

The End of TERRORISM

By Desmond Ford, Ph.D

What the destruction of the Twin World Towers can mean for thoughtful Christians as they survey the threat of worldwide terrorism and the Arab-Israeli Crisis.

Ford, Desmond

The End of Terrorism

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Dedication

To the memory of Marion Barbara Fritz, my friend and associate in the gospel for over 20 years.

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[Introduction](#)

Following July 1, 2002, the cover of Time magazine astonished millions of people. Inside a white cross was the title of the chief article set forth in black and red:

THE BIBLE AND THE APOCALYPSE, WHY MORE AMERICANS ARE READING AND TALKING ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD.

Throughout the whole issue of Time of July 1, are lurid and scary headlines. For example:

- "The Terror that Will not Quit," pages 22, 23.
- "Osama Bin Laden - Dead or Alive," p26.
- "Strike First, Explain Yourself Later - Bush's new military doctrine might make sense - if anyone knew what it meant," p29.
- "Apocalypse Now," pages 40-41.

This latter article tells its readers that "the biggest book of the summer is about the end of the world. It is also a sign of our troubled times." Early on we are informed of the "Rapture Index" on the Internet, "a Dow Jones Industrial Average of End-Time Activity." "Instead of stocks, it tracks prophecies, earthquakes, floods, plagues, crime, false prophets, and economic measurements like unemployment that add to instability and civil unrest, thereby easing the way for the Antichrist.

In other words, how close are we to the end of the world? The index hit an all-time high of 182 on Sept 24, as the bandwidth nearly melted under the weight of 8 million visitors..."

The article explains how the terrorist attacks and the anthrax deaths have led to even "hard-core, crusty, cynical New York lawyers and stockbrokers who are not moved by anything saying, 'Is the world going to end? Are all the events of the Bible coming true?'" The article concludes, "They want to get right with God."

Enter Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins with their series of books about the end-times purportedly based on the Bible's book of Revelation. Thirty-two million copies have been sold because polls reveal that 59 percent of Americans believe that the prophecies of Revelation will come true. For many, these books are not just a spiritual guide but a political agenda, which leads them to influence U.S. politics, so that the Israelis will get all the help possible - even if it means killing more Palestinians.

These books promote the long-exploded theology of the Secret Rapture - an eschatological view not shared by any of the 44 editors of Christianity Today - the foremost scholarly magazine of evangelical Christians. Paul Maier, author and historian, says of the books: "They are asking people to believe that we have a God who simply can't wait to zap the Christian crew flight out of jets so that they crash. You can't believe in a God who would do this kind of thing."

The truth is that the volumes are a mixture of truth and error like the tree of Eden that did all the damage. For example, the idea of globalisation is not an eerie dream. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has told the World Economic Forum that globalisation is the best way of solving the overwhelming problems of earth. The Forum itself recommends a United Nations of major religions.

In the days of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States, Christian Zionism entered the White House and the Congress and Senate. Hal Lindsey (a name ridiculed by most Christian scholars of eschatology) was a consultant on Middle Eastern affairs to the Pentagon. Interior Secretary James Watt, a Pentecostalist, and Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger who had studied the Book of Revelation, both believed in an imminent end of the world.

A well-known dictum in theology is: "All that's old is not pure gold, but if it's new, it can't be true." The teachings of the end of the world promoted by Hal Lindsey and these recent best sellers are largely based on an approach to prophecy pioneered by the former Anglican priest turned-member-of-the-Brethren, John Nelson Darby. He stressed a form of dispensationalism that included weird non-biblical concepts, such as the secret rapture and a divine plan to use converted Jews to win myriads of earth to Christ. This was popularised by the Scofield Bible, which was scattered throughout USA and other countries like the leaves of autumn. The distinctive eschatology so promoted has not worn well and is almost universally rejected by Christian scholarship today.

The present volume has no sympathy with the Left Behind series of Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, but this repudiation is not one of off-handed prejudice but the results of decades of intense study of Biblical apocalyptic.

My Master's degree and one of my PhDs (the latter under F. F. Bruce at Manchester) centred on this topic, as does my book, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology*, published by the University Press of America.

However, these pages give a straightforward explanation of the prophecies of Scripture rather than constantly attack differing views. No doubt, many who read it, who cherish the views of Darby, Lindsey, LaHaye, and Jenkins, will earnestly pray for this misguided author. Others will see and accept the unyielding rock of reality in preference to whims and fancies and rejoice in the sane and hopeful prophecies of Scripture, rightfully interpreted.

Foreword

Despite the unceasing cataract of bad news from the media, there is infinite good news to be had. The purpose of these pages is to offer convincing evidence that the future can be radiant for anyone willing to cherish an open mind.

The mind is like a parachute - quite useless unless it is open. A bright light can be shone in a blind man's eyes to no avail. As C. S. Lewis once wrote, "The majority of what is read or heard is lies, exaggeration, misunderstanding, or hearsay." John F. Kennedy echoed these words when he told the US public:

"The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie - deliberate, committed, and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Too often we hold to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought."

Psychologists call the phenomenon referred to by the former US president "cognitive dissonance". We each have a sieve into which all we hear is poured, only to retain what we wish to retain. Arthur Koestler was thinking of this pervasive cherishing of error when he made what was to some an outrageous statement: *If prejudice, personal egos, and greed are excluded from discussion by individuals on any subject, then not only will unanimity be possible, but inevitable.*

Even those wedded to aesthetic truth have perceived what Lewis, Kennedy, and Koestler meant. For example, listen to John Ruskin: *"It is not calumny or treachery that does the largest sum of mischief in the world; but it is the glistening and softly spoken lie; the amiable fallacy; the patriotic lie of the Historian; and the provident lie of the politician."*

Consider how the millions of post-war Japan have been misled about the events of World War II by the history books, which glossed over the harsh realities, which incriminated former Japanese leaders. Think about the way the CEOs of giant corporations in the US have misled millions into trusting them, while all the time stealing from them their invested pension monies. Remember the folly of Western participation in the Vietnam conflict and the many thousands of unnecessary deaths of US and Australian troops and others, as well as the much greater devastation of life among the comparatively innocent population of civilian Vietnam. We should never forget that an Austrian paperhanger and his gang of thugs led by the nose the most educated nation on earth - Germany. And nearby in Soviet Russia, one man - Joseph Stalin - was allowed to indulge his paranoia by killing many millions of his own countrymen. It is this depravity, prejudice, and egotism of the human heart that leads most of mankind to deny the reality of God. Yet, as two of a multitude of evidences of divine providences, consider two recent events.

March 23, 1989. There was no panic in the streets, no race for deep bomb shelters. Life went on as usual. Spring training was in full swing.

No astronomers saw it coming. A week would pass before anyone discovered what had - or better said - what had not happened. An asteroid was heading towards Earth. Not a giant the size of which killed off the dinosaurs. It represented enough energy to destroy most of the life on any continent it struck, something like the simultaneous explosion of twenty thousand one-megaton hydrogen bombs.

It whipped past us at 72,000 mph, crossing our exact path but missing by a mere six hours. For five billion years that rock, an agglomeration of a billion tons of stardust, had circled in the solar system just as had Earth. Of those five billion years, it missed us by six hours. That is like tuning an experiment to an error margin of one part in seven million millions, a precision rarely reached in the laboratory. See *Gerald L. Schroeder, The Science of God, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing, New York, 1997, p194.*

On January 25, 1995, military technicians at radar stations in northern Russia detected signals from an American missile that had just been launched off the coast of Norway carrying a US scientific probe. Although the Russians had been previously notified of this launch, the alert had been forgotten or ignored. Aware that US submarines could launch a missile containing eight deadly hydrogen bombs fifteen minutes from Moscow, Russian officials assumed that America had initiated a nuclear war. For the first time in history, the Russian computer containing nuclear launch codes was opened.

President Boris Yeltsin, sitting at that computer being advised on how to launch a nuclear war by his military officers, had only a three-minute interval to make a decision. At the last moment, the US missile veered off course. He realised that Russia was not under attack.

If Russia had launched its missiles, the US early-warning satellites would immediately have detected them, and radioed back to Cheyenne Mountain. This would have led to the notification of the president who also would have had three minutes to make his launch decision, and America's missiles would then have been fired from their silos. We were thus within minutes of global annihilation that day. See *Dr Helen Caldicott, The New Nuclear Danger, The New Press, New York, 2002, pgs 11-12.*

Add to these the miraculous restraint of nations against the usage of nuclear weapons since 1945 - the only time in history when an efficient, newly discovered weapon has not swung into general use. Only divine sovereignty can explain all of this. And of that, this book speaks.

Little in these pages so far sounds like good news. But the good news of the gospel only shines through to the mind and heart when the errors of unbelief, prejudice, greed, pride, and sheer mental laziness are swept away.

The writer of this book believes that most religion is harmful and should be exposed as such. So much in religion has been a cloak for the vices to which we have referred. The Inquisition, the Crusades, the burning of witches, and church-supported slavery illustrate our point. Unless religion makes a person kind, courteous, and tender hearted, full of charity, yet like granite rock for principle, it is bad religion.

Consider this: to trust in human plans for ameliorating the ills of the world is to make the greatest mistake possible. C.S. Lewis wrote that all men have two convictions: 1. There is such a thing as right and wrong; 2. They themselves have not fulfilled the

right, but have indeed pursued the wrong. No wonder John Keats declared, "Man is a poor forked creature." Man cannot see straight because there is a twist of ignorance and sin and death in his vision, putting a twist in all other things. He just cannot see straight.

Pascal described man as "judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth, depository of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error, and the pride and refuse of the universe."

But there is good news, and here the heart can leap for joy, and the twisted mind can find straightening. 2,000 years ago there was a God/Man untainted by sin and error who did see clearly. Our ignorance calls for a revelation, and He made it. Our sinfulness calls for a powerful motivation of love, which can overcome our selfishness, and He offered it. Our mortality begs for the cure of death, and He gave it.

Listen to these unique words: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

What a mouthful! Here is the strongest possible expression of authority. Such language would have been unsuitable for Moses for Paul. Here is the claim that Christ's verity would never be cancelled or superseded. The words are self-authenticating for they express a miracle that could never have been fulfilled unless the speaker was God. The word parallels another sentence by the same speaker. "Without me, you can do nothing." No mortal, no mere man could say that. Only God could. And God did.

In this book, we review some of the sorrows, tragedies, and yawning pitfalls of our own and earlier times, most of which are the result of the selfish, proud, and perverted thinking to which we have referred. We speak also of the "great tribulation, such as never was," which looms ahead for the world.

But we also point to the fact that nothing has happened to men and nations, which was not foretold long ago. It was foretold in such a way as to show that there is a sovereign ruler of the universe, despite the malicious misuse of human freewill. He will bring down the curtain and usher in a new world where righteousness, peace, joy, and love will reign and where evil is banished, after permitting the demonstration of what humanity's choice of evil can do.

Here we explain some of the chief prophecies of Scripture, not only those already fulfilled, but those about to be - particularly those about Antichrist and earth's last days. And, throughout these pages, is found the best news ever: that there is a way out of sorrow and loss for every individual with an open heart and mind. After sixty years of study of Scripture, theology, history, and psychology, the author has felt prompted to point where the facts lead - however contrary to religious prejudices and political manipulation.

We have studied in this book the chief prophecies about the end of the world given through the Spirit of Christ working on Old and New Testament prophets. These prophecies foretold the sorrows of the ages and the deceptions and vanities of nations and bureaucracies. But they also tell of a coming climax, which will put paid to all evil and usher in everlasting righteousness so that the whole universe from one end to the other will echo with the primary good news: God is Love.

Here, you will find the best news ever. God is for us and not against us, and He offers forgiveness, grace, help, and eternal life to all with open hands and hearts willing to receive the supreme gifts of heaven.

I pray that the Spirit of God will guide you as you read the words of this book.

Postscript

The manuscript for this book was completed nearly two years ago. In the interval, awaiting the initiation of publication procedures, much has happened in the world, but it is all of a piece with the events of September 11, 2001.

Beginning with President George Bush's threats against North Korea, Iran, and Iraq, and the declaration that USA would use nuclear weapons if necessary, the stage was set to transform the Middle East into a bloody mess, while simultaneously stimulating the suspicions and anger already existing in the world of Islam. The unnecessary war on Iraq has brought more casualties to American forces than the early years of the Vietnam conflict and ten times more Iraqi deaths.

Donald Rumsfeld's favourite editorial cartoon used to be one that showed him driving a car, surrounded by a group of juvenile reporters shrieking, "Is it Vietnam yet?" That was six months ago, when the Defence secretary laughingly dismissed the idea that Iraq was, or could turn into a quagmire. But as Rumsfeld sat down last Friday morning to face Sen. John McCain who spent six years in a Vietnamese prison, no one was laughing. The same day, six more US soldiers had died when their Black Hawk crashed under fire. It was the second chopper downed in a week, bringing the week's US dead to 32 (two more were killed the next day). It was the worst weekly toll since 'major combat' ended in May. And in a speech two days earlier, McCain had blasted Rumsfeld for being "irresponsible" and defeatist by talking of handing things over hastily to ill-trained Iraqis. 'Iraq is not Vietnam,' McCain said. But Vietnam holds "cautionary lessons." 'We lost in Vietnam because we lost the will to fight, because we did not understand the nature of the war we were fighting, and because we limited the tools at our disposal.' Was the same thing happening in Iraq now? (Michael Hirsh and John Barry, *What Will It Take?* The Bulletin with Newsweek, November 18, 2003, p. 46)

The practice of suicide bombing came into prominence in Lebanon in 1983, spread to Israel a decade later, and since then, it has metastasised in many other countries, including Sri Lanka, Argentina, Bali, Turkey, Chechnya, Russia, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, and Indonesia.

The war against terrorism has been an abysmal failure. USA cannot prevent its 1,000 murders a month in its own country, let alone terrorist killings. Suicide bombing has a logic all of its own. It is inexpensive, effective, and evokes media attention. It also spreads panic, widespread fear, and great uncertainty.

