his history of the Jews, Josephus wrote: "I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly, that neither did any other city suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world."

In a work entitled, *The Early Days of Christianity*, written in 1882 by F.F. Farrar, the author wrote,

"Fanatically relying on the visible manifestation of Jehovah, while they were infamously violating all His laws, the Zealots rejected with insult every offer of terms. At last Titus drew a line of circumvallation round the doomed city, and began to crucify all the deserters who fled from him.

The incidents of famine, which then fell on the besieged, are among the most horrible in human literature. The corpses bred pestilence. Whole houses were filled with unburied families of the dead. Mothers slew and devoured their own children. Hunger, rage, despair, and madness seized the city. It became a cage of furious madmen, a city of howling wild beasts, and of cannibals,—a hell. Disease and slaughter ruthlessly accomplished their work. At last, amid shrieks and flames, and suicide and massacre, the temple was taken and reduced to ashes. The great altar of sacrifice was heaped with the slain. The courts of the temple swam deep in blood. Six thousand miserable women and children sank with a wild cry of terror amid the blazing ruins of the cloisters. Romans adorned the insignia of their legions on the place where the holiest had stood."

This account by the historian F.F. Farrar supports well the statements of both Christ and Daniel about this being a time of great distress. Remember Christ said that this generation was like a man possessed of demons. Now Christ gives an object lesson and makes a very telling statement.

**Matthew 24:32-34: Now learn the lesson of the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. *I tell you the truth; this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.***

Here Christ uses an object lesson to demonstrate to His disciples that when they see come to pass all the things He had just predicted; the wars, famines, earthquakes, the gospel going to the world, etc., His coming would be at hand. Christ said just as they would know that summer is near when they see leaves come out on a fig tree, so they would know that the end was about to occur when they see all these events taking place. Christ then dates the events He is discussing by saying that the generation He was addressing would not pass until all the things He was speaking of would come to pass. All "these things" included His return (verse 30). What generation is Christ addressing? To what time was He dating these events?

## **WHAT GENERATION IS CHRIST ADDRESSING?**

To arrive at a scriptural understanding of what Christ meant by "this generation," let us first look at the Greek word *genea* which is translated "generation" in Matthew 24:34, and many other New Testament scriptures. In the Arndt, Gingrich and Bauer Greek lexicon, *genea* is shown to have the general meaning of, "the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time." The meaning can apply to all those descended from a common ancestor. Thayer's Greek lexicon provides similar meaning by defining *genea* as "that which has been begotten of the same stock, all having similar characteristics." *Genea* can also refer to a particular age or time.

It is interesting to note that *genea* is not defined as a specific number of years but relates to a group of people living at the same time, whereas our English usage tends more toward assigning a specific number of years to the word. Webster shows it to be around 30 years or the period of time between the birth of one generation and the birth of another generation.

Now let's look at how *genea* is used in context in the New Testament Scripture involving the sayings of Christ. In Matthew 23:34-36, in speaking to the Pharisees, Christ said that all the righteous blood that has been shed on the earth would "come upon this generation," referring to the generation of Pharisees He was addressing at the time. In Matthew 16:1-4 the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Christ and asked for a sign. Christ addressed them as a wicked and adulterous generation (GR. *genea*). In Matthew 11:11-19, Christ is speaking about Himself and John the Baptist in relation to their generation (same Greek word). In Luke 17:25, Christ speaks of having to suffer many things of "this generation," referring to the generation of His time (same Greek word).

In every place where the authors of the New Testament show Christ using the word which they translated into the Greek *genea*, the context shows Christ using this word to refer to the people He was addressing at the time. Therefore, there is no scriptural justification to say that Christ is using *genea* in some other way in Matthew 24:34. Christ did not say *that* generation or some other generation, He said *this* generation. To try and make this saying of Christ apply to a generation far out into the future is totally inconsistent and incompatible with the manner in which He used this word in His various conversations as recorded in the New Testament. It may be helpful to look at a few other translations relative to Matthew 24:34.

- 📖 New English Bible: I tell you this: the present generation will live to see it all.
- 📖 Today's English Version: Remember this! All these things will happen before people living now have all died.
- 📖 Moffatt's Translation: I tell you truly, the present generation will not pass away, until all this happens.
- 📖 Weymouth's Translation: I tell you in solemn truth that the present generation will not pass away, till all this happens.
- 📖 The Scholar's Version: I can promise you that some of the people of this generation will still be alive when all this happens.
- 📖 The New Life Testament: The present generation shall not pass till all these things happen.
- 📖 Tyndale's New Testament: even the present generation will not have passed away, till all these things have taken place.

A quote from David Chilton's book, *The Great Tribulation*, is instructive.

"Some have sought to get around the force of (Mt. 24:34) by saying that the word generation here really means race, and that Jesus was simply saying here that the Jewish race would not die out until all these things took place. Is that true? I challenge you; get out your concordance and look up every New Testament occurrence of the word generation, and see if it ever means "race" in any other context. Not one of these references is speaking of the entire Jewish race over thousands of years; all use the word in its normal sense of the sum total of those living at the same time. It always refers to contemporaries. In fact those who say it means 'race' tend to acknowledge this fact, but explain that the word suddenly changes its meaning when Jesus uses it in Matthew 24! We can only smile at such a transparent error."

Some have interpreted Christ's reference to "this generation" as meaning the generation existing at the time when all the things Christ prophesied would take place. As already documented in this book, the things that Christ prophesied in the Olivet Discourse clearly took place in the events leading up to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. There is no reason or need to believe that Christ was referring to events thousands of years into the future when the historical evidence

shows their occurrence in the first century. There simply is no contextual or grammatical justification for concluding that Christ is referring to a generation thousands of years future from the time He made this statement in the Olivet Discourse. In Matthew 23 we hear Christ proclaiming judgment upon the generation of religious leaders He was addressing at the time. Did Christ suddenly change the meaning of generation a few hours later when He was answering His disciples' question about when the temple would be destroyed and His return would occur?

It must be remembered that Christ is addressing *His disciples* in the Olivet discourse. He is answering *their* questions about when the temple will be destroyed and His return will take place. In addressing His disciples, He says to them, "Even so, when *you* see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door." Christ then makes the statement about their generation not passing until all these things are fulfilled. The "*you*" Christ is addressing are his disciples. Christ is not addressing us or anyone else. It must be understood that when we read the Olivet discourse, we are reading a record of Christ addressing His disciples. When Christ tells them "when *you see* all these things," He is telling them that it *is they who will see all these things*, not others living thousands of years into the future.

A good example of how a reference to the generation being addressed at the time is contrasted with some other generation being addressed is found in the letter to the Hebrews.

**Hebrews 3:7-10: So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry *with that generation*, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.'**

Here we see the Holy Spirit using the word "*that*" in reference to a generation other than the generation being addressed at the time. Christ, who also spoke by the Holy Spirit, never spoke in terms of "*that*" generation. Such a usage would have connoted a past or future generation depending on the context. We plainly see such usage in the passage in Hebrews quoted above. Christ never used the word "*that*" to modify the word generation. He always used the term "*this generation*" which connoted the generation He was addressing at the time.

A striking example of Christ's use of "*this generation*" being associated with the audience He was addressing at the time is found in Mark the eighth chapter.

**Mark 8:34-38: Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in *this adulterous and sinful generation*, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'**

In this passage it should be very apparent that Christ is using generation to signify the audience He was addressing at the time He made these statements. In several other scriptural passages we find Christ referring to His generation as sinful and adulterous. What is of even greater significance in this passage is that Christ made this statement in the context of His coming in His Father's glory

with the holy angels.

Had I been standing in that crowd listening to Christ refer to my generation as adulterous and sinful and then proceed to say that if I am ashamed of Him He will be ashamed of me when He comes in the glory of His Father, I would not have understood that coming to be 2,000 years into the future and counting. I would have understood Christ to be referring to an event that was not very far off. When Christ addressed His disciples in the Olivet Discourse, He said, “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” All “these things” included His coming in power and glory with the holy angels.

Let’s consider a present day parallel to what Christ was doing in the Olivet discourse. Let’s pretend that Christ is presently living in North Korea and you along with other of His followers point out to Him the beautiful palaces of Kim Chong-il. Christ tells you that they will all be destroyed. You ask Christ when these things will take place and what will be the sign that these things will happen. Christ gives you many details of a military invasion. He even throws in some hyperbole about the sun being darkened and the moon not giving its light. He then says that when you see all these things happening, you will know that the destruction of Chong-il’s palaces is at hand. He concludes by saying that this generation will live to see it all. Would you conclude that the generation Christ is speaking of is a generation thousands of years in the future? Would you understand “this generation” to be some other generation thousands of years after your death? Would you conclude when Christ says to you “when you see all these things happening” He isn’t really talking to you but to people living thousands of years in the future?

It should be apparent that Christ was referring to the generation He was associated with at the time He made the statements recorded in the Olivet Discourse. It would be that first-century generation of Jews that would experience the coming of Christ in judgment and to gather His elect. Christ said that generation He was addressing at the time would not pass until these events occurred. These events included His coming in the clouds. Was this the second coming? Do the scriptures teach another coming? Let’s take a look.

## **IS THERE A COMING OF CHRIST BEYOND THE FIRST CENTURY?**

Some Christians believe that Christ is speaking of a first-century return in judgment up to Matthew 24:1-35 of the Olivet Discourse, but He then shifts to discussing a final coming at the end of the world or the end of time beginning with verse 36. With the birth of Christ being His first coming, His coming in judgment in A.D. 66 to 73 would constitute a second coming. A future coming would amount to a third coming. Is there justification for a third coming? The disciples asked Christ basically one question. When will the temple be destroyed and what will be the sign that will tell them when this event will take place.

There is nothing in their question or in Christ’s answer to their question to suggest that the end of the world or the end of time is being addressed. Nowhere in Scripture is the end of time addressed. What is addressed is the *time of the end*. There is significant difference between addressing the end of time and the time of the end. The context of the Olivet Discourse is the time of the end. The destruction of the temple, and all the events leading up to that destruction, is the end

being addressed. The Temple's destruction is what the disciples were questioning Christ about. It is to this question that Christ addresses His answer.

Much of New Testament Scripture relates to the ending of the Old Covenant age of which the destruction of the temple was a significant dynamic. I repeat, the end of time is not being addressed here. What is being addressed here is the end of a covenant age, an age that had begun thousands of years earlier at the foot of Mount Sinai.

In the Olivet Discourse, Christ explained to the disciples what signs to look for relative to the destruction of the temple. His return in power and glory through the vehicle of the Roman armies led directly to the temple's destruction. The temple's destruction was the final dynamic in the covenantal change that was taking place. With the temple's destruction, the Old Covenant age had come to an end.

*This is the end of the age* that the disciples were inquiring about and not some age thousands of years into the future and counting. The whole focus of the New Testament is covenantal change. The New Testament is largely a history of the dynamics that led to that change. The very phrase New Testament means New Covenant. Christ returned in power through the human instruments of the Roman armies to bring to an end the age of the Old Covenant. This is the end being addressed. This will become abundantly clear as we proceed with our investigation.

After Christ explains that all these things would happen before the generation He was addressing would pass, He then goes on to explain that the exact time that this would take place was known only to the Father. While the exact time of these events would not be known by the disciples, the general time could be known by watching the events unfold that Christ said would precede His return. That is why Christ tells His disciples to watch. The general population of Israel would not be watching and therefore, as in the days of Noah, they would be caught unawares. History shows that this is exactly what happened.

There is no break in focus between Matthew 24:35 and the rest of the chapter. Christ didn't suddenly change the subject from his return in the first century to a return thousands of years into the future and counting. Instead, he repeatedly exhorts the disciples to be alert and watch. Watch what? Watch for those events that He just described to them so that they could escape what would be coming to pass. Let's look at more of the dynamics surrounding the return of Christ.

**Luke 17:26-37: Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left. 'Where, Lord?' they asked. He replied,**

‘Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.’

Christ explains that it will be as in the days of Noah and Lot, how some will be taken and others left and how those on roof tops should not come down or those in the field should not return to their houses. These same sayings are found in the Olivet Discourse. Christ is speaking of escaping the coming destruction. By citing Noah and Lot and their escape from destruction, Christ is telling his followers to be aware of what is going on and to react accordingly.

**Matthew 24:37-44:** As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

**Matthew 24:17:** Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.

Christ is speaking of a physical escape from destruction and death. He exhorts His listeners to watch and be ready. When they see the destruction coming, they are not to turn back as did Lot's wife. They are to get out of the city and the land of Judea. Christ is dealing with physical life and death in these passages.

What is meant by two women grinding at the mill? If this passage of Scripture is connected with a still future return of Christ, how would this apply? In ancient times, a mill consisted of an upper stone and a lower stone. The upper stone was fitted with a wooden upright peg near the outer edge so that the stone could be rotated in a complete circle. Two women would work the mill by sitting opposite each other, and each would turn the upper stone through half a revolution (*Hastings's Bible Dictionary*). This method of grinding grain is no longer used and hasn't been used for a long, long time. This can only apply to a past event. It should also be noted that the rooftops of houses were joined to each other in Jerusalem so that you could virtually leave the city of Jerusalem by running across rooftops to the outside walls.

It should be noted that Luke speaks of not coming down from the rooftops in the same context of these days being as the days of Noah and Sodom. Matthew speaks of not coming down from the rooftops prior to saying this would all happen in that generation. Matthew then speaks of the days of Noah following his statement about all this happening in that generation. Both these writers are speaking of the same event. Luke groups certain comments together and Matthew separates those same comments in his narrative. Therefore, there is no scriptural justification to conclude that Christ is speaking of two comings in the Olivet Discourse. As we move along with our investigation, you will see that there is no scriptural justification in all of Scripture for concluding that there is a

coming of Christ beyond the first century.

What's of additional interest in the Luke 17:26-37 passage is that Christ is asked where these things would be taking place and He answers, "Where there is a dead body, there the eagles (Greek *aetos*) will gather. Christ is making this statement in the context of this time being as in the days of Noah and Lot and not returning from the rooftops or fields. This is the same context found in the Olivet Discourse where, here too, Christ speaks of the eagles gathering around the carcass (Matthew 24:28). It is interesting to note from the writings of Josephus, that when the Romans burned the temple, they brought their ensigns to the temple area, set them up against the eastern gate and offered sacrifices to them. The Roman ensigns were eagles.

There is no scriptural reason to believe that Christ taught two different comings in the Olivet Discourse. The prophecy contained in this discourse is one continuous description of what would occur relative to the destruction of the temple. This discourse identified the dynamics involved in that destruction. Those dynamics included the return of Christ, and events associated with that return.

In part four of this series, we will consider additional scriptural evidence which clearly identifies the time frame when the events described by Jesus Christ would occur.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART FOUR

### THE COMING OF ELIJAH:

We have shown that the historical events of the first century correlate well with the Olivet prophecy. In Malachi 4:5 it is stated that the prophet Elijah would be sent before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. The context of the fourth chapter of Malachi shows this to be a time of spiritual renewal and a time of judgment.

Malachi 4:1-6: Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the LORD Almighty. “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

Malachi is speaking prophetically to show that a time of great judgment was coming against those who failed to revere God’s name and respond to His will. Prior to this judgment’s occurring, Elijah would bring a message of spiritual renewal. When was this going to take place?

In Luke’s gospel we find the angel Gabriel speaking to Zacharias and telling him the following about his son, John the Baptist.

Luke 1:14-17: He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, *in the spirit and power of Elijah*, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Here we find the words of Malachi being applied to John the Baptist. We also see that the man Elijah was not going to be resurrected and literally appear. Malachi was speaking of someone coming in the spirit and power of Elijah. This person would do what Elijah had done. A review of the ministry of Elijah in the Old Testament reveals that he brought ancient Israel to a realization of who God was. John the Baptist would reveal to first-century Israel who Christ was. Jesus identified John the Baptist as the Elijah that was to come.

Matthew 11:13-14: For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.

Matthew 17:10-13: The disciples asked him, 'Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, 'To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

When did John the Baptist appear? John appeared two-thousand years ago. What was to follow that appearance? The great and dreadful day of the Lord would follow. Are we still waiting two-thousand years later for the "day of the Lord" to appear? It appears from a reading of the entire book of Malachi that Elijah would come as a messenger to proclaim coming judgment upon Israel for her violation and misapplication of the Old Covenant. As that Elijah, John came to announce the coming of Christ. The ministry of Christ would provide an opportunity for Israel to repent and receive salvation. Some did accept Christ and His message, and consequently did escape the coming wrath. Many, however, rejected Christ and the covenantal change He was bringing. These were destroyed in the judgment upon Jerusalem that came during the A.D. 66 to 73 war.

John asks the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (Matthew 3:7). What wrath is John referring to? The apostle Paul reflected on how the Thessalonian brethren were waiting for Christ to appear to deliver them from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Is this the same "coming wrath" that John is speaking about? Are the Thessalonians still waiting for Christ to deliver them from the coming wrath? John speaks of Christ *being ready* to harvest the wheat and burn the chaff. John said, "The ax is *already* at the root of the trees" (Matthew 3:10-12). In Matthew 13:36-50, as shown earlier, a similar picture is drawn of the time of the end. In Matthew 23:29-36, Christ reveals what would come upon the generation he was addressing at the time. Now let's look at what Peter said. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, associates the manifestation of the Holy Spirit with the prophecy of Joel and said,

Acts 2:16-21: This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And anyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Here Peter identifies the manifestation of the Spirit with what was to take place in the last days. In so doing, Peter is identifying his time as the last days. He also shows this to be a time of judgment and the coming of the Lord. In quoting Joel, Peter uses the same apocalyptic language that Christ used in the Olivet prophecy where Christ said, "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light" (Matthew 24:29). Christ, like Peter, identifies these events with their generation when He says, "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Matthew 24:34).

In Acts 2:40, it's recorded that Peter, with many other words, warned them and pleaded with them to save themselves from the corrupt generation they were living in. Acts 2:37 states that the people were, "cut to the heart," when they heard these things from Peter, and three thousand were added to their number that day.

It's apparent that with the manifestation of the Spirit, and this being tied to the coming judgment upon Israel, many realized the plight they were in and chose to accept the gospel message and escape the coming prophesied destruction upon the land of Israel. While Peter was preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), he was also preaching a message of physical salvation from the coming judgment against Jerusalem. Peter was providing the same warning that John the Baptist was giving when he spoke to the Pharisees and Sadducees about the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7). This is also the same warning that Christ was giving in Matthew 23:33-38, and in the Olivet prophecy.

The ministry of John the Baptist was a fulfillment of what Malachi had prophesied. Malachi shows this ministry preceding the coming of the Lord in judgment. Malachi associates a burning by fire with this judgment. John the Baptist associates fire with the coming judgment upon Israel. John the Baptist shows this judgment already beginning at the time of His ministry.

Matthew 3:1-12: In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the *coming wrath*? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. *The ax is already at the root of the trees*, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 'I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

This passage of scripture shows John the Baptist addressing members of the Pharisee and Sadducee religious sects of his day. He is telling them what is happening and what is about to happen. This message was being directed to first-century Israel in anticipation of the appearing of Christ. The appearing of Christ would involve his ministry, death and resurrection, and his return in judgment. All this takes place within the generation that John the Baptist was addressing.

### **SOME WOULD BE ALIVE AT CHRIST'S RETURN:**

In Matthew 16, Christ addresses His disciples about the sacrifices they must make to follow Him, saying their reward would be according to what they do. Mark also records this saying in Mark 8 and 9. In Mark's account, it is shown that Christ was speaking to a crowd of people in addition to His disciples.

Matthew 16:27-28: For the Son of man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, some standing here will not taste of death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Mark 8:34: Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' Mark 9:1, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'

Here we see Christ dating his return. If the coming of Christ and the Kingdom are still future, then there are some 2,000 plus year-old people still living and waiting to experience that coming.

Some say that the transfiguration six days later fulfills Christ's statement about some of that generation seeing Him coming in power and in His Kingdom. Does this square with the facts? Christ said that not all of them would "taste of death" before He came in His Kingdom. The obvious implication is that some of them would be dead when He returned. Since he was addressing a crowd of people, when He said that some would not die, there is reason to conclude that a large number would be dead. The transfiguration occurred six days later. The chances that any of those that Christ had addressed just six days earlier had died, let alone a multiple number of individuals, just doesn't appear to be probable. We know none of the Apostles died during that time frame.

In the transfiguration narrative, we find that while Christ was praying, "the appearance of His face changed and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." Moses and Elijah appeared in "glorious splendor, talking with Jesus" (Luke 9:29-31). A bright cloud enveloped Peter, James and John and they heard a voice come from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5).

The context of Matthew 16:27-28, is Christ's coming in glory to reward his followers for what they have done. The transfiguration account does not deal with rewards. Both Matthew's and Luke's (Luke 9:26-27) accounts of this event show angels are involved. There are no angels involved in the transfiguration. There is no mention of the Kingdom in the transfiguration account. I therefore submit that the transfiguration does not relate to what Christ said about some not tasting of death before He would return in His Kingdom. The transfiguration appears to have occurred to give evidence to Christ's being the Son of God. The presence of Moses and Elijah when Christ is identified as the Son of God gives evidence to Christ's being greater than Moses and Elijah and it is therefore Christ who is the one the disciples are told to listen to. Since Moses and Elijah represented the Old Covenant system and Christ came to introduce the New Covenant system, the events of the transfiguration signified the transition that was in the process of taking place.

Some have used Peter's reference to the transfiguration in 2nd Peter chapter one as evidence that this event pictured the return of Christ and thus fulfilled the requirements of what Christ said in reference to some not tasting death before seeing Christ come in his Kingdom. Is the return of Christ what Peter sees in the transfiguration?

2 Peter 1:16-18: We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying," "This

is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ “We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

Peter did not say the event they experienced was representative of the return of Christ. Peter said they did not invent a story about the power and coming of Christ and that the evidence for this was their personal witnessing of the majesty of Christ. Peter was saying that because they had witnessed the majesty of Christ on the sacred mountain, they were able to affirmatively speak of the power and coming of Christ. Peter was here showing how God had affirmed the divinity of Christ and therefore his readers could rest assured that what was said about the power and coming of Christ was the truth.

Christ said that some would not die before they see the Kingdom of God come with power. The transfiguration does not show the coming of the Kingdom. In the vision called the transfiguration, we find Moses and Elijah speaking to Christ *about his departure, not His coming (See Luke 9:31)*. The Kingdom was to be established at His return. Luke records the Father saying: “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” I submit that the transfiguration was for the purpose of impressing upon the disciples the divinity of Christ and it is He that they must listen to.

We have another interesting narrative related to the return of Christ recorded in the gospel of John:

**John 21:20-23: Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is going to betray you?’) When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’ Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?’**

While this passage does not say that John would be alive at Christ’s return, the very fact that Christ indicated it was a possibility, shows the first-century context of His return. It would have made no sense for Christ to make such a statement if His return were to be hundreds or thousands of years in the future. Christ wasn’t suggesting that John could live physically for thousands of years. The context is the return of Christ. The rumor among the brothers was that John would not die. The context shows that the rumor was that John would be alive at the return of Christ. There is no reason to believe that the brothers were thinking in terms of John’s living for thousands of years. It is reasonable to conclude that the brothers were anticipating a return of Christ within a normal lifetime. As it turns out, all indications are that John did live to see Christ come in judgment against Israel.

The scriptural passages we have covered so far provide strong scriptural evidence for a first-century coming of Christ in judgment and to establish His everlasting Kingdom. When we add the historical documentation from the first century, it gives considerable strength to this position. The scriptural evidence strongly indicates that it was the generation that was living during the time of Christ’s ministry that lived to experience the events Christ prophesied. A spiritual return of Christ in judgment, through the vehicle of human armies, is not out of line with other similar events in Scriptural history. The Old Testament is full of accounts of God’s coming in various ways to bring judgment upon nations. Did God physically appear in these events? No, He didn’t. Instead, He appeared through human armies and other natural phenomena to accomplish His purpose.

Every disciple whose writings make up the New Testament addressed their audiences from the perspective that Christ would return during their lifetime. They believed and taught this because of what Christ taught them. The written record of Christ's teachings strongly point to a first-century return and establishment of the Kingdom. This return was not a physical return. It was a spiritual return whereby Christ facilitated His purpose through the Roman armies. That purpose was to bring judgment upon those refusing to accept Jesus Christ as Messiah and the New Covenant system that He came to establish.

## **THE EVIDENCE FROM THE REVELATION:**

Let's return to the book of Revelation and see how what is recorded there corresponds to what we have thus far identified as a first-century fulfillment of the return of Christ and all accompanying events. We already noted earlier, in discussing the letters to the seven churches, that the emphasis was on soon to occur events.

The basic focus of the Revelation is set forth at the beginning of this prophecy as seen in verse seven of the first chapter. "Look, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the people of the earth will mourn because of him." The phrase, "even those who pierced him," further identifies the time period as the first century. It was in the first century that Christ was crucified and was physically pierced by a Roman soldier and spiritually pierced by His enemies (See Acts 2:23,36; 3:15; 5:30; 7:52; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15).

This passage in the Revelation corresponds very closely with what Christ said in Matthew 24:30, "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory." Christ then said in Matthew 24:34, "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." Here Christ dates the fulfilling of the Olivet prophecy to the generation He is addressing in the first century. Since the statement in Revelation 1:7 about coming in the clouds and the nations mourning is essentially the same as in the Olivet prophecy, it is apparent that the same event is being discussed.

In both these passages Christ speaks of the people of the earth mourning. The Greek word translated people and nations respectively in these two passages, is *phule*. This word is translated as tribes throughout most of the New Testament and is shown to have tribes as its basic meaning in Greek lexicons. (See *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.) It also appears that this statement by Christ is taken from Zechariah 12:10-14, where the prophet speaks of there being a great weeping in Jerusalem over the "one they have pierced," and the tribes of Israel mourning. Since this coming of Christ was a coming in judgment against the tribes of Israel, these statements would make perfect sense.

## **The 144,000**

The statements dealing with the sealing of the 144,000 as found in Revelation the ninth chapter; provide another time/place indicator. "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" (Revelation 7:4). The tribes are then listed, showing that we are dealing here with actual physical descendants of the tribes of Israel and not "spiritual Israelites." Then in

Revelation 14:1-4 we see the 144,000 identified as the firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

Who are the firstfruits in Scripture? In the Old Testament, firstfruits designated the first gatherings of the crops (See Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 2:14; Nehemiah 10:35). James, in his letter addressed to the “twelve tribes scattered among the nations,” says in verse 18, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that *we* might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:1, 18). James is addressing his contemporaries as the firstfruits. A reading of the New Testament scriptures clearly shows that the first converts to Christianity were from the tribes of Israel.

The 144,000, who are Israelites, are called the firstfruits in the Revelation. Since the concept of firstfruits appears to be identified with those Israelites who became Christians in the first century, it would place the 144,000 in the first century. This would provide another time/place indicator as to when the events that John wrote about were to take place. If the 144,000 are to first make their appearance in our future, they could hardly be considered the “firstfruits.” There have been many descendants of the tribes of Israel converted to Christianity in the nearly 2,000 years since the first century, far exceeding anything close to 144,000. If the 144,000 were to appear at a “time of the end” that is yet in our future, the 144,000 could more appropriately be labeled the last fruits.

