

Pp

PP Practical

Prophecy

Volume I

*For those who want to read their whole
Bible—and enjoy it!*

A study in selected texts

by

Gary A. Hughes

In Loving Memory of Pastor
G. W. Billy Schuetz
*Who laid the foundation in many young lives,
And helped us make sense of the sixties ...
The seventies ...
The eighties ...
And beyond ...*

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Forward

If you're looking for a book that lays out the end times in lurid detail, this is probably not the one for you. If you're looking for charts and time lines, you'll probably find it disappointing. It won't even point you to the official website of the antichrist!

We're aiming for the bigger picture, God, His heart for the world, and what Jesus is looking for during the last days. Basically that's no mystery whatsoever. He wants to see souls saved, wrongs righted, and his church raised up as never before.

If you've studied other books on prophecy you'll likely find some differences. There are very few references to a Jerusalem Temple, except to say it will probably never be rebuilt. When this book talks about *tribulation* it shows you how the word is actually used in the Bible—somewhat different than what you may have been taught.

And this is a book of hope. Where many end-time books are all gloom and doom, this one looks at the prophetic passages, places many of them in their historic context, and doesn't save up all the trouble for the last few months. And that frees up some space, leaves a lot of room for some really good news.

Because that's what the Bible is all about-Good News! We know life has hard moments, we learned that early on. But Our God has answers! His greatest answer is named Jesus. We'll talk a lot about Him here ...

The layout isn't at all what I had in mind when I started a prophecy book. The first section is about hearing God in general. Then we take a little time in the New Testament to get an idea of what the Bible considers fulfilled prophecy.

After that it's a whirling dash through the main Scriptures dealing with The Second Coming. Not too much detail or depth, just a glimpse of the big picture.

I find myself doing a fair amount of un-learning and un-teaching, undoing facades others have diligently labored to construct, either wittingly or unwittingly. A great deal of the misinformation has been negative, pessimistic, sapping our faith by inspiring fear.

It's not pleasant to see bad ideas embraced with such fervor. But remember, the truth, no matter how painful, will ultimately set us free. And when all is said and done, The Truth is Jesus.

And suddenly my little book isn't so little any more. Sorry about that. Breaking it into two volumes should help. But I'll try to keep it moving, filled with light and hope. Even so, Come, Lord Jesus ...

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(in volume II)

From The Author,

This is not a book of heavy theology. If the truth be told, it probably doesn't classify as theology at all. For the most part I won't be comparing theories of interpretation, with endless citations and references. Those are already out there. No need to repeat them here.

When I began to learn about CD players my first studies were disappointing. Endless chapters on decoding the sub-code and things to make me aware of how clever the designers had been, but not a word on the stages of power up and what to check when the machine just didn't work.

I'm thinking along the same lines here, which is why the book is named *practical* prophecy. The world is full of talk and ideas. I've gotten old enough that for the most part, I really don't care. What works?

Conversely, what hurts us? What ideas and theories bog down believers and hurt the church? There are a few out there. And so, I will at least mention some other schools,

ones that play *cut and paste* with Scripture so people think they've heard from the Bible when they haven't.

Eschatology, or the study of the end times, is perhaps the most divisive territory of all. And yet, the nearer we draw to the end, the more important it is to have some kind of guide, an understanding greater than we can receive from half-remembered sermons and apocalyptic-themed movies. *What saith The Book?*

Most of this is formatted as a Bible study but I'm not probing very deeply. That's your part. Not all at once, but over a lifetime: you, your Bible, and the unfolding events of our world. I've written with footnotes and endnotes, but neither extensively nor exhaustively.

Most of the endnotes are really more discussion, side trails that didn't fit within the main text. If more proof is needed, it's out there, but in many cases it's a lifetime of study, here, there, and everywhere. I've tried to give some pointers of where to look, but I certainly haven't given them all.

For there comes a point of diminishing returns. We're delving not just into the acts of God, but His ways (Psalm 103:7). One is a recitation of facts and events, the other goes a little deeper, where we get into desires, longings, and the motivations of the heart. That takes longer and is more difficult to learn.

Ultimately, it's a heart issue, or even a matter of the Spirit. Some will find at least a few of my ideas offensive, especially as we enter into politics and start naming names.^{*} I regret that. I feel compelled to call it like I see it—but hopefully, as gently as possible. How each reader will receive what I say is another matter. For ultimately I'm writing not to change your mind but your very life.

Truth will do that. Have I stayed on the side of the truth? Your call ...

^{*} That happens mainly in volume II

Chapter Seven:

Prophetic Themes

What's important to God is not always important to mankind. We look to kings and kingdoms, the big and the bold, while our Lord is more concerned about what's going on inside the man. He's the caring Father, looking after the welfare of His children, while we stand goggle-eyed, staring at castles and towers, things that will someday come crashing down.

God's biggest themes:

-Redemption. Mankind has been lost, strayed, and stolen. What will it take to bring them back?

-The Messiah. Who is that one great hope for a troubled world? When and how will he appear?

-God's people. Historic Israel, the Church through the ages, ethnic Jews, and those who have yet to

meet their Lord. How is God's love demonstrated to each and all?

-The Kingdom of God. Everything wrong will be made right. Injustice shall be dealt with and the earth itself needs to be set free from the shackles mankind's fall has placed on it.

Messianic Prophecy

The single greatest theme throughout the Bible is Jesus. Genesis begins with God speaking and the book of John explains that that *WORD* was none other than Jesus himself. Practically every incident and character speaks something to us of Jesus. He's our Messiah, God with us, *Immanuel*.

"... in the volume of the book it is written of me ..."

^{Psalms} 40:7, KJV

Two Advents

The main reason Old Testament scholars had a hard time comprehending Messianic prophecy is because they were looking at two advents. In other words, Jesus was coming twice. The first was as the suffering servant, the lowly teacher, born into poverty and relative obscurity. His main mission was the cross, to pay for our sins and open the way of redemption. The second would be as the conquering king, coming to claim his rightful throne and put everything right. The two streams of prophecy came through all jumbled together, leaving many people confused about who and what to expect.

Let's take a look at the first advent. There were basically three reasons He came this way:

1) To put a human face on Almighty God. We're not looking at blazing columns of fire or the terrible visage that would destroy us to behold it but another man, personable, approachable. Not necessarily a religious man but one who could speak to fishermen and tax gatherers and prostitutes, people who knew they were sinners. And one who could speak to exceedingly cultured individuals and confront them with the fact that they too were sinners.

2) To teach us what we needed to know. The world was about to change and God's future leaders needed to know what to do. And so he taught deceptively simple truths that ran deeper than the greatest mind-bending philosophies of the ages. He told stories, simple stories and those who truly got them received life, hope, and a new way to live. His most radical teachings centered over forgiveness, receiving it and passing it on. He took love to a higher level, showing it to friend and foe alike.

3) To die for our sin. No matter what else we could say or do, mankind has inherited a problem, a crushing debt that can never be paid. God had a problem too. The creation he loved was marred, defiled. His holiness would never allow Him to overlook what had gone wrong, it had to be addressed, payment needed to be made. But nothing and no one within creation itself could be sufficient, there was no clear, unblemished title to anything. So God Himself had to enter the scene, the sinless man, dying once for all.

He came to us a tiny baby, insignificant, and yet heralded by signs that shook kingdoms. He grew up in anonymity until at thirty years of age he began teaching, training, gathering disciples and declaring a

kingdom. Those who looked for justice and righteousness heard him gladly, while those who expected a conquering king were frustrated, and many of them died disappointed.

For His second advent he will come to us as the conquering king. The greater portion of unfulfilled Scripture centers around this climactic event.

There's something else we should make clear too, a little twist that shipwrecks a great many teachings. Since there are two advents, and from the time elapsed we know they are separated by a minimum of about two thousand years, most Messianic prophecies have an implied gap that corresponds to this time period. When we encounter it, we should know two things absolutely:

- 1) The gap is between first and second advents. The ministry of The Messiah bookends it front and back.
- 2) Applying prophecies containing the gap to any other figure, especially an antichrist figure, is not appropriate.

Here's an example from the very first Messianic reference in the Bible:

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15, KJV

Jesus' heel was bruised at Calvary. Crucified, dead, and buried, but you can't kill God. Satan suffered a humiliating defeat but is still very active in our present fallen world. That will change at the second coming, and especially following the Battle of Armageddon. The snake's head will be crushed, his power broken once and for all. Between the two fulfillments is a gap of at least two thousand years.

Big God, Little Devil

Many prophetic studies forget Who's really in charge. As we learn the wiles and schemes of the enemy (and he truly is a prince within our universe, a mighty being with dazzling, baffling resources) we forget that he only has what he has. The same is true concerning those who serve the enemy of our souls. Some of them have become extremely rich and incredibly powerful.