While there are 30,000 suicides annually in USA, the number of Muslim men who suicide yearly is 150,000. However, the different cultures account for "the likelihood among Muslim extremists to take others with them in their death." Even those about to die have a thirst for glory, and with the fringe of Islamic fanatics, this is fulfilled in participating in the *Jihad* against infidels. Consider that in lands where rich men can have four wives, young men without wealth are often deprived of a wife or mistress and seek therefore the sensual delights of the Muslim Paradise promised to all who die for the faith.

USA has 100,000 forcible rapes a year - a kind of madness where, for the sake of a fleeting moment of sensual but messy sexual groping, men risk lifetime imprisonment. If the act promised the equivalent of a \$10,000,000 hijacking, some might see a modicum of rationality in it, but the yield of forcible rape is so uncertain and so mixed that only sexual mania can account for it. The case is different with the sexual appeal for male suicide bombers. They anticipate as their reward uninterrupted sexual pleasures never hindered by fatigue or other intrusions. In the wake of such senseless tragedies recently afforded by Istanbul, Jakarta, Bali, Moscow, Madrid, and so on, there is need for clear thinking regarding the present plight of the world - especially, but not solely, for the Western world.

Let us consider some relevant centralities of this crisis.

1. This is a unipolar world. For 100 years, USA has been the most powerful country on the globe. Even her enemies do not wish for the appearance of a second challenging superpower. But many countries today regard USA as an arrogant, bullying force and despise its leaders and their principles of conduct.

America's president during World War II encouraged the leaders of his nation to deal generously with the rest of the world. So China, then a peasant country, was welcomed into the United Nations, and the Marshall Plan distributed the equivalent of 120 billion dollars to needy peoples of Europe. Over the next 40 years or so, American presidents sought to win favour for the country by travelling widely outside their own country and offering help wherever possible. This changed with the coming of George W. Bush, who has travelled less outside the USA than any previous president for decades.

USA spends more on defence than its chief eleven competitors in total. The Pentagon invests 1 billion dollars every day of the year in war. The latest US aircraft carrier cost 25 billion dollars. These figures indicate the insanity of war, for the same amount of money in a world of peace could wipe out much of poverty, disease, and ignorance for two-thirds of the world.

2. It must ever be kept in mind that the great majority of Muslims wish chiefly for a quiet life with economic security. They have little practical sympathy for the extremists in their midst. The largest Muslim country, Indonesia, is not interested in the *Jihad* philosophy, despite the presence of the terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah. Similarly, Malaysia in its recent election has proved its desire for a secular government, one refusing Islamic extremes.

Turkey, which is 98 percent Muslim, rejoices in its secular, official stance. The initial bombings in Istanbul were directed against the Jews in that city, though most of the deaths were Muslim. For five centuries, Jews and Muslims have lived together in peace in Turkey, showing that such happy sharing should be possible in all other lands. At present there are about 17,000 Jews in Turkey, and they experience no threat from their government.

3. America has made the great mistake of equating terrorism with specific countries. The equation is false and has cost many thousands of lives in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nor is it true that most terrorists are linked to Al Qaeda. Rather, most terrorists belong to small isolated groups, and even the eradication of Al Qaeda could not end the present crisis.

4. At first sight, there seems no remedy for terrorism. The West's criminal disregard for the plight of millions of Arab refugees

in Palestine sowed the baleful seeds for a terrible harvest, which we have now begun to reap.

Yet there are some encouraging features in even recent history. For example, Turkey in the mid-1990s suffered from multiple terrorist attacks. The Kurdish rebel group PKK was responsible. However, following the 20 or so attacks between 1996 and 1999, these began to cease, and, until the recent bombings in Istanbul, there was luxurious peace in the land. The chief reason for the change was the gargantuan efforts of the Turks to win over the Kurds by social welfare programs and stable governing bodies.

It is a mistake to regard all suicidal bombers as deluded brainwashed victims. Selfish practices by governments also contribute. "The curse causeless shall not come," says Solomon. Journalist Tim Blair wrote an article for *The Institute of Public Affairs Review* in March 2002, in which he contended that many terrorists were either wealthy or middle-class, and well educated, but nevertheless possessed by irrational and dangerous prejudices. (In support of his thesis, it should be pointed out that the leaders of the Hamas have university degrees.) But he also cited the following, though without agreement: *CNN founder Ted Turner announced in February that, "the reason that the World Trade Centre got hit is because there are a lot of people living in abject poverty out there who don't have any hope for a better life." South African President Thabo Mbeki told the United Nations last year that poverty 'breeds a deep sense of injustice.' Argentina's then-President Fernando de la Rúa said last November that, "unequal distribution causes frustration and despair." (Unfortunately for Fernando, Argentina's very equal distribution of unemployment and debt forced him to resign one month later.) 'At the bottom of terrorism is poverty,' declared South Korean President Kim Dae-jung. And Bishop Desmond Tutu claimed that, "external circumstances such as poverty and a sense of grievance and injustice can fill people with resentment and despair to the point of desperation."*

Now that the genie of terrorism is out of the bottle, it is dubious indeed that its malignant high jinks can ever be restrained, but we are not, therefore, relieved of the responsibility of trying. The tit-for-tat practices we see continually in Palestine can never bring healing, only exacerbation of horror and death.

5. It is salutary to recognise that even governments reap what they sow-eventually. Lies have short legs. Witness the Weapons of Mass Destruction debacle for USA, Britain, and Australia. Consider the book by Robert Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, and its charges of negligence by the Bush government before September 11, 2001, and, likewise, the revelations of famous reporter Kenneth Woodward. There is a moral government for humanity, and "while the mills of God grind slowly, they grind exceeding fine."

6. The fulfilment of Christ's prediction regarding the Last Days is obvious. Men's hearts are failing them for fear, looking after those things coming upon the earth. Encouraging to us, however, is the promise of Isaiah 26:9: *When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness. To the people of God come the challenging, yet comforting words: Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.* Isa 60:1-3 See also Revelation 18:1-4; 14:6-7; 10:1-3; Matthew 24:14.

When earth gropes towards its climactic midnight, the nations of earth will look for a religious solution offering a false faith broad enough to tempt all peoples. Then will come the final manifestation of Antichrist, but also the final Pentecostal outpourings of power upon the people of God empowering them for the final proclamation of the gospel.

CHAPTER ONE

A 2,000-year Prophecy About the World's End and the Contemporary Shadows of its Fulfilment

When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away... Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

... Many false prophets shall appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

So when you see standing in the holy place - the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand.... For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world....

When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. (See Luke 21, Matthew 24, and Mark 13, NIV.)

What do "the roaring and tossing of the sea" mean? The Expositor's Greek Testament on this verse inquires: "Is it meant literally or is it a metaphor for the disturbed state of the world?"

Our Lord draws from Psalm 65:7 where "the turmoil of the nations" adjoins the reference to the roaring of the waves of the sea. Wordsworth's famous *Commentary* says that the sea in this passage represents men and nations "tossed about on the tumultuous billows of internal and external troubles." Certain it is that such imagery is so used frequently in the Old Testament, though it is this writer's conviction that both meanings are here the upheavals among humanity and the final physical convulsions of the heavens and the earth that those upheavals foreshadow.

The words of Christ are self-authenticating and find their seal in his promise that whatever the revolutions of earth, his gospel would remain in strength and prominence (Matt. 24:35). No other leader in all the history of the world made such a prediction, but Christ's knowledge that no verity would ever displace his has been fulfilled century after century. Therefore, we can have perfect confidence in all the other predictions of this same Olivet sermon as recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

In this eschatological address, which focuses first on the end of the Jewish world with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and then the scenes accompanying the end of all things (foreshadowed by the trauma accompanying the dissolution of first-century Judaism), our Lord sketched the features of our own time. These features will characterise all the days to come, intensifying in depth and breadth until earth's returning King is seen coming in the clouds with the angelic armies of heaven.

We should pay particular attention to the warnings in this sermon from Olivet regarding "false Christ and false prophets." "Christ" means an anointed one - a representative of heaven and "prophets" adds to that claim that his words interpret the present and foretell the future.

The contemporary terrorist and revolutionary groups come under this heading of false Christ and false prophets. Their leaders often claim illumination from heaven and selection by God. They beguile the unwary by promises about the future. Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Mao and a hundred lesser figures such as the cannibal Idi Amin all belong to this category. Today as I write, Osama bin Laden fills the picture. And there will be more to come traumatising the world by the violence attending their claims.

"Everything goes on as it has been" (2 Peter 3:4) - these words constituted the claim of many unbelievers until the world changed with the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No longer can the words bring any conviction. Our world was electrified again by unexpected violence on September 11, 2001 - the violence of terrorists whose name will stamp this century. Hereafter the 21st century will be known as the century of the terrorist.

Observe the striking words of AAP editor John Coomber written just after the dissolution of the World Trade Centre by terrorist hijackers:

Low-tech desert warriors humble civilisation...

Consider this: The greatest technological economic and military power in the history of humankind has just been humbled by about 15 men carrying weapons you might buy in a hardware shop for a few dollars. The genius of modern America has been reduced to dust, almost entirely.

All the technology, all the firepower, all the intelligence (in both senses of the word) and all the billions of dollars have counted for nothing. Just like [sic] in Vietnam, America has been outsmarted by an enemy it didn't understand.

This time it was by a group of plotters who, for all we know, hatched their plan around a kitchen table somewhere. If it were not so evil, it would be admirable. Their thinking was so clear, their plot so simple, it was almost foolproof.

Their weapons were everyday items, and with a terrible irony, the very symbols of the enemy they despised.

The essence of their plan:

- *Seek out domestic flights because security is less robust than on international routes.*

- *Make sure the aircraft are going a long way so [that] the fuel tanks are full (the United States is conveniently large). Full tanks ensure maximum damage on impact.*
- *Pick simultaneous flights in aircraft, which are simple to fly, or at least aim.*
- *Overpower flight crews by stabbing them or slitting their throats - warfare technology at its oldest and crudest.*
- *Pick targets which are big enough not to miss, and which strike at the material and emotional heart of your enemy.*
- *Above all, be prepared to die.*

And now, as the US rouses itself in retribution, drawing Australia and its other allies willingly along, the enemy is not there.

The sleeping giant awakened at Pearl Harbour had a real, live foe to concentrate its fury on. This one has no enemy it can see, no Japan to stand up to and fight, toe-to-toe.

Osama Bin Laden may well be a kind of Hitler, but he has no Luftwaffe to shoot down, no submarines to sink, no marching army to wear down by attrition.

Where does America turn to exact the revenge which any president worth his socks must deliver? Who are these people? The immediate attackers are no more. They were vaporised along with their victims when the jet liners speared into the World Trade Centre. Their cause is over; the war is won.

And if, as we are led to believe, they did it as martyrs for their faith - however misguidedly - they are in a paradise of their own making.

Their leaders are but shadows. Osama Bin Laden may be their ultimate leader. He may not. He may be in Afghanistan, sheltered by the Taliban. He may not.

How does the US fight back without killing the innocent and creating a new set of enemies? And how do we in Australia go about our daily lives, knowing that we can no longer board an aeroplane or go into an office building without wondering, however fleetingly, whether we might not come out again.

Authorities have known for a long time that it is nearly impossible to stop a determined enemy who is prepared to die for a cause. But they never imagined for a moment how searing the realisation would be when it happened. Truly, civilisation as we know it has ended (Weekend Bulletin, September 15-16, 2001, page 85).

Yes, John Coomber is absolutely right. Civilisation as we know it has ended. How traumatised the world has been since. Yet, warnings of this possibility have been sounding for many years. For example, consider the following quotations from *Bombs, Bugs, Drugs, and Thugs* written before September 11, 2001.¹

The author invites us to imagine the following possible scenarios:

The president has just read a techno-thriller about a member of a Middle East terrorist faction who leases a Twin Otter airplane from a small airport in the Virginia countryside, heads for Washington, DC and drops a fine rain of anthrax spores out the window from a suitcase while flying at low altitude along the Smithsonian Mall in the nation's capital. In the novel, the attack proves fatal within forty-eight hours to almost everyone inside the Washington Beltway. The president wants to know how farfetched this plot is, along with a full report on anthrax and other biological materials that could kill Americans targeted by a terrorist attack. He also wants to know what can be done to guard against such contingencies, as well as the history of international agreements controlling biological substances.

A White House science adviser informs the president that North Korea is probably developing biological weapons, most likely using smallpox, a disease thought to have been responsible for the deaths of at least 300 million people in the twentieth century alone, and more people through the ages than any other infectious disease (including the Black Death of the Middle Ages). The adviser suggests that the leaders of North Korea, known to have resorted in the past to risky acts of brinkmanship in their dealings with other nations, may have in mind loading a missile with hundreds of small bomblets filled with smallpox virus and firing the projectile at the United States. At least some of the bomblets would likely slip through any missile-defence program the United States might develop in the near future, and the disease would be disseminated over a wide area.

The chairman of the National Intelligence Council agrees that the peril of chemical and biological terrorist operations against the United States is rising, and former DCI James Woolsey views biological terrorism as "the single most dangerous threat to our national security in the foreseeable future." President Clinton recently confirmed that it was 'highly likely' that a terrorist group would try a chemical or biological attack against this nation within the next few years. Experts consider smallpox the greatest biological threat facing the United States, since 42 percent of the American public has never been vaccinated against the disease. Next in the hierarchy of dangers is an anthrax attack, which at least has the virtue of not being contagious (a fact of small comfort to those in the attack area). Some specialists look upon germs like smallpox as even "far more deadly than a nuclear weapon... because most people are no longer vaccinated and hence have lost their immunity to the virus."¹

George Bush spoke out bravely and with much assurance in a matter of hours after the deaths of thousands in the New York catastrophe. But many analysts knew that the facts of the case were much worse than the President suggested. For there is just no way of preventing the acts of terrorists prepared to die for their cause. But Bush was right in telling all that a new type of war was beginning. Since then he has expanded that claim by reminding all, that Osama bin Laden was intent on gathering all the biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons possible to bend the world to his will.