Some would define “firstfruits” as all those who convert to Christianity from the first century to the time of Christ’s return sometime yet in our future. Therefore, the firstfruits are defined as spiritual Israelites. If the number of 144,000 is considered as a literal representation of these converts, such a notion would be ludicrous as there have been millions of Christian converts since the first century. If this number is considered figurative, it still doesn’t square with the common usage of firstfruits. To define firstfruits as being gathered over a period of 2,000 years and counting, runs contrary to any sensible understanding of the meaning of firstfruits. In the Old Testament, firstfruits are associated with the first pickings of the harvest. Scripture associates this usage with events connected with conversion to Christianity. The initial converts to Christianity were the firstfruits of the greater harvest that was to come.

## **THE BEAST OF REVELATION 13:**

Let us now examine the “beast” of Revelation 13. Revelation 13:1-10 introduces the “beast,” and verse 18 asks the reader to calculate the number of his name, which is 666. Since all the foregoing time/place statements point to a first-century context for the events described in the Revelation, it would be prudent to consider identifying the “beast” within that context as well, rather than trying to place his appearance in our future. Many historians and theologians identify the Roman Emperor Nero with the beast of Revelation 13:1-10. History reveals that this man fit very well the description offered in “code” by John in the Revelation.

John writes that the beast was given authority for forty-two months and given power to make war against the saints (Revelation 13: 5-7). It is interesting to note that the Neronic persecution against the Christians began in November of A.D. 64, and continued until June of A.D. 68. It was in June of A.D. 68 when Nero committed suicide. The period of November A.D. 64 to June 68 is a period of forty-two months.

Nero (Emperor from A.D. 54 to 68) was the sixth Caesar to govern the developing Roman Empire and the first to bring massive persecution upon the Christians. Clement of Rome (A.D. 30-100) speaks of Nero's persecution claiming vast numbers of the elect through tortures and indignities. Clement wrote that Nero's behavior was evil beyond description and could rightly be attributed to that of a beast. Nero murdered his parents, wife, brother, aunt and many others. Using poison and elaborately rigged "accidents" were his favorite methods of murder.

The historian Suetonius (A.D. 70-160) tells how Nero would disguise himself and prowl the streets and attack men, stabbing them to death and dropping them down sewers. Suetonius described him as "insolent, lustful, extravagant, greedy and cruel." He had his travel paths lined with temporary brothels staffed with married women. Suetonius speaks of Nero as a torturer, a homosexual rapist and sodomist.

The Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 55-117) tells of how Nero initiated the persecutions against the Christians with horrible tortures, crucifixions, beheadings, burning them alive and using them as human torches. Pliny the elder (A.D. 23-79) describes Nero as "the destroyer of the human race," and "the poison of the world." The writer Thana (4 B.C. - A.D. 96) actually called Nero a beast, comparing him with wild beasts of the field. The writer Lactantius, speaks of Nero as "an execrable and pernicious tyrant" and a "noxious wild beast." Suetonius, in writing about Nero, said,

"He so prostituted his own chastity that after defiling almost every part of his body, he at last devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes, and when he had satiated his mad lust, was dispatched by his freeman Doryphorus."

It is Nero who initiated the war against the Jewish nation that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

The number 666 has been tied to various individuals and entities throughout the centuries. If indeed Nero is the beast of Revelation 13, the number 666 would have to relate to his name as the Scripture demands in Revelation 13:18.

In Latin, Greek, Hebrew and other older languages, letters were used to represent numbers. John wrote in code to hide the meaning from the enemies of first-century Christians. John was a Jew and understood Hebrew and yet wrote the Revelation in Greek. To identify the beast numerically in Greek would have been too easy to recognize by the enemies of the Christians. What John apparently did was to identify Nero in Hebrew letters, which he translated into Greek. The reader would have to know the Hebrew equivalents to the Greek letters in order to arrive at the proper meaning, the same way we have to know English equivalents to the Greek letters in order to understand the meaning. That is why John writes in Revelation 13:18, "This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast."

Nero's full title name as Roman Emperor was *Nero Caesar*. In Hebrew, translated into Greek, Nero Caesar is rendered (in English characters) as: NRWN QSR. The numbers associated with

these letters are N=50, R=200, W=6, N=50, Q=100, S=60, R=200. Total, 666. What gives greater evidence to Nero's being the beast of Revelation 13 is that in several very early copies of the Greek New Testament, the number 616 is given which is the Latin numerical equivalent of the name Nero Caesar. What this tells us is that the copiers knew that 666 in the Greek represented Nero and were simply using the Latin numerical designation that they were well aware of.

It is also interesting to note that in Revelation 17:9-10, seven kings are spoken of with five having fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. In actual history, five Roman emperors had come and gone (Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, Caligula, and Claudius Caesar) with Nero being the sixth. If the "one is" statement of John is to be applied to the Roman emperor who was on the throne at the time that John wrote the Revelation, then Nero is again identified as the beast, seeing how John refers to the king that "now is" as the beast.

It should be noted that when Nero killed himself, it ended the bloodline of Caesars that had ruled over the Roman Empire beginning with Julius Caesar around 48 B.C. In Revelation, 13:3, John speaks of the beast having a deadly wound that was healed. With the death of Nero the empire was thrown into civil war and great calamity. The historians of the time, such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Josephus all wrote of the imminent collapse of the Empire as three would-be successors to Nero failed and died within the space of eleven months during A.D. 69. The Empire appeared to be coming to an end when General Vespasian, at the insistence of his army, took control of the government and became the seventh emperor. Vespasian was not a member of the line of ruling Caesars, but did bring the empire back from oblivion. That is why John speaks of "The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction" (Revelation 17:11). Vespasian was figuratively of the seven heads of John's vision but also separate as he was not part of the ruling family of Caesars.

## **THE TEMPLE WAS STILL STANDING:**

Another strong indicator as to the time frame involved in the events described in Revelation is the fact that John speaks of the temple as still standing as part of his description (Revelation 11:1-2). We know that the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Therefore, it would be logical to conclude that the events being prophesied by John were within the time frame that included the temple that was still physically standing in Jerusalem. The only other explanation would be to postulate a yet future rebuilding of the temple with the events of Revelation 11 and much of the rest of this prophecy relating to future events. Such a futuristic interpretation, however, would fly in the face of all the above evidence for a first-century application of this prophecy.

There simply is no scriptural evidence to support a rebuilt temple. A rebuilt temple would imply a reestablishment of sacrifices and other Old Covenant ordinances. Christ came to forever set aside Old Covenant requirements. A rebuilt temple would have no significance relative to salvation or the purposes of God. A future rebuilt temple is not the temple of record in the Revelation.

As part of the prophecy relating to measuring the temple, John is instructed not to measure the outer court because it has been given to the gentiles and it is said "they will trample on the holy city for 42 months" (Revelation 11:2). In the Olivet prophecy it is stated, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). It is interesting to note

that from the time that Vespasian and his Roman armies entered Palestine in the spring of A.D. 67 until Jerusalem was destroyed in the late summer of A.D. 70, was a period of 42 months.

The Revelation was written with a great deal of symbolism. It appears that this narrative was largely written in code in order to conceal the meaning from the enemies of Christianity. At the same time, this narrative provided a warning to the Christians as to what was about to take place. This allowed the Christian community to properly prepare themselves and gain faith from knowing what the outcome would be. The outcome would involve the return of Christ to facilitate judgment and resurrection, and establish His everlasting Kingdom.

In the final chapter of the Revelation, John is told, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near” (Revelation 22:10). This is in stark contrast to what Daniel was told relative to his prophecy regarding end time events. “But seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future” (Daniel 8:26). “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end” (Daniel 12:9).

Daniel wrote in the 6th century B.C. Those portions of Daniel’s prophecy concerning end-time events were sealed and didn’t materialize until nearly 500 years later in the first century A.D. John was told not to seal up his prophecy because the time was near. It should be clear that the events described in the Revelation were to take place soon after John was given this prophecy and not thousands of years into the future.

In part five of this series, we will identify who Babalon is in the Revelation given to John and begin to look at the book of Daniel as it pertains to our discussion in these essays.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART FIVE

In the Revelation given to apostle John, we find the falling of an entity called Babylon associated with the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore the identity of Babylon becomes a key factor in our identification of the timing of Christ's return. Who or what is the Babylon spoken of in the Revelation?

### THE IDENTIFICATION OF BABYLON

Babylon is mentioned six times in the Revelation. It is described as a great city that is fallen and the mother of harlots. Some believe that Babylon refers to the city and government of Rome. Some believe it refers to a false religious system. Others believe that it is representative of a yet future nation or group of nations who, along with a false religious system, will be involved in the so-called war of Armageddon.

Historically, Babylon was the capitol of the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar was its first king. It was located in the area where Iraq stands today. It is referred to hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Peter shows greetings being sent from Babylon. This shows it to be a physical location existing in the first century (1 Peter 5:13). When mentioned in the Old Testament, Babylon is seen as a literal, physical territory of the ancient world that interacts with Israel and other nations. We see God using the Babylonian Empire to punish Israel and later using other nations to punish Babylon. We find in Old Testament Scripture a great deal of prophetic rhetoric involving Babylonian initiatives against Judah and then initiatives of other nations directed at Babylon.

In the Revelation we see Babylon discussed in a figurative sense. It is presented as representative of all that is evil and abominable before God. In ancient times, Babylon, as a literal, physical nation, was viewed as idolatrous and oppressive. This image of idolatry and oppression is used in the Revelation to describe a people whose abominations had reached the breaking point with God.

**Revelation 14:8: A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'**

**Revelation 16:19: The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.**

**Revelation 17:4-7: The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the**

seven heads and ten horns.

The beast with the seven heads and ten horns is the Roman Empire of the first century. I briefly substantiate this in the section on Nero. Scripture identifies the women as Babylon. She is riding the beast, which is Rome. Therefore Babylon cannot be Rome. Rome is the beast upon which the women, identified as Babylon, is riding. The woman is called the “mother of prostitutes” and described as being “drunk with the blood of the saints.” She is also called “the great city.” Who in Scriptural history fits this description?

**Revelation 11:8: Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.**

In Revelation 11:8, we see that the bodies of the two witnesses lie in the street of the city where Christ was crucified. While technically Christ appears to have been crucified outside the gates of the city (Hebrews 13:12), all other events associated with His passion occurred in the city of Jerusalem. Christ said that no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. While Scriptural history shows that some prophets did die outside of Jerusalem, Christ was a prophet and pictured Himself dying as a result of the influence of Jerusalem and its religious leadership. In Revelation 18, Babylon is pictured as killing the prophets. In Matthew 23, Christ pictures Jerusalem as killing the prophets.

**Revelation 18:24: In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.**

**Matthew 23:37: O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.**

**Luke 13:31-33: At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, ‘Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.’ He replied, ‘Go tell that fox, I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day, for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!’**

Jerusalem is identified as the city that killed the prophets. Babylon is identified as the city where the blood of the prophets is found. The “great city” called Babylon is identified as the place where Christ was crucified. The crucifixion took place in the environs of Jerusalem in the first century. The above passages of Scripture provide strong evidence for Babylon’s being Jerusalem. This evidence presents another time and place statement relative to the events described in the Revelation. There is, however, more evidence for this identification.

The city is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt. Egypt had stood in the way of Israel’s being released from physical bondage. Egypt had to experience the plagues facilitated through Moses before it would let Israel go. In Scripture, Moses is looked upon as a type of Christ. In Revelation we see Christ bringing judgment through plagues against Babylon. It would appear that this judgment is brought against Jerusalem in order to facilitate release from the bondage of sin under the Old Covenant. It was through this destruction that the old system was eliminated. This will be

elucidated in much greater detail as we proceed with this series of essays.

The woman is said to be the “mother of prostitutes” and “drunk with the blood of the saints and those who bore the testimony to Jesus.” In Matthew 23, we see Christ identifying those responsible for shedding the blood of the saints.

Matthew 23:29-38: Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. Look, *your house is left to you desolate.*

In this passage we see Christ identifying the religious leaders of Israel as responsible for shedding the blood of the saints. Christ shows that not only did their ancestors do this, but they too would persecute those that Christ would send in the future. Because of this, judgment would come upon their generation, and their house (temple) would be destroyed. The Jewish religious leaders of the first century spearheaded the persecution against the developing Christian Church. While Rome, during Nero’s reign, had many Christians put to death, it was the Jews that caused the greatest amount of trouble for the Christians as the scriptures and secular history reveal. It was at the instigation of the Jews that many Christians were put to death by the Roman authorities.

The woman described in Revelation 17 is adorned with precious stones and pearls. She is then identified as being adulterous and a prostitute. *In Ezekiel chapter 16, we find an allegory about Jerusalem. Here the writer shows how Jerusalem was adorned with gold and silver and fine clothes and then squandered it all to become a prostitute and enter into adulterous relationships with other nations. The writer goes on to show how Jerusalem would be stripped of her wealth and beauty and the very ones she committed adultery with would turn on her.* Jerusalem and the nation of Israel are identified as prostitutes and harlots many times in Scripture.

Jeremiah 2:19-20: Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of me,’ declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty. ‘Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, I will not serve you! Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree *you lay down as a prostitute.*’

Isaiah 1:21: *See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her but now murderers!*

Micah 1:7: All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since *she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of*

*prostitutes they will again be used.*

In Mark 8:38, Christ refers to those He was speaking to as an adulterous generation. Christ is not speaking of sexual adultery. The whole focus of statements showing Israel as being a harlot, a prostitute and adulterous, have to do with Israel's failure to be a faithful wife to Christ. The scriptures picture Christ as married to Israel, (see Jeremiah 3). The scriptures show Israel constantly being unfaithful. Israel was constantly forsaking her covenantal relationship with God. Christ came to abolish the Old Covenant and replace it with the New Covenant. Israel had Christ put to death and for forty years resisted implementation of the new system. That resistance was brought to an end in the Roman-Jewish War. It was at this time that Israel's cup of wrath became full before God.

**Revelation 18:2-8: Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries. Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.**

The major focus of the Revelation is the destruction of Babylon. All Scriptural evidence points to Jerusalem as the Babylon that John is writing about. This places the events described in the Revelation as occurring in the first century before and during the fall of Jerusalem. These events include the return of Jesus Christ. While much of the Revelation is written in symbolic language, this very language serves to identify Babylon as Jerusalem. When combined with the numerous time statements found at the beginning and end of the Revelation, it becomes very apparent that this writing is dealing with events that occurred nearly two-thousand years ago.

Despite such evidence as presented here for the Revelation being written prior to the destruction of A.D. 70, some current scholarship believes that the book of Revelation was written around A.D. 95 during the reign of Emperor Domitian over the Roman Empire. This belief is based on a variety of considerations and dynamics relating to the first-century Church and the writings of various Church historians. Dr. Kenneth L Gentry Jr., a Presbyterian pastor, did his doctoral dissertation at Whitefield Theological Seminary on the dating of Revelation. This dissertation provides conclusive evidence for a pre-A.D. 70 dating. This dissertation is available in book form under the title, *Before Jerusalem Fell – Dating the Book of Revelation*.

There is much more evidence that the Revelation was fulfilled in the first century. The reader is encouraged to read *Who Is This Babylon* by Don K. Preston, *The Beast of Revelation*, by Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry and *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, by Arthur M. Ogden

## THE SEVENTY WEEKS PROPHECY OF DANIEL:

The seventy weeks prophecy found in Daniel 9 clearly relates to the Olivet Discourse and the Revelation given to John. Therefore, this prophecy is important to establishing the validity of a first century return of Jesus Christ and all related events. Some of this discussion may appear a little complex. It is necessary, however, to thoroughly examine the dynamics of this prophecy in order to show its relevance to first century fulfillment. So let's begin.

During the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, the Babylonian armies had invaded Judah, destroyed Solomon's temple and had taken most of the people captive (2 Chronicles 36:15-21). Daniel was among the captives in Babylon. While in captivity, Daniel determined by reading certain scriptures that the length of the captivity was to be 70 years. After the fulfillment of these 70 years, by Divine intervention, the Jews would be allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple (Daniel 9:1-3; 2 Chronicles, 36:22-23; Jeremiah, 29:1-10; 25:11-12; Isaiah, 45:1-4,13; 44:24,28).

After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, his son, Nabonidus, became King. Nabonidus had a son named Belshazzar whom Daniel identifies as King in Babylon at the time it was invaded by the Persian armies. Neo-Babylon cuneiform dating from the 12th year of Nabonidus, shows Belshazzar as having equal status with his father. After the Persians conquered Babylon, a man named Gubaru was commissioned by Cyrus to govern Babylon. Gubaru was given the title name of Darius (See *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, volume 7, page 76-77). Cyrus gave the initial decree for the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Darius later reinstated this decree.

The general focus of the book of Daniel is the establishment of the Kingdom of God. In Daniel's visions, recorded in the 2nd and 7th chapters, Daniel speaks of four kingdoms which history reveals to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. It is at the time of the fourth kingdom that the Kingdom of God is seen to be established.

The seventy weeks prophecy is recorded in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Daniel.

**Daniel 9:24-27 (KJV):** Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah (Hebrew *mashiyach*, which means anointed) the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks 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 the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Daniel speaks of a period of seventy weeks, which he divides into seven weeks, threescore and two weeks (sixty-two weeks) and one week. Biblical scholarship has shown that scriptural writers often designate a day for a year in prophetic writing. We see the scriptural designation of the day for a year principle in Numbers and Ezekiel.

Numbers 14:34: For forty years-one year for each of the forty days you explored the land-you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.

Ezekiel 4:6: After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year.

In the 70 weeks prophecy, 70 weeks is equal to 490 days, which becomes 490 years according to the day for a year principle. Daniel 9:25 (KJV) says that, "from the going forth of the command to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks." This would be a total of 69 weeks or 483 years. Scripture shows four decrees relative to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Isaiah, in quoting God, writes of Cyrus decreeing the rebuilding of the temple many years before Cyrus was born.

Isaiah 44:28: who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'

Isaiah 45:13: I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.

There are several decrees that were issued by three different kings relative to the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The actual decree of Cyrus is found in several scriptures and is historically placed around 538 B.C.

2 Chronicles 36:22-23: In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 'This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you-may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.'

Ezra 1:1-3: In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 'This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you-may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.'

In 520 B.C. King Darius issued an order that the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon be searched (Ezra 6:1-5). In the search, the written decree of Cyrus, that had ordered the restoration of the temple and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, was found. Darius then reinstated the decree as shown in Ezra 6:6-12. Finally, Artaxerxes made a decree in 458 B.C. giving Ezra authority relative to temple worship and another decree in 445 B.C. directed at Nehemiah, who was commissioned to rebuild Jerusalem.

It is apparent from a reading of all the pertinent scriptures that relate to the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, that this rebuilding was a process that went on for a number of years, spanning the administrations of three different kings. The temple was completed in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius as Ezra 6:15 records. The city was not completed until later. The question is this: From what decree are we to count the 69 weeks (483 years) that bring us to the Messiah?

The prophecy is separated into three sections. The first period of seven weeks or forty-nine years appears to be the time span that it took to complete the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The threescore and two weeks (434 years) would then have to take us to Christ. If we count from the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C., 483 years would take us to 55 B.C. If we count from the decree of Darius in 520 B.C., we come to 37 B.C. Neither of these dates will do, as Christ would not have as yet been born. If we count from the first decree of Artaxerxes in 458 B.C., we arrive at A.D. 26. When adding the year 0 between B.C. and A.D. we come to A.D. 27, which is the year generally felt to be when Christ began His ministry. If we count from the second decree of Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. we come to A.D. 39 (remember year 0), which would take us past the beginning of His ministry and His death.

All the above counting is based on using the solar calendar of 365 days in a year. Some authors, such as Robert Anderson, have argued for using lunar years of 360 days each in arriving at the time of the Messiah. It is felt by these authors that the 445 B.C. decree of Artaxerxes is more probable, as using lunar years in counting would bring us to the approximate time of the crucifixion in A.D. 31 or 33. The 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel, however, speaks in terms of the 69 weeks taking us to the appearance of the Messiah, not His crucifixion. The prophecy speaks of Messiah's being cut off after the 69 weeks but doesn't address itself to any specific time frame for the crucifixion after the 69th week.

Looking at the time frame from 458 B.C. to A.D. 27, it appears that the decree that Daniel had in mind was that made by Artaxerxes in 458 B.C. This does take us to A.D. 27 when Christ began His public ministry. The time frame from 458 B.C. to A.D. 27 does encompass the 69 weeks or 483 years. This decree is recorded in Ezra the seventh chapter and addresses temple worship. It is apparent from reading this decree and the entire book of Ezra that the temple had been rebuilt and was functioning as the house of God. It is also apparent from Ezra's writings that a number of Israelites were living in and around Jerusalem. This decree does not, however, specifically address the rebuilding of Jerusalem, whereas the decree of 445 B.C. does, as clearly shown in Nehemiah the second chapter.

Therefore, in terms of counting solar years to arrive at the appearing of the Messiah, the first decree of Artaxerxes appears the more probable. In terms of better reflecting the words of Daniel in

regard to the building of Jerusalem, a counting from the decree in 445 B.C. seems more probable, even though such counting requires using lunar years. In either case, I feel it prudent to view the beginning point for counting the 483 years somewhere during the reign of Artaxerxes. It is specifically the building of Jerusalem, not the temple that Daniel addresses in the 70 weeks prophecy. By the time of Artaxerxes, the temple had been restored. A number of Israelites were already living in the area of the temple. This would indicate that some rebuilding of the city had taken place. It's apparent from a reading of Nehemiah, however, that the walls and gates had not been rebuilt. Daniel, in the 70 weeks prophecy, speaks of the walls being rebuilt in relation to the decree he had in mind. This again would suggest the 445 B.C. decree as the one under consideration. The prophecy goes on to state,

**Daniel 9:26-27: And after threescore and two weeks 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 the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (KJV).**

Note that Daniel's prophecy does not say how long after the end of the 69 weeks the Messiah would be cut off. Neither does it address a time frame for the confirming of the covenant. The prophecy simply says, "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off." If the 69 weeks (483 years) take us to the approximate time when Christ began his ministry, it is apparent that Christ was cut off three and one-half years after the end of the 69 weeks. We know from the Scriptural record that the ministry lasted three and one-half years and then Christ was crucified. If the lunar counting of the 69 weeks is correct, then the 483 years would take us to the crucifixion. This would mean that the ministry of Christ was accomplished during the 69th week and the crucifixion occurred right at the end of the 69th week. The identification of the 70th week (last seven years) and its associated events will now be our focus.

### **THREE VIEWS:**

There are three basic explanations that have been given to the seventy weeks prophecy. Some believe that Christ was cut off in or at the end of the 69th week at which time this prophecy stopped. The prince that shall come is thought to be a wicked prince ("antichrist") that is still to come in our future to make a covenant with Israel, which will have a rebuilt temple where the sacrificial system will be reestablished. After three and one-half years, this "antichrist" will break the covenant with Israel, cause the sacrifices to cease and precipitate the so-called "war of Armageddon." This final seven-year period is also seen as the "great tribulation." This approach proposes a gap of 2,000 years (and counting) between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th week. A slight variation of this view speaks of a three and one-half year tribulation period after which Christ returns, stops the sacrifices, and confirms the New Covenant for three and one-half years and then the millennium begins.

This view presupposes that the Kingdom has been postponed for 2,000 years and counting. This view teaches that Christ came to restore the Kingdom to Israel in the first century but since Israel

rejected Christ, He couldn't establish the Kingdom at that time. Proponents of this view see the Kingdom in a physical way and the return of Jews to the land of Israel as a sign that their restoration is near.

This view is very speculative. There is nothing in Scripture that speaks of a future wicked prince making a covenant with Israel. The Scripture nowhere speaks of the antichrist being a single individual. The Scripture identifies antichrist as anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ. The apostle John speaks of many antichrists already being present in the first century (See 1 John 2:18, 22, 4:3, and 2 John 7). The Scripture does not speak of a "war of Armageddon." The word Armageddon appears once in Scripture (Revelation 16:16), and is used to identify a gathering place for kings. There is nothing in this passage about a war. Nowhere does Scripture speak of a rebuilt temple and the reinstatement of sacrifices. Christ died to replace the sacrificial system. The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. The temple's destruction eliminated the final symbol of the Old Covenant system. A rebuilt temple would have no significance relative to the New Covenant. The scriptures show Christ came to establish a spiritual Kingdom not a physical one.

A second view is that the 70th week represents a seven-year ministry of Christ that begins immediately after the 69th week. Therefore, there is no break between the 69th and 70th week. Christ begins His earthly ministry at the end of the 69th week, which is the beginning of the 70th week. After three and one-half years of the 70th week Christ is crucified which is when the sacrifice and oblation cease. The remaining three and one-half years of the 70th week is when the apostles take the gospel message, as Christ's representatives, exclusively to Israel before it goes to the Gentiles. Thus it is felt that the New Covenant is confirmed with Israel during a seven-year period immediately following the 69th week. The prince that shall come is considered to be the Roman General Titus who led the Roman armies in the war against Jerusalem some 40 years later. Some, who take the view that the 70th week immediately follows on the heels of the 69th week, also believe that the prince that is to come is not Titus, but refers to Christ's coming against Jerusalem in judgment during the war with Rome.

This second view appears plausible but has several flaws. The sacrifices and oblations did not cease at the crucifixion of Christ. They continued another forty years and were not caused to cease until midway through the Great War. While it could be argued that the death of Christ made the sacrificial system obsolete and therefore caused its end, the fact remains it didn't cease to operate until the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. It should also be noted that the preaching of the New Covenant to Israel was not limited to seven years.

A third view sees the time of Christ's ministry and crucifixion as not the important issue in this prophecy. As stated above, both the decree of 458 B.C. and the decree of 445 B.C. are probable, depending on one's method of counting years. Whether Christ's ministry or His crucifixion occurred at the conclusion of the 69th week is not important to this third view because this view does not see the 70th week beginning immediately after the end of the 69th week. This third view does not see the 70th week as the beginning of Christ's ministry. This view does not see the start of the 70th week as a three and one-half year ministry of Christ to confirm the New Covenant with Israel. Neither does this view see another three and one-half years of the apostles' ministry as a seven-year completion of confirming the covenant with Israel. This view associates the 70th week with the Great War of A.D. 66 to 73. This is the view this author takes for the following reasons.