It's easy to look at what's happening in this world, realize who's doing it, comprehend how much success they're enjoying, and despair, to be absolutely blown away by the enormity of the betrayal we're experiencing from elected leaders

and others we put our trust in. One of the dangers in studying these matters is to become a bit wild-eyed.

**If you're not
outraged,
you're not paying attention.**

- Bumper Sticker

Our God, however, is *Infinite*, ruling from outside of our dimension entirely. Unlike his adversary, He never runs out of resources, or power, or wisdom, or goodness, or love, joy, or peace, or especially, *TIME*.

Existing outside of its linear constraint, He has no trouble arranging events to suit His purposes. From the standpoint of our common enemy, Our God cheats, having attributes a created being could never attain to. In truth however, the deception was all on the part of the itty bitty little pip-squeak who thought to take on the Master of Eternity!

So when Christ declared, "I will build my Church" it was a challenge, a slap in the face to every element within the satanic community. But there was more to come ...

**¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy and said,
"Lord, even the demons submit to us in your
name."**

¹⁸ He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

^{Luke} 10:17-20, NIV

God Is Love

Something else needs to be addressed too, early on, as we prepare to look at some of the greatest triumphs and tragedies of our time. God's plan is not to torment or punish mankind, but to save them. It gives our Lord no pleasure to see the earth in torment, or to see injustice triumph. We serve one who hears the groaning of the prisoner, the cry of the widow, and the whimper of dying children.

Too much prophetic teaching has been fear-mongering, playing on mankind's love of sensationalism. I remember years back, as a newly saved Christian talking with my piano teacher, also a believer. I mentioned how Jesus was getting ready to come back. She told me not to pay any mind, *People had been saying such things for years ...*

Her attitude hearkened back to her childhood, a woman standing on her front porch scolding the neighborhood children, telling them Jesus was coming back to punish their behavior. Even more sadly, what they were doing wasn't even naughty, it just didn't accord with her hide-bound interpretation of Scripture.

To me it was painful. The Bible teaches us to look to the second coming with joy. That old biddy made it into a bogeyman. Let us never do such things, remembering instead Revelation 19:10- "**... the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**" Let's speak of Jesus, his love, his mercy, his all-sufficient power. We desperately want Him back!

God's goodness can affect the fulfillment of prophecy too. Sometimes the promise of judgment is negated if Our Lord sees reason to change His mind.

¹⁰ **When God saw what they** [the people of the wicked city of Nineveh] **did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.**

4 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is

this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Jonah 3:10-4:2, NIV

For Jonah this was the ultimate humiliation. Not only would his mission to the enemies of Israel leave him a social outcast but his prophecy of destruction had been postponed for what turned out to be a hundred and fifty years! In truth, he'd become the first recorded missionary evangelist but in Jonah's day nobody knew what a missionary or an evangelist was, because he was the first!

A great deal of what the Bible says prophetically is *conditional*. There are no good people or bad people, only those who respond to their Lord or don't. People with no reputation for godliness can experience a change of heart and find a brand new life, while those raised in the kingdom can become the baddest apples in the barrel. It all boils down to the condition of heart, something under our complete control.

And when change occurs, sometimes what our Lord has to say about a particular situation changes too.

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed,⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted,¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it...

Jeremiah 18:7-10, NIV

One of the hazards of being a prophet is that a perfectly good prophecy may never come to pass. God is a heart God. He will respond to the condition of a man's heart, whether the response is blessing or judgment.

"Always in motion is the future ..." -Yoda*

Numerology

Part of the alphabet of prophecy is numerology. We find that numbers themselves are significant. This

* from the movie *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

again is a major study we'll attempt to do very little justice to. Aside from a basic introduction I'll leave the bulk of this to other writers, of which there are many.

There can be a bit of confusion, as some numbers appear to have more than one meaning. As with most prophetic elements, it pays not to take our interpretations too seriously until we start to see other confirmation and know we're on the right track.

1) Pre-eminent. First place. There is One God. The first mention is the most significant.

2) Separation, to make a distinction, bring to order.
And God separated the light from the darkness...

3) Unity out of diversity. One God, three persons.
Man is spirit, soul, and body.

4) Worldwide, universal. *The four corners of the earth ...*

5) Grace, redemption. Lucifer's five *I will's* answered by Calvary's five bleeding wounds.

6) Mankind, of earthly origin. 666 is the number of ...
man.

7) Complete, perfection, of divine origin

8) Starting over, a new beginning. Noah, the *eighth* person (generation)

9) Fullness, abundance. Nine fruit of the Spirit, Nine gifts of the Spirit ...

10) Trial, test. Ten plagues upon Egypt, Jacobs wages were changed ten times ...

11) Incompletion, one less than twelve.

12) Order, Structure, Government. Twelve tribes, Twelve disciples, Twelve apostles.

13) Rebellion, or a double portion blessing. Functionally, there were 13 tribes and 13 apostles.

Principle of The Cross

Although the cross as a symbol is seen in relatively few places within the Bible, the *principle* is a major, though oft hidden theme, from Genesis to Revelation. A proper understanding of its meaning is foundational to the knowledge of God. It has to do with how we live our life, who we take direction from, and what we allow to become important to us.

Practically everything of our world is laid out and active along a horizontal plane. All the animals, even our closely related primates, interface with their world on a horizontal level. All the natural inducements: food, sex, and security, are horizontal.

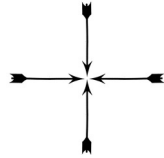


Man, being created in the image of God, stands upright. His very existence points to a vertical reality, a life above the things of this world. Our first temptation was to forsake the stark simplicity of the word of God and turn instead to what could be seen, felt, and reasoned out. Either direction represented a choice, one involving faith and the other representing self, sensuality, and personal indulgence.

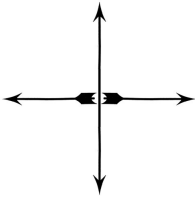
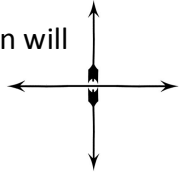
There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

Proverbs 14:12, 16:25, KJV (Same sentence, both references.)

The Bible uses the word *way* to describe some of the different paths a man might choose. Every path will have crossroads, places where one must choose among different directions. A **crossroads** represents a decision point.



Either one of two things will happen. One's own will triumphs, and the spiritual world is snubbed ...

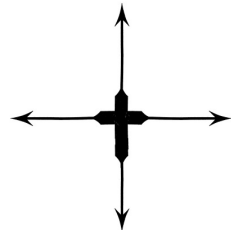


Or else the spiritual is given control, breaking the sin and stubbornness resident within the human heart. This is the basic meaning of *repentance*,

turning from a me-centered lifestyle to one that allows a higher power to have its say.

I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law *is* within my heart.

Psalms 40:8, KJV



This was actually the secret of Jesus life. He came into this world having no quarrel with His Father in Heaven. When we yield ourselves to God we partake of the same power Christ did. Things come into balance and once again we have a shot at the destiny we were created to fulfill.

Notice there is no break visible here. As soon as we embrace the cross another principle takes over, for when we die to ourselves the resurrection power of Christ comes into play. We're no longer half-broken people but totally alive and totally victorious, filled with all the good things of God!

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20, KJV

The revealed power of Christ is unbelievably attractive:

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.

John 12:32, KJV

When Jesus was lifted up from the earth He was more than on the cross, He *was* the cross. He stood

straight up, perpendicular to the horizon, and declared once and for all that there was another way, a better way, and all who followed him would find it. Thus, what was meant to be a badge of shame became a shout of victory, the ultimate triumph of our age.

I am The Way and The Truth and The Life ...

^{John} 14:6, KJV

And so, yielding to Christ becomes the ultimate slap in the face to everything in the world system, the striving for power, dog-eat-dog, anything goes mentality. Just as Christ humbled himself and became obedient unto death, we can likewise die to ourselves, our wants, our pride. And it's at that point true life begins, life in the Spirit, the better way.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: ⁸ Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

^{I Corinthians} 2:7-8, KJV

Tribulation

One word we need to get familiar with is *tribulation*. It's used to describe hardship, suffering, and opposition (persecution). The *Greek* word is used about forty-five times in the New Testament. It has a Hebrew equivalent that is used 4-5 times in the Old Testament, but never in the prophets.

A few times we hear the phrase *great tribulation*. That seems to describe times that are especially difficult, such as war, persecution, or the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. There is, however, no phrase in the Bible speaking of *THE* great tribulation. Somebody just made that up.