Human beings can only stand so much bad news at a time. Reassurance remained the order of the day following the initial speech by the President. *Time* magazine, at the commencement of October, declared in bold type that terrorist use of anthrax was not anticipated in the near future. Then a week later it recorded stage two in the terrorist war - anthrax by mail. In one envelope were two grams of anthrax - enough, if properly disseminated, to kill two million people. After that, government office after government office was declared out-of-bounds because of the presence of anthrax spores.

Simultaneously, came the pictures of the multitudes of refugees fleeing the cities of Afghanistan, and then pictures of innocent civilians wounded or killed by US bombs. Then the other pictures - ferocious faces of angry fundamentalist Muslims calling for a *Jihad* against America and all who help her.

Why is it that so many nations outside the wounded United States have joined together against terrorism? England's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, summed up the reasons: *I do believe that this is a fight worth undertaking because of what is at stake in the world. If these terrorists who killed over 6,000 people in America are allowed to carry on building up their network, possibly acquiring chemical, biological even nuclear weapons of mass destruction, our world will be an insecure, unsafe place, and there will be no corner of the world... that will be untouched by that.* (International Express, Oct 30 2001, p7)

He could have mentioned the danger of a small plane loaded with explosives striking one of the many nuclear plants of the world, or the probability of a plane spraying anthrax spores over cities. No wonder New Yorkers are leaving town.

The reference to nuclear weapons is not just oratory. Politicians and scientists alike recognise that with so much floating nuclear materials since the fall of the USSR, mass destruction employing such weapons is a distinct possibility. There is such a thing as a suit-case nuclear weapon, and there is no known way of preventing its use. It is well known that there have been over 170 illicit sales of nuclear elements in the last decade, and, no doubt, many of them were made to "rogue" states or terrorist organisations.

Years ago, an intelligent commentator foretold this likelihood in a BBC series called *Connections: As the atomic era lengthens and the knowledge of how to build and operate atomic power stations spreads, the means to produce atomic weapons is becoming available to smaller, less politically stable countries. The secure monopoly once exercised by the Big Five no longer exists. In particular, the complex and costly defence systems of both sides, which hitherto have acted as deterrents against aggression can now be breached with ease by any physics graduate with access to the necessary radioactive material. Antimissile batteries are impotent against attack by a suitcase bomb, and, as the technology of miniaturisation improves, there is no reason why a nuclear device should not be contained in something the size of a handbag. Such a weapon delivery system is virtually undetectable, and its use would radically alter the future.*²

In more recent years, journal after journal has echoed the same dire warning. No wonder most recognise now that September 11, 2001, was a declaration of war not just against the USA but also against civilisation. No wonder economic depression is settling in all around the world. No wonder airline companies that have been household names are either drastically reducing staff and fleets or considering bankruptcy. No wonder thousands of business companies are downsizing or shutting their doors

Even the universal business of travel has been revolutionised. For years, visiting Europeans were amazed at the lax security arrangements at US airports. Now we know this situation was a fool's paradise. Who would have imagined that four airliners would be hijacked at the same time? But we should ask ourselves, why not? It was not that difficult.

Think how projects involving the expenditure of millions of dollars have now changed in relevance. America's missile shield would be no shield at all against harm to the people of the USA.

Then there are those who have been called the "homegrown lunatics." The FBI and other government bodies have long been aware of approximately fifty militia groups in the US holding extreme political views that could threaten large populations.

It is quite clear that there is security in nothing earthly. All the firepower of the world's superpower cannot guarantee safety to the people back home or elsewhere in the world. Government officials have gone public with the word that in the present war against terrorism more citizens at home may be killed than members of the armed forces in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

How precious are the promises of Scripture: *If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things... Christ Jesus... is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).*

Footnotes:

1. Loch K. Johnson, *Bombs, Bugs, Drugs, and Thugs*, 2000, pages 78 to 81.
2. James Burke, *Connections*, pages 46, 47.

CHAPTER TWO

September 11, 2001 and Beyond

September 11, 2001, was a "Johnny-come-lately" date in the history of terrorism though, today, most people join the awful word with the awful date. Palestine, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Northern Ireland, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, Japan, the Philippines, South Africa, and many other parts of the globe have witnessed recurring terrorist threats or attacks. But most agree that henceforth the USA will be the chief target. Why?

There are those, like President George Bush, who profess they are mystified that such a democratic, generous, and just nation as the USA could be so hated by other nationalities. Having lived in the USA for 25 years and having enjoyed hospitality and generosity there on a scale unknown to us in other countries, my family and I have considerable sympathy with the president. But not everybody sees things the same way.

I recall dining many years ago at Andrews University, Michigan, with a visitor not long returned from Palestine. He knew much more than I did about the political, social, and military situation there. In the short space of an hour, he convinced me of my ignorance and enlightened me regarding the true state of affairs in Palestine. It was beyond anything I had hitherto known, though I had visited Israel. Probably there are many like me who have been exposed to just one viewpoint, and who need to be aware that many conscientious people share a different one.

Let me illustrate the two differing views:

First, some words from a Canadian who, like myself, has known firsthand the good things of the USA, including people with warm hearts and open hands. Not long after Sept 11 2001, the following appeared on the Internet:

America: The Good Neighbour.

Widespread but only partial news coverage was given recently to a remarkable editorial broadcast from Toronto by Gordon Sinclair, a Canadian television commentator. What follows is the full text of his trenchant remarks as printed in the Congressional Record: This Canadian thinks it is time to speak up for the Americans as the most generous and possibly the least appreciated people on all the earth.

Germany, Japan and, to a lesser extent, Britain and Italy were lifted out of the debris of war by the Americans who poured in billions of dollars and forgave other billions in debts. None of these countries is today paying even the interest on its remaining debts to the United States.

When France was in danger of collapsing in 1956, it was the Americans who propped it up, and their reward was to be insulted and swindled on the streets of Paris. I was there. I saw it.

When earthquakes hit distant cities, it is the United States that hurries in to help. This spring, 59 American communities were flattened by tornadoes. Nobody helped.

The Marshall Plan and the Truman Policy pumped billions of dollars into discouraged countries. Now newspapers in those countries are writing about the decadent, warmongering Americans.

I'd like to see just one of those countries that is gloating over the erosion of the United States dollar build its own aeroplane. Does any other country in the world have a plane to equal the Boeing Jumbo Jet, the Lockheed Tri-Star, or the Douglas DC10? If so, why don't they fly them? Why do all the International lines except Russia fly American Planes?

Why does no other land on earth even consider putting a man or woman on the moon? You talk about Japanese technocracy, and you get radios. You talk about German technocracy, and you get automobiles. You talk about American technocracy, and you find men on the moon - not once, but several times and safely home again.

You talk about scandals, and the Americans put theirs right in the store window for everybody to look at. Even their draft-dodgers are not pursued and hounded. They are here on our streets, and most of them, unless they are breaking Canadian laws, are getting American dollars from ma and pa at home to spend here.

When the railways of France, Germany and India were breaking down through age, it was the Americans who rebuilt them. When the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central went broke, nobody loaned them an old caboos. Both are still broke.

I can name you 5,000 times when the Americans raced to the help of other people in trouble. Can you name me even one time when someone else raced to the Americans in trouble? I don't think there was out-side help even during the San Francisco earthquake.

Our neighbours have faced it alone, and I'm one Canadian who is damned tired of hearing them get kicked around. They will come out of this thing with their flag high. And when they do, they are entitled to thumb their nose at the lands that are gloating over their present troubles. I hope Canada is not one of those.

Stand proud, America!

About the same time as the above, there also appeared on the Net the following from a professor of physics at Quaid-eAzam University, Islamabad:

Black Tuesday, The View from Islamabad by Pervez Hoodbhoy.

Samuel Huntington's evil desire for a clash between civilisations may well come true after Tuesday's terror attacks. The crack that divided Muslims everywhere from the rest of the world is no longer a crack. It is a gulf that, if not bridged, will surely destroy both.

For much of the world, it was the indescribable savagery of seeing jet-loads of innocent human beings piloted into buildings filled with other innocent human beings. It was the sheer horror of watching people jump from the 80th floor of the collapsing World Trade Centre rather than be consumed by the inferno inside. Yes, it is true that many Muslims also saw it exactly this way, and felt the searing agony no less sharply. The heads of states of Muslim countries, Saddam Hussein excepted, condemned the attacks. Leaders of Muslim communities in the US, Canada, Britain, Europe, and Australia have made impassioned denunciations and pleaded for the need to distinguish between ordinary Muslims and extremists.

But the pretense that reality goes no further must be abandoned because this merely obfuscates facts and slows down the search for solutions. One would like to dismiss televised images showing Palestinian expressions of joy as unrepresentative, reflective only of the crass political immaturity of a handful. But this may be wishful thinking. Similarly, Pakistan Television, operating under strict control of the government, is attempting to portray a nation united in condemnation of the attack. Here, too, the truth lies elsewhere, as I learn from students at my university here in Islamabad, from conversations with people in the streets, and from the Urdu press. A friend tells me that crowds gathered around public TV sets at Islamabad airport had cheered as the WTC came crashing down. It makes one feel sick from inside.

A bizarre new world awaits us, where old rules of social and political behaviour have broken down and new ones are yet to be defined. Catapulted into a situation of darkness and horror by the extraordinary force of events, as rational human beings we must urgently formulate a response that is moral, and not based upon considerations of power and practicality. This requires beginning with a clearly defined moral supposition - the fundamental equality of all human beings. It also requires that we must proceed according to a definite sequence of steps, the order of which is not interchangeable.

Before all else, Black Tuesday's mass murder must be condemned in the harshest possible terms without qualification or condition, without seeking causes or reasons that may even remotely be used to justify it, and without regard for the national identity of the victims or the perpetrators. The demented, suicidal, fury of the attackers led to heinous acts of indiscriminate and wholesale murder that have changed the world for the worse. A moral position must begin with unequivocal condemnation, the absence of which could eliminate even the language by which people can communicate.

Analysis comes second, but it is just as essential. No "terrorist" gene is known to exist or is likely to be found. Therefore, surely the attackers, and their supporters, who were all presumably born normal, were afflicted by something that caused their metamorphosis from normal human beings capable of gentleness and affection into desperate, maddened fiends with nothing but murder in their hearts and minds. What was that?

Tragically, CNN and the US media have so far made little attempt to understand this affliction. The cost for this omission, if it is to stay this way, cannot be anything but terrible. What we have seen is probably the first of similar tragedies that may come to define the 21st century as the century of terror. There is much claptrap about "fighting terrorism" and billions are likely to be poured into surveillance, fortifications, and emergency plans, not to mention the ridiculous idea of missile defence systems. But, as a handful of suicide bombers armed with no more than knives and box-cutters have shown with such devastating effectiveness, all this means precisely nothing. Modern nations are far too vulnerable to be protected - a suitcase nuclear device could flatten not just a building or two, but all of Manhattan. Therefore, the simple logic of survival says that the chances of survival are best if one goes to the roots of terror. Only fools can believe that the services of a suicidal terrorist can be purchased, or that they can be bred at will anywhere. Instead, their breeding grounds are in refugee camps and in other rubbish dumps of humanity, abandoned by civilisation and left to rot. A global superpower, indifferent to their plight, and manifestly on the side of their tormentors, has bred boundless hatred for its policies. In supreme arrogance, indifferent to world opinion, the US openly sanctions daily dispossession and torture of the Palestinians by Israeli occupation forces. The deafening silence over the massacres in Qana, Sabra, and Shatila refugee camps, and the video-gamed slaughter of 70,000 people in Iraq, has brought out the worst that humans are capable of. In the words of Robert Fisk, "those who claim to represent a crushed, humiliated population struck back with the wickedness and awesome cruelty of a doomed people."

It is stupid and cruel to derive satisfaction from such revenge, or from the indisputable fact that Osama and his kind are the blow-back of the CIA's misadventures in Afghanistan. Instead, the real question is: where do we, the inhabitants of this planet, go from here? What is the lesson to be learnt from the still smouldering ruins of the World Trade Centre?

If the lesson is that America needs to assert its military might, then the future will be as grim as can be. Indeed, Secretary Colin Powell, has promised, "More than a single reprisal raid." But against whom? And to what end? No one doubts that it is ridiculously easy for the US to unleash carnage. But the bodies of a few thousand dead Afghans will not bring peace, or reduce by one bit the chances of a still worse terrorist attack.

This is not an argument for inaction: Osama and his gang, as well as other such gangs, if they can be found, must be brought to justice. But indiscriminate slaughter can do nothing except add fuel to existing hatreds. Today, the US is the victim but the carpetbombing of Afghanistan will cause it to squander the huge swell of sympathy in its favour the world over. Instead, it will create nothing but revulsion and promote never-ending, tit-for-tat killings. Ultimately, the security of the United States lies in its reengaging with the people of the world, especially with those it has grievously harmed. As a great country, possessing an admirable constitution that protects the life and liberty of its citizens, it must extend its definition of humanity to cover all peoples of the world. It must respect international treaties such as those on greenhouse gases and biological weapons, stop trying to force a new Cold War by pushing through NMD, pay its UN dues, and cease the aggrandisement of wealth in the name of globalisation.

But it is not only the US that needs to learn new modes of behaviour. There are important lessons for Muslims too, particularly those living in the US, Canada, and Europe. Last year I heard the arch-conservative head of Pakistan's *Jamat-i-Islami*, Qazi Husain Ahmad, begin his lecture before an American audience in Washington with high praise for a "pluralist society where I can wear the clothes I like, pray at a mosque, and preach my religion." Certainly, such freedoms do not exist for religious minorities in Pakistan, or in most Muslim countries. One hopes that the misplaced anger against innocent Muslims dissipates soon and such freedoms are not curtailed significantly. Nevertheless, there is a serious question as to whether this pluralism can persist forever, and if it does not, whose responsibility it will be.