The preaching of the gospel was initially targeted to the Jews. It is difficult to show from Scripture that this targeting covered a period of seven years. Depending on what method of counting is used, the end of the 69th week could signify the beginning of Christ's ministry or His crucifixion. It is unclear from Scripture how long the gospel was exclusively directed to the Jews. While Paul, because of the Jew's hostility toward the gospel, spent more of his efforts on preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, he didn't stop preaching to the Jews. Peter and the other Jerusalem based apostles all continued preaching the New Covenant to the Jews. Let's briefly look at Paul's ministry to the Jews and Gentiles. In Acts 18 we find the following recorded:

**Acts 18:1-6: After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'**

Here we see Paul's frustration with the lack of Jewish response to the gospel. In exasperation he makes the statement, "from now on I will go to the Gentiles." Paul had already been preaching to the Gentiles as the previous chapters in Acts clearly show. Was Paul now saying he was going to take the gospel exclusively to the Gentiles? Was Paul going to stop preaching to the Jews? In this same chapter of Acts, we see Paul, several years after his remarks about going to the Gentiles, still preaching to the Jews as well.

**Acts 18:18-21: Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, 'I will come back if it is God's will.' Then he set sail from Ephesus.**

There is nothing in the scriptures to suggest that the New Covenant was confirmed with Israel for a seven-year period involving the three and one-half year ministry of Christ and a three and one-half year ministry of the apostles. Confirmation of the New Covenant went on for forty years and then the New Covenant was given a final confirmation when the physical means to propagate the old system was removed in the Roman-Jewish War. Confirmation of the covenant was not a single act. It was a continuing act that culminated in the great destruction. The very word "confirm" means to establish, make firm, make strong, etc. This process went on until the consummation at the end of the Old Covenant age.

The New Covenant was preached to Israel for approximately forty years. The Gentiles also had the gospel preached to them for most of this period. During this period of time the Old Covenant was still a force to be reckoned with. Most Jewish converts to Christianity still practiced the requirements of the Old Covenant. Even the apostle Paul kept Old Covenant requirements as seen in the cutting of his hair in response to a vow he had taken. It wasn't until the destruction of Jerusalem

that the old system was completely removed.

Notice at the beginning of the 70 weeks prophecy that the Messiah is called the prince. The prophecy then goes on to say that, “the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.” Is Daniel suddenly speaking of a different prince? I submit that he is not. Scripture shows that the people of Israel are the people of the Messiah who was the anointed one to bring salvation to Israel. Scripture shows that salvation is of the Jews.

I submit that the coming prince spoken of by Daniel is Christ, coming in judgment against Jerusalem in the A.D. 66 to 73 war. The Great Revolt did not suddenly end in A.D. 70. It continued for three more years. This war began when Cestius Gallus came up against Jerusalem in October of A.D. 66. The revolt did not end until the last of the Jewish holdouts died at Masada in A.D. 73. Midway through this war, the temple was destroyed. It was during this time that the sacrificial system came to an end. There has been no temple, priesthood or sacrifices since. This is when Christ caused the sacrifice to cease.

When Daniel speaks of the people of the prince that shall come, the people he is referring to are the people of Israel. The people of Israel are the people of the prince who would come. If Daniel were referring to a Roman army, he would have spoke in terms of the prince destroying the city, not the people of the prince. Christ is the Prince who came in judgment against Israel after Israel had desecrated the holy place. The Jews had done much to desecrate the temple and much of the city of Jerusalem before the Romans ever entered the city.

The 70 weeks prophecy says, “The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary” (Daniel 9:26). On the surface this would appear to relate to the Roman destruction of the city and the temple. The Romans did bring a final and complete destruction to the temple and the sanctuary. The Romans did complete the overspreading of abominations.

A reading of the historian Josephus, however, shows that the Jewish zealots had already done much to destroy the city and the temple. One participant in the Jewish revolt actually took possession of the temple and its adjoining parts and melted down the sacred implements used by the priests. He emptied the vessels of sacred wine and oil, which the priests used to pour on burnt offerings, thus leading to the eventual discontinuance of the daily sacrifice. The Idumeans (descendants of Esau) became involved in the rebellion and killed thousands of Jews. What followed was the development of many factions, all fighting each other in civil war. The high priest Ananus was killed and non-Levitical priests installed. Josephus felt this marked the beginning of the destruction of the city.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART SIX

### THE ABOMINATION THAT CAUSES DESOLATION:

Some feel it was the Roman armies that were the abomination causing desolation. The scripture doesn't say it was the Roman armies. When Luke speaks of armies surrounding Jerusalem, he says this in conjunction with the desolation of Jerusalem *being near*. Luke does not speak of the abomination that causes desolation. He speaks only of the desolation itself. Matthew speaks of the abomination standing in the holy place causing the desolation. Mark says the same thing. Christ told the inhabitants of Judea to flee when they saw the abomination standing in the holy place. Daniel says that because of the overspreading of abominations (more than one), He (the prince, Christ) shall make it desolate. I believe the "it" is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Greek word *bdelugma*, which is translated as abomination, has as its basic meaning, "a foul thing." Neither Daniel nor the gospel writers identify the exact nature of the abomination. However, an examination of the pertinent scriptures which speak of the abomination that causes desolation, and a review of the history of the time, will identify the abomination.

**Daniel 9:27:** And he shall confirm (Hebrew: *Gabar*, which means to make strong) the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for *the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate*, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (KJV).

**Matthew 24:15-16:** So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation.' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

**Mark 13:14:** When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

**Luke 21:20-21:** When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city.

Roman armies began occupying Judea with the arrival of Cestius Gallus. This Roman General and his army did not enter the city of Jerusalem. Instead they withdrew. The Romans, however, were not the only armies in the area. The Idumeans, played a significant role in the destruction of Jerusalem. They lived to the southwest of Judea and they joined forces with rebel Jews warring against other Jews. All of this military activity was the immediate signal to the Christians to get out before the Roman armies returned and occupied Judea in great numbers, surrounding the city of Jerusalem. Once this happened, it would become very difficult if not impossible to escape. It was the actions of desecration committed by the Idumeans and the zealots that greatly disrupted the temple worship. I submit that this desecration by the Idumeans and zealots was the abomination that preceded the desolation. The Christians saw what was happening at the temple, in the city of Jerusalem and in Judea at large, and fled before the Romans totally occupied the area.

The Romans built a mote around the city of Jerusalem. This would have made it impossible for Christians living in the city to escape the city. This mote was built before the Romans scaled the walls of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The Christians were able to escape before the Romans scaled the walls of Jerusalem and occupied the temple area. Since their escape was in response to

seeing the abomination set up, this abomination must have occurred prior to the Romans surrounding the city and making it all but impossible to escape.

Christ speaks of the abomination that causes desolation standing in the holy place as the signal to flee Judea. If the holy place is to be understood as the temple, the city of Jerusalem, or both, the Roman armies could not be the abomination standing in the holy place. By the time the Romans would have been standing in the holy place it would have been too late to flee the city. By the time the Romans entered the city and reached the temple to destroy it, the city of Jerusalem and much of Judea was in shambles. In order to escape this destruction, the Christians would have fled much in advance of the Romans entering the city and the temple area. By the time the Romans stood in the holy place, it had already been desecrated by the Jews. The Jews, Idumeans and other rebel forces had already created an abomination (foul thing) in the city and at the temple. The desolation to follow was the complete destruction of the temple and the city by fire. This was the judgment brought by Christ through the vehicle of the Roman armies. This Roman invasion brought about the final spreading of abominations that had been started by the Jews and their rebel associates. These abominations caused the final desolation of the city and temple. This brought to an end the Old Covenant system, the consummation that Daniel speaks of.

In the 70 weeks prophecy, Daniel speaks of Christ confirming the covenant for one week. In the midst of the week the sacrifices would cease. The war lasted seven years. The sacrifices did cease around the middle of the war. The war ended the Old Covenant system once and for all. The physical removal of the priesthood, sacrifices and temple was the final and full confirmation that the New Covenant system had fully replaced the Old. As word spread of this destruction, it became obvious to the Christian community that the old system was abolished. Christ confirmed the New Covenant by His intervention through human instruments to destroy the Old system. The destruction of the temple was the confirmation that the old system was gone and the new system was now fully established. This final confirmation lasted seven years. It involved the complete removal of the old system, right down to the last remaining adherents to this system who were destroyed at Masada in A.D. 73. This was the final and complete fulfillment of “all things that have been written,” as Christ prophesied in the Olivet Discourse.

### **Daniel characterizes the 70 weeks in the following manner:**

**Daniel 9:24: Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy (KJV).**

The end of the 69th week to the end of the 70th week is the focus of Daniel in this passage. I believe that the scriptural evidence points to an approximate 40-year time frame between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th week. It was during this 40-year period of time that the New Covenant was in the process of being established. It began to be established through the ministry, death and resurrection of Christ which all took place at or after the end the 69th week. It was further established during the approximate 40-year ministry of the apostles. It was completely established and confirmed by the final dissolution of the Old Covenant from A.D. 66 to 73.

This seven-year war was the 70th week. In Daniel 9:26, Daniel speaks of this time frame as a time of war, and overspreading of abominations. This didn't happen at the time of Christ's ministry or at the time of the crucifixion. The context of the 70th week includes the destruction of the city, leading to the consummation. In Daniel 12:11, the prophet spoke of the daily sacrifice being removed at the time when the abomination is set up. We have seen from our review of scripture and history that the

abomination is set up at the time of the war that led to the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The removal of the daily sacrifice is dated to the war. This destruction took place approximately 40 years after Christ returned to the Father. This is when Christ facilitated the end of the sacrificial system in the middle of the 70th week. This tie-in to the war shows that the 70th week occurred some 40 years after the end of the 69th week. This was the 70th week (seven years) confirmation that Daniel speaks of. This confirmation took place between A.D. 66 and 73 when the old system became visibly destroyed, thus signifying to the Christian community that the New Covenant, and all that it represented, was now fully in place.

Some may object to the conclusion that Christ confirmed the covenant through the Roman-Jewish War of A.D. 66 to A.D. 73. Some would argue that the New Covenant was established at the death of Christ when He became the sacrifice for sin. It is true that Christ's sacrifice terminated the need for animal sacrifices. In the temple, the curtain that hid the holy of holies from general view was torn from top to bottom at the time of the crucifixion. This exposure of the holy of holies was evidence that the sacrificial system was no longer necessary. Everyone would now have direct access to God, not just the High Priest.

There is no doubt that the death and resurrection of Christ caused the sacrificial system to become obsolete. Through His death and resurrection, Christ became our High Priest. There no longer was a need for the priestly system of the Old Covenant. For Gentiles converting to Christianity, the Christ event was confirmation enough that a new system was being established. For many Jews converting to Christianity, the Old Covenant was still felt to be of significance. This obsolete system did not pass away at the death of Christ. While it no longer held any spiritual significance before God, it nevertheless continued to function physically for another forty years. Those who continued to adhere to this system believed it still to be a viable system and necessary for a proper relationship with God. This included Christian Jews who still wanted to cling to many aspects of the old system. This misplaced adherence to an obsolete system would end only when the means to facilitate this system would be destroyed. This destruction would confirm that the new had replaced the old in its entirety.

Therefore, the establishment of the New Covenant was a gradual process that took place between the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ and His return in the destruction/judgment of A.D. 66 to 73. The Old and New Covenants co-existed during this period of time. The Old Covenant would not be wiped out until the destruction of the temple, which was the centerpiece of that covenant. There is good scriptural evidence for this position. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul writes:

**Galatians 4:21-31: Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: 'Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.' Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. *It is the same now.* But what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.' Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.**

This figurative application by Paul shows that the Old and the New Covenants were co-existing at the time of Paul's letter. But as the son of Hagar was cast out, so would the Old Covenant be removed. This analogy reflects the bitter struggle that was taking place between fleshly and spiritual Israel. Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, physical Israel was persecuting spiritual Israel, which was the developing Christian Church. The whole force of Paul's writings, as well as other New Testament authors, reflects this struggle and its eventual resolution in the return of Christ to judge the Old Covenant adversaries of the New Covenant Christians. We see this ongoing battle recorded throughout the New Testament scriptures of which the following are a few examples.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16: For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Hebrews 10:32-37: Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, (Greek: *very, very* little while) 'He who is coming will come and will not delay.'

Here are just two examples of persecution the adherents to the Old Covenant system were waging against the Christian community and how the coming of Christ would bring it all to an end. Here again we see the imminency of the coming of Christ tied to bringing relief to first-century Christians who were being persecuted for their acceptance of the New Covenant system. To postulate that these Christians all went to their graves and are still waiting to be delivered from the Jewish and other persecutions of the first century is ludicrous and contrary to the context of the text.

Much of the New Testament narrative is about the covenantal change that was taking place and the dynamics associated with that change. The implementation of the New Covenant system included the establishment of the New Jerusalem.

Hebrews 12:18-24: You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.' The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear.' But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer contrasts the physical with the spiritual, the temporal with the eternal.

**Hebrews 9:22-23 (King James Version): Almost all things are by the law purged with blood and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.**

Here the writer is showing that under the law (Old Covenant system), there existed physical patterns of things that exist at a much higher level of reality in the non-physical spiritual realm. In verse 24 (KJV) it is recorded that “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” The NIV says it this way: “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one.”

A modern analogy would be the sewing of a garment. In most cases you would use a pattern. The pattern would not be of the same material as the garment. Nor would it be the thing that you would wear. Once the pattern is used it is generally cast aside because it is not the real thing. You would now wear the garment. The Old Covenant provided the physical patterns of the spiritual realities that have now been established.

Christ came to facilitate the wearing of the new garment. He did this through His death, resurrection and accession to the Father. He powerfully intervened in the Great War to completely remove the old garment and replace it with the new. The new garment includes inherent eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ. This new garment includes the reality of the Kingdom life available through the indwelling of God’s Spirit. Living the Kingdom life is synonymous with living in the spiritual New Jerusalem.

Again, it must be emphasized that the Old system was not eliminated at the cross. The cross event began the removal of the old system. This removal was not completed until Christ returned to bring salvation with Him. Many years after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ the Old Covenant was still around.

**Hebrews 8:12-13: For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’ By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.**

This letter to the Hebrews was written many years after the cross. The Old Covenant was still around. It was obsolete but still a functional entity. Animal sacrifices were still going on, temple rituals were still being performed and holy days were still being kept. Dozens of New Testament scriptures attest to the first-century Christians looking to the return of Christ as the terminus event in the full removal of the old system and the full implementation of the new system.

The apostle John made a rather interesting statement in the first chapter of his Gospel. He said: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). What are we to make of this statement? It’s not difficult to understand that grace came by Jesus Christ. The very fact that Christ paid the death penalty in our stead demonstrates His grace bestowed upon us. But why does John contrast the giving of the law by Moses, with truth coming through Jesus Christ? Wasn’t the law of Moses truth as well?

The answer to that question involves the issue of the two covenants in scripture. The Old Covenant that God established through Moses deals with the physical while the New Covenant established through Christ deals with the spiritual. The Old Covenant was temporal in nature. It could not facilitate eternal forgiveness of sin. This system was only a pattern of the real thing. John, therefore, contrasted it with the truth that Christ brought. Christ brought the real thing. The Old Covenant was valid for what it was designed. It was designed to facilitate a relationship with God based on works. The New Covenant is designed to facilitate a relationship with God based on grace. The whole battle between advocates of the new system versus advocates of the old system involved this question of grace and works relative to a right standing before God.

Christ came to reveal the spiritual relationship that we can have with the Godhead through Christ. That relationship involves our resurrection from spiritual death and the presence of the spiritual Kingdom within us. This is what covenantal change brought about and continues to sustain. Our responsibility as Christians is to respond to the grace of Christ by facilitating the righteousness of God in our behavior.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART SEVEN

### THE PROPHECY OF DANIEL 11:

While the 70 weeks prophecy brings us to the completion of the covenantal change that Christ facilitated, Daniel also shows a continuum of historical events that lead to this same covenantal change. This continuum of historical events parallels the seventy weeks prophecy and brings us to the time of resurrection and the establishment of the Kingdom. In the 11th and 12th chapters of Daniel we find a prophetic overview of events that leads right up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of Christ in the Great Judgment of A.D. 66 to 73.

I have taken the events described in Daniel 11 and compared them to actual historical occurrences. This overview of history, as it compares to Daniel's prophecy, is a powerful witness to Daniel's being led by God in foretelling the dynamics that would lead to the time of resurrection and the establishment of the Kingdom. I include the presentation of this history as strong evidence for the consummation that took place in the first century. While this chapter may get a little tedious, I encourage the reader to stick with it, as it will provide significant insight into the prophetic dynamics associated with the age ending events, which occurred in the first century.

The chain of historical events prophesied by Daniel begins with the issuing of a decree by Cyrus to rebuild the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed. In Daniel 10:14, Daniel is told what will befall his people in the years to come. Therefore, it is evident that what follows is about the people of Israel. Daniel 11 begins a long prophecy of events that can be clearly shown from secular history to have taken place in the order given and culminating with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. We will now compare the prophecy with history.

**Daniel 11:2: Three more kings will appear in Persia, then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece.**

Following the reign of Cyrus, the kings referred to here were Ahasuerus (*aka* Cambyses), 529 to 533 B.C., pseudo-Smerdis (*aka* Artaxerxes ), 522 to 521 B.C., and Darius Hystaspes, 521 to 485 B.C. It was this Darius, (*aka* Ahasuerus) who married Esther, as recorded in the Book of Esther. Xerxes is the fourth king, 485 to 465 B.C. Xerxes was the richest of the four and stirred up war with Greece.

**Daniel 11:3-4: Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.**

Alexander the Great of Greece was this mighty king, 336 B.C. to 323 B.C. He defeated the Persian Empire in 331 B.C. and the Greco-Macedonia Empire was born. Alexander died at a young age, and his several wives; two sons and brother were all killed within fifteen years of Alexander's death. The empire was divided between four of his generals. Ptolemy Soter got Egypt and part of Syria and Judea. Seleucus Nicator was given part of Syria, Babylonia and territory east to India. Lysimachus acquired Thrace and part of Asia Minor and Cassander ruled Greece and Macedonia.

**Daniel 11:5-6: The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power. After some years they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last. In those days she will be handed over, together with her royal escort and her father and the one who supported her.**

Ptolemy Soter became a strong ruler in Egypt, but Seleucus Nicator became an even stronger ruler in Syria. After about 50 years, Antiochus II, known also as Theos, became ruler of Syria and Ptolemy Philadelphus became king of Egypt. In 260 B.C. a war broke out between Syria and Egypt, which was terminated in 252 B.C. by a marriage between Antiochus and Bernice, the daughter of Ptolemy. On the death of Ptolemy Philadelphus, Antiochus took back his former wife, Laodice, who had Bernice put to death and then had Antiochus murdered. Laodice then placed her son Callinicus (*aka* Seleucus Nicator ) upon the Syrian Throne. Seeing how these events match Daniel 11:5-6, it can be safely determined that Egypt is the king of the South and Syria is the king of the North because of their geographical relationship to Judea which is located between the two. This prophecy of Daniel is focused on Israel. Other nations are discussed only as they in some way relate to Israel. This is true in much of scripture.

**Daniel 11:7-8: One from her own family line will arise to take her place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortress; he will fight against them and be victorious. He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. For some years he will leave the king of the North alone.**

From the ruling family of Egypt, Ptolemy Euergetes, Bernice's brother, invaded Syria in 245 B.C. to avenge the death of Bernice. He carried back to Egypt 2,000 molten images. He then left the king of the North, Seleucus II, alone for the next 15 years.

Daniel 11:9-10: Then the king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South but will retreat to his own country. His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress.

Seleucus II died in 226 B.C. After his death, his two sons, Seleucus III, 226-223 B.C., and Antiochus III, 223-187 B.C., assembled large forces to war against Egypt to avenge the Syrian invasion of 245 B.C. Seleucus was killed and Antiochus continued the war to the frontiers of Egypt. The Syrians recovered a certain amount of territory that had been appropriated by Egypt.

**Daniel 11:11-13: Then the king of the South will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North, who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated. When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride and will slaughter many thousands, yet he will not remain triumphant. For the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped.**

In response to the attack by Syria, the Egyptian king Ptolemy IV (Philopater) came out with an army of 20,000 and inflicted a severe defeat on Antiochus the great, killing many thousands in the process. Twelve years later Philopator died. After his death, Antiochus assembled a great army. He

allied himself with Phillip of Macedonia, and along with a number of Jews from Judea, they fought against Egypt and recovered certain territory.

**Daniel 11:14-19:** In those times many will raise against the king of the South. The violent men among your people will rebel in fulfillment of the invasion, but without success. Then the king of the North will come and build siege ramps and will capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand. The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the beautiful land and will have the power to destroy it. He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed or help him. Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence back to him. After this, he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more.

Antiochus took Sidon from Egypt, and in the battle of Mount Panium in 198 B.C., took away Judea. Phillip of Macedonia joined with Antiochus, as did many Jews. It is these rebel Jews that Daniel refers to as “violent men among your people.” The Egyptian General Scopas, initially subdued the Jews, but was eventually defeated by Antiochus. Antiochus occupied Jerusalem and Judea. He initially showed great favor to the Jews. Antiochus then arranged a marriage between his daughter Cleopatra and Ptolemy Epiphanes, king of Egypt. Through this maneuver Antiochus hoped to get complete control of Egypt, but the plan failed. Antiochus then tried to conquer the islands and coasts of Asia Minor, but was defeated by the Roman commander Cornelius Scipio. He then turned his attention toward the east and attempted to plunder the wealth of Oriental temples in Elymais. Antiochus returned to his own country and was killed by his own people.

**Daniel 11:20:** His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor. In a few years, however, he will be destroyed, yet not in anger or in battle.

Seleucus IV Philopator succeeded Antiochus and in an effort to maintain the royal splendor, sent a tax collector, Heliodorus, through Judea. Seleucus reigned eleven years when Heliodorus poisoned him.

**Daniel 11:21-24:** He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue. Then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him; both it and a prince of the covenant will be destroyed. After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power. When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses-but only for a time.

Seleucus IV, only son Demetrius, was in Rome when Heliodorus killed his father. A brother of Seleucus, a younger son of Antiochus the Great, named Antiochus Epiphanes, (Antiochus IV) was able to get rid of Heliodorus and took the throne without a battle in 176 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes slowly increased in power and replaced the Jewish high priest (prince of the covenant) with someone who would be subservient to him. History records that Antiochus gave away much wealth

in order to gain followers.

**Daniel 11:25-28:** With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. Those who eat from the king's provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle. The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time. The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country.

Antiochus marched against Egypt and was met by his nephew, Ptolemy Philometor, king of the South, who came with an immense army. Antiochus had great success and conquered much of Egypt. Antiochus then pretended to ally himself with Ptolemy against his brother Euergetes II who controlled Alexandria. Antiochus did this in an effort to take control of all of Egypt. The plot, however did not work. Antiochus returned from Egypt with great plunder. Passing through Judea and facing rebellion from some of the Jews, he vented his anger against them, and killed many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He sold many as slaves, boiled swine's flesh and sprinkled the broth on areas of the temple. He removed golden vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem and took them back to Syria.

**Daniel 11:29-35:** At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant. His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will come at the appointed time.

In 168 B.C. Antiochus again invaded Egypt. This time Ptolemy got help from the Roman fleet and Antiochus was forced to surrender to the terms put forth by Popillius, commander of the Roman fleet. Having to leave Egypt, Antiochus returned through Judea in great anger over his defeat in Egypt. He sent troops to Jerusalem who plundered and set fire to the city and killed many Jews. Antiochus published a decree that the Jewish worship was abrogated and that the temple be consecrated to Jupiter Olympius, a Greek god. At the same time he extended special favors to those Jews who would turn from their religion. Antiochus abolished the daily sacrifice, and placed a pagan statue in the temple. A number of Jews abandoned their religion and allied with Antiochus. Another group, led by the priest Mattathias, along with his five sons, remained faithful to the covenant. They led a successful revolt against Antiochus, and restored the temple worship. This group became known as the Maccabees. They held rule in Judea as the Hasmoneans, from around 164 B.C. to 37 B.C. The Maccabees suffered greatly in their battle against oppression but were successful in restoring reasonable stability to the land of Israel.

**Daniel 11:36-39:** The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath

is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver and precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price.

With the death of Antiochus, and the stabilization of Jewish territory and worship under the Maccabees, Daniel's prophecy appears to take us to the time of Herod the Great, 37 to 4 B.C. Herod was an Edomite who rose to power as a result of his family having a close relationship with the Roman governing authorities. Being a descendant of Esau, brother of Jacob, Herod shared a common ancestry with the Jews and was virtually considered part Jewish. Herod bribed his friend Marc Anthony of Egypt to get rid of Antigonus, the last of the ruling Hasmoneans. Anthony then made Herod king over Judea. Herod honored the Roman Caesars with great building projects including rebuilding the temple to be the magnificent structure it was during the time of Christ. He built many statues of Caesar and even went so far as to place a huge golden eagle at the gate of the temple. The eagle was the emblem of imperial Rome.

The king would have no regard for "the one desired by women." This appears to be a reference to Herod attempting to kill Christ. History shows Herod to be a very powerful but evil man who killed family members and anyone else that he perceived as a threat to his reign. Daniel said, "he will be successful until the time of wrath is completed." The time of wrath is often referred to in Scripture as that time of the end of the Old Covenant age. The dynasty of the Herodian family lasted to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. History shows that Herod continually did things to honor the Roman government and would parcel out land to those who would support his projects.

**Daniel 11:40-45: At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom and Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.**

Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, hoped to oust Herod and gain the land of Palestine. She also looked to bring Arabia under her domain. She prevailed with Anthony to commit the war against the Arabians to Herod, thinking that if Herod lost and got killed, she would have Palestine, and if he were successful, she would gain Arabia. About this same time a great war broke out between Anthony of Egypt (king of the South) and Augustus of Rome (king of the North). In history this is referred to as the battle of Actium and it resulted in a Roman victory and the death of Anthony and Cleopatra. The Roman armies invaded many lands, including Egypt. Herod accommodated the Romans' march through Judea on their way to conquering Egypt. History shows that Rome sent an expedition against Edom, Moab and Ammon but it failed to bring these areas under Roman control.

The section of Daniel's prophecy about reports from the east and north alarming him is somewhat problematical. Some historians feel that this could very easily refer to Herod and his being troubled by the report of the wise men that came from the east looking for the Christ child. It was also at this

time that Herod's oldest son Antipater was in Rome (Rome being to the north of Israel), plotting to remove Herod. From the scriptures we know that Herod had the children killed at Bethlehem. History records that at this same time Herod initiated recriminations against his own family and the Jewish people. Herod had two palaces in Jerusalem, which is located between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea. Herod died in disgrace shortly after these events.

I have provided this brief overview of historical events to show their alignment with Daniel's prophecy. These prophesied events take us to the time of Christ and the period of time referred to as the time of the end. As has already been seen, this time of the end related to the ending of the Old Covenant era. Daniel continues his prophecy by saying that at that time a great prince will appear.

**Daniel 12:1-3: At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people-everyone whose name is found written in the book-will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.**

"At that time" shows a continuation of this prophecy. There is no reason to believe that a gap of thousands of years separates the historical events of Daniel 11 from what Daniel sees happening next. "At that time" is the time of the first century. Chapter 12 is a continuation of chapter 11. It is felt by biblical scholars that "Michael" represents Christ. The context shows this to be the same time of the end outlined by Christ in the Olivet Discourse.