The Bible indicates that a certain level of tribulation is normal, even desirable. This world is a sick, twisted place and if nobody finds fault with anything we say or do, we probably have a problem.

"Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."

^{Luke} 6:26, NASB

Enter ye in at the straight gate:

**For wide is the gate and broad is the way that
leadeth to destruction,**

And many there be that go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,

Which leadeth unto life,

And few there be that find it.

Matthew 7:13-14, KJV

**If ye were of the world, the world would love his
own:**

But because ye are not of the world,

But I have chosen you out of the world,

Therefore the world hateth you.

John 15:19, KJV

**We must through much tribulation enter into the
kingdom of God.**

Acts 14:22, KJV

What does all that really tell us? That there will be
resistance, an opposition to our Christian lifestyle.
The stand we take will bring us into conflict at times.
No matter how nice we try to be, we won't be

everyone's buddy. Despite all the benefits, being a believer will also cost us something. And when the Bible uses the word *tribulation*, that's exactly what it means.

Some who interpret prophecy point to a time of future anguish, calling it *The Great Tribulation*. They do this by redefining the word to give it meaning found nowhere in the Bible. Don't be fooled. *Tribulation* is a normal word, describing our normal condition. If you're a believer, the devil doesn't like you. But his time is limited, yours is not. Give him Heaven!

National Israel & The Jew

One of the greatest sources of wonder and mystery in our world centers around the nation of Israel and the people known as Jews. Beloved of God for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they nevertheless missed their Messiah and have been adrift for centuries, cleaving to their national identity and yet knowing that without the temple system, their faith is missing something.

In the book of Romans Paul deals in great depth with the issue, how that Jews who missed Christ became as unbelievers, while unbelievers who received the promise of the Messiah became as Jews.

Nevertheless, Our Lord still has great love for the historic people, and so should His Body, the Church.

Long ago Hosea told the story of how it would be for the nation:

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and *without* teraphim: ⁵ Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

^{Hosea} 3:4-5, KJV

The fulfillment has been amazing. These people have maintained their Jewish distinctive through centuries of dispersion, living amongst other nations as outsiders and often pariahs. While they were missing the trappings of their civil structure and temple ceremonies, they also remained free of the idolatry that had previously plagued them. Also miraculous was the rebirth of the modern state of Israel. A solid

block of prophecy was fulfilled in this event and the nation has a destiny still to play in the end times.

And yet, the main plan of God is for the Church. Lest that sound too restrictive, remember the book of Acts. What was the early church but mainly Jews who received Jesus of Nazareth as the coming Messiah? As time went on the two streams pulled apart and yet the fact remains, the roots of the Church are Jewish! Christianity is basically a sect of Judaism.

Over the years there have been problems. Some leaders and branches of the Church persecuted Jewish people, labeling them *Christ-killers*. This demonstrates not only ignorance concerning what the New Testament clearly teaches but a complete failure to comprehend the heart of God toward all people. Others became frustrated when their attempts to win over those they considered their 'Jewish brethren' were not received. The problems were especially bad during the middle ages when the vast majority of people lost touch with the Holy Scriptures. Without a clear standard to live by people ran their lives on superstition, supposition, and religious hear-say.

In recent years things have turned around greatly. The United States of America, drawing heavily on its Christian roots, held out a welcoming hand for Jewish people displaced from other lands. While the record is far from perfect, nowhere have Jewish people found more acceptance and less fear than in America.

During World War Two they found an unexpected ally in the Roman Catholic Church. Under Pope Pius XII they received all the help the network of Catholic Churches was able to give them, including falsified baptism papers to allow them not only to evade the anti-Jewish programs of Axis governments but gain entry to countries hesitant to accept them as Jews.

Some have tried to dub Pius XII as *Hitler's Pope* for supposedly collaborating with the Nazi regime, accusations based on a very small number of his public statements. It must be remembered he was residing within Mussolini's Italy and needed to tread very carefully. Not only was his own life potentially at risk, there was the welfare of thousands of churches operating under the noses of, basically, madmen. For all that, his influence is credited with saving more than 860,000 Jewish lives, more than any other single entity within the war. And America, during those years, turned away at least one boatload of Jewish refugees, mainly due to the socialist influence of FDR and his *New Deal* cabinet.ⁱⁱ

The Bible does predict a major revival among the Jewish people at the very end of our age. It tells us that Israel, being the first nation visited, will also be last. It speaks of Jews being surprised when they meet their Messiah, wondering where the wounds in his hands and feet came from.

¹⁰ And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. ...⁶ If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'

Zechariah 12:10-11, 13:6, NIV

With all that said, it's important to remember what the Bible doesn't say:

It doesn't say that the Jerusalem temple will ever be rebuilt. What it does speak of is the *Tabernacle of David* (Amos 9:11), which the early church leaders applied to the Body of Christ. (Acts 15:13-18)

Neither should we look to see the Mosaic system of sacrifices and feasts restored. The book of Hebrews

tells us very plainly that these pointed to what Christ would give us. While we can always learn from what came before, what we have now is *better*.

In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is ready to vanish away*.

Hebrews 8:13, KJV

Written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, this appears to anticipate the event. God, being finished with the entire Mosaic order, was about to make it disappear. Neither does the Bible give us any reason to raise it up again. That was type and shadow, we now have the reality.

Whole chapters have been written in some *prophecy* books concerning the Ark of the Covenant: who might have it and where it might be found. Yet Jeremiah said it was going to go away and stay gone:

¹⁶ In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.

Jeremiah 3:16, NIV

There it is, in black and white!

The Kingdom of God

We'll never take hold of God's plan for the ages without a proper understanding of the Kingdom of God. The prophets foretold it, both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed it, and the disciples were still wondering about it when Jesus was ready to ascend back into Heaven (Acts 1:6). Obviously there was confusion, even in those days!

To begin with, Our God has always been The King. That means there has always been a kingdom, in Heaven. We pray, after all, *Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth **as it is in Heaven.***

That then is the rub. With the fall of mankind God's rule over the earth was marred. Even when Israel was established as a nation the concept was less than satisfying. Historical Israel was for the most part a naughty little kingdom ruled by naughty little kings who required frequent spankings and more than a few 'time outs.'

And yet there were those who did bow their heart and allow the King of Heaven to rule in their soul.

But even the good kings fell short. The promise of a New Covenant, where God's law would be written directly into our hearts, was truly amazing.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ³² Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: ³³ But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31:31-34, KJV

It would have been for this reason our Lord declared of John the Baptist, **Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.** (Luke 7:28)

One of the greatest theological debates of the last few centuries centers over the Kingdom of God. Since the Jews rejected their Messiah, did the kingdom come, or did it not? In other words, did Jesus totally fulfill His mission, or was it to a large degree a failure?

In the first place, both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed the Kingdom as being currently available, or *at hand* (Matt 3:2, Mark 1:15). The implication was that it was there to be grasped, right at that present time.

The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

Luke 16:16, KJV

When questioned by the Pharisees, Jesus said that the kingdom did not come by observation, or with outward show (Luke 17:20). Instead there was an inner work, those who had made their peace with God and were living a very different life than those around them.

Speaking with Pontius Pilate, Jesus stated that his kingdom was not of this world, otherwise his disciples would have fought to keep him from being captured. Pilate saw no competition to his own rule

for he immediately declared, "I find no fault in Him" (John 18:36-38).

In Daniel chapter two we see a stone cut without hands striking a great statue that symbolizes the kingdoms of men down through the ages and breaking it to pieces. The stone then becomes a great mountain, filling the entire earth. The statue is struck on its feet, which, within the flow of the vision, points us to the end of the world as we know it.

Up to that point we see a mystery aspect to the kingdom. Yes, it's here, but no, it is not that visible. Yes, it came, but no, there is more to come, much more. The important thing is to realize that Christ completely fulfilled the mission of His first advent. He did establish a kingdom and he initiated a new covenant that changed God's dealings with mankind forever.

He shed his blood, paid for our sin, and broke the power of Satan over our lives. The battle is far from over but we entered a new dimension. We have a new hope, a new power, and a new ability to do God's will.

The Messiah's rejection did not catch God by surprise. It was prominent in many Old Testament prophecies (**Who hath believed our report?** Isaiah 53:1) and was part of the pathway for bringing every people group into the kingdom. And in Romans we see that Israel has a set time approaching when she

will recognize the stone that was rejected as the capstone of God's dealings with mankind. Romans tells us that when we see such a thing happening we'll also see graves opened as death is swallowed up in victory (Romans 11:15).

The vision in Daniel does say that the kingdoms of this world will one day crumble before the Kingdom of God. That's coming, we can count on it. But for right now, there's much to do. We are in this world, but not of it. Like Jesus, we're here to serve. If we serve with him, we will one day reign with him. It's a promise (I Timothy 2:12).