The problem is that immigrant Muslim communities have, by and large, chosen isolation over integration. In the long run this is a fundamentally unhealthy situation because it creates suspicion and friction, and makes living together ever so much harder. It also raises serious ethical questions about drawing upon the resources of what is perceived to be another society, for which one has hostile feelings.

This is not an argument for doing away with one's Muslim identity. But, without closer interaction with the mainstream, pluralism will be threatened. Above all, survival of the community depends on strongly emphasising the difference between extremists and ordinary Muslims, and on purging from within jihadist elements committed to violence. Any member of the Muslim community who thinks that ordinary people in the US are fair game because of bad US government policies has no business being there.

To echo George W. Bush, "let there be no mistake." But here the mistake will be to let the heart rule the head in the aftermath of utter horror, to bomb a helpless Afghan people into an even earlier period of the Stone Age, or to take similar actions that originate from the spine. Instead, in deference to a billion years of patient evolution, we need to hand over charge to the cerebellum. Else, survival of this particular species is far from guaranteed.

Both these viewpoints are worthy of prolonged reflection and no one can justly deny the substantial truth in each. However, it is the second article which is perhaps the more challenging, urging upon us the duty of asking why such terrible antagonism to the US exists, and the harder duty for people on both sides of the fence to consider how to heal rather than exacerbate this terrible open sore of the world.

Michael Albert and Stephen R. Shalom, along with many others, have also expressed their personal views on the Net - views considered by many as extreme, and unnecessarily arousing fears for the future. But they have a right to be heard.

People who are newly pushed to desperation by current policies, by the starvation, by the other continuing policies in the region all now highlighted and aggravated, do not overnight manifest their commitment via terrorist attack, of course. The assessment of this miserable and depressing prediction against actual outcomes is in the future, not the present. It is not unlike when critics warned back in the 1980s that supporting bin Laden and the Mujahideen would have horrible future blow-back ramifications. To say a week or two, or even a year or two after that prediction that it was proved false would have been a bit premature, obviously.

The same can be said for Alouetter Mayer in her plea entitled *7.5 Million Starving*: It is difficult to grasp, and thus care about, that many people starving. Maybe it could help us to fathom this if we were able to imagine one person starving, our own self, perhaps. What does it feel like to be hungry, really hungry, for many days? And many weeks? And longer? It's easy to imagine the beginning symptoms like weakness, shakiness, irritability, fatigue. But what happens when those aren't remedied by food? Is it painful when the organs begin shrinking as they do in starvation? It must be. And as the immune system loses force, how does one endure the cramping, combined with the weakness, combined with the lowering body temperature, combined with the overall bloating as the body retains fluid? Can you imagine yourself feeling that terrible? Now expand it to your family. Your daughter. Your tiny son whose tummy is distending and who cries with headaches. Your grandmother, coughing and scared and silent. What would it feel like to watch a toddler, your toddler, weaken and beg for what you can't give? So we're not at 7.5 million people yet.... Already the misery is profound and unbelievable. Now add all your closest friends to those hungering, and you not being able to help them or be helped by them. And you watch the gaunt stares as the body fails because its cells haven't the nutrients they need to make the brain work well. Add your neighbours, all of them. Are we at 100 people yet?

Millions left to go. Farther than the eyes could see, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of weakening hungry people who want something that is in abundance all over the world - food. And if hunger and its related illnesses are bad enough and already hard to wrap your mind around, add the other unthinkable that the Afghani families are enduring today, right this second as you read this. No running water, no toilets, huddled in refugee camps miles and miles long, and it's getting cold. It's going to get really, really cold, and wet, heavy snows are coming. And you're so terribly hungry.

Imagine the stench and disgusting danger of raw sewage, of the infectious diarrhoea that comes from that. And there are already dead bodies to be dragged away to be buried or burned by weak, hungry men. How does a frail starving man dig a grave for his neighbour, his friend, or his tiny son? The nights must be endless, filled with prayers for a warm morning sun.

And can it possibly get worse than our imaginings so far? Yes. There are bombs dropping in the distance, and they are so loud, and the ground shakes and you are already shivering. Those bombs are so loud and the planes dropping them come one after another after another. And you just wish you could have the food that that pilot will be having later. And don't forget to add the landmines that make every step a roulette. Two of your younger brothers stepped on them. One died after a few days of untold pain without any medicine and the other one lost his leg just past his knee. It's so hard for your body to heal when you can't feed it. This gets so hard to fathom. Please try. This is all real, and all happening right now in a place only a plane flight away from you. What would it be like to starve?

Probably it is hard to fault the words of Albert and Shalom. The article by Mayer plucks at our heartstrings but perhaps offers only one side of the picture. Of course, all truehearted people mourn for the suffering Afghans. But, on the other side, if the bold terrorists responsible for the September 11, 2001 events were not pursued, even at awful cost, could not the consequences be even more dire? What is holding back terrorists from repeat performances over the cities of Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles? Imagine the state of the USA if such repeat performances were carried through! There would be panic among 260 million people in that great country, and a similar reaction on a lessened scale throughout the whole western world. Panic breeds the call for a dictator and subsequent totalitarianism, and the fruitage of such would dwarf even the present Afghan tragedy.

Nevertheless, members of Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda exist in approximately 60 countries, and even their eradication from Afghanistan is no guarantee of their quiescence elsewhere. Will these scattered embittered men be intimidated or provoked?

Since the above was written, news has come that in the USA a man who was planning to construct a "dirty bomb" has been arrested. This climaxes repeated statements by US leaders that future terrorist atrocities are inevitable. Notice the following

scary but accurate reflections on the present scene:

Since September 11, the White House has come to see the idea that a terrorist will try to smuggle a nuclear weapon into the US as a near certainty...

"It's not a nuclear explosion. It's not so intense to cause radiation poisoning," says nuclear weapons expert, Joseph Cirincione of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 'The main danger is that the particles cling to the area and continue to radiate for hundreds or thousands of years, and to increase the cancer risk to the point it's uninhabitable.'

Fear is the main result, and economic loss. "It's a weapon of mass disruption, not destruction," says the Centre for Defence Information's Colonel Dan Smith.

The Federation of American Scientists recently told Congress that such a bomb would be easy to make and could wreak damage worth trillions of dollars...

A single piece of cobalt used to irradiate food, dispersed by an explosion at the tip of Manhattan, would make the entire borough uninhabitable for decades because of the high risk of cancer...

According to the CDI, in 1996, Muslim rebels from Chechnya planted, but did not detonate, a dirty bomb of dynamite and caesium 137 in Moscow's Izmailovo Park to demonstrate Russia's vulnerability.

Cirincione worries about what would happen if terrorists got hold of something even deadlier, such as plutonium from the Russian weapons program. With little skill, it could be made into a radioactive bomb; with real skill it could become a nuclear weapon...

According to the CDI, a relatively small bomb of 15 kilotons, detonated in Manhattan, could immediately kill more than 100,000 people, with a comparable number dying later from radiation poisoning.

The US accepts there is no guarantee it can keep out radioactive material. There are more than 300 entry points to the country, and about 6 million cargo containers coming into seaports alone, never mind the vast amount of traffic from Mexico and Canada, plus air cargo.

US nuclear fears are many. First, it fears the possibility of a long-range missile strike by a rogue state. That is why it is pouring billions into technology to shoot down warheads in mid-air - the so-called missile shield.

Second, Bush fears that states that are developing nuclear, chemical or biological weapons will link with terrorists to strike the US with a smuggled weapon. Top of the hit-list is Iraq, but the "axis of evil" also includes Iran and North Korea. Pakistan must also be a worry, given it is a nuclear-armed state and a base for Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists. Third, the US worries that someone will buy or steal a decommissioned warhead, or its contents. If it was the latter - the bin Laden strategy - they would need to make their own bomb. There's no shortage of material... The biggest dirty bomb of all would be an attack on a nuclear power station, possibly with a commandeered airliner.

Yet, according to COI, the US has only one hospital emergency room dedicated to treating patients exposed to radiation hazards - at Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

For terrorists, the two most tempting targets would be New York, where a nuclear explosion could send the world financial system into freefall; and Washington in January, when the Congress and all but one member of the cabinet gather for the President's State of the Union address.

An attack at that time would decapitate the US... (Roy Eccleston, "True Tales of Terror," *The Australian*, Wednesday June 12, 2002.

In 1994, an Algerian terrorist group hijacked an Air France airliner and threatened to crash it into the Eiffel Tower. In 1995, police in Manila broke up a terrorist operation that was planning to plant bombs with timing devices on as many as twelve American airliners...

In late December of 1999, a group of Al Qaeda terrorists armed with knives hijacked an Indian airliner and diverted it to Kandahar, Afghanistan. The hijackers maintained control of the passengers and crew by cutting the throat of a young passenger and letting the victim bleed to death, a tactic that the September 11 terrorists are believed to have used on flight attendants...

"Traditionally, when Americans have had a war, they go and find the enemy, defeat it on the battlefield, and come home to replant," a senior FBI official said. The war against terrorism is a long-term struggle and has no borders. (Seymour M. Hersh, "Missed Messages," *New Yorker*, 40-48)

There are no easy answers. But this we know - unless the God of heaven exercises His sovereign rights and power, we have no grounds for confidence. There is security in nothing earthly - not even in the might of the most powerful nation in the world.

At this point we surely have the need to inquire: "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jer 37:17). Yes, the scriptures speak emphatically about the future, and its message includes this assurance - the world's end will **not** come from terrorists of any stripe or shade. Evil will intensify and diversify on planet Earth. Finally, "where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Mt 24:28). In other words, our society will deteriorate until heaven sees it as a rotting carcass, and then heaven's cleansing judgments will fall.

The sermon where this graphic warning about the carcass occurs is known as the Olivet sermon. That sermon began with the disciples asking for a sign regarding the end of the world. Christ replied by saying that the climactic sign would be none of the following: worldwide wars, dreadful pestilences, false Messiahs, or earthquakes. What then is the sign sought by the Twelve? The answer is found in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14. In these verses our Lord asserts that the climactic sign coming fast on the heels of worldwide wars, false messiahs, etc., would be the eschatological. Antichrist who would unleash "a time of trouble such as never was," - an Antichrist hailed as the answer to terrorism and all the ills of the globe. He will intensify rather than

heal the world's wounds. The elect for the most part will survive this awful time of testing, and in great relief and joy they will actually witness the return of Christ in glory.

The "abomination of desolation" referred to by Christ is the Old Testament name for Antichrist. It was mirrored in the idolatrous, blasphemous, persecuting kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and most of all in the bloody persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria who murdered 40,000 faithful worshippers of Israel. The first-century Christians saw the attack on Jerusalem by the Roman armies of Titus in A.D. 70 as a fulfilment of this prediction, but that event was only a shadow of the eschatological and final fulfilment by the Antichrist who will in earth's closing days direct a tottering, fear-filled global empire to its catastrophic fall.

Therefore, heeding our Lord's admonition that the last sign, the really crucial event at the end-time is the manifestation of Antichrist, we will shortly turn to the scriptural elucidation of the nature and history of that final foe of the world - and the church.

But, first, let us consider the root of modern terrorism - the Arab-Israeli conflict.

CHAPTER THREE

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

God cried Himself to sleep last night. He saw ten thousand sons of his on cruel crosses slain.

When William Stidger wrote those words during World War II, he said nothing about the nationality of those sons of God who died, and wisely so, for all men and women are the children of the Most High.

According to the record of Scripture, Ishmael, the father of twelve prominent Arab tribes, was the son of Abraham and Hagar and thus brother to the child later born to Abraham and Sarah, Isaac. At the time of Hagar's flight from Sarah and her subsequent depression of spirit, God made the following promise regarding the child in her womb:

"I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count. You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." (Genesis 16: 11-12, NIV)

After the rise of Mahomet twenty-five centuries later, the Arabs who flocked to him claimed as he did to be the descendants of Ishmael. Genesis 25:12-18 in listing the descendants of Ishmael repeats the characterisation given him in Genesis 16 affirming that Ishmael's seed lived in hostility to all related to them. The scriptural predictions are astonishingly accurate of the future of the Bedouins and the Arabs in general.

While Scripture foretold that the future of Babylon and Assyria would be desolation (see Isa 13:19-22; 14:22-23; Jer 50:13, 39, 40; 51:26, 37, 43; Nahum 3:7; Zeph 2:13-15), and that of Egypt's degradation (Eze 29:15; 30:7,13-16) and dispersion for the Jews (see Eze 22:15; Hos 9:17; Amos 9:9; Deut 28:25, 64; Lev 26:33; Deut 4:27; Neh 1:8; Jer 9:16; Jer 24:9; 29:18), the Arabs were to continue to exist in perpetuity ever distinguished by the characteristics of Ishmael.

The first recorded act of Ishmael is that he mocked Isaac. First references to a topic in Scripture are prophetic of later uses and so it is here. Genesis 21:9 is a paradigm of all the centuries to come, and finds a remarkable correspondence in our own day. This original clash between two brothers sadly echoes the only record we have of the first brothers born into the world. Cain mocks his brother's way of worship and kills him. Observe that the first "war" was over religion and Scripture foretells in its last book that the final war will likewise have to do with contrasting systems of worship. See Revelation 13 and 16:13-16. "Lilies fester worse than weeds" and the best, when perverted, becomes the worst. This has led to the bloodshed in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Palestine, and elsewhere. It was even so in the Middle Ages, and it will be so till the end of time.