**Matthew 24:21: For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again.**

**Daniel 12:1: There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.**

Later in chapter 12 Daniel shows that these events take place when the power of the holy people is broken. The power of the holy people was broken when the temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed. It was at this time that the temple worship and sacrificial system were ended forever. We are looking at a first-century event and not something to occur thousands of years subsequent to this time. It was at this time that the eternal Kingdom was established. This prophecy of Daniel complements the seventy weeks prophecy in Daniel nine. Both these prophecies are in harmony with Christ's prophecy in the Olivet Discourse. All these prophecies speak of the time of the end and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART EIGHT

### WHEN IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD ESTABLISHED?

The scriptures show that the establishment of the Kingdom is to occur at the time of Christ's return. As the evidence already presented shows, Christ's return was to occur at the time the temple would be destroyed. Christ clearly shows in the Olivet Discourse that His return would occur before the generation He was addressing would pass.

**Luke 21:27-32:** At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.' Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

In Matthew 13, we see Christ giving a number of parables that speak of various aspects of the Kingdom. In explaining one of these parables to the disciples, Christ makes it evident that the establishment of the Kingdom is associated with the end of the age. As already seen, the age spoken of by Christ is an age that was to end in the generation He was addressing during His ministry.

**Matthew 13:36-43:** Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.' He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.'

In 2 Timothy 4:1, Paul says to Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall (is about to) judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom" (KJV). The Greek word "mello" which is translated "shall," actually means, "is about to." A full review of this Greek word is given below. The Kingdom appears at Christ's appearing and at the time of the judgment. This coincides with Matthew 24:30, where Christ is seen as coming in power and glory in the generation being addressed in Matthew 24. We know from Matthew 16:24-28 that the coming of Christ would take place while some of the disciples were still alive. This places the establishment of the Kingdom in the first century. The Kingdom was to be established with the coming of Christ.

### THE GREEK WORD "MELLO"

In Vines Expository Dictionary of Greek Words, on page 1038, Vine shows *mello's* primary meaning as "to be about (to be or do). It is used of purpose, certainty, compulsion or necessity." Vine shows Matthew 16:27, where the King James translation says, "For the Son of man shall (Gr. *mello*) come," as "is about to come." Thayer's Greek Lexicon, on page 396, defines "mello" as "to

be about to do anything” and “to be on the point of doing or suffering something.” The Arndt, Gingrich, Bauer Greek -English Lexicon defines “mello” as “Be on the point of, be about to.” This Lexicon defines “mello” (shall) in Romans 8:18 as, “be about to be revealed” in reference to the coming of Christ. The Companion Bible by Bullinger also supports this definition.

Since the primary meaning of “mello” has to do with something about to happen, the scriptures involving this word and the coming of Christ would appear to imply imminency of his coming and therefore further substantiates a first century return. Here are some examples:

Matthew 16: 27-28: For the Son of man shall (Gr. *mello* and therefore could be translated “is about to) come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (KJV).

The statement about some not tasting death until they see Christ come in His Kingdom makes perfect sense if we translate “mello” as indicated above. In Wuest’s *Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament*, he translates Matthew 16:27 as, “For the Son of Man is about to be coming in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He shall recompense to each one according to his manner of acting.”

**Luke 21:36: Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall (is about to) come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man (KJV).**

The word “shall” in this passage is the Greek “mello” and could be translated “about to come to pass.” This “about to come to pass” would include all that is said prior to this statement and would therefore include the return of Christ. Wuest translates this passage as follows: “But be circumspect, attentive, ready in every season being in prayer, in order that you have sufficient strength to be escaping all these things which are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of man.” (NIV has “is about to happen”).

There are 110 places where “mello” is used in the Greek New Testament. In many places, by context, it can be seen to mean something about to take place. Here are a few examples.

**Matthew 2:13: When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to (mello) search for the child to kill him.**

**John 4:47: When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to (mello) death.**

**John 6:15: Jesus, knowing that they intended (*mello*) to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.**

These scriptures show how the New Testament writers understood and used the Greek “mello” in their dialog. All these passages show imminency about what was to happen. This word is used in many passages that relate to the coming of Christ, the judgment, the establishment of the Kingdom and the resurrection. The translation of “mello” as “about to take place” is certainly in keeping with the basic intent and usage of this Greek word by the writers of scripture and as attested to in various lexicons and translations. This is another strong piece of evidence relative to a first-century return

of Christ and all related events. Here are more examples of how this word supports a first-century fulfillment:

Matthew 12:32: Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to (mello) come. [This can read, “age about to come.”]

Romans 8:18: I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be (mello) revealed in us. [This can read, “is about to be revealed in us.”]

Hebrews 1:14: Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will (mello) inherit salvation? [This can read, “who are about to inherit salvation.”]

Hebrews 13:12-14: And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is (mello) to come. [This can read, “city that is about to come.”]

Revelation 1:19: Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will (mello) take place later. [This can read, “what is about to take place later.” The “later” (hereafter in the KJV) is not a “later” to occur thousands of years in the future but a “later” that is about to happen. This shows that John was writing about soon to be accomplished events in the Revelation.]

We find in Acts 11:28 that the prophet Agabus signified that a great famine *would* (mello) come upon the Roman world. This scripture shows that this famine happened during the reign of Claudius. Here we find the writer using “mello” in an obvious context of something that was about to take place and did take place as the scriptures report and as secular history confirms.

In Acts 20:3 it’s recorded that “Because the Jews made a plot against him (Paul) just as he was about to (mello) sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. Again we see “mello” used by the writer to describe an about to occur event.

In Acts 27:10, Paul is quoted as saying, “Men, I can see that our voyage is going (mello) to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” Here again we see “mello” used in the context of something about to occur. We see “mello” used several dozen times in the book of Acts. A review of the context wherein this word is used will over and over again show an event that was about to take place and subsequently did take place. Yet when it comes to Paul’s use of this word in Acts 24:15, it is automatically assumed to relate to an event that has yet to take place, thousands of years from the time Paul spoke. Let’s look at this scripture:

In Acts 24:15, we read the following: “and I have the same hope in God as these men, that *there will be* (mello) a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.” Author Samuel Frost shows “mello” in this passage to be a “present infinitive with the copulative in the future,” (*The Millennial Post*, December 1, 2003). Mr. Frost points out that the Greek in this passage shows the same grammatical construction that is seen in Acts 11:28 and Acts 27:10, as cited above. Paul was saying that the resurrection was about to take place in the same sense as Agabus was saying a famine was about to take place. These were events that would take place soon after they were prophesied. There is absolutely no grammatical or contextual reason to believe that “mello” has suddenly changed its meaning in Acts 24:15. There is no legitimate way one can justify interpreting Paul’s statement

about resurrection to relate to an event thousands of years into the future. Whatever Paul meant by “resurrection” in this passage, he was seeing it as something about to take place. We will deal extensively with the issue of resurrection later in this series.

## **IS THE KINGDOM A PRESENT REALITY?**

The scriptures we have reviewed all point to the Kingdom having arrived with the return of Christ in the events connected with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem during the Roman-Jewish War. This was a spiritual event insomuch that Christ didn't visibly appear, but facilitated events that clearly reflected what He prophesied in the Olivet Discourse, the Revelation and numerous other sayings. The Kingdom was established as a spiritual entity and continues as such for all those who accept Christ and direct their lives according to the tenets of the Kingdom.

Some would challenge the position that the Kingdom is a spiritual reality in the life of a Christian. This challenge sees Christianity as being hopelessly divided and having been so for two-thousand years. Many that think of themselves as Christians live lives that belie that conclusion. The great majority of humans that have lived and died since Christ appeared have not been Christian but of some non-Christian religion or no religion at all. The history of the world has been one of violence, war, pain and suffering since the appearance of Christ. What kind of Kingdom is that? According to the scriptures, the establishment of the Kingdom involves the putting down of Satan. It would appear that Satan is doing quite well in this world, and if there is anyone that could be identified as king of the earth, it would have to be Satan and not Christ.

Our challenger may state the following: If the tenets of the Kingdom are within the heart of the Christian, then the behavior of the Christian should reflect that. If we are to postulate that the Kingdom of God is here and now, and is made up of the community of believers in Christ, why is it that this community of believers is so divided as to their doctrinal belief systems and the manner in which they practice (and often fail to practice) Christianity? The scripture itself states, “a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.” It is certainly apparent that the Christian community is very divided not only in its doctrinal and theological understanding but also in its moral and ethical behavior. Seeing this has been the case for the past two-thousand years and continues to be the case, how does this fact correlate with the position that the Kingdom of God is here now? While there is sound scriptural evidence for understanding that the Kingdom is a present spiritual reality, there appears little correlation between that understanding and the actual state of affairs extant in the Christian community.

The challenger will go on to show that there are a variety of scriptures in both Old and New Testaments that suggest that the Kingdom of God represents a time of peace, joy and tranquility. Even if one were to totally spiritualize these passages and apply them to Christians, a reality check would quickly dispel the idea that such peace, joy and tranquility exist in any significant way within the Christian community. Physical, emotional, social and spiritual problems are rampant in the Christian community. What kind of Kingdom is that?

On the surface, this appears as a valid challenge to the Kingdom being a present reality. The problem with this challenge is that it is based on a wrong understanding of what the Kingdom is. The Kingdom has to do with being born of the spirit as Christ told Nicodemus. Being born of the spirit isn't something you see physically. It can and should have outward manifestation in righteous living, but it is a spiritual phenomenon. Christians today, as the Jews of the first century, expect a

physical Kingdom. Christians often look to a future return of Christ to set up a world ruling government, headquartered in Jerusalem where a rebuilt temple will stand as Christ's residence. The scriptures, however, speak of a new order of things occurring near to the time the Revelation was given to John.

Revelation 21:1-8: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.'

Revelation 22:10-15: Then he told me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.' 'Behold, *I am coming soon!* My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.'

John is told not to seal up the words of this prophecy because the time was near. John sees, prophetically, the passing of the old earth and heavens. He sees the new heavens and the new earth coming into view. The replacement of the old heavens and earth with a new heavens and earth relates to the passing of the Old Covenant of death and the establishment of the New Covenant of Life represented by the tree of life. This will be explained in detail later on in this series. It is this change in covenants that is the focus of the end of the age events discussed in Scripture.

In Revelation 22, we again see the imminency of the events being discussed. The prophecy is not to be sealed, because the time was near. This passage also shows that the unrighteous will still exist but will be outside the city, which represents the Kingdom. The unrighteous continue to live in a state of spiritual death while those that have accepted Christ are invited to partake of the tree of life and enter the Kingdom.

It is interesting that the same Christians who believe that the Kingdom is future, will also believe that they are led by God's Spirit in the here and now. If the Spirit of God is indeed present in the life of Christians, one would expect that "spiritual" living should be obvious. Yet the same reality check that some feel challenges the presence of the Kingdom, would also challenge the presence of the Spirit. The same spiritual, emotional, physical and social problems that are evident for those who believe in the presence of the Kingdom are also in evidence for those who believe they have God's Spirit and yet believe the Kingdom to be future. Since Christians who claim to have God's Spirit dwelling in them still have behavioral problems, are we to conclude that they don't have God's

spirit? I don't believe that very many Christians would endorse that idea.

I submit that having God's Spirit and being in the Kingdom are one and the same. We need to consider how the Kingdom of God applies to us. The coming of Christ has destroyed death. Not physical death but spiritual death. The acceptance of Christ facilitates the passing from death unto life and a glorious future that has already begun for the Christian. The fear of death should no longer be a factor for a Christian. Death has been swallowed up in victory through Christ. The righteousness of Christ applied to the Christian is what facilitates our passing from death unto life. Christ said we must be born again in order to enter the Kingdom. Being born again is passing from death unto life and is the spiritual process by which we enter the Kingdom.

God sees us as righteous and therefore as being in the Kingdom. Our challenge is to more fully recognize this and conduct ourselves accordingly. Such conduct, however, will never even be close to perfect. To think that it is our conduct that will qualify us for acceptance with God is to return to the Old Covenant system of attainment through works. It is this very system that Christ came to destroy through His death, resurrection and return.

The Old Covenant system of death has been destroyed. Christ did return as He said. His return has facilitated life through the termination of the old and the establishment of the new. Christ said in Revelation 21, as quoted above, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

Everything is made new in Christ. In Christ there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain. The Christian can be confident that spiritually he has passed from death unto life where there is peace and joy. Physically, there will continue to be troubles, pain, suffering and death. These physical realities of life are not the measurement of being in the Kingdom. Being in the Kingdom involves our spiritual relationship with God. That spiritual relationship is what will determine how we handle the troubles, pain, suffering and death of this physical life. Christ was the embodiment of the Kingdom. Yet Christ, while in the flesh, experienced trouble, pain, suffering and physical death. It was Christ's spiritual relationship with God that enabled Him to deal with all of this and rise above the physical.

The Christians of the first century were in the process of entering the Kingdom. Paul told the Colossian Christians that they were being ushered into the Kingdom. Yet these Colossians continued to experience the persecutions and sufferings associated with this physical life. The Kingdom is of the spirit, not of the flesh. The Kingdom has to do with how we handle the difficulties of this physical life. It is not defined by the absence of such difficulties.

Christ plainly told Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). The Greek word *kosmos* is used for world. This word pertains to the physical realm. *Kosmos* means the world as created, ordered and arranged (See appendix 129 of the Companion Bible). Christ plainly said His Kingdom was not of this physical realm, this world as created, ordered and arranged.

Christians want to define the Kingdom in a physical context. It can't be defined that way. God is growing a spiritual Kingdom of individuals who are willing to submit to his will. This involves two things. First, repentance, which is a willingness to change and pursue righteous behavior. Second, there must be acceptance of and reliance on the sacrifice of Christ to atone for unrighteous behavior, which is sin. It is these two dynamics that constitute being born into the everlasting Kingdom.

Since the Kingdom is a present spiritual reality for the Christian, the Christian can have a very positive impact on the physical world we live in. By living in a manner reflective of the law of the Kingdom, Christians can make the world a better place to live out our physical lives. In this respect, it is not so much a matter of our being in the Kingdom as it is a matter of the Kingdom being in us. It therefore should be the goal of Christians to be proactive in sharing the message of the Kingdom. In so doing, God's Kingdom will continue to expand as increasing numbers of individuals are born into the Kingdom and pass from death unto life.

For an indebt examination of what the Kingdom is and how one enters it, I refer you to my essay entitled, [\*What Is The Kingdom of God.\*](#)

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART NINE

### WHEN ARE THE “LAST DAYS”?

In previous parts of these essays, we have discussed phrases such as “the end of all things” and “the time of the end.” Many Christians believe that such phrases pertain to what the scriptures call the last days. A reading of Acts 2:14-21, 1 Peter 1:20, and Hebrews 1:1-2, show that the apostles Peter and Paul were teaching that the last days were upon those they were speaking to at the time. Some who teach that the last days are our days, contend that the last days have been going on for the past two-thousand years and will continue to go on right up to a yet future return of Christ. Is this a scripturally supportable position? Let’s set the stage for this discussion by first looking at what Peter and Paul said about the last days.

Acts 2:14-20: Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: *‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.’*

1 Peter 1:20: He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Hebrews 1:1-2: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but *in these last days* he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Let’s continue by reviewing Paul’s first letter to Timothy. In this letter, He warns Timothy about false teachers bringing in false doctrines to the Christians at Ephesus. Paul then instructs Timothy about matters relative to worship and the qualifications for elders and deacons. In chapter 4:1 Paul says, “The Spirit clearly says that in *latter times* some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” Paul then goes on to define what some of these teachings are and instructs Timothy to point these things out to the brothers (verse 6). Therefore, Paul ties the latter times to problems that were occurring at the time he was writing this letter. There is nothing here to suggest that Paul was looking down the corridor of time and saying these problems would continue for 2,000 years and counting, and therefore, the “later times” were to continue thousands of years into the future.

While the problems that Paul speaks of are still problems in the church today, to conclude that the “later times” is also a present and a continuing phenomenon does not logically follow. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, he begins by encouraging Timothy to be faithful and again warns against false teachers.

2 Timothy 3:1-5: But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful,

unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

Paul is addressing Timothy and saying that in the “last days” all these things will be going on and Paul admonishes Timothy to have nothing to do with those who behave in this way. Again we find Paul addressing a situation current to him and he is advising Timothy how best to handle the situation. As always, context is the overriding dynamic that must be considered when examining an issue in Scripture.

The last days are shown in the context of Paul’s letter to be a time frame that Timothy was living in. Paul is not addressing us; he is addressing the man Timothy who lived 2,000 years ago. To stretch these “last days” thousands of years beyond the life of Timothy is totally without justification.

As I have mentioned several times, the last days spoken of in the New Testament are the last days of the Old Covenant system, not the last days of time or planet earth. It is these Old Covenant last days that Paul is dealing with in his letter to Timothy. Both scriptural and secular histories attest to the spiritual corruption of those living in Israel just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. While it is true the kind of behavior Paul describes has been extant in human culture for the past 2,000 years, it is also true that this kind of behavior has also been extant to one degree or another throughout all of human history. The kind of behavior Paul is reciting was not some new kind of behavior. What Paul was telling Timothy was that this type of behavior was a condition of the last days time frame they were living in.

Paul is dealing with a specific time frame of behavior referred to throughout the New Testament as the last time or the last days. Paul is saying that *during this time frame* these spiritual conditions will be extant. Paul is simply identifying what conditions would exist in this specific time frame called the last days. This time frame is associated with the transition from the Old Covenant system to the New Covenant system. It encompasses the spiritual and sometimes physical battle that was being waged between the adherents to the old system and the proponents of the new system. While the behavior described for this time frame has continued to one degree or another for the past 2,000 years, it is a real stretch to postulate that the last days time frame itself has been ongoing for 2,000 years. The apostle James speaks of the last days:

James 5:1-8: Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the *last days*. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, *be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

Notice how James ties in the last days to the fact that the coming of the Lord is near. Here we have the time frame of the last days tied into the time statement of when the return of Christ was to take place. The brothers that James was addressing are not still alive exercising patience and standing

firm waiting for the Lord's coming. The scriptural use of the word *near* in the New Testament is discussed elsewhere in this book. Peter addressed the issue of last things as well.

1 Peter 1:3-5: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the *salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*" Peter goes on to say in verse 13, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the *grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.*"

Peter is showing how salvation was not yet fully available at his writing of this letter but that it would be revealed in the last time and that grace would be given when Jesus Christ is revealed. Think about this! If the last time is still future and Christ has not yet been revealed, then grace and salvation have not yet been revealed and we are still waiting for them to be revealed. This, however, is not the case.

Hebrews 9:24-28: For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

We see here that Christ was sacrificed once to take away sins and would appear a second time to bring salvation. As this passage shows, this was a fulfillment of what the High Priest did yearly to facilitate atonement for the sins of the people. Like the passage in 1 Peter, the writer is saying that Christ will appear to bring salvation to those waiting for Him. This statement is directed to first-century Christians. These Christians are not still waiting for Christ to bring salvation. Neither are present day Christians waiting for Christ to bring salvation.

The granting of salvation was tied to the transition of the Old Covenant system of death to the New Covenant system of life. This transition was not complete until Christ returned in A.D. 70 to wipe out the old system by facilitating the destruction of the temple and its sacrificial system. The transition to the New Covenant system was a gradual process that began with the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. This transition was completed through development of the New Testament Church, and the return of Christ to rescue that Church from the Jewish/Roman persecution. The return of Christ also brought salvation to the saints. The physically living saints were resurrected from spiritual death unto spiritual life. The dead saints were given spiritual residence and eternal life in the heavenly realm. The whole focus of the New Testament narrative is on this transition and the dynamics that surrounded it.

In addition to what Peter writes about salvation being revealed at a yet future to them coming of Christ, other New Testament writers speak in the same manner. In Romans 13:11, Paul says this: "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, *because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.*" Paul is looking at salvation as a yet-to-arrive event, but an event more near than when they first believed.

In his letter to the Philippian Church, Paul says the following: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Here Paul is saying salvation is something they need to continue to work out, which would indicate it was not yet there for the taking. As shown above, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews makes this profound statement: “So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28). Are the Jewish Christians that the writer is addressing still waiting for this to happen? Here we see a very direct statement about Christ bringing salvation with him at His second appearing. This appearing was eagerly being anticipated by first-century Christians as other scriptures clearly show.

If Christ’s second coming is still future, then we are still waiting for salvation to be revealed. I don’t think any Christian would accept that idea. Yet most Christians believe Christ’s second appearing is future. The New Testament writers show clearly that the full availability of salvation was tied to the full implementation of the New Covenant, and the New Covenant was not fully established until the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. This was God’s judgment on Israel brought through the spiritual return of Christ, which resulted in the full availability of salvation for both Jew and Gentile. This salvation is what the New Testament Church was looking forward to. It was this salvation that facilitated their passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life. Before the return of Christ, Christians had the “down payment” of salvation. Paul wrote of this to the Ephesian Church:

**Ephesians 1:13-14: And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.**

At the return of Christ in A.D. 70 this down payment became full payment as eternal life now became resident within them. This is when the full redemption of those who were God’s possession took place. For those who had died in Christ, this was the time when they received their eternal residence with Christ. For those that remained alive, they now knew, because of the events of A.D. 70, that Christ had appeared and they had received full salvation, which translates to resurrection from death unto life. Those who remained alive also knew that when they died, they would continue living in the heavenly realm with Christ.

Anticipating the coming of salvation and the coming of the resurrection amounted to the same thing. It involved a spiritual change. It involved the physically dead in Christ receiving salvation and consequent resurrection to eternal life. For the Christians alive at the return of Christ, it involved a spiritual change, a change in status before God. A passing from death unto life. A change from mortality to immortality. A spiritual entrance into the Kingdom of God. That is the overview that Paul is essentially providing in his letter to the Corinthian brethren. Paul’s treatment of resurrection in his letter to the Corinthians will be treated in detail in a later chapter.

For the first-century pre- A.D. 70 Christian, the hope of eternal life was just that, a hope. This hope did not materialize until the return of Christ. These Christians did not completely enter the Kingdom until the return of Christ. Paul clearly said flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Mortality had to put on immortality. The perishable had to become imperishable. A change had to take place. For the physically dead, this was a resurrection to eternal life in the heavenly realm. For

the physically alive, this was a change of spiritual status before God. This was a change to inherent eternal life, which allowed for spiritual entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, our present day paradigm should be different from that of the pre- A.D. 70 Christian. We don't have to hope for eternal life. The blessed hope that Paul speaks of is already a reality for us. We don't have to experience the same kind of struggles and uncertainties about entering eternal life as we find the pre- A.D. 70 Christians dealing with. Our focus has to be on pleasing the one who has given us eternal life, by responding to His grace and helping to grow the Kingdom that He has given us. Our focus needs to be on living the law of love and reflecting the love of Christ in our behavior toward others.

The conclusion to this matter is that the last days are past. The New Testament last days were a specific time frame relating to the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. This transition facilitated the movement from death unto life. This transition facilitated the establishment of the spiritual Kingdom and our ability to be reconciled to God and to be given eternal life. As Paul said, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). Paul said that the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. The death and resurrection of Christ provide for the forgiveness of sin and thus facilitate the removal of death. The victory over death has been accomplished through the death, resurrection *and* return of Christ. The return of Christ is as critical to this process as His death and resurrection. The scriptures clearly show that the victory over death was not complete until the complete removal of the Old Covenant system. This didn't happen until the destruction of the temple and the judgment upon Israel. In the Roman-Jewish War Christ completed the salvation process by restoring His covenantal presence. Complete salvation has been available to mankind ever since and will be for as long as God allows humanity to continue.

In Acts the third chapter, we see Peter telling the Jews to repent and turn to God, so that their sins could be wiped out when "times of refreshing" would come from the Lord at His return. Peter speaks of God sending "the Christ who had been appointed for you." Peter goes on to say that Christ "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets." Peter then explains that Christ is the prophet that Moses prophesied would come and it is He that they are to listen to or be cut off (Acts 3:17-23). Here again we see Christ being shown as the replacement for Moses. Once again we see the old system being replaced by the new system. Are these Jew's who Peter was addressing still waiting for "times of refreshing" to come? Are they still waiting for their sins to be wiped out? Peter said that Christ "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything." Are these first-century Jews still waiting for God to send the Christ that had been appointed for them? It should be obvious that the return of Christ was an anticipated event to occur in the lifetime of those being addressed by the apostle Peter. As Peter had shown in his sermon recorded in the second chapter of Acts, these were truly the last days when all that had been spoken by the prophets would come to fulfillment.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART TEN

### WHAT IS THE PASSING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH?

As already mentioned, the context of Peter's two letters is the exhortation to live righteously in view of the nearness of the Lord's appearing when He will bring salvation to those who are looking for Him. As explained elsewhere in this book, the bringing of salvation translates into the receiving of eternal life, which is the final nail in the coffin for the Old Covenant system of death. We find that Christ, like Peter, also spoke of the passing of heaven and earth.

**Matthew 5:17-18: Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.**

Christ said He came to fulfill the law. What law is He talking about? Christ then says that until heaven and earth disappear, not any part of the law will disappear until everything is accomplished. What is the "everything" that must be accomplished? Is Christ talking about the physical heaven and earth passing away? The physical heaven and earth are still here. Is the law still here? It must be if it is the physical heaven and earth that must pass away. If the law is still here, then Christ hasn't yet accomplished everything. Let's take a closer look at this matter by seeing what Luke records.

**Luke 24:44-47: This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that was written about in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms. Then He opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**

Here we see "everything" was what was written in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms that must be fulfilled. Christ then goes on to show them some of what is written. Notice that one of the things He lists is the preaching of the gospel to the nations. Preaching the gospel to the nations is one of the things of the law that must be fulfilled/accomplished before heaven and earth pass away. Remember, Christ said that not *any part of the law would disappear* until *everything* is accomplished.

We see from Luke 24:44-47, that a part of the law to be accomplished was that Christ must suffer and rise from the dead. That happened. Preaching of the gospel to the nations was a part of the law that was to be accomplished. As explained earlier in this book, that happened. Forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of Christ was accomplished with the voiding of the sacrificial system at the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. All this was accomplished in the first century.

These fulfillments didn't all happen at the same time. The fulfillment of what was written in the law began with the death and resurrection of Christ. It proceeded with the preaching of the gospel to the nations. It ended with the abolishment of the sacrificial system, priesthood, and legal requirements at the return of Christ in the destruction of the Jewish temple. Above all, the return of Christ abolished spiritual death by bringing salvation at His return to fulfill the hopes and expectations of the saints who were waiting for His return. In Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, Christ is quoted as saying:

Luke 21:20-22: When you shall see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.