Seasons and Cycles

In The Old Testament and especially Genesis we find not just the chronological story but the roots, the seeds, the patterns for everything else. The language of creation becomes the language of redemption and the language also for all the prophetic themes and passages to come.

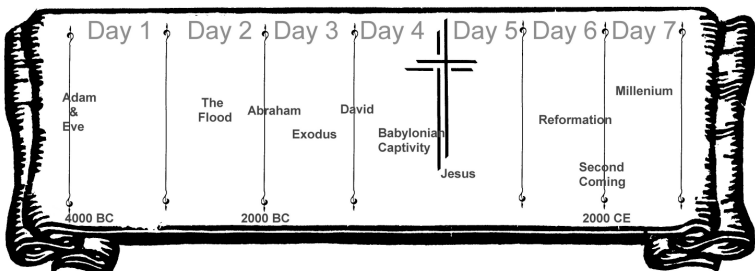
**While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest,
and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and
day and night shall not cease.**

Genesis 8:22, KJV

Our God created these cycles for a purpose and they teach us many things. The brevity of life, the necessity of sowing towards a harvest, preparing for bad times while things are good, the assurance that adversity has another side to it—we can learn all that and more. As goes the natural, so goes the spiritual.

We see the agricultural year reflected in our own life, spring, summer, fall, and winter. Jesus spoke of his presence being the day and warned his disciples night was coming. Proverbs is filled with admonitions concerning planting and harvesting, activities that seldom need to be done when it's comfortable and convenient.

We find that one may be a metaphor for another. Daniel Nine speaks of weeks of years while Psalms Ninety tells us that a thousand years is like a day, or as a watch in the night. The original creation story took place within one week. Whether that would be a 168 hour week or a seven thousand year week seems hardly worth debating, it's just as big a miracle either way.



Recorded history seems to be working out to be a week too, one of about seven thousand years. Adding up all the genealogical information in the Bible places the fall of man about 4000 BC, the flood about 2500, and the exodus from Egypt at about 1500. That puts us right about the six thousand year mark. The Bible also makes reference to a thousand year period where Christ will reign supreme on the earth before allowing the final battle of Armageddon to take place. Assuming we're getting close to that would give us six days of strife and one of rest, a perfect week.

Some of us will feel a little shocked at how short a time line this works out to. Where are all the billions of years secular science keeps giving us? We need to bear in mind that *billions and billions of years* is to the evolutionist what *abracadabra* is to the magician, the powerful incantation that makes the impossible thing happen. If we accept the fact that evolution is open to question and there's a reasonable alternative, we may not need those billions after all. Even some of our earth's geologic features, layers and canyons, may speak more of catastrophic intensity than incremental persistence.

iii

There are about a hundred and twenty-four theories by which we can guesstimate an age for the earth. All but a handful give us eight to ten-thousand years. One is dust on the moon. We have a pretty good idea what's drifting through space and how fast it's

been falling, and as far as we can tell or postulate it's been fairly regular. If anything the rate of fall would be decreasing, as the leftovers of a climactic creation were slowly swept away.

For the 1969 landing they spent an extra thirty million dollars retro-fitting the capsule with giant foot pads to keep it from sinking into billions of years worth of dust. They found an accumulation of less than half an inch, barely ten-thousand year's worth!^{iv}

It's interesting to note that the concept of the week was important to the Jewish expositors at about the time of Christ. They found ways to infer six thousand years of previous history so they could place themselves at the time of the end, needing only that final thousand year segment to make it perfect.

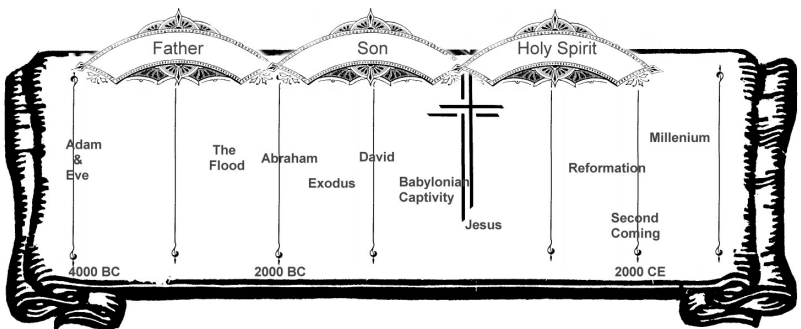
As we look into Bible prophecy we discover that every generation takes it for granted they're the last. It's always assumed things have come to their climax, evil couldn't get any worse, nothing is left to be discovered or invented, and surely God Himself could not stand any more strife and upheaval. And yet, those born in that hour look back to it as 'the good old days', when life was innocent and the sky much bluer than we've ever seen it since.

We're no different, and like everyone before us, have all the Scripture and signs and *proofs* we need. And yet, nothing in our society challenges God. Maybe we're there, maybe not. Somebody once

asked Martin Luther what he'd do if he knew definitely, beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ was returning that afternoon. Luther's answer? "I'd plant a tree." Meaning of course, he'd initiate a project that looked decades ahead for fulfillment, because no matter how sure he thought he might be, he wouldn't be that sure.

While we've got the charts up (*de rigeur* for a study of prophecy, it seems), we might as well take a look at a little more of the overall symmetry.

The first two *days* are the era of the Father. Creation, beginning, setting the whole world in motion. The second pair, bookended by the 'sacrifice' of Isaac and the sacrificial death of Christ, were the era of the Son. Moses, standing on the mount, receiving the revelation of God's name, "I am that I am." A tripartite name for a tripartite God, and yet containing a mystery, a *that*. Preparing the way for Christ and all his "I AM" declarations.



Our present age is the time of the Holy Spirit. Beginning at Pentecost, cloven tongues of fire, a

miraculous gift of tongues, and tongues of witness, the carrying of the gospel to every corner of the world. A long season when we saw very little of the supernatural but a deep working of truth and righteousness, millions brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But now, as the age draws to a close, it is once again shaping up to be a power encounter, the One True God facing off with all the other wannabe's.

Another item of interest is that creation appears to have a *fold line* right at 1000 BC, the time of David, his tabernacle, and the worship in the tent on Mount Zion. Five hundred years back and you find the exodus, when Israel received her land. Five hundred years ahead, another exodus, the great dispersion. A thousand years either way we find the two sacrifices already referred to. A little beyond that and we find the confusion of tongues at Bab-El contrasted with believers speaking new tongues at Pentecost. Fifteen hundred years takes us to the flood in one direction, and the beginning of the dark ages on the other, as well as the initial rise of Islam. Three thousand years and you find a Sabbath rest in each direction: God's rest after creation, and the thousand year reign of Christ. Beyond that, we find the initial days of creation, also the possibility of a new heaven and a new earth.

While I was playing around with this concept I discovered such a fold line in my own life, centered around the age of thirty three. There were some rather eerie parallels going an equal number of years in either direction. Makes me wonder what might happen when I'm sixty-six. I like to think it may be the year I'll simply go off the charts, accomplishing things I wouldn't have dared hope for in former years. Doesn't pay to take these matters too seriously, but still ...

The Concept of "Restoration"

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

John 12:24-25, KJV

Closely allied to seasons and cycles is the concept of *Restoration*.

"Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before

was preached unto you: Whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath shewed by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

^{Acts} 3:19-21, KJV

Some of this follows the pattern of the agricultural cycle. Just as Jesus suffered a death burial, and resurrection before reproducing his ministry into the Church, so has the Church been likewise planted. As the years multiplied she was stripped of much of her power and glory until what was left during medieval times looked very unlike her New Testament counterpart. For all that the roots went deep and numbers multiplied. What we've seen since the days of the Reformation has been a gradual return of all that was lost, strayed, and stolen.

Our Lord's dealings with mankind do not progress in a linear fashion. There are times when Heaven appears to draw very near and great things happen in a short amount of time. In like manner there are seasons of apparent dryness, where "nothing" happens at all. The days of open heavens are very often times when some of what was lost is being restored to the church.

It all started out with just one big church in Jerusalem. As Christianity spread and multiplied something was nevertheless lost, the miraculous atmosphere that surrounded both Jesus and the

early church. By the time Christ comes back there will be many churches, scattered throughout the earth, each manifesting the full power and glory of Jesus Himself. That's the Church he's returning for!

The basic doctrines of the church are listed in Hebrews, Chapter Six.