The History of the Arabs and the Israelis

The Arabs

The people of the Arabian Peninsula existed, according to the monuments of history, as far back as the third millennium before Christ. But it is the Arabs of the north - many of them the descendants of Ishmael, and, in the seventh century, propagators of the Muslim faith - who are of chief importance because of their conquests and culture. One must keep in mind the predictions of Genesis 16 regarding Ishmael as one considers the destiny of his descendants. His was to be "a great nation," consisting of myriads that would in lifestyle be reminiscent of a wild donkey. As such the Arabs would cherish freedom and overcome many enemies surviving all who would endeavour to conquer them. The description of Job 39:5-8 is pertinent.

Who will let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver's shout. He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing.

These words offer an exact image of the general character and habits of the races, which for millenniums have roamed the vast deserts and pasturelands of Arabia. The Bedouins ever claimed unrestrained freedom and were long opposed to the settled order of civilised life. The proverb "in the desert, every one is the enemy of another" is most appropriate. Despite their desert homes the people of Arabia have multiplied and thrived.

Consider this tribute from Patrick Fairbairn: *"The victorious arms of the Arabs have spread the terror of their name far and wide; they have ascended more than a hundred thrones; and have established their colonies, their language, and their religion from the Senegal to the Indus, from the Euphrates to the islands of the Indian Ocean."*

A contemporary of Fairbairn wrote the most striking and comprehensive summary regarding the Arabs I have been privileged to see. Here it is: *"Few, indeed, could ever have attained to such distinction, because there are but few nations who ever arrive to any great degree of honour; much less to such a state of renown, as to secure observation in the pages of inspired truth, or in the general history of the world. Yet if you have been called upon, at all events, to point out those individuals, perhaps the very last you would have fixed upon would have been the son of that poor outcast slave, without a father, without a friend, without a prospect excepting the wilderness for his home. Yet these wanderers in the desert and amongst the rocks were the objects and the sources of surprise and of terror to their early neighbours.*

It was they who first gave to commerce its gold, its spices, and its gems. It was they who furnished to the navies of Tyre that for which they were renowned. It was they who gave to monarchs that by which they decorated their halls and their palaces. It was they who gave to arms honour and renown, while with one hand they seized on the fertile plains of Egypt and with the other laid hold on the mountains of Assyria. Thus during successive ages did they continue "dwelling in the presence of all their brethren"; whether the Babylonian or the Macedonian, whether the Persian or the Roman swayed the destinies of the world, the Arab occupied the same position, and exerted to a great extent the same power.

In later days, however, they came forth under another form, and their course was followed by far deadlier consequences. They lifted up in one hand the Koran, which they regarded as at once the product and the instrument of their great prophet, who said he came from God; with the other they brandished the sword, while nations trembled and fell. They passed off to the east - rushed through the turbid and impetuous waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris - and laid prostrate the millions of India, even to the walls of China. They passed to the north, swept the sacred shrines and hollow mummeries of Palestine; laid prostrate the cities and temples and towers of Greece - rushed through the Bosphorus - reared the tokens of their power, and at length became consolidated into a mighty empire, in the eastern part of Europe.

They passed to the west - overflowed the plains of Egypt with more resistlessness than the waters of the Nile - dashed along the coast of Barbary - rolled away to Central and Western Africa - overleaped the pillars of Hercules and the barriers of Spain - planted the crescent on the walls of Grenada - illumined darkened Europe with a ray of science - and then returned, leaving the marks of their science and their power in arithmetical characters, used in every one of our schools. And so their history, so unique and so marvellous, has been interwoven with the history of all people, to gather from them all some increasing attestation of the truth of this book." The Biblical Illustrator, I: 629.

It should not be concluded from this statement by J. Aldis that there was no agriculture in the Arab world or no great cities. Baghdad of Persia and Cordova in southern Spain were Islamic centres of great influence, and in the eleventh century the latter city was the largest in Europe with 80,000 market places and over 1,000 mosques. It was famous for its weavers and metal workers and also a centre of learning with many libraries some holding up to 400,000 books. Here the legacy of Rome and Greece was preserved, and handed down to later generations as did also the Christian monasteries of medieval times. In the same century an agricultural revolution spread across the Islamic world, that world which for 4,000 miles was united by mosques and the call to prayer.

The sword of Islam everywhere was the vanguard of trade with caravans of camels crossing deserts laden with precious gems and other valuables. Where the sword was wielded, one only had to confess that there was one God (Allah) and that Mahomet was his prophet and all else was well.

While today's Arabs are composed of more than one race and differ in significant ways including skin colouring, they remain mostly Muslim, though there are millions of Christians in their midst. Egypt, for example, has over five million Coptic Christians. The distinguishing marks of Arabian peoples are the native language of Arabic and the cherishing of Arab culture. About twenty countries can thus be characterised including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen (Aden) and Yemen (Sana). But three quarters of the Arab population of the world live in just six countries - Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan, and Syria. Egypt has the largest number of Arabs.

We must keep in mind that while most Arabs are Muslims, it is not true that all Muslims are Arabs. From the mid 1500s, the Ottoman Empire led by Turks controlled most of the Arab lands, and only World War I terminated the Ottoman power. In our day some Muslim countries, such as Indonesia, only have a minority of Arabs in their midst.

The book by Samuel P. Huntington *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* should be closely studied, especially pages 46-47, 110-111, 118-119, 312-313, and, most of all, the last page of the text itself - p312. Huntington's thesis is that the major religions of the world are responsible for its chief civilisations and the commonalities shared by these faiths must lead to international cooperation in order to avoid the increasing tendency to barbarism and anarchy. Since the mid-1970s, there has been a considerable increase in religious fervour throughout the whole world, but, simultaneously, a "sheer chaos" paradigm of world affairs has emerged to threaten the very survival of world civilisation.

Huntington stresses that Islam grows, not merely by conversions as in Christianity, but by reproduction. Consequently, Islam will overtake Christianity in numbers early this century. The predominant vitality of the youth culture in Islam is spreading a vigorous and often violent mood of drastic change throughout Islam's scores of nations. Increasing world ferment is inevitable, and only the uniting of religions on agreed centralities can save humanity.

After 1918, the League of Nations gave Great Britain and France control of the Arab lands. Promises made to the Arabs by England were broken. Iraq and Palestine were controlled by Britain, and Lebanon and Syria by the French. But Arab nationalism blossomed during the 1920s and 1930s until all the Arab nations secured their independence.

In 1917, Palestine's population was chiefly Arab Muslims with only a small minority of Jews. At the request of the British, the United Nations undertook to handle the Arab-Israeli problem, and, in 1947, by UN mandate, Palestine was divided into an Arab state and a Jewish state, the latter called Israel, and made Hebrew its language.

May 14, 1948, was the birthdate of the new Israel and, that very night, Arab attacks began.

The Israelis

A bibliography on Jerusalem compiled nearly twenty years ago showed over 6,000 titles. Sacred to three religions, it has been central in the hearts and minds of millions for many centuries. The surrounding country, though smaller than Tasmania in Australia or the state of Maine in the USA, has yet been one of the chief focal points of history. Today it holds over six million people - about one million Arabs - and is one of the most troubled areas on earth.

The Israelite, or Jew, is one of the great mysteries of history, and the biblical predictions regarding them, as those concerning the Arabs, is enough to demonstrate the divine inspiration of Scripture. Mark Twain sensed the mystery of Israel and wrote the following: "*If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests the nebulous, dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, is always heard of. He's as prominent on the planet as any other people. And his commercial importance is extravagant and out of all proportion to the smallness of his bulk.*

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are out of all proportion to the smallness of his numbers. He's made a marvellous fight in this world and in all the ages. He's

done it with his hands tied behind him.

The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian, rose, filled the planet with sound and splendour, and then faded to dream-stuff and passed away. The Greek and Roman followed and made a vast noise, and they are gone. Other peoples have sprung up and held their torches high for a time, but they burnt out. They sit in twilight now or have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was: exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew. All other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

Since Mark Twain's time, the Jew has remained equally prominent, though his numbers have dwindled to much less than 1 percent of mankind. Let us consider the last 2,000 years of the Jews' history.

The greatest crisis for Israel, after the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC, was the devastating onslaught of the armies of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC, which resulted in the near evisceration of their religion and the death of multitudes. After his return from Egypt in 167 BC, Antiochus took Jerusalem and garrisoned it with Syrian soldiers. An enforced process of hellenisation followed. An idol in the image of the king was placed in the temple, and sacrifices to it replaced the Jewish morning and evening offerings. This endured for approximately three and a half years, comprising what would have been 2300 Tamid services. See Daniel 8:13-14 and the history recorded in the Apocryphal books of Maccabees.

Jewish patriots, led by the family of the Maccabees, defeated the Syrian armies, tore down the idol and cleansed the sanctuary in 164 BC. Hanukkah is the memorial of that victory, and Jesus joined in its celebration. See John 10:22.

The new Israel now enjoyed its last independent existence until the coming of the Romans a century later. A generation after the Crucifixion, the Romans, in avenging a Jewish revolt, burned the temple, executed a host of Jews, and scattered the rest. This was the beginning of the Diaspora. Yet more uprisings by the Jews took place in the early 130s in a revolt that lasted four years. After their defeat, the decree went forth that never again would Jews be permitted to enter Jerusalem, and the Diaspora became complete.

To read any account of Israel's history in the last 2,000 years is to encounter a staggering and perfectly unique record of unremitting persecutions and expulsions. This is even more amazing when we remember how much civilisation and the Christian church owe to this despised race. Every writer in the Bible was a Jew except Luke. The Messiah was a Jew and He said, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

Like all human beings the Jews were prone to stray from God, and God delivered them again and again. Read the book of Judges about the seven declensions, the seven repentances, and the seven deliverances.

But why has there been no deliverance in the last twenty centuries? God spoke through the Hebrew prophets century after century. Why have there not been any Hebrew prophets in the last two millennia? How do we explain what this great race has been taught by many of its leaders - that is, to despise and sometimes hate the only Jew who ever kept all the Law of Moses! Isn't that a mystery? Why should they repel Jesus, the one and the only Jew, who has been fully faithful to the Old Covenant?

Why is it that the Jews feel alienated from the one people on earth, Christians, who have done much more than they in spreading the sacred writings of the Hebrew Bible? How is it that they confuse their persecutors with the followers of Him who demanded of His followers that they love their enemies? Those people who, century after century, have murdered, massacred, defrauded, cheated, robbed, and tortured the Jews were never true Christians anymore than the mixed multitude who left Egypt with Israel were true Jews.

The military expeditions (eight chief ones) of professed Christians, between AD 1100 and AD 1300, aiming to recapture the Holy Land, were motivated by a mixture of religious enthusiasm, greed, lust for power over further domains, and hatred of the Muslims. While rarely did the European soldiers attack the Jews in their own local cities, restraint was lost further afield, and Jews throughout the Rhineland cities, in particular, suffered horribly. At Mainz, the Jews practiced mass suicide, with over 1,000 perishing. In Jerusalem, the victorious first crusaders were guilty of awful slaughter. Blood ran down the streets of the Holy City, and men, as they rode, splashed through blood. The Children's Crusade of 1212 was a debacle of tragic proportions, with most of the youngsters dying of cold and hunger or in storms at sea or sold as slaves to the Muslims. Very few ever got back home.

This sorry tale reminds us of how easy sinful humanity is caught up by corporate power and mass enthusiasm. Only very mature souls can resist such contagion. If ever there was a book warning against thoughtless conformity, it is the Bible, and its clear-cut principles make it plain that those who maliciously cause pain for others - Jews or Gentiles - have never met the Master. And those who refuse to protest the evils of their own community, or corporate religious body, have yet to learn the first principles of the true Christian faith. No real Christian can have anything but loathing for every form of anti-Semitism or ethnic cleansing.

There are God-given clues for solving this mystery. Read Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19 (NIV), for example: *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among your brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.*

The Lord promised them a prophet like Moses. There was only ever *one* prophet just like Moses. There has only ever been *one* who founded a new commonwealth, who was a great Lawgiver and Saviour, who was the Mediator of a new covenant.

Like Moses, Jesus was menaced in childhood by a cruel king but escaped while other children died. Like Moses, Jesus spent his early years in obscurity and came forth to work miracles and deliverance. Like Moses, he lived by faith in the Invisible refusing the wealth of kingdoms. Like Moses he controlled the sea and fed the multitude with bread. Like Moses, he was meek and willing to be blotted out for the sins of his people. In at least seventy respects, Jesus was "like unto Moses."

Read Deuteronomy 28:15-23, 29, 64-67 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-16, 20-21. Surely here is the record of one of the greatest

prophetic warnings ever given to humanity. It warned that if disobedient to God he would scatter them among all nations where they would find no repose. They would live in constant suspense, filled with dread night and day. They would become a byword to all other nations and the object of hate and cursing and persecution. So it has been.

Read Daniel 9:24-27. When the Messiah came, He would be rejected by his own people and delivered over to death. Though He had come to finish transgression, make an end of sin, and to make atonement for iniquity, the worldly minded Jewish people would despise and reject Him. In consequence, says Daniel 9, Jerusalem would be destroyed with its temple and *until the end of time the Jewish people would know war and desolation.*

Take any encyclopaedia and look up the history of Jerusalem. It has known more upheaval, more conquests, than any other city of earth. Even before the coming of Christ, it had been destroyed and rebuilt or recaptured by different people 24 times.

As we consider modern Israel several things should be kept in mind. One of these is the fact that a large proportion of modern Jews are not descendants of Abraham (just as many contemporary Arabs are not the seed of Ishmael). The Khazars, a Turkish people, centuries ago adopted Judaism and became the majority of those in Jewish settlements in Poland and Russia. Second, many people in the West consider that the Jews accept the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. This is not true for most Jews, the majority of whom are atheists or at least pure secularists. Even in the USA, which, until recent times, held more Jews than Palestine, only 20 percent of Jews attend synagogues. And probably at least half of those who do attend synagogue attend for reasons other than religious. They attend for ethical, social, or financial reasons.