These events happened during the Roman-Jewish War as history clearly shows. If these events happened in fulfillment of all that has been written, isn't it reasonable to conclude that this is the same "all that has been written," that Christ spoke of in Luke 24:44-47? Furthermore, Christ said,

Luke 21:31-33: Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

What heaven and earth will pass away? Christ said this in the context of the fall of Jerusalem. The fall of Jerusalem was also the fall of the temple, priesthood and sacrificial system. Let us consider what the writer of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 12:25-28: See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' The words 'once more' indicate the moving of what can be shaken-that is created things-so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

Here we find the writer alluding to the giving of the law when the earth shook at Mount Sinai, as the first part of this chapter clearly shows. Now the writer speaks of God shaking the earth and the heavens so that things that cannot be shaken will remain. He then speaks of the Kingdom as that which cannot be shaken. We therefore see the new order of things, which cannot be shaken, being compared with the old order of things, which can be shaken and will be moved out of the way.

The old order of things was the Old Covenant system. That covenant was in the process of disappearing between the death and resurrection of Christ and His return forty years later. That is why we read in Hebrews 8:13, "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging *will soon* disappear." The Old Covenant still existed when this was written. It took the "fulfillment of all that has been written" to completely abolish the Old Covenant and establish the new. The New Covenant is synonymous with the Kingdom that cannot be shaken because it is spiritual. This passing of the Old Covenant was the passing of heaven and earth. Now let's return to 2 Peter.

2 Peter 3:6-7: By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

The Greek word for world in this passage is *kosmos*. This word refers to the physical realm or the orderly arrangement of things. The physical world was not destroyed at the time of the flood. The disobedient people were destroyed. Their arrangement of things was destroyed. Peter then shows that the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire in relation to judgment and destruction of

ungodly men. Peter is not saying that the physical earth and heavens will be destroyed but that the Old Covenant system of ungodly men would be destroyed. The word “world” is being used of a specific system in association with a specific generation of people no different from us when we use such phrases as “the wide world of sports” or “the world of communications” to signify a specific arrangement of things.

Peter is not referring to the physical world here any more than he was earlier in this letter when he spoke of the ancient world not being spared. In 2 Peter 2:5, Peter speaks of God not sparing the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others. The context of this verse clearly shows he is speaking of the world of ungodly people, not the physical world. While it is true that the orderly arrangement of the physical world was destroyed along with the ungodly people, the physical earth remained and continues to this very day. Peter writes:

**2 Peter 3:10-12: But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and *speed* its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.**

Here we see Peter, within the context of this coming destruction, exhorting the readers of his letter to live holy and godly lives in anticipation of God’s coming. The first-century Christians were all expecting the return of Christ to be imminent. We see the same approach here in Peter’s letters. We therefore must seek an explanation of Peter’s comments about the destruction of heaven and earth within that context.

Peter speaks of the elements melting in the heat. The Greek word *stoikion* which is translated as elements in this passage can refer to the elements that make up the physical earth and heavens, or it can refer to what elements make up the letters of the alphabet, or just about anything else you may want to break down in small pieces. Once again, context must determine the meaning. In the New Testament, this Greek word is translated as “elements, rudiments and principles,” depending on what translation you look at. The apostle Paul used this word relative to the law. In the NIV it’s translated as principles and in the KJV as elements. The context shows that it is referring to the Old Covenant law. Let’s take a look at the context of Paul’s letter to the Galatian brethren.

**Galatians 3:1-5: You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing-if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?**

Paul is dealing here with the problem of the Galatian Christians being deceived by the Jews into ordering their lives according to the Old Covenant. This is the context as clearly shown in chapters one and two. It is in this context that Paul refers to being under the slavery of basic principles of the world. By context, Paul is showing that he is speaking of the Old Covenant law system as basic principles of the world. Paul is not suddenly changing the subject and speaking of some other system.

Galatians 4:3-11: So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God-or rather are known by God-how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

Paul deals with the same problem relative to the Colossian Christians and here, too, uses the phrase "basic principles of the world" to reference the law.

Colossians 2:8-17: See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."

Verse 20: "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules?"

In 2 Peter 3: 7&12, the apostle speaks of the present heavens and earth reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men and the elements melting with fervent heat. These elements, elsewhere called principles, are referring to the law system. It is this system that was going to be brought down. In Luke 12:49 Christ said, "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" Let's now look at what Paul writes to the Thessalonian brethren.

#### **CHRIST IS REVEALED IN BLAZING FIRE:**

2 Thessalonians 1:1-10: Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: *He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.* This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in *blazing fire* with his powerful angels.

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Paul, Silas and Timothy congratulate the Thessalonian Church for its perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials it was enduring. Keep in mind it is the Thessalonian Christians being addressed. Paul is not addressing Christians living in the 21st century. The Thessalonians were being promised relief from the trouble they were experiencing. By having their enemies destroyed, it would bring relief to Paul, Silas and Timothy as well. This promise of retribution upon their enemies would have been meaningless to the Thessalonian Church if it were meant to occur 2,000 years into the future after a long delayed coming of Christ. It is evident from the context that this retribution took place while they were still living and that this retribution involved the revealing of Christ.

Those who teach a future fulfillment of what is written in Thessalonians will point to chapter two and the narrative about the “man of lawlessness.” Let’s carefully consider this entire passage. Keep in mind that the physical temple was still standing in Jerusalem when this was written. There is no reason to believe that the writer means something other than that first-century temple which was the center of the Jewish religious system.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-7: Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.” Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And *now* you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness *is already* at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

*The context here clearly shows this to be a current events situation.* This passage leaves no doubt that the subject is the return of Christ. The writer reflects on how when he was with the Thessalonians in person, he had discussed these events with them. He then relates to them how they presently know what is holding back the man of lawlessness, and that the power of lawlessness is already at work but will be held back until the one holding it back is removed. Here we have the writer showing that these events were already in progress and beginning to occur.

2 Thessalonians 2:8-12: And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the splendor of His coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Who is this lawless one? Who or what prevents him from being removed? Remember that the original thrust of this letter to the Thessalonian Christians involved their being granted relief from

persecution. Then the writer wants to assure them that, contrary to some reports, Christ has not returned. The very fact that some believed that Christ had returned, shows the first-century context of these events and their spiritual nature. It would have been obvious that Christ had not returned physically or that any type of physical resurrection had taken place.

Those who propose a future fulfillment of this passage have named about every person imaginable as the “man of lawlessness.” Those who believe this to be a first-century event have at times considered Nero as this person. Nero, however, was already dead at the time the temple was destroyed and never set himself up in the temple. The most practical approach to determining who this man may have been is to search the writings of the secular historians of the time and see if their writings identify such a person. John L Bray, a Baptist minister from Florida, has done just that and published his findings in a booklet entitled, *The Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians 2*. Mr. Bray found in the writings of Josephus a description of a man that fits very well the description given by the writer to the Thessalonians.

Josephus writes that the Roman General Cestius Gallus and his army came against Jerusalem and were driven out by the Jewish forces at which time the Christian community fled the city. About this time there arose a man from the small town of Gischala in Galilee, by the name of John Levi. Josephus describes him as treacherous, cunning and conniving. After the defeat of Cestius Gallus, Nero sent Vespasian against Judea. Vespasian, with his son Titus, first took Galilee, and in coming to Gischala, Titus was tricked by John Levi into a delay, giving John Levi and his followers time to flee to Jerusalem. Josephus writes, “Now this was the work of God, who therefore preserved this John, that he might bring on the destruction of Jerusalem.” When Titus realized he had been deceived, he pursued after John and in the process many thousands were killed. John, however, along with some of his men, escaped to Jerusalem.

Once in Jerusalem, John Levi persuaded the people to go to war against the Romans and deceived them into thinking that they could win. He especially corrupted the young men into thinking that they could succeed in war. With John Levi working behind the scenes, a rebel army developed, intent on fighting the Romans. At one point John went into the temple and told an assembly of zealots that he was an ambassador sent to them by God. John had a hand in bringing the Idumaeans to Jerusalem to prevent the people from submitting to Rome. The Idumeans killed thousands of Jews. Many factions developed, all fighting each other in civil war. The high priest Ananus, the one restraining force, was killed. Josephus said, “I should not mistake if I said that the death of Ananus was the beginning of the destruction of the city, and from this day may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs.”

John broke off his relationship with the zealots and joined himself to an even more rebellious group. He was responsible for burning the stores of corn and other provisions that could have supported a much longer resistance. He took possession of the temple and its adjoining parts and melted down the sacred implements used by the priests. He emptied the vessels of sacred wine and oil, which the priests used to pour on burnt offerings thus leading to the eventual discontinuance of the daily sacrifice. Josephus tells of how John began to tyrannize and set up a monarchical power and how he was a shrewd man, able to entice men to him, both by deluding them and putting cleats upon them. Josephus wrote that John was so great in activity that he required guards around him at all times to protect him from his enemies.

John L. Bray summarizes his reading of Josephus as follows:

"John [John Levi] had complete control and authority in the Temple. He caused the death of Ananus the high priest; he committed sacrilege by melting down the vessels of the Temple; he was the cause of the daily sacrifices ceasing. In short, he was taking the place of God in the Temple."

A careful reading of Josephus will show that it was the high priest Ananus who stood in the way of John Levi and others as they attempted to mobilize the Jews in their rebellion against the Romans. Josephus writes at length of the efforts of Ananus to stop the rebellion and cooperate with Rome. Once Ananus was killed, all "hell" broke loose.

While we can't be positive that John Levi was the man of lawlessness that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Thessalonians, this man and his actions certainly fit the description. To argue that the appearance of the man of lawlessness is a yet future event is unnecessary and actually contrary to the context of this letter to the Thessalonians and the historical events of the first century.

It should be clear from the context of Paul's letter, that the apostle is addressing a current situation. He is writing to the Thessalonian Christians about events currently happening to them and of events that are about to happen to them. He writes of the current persecution he and they are experiencing and how he and they will be given relief from that persecution at the time their persecutors are punished. He goes on to show how that punishment will take place at the coming of "our Lord Jesus Christ." He shows how that coming hasn't happened yet but will happen when the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness appears. He speaks of this man of lawlessness being held back and that they know what is, at the time of the writing of this letter, holding him back. He speaks of the power of lawlessness already at work but being presently, *at that time*, held back by someone. He speaks of how once this restraint is removed, the lawless one will be revealed and will be overthrown. As shown above, after the high priest Ananus was killed, the rebellion became all encompassing and led to the great slaughter and destruction of the common people.

Whether John Levi and Ananus were the principals involved in this drama is speculative. What should not be speculative is the time frame surrounding the events that Paul is addressing. Paul is addressing current events in the first century. This places the return of Christ in the first century along with all associated events such as the establishment of the Kingdom and the occurrence of the resurrection. These events are tied to the return of Christ.

It should therefore be apparent that when Paul speaks to the Thessalonians about Christ coming in blazing fire, he is reflecting on what Christ said about having come to set fire on the earth. This also associates well with what Peter says about destruction by fire. These men were not talking about a fire thousands of years future from them. They were speaking of a fire that was shortly to come to pass as judgment against Israel. This fire had to do with the abolishment of the Old Covenant system of death and the establishment of the New Covenant of life.

When we look at 2 Peter 3 within the context of the removal of the Old Covenant system, which is the context of much of the New Testament, we see how the various scriptural references to "the day of the Lord" apply. We see how the last days are tied to covenantal change. We see that destruction by fire and elements burning with fervent heat are symbolic language for the final removal of the Old Covenant system and judgment upon its adherents. Much of the New Testament is a history of the battle for the New Covenant. Much of what is written in the New Testament is about the struggle that took place between advocates of the old system and advocates of the new system. This battle came to an end with the destruction and judgment of the Jewish temple system. Peter, as

Christ did in the Olivet Discourse, is simply using symbolic/apocalyptic language to describe these events. Let's again look at what Peter says.

2 Peter 3:10-13: But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Peter speaks of living holy lives in anticipation of a soon to occur coming of Christ. That coming will bring destruction of the heavens by fire. It is the heaven and earth of the Old Covenant system of death that was destroyed. It was replaced by the new heaven and earth of the New Covenant system of life. The promise of a new heaven and a new earth is found in Isaiah.

Isaiah 65:17-18: Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

Isaiah 66:22: As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.

As shown earlier, the apostle John speaks of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. John shows the unrighteous to still exist on the outside of the new heavens and earth. If the *physical* heaven and earth are what is being removed, why do we still find the unrighteous hanging around? This is all symbolic language for being in the Kingdom as opposed to being outside the Kingdom. Christ has established the pathway to eternal life. He has invited all who are willing, to enter through the gates into the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is synonymous with the Kingdom of God. Those who refuse to accept the new order of things are those outside the gates.

The Revelation was written prior to A.D. 70. This message was written to the seven churches existing in Asia at the time of this writing. This message gave, in much symbolism, an account of what was to take place relative to the transition from the Old to the New Covenant system. This message concludes with a description of the new heavens and new earth and the New Jerusalem being the bride of Christ, which is the New Covenant Church. The wicked remain outside of this system. This shows that the physical earth remains. The nearness of these events is repeated over and over again. The context is the first century and that is when these events described by Peter and John took place and the new system was established.

## WHEN WILL CHRIST RETURN? PART ELEVEN

### RESURRECTION:

If you have read the previous ten parts of this series, you are ready for this essay on the resurrection. If you have not read the previous ten parts, I highly recommend you do so before reading this section on resurrection. Without having read the material leading up to this section, it would be difficult to make a whole lot of sense of what you are about to read.

If you have read this far, you have seen that many scriptures, in conjunction with secular history, show a first-century return of Christ in judgment and establishment of His everlasting Kingdom. All Christians understand that resurrection from the dead is also associated with the return of Christ. If the return of Christ is a first-century reality, then resurrection is also a first-century reality.

What is resurrection? When most people think of resurrection, they think of dead bodies being raised from graves. When Christ and the writers of scripture speak of resurrection, how do they see resurrection? Christ was raised to life after having physically died. Christ raised the daughter of Jairus and Lazarus to physical life after they had physically died. We see several examples of people being brought back to physical life in the Old Testament. The record of events associated with the crucifixion/resurrection of Christ reveals that one of those events involved bodies coming out of tombs and appearing to various people (*cf.* Matthew 27: 52-53). It is therefore apparent that one scriptural meaning of resurrection is to bring a dead physical body back to physical life. Is this the only way to view resurrection? How should resurrection be viewed relative to receiving salvation and in relation to the return of Christ?

We have already read in Daniel 12 that multitudes would rise at the time the power of the holy people is broken. That time was when the temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system was terminated. Was Daniel referring to individual dead people rising or was he referring to some type of collective or corporate rising? As Christians, we all look forward to being resurrected to eternal life. When does this take place? Many Christians believe that when they die they go straight to heaven to be with Christ. Yet these same Christians believe that they will be resurrected from the dead at a yet future return of Christ. If this is the case, what kind of existence are they experiencing in heaven while awaiting a resurrection to life some time in the future? If they are already with Christ, then why a future resurrection to be with Christ? Some attempt to resolve this problem by asserting that soul and body are the same. Therefore, when we physically die our soul does not go to heaven or anywhere else. The soul simply “sleeps” in the grave awaiting a future resurrection.

In the ancient world, the idea of once dead physical bodies being resurrected back to physical life was considered absurd. There were various beliefs in life beyond the grave but such life was always seen as existing in some disembodied form. The idea of dead physical bodies coming back to life was not considered to be possible. Greek philosophers introduced the concept of the immortality of the soul. This concept saw the soul as the “real person” who had always existed but was temporarily housed in a physical body. Upon physical death this immortal soul continued to live on in another dimension.

The Hebrew concept of life after physical death is not well defined in the Old Testament. The focus is more on living a good physical life by being blessed with children, having good land to live on and having a proper relationship with God. Life beyond physical death is seen more in terms of

simply returning to the dust from which one came. While there is reference to life after physical death in Old Testament writings, the nature of such life is unclear. Where the concept of resurrection is found, it appears to be associated with a return from exile for the people of Israel. A good example of this is the “dry bones” metaphor found in Ezekiel 37.

Some scholars see evidence for belief in physical resurrection from the writings of the Maccabees just prior to the first century A.D. During the time of Christ, it is assumed the religious sect of the Pharisees believed in physical resurrection while the sect of the Sadducees did not. This mix of belief about the meaning of resurrection has continued to our present day. What people have believed or not believed about resurrection over the centuries cannot be our focus.

Our challenge is to determine what Christ taught about resurrection and what Paul and other New Testament writers understood resurrection to be. The scriptural and historical evidence says Christ returned in the first century. Since resurrection is tied to the return of Christ, then resurrection also occurred (or began to occur) in the first century. Our task is to determine how resurrection took place. How did/does resurrection occur? Do dead physical bodies become live physical bodies? Do dead physical bodies become spiritual bodies? Does resurrection have to do with dead physical bodies at all? How are we to understand resurrection relative to a first-century return of Christ?

There are a number of dynamics involved in coming to understand resurrection in relation to a first-century return of Christ. These dynamics involve the covenantal transition that was taking place, and the response to that transition from Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians and Jewish non-Christians. Let’s take a look at these dynamics.

#### COVENANTS IN TRANSITION:

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the close associates of Christ were given the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and began to preach salvation through Christ. This message initially went only to the Jews. With the conversion of Paul, and Peter’s experience with Cornelius, the gospel of Christ also went to the Gentiles. A careful reading of the book of Acts will clearly demonstrate there was a great deal of tension between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Many of the Jewish Christians, while accepting Christ as their savior, still continued to observe the Old Covenant law. While it appears that the leadership of the Jewish Christians understood that adherence to the Old Covenant regulations was not required for salvation, such regulations continued to be an important dynamic in the lives of Jewish converts.

After initially ministering to the Jews, Paul took his ministry to the Gentiles. The Gentiles, having not been under the Old Covenant law, readily accepted the gospel message and all that message implied relative to New Covenant living. This created much tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Many Jewish Christians still felt that the law of Moses had to be followed. This led to the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15 where it was basically determined that Gentile Christians were not obligated to keep the law of Moses. It is interesting that little is recorded about the Jewish Christians setting aside the Old Covenant system. In fact, it appears that the Jewish Christians, including their leadership, continued to observe the Mosaic customs as demonstrated in Acts 21.

**Acts 21:17-26: When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: ‘You see, brother, *how many thousands of Jews have believed,***

*and all of them are zealous for the law.* They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, *but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.* As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.’ The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

It is apparent from this record that Jewish Christians were still observing the customs and regulations of the Old Covenant system and believed that they should. Only the Gentile Christians were excused from such adherence. It is also apparent that many Jewish Christians continued to feel that the Gentiles should adhere to the Mosaic regulations. The persecutions suffered by Paul were a combination of assaults from both the Jewish Christian community and those non-Christian Jews who were vehemently opposed to the developing Christian religion in general. This is revealed again in the face-to-face altercation between Paul and Peter.

*Galatians 2:11-16: When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.’*

It’s apparent from this account that Paul had come to understand and act on the New Covenant initiatives in Christ. Peter and the other Jerusalem apostles were still squeamish about separating themselves from Old Covenant regulations. The leadership of the Jewish Christians was especially reluctant to behave contrary to the Old Covenant requirements in full view of their fellow Jewish Christians.

This altercation between Paul and Peter shows the struggle going on within the Jewish Christian community relative to the Old Covenant way of living on the one hand, and the freedom contained in the New Covenant system on the other hand. Paul’s letters to the various Churches reflect the ongoing tension that he constantly had to deal with relative to the two covenantal systems. Jewish Christians were constantly infiltrating the ranks of the Gentile Christians to try and turn them to Mosaic observances. As the Gentile Christian community became more established, it’s apparent that such Jewish infiltration had less and less effect and there is indication that some of the Gentile Christians began to view the Jews as being rejected and ineligible for salvation through Christ.

## GENTILE REACTION:

A careful reading of Paul's letter to the Church at Rome reveals that a certain smugness had developed among some of the Gentile Christians relative to their being granted salvation in Christ. The reason Paul had taken the gospel to the Gentiles was that the Jews had largely rejected Paul's message. This rejection of Paul may have been because he simply didn't pull any punches in teaching salvation through faith in Christ, devoid of the Mosaic system. As shown above, Peter and the other Jerusalem leadership appear to have taken a much gentler and restrained approach to introducing New Covenant concepts.

As persecution from the non-Christian Jewish community and pressure from Jewish Christians continued, Gentile Christians began to feel pretty good about themselves. Some appear to have concluded that God had rejected Israel altogether in favor of Gentile salvation. We see the evidence for this in the way Paul feels it necessary to defend Israel and God's purpose before the Gentile Romans.

**Romans 10:1-4: Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites, is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.**

Here we find Paul addressing the Gentile Romans and speaking of how Israel is zealous for God but has failed to understand the Christ event. This lack of understanding keeps Israel locked into trying to establish righteousness through observing the law. Because most of Israel continued to resist the gospel message, it was allowed to go to the Gentiles. This did not, however, mean that Israel was rejected, as some apparently believed.

**Romans 11:1-5: I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me?' And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.**

**Romans 11:6-8: And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.'**

Paul made it clear that Israel had not been rejected. He supports this by showing that at that time a remnant of Israel was chosen just as in the days of Elijah. That remnant was the Jewish Christians. These Jewish Christians were in the process of moving from the Old Covenant system of death into the New Covenant system of life. The rest of Israel remained opposed to the transition as the New Testament narrative clearly shows. Christ had made it clear that salvation is of the Jews. Because of Israel's rejection, the Gentiles are brought into the salvation meant for Israel. Paul, however, makes it very clear that there will be a coming acceptance on the part of Israel.

Romans 11:11-15: Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Paul tells us that Israel's lack of acceptance of the gospel message has opened the door for the Gentiles and the entire non-Israelite world to be reconciled to God. Paul also shows that their acceptance will mean life from the dead. This status of life from the dead is viewed as a yet future event to those Paul is addressing. Resurrection is life from the dead. Is Paul talking here of returning to physical life from physical death or is he talking about a different kind of life and death? Keep this question in mind as we continue to examine resurrection.

In Romans 11, Paul continues to show the Gentiles that the only reason they are being granted salvation is Israel's rejection of Christ. Paul tells the Gentiles that they totally owe their opportunity for salvation to the promises made to Israel. Without Israel there would be no salvation.

Romans 11:16-21: If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Paul makes it clear to the Gentiles that they have nothing to boast about. They are being granted salvation only because of their spiritual connection to the root of Israel. Paul shows that there are firstfruits from this root that are considered holy. Those firstfruits were the Jewish Christians. The broken branches were the non-Christian Jews who were persecuting the developing Christian Church. Paul goes on to show why this all was happening and what the outcome would be.

Romans 11:25-32: I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.' As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

It is clear that the hardening of Israel took place so Gentiles could be accepted. Paul then shows that Christ would come and establish a covenant with Israel that would take away their sins. Take note that this establishment of a covenant is future to those Paul was addressing. The New Covenant was not completely established at the cross or at Pentecost when the Spirit was given. The establishment

of the New Covenant was a process that went on for the forty-year period between the ascension of Christ and His return during the war with Rome. It was during this forty-year period that the Gentiles were accepted into Israel's promises along with a remnant group of Israelites, referred to as the firstfruits. It was in judgment against the gospel-rejecting Jews that Christ came in A.D. 70. It was then that the Old Covenant was finally destroyed and fully replaced with the New Covenant.

#### RESURRECTION AND THE ROMANS:

Paul's use of resurrection in his letter to the Romans is not speaking of dead biological bodies rising to physical life. This should be clear from the following passage.

Romans 6:3-11: Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul explains that through baptism we are buried with Christ into death and raised with Christ to life. Obviously, we don't physically die nor are we physically resurrected in this process. Paul sees this process as our body of sin being done away. Paul says that Christ, being raised from the dead, cannot again die because the death He died was to sin. Paul is not speaking here of Christ's physical death and resurrection. Dying to sin involves the removal of sin and its associated death penalty. The death of Christ facilitated the removal of the penalty for sin death. Christ could not die again because he had conquered sin death, which is spiritual separation from God. We find sin death defined in Isaiah.

Isaiah 59:1-2: Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

In Genesis 2:15-17, God told Adam that he would die in the day that he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Hebrew word translated day in this passage is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament scriptures and its meaning is determined by context and/or the particular grammatical form the word takes. Here in Genesis the word is in a form that means, "in the day in which," signifying a specific time as opposed to a general time as found in other usage of this word in the Old Testament (See *Gesenius Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* - see also Exodus 10:28 and Leviticus 7:35-36 for additional examples of this usage).

Therefore it is apparent that "in the day" (because of the context in which it is used and the grammatical form in which it is found) means that in the specific day that Adam and Eve ate of the tree, in that day they would die. Adam and Eve did not physically die when they ate of the tree. Adam lived to be 930 years old and then he died. While we do not know how long Eve lived, we do know that she had children and therefore lived for some time after the tree incident.

What kind of death did Adam and Eve experience as a result of eating from the forbidden tree? Since the immediate penalty was not physical death but instead removal from the garden and separation from the immediate presence of God, it is apparent that they died a spiritual death, a sin death, which Scripture shows to be a separation from God.

In Romans 6, Paul said the death Christ died was to sin and that is why He could not die again. Lazarus physically died, was physically raised and apparently physically died again. Just to physically die and be physically resurrected did not protect a person from dying again. Christ physically died and was resurrected but could not die again because He destroyed the cause of death. What is the cause of death and what kind of death is being considered? Let Paul answer these questions.

1 Corinthians 15:56: The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

2 Corinthians 3:6-10: He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.

Romans 10:4: Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Galatians 3:13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'

The law defined sin. Paul said in Romans 5:13 that where there is no law there is no sin. Paul also shows in Romans 5 that sin had been around since Adam. Therefore law had been in place since Adam. Paul explained that the Old Covenant codified law system facilitated by Moses was actually added to increase sin (Romans 5:20). By codifying the law, it made it even more apparent when the law was broken and sin occurred. Scripture defines sin as breaking the law (1 John 3:4). The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Man was never able to avoid breaking the law and therefore was unable to avoid sinning. Since sin causes death, man was unable to avoid death.

Breaking God's law demanded death. Death involves separation from God. Christ never sinned and therefore never experienced separation from God except for one time. Christ voluntarily took our sins upon Himself in order to pay the death penalty. This one act by Christ paid the death penalty for all of humanity. The penalty for breaking the law has been satisfied for all time. By suffering the penalty for breaking the law, Christ brought the reign of sin and death to an end. The death of Christ provided the way to escape spiritual death. By taking our sins upon Himself, Christ not only experienced the shedding of His blood in physical death, but He also experienced what every one of us experiences, separation from God. Notice what happened at the cross.

Matthew 27:46: About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

The Greek word translated “forsaken” means to “abandon, desert or leave helpless,” (see Thayer’s *Greek Lexicon*). Since it is sin that separates us from God, Christ experienced a momentary separation from God, as He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). The death of Christ facilitated reconciliation with God. Christ was resurrected to show he had indeed conquered death. The death Christ conquered is sin death. Sin death is spiritual separation from God. Physically, we all continue to die. Spiritually, we are alive as a result of Christ’s having made reconciliation with God possible. We appear righteous before God because of what Christ did. Reconciliation with God changes our spiritual standing before God. In the past we stood before God as condemned sinners. Now we can stand before God as righteous because the perfect righteousness of Christ is applied to us.