1) Repentance from dead works

2) Faith Toward God

3) Water Baptism

4) Holy Spirit Baptism

5) Laying On of Hands

6) Resurrection of the Dead

7) Eternal Judgment

If we look at the medieval experience we find very little to compare with the New Testament Church. Salvation was a complicated morass of tradition and more than a little superstition. The church had largely become a secular institution, vying for power with kings and oppressing the poor almost as sorely as they did.

And yet a seed of piety remained, people who loved their Lord and weren't afraid to pray and share their faith with others. Some began to translate the Bible into languages people actually spoke and understood. The invention of the printing press meant that Scripture now belonged to the masses, just about anyone could own a copy.

The upshot of that was the Protestant Reformation, where people realized that all the ceremonies and formalities they'd grown up with were pretty much useless before God. Jesus Christ himself had paid the price and made the way. Salvation was not a matter of living by every tradition of Papal Rome but of coming before Christ and just accepting the provision he'd already made. No saint ever had any excess righteousness to share but Jesus has more than enough for all and He gives it away free. No priest or other intermediary was needed, for Christ Himself was the Mediator, the bridge between God and Man.

Those issues pretty well took care of the first two points, the laying aside of religion, man's attempt to reach God, and the acceptance by faith of the salvation Christ died to purchase. As the years went by other matters came to the surface, usually accompanied by *times of refreshing*, those moments when Heaven appears to invade the earth.

The ink was barely dry on Luther's 95 theses when others began to insist that baptism should only be

administered to those old enough to have a valid conversion experience. As the years began to add up, other doctrines and emphasis began to both advance the faith and divide the believers.

Often God was speaking, restoring something to His people. At other times, man was reasoning, bringing forth ideas and movements that perhaps mainly testified to the patience and forbearance of the One who sits in Heaven and loves all of His children equally. The wide array of denominations can be bewildering, yet most of them serve the God of the Bible and love their Savior with all their heart. And historically they represent a journey, the church's path from the first century up to ours.

Holy Spirit Baptism came to the forefront twice, once at the very start of the twentieth century when the Pentecostal denominations came into being, and then starting mainly in the nineteen sixties as more historic movements were suddenly confronted by the *Charismatic* outpouring.

Laying on of Hands accompanied by prophecy for the impartation of gifts started about 1948 during a controversial revival known as *Latter Rain*, but as the years went by those doctrines began to be mainstreamed into the Christian experience.

The last two, *Resurrection of the Dead* and *Eternal Judgment*, are received as statements of faith by pretty much all but generally have no practical outworking within our fellowships. It's believed they

will be associated quite closely with the physical return of Jesus Christ and what we now give mental assent to will become an actual physical experience for many.^{v *}

Zion & the Tabernacle of David

Some time into David's reign he realized there was something missing, the ark that represented the very power and presence of God. So he sent to fetch it out of the house of Abinadab where it had resided for decades after being returned from its capture by the Philistines.

Following the Philistine program, loading the ark onto a *new cart* for transport, proved disastrous. One of the attendants, a man named Uzzah, was

* Perhaps we should at least mention a false teaching that pops up from time to time, *Universal Reconciliation*, also known as *Universal Rec'* ... It states that because God is so gracious, eventually everything and everyone will be restored, up to and including the devil. A biblical concept of Restoration is strictly limited to that which was spoken of by the prophets.

Universal Wreck effectively guts the entire gospel message. If everyone will eventually be 'saved', why should we be troubled over evangelism, or missions, or for that matter, even be concerned about our own salvation, if it's such a done deal? This is what's known as a ticket to Hell!

struck dead in a burst of divine judgment. Somewhat discomfited, David abandoned the project, dropping the ark off with the nearby family of Obed-Edom.

Matters might have remained there indefinitely but within a few months word got around that Obed-Edom was being blessed beyond all expectation or belief. David took up the plan once again but first he began delving into the sacred texts, trying to discover why the previous attempt had gone wrong.

For all that study, what happened next was completely irregular. Rather than return the ark to the Tabernacle of Moses at Gibeah, David pitched a tent within his military stronghold of Zion. Whereas Moses' Tabernacle was a religious masterpiece, every detail and measurement a matter of scriptural record, there's really only one thing we're sure of concerning David's tent. It was big. It held lots of people.

And they came. Moses' Tabernacle was all about separation, holding the ark in virtual quarantine. Here it was on display, and people came from all over to commune with the very God of Heaven. What happened seemingly contradicted everything we'd learned concerning meeting with the Most High!

For this whole episode was a prophecy, an unexpected glimpse into something that wouldn't be fulfilled for a thousand years. Only after Christ's

blood had been shed could mankind pass through the veil and live to tell about it.

Moses' Tabernacle had a veil, a heavy, thick curtain that separated man from God. The Jerusalem Temple had one too, even thicker and heavier, and when Jesus died it was torn from top to bottom, a rip only a being reaching down from heaven could accomplish.

By such an action Our Lord was speaking to mankind, letting us know the separation was over. Even more important, that it was not ultimately pleasing to him. He was a Father longing for his children and wanting to be with them.

Worship as we know it was born in the Tabernacle of David, the praises, the instruments, the prophetic songs, sitting, standing, dancing, handclapping, this was the setting for the Psalms. And it all happened right in front of the ark, in the very presence of God.

The snapshot only lasted a few years for when Solomon's Temple was completed the ark went back into seclusion and the events of Zion were almost forgotten—except by God, scholars, and the prophets. The Temple was on Mount Moriah, an entirely different hilltop.

If we truly understand the meaning of that, it clears up a lot of confusion relating to both the Church and national Israel at the time of the end. *Zion* had very little significance to the former Jewish order. Aside

from the Christian foreshadowing provided by the Tabernacle of David, a reference to Zion could only mean military strength, hearkening back to David's prowess in battle.

That seems to be the hope of the secular Zionist movement but is far from the heart of God. It certainly doesn't reflect the *Zion* longed for in the Psalms and the Prophets. All those wonderful references were looking ahead to what we would inherit through Christ!

The Messiah is the Savior of both Jew and Gentile. During the first century, all who were saved became part of the church. Why should it be any different today? This is the love of God shown to all men everywhere (Romans 3:29-30).

The Lord chose to break down that middle wall of partition and make of twain *One New Man* (Ephesians 2:15). Local churches can have ethnic, cultural flavors, including that of Messianic Judaism. Honoring their Jewish roots would certainly bring glory to God and may help them reach out to the Hebrew community but the fact remains these are churches and not synagogues.

This would be true if for no other reason than that the Jews have erected strong barriers against their members naming the name of Christ or being baptized as a Christian. Traditional Judaism sees this as a repudiation of their religion and a betrayal of their culture.

It's regrettable but it does make sense. Christ openly presented himself as greater than both Abraham and Moses, and once he'd fulfilled the law his disciples lost little time in distancing themselves from the ceremonies and traditions of Judaism. Part of this was because some of the more radical Jews became lightning rods for Roman persecution and it paid the early believers to completely re-brand themselves.

On the other hand, there was much dissention and misunderstanding within the fledgling churches concerning issues like circumcision or the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic code. Once again, it seemed wisdom to distance themselves a bit, just to make it clear that yes, things were very different now.

¹¹ In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: ...

Amos 9:11, KJV

Many who teach on prophecy devote entire chapters to the rebuilding of a Jewish *temple* on the mount in Jerusalem. Interestingly, there isn't a single verse in the Bible that emphatically states that will happen!

To complicate the politics, there is currently a Muslim shrine built on the temple mount, one that will not be easily removed. A few centuries ago Muslims held exclusive title (by man's reckoning, not God's). During that time they showed little evidence of placing much value on the site. But now the Hebrews are back and there's someone to scrap with that plot of ground is considered the third holiest site in all of Islam, the very spot where Abraham attempted to sacrifice his firstborn son, Ishmael. (Muslims are not above correcting the Bible, which is, after all, a *Jewish* book ...)

We've heard that after the veil was rent the temple leaders missed the whole point of what had just happened. They sewed it back up and tried to go on with business as usual. But the world had changed and things would never be that way again.

Some in this era portray Our Lord as longing to return to the good old days of earthly temples. But it's hard to draw such an inference from a story like this. Ripping the veil meant God was through with it. He wanted out.

Or perhaps, even more significant, He wanted his children in there with Him. For even back in the day when He appeared to dwell in temples made with hands, He was never that much into buildings. He lives in people.

God's Preserving Power

From Genesis to Revelation we find a subtle message woven into the fabric of every story:

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

II Peter 2:9, KJV

From Abraham's dealings with Abimelech, where the patriarch just assumed *the fear of God is not on this place*, through God separating the Israelites from the Egyptians during the ten plagues, all the way up to the final days in Revelation, practically every encounter tells us something of the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God.

Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, where God delivered an ongoing miracle that supernaturally sustained both of them during a famine that lasted three and a half years ... (the exact span of time in Revelation we may have to deal with ourselves!!!)

From the children of Israel living on manna in the wilderness to Daniel and his three friends living off

the king's bounty there are lessons for all but the punch line remains the same: God will provide!

That's especially important since one of the characteristics of the last days will be **men's hearts failing them for fear** (Luke 21:26). It will be vital for us to stay in the Word every day, renewing our minds, keep our hearts filled with the awe of the presence of God, and keep our lifelines open to those who pour good things into those around them.

For fear is contagious, but so is hope, and joy, and faith. We need to establish our milieu, circle of fellowship, those who will walk with us through some of the most incredible days our world will ever know. That would mean the local church, not only belonging but vitally linked, interacting, in a deep and relevant pool of fellowship and productivity.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; ²⁰ And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; ²¹ In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: ²² In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22, KJV

One of the snares of the last days will be individualism. The natural man defines his space and guards it with his life. God has a different plan. He'll allow a few select individuals to invade our territory, intertwine their life with ours, and create something far stronger than we could by our own power or wisdom.

For according to the passage in Ephesians, believers finding their place of unity create a temple, *the temple* for our day and age. And when God encounters such a structure He takes up residence, lives there, and does business. The church actually becomes an embassy, an official outpost of The Kingdom of Heaven, with all the king's resources available as needed!

Noah's ark was a corporate experience, doubtless cramped and perhaps even smelly at times but preserving life for all who entered in. In like manner the church is called not to be an organization but an organism, a living, breathing entity. Each of us has a part to play, both for giving and receiving. Unless we allow ourselves to be joined in such a dynamic fashion we'll never experience the fullness of God's provision. It's all part of the package.

To a large degree, each of us has the power to choose our surroundings. Choose well.

The Lesson of The Pharisees

The word *Pharisee* has come to be a byword for faith gone wrong, becoming so preoccupied with externals there's nothing left for the heart. It speaks of pride, arrogance, and hypocrisy. And yet, the group began with a desperate attempt to preserve their faith during an era of mixture and compromise.

The story begins with the political turmoil told in great detail in Daniel 10-12. The death of Alexander the Great left a power vacuum that was never filled until the rise of Rome. Until that time there was constant sparring between the *King of the North*, or the Syrian Selucid dynasty, and the *King of the South*, the Ptolemies of Egypt. Caught in the middle, and buffeted back and forth between the two wannabes, was the land of Israel.

Matters came to a head when the Selucid ruler Antiochus IV, known as *Epiphanus* for his attempts to pass himself off as divine, came to the throne. Somewhat of a washout as a king, he took special interest in Israel and interfered greatly with her religious customs, becoming the *little horn* referred to in Daniel chapter eight (see page 178-181). Daniel eleven talks more about this rascal:

**For the ships of Chittim shall come against him:
therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have**

indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant.³¹ And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily *sacrifice*, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.^{* 32} And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do *exploits*.³³ And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, *many* days.³⁴ Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries.³⁵ And *some* of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make *them* white, *even* to the time of the end: because *it is* yet for a time appointed.

Daniel 11:30-35, KJV

The people who would know their God and be strong referred largely to the Asmonean family, especially Judas, who was given the surname Maccabeus, *The Hammer of God*. Because of him we often refer to this as the time of the *Maccabees*. Although eventually slain in battle he was able to muster the military might to drive Antiochus out of Palestine and provide some relief for the Jewish people.

* For a discussion of the phrase *Abomination of Desolation*, see pages 206-208.

Of the priestly line, the Asmoneans became high priests, governors, and teachers of the law. As time went on, however they began to make alliances with the enemies of God. The princess Mariamne wound up married to Herod the great, although he eventually had her and the children he had by her put to death, lest they become rivals. Her brother, Aristobulous, was appointed high priest by Herod but murdered shortly thereafter.

In this atmosphere of compromise and betrayal some began to distance themselves from the established order, seeking a purer, truer faith. The name *Pharisee* speaks of separation, striving for the concept of *holiness*. The fundamentalists of their day, they focused on the minutia, details so trivial that by the time Christ arrived they'd pretty much lost sight of the big picture.

And therein lies the tragedy. If anyone should have rejoiced to meet their Messiah, it should have been the Pharisees. If anyone should have soaked up His teaching like a sponge, it should have been them. But their hearts had become hard, and filled with pride.

What went wrong? A great deal. The biggest problem was they thought they'd figured out everything there was to know. Had they really found The Truth it would have broken them, softened their hearts and given them ears to hear. They'd become the masters, the arbiters, little gods, if you will. In

the sight of the One True God, they knew nothing at all.

Something was wrong with their most basic concepts and everything built upon that foundation was profane. And so when God Himself came walking into their midst, they found fault. They argued, quarreled, and many of them died without ever stumbling into the covenant of grace.

If there is anything we should fear it would be living by our own understanding. Nothing can so thoroughly rob us of our love, joy, and peace, and ultimately our eternal reward than filling our head with religiosity. Truth should challenge us, humble us, make us weep at times. It should make us gentle, approachable, ready to hear from those around us—not to be taught of all but to hear the heart, the cry, the need. For before God we are all needy.

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.

I Corinthians 2:14, KJV

Lord, give us ears to truly hear what
You want us to hear, to truly care about
what You want us to care about, and to
think the way You would have us think.
Don't let us go our own way but
reprove us and bring us back to the
way of Truth, whenever we wind up
knowing too much for our own good ...

Chapter Thirteen:

A Sequence of Sevens

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like ..."

In Matthew Thirteen we find seven stories, all telling us something about the Kingdom of Heaven. Many simply regard these as wise sayings, good to know but carrying no prophetic significance. Others take the number seven and tie them in with other sevens in the book of Revelation. Seven parables, seven churches, seals, trumpets, and so on. That would place them as a series or sequence, something that implies movement and change.

There can be reason to view them either way. I tend to link several of the sevens together. That seems to provide a greater depth to our understanding of what Jesus actually said. Viewed separately, most parables cry out for a happy ending. Viewed as a progressive picture of the entire gospel age, some glimpses are quite negative. What we're actually seeing is a picture of restoration, the good seed falling into the ground and *dying*, only to be reborn as a multitude.

For instance, consider the mustard seed, the very picture of insignificance, growing into something as big as a tree but lacking the nobility. Birds of the air

are nesting in the branches, possibly the same birds we saw in the first parable that swoop down and devour the good seed before it has a chance to sprout, or the dirty birds of Babylon we later see in Revelation.

We've sown our seed and the growth has been phenomenal, and yet our garden looks nothing like a wheatfield. Is that good news or bad? Any hard decisions to be made?

A woman hides her leaven in three measures of meal, and suddenly it's neither pure nor stable; it's fermenting and working, puffed up and rising. Everywhere else in the Bible leaven has a rather negative connotation, why not here too? Was there a church in the middle ages known, not for taking away from God's Word but slipping a little something extra into it? Adding such things as the papacy, Mary worship, Purgatory, and a host of other things found nowhere within the Bible?

Interestingly enough, the Catholic Church has never questioned any of the primary doctrines, they've added to them. It's been Protestants who've denied the virgin birth, the authority of Scripture, the reality of miracles, or the case for biblical morality. Revelation has things to say about both adding to and taking away from the Word of God. Are we listening?

Examining some of these as negatives places a great deal of the trouble into a historical context. Many

would pile all the conflict into the final few years, packed in like Fibber Magee's closet. In this standing joke from the golden days of radio, Fibber would go after some kind of wild hare while his wife, Molly, cried out, "Don't open that door, McGee ..." And then the sound effects man would have a field day as the contents of the overstuffed closet spilled to the furthest outrages of the imagination.

Some teachers strive for a similar effect, clustering all the calamities into one giant catastrophe, something nobody would want to live through. A more realistic view sees trouble and adversity spread out, consistent over the pages of history. Most it we already knew about anyway. Suddenly there's a lot less in The Book to be afraid of!

We're going to take a quick look at these parables, just to get a glimpse of the big picture. For a detailed study, there are books already written for that, no need to repeat everything here.

Picture #1

A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and

they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.

Matthew 13:3-9, NIV

The admonition, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," was a challenge, an assurance there was something beneath the surface. In an interesting contrast, in Revelation where Christ is not physically present, the admonition is always "He that hath an ear ..." In others words, the plural *ears* was not referring to the fact we all have two, but that we also needed an inner, spiritual ear to hear what was really being said.

We have a good start on this parable because Jesus himself interpreted it for his disciples a short time later, an explanation that was not given to the entire crowd.