Among the many catastrophes, which overtook the Jewish race, those in Poland, the Ukraine (1648-9), and the pogroms of Russia in the last decades of the nineteenth century had tremendous impact. They made it abundantly clear that there would never be safety for the race within other countries. According to Jewish chronicles, 100,000 were killed and 300 communities destroyed during 1648-49. This affected Jewish communities around the world. In Imperial Russia three centuries later, the official Jewish regulations constituted a monument to human irrationality and cruelty. The anti-Jewish statutes ran into 1,000 pages of print. Yet the Jews were but 1/24th of the population. The first Russian pogrom came in 1871 followed by a series of them. In consequence, there was panic and flight on the part of the oppressed. They hurried westwards. More than two million ultimately went to the USA as emigrants with tremendous impact on world history, including the outcome of World War II.

When Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the only Jew serving on the general staff of the French army, was falsely accused of giving secrets to the Germans and, consequently, dishonoured and expelled, the chief seed of Zionism was planted. Theodor Herzl was one of the few journalists who witnessed the mockery of the trial, and six months later he completed the first draft of his monumental work, *Der Judenstaat*. Dreyfus was ultimately vindicated and brought back from Devil's Island - a paradigm of his people's fate.

The Jew, Albert Einstein, though never a practicing Jew, changed the way the twentieth century saw the universe. But, in demonstrating the truth of the law of relativity, he laid unwittingly the seeds of relativism, a confusion and perversion of his thought. Moral relativism was to characterise the century and devastatingly lay low the absolutes and certainties of Judeo-Christian ethics - ethics in which Einstein was a profound believer. Jacob von Hoddis, an expressionist poet, set the contemporary bewilderment to verse in "The World's End" (in German "*Weltende*"), which has been called "the most famous and notorious poem in Germany."

Historian Paul Johnson's words are deeply significant: "*In 1914 the young poet went insane, followed immediately after by virtually the whole of Europe, in a vast dance of destruction from which both the prospects and the predicament of the Jews emerged dramatically transformed.*" (A History of the Jews, p. 421)

The majority of professors in universities in Germany during World War I were Jewish. But when Hitler came to power in the 1930s, he made anti-Semitism (which only originated towards the end of the nineteenth century) an important part of the Nazi program. That was the beginning of the slaughter by the Nazis of nearly six million out of the ten million Jews then in Europe. Many countries cooperated, some like the USA under Franklin D. Roosevelt by doing nothing to ease the Jewish danger.

Italy and Denmark did not follow the same route as France, and these two countries saved many threatened Jews. Before the war began, some top Jewish scientists of world renown fled to the USA and thereby guaranteed that Germany would lose the war. Some of these scientists had much to do with the first atomic bomb.

During the nineteen-thirties many Jews immigrated to Palestine and, by the end of World War II, about 600,000 Jews were in Palestine. There is a background to that fact which should be noted.

On November 9, 1914, Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister, announced, "The Turkish empire has committed suicide." The sultan threatened to take 100 million Moslems of the British Empire and turn them against the Crown. Once committed to end the Ottoman Empire, Britain simultaneously paved the way for a Jewish national state in Palestine.

Before World War I had ended, Foreign Secretary Balfour made a definite and public British commitment to the Zionist cause. In 1917, British troops began the conquest of Palestine, which they were then to govern until handing it over to the UNO in 1947. Simultaneously, with Balfour's move, the US government became a supporter of the Jewish Palestinian state concept. Colonel T. E. Lawrence, the famous "Lawrence of Arabia," also favoured the same cause, though most Arabs were emphatically and understandably opposed.

Three years after the Armistice, Britain erred in its selection of a violent anti-Zionist as the Grand Mufti. He was to create a gulf between the leaders of the Arabs and Jews, which has never since been bridged. As historian Paul Johnson has pointed out, "the whole future of Palestine turned on the issue of Jewish immigration." The British initially took for granted that such emigration would be unrestricted but quite quickly changed their mind. In 1922 Churchill, pro-Zionist, demanded that all restrictions on Jewish emigration be abolished.

Sadly, Jews did not avail themselves of their opportunity during the calm 1920s. But as their position in Europe deteriorated, simultaneously, barriers were thrown up to restrict the move to Palestine and a national state home. Hundreds of thousands of Jews now tried to enter the hoped-for land, but British commissions moved to restrict the immigration to 12,000 a year from

July 1937. By 1939 the Balfour promises had fallen to the ground. Now the question was whether European Jewry could even survive.

Decades earlier, as agent of the anti-Semite Tsars, a Russian in Paris invented the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a work purporting to prove the Jewish intention of exterminating democracy. Only after the Bolshevik triumph were the *Protocols* pushed to the front. But ever since, many who should have known better have been deceived by the forgery, including such fine men as Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton. The early twentieth century, before World War II, saw a repetition of Martin Luther's egregious error when he turned on the Jews of Germany in the fifteenth century.

But nothing could stem the Zionist tide. After the great eastern massacres of 1648 and the Russian massacres of 1881, myriads of Jews, by panic flight, ultimately ended up in Britain or temporarily in Britain en-route to the USA. Near the end of the war, Churchill wrote to his Secretary of State "I cannot conceive why this martyred race scattered about the world and suffering as no other race has done at this juncture should be denied the satisfaction of having a flag." Two years earlier, the British had turned back a refugee ship, the *Struma*, and 770 drowned.

Desperate causes produce desperate means. Modern terrorism owes much to the severe restrictions placed on Jewish immigration to Palestine. Menachem Begin, grim survivor of the Russian Gulag launched the Irgun, a terrorist organisation dedicated to making existence so hot for the British in Palestine that they would leave. And after he hanged two British sergeants and blew up the King David hotel, Begin succeeded. It was in 1947 that Prime Minister Begin announced he was putting the problem of Palestine in the lap of the United Nations. (The hanging of the British sergeants took place after this, expediting the withdrawal.)

Both the USA and Russia at the UNO meeting supported Zionism, and, on May 14 1948, Israel declared its independence. Immediately, the secretary-general of the Arab League declared over the radio: "This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre." Adroit military action by the Israelis won the war before it started. The very day the last British left Palestine, Arab armies invaded Israel but did so ineffectually.

Two-thirds of a million Arabs fled from Israeli-held territory. While the Israelis integrated their own people who fled from Arab countries, the Arabs were content to leave their own in refugee camps as title deeds to the land and in protest of what they regarded as illegal possession of territory by the Israelis. Because of this, a whole generation of Arabs has grown up in refugee camps, apparently unwanted by anybody else in the world.

To be unwanted is to be unloved, and to be unloved means to feel worthless. This breeds the violence of anger and frustration. The Arab-Israeli problem can never be solved until the refugee camp problem is resolved. In the late 1980s, Arab refugees were far more numerous than forty years before. This was not just the result of the later wars but of natural increase.

In the brief war initiated by Gamal-Abdel Nasser in 1956, the Israelis were speedily victorious conquering the whole of Sinai and taking up possession of Gaza. After the Yom Kippur war of 1973, launched by Egypt's Anwar Sadat, Israel swelled to its present proportions, including all of Jerusalem and the West Bank settlements. It is these places, which are the present sticking points in all negotiations. It was Jerusalem, which destroyed the endeavours for reconciliation in September, 2000 at Camp David. When Sharon stood on the Temple Mount, he thereby precipitated the *Intifada*. The terrorist murder of hundreds of Americans in Lebanon and the massacre of Arabs in refugee camps there by Israeli allies turned up the heat significantly.

Despite the best efforts of a succession of U.S. Presidents and others, whether meetings have taken place at Camp David, Madrid, or elsewhere, all endeavours to resolve the Arab-Israeli tensions have failed. This is being written in June 2002 when George Bush, Jr., is desperately making another attempt.

The Present and the Future

Most Arabs in Palestine and Israelis are heartily sick of the conflict. On both sides normal life is impossible. In Israel children are afraid to gather in crowds or attend social functions. For practical purposes, most homes of both peoples seem sealed and within them, all life is contingent. Plans are either suspended or conditional. Tourism is dead and business decimated. Existence is not possible for a prolonged period without drastic change. The Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the mutual claim to Jerusalem with its holy places constitute the main barrier to resolution.

The Muslims have controlled Jerusalem for nearly 14 centuries, and Israel has had the wisdom to insist that its people leave the Temple Mount to purely Muslim control. Fundamentalist fanatics have tried to change that stance but without the support of the Israeli government. There is no chance that the Arabs of Palestine could recover the city, for they have no army whereas the army of Israel is the fourth strongest in the world. Besides that, the governing bodies of the Arabs are rife with corruption and inefficiency.

There are more than five million Arab refugees packed in poverty-stricken camps. Most of them are second or third generation "cast-offs," neglected by Israel and the rest of the world. Even many in other Arab states have been content with the situation as it deflects attention from the iniquities in their own lands. No wonder young and passionate Arabs, feeling the shame of rejection, are angry and willing to die to right the wrong.

Then there are many in Israel uncomfortable with the knowledge that their state was built upon the ruin of another; that their own soldiers at the time of the founding of the new state practiced ethnic cleansing, massacring thirty Arab communities. They also know that in their tradition, the Hebrew Scriptures teach a restoration of exiles to their own property after fifty years - the merciful plan of the Jubilee.

The failure to solve the problem of the West Bank and Gaza has been a prominent obstacle for those engaged in reconciliation talks, especially at Camp David II.

Israel has followed its own apartheid policy, not accepting the challenge to live *with* the Palestinians, but *instead* of them. After the signing of the Oslo Accords, the right of return and the abolition of overcrowded refugee camps dissolved from Israeli political memory. And all this occurs, despite the fact that the Palestinian rights are rooted in international law, such as the

universal *Declaration of Human Rights*. See particularly the U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194.

In recent months, between two and three thousand Palestinians have been killed and several hundred Israelis. But it is too often forgotten that most Palestinians are not terrorists. The *intifadas* have, on the whole, been peaceful protests. For every suicide bombing, there are thousands who refuse such tactics.

It has always been a recognised principle that in a just war, women and children are immune from attack. This has not been the case now for approximately sixty years, and the recent torrent of suicide bombings and the Israeli invasion of Arab refugee towns but illustrate further the depths to which modern civilisation has sunk. It should be remembered that the Israelis foil more than nine out of ten such attacks, about two each day. But should not attention be paid to the cause of these outrages rather than the defence?

Just suppose that the USA, that bastion of liberty, had decided half a century ago to intervene on behalf of the Arab refugees. Suppose that during the late fifties and all the sixties, America had done for the Arabs what the Marshall plan did for Europe. Think of the billions of dollars they would ultimately have saved, not to mention what is worth much more - human life! Consider the huge, ongoing expenses of the war against terrorism that may never have begun but for the widespread conviction among Muslims that the USA is the great Satan, not caring about their plight and encouraging the Israelis in their oppression of Palestinians by the gift of billions of dollars per year. Add to this, the Muslim awareness that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children have died because of US sanctions.

Those of us who attend Christian churches should consider the opinion of Hans Kung, who has affirmed that there will never be peace in the world until there is peace among the world's religions, and that this is impossible until the barriers between Christians are broken down. This would not require the sacrifice of principle, only the reign of charity.

On the other hand, it must never be forgotten that much that poses as religion in motivation is actually nothing but selfish politics. Any religious group that fails to practice the principle of the Sermon on the Mount is not really Christian at all, whatever their profession. To love one's enemies is the characteristic stamp of the converted, and to follow in the steps of Christ demands gentleness and compassion though never the sacrifice of principle.

What of the future? A temporary resolution may have succeeded before this book goes to print, but the key word is "temporary." Scripture is emphatic that having rejected their Messiah the Jews will have to sorrow until the end of time over their capital city's enduring exposure to war and desolation. The last verses of Daniel 9, after predicting the cutting off of the Messiah, make this very clear.

Global Significance of Arab-Israeli Conflict

Malcolm Muggeridge was fond of pointing out that everything that happens in our world has a deeper parabolic meaning, whether it is the dropping of a leaf, or the explosion of an atomic bomb, or whatever. The Bible very clearly makes some points in this regard regarding the present and past of both Arabs and Jews.

Paul, at the close of Galatians 4, uses Ishmael as a type of all those who are so blinded by the visible and outward that they are led to oppress all who see with the spiritual eye. As a teenager he could not comprehend why a fuss should be made over baby Isaac while he was practically ignored. So he mocked the newcomer, and his kind have done similarly ever since. But by "his kind" we do not mean all Arabs. Many of us have found among both Israelis and Arabs men and women who love justice and who are generous, kind, and truthful. Those who copy Ishmael cannot progress for long. Whether it be piracy, slavery, or genocide, the perpetrators cannot ultimately be successful. The London blitz, the bombing of German and Japanese cities proved that such terrorism only steels the people who suffer. It does not work. Those who use terror in response to terror will always fail in the long haul.

There would have been no Ishmael had Abraham trusted the promise of God regarding his descendants. After a quarter century of hope deferred, he took a slave girl in order to fulfil the promises of God by his own power. Ishmael was the result. Paul in Galatians 4 uses Hagar as a symbol of the law and all outward religious forms. He is saying in effect that if we bring the law to our bed instead of keeping it in the kitchen, only evil will result. The profundity of this truth cannot be overestimated. It is a magnificent illustration of the relation between faith and works, law and grace. Let all ponder the illustration deeply. We are to be married only to the promises of God as found in the gospel.

To run and work the law commands,
But gives me neither feet nor hands,
Better news the gospel brings,
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.

I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice,
And I have peace with God.

I would not work my soul to save,
For that the Lord hath done,
But I would work like any slave
For love of God's dear Son.

Romans chapters three and four amplify this theme. See also the whole book of Galatians.

But there is another parabolic truth to be learned from this terrible conflict. Let me ask you: If because of disobedience to Old Testament prophets, the people of Israel had seventy years of anguish in the Babylonian captivity, what has caused two thousand years of anguish? We have already touched on this, but let us go further.

Repeatedly, in ancient times, when Israel repented, God delivered them. Can it be that they have never repented of something these last 2,000 years?