Under the Old Covenant, righteousness was measured in terms of how well one kept the law. Christ came to abolish the Old Covenant and establish the New Covenant where righteousness is obtained through faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

**2 Corinthians 5:17-21: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to *be sin for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Christ took our sins upon Himself and suffered the death penalty in the process. This death was both physical and spiritual. The resurrection of Christ proved him to be the promised Messiah to Israel. The Messiah was the one prophesied to take away the sins of Israel and, therefore, reconcile Israel back to God. The sacrificial system of the Old Covenant could not take away sin. It took the sacrifice of Christ to do this. Christ’s sacrifice began the process of establishing the New Covenant system and abolishing the old. This process would culminate in the destruction of Herod’s temple.

The Old Covenant required strict obedience to the law that defined that covenant. That law was composed of the Ten Commandments, numerous other behavioral requirements, and a variety of religious holy days and ceremonial statutes. Disobedience to that law was defined as sin and sin required death. That law was holy, just and good as Paul stated in his letter to the Romans. The problem was that the people of Israel were unable to obey it in any consistent manner and therefore the very law that was meant for their good became a ministration of death for them. This death was a sin death, a spiritual separation from God. Christ came to do away with the ministration of death and eliminate this spiritual separation from God.

Christ accomplished this by taking our sin upon himself. This caused Him to experience a momentary spiritual separation from God. The physical death of Christ, while a necessary dynamic, did not do away with the requirement that we physically die. We all physically die. We do not have to die spiritually. In rising from the dead, Christ made eternal life available. He did this by facilitating the abolishment of the Old Covenant system of death and establishing the New Covenant system of life. The new system brings life by bestowing the perfect righteousness of Christ on us so that before God we appear righteous. Therefore, we are no longer separated from God. The Old Covenant system was a body of death. The New covenant system is a body of life. Paul makes an interesting statement in Romans:

**Romans 8:10: But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.**

Paul is saying our body is dead as a result of sin but our spirit is alive because of righteousness. Paul does not mean that we physically die the moment we sin. Paul is not talking about physical death or physical bodies here at all. If that were the case, no one would be physically alive. Paul is referring to the natural body of sin versus the spiritual body of righteousness. The natural body of sin must be transformed into a spiritual body of righteousness. We know from scripture that it is not our righteousness but the righteousness of Christ applied to us that makes our spirit alive. If this didn't happen, our spirit would remain dead as well. Whether such spiritual death constitutes a spiritual separation from God in some other dimension or an actual death of the spirit is for another discussion. We will discuss the natural versus the spiritual in more detail in the section on 1 Corinthians 15.

Resurrection was a spiritual event that occurred at the return of Christ in A.D. 70. Those saints who had physically died to that point were given spiritual life. Those living at the time of this event were spiritually changed to have immortality now dwelling within them which made them part of the spiritual Kingdom. Under the New Covenant system, we resurrect from spiritual death unto spiritual life. We therefore already have eternal spiritual life dwelling within us. At the time of our physical death, our spiritual body enters into the full presence of God. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says this:

**Colossians 2:9-14: For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in a bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In Him you were circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were *dead* in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you *alive* with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross.**

Paul shows that we were dead in our sins but made alive through Christ as a result of His resurrection from the dead. The implication is that we are alive now with Christ through resurrection. That is why we go through the ritual of baptism to demonstrate the movement from death unto life. Even though we remain in a physical state until our physical death, we already have spirit life dwelling within us. Christ appeared physically after his death to prove to the world that he truly was alive and had through His death paid the price of our sin. His resurrection was not to show that humans will be resurrected in the same manner, but to show that passing from death unto life was possible. Resurrection is all about our spiritual status before God.

**Ephesians 2:4-5: But because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.**

This is obviously referring to spiritual death and spiritual life. To be united with Christ in His death and resurrection doesn't mean that we die like Christ died or are resurrected like Christ was resurrected. In baptism we don't physically die and become resurrected from such death. Instead baptism is symbolic of passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life through spiritual resurrection. It's akin to being born again as covered above in the section on the Kingdom.

John 5:24: Christ said: 'I tell you the truth, whoever hears my words and believes Him that sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has *crossed over* from death to life.'

John 8:51: I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.

John 10:27-28: My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

John 11:26: And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

Christ says that believers will never die. Obviously all those that Christ addressed, died physically. It's apparent that when Christ speaks of death in these passages, He is speaking of spiritual death versus spiritual life. Here again Christ is showing that we can, in the here and now, have eternal life dwelling in us. This is tantamount to passing from death unto life. This is what resurrection is all about.

In Hebrews 1:1 it's recorded that God had spoken through Christ in "these last days." Hebrews 9:26 shows that Christ appeared at the end of the age to take away sin. What last days and end of the age are we looking at? I addressed the issue of the last days earlier and showed how the last days were those days that the first-century Church was living in. Christ appearing at the end of the age to take away sin is self-explanatory. We all understand that Christ came in the first century to take away sin. So the end of the age occurred in the first century. Since the taking away of sin involves the removal of the ministration of death under the Old Covenant, it should be apparent that the end of the age referred to involves the end of the Old Covenant age.

Since the end of the age is associated with the passing of the Old Covenant age, then that Old Covenant age extended past the death of Christ, into the apostolic period, and would include the preaching of the gospel to the nations. Christ said in Matthew 24 that the end of the age would come *after* the gospel was preached to all the world. This shows that the end of the Old Covenant age did not come with Christ's passion or on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given. The end of the age came after the gospel was preached to the world. Yet the fulfillment of this preaching of the gospel to the world was not something to occur thousands of years into the future, but in their generation (Matthew 24:14, 34).

Paul provides further insight as to how death is associated with the Old Covenant system. He then shows how through Christ, death is eliminated.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57: Where, O death, is your victory? Where O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This teaching, within the resurrection context of 1 Corinthians 15, shows that sin is what leads to death, and that the law gives sin the power to produce death. Paul then shows that the ministration of death resulting from sin generated through the Old Covenant system is done away in Christ. Therefore, through spiritual resurrection we enter the Kingdom and the realm of eternal life. Therefore, passing from death unto life is really the passing from the Old Covenant system to the New Covenant system or the raising up from spiritual death unto spiritual life. In other words, the resurrection.

Paul, in 2 Timothy 1:10, stated that Christ had destroyed death and had brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. It's obvious that Christ did not destroy physical death since Christians continue to die physically. It is spiritual death that Christ destroyed. When Paul says in Phil. 3:10 that he wants to experience the power of the resurrection and become like Christ in His death so somehow he could attain to the resurrection of the dead, he is really speaking about escaping spiritual death by having the death of Christ applied to his sins. In Philippians 3:12, Paul speaks of this resurrection not being fully accomplished yet. This is true. The Christians prior to A.D. 70 were in the process of having the Old Covenant death system removed and fully replaced by the New Covenant life system. This wasn't totally accomplished until the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed in A.D. 70. With the spiritual arrival of Christ in A.D. 70, the old "heavens and earth," were totally removed and the new spiritual heavens and earth were fully established and along with it the spiritual resurrection to life. That spiritual resurrection to life continues to be available to us today and takes place when we repent and express faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

Paul speaks here about somehow attaining to the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:10). Yet in verse 16, he says, "Only let us live up to what we have already attained." Paul has not changed the subject here. He is still talking about the resurrection and he is saying that it already has been attained in part. This clearly shows the spiritual nature of the resurrection and its being the process of passing from death unto life. This process was accomplished and consummated at the return of Christ in A.D. 70. Resurrection continues to be available to this present day. Let's read what Paul said to the Colossians.

Colossians 3:1-4: Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Here again we see the resurrection in process for the early Christians. They are already experiencing being resurrected to a new life in Christ. This new life would be consummated at the return of Christ in their lifetime. It would be then that Christ brings salvation with Him and consummates the covenantal change that was in process of taking place. The resurrection was a process that began with the death and resurrection of Christ and continued through the forty-year period that culminated in the consummation of A.D. 70. It was in this consummation that salvation was fully established for all future generations. The Old Covenant system of death was finally and fully replaced with the New Covenant system of life.

Christ spoke over and over again about raising up those at the last day who were committed to Him. Most Christians believe this to be an event still future to us. What is the last day that Christ is referring to? Is this some kind of last day at *the end of time*, or is this a last day at the *time of the end*? There is a big difference between speaking about the end of time and the time of the end. The scriptures nowhere address the end of time. The scriptures say a lot about the time of the end. What time and what end are being addressed?

John 6:39-40: And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:54: Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 12:48: There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

The same apostle John that recorded the words of Christ relative to the last day speaks of living during the time of the “last hour.” Is the last hour discussed in John’s letter the same as the last day that Christ was speaking about? Remember that this is the same John who wrote the Revelation wherein he shows an imminent return of Christ as covered earlier in this book.

1 John 2:18: Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

John taught that the last hour was upon them. Is John’s last hour synonymous with Christ’s last day? In Luke 21:22, within the overall context of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, Christ says, “For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.” Christ goes on to tell how dreadful things will be and what great distress there will be upon the land and wrath upon the people. In verse 28 Christ says, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” What redemption is He talking about and how does it relate to the resurrection and the last time?

In Galatians 3:13, Paul said, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.” The curse of the law was death. Redemption is therefore related to passing from death unto life, which is what resurrection is all about. Paul speaks of their redemption as yet future and something they are hoping for when all things reach their fulfillment.

Romans 8:22-25: We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Greek singular, “body”). For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Ephesians 1:3-10: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Ephesians 4:30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Paul instructs that redemption is something viewed as a thing to be put into effect when all things have reached their fulfillment. Christ said the time of fulfillment of all things was when Jerusalem would be destroyed. Paul speaks about the redemption of our body. Paul is speaking about our

natural body of sin being redeemed when Christ would bring salvation with Him at His coming. Redemption has been available ever since.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART TWELVE

It becomes apparent when comparing all the scriptures that bear on the subject, that redemption, salvation, resurrection and entering the Kingdom, were all part of the same process that Christians were experiencing in the first century in anticipation of the return of Christ. All things reached their fulfillment in the complete dissolution of the Old Covenant system. This complete removal of the old system opened the way for the complete implementation of the New Covenant system and the opportunity for eternal life, which the old system could not accomplish.

The whole of God's involvement with man appears to revolve around moving from the first covenant system, which resulted in human spiritual death, to a second covenant system that results in spiritual life. Since we all die physically, regardless of which covenant we live under, it should be apparent that when life and death are spoken of in relation to covenant, it is spiritual life or death that is being addressed. Therefore, resurrection has to do with moving from the ministration of spiritual death to the ministration of spiritual life. From a spiritual body of death to a spiritual body of life. From the Old Covenant to the New Covenant system.

When Paul speaks of the redemption of our bodies, he is not speaking of biological resurrection. Paul is speaking of our sinful nature, which is redeemed through the death and resurrection of Christ. Let's once again look at what Paul teaches in his letter to the Colossians.

**Colossians 2:11-14: In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature (body in KJV), not with a circumcision done by hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature ("body" in KJV), God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins. Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.**

Paul is writing about spiritual death versus spiritual life. Spiritual life is given as a result of the forgiveness of sin. The forgiveness of sin removes the spiritual death penalty, which results in a new man. In Colossians 3:9-10, Paul speaks of taking off the old self and putting on the new self. In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul speaks of putting off the corruptible self and putting on the righteousness of God.

To be forgiven of sin is to experience resurrection. The forgiveness of sin facilitates the passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life. It involves the moving from a perishable human nature to an imperishable spiritual nature. It involves moving from being a natural man to being a spiritual man. It is that imperishable spiritual man that enters the kingdom and upon physical death will continue to live for eternity. A converted Christian is one who has been spiritually born again and resurrected to spiritual life. For the first century Christian this was a process in the making as the resurrection to life was not fully available until the return of Christ in A.D. 70. That's why Paul said what he did about striving to attain the resurrection. "I want to know Christ and the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." Was Paul talking about becoming like Christ in physical death? No he wasn't. Paul knew that he would die physically like everyone else. Paul was talking about participating in Christ's destruction of sin death, which would lead to spiritual resurrection.

In Hebrews 11 we see a contrast between physical and spiritual resurrection. This passage shares the experiences of Old Covenant personalities as they looked forward to the promises of salvation.

**Hebrews 11:35: Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.**

That better resurrection was in contrast to the physical resurrection experienced by some in Old Testament times. This better resurrection was a spiritual resurrection, which equates with the salvation that the first-century Christians would receive at the revealing of Christ. The writer of Hebrews declares:

**Hebrews 11:39-40: These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**

Being made perfect was accomplished through the righteousness of Christ applied to us so we could become perfect before God. This perfection was accomplished at the “last time” when salvation was consummated at the revealing of Christ. The apostle Peter shows that the salvation to be revealed in the last time is tied to the revealing of Christ. We have already shown that the revealing of Christ was considered imminent to the first-century Christians. Therefore the “last time” was something to occur in the first century and not thousands of years into the future and counting. Let’s again look at what Peter said:

**1 Peter 1:3-7: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

Here we find Peter teaching that salvation is something yet future to them. It would occur at a period called “the last time.” The last time period is tied to the revealing of Christ. As has been shown, the revealing of Christ is associated with His return.

#### **RESURRECTION AND THE CORINTHIANS:**

The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians speaks a great deal about resurrection. Most Christians look at Paul’s references to resurrection in this chapter and conclude he is speaking of biological resurrection. It is concluded that Paul is discussing the raising of physical bodies from physical graves at a point in time still future to us. If this is the case, then Paul is speaking here about rising from the dead in stark contrast to how he speaks of this subject in many other areas of scripture, many of which we have already covered in this book.

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Church deals with a variety of problems and issues that this Church was dealing with at the time. A major problem was that various Corinthian brethren were aligning themselves with specific Christian leaders and, in so doing, causing division in the Church. Paul also had to deal with immorality, lawsuits, questions about marriage, foods sacrificed to idols,

spiritual gifts and the proper way to keep the Lord's Supper. In addition, Paul had to deal with some Corinthians believing there was no resurrection of the dead. What kind of resurrection was being questioned?

The Corinthian brethren were Gentiles who became Christian as a result of hearing and believing the gospel message. The foundation of that message was the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life. To be Christian was to believe in the resurrection of Christ. The whole focus of the preaching of Paul, Peter and every other apostle and minister, was the death and resurrection of Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles became Christian because of their belief in the resurrection of Christ. Being a Christian was defined by belief in the resurrection. How then, could some of these Corinthian Christians question the reality of resurrection?

**1 Corinthians 15:12: But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?**

In verses one through eleven of this chapter, Paul sets out to remind the Corinthians that the gospel he had preached to them was defined by the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul relates that it is this gospel that the Corinthians believed and on which the Corinthian Christians have taken their stand. It would, therefore, appear that the resurrection of Christ is not what is being questioned. In essence, Paul is saying that since Christ is preached as having been raised from the dead, which is what you believe and base your Christianity on, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? It is apparent that these Corinthians were not questioning Christ's resurrection. They were, however, questioning resurrection of the dead. Paul goes on to show the absurdity of questioning resurrection of the dead in view of their belief that Christ was resurrected from the dead.

**1 Corinthians 15:13-19: If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.**

Paul here shows the contradiction that exists if the dead are not raised. The purpose of the resurrection of Christ was to facilitate the passing from death unto life for the believer. If a believer doesn't believe there is a passing from death unto life, which is what resurrection is all about, then Christ hasn't been raised either. Neither will those who have died in Christ be resurrected. Paul is showing the folly of their thinking. Paul is saying you can't believe Christ was resurrected and not believe that resurrection is now unavailable. The question that remains is, what kind of resurrection do some Corinthians doubt? Are they thinking in terms of physical bodies rising from graves, or is there another kind of resurrection being considered? Are those Corinthians that are questioning resurrection, questioning it only for some and not for others?

It must be remembered that only *some* Corinthians were questioning resurrection. It's apparent they were not questioning Christ's resurrection. They apparently were not questioning resurrection for those who died in Christ, as their resurrection would be assured.

The death of Christ involved the physical shedding of His blood and His momentary spiritual death. The shedding of Christ's blood facilitated forgiveness of sin. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). It took both these dynamics to occur for Christ to facilitate reconciliation with God.

Sin produces both physical and spiritual death. Spiritual death is immediate while physical death most often comes later. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were separated from God immediately. They didn't physically die until much later. We all physically and spiritually die because of sin. If physical death alone were the payment for sin, we would all be paying for our own sin because we all physically die. Christ paid the full penalty for sin. He died physically, shedding His blood, and He died spiritually when He experienced a separation from God.

Since we all continue to physically die, it's apparent that the death of Christ does not free us from physical death. While it could be argued that our physical death is only temporary, if you believe that we will be physically resurrected, temporarily or not, we still experience physical death. Christ said over and over again that those who believe in Him would never die. Paul reiterated this theme over and over again in his writings.

When Christ took our sins upon Himself, it caused Him to experience both physical and spiritual death. After Christ was resurrected, He could never die again. Christ's resurrection also set the process in motion for our never dying again. Since we still physically die, it should be apparent that it is spiritual death that Christ eliminated. After Paul shows the Corinthians the absurdity of believing in the resurrection of Christ and yet denying resurrection, he defines more clearly the significance of Christ's resurrection.

**1 Corinthians 15:20: But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

**Colossians 1:18: And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.**

If physical resurrection is under consideration here, then Christ was not the firstfruits or firstborn from the dead. As already covered in this book, there had been various physical resurrections prior to Christ. Christ Himself performed some. Being the firstborn from the dead had to do with spiritual rebirth. Christ had said to Nicodemus that one must be born again. He wasn't talking about physical rebirth. When Christ died spiritually, He became the first to be born again spiritually.

While Christ Himself never sinned, he virtually became a sinner by taking our sins upon Himself. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Becoming the righteousness of God is to experience a change in spiritual status before God. When sin separates us from God, it produces spiritual death. Paul speaks of our being dead in our sins. When Christ took our sins upon Himself, He experienced the same separation from God that we do. Christ, however, couldn't remain separated from God. He personally never sinned. God resurrected Christ from sin death and restored to Christ his righteous status before God. Our faith in, and acceptance of, Christ's sacrifice, is what facilitates our righteous status before God.

The whole focus of salvation teaching in Scripture is the elimination of spiritual separation from God. Elimination of spiritual death is what the salvation process is all about. When the Scripture

discusses death in relation to salvation, it is addressing spiritual death. Avoidance of physical death and resurrection from physical death is not the focus of Scripture. The focus of Scripture is our change in spiritual status before God. Salvation is reconciliation with God. Physical resurrection has nothing to do with this. Being raised from spiritual death is what salvation is all about. It is spiritual death and resurrection that Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians the fifteenth chapter.

**1 Corinthians 15:21-26: For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

When Paul writes about death in this passage, he is writing of spiritual death. The scriptures clearly teach that starting with Adam, all have sinned. Therefore all die. Do we all die physically? Yes we do. Are we all made physically alive in Christ? No we are not. Physical death and physical life are not the issue here. Our spiritual death in Adam is what Christ came to eliminate. Christ was the firstfruits of this process. Next it would be those who belong to Him at his coming. As shown throughout this book, that coming took place in the first century. Some of those who belonged to Christ had died before His return. Others that belonged to Christ were still alive at His coming. If physical resurrection is the focus here, then how could those alive at Christ's coming be resurrected? Whether you look at resurrection as a past or a future event, resurrection still involves having died and then being brought back to life. In both 1 Corinthians 15 and in 1 Thessalonians 4, it is shown that some would not have physically died at Christ's return and yet they would still be part of the resurrection. It should be apparent that spiritual resurrection is the focus here.

Paul says, "the last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). The Greek word translated "to be" is in the present passive tense. This passage should be translated "The last enemy *being* destroyed is death." Greek scholar Kenneth S. Wuest, translates this passage this way: "As a last enemy, death is being abolished, for all things He put in subjection under His feet." *Misplaced Hope* author Samuel M. Frost translates it this way: "The death is the last enemy being destroyed presently." Christ spoke of this process in the book of John.

**John 5:24-25: I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.**

Christ speaks of the time being then present ("has now come") and also of a time in the future when those that hear the message of Christ and believe would live. Those living in the present, and hearing this message were physically alive. Christ wasn't speaking to physically dead people. Yet Christ told them that if they hear His words and believe Him who sent Christ, they have crossed over from death to life. Christ was speaking to spiritually dead people and showing how they could be resurrected from that spiritual death.

Death was in the process of being, at that time, destroyed. The Old Covenant was the ministration of death. It was this covenant that was being removed and with its removal, death was being destroyed. If the last enemy to be destroyed is physical death, then that destruction has not yet taken place as people have continued to physically die for the past 2,000 years. Yet Paul says that death

was being destroyed in the first century. It was the death of spiritual separation from God that was being destroyed and that destruction of spiritual death was consummated in the return of Christ during the Roman-Jewish war. This destruction of spiritual death made it possible to be spiritually reconciled to God. Physical death and physical resurrection are not the subject of Paul's teaching. Christ at His resurrection became the first of the firstfruits to receive eternal life. Those that belonged to Christ at His appearing were the next to be granted eternal life. The period between the resurrection of Christ and His return was the period of time when the Old Covenant system of death was being phased out and replaced with the New Covenant system of life. This is evidenced by the many scriptural passages that speak of the first-century Christians looking and waiting for salvation to be revealed at the appearing of Christ. Those that accepted Christ in the first century received the Spirit of God as a down payment of salvation. This salvation was consummated in the return of Christ in A.D. 70. This salvation has been available ever since in Christ.

The first-century Christians were considered firstfruits of the salvation process. Christ was the first of the firstfruits to be born from the dead. Christian converts made up the remainder of the firstfruits in the first century. This firstfruits designation was especially applicable to Israelites who accepted Christ. As cited above in Romans 11:16, the Christian Jews of the first century were considered the firstfruits of a much larger group involving the rest of Israel. The implication was that the rest of Israel would be accepted by Christ and that such acceptance would be considered life from the dead for Israel (Romans 11:15). The apostle James spoke of first-century Christians being firstfruits. James 1:18: He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Christ explained to Nicodemus that to be born again involved a spiritual event. James uses the word birth in connection with being firstfruits of all God created. The firstfruits were to receive salvation at the appearing of Christ. This association of rebirth and firstfruits shows the spiritual nature of this event. We find the firstfruits motif prominent in the yearly harvest festival of Old Covenant Israel. This motif is used by New Testament writers to demonstrate the purpose of God relative to salvation. That purpose was to resurrect Israel from her bondage to sin death by making reconciliation to God possible through what Christ did. The reconciliation of Israel made it possible for the Gentiles also to be reconciled to God. Christ said salvation is of the Jews. Only through Israel's salvation could the human race escape eternal death.

The coming of the end as described in 1 Corinthians 15:24, shows the continuum of events leading to the destruction of death through the complete removal of the Old Covenant system which was the basis for death. Christ reigned through His Church during the forty years between His resurrection and His return. It was during this period of time that the old system was being removed and the new system was being implemented. This was synonymous with moving from death unto life, a process that was consummated with Christ's return in the first century.

Paul wrote that Christ must reign until all enemies were destroyed. The last enemy to be destroyed would be death. That enemy was not completely destroyed at the cross or at the resurrection. If it were, there would be no reason for Paul to speak in terms of its first being destroyed at Christ's coming. Neither would there be reason for first-century Christians to be looking to a future revealing of Christ to bring them salvation from death. Christ put the final nail in the coffin of death with his appearing and intervention in A.D. 70. If the reign and coming of Christ are still future to us, then death has yet to be destroyed and we will not be given eternal life until sometime in the future. Such a conclusion runs contrary to everything the scriptures teach about salvation.

The Christian community of the first century, in being the firstfruits of eternal life, became the forerunners of the much greater harvest of the rest of Israel who were in their graves. Daniel was told that it would be at the time when the power of the holy people is broken that the dead would be raised. As shown elsewhere in this book, it was at the destruction of Jerusalem that the power of the holy people was broken. It is at this time that resurrection took place. Because the first-century Christians were the firstfruit forerunners of this resurrection, Paul sees their baptism into Christ as foundational to the bringing in of the rest of the harvest. Without the firstfruit Christians of the first century, the rest of the harvest could not be brought in. This is why Paul says what he says about being baptized for the dead.

**1 Corinthians 15:29: Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?**

Baptism is symbolic of being buried with Christ in His death to sin, and rising with Christ in His resurrection to life. Baptism is not symbolic of passing from physical death to physical life. Baptism symbolizes passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. Paul is speaking of the Corinthians being baptized as a symbol of the removal of sin death, not only for themselves, but also as a setting of the stage for the raising of the spiritually dead at the appearing of Christ. It was through the firstfruit accomplishment of Christ and the firstfruit resurrection of Christian converts that the harvest of those long dead was brought in. Paul is saying that if the dead are not raised, then those being baptized are being baptized in vain. If they are being baptized in vain, then those who have died have no hope either.

In examining the issue of some Corinthians denying resurrection, it appears some believed that salvation had been denied to Israel because of their continuing rejection of the Christian message. The Gentiles were very aware that because of the Jews' hostility toward the gospel, the Gentiles had been given opportunity for eternal life. At the beginning of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he had to deal with divisions among the Corinthian Christians. The Gentile converts at Rome, as discussed earlier, had come to believe the Israelites had been rejected from obtaining salvation. This would be the same as concluding the Israelites would not be resurrected from spiritual death. Paul had to constantly remind the Gentile converts that their salvation was possible only because Christ came to bring salvation to His people Israel. Without Israel's salvation, there would be no salvation for anyone. If the spiritually dead Israelites are not raised, no one is raised. Paul then argues that since Christ *is* raised, all of Israel will be raised, and through Israel, the Gentiles will also be raised. This raising, however, is not associated with physical bodies coming out of graves. This raising has to do with the collective body of Israel being raised from sin death under the Old Covenant to a status of righteousness before God under the New Covenant.

#### **How Are the Dead Raised?**

Having established that resurrection is a matter of rising from sin death, Paul continues to discuss resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 by dealing with potential questions about how the dead are raised. If indeed it is spiritual death that we rise from, how is this accomplished?

**1 Corinthians 15:35-38: But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? [Present passive is used here to signify "being raised."] With what kind of body will they come?' How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but**

just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

Paul shows that what is sown must first die before it can come to life. Paul cannot be referring to physical bodies in his seed analogy. With physical death, the body that is sown is already dead when it is laid in the grave. A seed is alive when sown and first dies while in the soil in the process of facilitating a new life. The seed and the plant it produces are in continuity, inasmuch as the seed provides the raw materials for the new plant and therefore becomes part of the new plant. Paul's seed analogy parallels that of baptism. In baptism we bury the natural man so that the new spiritual man can be raised in newness of life.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (KJV): But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

When Paul speaks of the natural man or the natural body, he is referring to the body of sin and death. This body must be buried before the new spiritual body of life is able to rise up. Paul is not writing about biological death. Our biological death does not atone for our sins and we cannot rise from biological death to a sinless status before God. Paul is speaking of the death of our sinful nature through Christ. We bury that sinful nature in accepting the sacrifice of Christ and are consequently raised to a righteous status before God. In so doing, we become a new creation in Christ. The old that is gone is the old sinful status before God. The new is the righteous status attained through Christ.