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once

receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Matthew 13:18-23, NIV

Our Lord never specified who the actual sower was. He's the ultimate evangelist, preacher, proclaimer, and yet he was raising up disciples who would follow behind and carry on the work. This is the foundational parable of the entire gospel age. "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations ..." The parable anticipates all the opportunity and heartbreak of reaching out to those who may or may not respond. The sower could give the same care to every seed he sows, and the seed may be equally efficacious for all, yet many will not receive it and become part of the harvest.

Two things would come of that. One is the discernment to recognize the four soils, to do anything possible to remove stones, or weeds, or break up the path if its destiny was to bear fruit, and

not waste time and seed if it was to remain a path. The other would be to acknowledge, like the farmer, that some things were out of his control and some of the results needed to be left up to the Father in Heaven.

Let's jump here and take a look at Ephesus, the first church in Revelation:

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; ² I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: ³ And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. ⁴ Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. ⁶ But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:1-7, KJV

Ephesus was a busy church. They sowed the seed with both hands and got results, a huge, thriving congregation that had influence far beyond its own four walls. While there is little here to tie this to the parable, the church is obviously doing what they are supposed to but are in danger of forgetting Who they are doing it for. However, if this series is progressive, it's good to know things started out with a bang.

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. ² And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

Revelation 6:1-2, KJV

This would tie very well also with the start of the gospel era, Christ the victorious King leading his conquest out over the entire world.

Viewed this way, one other thing needs to be mentioned too. Revelation gives us a picture of a book with seven seals. Once a parable or seal or

whatever opens, it stays open to the very end of the age. Thus, there will be a progressive revelation until we're viewing all seven faces of the vision, carrying us through our present era. The rider on the white horse will continue to ride, and the sower will continue to sow.

Picture #2

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ 'An enemy did this,' he replied.

The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹ 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.

³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the

weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'

Matthew 13:24-30, NIV

Like the first parable, Our Lord also delivered an interpretation. However, this one was more private, given only to the disciples after they were back in the house.

His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ 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, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:36-43, NIV

Suddenly all is not well, mixture has appeared in the Kingdom. Not so apparent in this translation, these are not generally believed to be common garden weeds but *tares*, a close counterfeit to the true wheat. They look just like the real thing till right up to the harvest. When the weight of the ripened grain causes the true wheat to bow its head, they don't, standing arrogantly and offering nothing good to a hungry soul seeking nourishment.

No, this isn't just culture or the opinion everyone's entitled to. "An enemy has done this!" Here is one of the most painful aspects of the Christian world, people who appear godly and talk as if they believe something but it's just not the same. They never quite do what a believer should and when you can least afford it, suddenly there's a knife in your back, not from without the camp but within. It's not *friendly fire* but a betrayal, plain and simple.

This is more than just joining the *right* as opposed to the *wrong* church. If this parable is to be believed there will be some level of mixture present in every church. Some of the *tares* will advance into leadership. False deacons, false elders, false pastors, false apostles. Come to think of it, the church of Ephesus was already dealing with those....

Other teachings of Jesus warn of this too, as he speaks of separating sheep and goats. How can we tell if we are the good seed, the true believer?

1) We come in by way of the door, Jesus Christ (John 10:9) He is our hope, our only hope.

2) We hear His voice. (John 10:4) A true believer will be drawn to the Word, love it and read it.

3) We will obey His Word when it's difficult. (John 3:19-21, 1 John 3:8)

4) We will show honest, self-sacrificing love to God's people. (1 John 3:14)

5) We will show love to God's house, the Church. (1 John 2:19)

6) We will deny ourselves when we feel the pull of the world. (1 John 2:15-17)

7) We will follow the Lamb wherever he goes. (Revelation 14:4-5)

⁸ And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; ⁹ I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I *know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan.

¹⁰ Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. ¹¹ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He

that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Revelation 2:8-11, KJV

History tells us that within a few decades of its existence the Church began to encounter the internal storms of controversy. Even as Paul warned in Acts 19:28-30, men rose up, some from outside the fellowship, others from within, who sought to promote themselves at the expense of the gospel itself. Suddenly there were *isms* and *schisms*, *ascendancies*, and all manner of little heresies trying to gain a toe-hold. Nevertheless, there was always a true seed, a righteous remnant who stood firm in the midst of tribulation.

And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. ⁴ And there went out another horse *that was red*: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

Revelation 6:3-4, KJV

Three perspectives, one story. The King on the white horse has an adversary, and we get to share in the

conflict. Not pretty, but it explains a great many things.

Picture #3

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.

Matthew 13:31-32, NIV

There is room for discussion on how to read the wording of this parable. Are we saying the kingdom is the mustard seed? Or are we looking at the unexpected growth of the little seed, which may or may not be a good thing, and saying *here is a lesson about the kingdom we really need to know?* I tend to take the latter point, especially with this parable and the next.

In that case, this is a warning against mixture, allowing little things into our message that are *not* the gospel. The line can be very fine, for church always draws something from its surrounding culture, but we must be careful how much of what

we preach is culture and not Christ. It becomes especially important as we minister cross-culturally, deciding what needs to be kept or discarded on both sides of the pulpit.

In any case, growth is a challenge and a trial all by itself. As we look ahead and hope, it's always seen as a reward, a payday, but when it arrives it brings its own set of conflicts. When God pours out His Spirit and things start happening, other things will try to happen too, things that need to be opposed. Always seem to be a few mustard seeds waiting for a chance to sprout.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; ¹³ I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. ¹⁵ So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ¹⁶ Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my

mouth. ¹⁷ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth *it*.

Revelation 2:12-17, KJV

If we view the mustard plant as something that doesn't belong in our wheatfield then there definitely is a correlation. For without doubt, there was some kind of stronghold in Pergamos. Among other things it was a university town, with all the ideological ferment that entails.

Paul's experience on Mars Hill comes to mind. His best efforts in evangelism only resulted in a handful of responses among people who'd hardened their hearts. They'd trained their ears not to buy-in to truth but to hear something different every day.

We'll talk about the doctrine of Balaam in Volume II as we look at the forces shaping and twisting end time society. The *Nicolaitans* may have been a short lived sect or there may be another explanation entirely. The name is the Greek equivalent to *Balaam* and it speaks of a victory, or conquest, or a consumption of the common people, or *laity*. It could very well be speaking of the rise of church

leadership from 'servant of all' to a position of exaltation and exploitation. Balaam basically sold out the people of God for his personal profit. Jesus was very insistent that His leaders not become lords. But some of them did.

And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. ⁶ And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

Revelation 6:5-6, KJV

The nature of this famine brings to mind a word spoken in the Old Testament book of Amos:

¹¹ **"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD,**

"when I will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.

¹² **Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.**

Amos 8:11-12, NIV

And in truth, that did come about in medieval times. Church was conducted in Latin, a language few could understand, and the only Bible available might be the one chained to the pulpit, read by virtually no one. The average believer was left with only secondhand legend and hearsay to build his faith on, reduced to a worship of saints, images, and relics. And yet, for all that, God's program went forward.

Picture #4

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.

Matthew 13:33, NIV

Interpreted as a negative, it does appear to follow a sequence. Gone is the joyous spontaneity of the Book of Acts, the fearless preaching, the selfless commitment, the casual, gratuitous miracles. Instead we find structure, political alliances, temples made with hands, and grueling levels of corruption.

Where the Old Testament people of God were referred to as the *daughter of Zion*, here a woman

could refer to a church. As mentioned before, Catholicism has never been guilty of taking away from the word of God, but of *adding to it*. And yet, for all that, a surprising amount of faith remained.

Even more heartening, over the years the Catholics had their own revivals and reformations. Whereas a medieval theologian had no trouble calling the Roman church *Mystery: Babylon, The Great Whore* and labeling the pope *Antichrist*, those titles don't seem to apply in our day. We've lived to see Catholics and the Pope stand up for the faith in ways many Protestants could learn from.

Nevertheless, when our Lord spoke to the church of this day, the words are stern and uncompromising:

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass; ¹⁹ I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first. ²⁰

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. ²¹ And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. ²² Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation,

except they repent of their deeds.²³ And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.²⁴ But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.²⁵ But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come.²⁶ And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:²⁷ And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.²⁸ And I will give him the morning star.²⁹ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 2:18-29, KJV

Whoa, another woman! Or is this the same one, just another perspective? In the Old Testament, *fornication* could refer to unholy alliances, either politically or with deviant religion. There was *free love* back then too, which came to be known as *Baal worship*.

Ezekiel 23, speaking of Judah's infatuation with other nations, is so crudely graphic most translators tone it way down. Israel's *foreign lovers* are mocked, their private parts compared to those of beasts (vs. 20).