Individually, many have repented, especially in the last 20 years. But can it be that nationally, for 2,000 years, there has been no acknowledgement of a terrible sin, no repentance? If so, that is why there has been no reconciliation and no forgiveness.

Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). To the Jew first, then also to the Gentile. Not only does the gospel go to the Jew first, but **God's judgments also go to the Jew first**. That is what has happened to that nation. And it is symbolic of what must happen to every Gentile, to every person who rejects the gospel.

Now the question arises, "Did no one warn the people of Israel of the terrible calamities to come?" God warned the world 120 years before the Flood. He warned Sodom and Gomorrah. And, yes, Israel was warned. Read Luke 19:41-44, where Christ specifically forewarns of the Roman assault on Jerusalem and its dreadful consequences. See also Matthew 24:2. "Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather" (Mt 24: 28). Every Israelite had seen a carcass that had become putrefied through corruption in the desert. Then the vultures came swooping down to pick it clean of the last fragments of flesh.

Jesus is saying, "Wherever there is a decay of goodness and holiness, judgment will fall." Repeatedly - not just in the destruction of Jerusalem - history testifies to this principle. The barbarians poured down on the pagan Roman Empire and dissected it, because it had become a rotten carcass.

In France, the vultures swooped down at the time of the French Revolution. That was a time when the church owned about one-third of the land and at least that much of the wealth. The aristocracy treated the rest of the people as dirt. The vultures swooped, and what a bloody time that was.

The Russian aristocracy repeated the error of France and treated their peasants as though they were slime. Nemesis came in 1917 in the Russian Revolution. When the intellectuals of Europe - the university leaders of Germany - gave their loyalties to Adolph Hitler, they, too, prepared the way for awful judgments to fall upon Germany.

Yes, Israel was warned. When they ignored the warnings, the judgments came. Since then the Jews have been without a temple, without a sacrifice, and without a priest. As they had been first in salvation so they became first in judgment. Since then judgments have been falling on the Gentile world and the worst are yet to come. Christ took the warning expressed to the Jews in Daniel 9, and he applied it to the whole world. See Matthew 24.

There is no crime that is worse than the crime against love. It is an infinite crime to reject infinite love. Incarnate love came in Jesus of Nazareth. What kind words He spoke! "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die." "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." See Matthew 12:31; John 6:37; 3:16; (CEV) and Matthew 28:2 (KJV).

Jesus says: "I am with you always" - all the days. He means the good days, the bad days, the mad days, the dazed days. I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world.

Listen to Him as he gives an incomparable invitation: "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30)

Could there be a greater folly than to neglect that invitation? But permit me to make the invitation more pressing. At Calvary, Christ, Himself, bore all the curses of the covenant that were threatened against the disobedient. He took our punishment. He bore the heat of the wrath of God. The heavens were as brass above him. He was hungry and thirsty, naked and exposed. He became a proverb to all who saw Him. He became sin for us. "All we like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Read all of that magnificent prophecy found in the closing three verses of Isaiah 52 and all of chapter 53.

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

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The story of Israel is not given so that I can throw a spear at the Jew. Rather, the story is given so that I can feel the javelin of conviction thrust into my own heart. Just as the Jew has not given Christ His place, neither have I in the fullness that Christ deserves.

I see Christ suffering on the cross under all those curses. And I think of David whose name means "Beloved." David was born in Bethlehem, was the good shepherd of his people. He overcame the giant oppressor that his people might be counted as victors.

Read the Goliath story in 1 Samuel 17. I think of him when he cried: "*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son*" (2 Samuel 18:33, KJV).

Our King David - Jesus - did die for us after overcoming for us the world, the flesh, and the devil. His victory is ours if we respond to His love.

What more can God do? If you and I are not moved by what happened when God in Christ took our place, when God in Christ bore all those curses - if you and I are not moved by that - then there is no more that God can do for us whether we be Jew or Gentile.

CHAPTER FOUR

When Antichrist's Promises to a Troubled World Fail

Democracy is clearly the best of all political systems. But, because of its very nature, it nurtures potential problems. Where decisions are decided by majorities, mob rule can assert itself in times of unusual stress. Terrorism and other ills, and consequent global panic will ultimately bring a demand from fearful and lawless masses for the protection that only world union can bring. The cement of this union, Scripture teaches, will be the worship of Antichrist.

In the Antichrist chapter of Scripture, Revelation 13, the world is warned that, in the final crisis era of this planet, men will enthrone Antichrist rather than Christ, and all whose names are not written in the book of life will worship him. Throughout the prophecies and types of Scripture. Antichrist is a genus comprising all who oppose or counterfeit the work and people of God. Nimrod in Genesis, Pharaoh in Exodus, the Babylonian kings in Daniel, and Antiochus Epiphanes in Daniel's prophecies all point to Antichrist. Pagan Rome in its persecution of Christians followed in the wake and example of Antiochus, and so did the amalgam of church and state during the bloody Middle Ages. But the final fulfilment is yet to come, and it is to this that Revelation 13, in particular, points.

In *Crisis!*, my commentary on Revelation, I have written at great length on this topic. Suffice it to say here that the Bible predicts the time when the world in desperation is "looking after those things coming on the earth," when there will be "distress of nations with perplexity" (Luke 21:25), will unite its fragmentary political systems under one head, and for the sake of unity and peace, enforce a system of religion that embraces the lowest common denominator of all faiths - pagan and professedly Christian.

The well known missionary bishop and scholar Stephen Neill affirmed that fundamentally all great problems are theological in nature. For example, no ethical injunction carries weight unless it has religious underpinnings. Both science and democracy owe their dynamism to Christianity, which teaches the reign of natural law because of the Creator, and the equity and value of all men because of both creation and redemption. Religion and life rightly viewed are the same in essence. Because religion is so vital, it has a thousand counterfeits and most religion is either worthless or evil. The counterfeits testify to the existence of the true. In times of crisis, men will worship pleading for supernatural aid, but they will worship pragmatically with the primary motive of selfishness rather than reverence.

The Bible clearly teaches that worship is the touchstone of human existence. We become like whatever we adore. The first "war" in the world, the conflict between Cain and Abel, was over religion and so it will be with the last war of Armageddon. When all human resources seem finite and powerless, men will call on God, but a God of their own making - Antichrist. Totalitarianism will assert itself globally and calion religion to validate it.

Note the following from twentieth century scholars: "The twentieth century is the age of totalitarianism. Not only does a great portion of the human race live under pervasive totalitarian rule, but totalitarianism emerges as a crucial problem at every level of twentieth-century life, and is largely at the source of the great conflicts - economic, political, and spiritual - that are tearing apart the contemporary world... The confusion in the churches is itself a major factor exacerbating the crisis and facilitating the advance of totalitarianism on many fronts."¹

Direct and conscious confrontation with totalitarianism did not arise for the mass of Christians in Western Europe and America, and for the Church as such, until the appearance of Nazism as a massive power on the continent of Europe.²

The totalitarian State... is the contemporary embodiment of the *illegitimate* State pictured in Revelation chapter 13... It deifies and exalts itself; it demands a quasi-religious commitment on the part of its subjects; it runs consistently *contra legem Dei*... It refuses to recognise, and strives incessantly to destroy, man's personal being and his God-relationship.³

What we are here discussing is the last attempt of humanity to save itself from universal and rapidly spreading chaos. Grasping at the straw of false religion as a sop to appease the variegated masses of earth, it will actually make war on the true God by attacking Christian nonconformists, and the Bible calls this Armageddon.

We have now clearly switched gears in our discussion, turning from the terrorist threat to the attempt at globalisation which terrorism will precipitate. At this point, only Scripture can help us thread our way through the maze of misleading and dangerous human opinions. Again, we quote from our commentary on the predictions of earth's finale as found in the closing book of Scripture - Revelation and its thirteenth chapter.

Revelation 13 and Armageddon

Amid the trees of exegetical details in Revelation 13, one must not miss the impact of the forest. This chapter points to the long-anticipated crisis at the end of the age - the crisis that ushers in the Day of the Lord and Armageddon. Armageddon is to the Church what Calvary was to Christ - the last conflict, the hiding of God's face, threatened extinction, but ultimate deliverance. This sorrowful midnight will illuminate the universe by its worldwide demonstration of the same God-vindicating truths revealed at the Cross.

The rest of Scripture in prophecy and type foreshadows this final crisis. The very first conflict among men recorded in Genesis 4 was over the issue of worship, and so it is to be in the last battle. In both Revelation 13 and 14, "worship" is the key word. Men are to choose between adoration of, and obedience to, their Creator and Redeemer, or under totalitarianism pressure, yield to the popular religion of idolatrous creatureworship symbolised by the image to the beast. The compromise of the church with the world mirrored by the followers of Balaam and the children of Jezebel in Revelation chapter 2, finds its ultimate fulfilment at the end of the world. Balaam is the prototype of the eschatological false prophet - the lamb-like beast that causes earth's inhabitants to bow down to the beast and its image.

Let us link together the allusions in the apocalyptic picture (Revelation 13 and its parallels), to earlier crises typical of the

eschatological one.

Revelation 13:11-18 expands the 'hour of trial' foretold in 3:10. It is also called "the tribulation" in Matthew 24:21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; 'a time of trouble, such as never has been' in Daniel 12:1 (the source of Christ's references to the tribulation). Jeremiah 30:7 affirms that the trial is so great "there is none like it," and 'it is a time of distress for Jacob, yet he shall be saved out of it' - these are expressions that parallel Daniel 12:1.

The New Testament, not only in Revelation but also in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, likens the final crisis to the fall of Babylon which was the prelude to Israel's deliverance and return to Canaan. Compare, for example, 1 Thessalonians 5:3 with Jeremiah 30:7-11 and Isaiah 47:8-15 with Revelation 18:7-8. Thus the drying up of the Euphrates in Revelation 16 should not be divorced from the parallel references in Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the overthrow of Babylon. Daniel 5 portrays the same scene, sketching the peace and safety spirit in Babylon at the time of Belshazzar's feast on the eve of disaster.

Not only Daniel 5 and the time of trouble there mirrored, but also the narratives of Daniel 3 and 6 are hinted at by Revelation 13, as the beast motif refers to the Antichrist picture in Daniel 7, 8, 9, 11, 12. The reference to Babylon's image to the beast which all must worship (13:11-18, 14:9-11) points back to the union between false religion and political force in Daniel's day when commandment-keepers were threatened with death. Daniel refused to violate conscience. His enemies declared, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God" (Dan 6:5). It is this situation magnified to world proportions that Revelation 13 depicts in its closing verses.

It is highly significant that Daniel 12:1, in speaking of the eschatological deliverance of the threatened remnant, uses the same keyword found primarily in the stories of chapters 3 and 6. See the references to 'deliver' in 3:15, 17, 28; 6:14, 16, 20, 27, and compare 12:1. As in Daniel, the narratives are the key to the prophecies, so the prophecies of Revelation find their clues in Old Testament history. This is made clear by the allusions in the apocalyptic mosaic such as in 13:14; 14:1, 8, 9, 19, 20; 15:1-3; and 16:12-16, referring back to crises in the experience of ancient Israel.

Revelation 16 enlarges the 13:11-18 scene by its reference to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Religious wonders are seen as polarising the unbelieving hosts of earth for the prelude to Armageddon. The peoples, multitude, and tongues supporting Babylon are symbolised by the Euphrates, which is to be dried up by the wrath of God. Such language to a Christian Jew would be evocative of a host of memories - the Exodus, with its drying up of the Red Sea, the diverting of Babylon's waters when God's anointed shepherd, Cyrus, came from the east to deliver the people of God, and to stop the many floods of invaders from the pagan north attacking Israel over the centuries.

The term "time of trouble," the 'distress for Jacob' points back to the Genesis story of that patriarch's great trial. Jacob, only one river from home, heard the news that his brother was approaching with murderous intent. It seemed that all of his sins of the past were about to catch up with him. In fear, in case God could not shelter him because of his guilt, Jacob wrestled with his midnight visitor until, disabled, his hold of faith and earnest plea brought the blessing he sought.

When the remnant of spiritual Israel faces the death decree of the beast, there will be soul-searching akin to that which came to Jacob of old. But, ultimately, at the Advent, as forgiven but loyal sinners, they will see the face of God and be preserved because of their faith in the merits of the Atonement.

There are other Old Testament pictures, which seem appropriate for understanding the time of trouble brought to view in Revelation 13. The people delivered from that test are seen as "sealed" and with the lamb on Mt. Zion. They have the blessing belonging to all who have 'kept' their garments (see 16:15). The seal on the forehead of the victors is said to be the name of the Lamb and His Father's name. This imagery is based on Ezekiel 9 and Zechariah 3 - especially the latter. Zechariah 3, in a judgment and, therefore, eschatological setting, points up as the emblems of acceptance with God, white robes and a mitre upon the forehead. The mitre of the High Priest enshrined Yahweh's name. See Exodus 28:36. In the tense situation drawn by Zechariah, we have the imagery of the Day of Atonement when the High Priest as representative of the sinful worshippers appeared before the Lord on Israel's Judgment day (verse 37). It is therefore easy to see the connection between Revelation 3:10, 12 (which speak of "the hour of trial" and 'the name of my God') and Revelation chapters 13 and 14.

Centuries ago, Sir Isaac Newton suggested that Revelation 13, with its mark in contrast to the divine seal, could only be unlocked by the Day of Atonement type which symbolised by its two goats and their seals the two classes on Judgment day, the lost and the saved, those sealed for Yahweh and those marked for Azazel, the rebel. Jacob's wrestling with the angel, Israel's pleading on the solemn fast-day of Yom Kippur, and the judgment scene of Zechariah 3, all three with a common diapason, illuminate the forecast made by John in Revelation 13 as he sets forth the final polarisation of earth's multitudes.