The reader is asked to carefully read Romans chapter 4 through Romans chapter 8. In these chapters, Paul discusses the putting to death of our sinful nature through the death of Christ. Paul shows how the sinful nature is the body of sin that is buried in Christ. The burial of the body of sin results in rising to a new status of life in Christ. Paul is not writing in these passages about biological death; he is writing of sin death generated by our inability to keep the law. The body of death encompasses the law system. Christ came to replace the law system with the grace system. It is the grace system that facilitates the spiritual body of life.

The whole focus of the Christian system is a change in status before God. Sin separates us from God. Perfect righteousness reconciles us to God. Since we can't produce perfect righteousness, Christ did it for us. It's His righteousness that is applied to us and is what makes us reconciled to God. Our being reconciled to God is to pass from death unto life. It is the putting off of the mortal, perishable natural body of death and the putting on of the spiritual body of life.

1 Corinthians 15:42-49: So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam, a life giving spirit.' The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

It should be noted that the phrase, “so *will it be* with the resurrection of the dead” is better translated, “so also the resurrection of the dead.” There are no future tense verbs in this passage. Phrases such as “is sown,” and “is raised,” in the Greek, are in the present tense and mean, “are being sown” and “are being raised.” This all shows how this change was a present process at the time Paul was addressing this issue. When Paul writes of bearing the likeness of the man from heaven as opposed to the likeness of the earthly man, Paul was not writing of biological likeness. Christ bore the biological likeness of Adam just as we do. Christ did not bear the nature of Adam like we do. The goal of first-century Christians, as should be our goal, was to replace the nature of Adam with the nature of Christ. This change in nature became fully available at the return of Christ in the first century. Bearing the nature of Christ is what resurrection is all about.

Paul wrote of the natural body of sin and death being raised to a spiritual body of life. A change from the earthly nature to the heavenly nature. This is not something that happens as a yet in the future biological, physical resurrection. This happened for the first-century Christians when Christ returned in A.D. 70 to bring salvation to those waiting for Him. The living Christians were given a new nature, which included eternal life to be resident within them. Those Christians who had died were raised to eternal life in the heavenly realm. This raising to life is also what brings us into the spiritual Kingdom of God, which is the same as having the Kingdom in us.

**1 Corinthians 15:50: I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.**

Paul shows we cannot be in the Kingdom as flesh and blood, perishable beings. If physical resurrection is the focus here, then nobody, except Christ, has entered the Kingdom to this very day. Yet this would run contrary to the scriptural evidence that the Kingdom is a present reality for Christians. As shown in the chapter on the Kingdom, the Kingdom is spiritual in nature and is entered into at the spiritual level. Christ came to raise Israel from their Old Covenant natural, mortal body of death, into a New Covenant spiritual body of life. That body of life is what the Kingdom is all about. Because of God’s keeping His promises to Israel, the rest of humanity is also given opportunity for eternal life. It is spiritual change that is the focus of Paul in his Corinthian letter.

**1 Corinthians 15:51-57: Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul says, “we will not all sleep.” The “we” he is addressing are the Corinthian Christians. Paul is not addressing people living thousands of years into the future. Paul is speaking of an event that he anticipated would take place shortly before some of those he was addressing would die. Paul says the “we” will be changed. That change for the “we” would take place at the same time the dead in Christ were receiving their change. It was at this moment in history that Christ consummated the process of change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The power of sin to produce eternal death was broken. The victory over death was won and continues won to this day.

## RESURRECTION AND THE THESSALONIANS:

Paul addresses the Thessalonian Christians in much the same way regarding the return of Christ and the resurrection. Is Paul addressing a different kind of return and resurrection with the Thessalonians from the one he is with the Corinthians? Let's take a look at how he addresses the Thessalonians regarding this matter.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17: Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Throughout this book we have cited dozens of scriptural passages that show the return of Christ was going to occur in the lifetime of the first-century Church. Christ taught that this event would occur before the generation He was addressing would pass. The apostles all taught that the return of Christ was about to occur. As covered previously, the Thessalonian Christians were expecting relief from persecutions when Christ returned. Now Paul is telling them that some of them would be alive at Christ's coming. The context is clearly first century. Paul is not speaking of Christians thousands of years into the future still being alive at a yet future return of Christ. Paul is speaking about an event that would occur while some of those he was addressing would still be alive. Paul's reference to meeting in the clouds is symbolic language. As shown earlier in this book, such language was commonly used by scriptural writers to describe the power and glory of God as He intervenes in the affairs of men. The birth, death, resurrection and return of Christ in the first century were the most significant interventions of God in the affairs of men since creation. This intervention brought redemption through reconciliation with God. This redemption has been available ever since. A reading of the full context of Paul's letter to the Thessalonian Christians should make it apparent Paul was addressing what he believed to be a first-century event in speaking of Christ's return and being raised to meet Him. Let's look at what Paul says just a little farther along in this same letter.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-4: Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But *you*, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

Paul has just told the Thessalonian Christians that when Christ comes, the dead would rise and those of them still alive would also be caught up to be with Christ. Now Paul is telling these same Christians that Christ will come as a thief in the night. Has Paul changed the subject here? Has Paul suddenly shifted from discussing a return of Christ involving the saints rising to meet Him, to discussing some other coming that would be totally unexpected? If, as is largely believed by much of present day Christendom, Paul is speaking about Christ coming as a thief in the night as an event yet future to us, then these Thessalonian Christians are still alive and living among us today. That, obviously, is not the case.

Paul said very straightforwardly, “But *you*, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4). How could this day not surprise the Thessalonian Christians like a thief if they are all dead in their graves and this event was to first take place thousands of years into the future? Paul is obviously telling these Christians that because they live in the light of the truth, they will see the day of Christ approaching while others will not. They would escape the coming destruction while others would not.

This destruction is the same destruction prophesied by Christ and all the apostles. This is the wrath to come that John the Baptist spoke about. This destruction and wrath to come was the Roman-Jewish War of A.D. 66 to 73 that physically destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem, and spiritually terminated the Old Covenant system. Now let’s read more of Paul’s letter.

**1 Thessalonians 5:23: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul *and body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here again Paul speaks of these Thessalonian Christians being alive at the coming of Christ. Paul speaks of their “whole spirit, soul and *body*” being kept blameless (preserved blameless in the KJV) at the return of Christ. You don’t find any preserved bodies of Thessalonian Christians walking around in the 21st century still waiting for Christ to appear. It should be obvious that Paul is anticipating a first-century event.

In this letter to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul speaks of the persecutions being experienced from those opposed to the gospel message. Paul then speaks of these persecutors experiencing the coming wrath and destruction while those responding to the gospel would be granted salvation. In chapter one, verse ten, Paul speaks of them waiting for Christ to appear in order to rescue them from the coming wrath. In chapter five, verse nine; Paul speaks of the Thessalonian Christians not being appointed to experience the coming wrath but instead salvation through Christ.

The entire context of this letter relates to an event about to occur. Even if one disagrees with the perspective of resurrection discussed in this book, the fact remains that the return of Christ and the resurrection had to take place in some fashion in the first century. The wrath and destruction that the Thessalonians were to escape was not a wrath and destruction to occur thousands of years into the future. Such a conclusion would be ludicrous.

In Paul’s letters to both the Thessalonian and the Corinthian Christians, Paul is addressing resurrection within the context of an imminent return of Christ. This return brought wrath and destruction upon those in opposition to the gospel. This return brought salvation to those that received the gospel. This return also provided salvation to the dead in Christ, those who had accepted the gospel message but who died before Christ’s return.

The scriptures indicate that many who had died in past generations would also rise up at the time of Christ’s return. Some would rise to life while others would rise to condemnation. The dynamics associated with this process are unclear in Scripture. The fate of the unsaved dead, both past and future, is a subject for a separate investigation and therefore is not addressed in this book. Neither will I address the issue of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked versus their eternal annihilation. This, too, is an issue for a separate investigation.

For the reader that desires to explore in greater detail the foregoing view of resurrection, I recommend *The Cross and The Parousia of Christ*, by Max King. The word “*parousia*” is a Greek

word translated as “coming” in the New Testament narrative. Its basic meaning is presence. It is interesting that the New Testament writers used this word to describe the coming of Christ. In his *Companion Bible*, Bullinger footnotes “*parousia*” in Matthew 24:3 to explain that the “Papyri show that from the Ptolemaic period down to the second century A.D. the word is traced in the East as a technical expression for the arrival or visit of the King or emperor.” This Greek word can also mean the coming of a “divinity who makes his presence felt by a revelation of his power.” (See, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, by Arndt, Gingrich and Bauer).

Christ did make His presence felt by the revelation of His power and glory in resurrecting us out of the old age of eternal death into the new age of eternal life. Christ continues to be present as He facilitates reconciliation with God, which is resurrection to eternal life.

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART THIRTEEN

### WHAT/WHEN IS THE MILLENNIUM?

Many Christians believe that Christ will return in the future to establish a one-thousand-year reign called the millennium. The word thousand is translated from the Greek *kilioi*, which means “one thousand.” The word millennium is not an English translation from the Greek. Millennium is a word from the Latin, which means one thousand years. The concept of a one-thousand year reign of Christ is obtained from several passages in Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:1-3: And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for *a thousand years*. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Revelation 20:4-6: I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ *a thousand years*. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Is this thousand-year time frame a literal one-thousand years or does it represent a different period of time? Is this one-thousand-year time-frame something yet in our future or has it already happened? If you have read this far, you have seen a great deal of evidence presented to establish a first-century return of Christ and the associated events of resurrection, judgment and the establishment of the Kingdom. The one-thousand-year reign of Christ is also associated with His return. How can this association be defined within the context of a first-century return?

The Revelation given to John is contextually positioned in the first century. This is established in verse one of the first chapter of Revelation where John is told that the events contained in the message he is about to receive are to soon take place. In verse three of this chapter, John writes that the time is near for the events in the Revelation to take place. In verse nineteen of chapter one, John is told to write about what is about to take place. The Revelation is written to seven first-century churches.

After John records the events revealed to him, his final words in chapter 22 reflect more admonition from Christ that these events will soon take place, that He is coming soon and the time is near. Three times, in chapter 22, Christ is quoted as saying He is coming soon.

Unless one is willing to blatantly ignore these time statements that identify the time frame for the events of the Revelation to occur, the evidence is inescapable that these events were to occur during and soon after John received this revelation. In Revelation 1:19, John was told to write, “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will (Gr. *mello*, is about to) take place later.”

John was told to write about what he had seen, what was now happening and what would shortly come to pass.

As seen from the scriptures cited above, the thousand-year reign is tied to resurrection. As explained in some detail in the chapter on resurrection, resurrection was a work in progress for the first-century Christians prior to Christ's return. Before the return of Christ, Christians were sealed by the Holy Spirit, which acted as a deposit guaranteeing salvation.

**Ephesians 1:13-14: And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.**

Resurrection involved a rising up from the natural body of death into a spiritual body of life. The natural body of death was defined by the Old Covenant system. This covenant defined sin and death. As covered earlier, this covenant was being gradually eliminated during the forty years after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. The Old Covenant became fully removed at Christ's return in the Judgment of A.D. 66 to 73. At His return, Christ brought redemption to those who had acknowledged His sacrifice and accepted His rule over their lives.

**Hebrews 9:28: So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**

**1 Peter 1:3-5: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. [Peter goes on to say in verse 13] Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

Prior to the return of Christ, first-century Christians were in the process of passing from death unto life. This was resurrection in process. This process continued right up until the return of Christ. I submit that this process was the first resurrection discussed in Revelation 20. This resurrection went on during the forty years following the death of Christ and His return. This resurrection period was a time of much persecution and hardship for Christians. A number were killed. Yet through the power of God's Spirit, they overcame. Christ had repeatedly said that those who overcame and endured to the end would be saved.

Christ had defeated Satan by His death and resurrection. In John, chapter 12, Christ speaks of the time of His death having come and that this would be when Satan is cast out. The Kingdom of God was being established. This Kingdom replaced the rule of Satan. In the temptation of Christ, Satan had offered Christ the kingdoms of this world. This shows that Satan was a controlling power at the time. Christ called Satan the "prince of this world" (John 12:31). Christ defeated Satan and Satan's power through His death and resurrection. The binding of Satan is reflective of his power being subdued. The reign of Christ began when He empowered his disciples at Pentecost. This reign continued during the forty years leading to the consummation at the end of the Old Covenant age. This was a specific reign that involved the putting down of His enemies. The putting down of His enemies took place during this forty-year reign.

Hebrews 10:12-13: But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.

1 Corinthians 15:24-26: Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Christ is not still waiting to have His enemies made his footstool. He is not still waiting for the last enemy, death, to be destroyed. This occurred during this forty-year transition period when the New Covenant system of life was advancing and the Old Covenant system of death was being destroyed. At the time of the consummation, Satan was allowed a short space of time to exercise his power in the events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem. The defeat of Satan was completed at the time of that destruction. The process that began at the cross was completed at the consummation. Satan would no longer have the power of death. He would never be able to prevent the spread of the gospel message of life. Christ brought salvation with Him at His return. The Kingdom of God would continue to advance with the granting of eternal life as its focus. Christ would now reign forever as the scriptures teach.

The thousand-year period is not a literal thousand-year period of time. John was told to write about things that were already happening and things that would shortly come to pass. The thousand-year period was already happening. It was symbolic of the forty-year transition period when the old system was being replaced by the new system. It was a time of resurrection from spiritual death unto spiritual life. Christ was reigning and the Christian saints were reigning with Him as a royal priesthood.

Ephesians 2:4-6: But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 2:9: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Revelation 1:4-6: John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

A period of forty years is connected with several significant events in Scripture. The Israelites were tested for forty years in the wilderness before entering the promised land. Some view this as a foreshadowing of the trials experienced by the first-century Church before the full establishment of the Kingdom. David reigned over physical Israel for forty years. David is often seen in Scripture as a type of Christ. Some see David's forty-year reign over physical Israel as a foreshadowing of the reign of Christ over spiritual Israel during the forty-year transition period.

A number of Jewish rabbis, writing in the first and second centuries, believed that the days of the Messiah would be a transitional period of forty years between this present world and the world to

come. The Rabbis, of course, didn't consider Christ as their Messiah and were looking for the Messiah to appear in the future as they still do to this very day. What is of significance for this discussion is that some Rabbis did hold to a forty-year transitional period. This lends additional credence to this concept.

As indicated above, the most significant consideration in arriving at the proper time frame for the fulfillment of what John wrote, are the time statements that "bookend" his narrative. John's narrative begins and ends with straightforward, clear statements as to when the events he wrote about would come to pass. Unless one can demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that such time statements mean something different from what they obviously imply, this author sees no alternative but to seek meaning for the Revelation in the events associated with the covenantal transition that took place in the first century.

When all the teachings of Christ and the apostles are considered as a whole, there is one central purpose that comes through. That purpose involves the change from the Old Covenant system of death to the New Covenant system of life. Christ died and was resurrected for that purpose. The first-century Church toiled and suffered for that purpose. God used the calamity of the Roman-Jewish War to consummate that purpose. The writings of John provide an overview of this purpose and what its outcome was going to be. The millennium, as representative of the forty-year transition period, is just one of many dynamics that John wrote about. The clear time frame statements tell us when it all occurred.

We presently find three basic views expressed in the Christian community regarding the millennium. All three views express belief in a future return of Christ. These views differ as to when the millennium occurs relative to the return of Christ. Some believe that Christ will initially return to "rapture" Christians off the earth. Following such "rapture" will be a time of great tribulation involving catastrophic world events. Christ will then return to establish His Kingdom and begin a literal thousand-years millennial reign. Those who believe in this approach are called Premillennialists. Other Christians believe that the millennium is to follow the evangelizing of the world, leading to a period of peace on earth for a thousand years or more. Christ will then return after this period of time. This position is known as the Postmillennial view. A third view is called Amillennialism. This view postulates that the present church age is the millennium and Christ will return at some future point to facilitate resurrection and a final judgment.

It should be noted that premillennialists believe that Christ returns "in the clouds" prior to the millennium. They also believe the resurrection of the wicked will take place after the thousand years are complete. With this in mind, consider the following scripture: "The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: In the future (Greek *arti*) you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Matthew 26:63-64).

How future was this event to be? The Greek word translated "future" in the NIV is *arti*. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament says that *arti* "properly marks time closely connected with the present." The Arndt, Gingrich, Bauer Greek-English Lexicon defines *arti* as relating to the immediate. This word appears thirty-six times in the New Testament and contextually is always found to relate to an event that has just happened, is happening or is about to happen. The KJV, NKJV and RSV translations of the New Testament translate *arti* as "hereafter" in Matthew 26:63-

64. Christ was speaking of an event that would happen in the lifetime of those He was addressing at the time. This statement by Christ is a very powerful witness to His first-century return.

Some may argue that when Christ says “*you* will see,” He is using the word “you” in an editorial sense meaning that the “you” He is referring to are the “you” living at a time in the distant future when He would return. The use of the Greek word *arti*, however, completely dispels such a notion. *Arti* cannot mean something in the distant future. Use of this word restricts the “you” Christ was addressing to His accusers whom He was addressing at the time.

These accusers of Christ would be classified as wicked. Yet they are told that they will see Christ “coming on the clouds.” If, as the premillennialists believe, the wicked are resurrected and judged after the millennium and the millennium is a literal thousand-year period that begins at the return of Christ, how could these wicked accusers see Christ coming at the beginning of the thousand years? They wouldn’t be resurrected until a thousand years after Christ returns. If, however, we are to understand the millennium as a forty-year transition period that occurred in the first century, then it is very easy to see how these accusers could see Christ “coming on the clouds.” They would still be alive to witness His return in judgment.

The three millennialist views discussed here revolve around the belief that Christ will return in the future. If as documented throughout Scripture, Christ returned in connection with the A.D. 66 to 73 judgment, then the millennium must be understood to occur within that time frame of Christ’s return.

In keeping with the understanding of the millennium as the time frame between the ascension of Christ and His return forty years later, or the transition between the Old and New Covenant systems, a new millennial view is taking shape. It is called Transmillennialism. Webster defines “trans” as across, through or beyond. Christ facilitated the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Through His first-century millennial reign, Christ was able to move through and beyond what had been before. Transmillennialists view Christ as having returned in the first century and establishing His everlasting Kingdom. This view advocates a constructive worldview where the goal is to promote Kingdom living and bring all people to reconciliation with God through Christ.

## **DOES THE DEVIL “MAKE ME DO IT”?**

We saw in the previous chapter that the millennium must be understood within the time frame of the first century, if we are to honor the time statements that “bookend” the Revelation. The Revelation of John also shows the destruction of Satan within this time frame. Has Satan been destroyed? We live in a world of many evils. Most Christians and many non-Christians believe that Satan is at the root of what is wrong with the world. Is this really the case? Is Satan the controlling power in the world today? Is the continuing history of this world a history of the activity of Satan and his influence over the affairs of men? Does the devil really “make me do it”?

Scriptural history shows that Satan has been a controlling influence for a good portion of human history. We see Satan active in the Garden of Eden. We find in 1 Chronicles 21 that Satan provoked David to number Israel. We have the famous episode with Job where Satan is allowed to create havoc for Job and his family.

In the New Testament we find a lot of Satanic/demon activity. There is Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness. We find Christ, and those he sent, casting out many demons. We find Christ in His parables showing how Satan was active in preventing people from clinging to the word that Christ was teaching (Mark 4:15).

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, we still find Satan very active in the developing Christian Church. Peter indicates that it is Satan that filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). In 2 Corinthians 2:11 (KJV), Paul speaks of the devices of Satan. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul wrote about his "thorn in the flesh" being from Satan. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18, Paul wrote of Satan hindering him from coming to see the Thessalonian Christians. In 1 Peter 5:8, the devil is pictured as a roaring lion seeking to devour someone. In Mark 16:15-17, Christ instructed the eleven to preach the gospel to all creation. He said that those who believed would cast out demons. We see the deacon Philip casting out demons at the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-7).

It is apparent that Satan was very active during the time Christ walked on this earth as God incarnate. It is also very apparent that Satan was very active during the forty years between the ascension of Christ and his return in judgment of Israel in the Great War. In view of this apparent activity of Satan, how are we to understand statements by Christ and the apostles that indicate Satan was about to meet his doom? If Satan did indeed meet his doom in the first century and is no longer active in the world, how do we explain the presence of evil in the world today? Let's look at those scriptural statements that appear to say that Satan was about to have his power and authority terminated.

After the seventy-two returned from their missionary journey, they were elated that the demons were subject to them. Christ told them "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). In John 12:31, in anticipation of His impending crucifixion, Christ said, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." "The prince of this world" is considered to be referring to Satan. In John 16:11, Christ said, "the prince of this world now stands condemned." Was Satan going to be suffering only a temporary setback or are we here looking at something more permanent for Satan?

In Romans 16:20, Paul said, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." The English word *soon* is translated from the Greek word TAKOS. As covered in chapter one, in its various tenses, this word *always means* with speed, quickness, swiftness and haste. Are we some 2,000 years later still waiting for Satan to be crushed? This statement about Satan was made several years after the crucifixion of Christ. So we see Christ before the crucifixion saying Satan would be driven out and condemned and we see Paul after the crucifixion saying Satan would soon be crushed. In Genesis 3:15, we find it prophesied by God that Satan would be crushed. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This prophecy is considered a prediction that Satan would strike at Christ's heel through the crucifixion and Christ would subsequently crush his head. The crushing of Satan's head did not take place at the resurrection of Christ. We find Satan very active after the resurrection. Yet Paul said that the crushing of Satan would soon take place. Therefore it had not yet taken place when Paul made this statement but Paul said it would take place soon. How soon would it take place?

The message of the Revelation was focused on the judgment to come through the impending Roman Jewish War, A.D. 66 to 73. In the Revelation we see Satan pictured as being cast down to the earth

at the same time that we see salvation and the Kingdom being established. John is told that Satan has only a short time.

Revelation 12:9-12: The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

How short was Satan’s time? John wrote this message twenty centuries ago. Paul said Satan’s head would be soon crushed. Did this happen soon after Paul made this statement? Are we still, 2,000 years later, waiting for this to occur? Throughout this book I have shown that the bringing of salvation and the establishment of the Kingdom would take place at the return of Christ. I have also shown that the return of Christ is seen throughout the New Testament as an event imminent to first-century Christians. I submit that the “accuser of our brothers” was cast down to the earth in the first century through the A.D. 66 to 73 judgment. This is when Christ returned to bring salvation and establish the Kingdom. Satan was allowed one last fling before his demise. That is why he is shown as being “filled with fury because he knows his time is short.” He knows that he is about to be cast into the lake of fire. Satan is not still down on the earth 2,000 years later going about in fury doing his thing.

In Revelation 20 we see Satan bound for one-thousand years. This millennium, or one-thousand year period can be best understood as representative of the forty years between the ascension of Christ and His return in A.D. 70. This 40-year period was the time frame in which the Old Covenant system of death was being replaced with the New Covenant system of life. This transition period also led to the demise of Satan. The death and resurrection of Christ began the demise of Satan, and the return of Christ finished him off. We are not still waiting for Satan to be crushed. That event occurred at the return of Christ. This is why Satan sees himself as having only a short time as recorded in the Revelation.

During the 40-year transition period, Satan was already bound to the extent that the apostles and first-century Christians had power over Satan. Satan was unable to prevent the Christian church from growing even though he made every attempt to do so. Just before the return of Christ, Satan was loosed for a short period and played an active role in the events leading to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. After these events, Satan was thrown into the lake of fire.

The events that describe the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem and the transition from the Old Covenant system of death to the New Covenant system of life, are events that brought about the demise of Satan. Christ described these events in a great deal of symbolic language in both the Olivet Discourse and the Revelation given to John. We find this symbolism especially apparent in Revelation, chapters 20 through 22 where the New Jerusalem is described. After Satan is thrown into the lake of fire, we see the New Jerusalem established. This New Jerusalem is a spiritual representation of man’s reconciliation with God. The New Jerusalem represents life in the Kingdom and our New Covenant relationship with God. We also see the existence of evil outside the gates of the New Jerusalem. Therefore evil continues to exist outside of the Kingdom. Man is still pictured as engaging in sin after Satan has been thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 22:14-15: Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Since evil continues to exist, does this mean that Satan is still active? If Satan is still active then he isn't really destroyed. His head hasn't really been crushed. If that is the case, then Christ has yet to complete the job of removing death. Let's read what the writer to the Hebrews wrote:

Hebrews 2:14-15: Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might *destroy him* who holds the power of death-that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Satan is seen as holding the power of death. The death of Christ is shown to destroy Satan. The word "destroy" is from the Greek *katargeo*, which means: "to make ineffective, powerless, abolish, wipe out" (Arndt, Gingrich, Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*). Christ died, was resurrected, returned to the Father and through His judgment of A.D. 66 to 73 facilitated the full establishment of the Kingdom and restoration of His covenantal presence. The Kingdom equates with the New Covenant system of life which equates with entrance into the New Jerusalem. Establishment of the New Jerusalem represents the culmination of God's plan to destroy the power of death by destroying the one who held that power. Any conclusion contrary to this would be in contradiction to all that scripture says about Christ defeating and destroying Satan and Satan's holding of the power of death.

The apostle John plainly said, "*The reason* the Son of God appeared was *to destroy* the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). If the devil's work has been destroyed, then the devil is no longer working. He is no longer prowling "around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Satan was doing this big time prior to the return of Christ. Once Christ returned and brought salvation with Him to complete the facilitation of our reconciliation to God, Satan was destroyed by being cast into the lake of fire. However you choose to view the lake of fire, there is no scriptural evidence to suggest that Satan is somehow exercising power and influence from the lake of fire. Neither is there any scriptural evidence to suggest that Satan has been released from the lake of fire. Christ did not only come to destroy Satan's power of death but to drive him from the world (John 12:31). The scriptures plainly show that Christ came to destroy Satan and his works and Christ accomplished exactly that.

Most Christians believe that the events described in Revelation are future in their fulfillment and, therefore, a future return of Christ is necessary for the destruction of Satan. Some Christians will grant a past fulfillment of events in Revelation but hang on to the belief that Satan is still around because evil is still around. The scriptures, however, show that Christ appeared the *first time* to destroy Satan (1 John 3:8, John 12:31, John 16:11, Hebrews 2:14-15).

Many Christians look at the scriptures that speak of Satan's destruction and interpret them to mean that Satan is still around but Christians now have power over him through Christ. This is not, however, what the scriptures say. The scriptures show Satan to be "driven out," "destroyed," "crushed," "condemned" and thrown into the lake of fire. To interpret this as Satan still having power, doing his works as usual and going around, as a "roaring lion seeking to devour someone" (1 Peter 5:8), is inconsistent with all that is said about his first-century demise. Christ came to destroy Satan's work. He did exactly that.