And then he likens His people to a prostitute running after her customers so she can pay them money!

Is this another warning against political alliances, a failure to separate the precious from the vile? The last days will blur the distinction. In many cases it will be a fine line for the church should be faithful in serving its community. But there will be times when worship to something other than the one true God is demanded and we'll need to have settled just how far we're willing to go.

Again, there is a temptation to apply this picture in full to Catholicism. While that may once have had some validity, history shows not only a faithful remnant there but apostasy within the Protestant fold equal to or greater than their Catholic brethren.

The parables dealing with mixture and compromise apply across the board to all believers everywhere. Until our Lord comes back we must be ever diligent, submitting every thought and plan to our unseen Lord and continually asking, "What saith the Scripture?"

Getting back to Revelation:

And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.⁸ And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the

fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Revelation 6:7-8, KJV

This picture is extremely negative, and in truth, if this is progressive on a time-line it would take us to the height of the Dark Ages. It was the time of all the poverty, corruption, and injustice inherent in feudalism. Nevertheless, there were bright spots to be found, people who loved their God regardless of how little formal teaching or understanding they were able to receive.

Remember too that a bloody rival had arisen from without the fold, militant, aggressive Islam. As much as revisionists decry the Crusades, now that we are once again acquainted with the Muslim world we see the Church with much less to apologize for. Some type of military intervention was necessary to hold back the relentless expansionism of those who followed their prophet, turning pretty much all of Europe into a besieged city.

And speaking of rampant death, these were also the years of the great plagues. As population increased, infrastructure became crucial. While the underlying factor was malnutrition, plagues were largely spread by rats and sewage. It was technology, based on the principles of sanitation found in books such as Exodus and Leviticus that allowed mankind to take

civilization to a higher level and make the earth a better place.

And so, for all the negatives, things were ready to start turning around. Remember our agricultural picture, the cycle of the seasons. The seed, which had apparently died, was safely in the ground, weathering the storms, awaiting only the coming of Spring.... *

Picture #5

⁴⁴ The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Matthew 13:44, NIV

About the time the printing press was invented men also began translating the Bible into languages

* Some refer to the first four seals as *The Four Horsemen of The Apocalypse*, wreaking untold havoc at the end of the age. Fitted into their historical context they give us more insight into matters we were already well aware of. That scenario labels the first personage as not Christ but the antichrist. Nothing in the description of the first seal even hints of fraud or deception. The white rider is Christ, *conquering and to conquer*.

people could read for themselves. Suddenly they began to realize what it was all about. For the time being the treasure had to stay hidden but there began to be a stirring, the tremors of a grassroots movement that was felt all the way to papal Rome.

There is no question of the plain meaning of this parable and the next. They concern the cost of The Kingdom. Everything. All you have, all you are. And yet, when the man saw the treasure, joy filled his heart and he liquidated his assets, giving him just enough to make the purchase.

In one sense, Jesus was that man, who "for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). In other parables we learned that the field is the world. Here then is the start of modern world missions, as men began to realize their God loved all men and wanted them touched by His Good News.

One such man was Christopher Columbus, discovering new lands, not just as trade routes but opening the door for brand new nations and continents to hear the gospel. The writings in his journal, revealing him to be a devout Christian with a heart for world evangelism, are absolute facts most historians do not want you to know. He did have some personality quirks and lapses, the revisionists make sure you know all about those.

¹ And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. ⁴ Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. ⁵ He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. ⁶ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:1-6, KJV

Same time, same picture, but as in stereo photography, we've shifted the camera a little and some things are really standing out. Lots of work needs to be done, and it's a great work but the Church is in no shape to do it. And yet, like the ten virgins who slumbered and slept, some are beginning to wake, look around, and realize steps need to be taken.

Revival always starts with repentance. As God draws near, suddenly we see how truly needy we are. Not everyone is ready for a dose of reality. The Pharisees of Jesus' day had sacrificed greatly and waited a long time for The One who was to come. They expected to be recognized, affirmed, and commended for everything they'd been doing. What the light of Christ really showed was that all their righteousness was as filthy rags. Suddenly they were at a disadvantage, for the prostitutes, tax gatherers, and generic, brown-label sinners, who had nothing to lose by admitting their need, came flooding into the kingdom ahead of those who'd spent their lives preparing for it.

Just the same, there's always a remnant, a people who, against all odds, appear to have gotten it right. Be nice to think we could be in that group.

⁹ And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: ¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? ¹¹ And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled.

Revelation 6:12-17, KJV

Another look at the cost. For many of us, it's been less than physical death; it's been not getting the recognition, or the promotion, or however we might have advanced but for the offense of the gospel. But many have bought their passage with their own blood. The twentieth century was the bloodiest in history and the twenty-first promises to surpass everything that came before. People are dying for their faith. Are we ready?

There's opportunity in this parable, and especially in the one that immediately follows. Great works are called for, which means Our Lord wants to raise up mighty workers. We need millionaires in this hour, men who can build the financial engines that will underwrite the gospel, at home and abroad. But they must be fearless entrepreneurs, remembering who has empowered them and able to stand in the face of opposition, for they will experience that too. We need the apostles who can raise up mega-churches, organizers who can lead and empower and whose influence will be felt to the ends of the earth.

And don't forget the souls under the altar, those who have and have yet to pay the ultimate price. They're needed too.

Picture #6

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46, NIV

Another look at the cost. This time the treasure is no longer hidden, it's on display for all to see. But the cost is still the same, it is still everything.

⁷ And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; ⁸ I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. ⁹ Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. ¹⁰ Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come

upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. ¹¹ Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. ¹² Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is new Jerusalem*, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him my new name.* ¹³ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:7-13, KJV

Philadelphia, the *City of Brotherly Love*. An amazing place, but still falling short of that which is to come. And yet there is power here, and productivity. This church is coming of age, doing great things, confronting the very systems of the world. There are warnings, a definite conflict, yet the overall tone is triumphant, victorious.

² And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; ¹³ And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. ¹⁴ And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island

were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: ¹⁷ For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Revelation 6:12-17, KJV

This appears to belong to the very end of the age, the return of Christ. A time of incredible hope, but of terror for those who have been resisting the grace of God and the working of the gospel.

Picture #7

⁴⁷ "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ 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. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the

righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

"Yes," they replied.

⁵² He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Matthew 13:37-52, NIV

Once again there is little mystery here for Jesus himself interprets it, almost simultaneously. This can only refer to what will happen at the return of Christ. For the believer, a time of empowerment, affirmation, and linking up with the One we have viewed from afar for so very long. For others, a time of exposure, discovery, separation and judgment.

¹⁴ And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; ¹⁵ I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. ¹⁷ Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor,

and blind, and naked: ¹⁸ I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. ²¹ To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. ²² He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Revelation 3:14-22-, KJV

This appears puzzling, almost cryptic. Apparently some level of separation has already taken place, for there appears to be nothing, and no one to commend here. This is a last call, a final opportunity for a group that has been making bad choices for some time now.

Analyzing the name, *Lao* refers to people, common people, the *laity*. The rest of the word speaks of rule, or sphere of authority, as in *diocese*. Unlike *Nicolaitans*, which implied the laity was being ruled over, here they're the ones in charge, a democracy

where even God can be out-voted.* That produces the flavorless corporate mentality so characteristic of many of our *Dilbertized* institutions. Hot is good, and cold is honest, but either requires taking a stand so the consensus is lukewarm, poised to jump in either direction.

This brings us to a question. Where are the believers who have overcome, who have already opened the door, who know their God and have been doing exploits?

¹ And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Revelation 8:1, KJV

Heaven appears a little bare at this moment too. Is it possible the action is elsewhere, perhaps up in mid-air, as Christ returns for His victorious church? Could this be a scene related to the second coming? Seems to fit.

Some speak of a secret *rapture*, another made-up word where the believers are snatched away to leave the rest of the earth to a set time, either three

* *Democracy* as a concept is discussed in its own section in Volume II of this book. It could have great application to the Laodicean Church.

and a half or a full seven years of turmoil and torment known as *The Great Tribulation*. We've already been rather unkind to that position, and yet there does seem to be some kind of a separation at this point between those ready for Christ at His coming and those, like five of the ten virgins, who needed a bit of time to get their act together.

The temptation, of course is to try and figure everything out. Rather than that, why not follow Mary's example, to consider all things said and ponder them in our heart? (Luke 2:19) We do know that though the end times will be trying and tumultuous, we are within the strong hands of a God who has already loved us unto death.

And once again we should emphasize that the gospel is *simple*. Those who have trouble getting it are not the weak-minded but those who think they are smarter than God, figuring it all out on their own. The magic word in the kingdom is obey. Will we just do what Jesus asks us to?