Others will say that Satan no longer has power over Christians but is still active in the non-Christian world. If that is the case, then Christ has not really destroyed Satan's works. Satan was destroyed as part of the process of making salvation available to all of mankind. It is because Satan is destroyed that man can escape spiritual death and be reconciled to God.

The scriptures teach that it was Satan who held the power of death. How did he do this? The apostle Paul said, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:56-57). Paul shows that sin derives its power from the law because it is the law that defines what kind of behavior is sin. Sin is defined as lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Paul wrote, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). This is how the "sting of death is sin." How does Satan factor into all of this?

Scripture shows that Satan has been sinning from the beginning (1 John 3:8). Satan has been the tempter and instigator of sin. He began the process in the Garden of Eden by deceiving Eve. He was allowed to continue influencing human nature for thousands of years. He is said to have the power of death because his influence upon human nature produced sin and sin results in death. Christ came to destroy the influence of Satan, and through His atoning work, provide man a way to escape death.

Since Satan is destroyed and therefore his power broken, why do we still have so much evil in the world? Satan was around for thousands of years influencing human nature. We still have much sin in the world. If the influence of Satan is gone, why do we have so much sin in the world? The apostle James made a profound statement about the cause of sin:

**James 1:14-15: Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.**

James points out that our evil desire is what leads to sin. James wrote, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1). James also made this statement: "Do you think scripture says without reason that the spirit He caused to live in us tends toward envy?" (James 4:5). James shows that God placed within us a spirit that tends toward envy. Jeremiah wrote thousands of years ago, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV). Man has a nature that tends toward sin. Israel proved this beyond any doubt in their inability to keep the Old Covenant law. Man has always had freedom of choice. Since man's nature tends toward sin, man has more often than not chosen sin rather than righteousness. Satan took full advantage of man's nature for thousands of years. It has been the choosing of sin over righteousness that is responsible for evil since the beginning of creation to the present.

Satan was the instigator of sin from the beginning. John wrote, "the devil has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8). The penalty for sin is death. Through Satan's instigation of sin, he held the power of death. The death, resurrection and return of Christ removed that power from Satan. The righteousness of Christ applied to us negates the power that sin previously held over us. Not only was the power of death removed from Satan, but also Satan himself was removed by being cast into the lake of fire.

If the instigator of sin is destroyed, why do we still have so much sin in the world? The answer is that we still have human nature! Also, the past influence of Satan and the demons continues to

affect man to this present day as man, because of the nature that he has, continues the sinful behavior that has been learned from generation to generation. Sin is still transgression of law and always will be. Sin still requires death. Through Christ, however, we can escape death because He paid the death penalty in our stead.

Christ came to put an end to Satan's influence and therefore Satan's power of death. As the apostle John said, "The *reason* the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). Christ did not fail in what He set out to do. Christ appeared and accomplished the destruction of Satan as He said He would. Satan tried to defeat Christ by attempting to have him killed at His birth. Christ escaped. Satan tried to tempt Christ into worshiping him and Christ resisted. Satan instigated the death of Christ and Christ rose from the dead. Satan instigated much persecution against the developing first-century church and Christ returned in judgment and cast Satan into the lake of fire. The devil and his work have been destroyed.

I know that it is difficult to believe that Satan and the demons are no longer active in the world. We all like to pass the blame for the existence of evil onto Satan. We need instead to look in the mirror and realize that it is our nature that is responsible for evil. Christ has provided the means by which we can have power over our nature. God offers us his spirit when we choose to follow Christ. The Scripture says that God's spirit is a spirit of "power, love and a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7, KJV). Our focus as Christians must be on utilizing the power of God as the means to controlling our nature.

Some people in the Christian community and even outside the Christian community believe in present day demon possession and even claim to cast out demons. It is beyond the scope of this book to fully investigate the reality of such belief. We should be mindful, however, that human behavior is the result of many dynamics. Social, cultural, physical, psychological, spiritual, environmental, educational and genetic factors all play a roll in why we behave the way we do. It is interesting to note that people with serious psychological/spiritual problems, who by some standards many be thought to be demon possessed, can have their problems alleviated through drug intervention. I would not think that demons, who are spirits, would be affected by drugs, which are of the physical realm.

While Christ has put an end to Satan's influence and power of death, He has not put an end to human nature. Human nature is as strong as ever. It can manifest itself in some very bizarre ways. Human nature still tends toward sin as it always has and probably always will. What Christ has done for us is to remove the death penalty connected with that sin so we can be reconciled to God and be granted life in spite of our human nature and the sin it produces. We should thank God for that every day of our lives!

Satan has been defeated. We should not look at the activity of Satan and the demons during Christ's time on this earth and conclude that such activity is extant today. The demons during the time of Christ knew that their time was short. Satan was responsible for the binding of many people. Christ came to loose those bounds. On one occasion when Christ cast out some demons, they responded by accusing Christ of tormenting them before the *appointed time*. What appointed time were the demons referring to?

**Matthew 8:28-29:** When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 'What do you want with us, Son of God?' they shouted. 'Have you come here to torture us before *the appointed time*?'

That appointed time for their demise occurred when Christ destroyed the power of Satan through His death and resurrection and His return in judgment. Christ told His disciples shortly before His death, “My *appointed time* is near” (Matthew 26:18). The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians “Therefore judge nothing before the *appointed time*; wait till the Lord comes” (1 Corinthians 4:5). Paul ties the “appointed time” to the coming of Christ, and the Great Judgment unleashed upon national Israel from A.D. 66 to 73. The appointed time was the entire transition period that began with the death and resurrection of Christ and ended with His return in judgment. This was the appointed time that the demons were referring to. It was during this time that Satan was bound and then thrown into the lake of fire when Christ returned to bring salvation and establish the Kingdom. This was the crushing of Satan that Paul said was soon to take place.

What is the status of Satan and the demons today? They have no status. Satan and the demons have been defeated and destroyed. They no longer have ability to influence the behavior of man. Sin continues to exist because human nature continues to exist. However, the power of the Holy Spirit also exists. Christ dwelling in us grants us power over our sinful nature. Our focus needs to be on pleasing Christ by making righteous choices. We can no longer say, “the devil made me do it.”

## WHEN DOES CHRIST RETURN? PART FOURTEEN

### WHAT ABOUT THE CREEDS?

To conclude that the return of Christ, along with the judgment, resurrection and establishment of the Kingdom occurred during the Great War of A.D. 66 to 73 may appear unconventional. Even in the face of biblical time statements, a first-century “fulfillment of all things” may be hard to accept. Some will no doubt look to the Christian creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries that all speak of a future return of Christ. Others may consider the writings of the apostolic fathers of the second century. These men, by and large, looked to a future return of Christ. What is interesting, however, is that these men anticipated its occurring in their lifetime.

Why would Christian leaders of the second century be looking for a coming of Christ in their lifetime if indeed He had come during the latter half of the first century? Did they not understand the significance of the A.D. 70 events? What would have led second-century Christians not to understand the significance of A.D. 70?

In reading the material of the late first century and second-century writers, it becomes apparent that they had a mixture of ideas about prophetic fulfillment. They saw that the physical temple had been destroyed but they did not consider the full spiritual ramifications of this event. Just like the Jews during the time of Christ, some were looking for a physical Kingdom and, therefore, a physical presence of Christ. Since in their view this had not happened in conjunction with the temple’s destruction, they were anticipating something more to happen right around the corner. It is clear they felt the destruction of the Jewish temple had set in motion the whole chain of events, we understand as the return of Christ, resurrection, judgment and Kingdom. It appears, also, they were looking for a physical manifestation of these events.

Since the temple had been destroyed, they expected these accompanying events to soon take place. When these events didn’t take place as they thought they should, they simply kept elasticizing the fulfillment of these events farther and farther into the future. By the time the creeds were written, it had become a firmly entrenched doctrine that the return of Christ was future and that entrenched doctrine continues to this very day.

It must be remembered that there was no canonized New Testament Scripture in the second century. There were numerous Christian documents circulating among the churches. Many perspectives were being shared and considered. The return of Christ was not the only issue. There were those who still thought that aspects of the Old Covenant should be adhered to. Others raised questions about the deity of Christ. Works and grace were also at issue. The list goes on and on. Many of these issues got resolved by the time of the creeds. Others did not. The works and grace issue didn’t get resolved until the Reformation. In some areas of Christianity, this issue still hasn’t been resolved. I submit that the matter of the timing of the return of Christ, and all related events, also failed to get resolved at the time the creeds were written.

What we do know is that there was a diversity of perspectives about prophetic fulfillment after the destruction of A.D. 70. Tertullian, writing in the second century, sees Daniel 9 as being fulfilled in the life of Christ and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The Church historian Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, writes of the Jews suffering great calamities in direct fulfillment of Christ’s teachings in the Olivet Discourse. Origen mentions non-fleshly perspectives as to

resurrection in writing about the apostolic fathers. Irenaeus also makes reference to some early Christians who denied the resurrection of the biological body. A document called the *Odes of Solomon*, from the late first century, considers the resurrection of the dead as a past event.

There have been a number of Christian writers throughout Church history that have examined the time frame for the return of Christ. In 1878, a major work was published by James Stuart Russell, entitled, *The Parousia: A careful look at the New Testament doctrine of our Lord's Second Coming*. Dr. Russell was a Christian pastor for 26 years in England. In his over 500-page book, he documents in great detail the first-century “fulfillment of all things” that Christ said would occur. One of today’s leading theologians, N.T. Wright, in 1996, published a book entitled, *Jesus and The Victory Of God*. While embracing a futurist framework, Dr. Wright clearly shows Jesus’ teachings were focused on the demise of Herod’s temple.

For further perspective on the early Church fathers and the teaching of the Creeds relative to the return of Christ, I highly recommend *Misplaced Hope*, by Samuel M. Frost. Frost provides a well-reasoned and documented investigation of early Church thinking relative to the issues we have been discussing in this series.

## **EXAMINING OBJECTIONS:**

As is true in a court of law, the truth of something must be based on a preponderance of evidence. Once such preponderance of evidence has established the truth of something, any objections must be considered in relationship to what has already been established. Objections to established evidence should always be evaluated according to what has already been established and not the other way around. For example, in medical research, if fifty clinical studies show that *A* leads to *B*, and one or two studies appear to show that *A* does not lead to *B*, you don’t conclude that *A* no longer leads to *B*. You further evaluate the two studies in light of the fifty studies to determine why the two studies appear to show something different. You carefully examine the dynamics involved.

This same methodology must be applied to theological issues. I feel that there is a preponderance of scriptural and historical evidence relative to the “fulfillment of all things” with the fall of Jerusalem in the first century. If there are scriptural or historical objections to this evidence, such objections should be evaluated in light of what has already been determined.

Some people often pinpoint a single verse, which on the surface, might appear to teach a future fulfillment. Ignoring the overwhelming evidence of first-century time statements, they claim their verse is “proof” that a past fulfillment paradigm is false. I will present several examples of how scripture is used this way and then evaluate those scriptures in relation to the evidence that has already been established. In so doing, I hope to model a proper approach in letting the Bible interpret itself, in dealing with isolated verses. Let’s begin by looking at Matthew 10 and 11.

### **The Judgment of Ancient Cities:**

**Matthew 10:14-15:** If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

**Matthew 11:20-24:** Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ‘Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have

repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the *day of judgment* than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.'

Those who see a final judgment at a yet future return of Christ will point to these scriptures as proof for such a future return and judgment. It is argued that since the people of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah had been dead for thousands of years, they could only be judged in the A.D. 70 event if they were resurrected at that time. Where, it is asked, is the evidence for this happening? It's then concluded that there is no evidence so this must still be a future event. The objector will, with one wave of the hand, dismiss all the evidence presented for the past fulfillment paradigm.

Let's look at the entire context of these scriptures, which include Matthew 10 and 11. In Matthew 10, Christ specifically says that the disciples would not finish going through the cities of Israel before He would come. A careful reading of Matthew 10 will show that the kind of persecution described as being experienced by the disciples occurred after Christ's ascension as the book of Acts clearly shows. So the coming that Christ is referring to in Matthew 10 is a coming subsequent to His ascension and yet before the twelve would finish going through the cities of Israel.

Christ shows His coming is to take place before the disciples finish the commission he gave them. This shows the first-century time frame of that event. Christ is speaking of the judgment of the people of these ancient cities in the same context as his return. This return was to take place before the disciples could finish the job he gave them to do. Scripture shows that the judgment is associated with Christ's return. The return, judgment and resurrection are synonymous events.

This judgment was not only upon the Jews living at the time of the destruction but it was the day of judgment for all who had lived and died to that point. Chapter 12 of Daniel shows it is at the time the power of the holy people is broken that the resurrection takes place. Both scripture and secular history show that this occurred in the A.D. 70 destruction. A careful study of the many passages of Daniel that tie into the Olivet Discourse provides abundant evidence for a first-century fulfillment of end-time events. This includes the resurrection of the dead. Daniel speaks of the righteous and the unrighteous being resurrected with some being given everlasting life and others facing everlasting contempt.

The objector will dismiss the resurrection as a non-occurrence in the first century because it doesn't fit his paradigm of physical bodies coming out of the ground. All the plain scriptures that point to a first-century fulfillment will be ignored. Rather than try and synchronize Christ's statements about the judgment of these ancient cities with the many clear statements about a first-century fulfillment, these clear statements are ignored in favor of an established paradigm of future fulfillment.

The Scripture does not define resurrection as physical bodies coming out of the ground. Resurrection involves spiritual transformation. It involves the natural body being replaced with a spiritual body. It speaks of the natural body being the body of sin and death and the spiritual body being the body of life and righteousness. Biological bodies are not the issue. Scripture shows that upon physical death the spirit goes back to God who gave it. Scripture doesn't reveal the details of what that means or how that relates to the afterlife.

Scripture shows that at the judgment some were given everlasting life and others faced everlasting contempt. The dynamics of everlasting life and everlasting contempt are not clearly defined. What is clearly defined is the time frame when these events are to take place. There are multiple dozens of time frame statements that point to a first-century fulfillment. These statements all say that *A* leads to *B*. With the few passages that suggest that *A* does not lead to *B*, we need to carefully examine them in light of the proven *A/B* relationships. Either we honor the scriptural time frame or we create our own time frame. I prefer to honor the time frame that Scripture teaches even if all the dynamics of that time frame are not completely enumerated.

**Every Eye Shall See Him:**

Let's now look at an entirely different objection about the first-century return of Christ. This objection is one of the most popular and often the first to be offered. It is found in the first chapter of Revelation.

**Revelation 1:7: Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.**

It is argued that every eye will see Christ at His return. It is also argued that there is no record of every eye seeing Christ return in A.D. 70. Therefore, the return of Christ is future. What is ignored is the rest of the scripture, which establishes the time when this would occur. John recorded that Christ would come in clouds. He said that those who pierced Christ would see Him and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him. When did Christ say this would happen? Let's return to the Olivet Discourse.

**Matthew 24:30-34: At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.**

It should be clear from the words of Christ that coming on the clouds, and the nations of the earth mourning, take place in the generation Christ is addressing. This is covered in detail earlier in this book. Christ was literally pierced by a Roman soldier and scourged by a contingent of soldiers. If you prefer a more figurative interpretation of this, Christ was spiritually pierced by all those who rejected Him. Regardless of how you view it, all those who pierced Christ lived in that generation that was to experience the events that Christ prophesied in the Olivet Discourse. In the Olivet Discourse, Christ identifies the time frame of Revelation 1:7. Coming in the clouds and nations mourning, are tied to every eye seeing Him.

The objector may still object by asking where the evidence is for every eye seeing Christ. The evidence is the identified time frame. Christ shows the time frame when this would happen. If we are willing to believe Christ, we must believe it happened. How it happened is another question. As already shown in this book, a great deal of prophetic writing uses apocalyptic language. The language of Christ coming in clouds is used in scripture to demonstrate God's intervention in the affairs of men. Every eye seeing Him may simply refer to a visual recognition of Christ coming in judgment upon Jerusalem through the vehicle of the Roman military. The important point is that

Scripture identifies it as happening in the first century and not something future to us. A review of Matthew 26:62-64, also supports this first-century view.

**Matthew 26:62-64:** Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Here again we see Christ identifying the time of His coming. Christ is using the apocalyptic language of coming in the clouds and expressing his power and authority by identifying with God the Father. Christ tells those around him they will see this in their future. The Olivet Discourse and many other scriptures place that future in the first century. It is interesting that the Greek word translated “future” in the above passage is *aptil*, which denotes a near occurrence. The word relates to time closely connected with the present. (See Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon*.)

The two objections that I have identified and discussed are common objections to the position expressed in these essays. When these objections are evaluated within the context of established evidence, they fail to stand as a hindrance to the overall validity of a past fulfillment position. It is vitally important that all perceived objections to the position expressed here be examined within the larger context of the New Testament narrative and secular history. I encourage the reader of this book to take this approach in examining perceived objections.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST’S RETURN:**

You may be asking, if the return of Christ did occur in the first century, along with the judgment, resurrection, and establishment of the Kingdom, how does that affect me in the here and now? How does this affect my faith?

The first-century return of Christ and all associated events, establish the context for our Christianity. We can be confident that upon our repentance and acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ, our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God. We can be confident that we have passed from death unto life and have eternal life abiding within us. Because eternal life abides within us, we can be confident that upon physical death we will continue to live in the spiritual realm for all eternity.

We can be confident that the spiritual Kingdom is a present reality and that the Kingdom is truly in us as Christ said. This Kingdom is defined by the New Covenant. The New Covenant is a covenant of life. It is also a covenant of love where the law of God is established in our hearts. Paul said in Romans 14:17 that the Kingdom is “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Our purpose for living is to grow the Kingdom in ourselves and help others do the same. Growing the Kingdom involves sharing the Gospel message with others and living the law of love in all that we think, say and do.

Knowing that Christ has returned, and we have been resurrected into eternal life, should give us great confidence in the future. Knowing that the world is not facing imminent danger of extinction, we can pro-actively become involved in helping others achieve Kingdom living. Our focus is not on waiting for something to happen but on helping make something happen.

Understanding that Christ has returned becomes a determinative in how we relate to God. We no longer see God as catastrophically intervening in the affairs of men. We instead see God expanding His Kingdom through the activity of Christian involvement. Our prayer to God is no longer asking that Christ return but that He facilitates his will through us as born again followers of a returned Christ who is fully present with us.

We can make a difference in the world if we practice Kingdom living. Kingdom living is conducting ourselves according to the law of love. If we fulfill our physical journey in this fashion, we will represent the Kingdom well and be pleasing to God. Some may ask: What is the law of love and how does it differ from the Old Covenant law?

The Ten Commandments, weekly and annual Sabbaths, animal sacrifices and various other regulations were a codified body of law that made up the Old Covenant system. Many of the laws contained in this system were already extant before being codified at Mount Sinai. A number of these laws continue to be extant to this very day. As the apostle Paul pointed out, where there is no law, there is no sin. Yet sin was in evidence from Adam to Moses and sin continues to be evident to this very day. Paul points out that the codification of law under the Old Covenant system made sin even more apparent because it gave greater definition to law.

Christ came to abolish this particular system of law because it became a ministration of death resulting from people's inability to keep it. Christ has abolished the Old Covenant system. Therefore the Ten Commandments, Sabbaths, animal sacrifices and all other regulations that made up that system no longer exist as a codified body of law. Christ abolished that system because man could not live up to its demands. Does this mean there no longer is law that we are required to live by? Since Christ abolished the Old Covenant system of law, does this mean that sin no longer exists? Are we free to do anything we want? Are we assured of eternal life regardless of our behavior as long as we accept the sacrifice of Christ?

Christ did not come to abolish law in general. New Testament Scripture records numerous examples of how we are to conduct ourselves toward God and man. Christ taught a very high moral code of conduct that goes far beyond the letter of the law required under the Old Covenant system. For example, under the Old Covenant you could not commit adultery. Christ taught that to lust after a woman is to commit adultery in one's heart. The Old Covenant taught that you could not commit murder. Christ taught that to hate your brother was akin to committing murder.

The major change that Christ facilitated in abolishing the Old Covenant and establishing the New is that we no longer are made righteous by keeping God's law. Israel proved beyond any doubt that it is impossible for man to attain righteousness on his own. From the time of Adam to our present day, man has failed miserably to keep the law of God in any consistent manner. Since disobedience to the laws of the Old Covenant required death, Israel's inability to keep the Old Covenant resulted in that covenant becoming a ministration of death for them.

Under the New Covenant the righteousness of Christ is applied to us so that before God we appear righteous even though we fail to actually be righteous in our behavior. This is how we pass from death unto life. Does this mean we don't need to be concerned about our behavior? Does this mean that Christ will take care of everything regardless of how we conduct ourselves? Nothing could be further from the truth.

When we accept Christ as our Savior, we are essentially accepting Christ as Lord of our lives and agreeing to be responsive to His will. When we accept the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, we enter into a covenant relationship with Christ. We enter into the New Covenant. This places us in the Kingdom. Kingdom living involves loving our neighbor. Loving our neighbor involves treating our neighbor in the manner that Christ taught.

Christ taught us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Christ taught us to be kind, compassionate, gentle and willing to help even our enemies. Does this kind of behavior make us righteous before God? No it does not. We could never behave righteously enough to accomplish the level of righteousness that God requires for salvation. That is where the righteousness of Christ comes in. The perfect righteousness of Christ applied to us fulfills what God requires for salvation. By accepting the gift of salvation that Christ offers, we essentially are saying to Christ that we love Him and want to obey Him. Obedience to Christ involves living in a manner reflective of the teachings of Christ as found in the scriptures.

Some Christians have looked at the New Testament scriptures and because they find that Christ and the first century Church kept the seventh day Sabbath, annual holy days and other regulations of the Old Covenant system, it is believed that these laws are still to be kept today. What must be understood is that Christ was still living under the Old Covenant system when He appeared in the first century A.D. Christ was therefore bound to keep the Old Covenant law. The first-century Church was in the process of moving from the old system to the new system. The book of Hebrews claims that the Old Covenant was in the process of passing away (Hebrews 8:13). The Jewish converts in particular were slow to give up the requirements of the Old Covenant. Many in the developing Christian Church kept old Covenant regulations right up to the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The Old Covenant did not pass away until the return of Christ during the A.D. 66 to 73 war.

Outside of the expanded moral law that Christ and the apostles taught, there is no indication in the New Testament scriptures that the numerous other regulations of the Old Covenant system would carry over to the New Covenant system. This would be especially true of Sabbaths, new moons, feast days, etc. that Paul shows to be a shadow of events involving Christ, including His return in the first century (see Galatians 4 and Colossians 2). These shadows have been fulfilled. In fact it is evident from several documents that are dated from the late first and early second century that the Christian Church began meeting for services on the first day of the week from early on instead of continuing to meet on the seventh day Sabbath. One such document is the *Didache*, a non-canonical work written by a Jewish Christian, which reflects upon the early life of the Church.

Christ taught repentance as the first step in becoming reconciled to God. Repentance simply means to change. Change involves our recognition that it is not by our works but through the sacrifice of Christ that we can appear righteous before God and therefore pass from death unto life. Change also involves our willingness to conduct ourselves according to the law of love. If we love Christ, we will try to be obedient to His teachings. Obedience to the law of Christ will facilitate the growth of God's Kingdom within us and allow us to be a vehicle for helping others to become part of the Kingdom as well.

Our worldview should be optimistic rather than pessimistic. Though troubles abound at the physical level, we can facilitate small but steady change in human behavior by demonstrating the law of love toward others. The whole focus of Christ's moral teaching revolves around the law of love. This law has as its foundation love toward God and love toward man. Christ told the teacher of the law

he was not far from being in the Kingdom when he agreed with Christ that these two laws were the most important (Mark 12:28-34).

Knowing that Christ has returned is very exciting. The return of Christ means that death has been defeated. By being in Christ, we can't die. Yes, we will die physically, but that amounts to nothing more than a transition to a different mode of being. Christ brought spiritual salvation with Him when He returned. Spiritual salvation is synonymous with eternal life. As Christians, we should be hopeful about the future, with a heart to engage problems others find hopeless.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The scriptural and historical evidence says that Christ returned in the first century. Christ continues to be fully present with us in spirit. Does this mean that Christ can't appear in some visible way sometime in our future? No, it doesn't. Christ is God and He can appear in any way and at any time He pleases. The Scriptures, however, do not teach a return separate and beyond the return in the first century. There is no scriptural reason to believe that Christ will return in our future. The scriptural evidence all points to a first-century return. Any future return would be outside of any scriptural evidence for such an event to occur.

The language of the New Testament is very straightforward about the time of Christ's return. Statements such as "this generation shall not pass," "the time is short," "the time is at hand," "in just a very little while," "the end of all things is near," "must soon take place," "I am coming soon," etc., are all straightforward statements that contextually and in Greek syntax mean exactly what they convey.

If we can't take these straightforward statements as meaning what they say, then the Scripture, as a vehicle for communicating God's message to mankind, becomes subject to every interpretation imaginable and makes any attempt to arrive at the truth of a matter virtually impossible. Straightforward statements, as recited above, mean exactly what they say. Short does not mean long. Near does not mean far. Soon does not mean distant. When Christ said, "This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:34), He did not mean a generation thousands of years future from when this statement was made. Christ did not say "that generation" thus indicating some future generation. He said "this generation," thus indicating the generation He was addressing at the time.

Use of words in their normal sense is the key here. Time statements in Scripture are using words in their normal sense. We therefore must understand them in their normal sense. Look up the hundreds of times "soon," "near," "short," "at hand," etc. are used in various contexts in the New Testament. These words mean what they say. Therefore, there is no reason to conclude that they mean something else in passages dealing with the return of Christ and all associated events.

Some, having recognized the strength of the position presented in this book, have tried to get around the force of the time statements by concluding that such statements are dual in nature. Those that take this position believe that Christ did return in some sense in A.D. 70, but will return in the future in a final fulfillment of prophetic end-time events. While this view may provide comfort in holding to a futuristic perspective regarding the return of Christ, there simply is no scriptural support for this position. The scriptures do not, in any way, show the time statements to have duality of meaning. It just isn't there!

I believe that the scriptural and historical evidence speaks for itself relative to the timing of Christ's return. The multiple dozens of time statements in the New Testament narrative cannot be ignored. These time statements identify when Christ would return and when all events associated with that return would take place.

In addition to the time statements, a careful reading of the New Testament narrative shows a continuous and consistent focus on the return of Christ being an expected event to occur within the lifetime of those living in the first century. This focus is inescapable when reading the New Testament Scripture. The various letters written to the first-century churches by Paul and other Church leaders are especially focused on an about to occur return of Christ. If one is simply willing to accept the fact that these letters are dealing with concerns and expectations of first-century Christians and not twenty-first century Christians, it should become apparent that the return of Christ must be understood within a first-century context.