The death decree of 13:15 echoes another Old Testament passage. According to the apocalypse, all "both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave" are coerced into false worship under the threat first of economic hardship and finally loss of life itself. Only in one other place in Scripture do we find a crisis of this magnitude involving multitudes in a death threat because of their mode of worship.

The story recorded in Esther belongs to the closing days of Old Testament history and concerns the threatened remnant whose worship contrasted so sharply with that of their enemies. Says the idolater, Haman, who helps direct the throne of MedoPersia: "*There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them... let it be decreed that they be destroyed.*" (Esther 3:8-9).

As with the similar scenes in Daniel, though there on a much smaller scale, the tables were ultimately turned and instead of disaster, the Jews found "gladness and joy... a feast and a holiday," while death overtook their enemies.

The same gladness and joy of deliverance had been Israel's on a recurring basis since their deliverance from Pharaoh's host at the Red Sea. Revelation 15:1-4 and 16:12-16 draw heavily upon this early national paradigm, as chapter 16:21 alludes to the later episode of deliverance from the Amorites by Heaven's hailstone bombardment. See Joshua 10:11.

While the name Megiddo spelled trouble to Israel, it also told of the unsleeping eye of God over His people. In Judges, we

have the first detailed account of conflict at Megiddo. The sunworshipping Midianite hosts attacked the little flock of Israelite Sabbath-keepers. God only was their refuge and strength, and 'the stars in their courses' fought against Sisera and his hosts, causing them to fall in the valley of Megiddo (Judges 5:19-21). Finally, the mention of Mount Megiddo in the Revelation 16 parallel to Revelation 13 is reminiscent of the conflict between the idol-worshippers of Ahab and Jezebel and the prophet of Jehovah, Elijah at Mount Carmel. After the answering from heaven by fire, the false prophets were slain by the waters of Megiddo nearby. That conflict, like the one predicted in Revelation 13, concerned worship and the commandments of God. See 1 Kings 18:18, 30, 19:14. While the word Armageddon occurs only once in Scripture, the idea that it signifies - the battle of the great day of God Almighty - is prevalent in both Testaments. Even the mourning of all nations referred to in Revelation 1:7 is a reference to the final catastrophe and points back to the mourning when Josiah died as one of Babylon's allies.

We wish to underline the fact that Revelation 13 is a crucial chapter in the book because it points to a watershed for humanity in the near future, and, in one sense, is the heart of the apocalypse. It unites threads of typology and prophecy from preceding Scriptures. What gives special urgency to this claim is the reflection of the Christ-event in this chapter concerning Antichrist. The main "clue" in Revelation 13 is its reference to our Lord's passion. All prophecies in the Apocalypse reflect Him in some manner, and, just as the Olivet sermon enlarges the Passion of Christ, so Revelation 13, in depicting a worldwide Gethsemane for Christ's body, alludes to the same. The real end of Old Testament times merges with Christianity's beginnings.

Our Lord's ministry, especially its closing days, as shown earlier, is a paradigm of the experience of His body in the last days. With Him came the everlasting gospel and the hour of God's judgment. After his anointing by the Spirit, His ministry polarised the Jewish religious world. He cleansed its sanctuary, pronounced woes on hypocritical worshippers, and, by every discourse and acted parable of Passion Week, warned of judgment. Opposing religious bodies joined together and then united with the state to condemn him to death. His time of trouble was divided into two, with his sealing, so to speak, in Gethsemane when His decision was fixed irrevocably to die for the sins of the world. Then came judgment halls, plagues of divine wrath, signs in the heavens, the torn veil drawing attention to the Most Holy Place, and, finally, the end. His cross was a judgment throne as predicted in John 12:31.

Revelation chapters 11-13 draw upon this paradigm from the Gospels when describing the last days, and we would err if we failed to give it true attention. See particularly 11:3 to 13:1 (with its allusions to 1260 days of ministry, rejection by the world despite miraculous powers evinced as signs, Jerusalem the guilty city, the three-and-a-half days of death, then the resurrection and ascension). With the crisis came the opening of the Most Holy Place in the temple as a reminiscence of the sign marking Christ's death. The similarities are too numerous to be coincidental. Even the Antichrist is portrayed as a parody of Christ's ministry, with his 1260 days, his death and resurrection, as well as his advocate - the beast like a lamb.

This Antichrist is present in our Lord's forecast of "the last things." Remembering that the Olivet sermon mirrors the future in terms of Christ's passion, His use of Daniel's title for Antichrist - the abomination of desolation - is doubly significant. Around His Cross gathered the representatives of Rome, the power recognised by the Jews as the contemporary fulfilment of those prophecies once accomplished in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Our Lord affirms in Mark 13:14 (and the use of the personal pronoun with the neuter antecedent is particularly significant) that the last sign will be a world-dominant power like Rome - idolatrous and persecuting (as implied by abomination and desolation), enforcing its false system of worship upon the whole world. The church, His body, is to suffer as its Head at the hands of idolaters. It is this prophecy, which John enlarges in Revelation 13 by his allusion to the formation of an image and the decree that all should worship it. This is the prelude to Armageddon. See Mark 13:14 ff., and Matthew 24:15ff., and compare Daniel 8:13; 9:26, 27; and 11:31 to 12:11.

Says Jeremias: "*The abomination of desolation in the holy place, demanding worship and reverence, glorified by false prophets through word and miracle - that is the last great temptation...*

This is the last and final catastrophe in history that Jesus sees coming. He was certain that the kingdom of God comes through suffering and only through suffering."⁴

Lars Hartman speaks similarly: "*We encounter 'the abomination of desolation' in Daniel in passages dealing with persecutions and oppression.... Bearing the context mind, both in the Gospels and in Daniel (which was interpreted eschatologically), it seems probable that the symbol in question refers to some form of blasphemy, which will characterise the last days... Devastation will be associated with it.*"⁵

Thus modern expositors echo comments of such earlier exegetes as Wordsworth and Tanner: "*Even in the Christian church, Law will establish some form of infidelity and impiety, as our Lord Himself foretells.*" (Matthew 24:15).

So will it be in the last times. The church itself will be betrayed by some in high places in her ministry, and by means of their timid and treacherous concessions and compromises it will be polluted by a form of worship which will make it execrable in the sight of God and will cause all good men to weep and hide their faces in shame and sorrow, and to forsake the courts of the sanctuary.⁶

The 'abomination of desolation' is a formula indicting an overthrow of God's religion, a desecration of what is holy, and a dissipation and corruption of His order of worship by some great God-opposing power. This description is evidently applicable with more or less exactness to several crises in history including... Antichrist.⁷

It should be noted that 2 Thessalonians 2 is also based on 'the abomination of desolation' motif. Thus the prophecy of the Apocalypse concerning the image of the beast in the last crisis is the final expansion of the warnings against idolatrous worship found from Deuteronomy 13:1-3 onwards, and particularly emphasised by Daniel, Christ, and Paul. We, who may well be living on the eve of Armageddon, would do well to heed the warning prophetic refrain against idolatry, and in response "worship Him that made Heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water" (Rev 14:7). That worship is exemplified in the keeping of 'the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus' (Revelation 14:12).⁸

In the following chapters we will tease out the themes introduced by the eschatological summary just given. We will trace the theme of Antichrist through Scripture and then turn to the inspired predictions of how the true Christ will "trump" Antichrist and bring life out of death, light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, and a glorious new world out of a troubled disintegrating planet.

Footnotes:

1. Will Herberg, "Christian Faith and Totalitarian Rule," in Faith Enacted as History, page 242.
2. Ibid., page 251.
3. Ibid., page 252.
4. J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology, vol. 1, p. 128-129.
5. Lars Hartman, Prophecy Interpreted, p. 152.
6. C. Wordsworth, "Revelation," p. 62.
7. J. Tanner, Daniel and the Revelation, p. 56.
8. Desmond Ford, Crisis! Vol. 2, pages 578-584.

CHAPTER FIVE

From Genesis to Revelation - Antichrist to Christ

Antichrist has been the most dreaded word in many languages for millenniums, a word that, for many people, has been synonymous with the word, Satan. For centuries, mothers have hushed their children to sleep, or should I say scared them into being good, by the use of that word. Armies have fought bloody battles over what each army thought was meant by Antichrist. But who is Antichrist? And why do we want to know? Do we want to know in order to avoid his subtleties in the world's last crisis? Or could it be that we have it in for some particular group, and we want to stab them with the name? Why do we want to know?

Who was Antichrist? The Greek Orthodox Church, with its millions of devout believers, have always said it was Mohammed and his followers. Huss, Wycliffe, the Lollards, the Waldenses, the Albigenses, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Ridley, and Latimer - all said it was the pope. And if you have a King James Version, that's what it says in the introduction. The Roman Catholics know it's Luther and all who have followed him. The Jews, for millenniums, had believed that Antichrist was Antiochus Epiphanes, who slaughtered 40,000 of them in three-and-a-half years and defiled their temple and suspended the daily offering. But when the Romans came and killed a million Jews at the same place, the Jews decided that Antiochus was but a shadow of Caesar.

And, still, today the theme is of great interest.

Recent issues of *Newsweek* and *Christianity Today* have articles on Antichrist. Preachers speak on the topic all around the world.

Our Lord mentioned Antichrist. He called Antichrist the "abomination of desolation" and said, "When you see it, flee, for then will be great tribulation such as never was since there was a nation." Paul mentioned Antichrist. He spoke about the man of sin, the son of perdition, "sitting in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." And the closing book of the Bible speaks of the beast and Babylon and a false prophet, all aspects of the final Antichrist.

Antichrist is all the way through Scripture. He's only named near the very end, but he is all the way through. Actually, the Bible is a book of two Christ - the true Christ and the Antichrist. The Bible is a book of two seeds - the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The Bible is a book of two cities. They are both mentioned in Genesis, they are both mentioned in Revelation, and they are both found near the centre, in Daniel. They are: Jerusalem, the foundations of peace, the holy city, the symbol of the church of God in New Testament times and Babylon, beginning with Babel, the gate of God. But man's endeavour to get to heaven by human works, by human traditions and not by faith, is Babel. The supposed gate of God became confusion - Babylon.

Let's look at some of the Scripture evidence, starting with 1 John 2:18. The beloved apostle is the only one who names Antichrist, and he names him four times in the first two epistles. "Dear children, this is the last hour and as you've heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour."

There are two things to notice. John says there is an Antichrist to come - an antichrist *par excellence*, written with a capital A. But then the second fact is often ignored. "There are many antichrists," written with a lower case "a," because they are manifestations of THE Antichrist by nature but they are not THE latter-day Antichrist. Underline that in your memory. **There are many antichrists.**

Antichrist is a genus. It is a group of all those representatives of Satan who oppose Christ, either by ferocity or by subtlety. The word "anti" can mean "against" or it can mean "instead of." So there are the two strands of meaning for Antichrist - one who is fiercely opposed, and one who is pretending to take Christ's place.

So please note, here's the first place in the Bible where the word antichrist is used, though the theme is all the way through. And it tells us two things: There is an Antichrist to come, but there are many antichrists.

The chief Antichrist is Satan himself. If you study Revelation 12, you will find it begins with a description of the devil as having seven heads and ten horns. The same description is found in the famous antichrist chapter, which is the next one, where all of apostate government in the last days is an antichrist. And Antichrist includes both the devil and the apostate government, pictured as having seven heads and ten horns. Multiplicity of power and influence over all the nations is thus symbolised.

So the devil himself is the chief Antichrist - that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. The conflict between Christ and Antichrist is foretold in Genesis 3:15: "*I'll put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He'll crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*"

It had its first fulfilment in the war between Cain and Abel. It has its culminating fulfilment in Christ, whose heel is bruised on the cross but who thereby crushes the serpent's head. The cross will be consummated at the next Advent when later, dethroned at Calvary, Satan is revealed as the defeated foe and destroyed.

The Bible contains Old Testament types of the final Antichrist as surely as it contains types of the true Christ. Nimrod is one example. The word "Nimrod" means "the rebel." And Nimrod is the first enlarged picture of Antichrist. Cush was the father of Nimrod, and Cush was a descendent of Ham, who was cursed because he violated the fifth commandment.

Four times, Nimrod is called "mighty" - a mighty warrior, a mighty hunter - someone that hunted men as well as animals. The Septuagint has for "mighty hunter before the Lord" a "mighty hunter against the Lord." He is the first ruler of Babylon.

So Nimrod was the founder of "the gate of God," the tower that men proudly built. Nimrod was the first king, the founder of imperial government, notorious for force and cruelty, and a violent invader of his neighbour's rights. He was also a persecutor of innocent men, the first to establish idolatry, symbolised by the tower of Babel, of which he was probably the architect. When his project to rule all the sons of Noah was frustrated, he went out to Assyria and built Nineveh. He personifies godless

ambition. He embodies all the elements of Antichrist: pride, self-will, violence, ambition, selfishness, cruelty, and covetousness.

Do you remember when the Lord speaks about the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, he says, "Look at what they are doing. But we will go down." Now, please notice, here you have a symbol of the end of the world, when the whole world develops a Babylonian confederacy, its own religion, its own way to heaven. But then Christ will come down. Those words in Genesis where God says about the tower of Babel, "we will go down," anticipate the final form of Babylon. A one-world government will be dedicated to a religion of the lowest common denominator. And, when it's apparently victorious, God says to Christ, "we will go down." This is the Second Advent.

Pharaoh is another type of Antichrist. He denies the Lord. "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" He despises God's message and calls it vain words. He oppresses with burdens. And I want you to notice the marvellous symmetry of temptation the devil used through this Antichrist. When Moses says, "We have to go away and worship the Lord," first of all Pharaoh says, "Look, worship God in the land. Don't go away. Do it here." Then he says, "Well, go, but don't go very far away." Next, "Well, just you and the men do it. Don't take your families." And then finally he almost agrees, "All right. You can go, but you must leave your flocks and herds behind." In other words, don't take anything to sacrifice to God.

Do you see the marvellous symmetry of how the devil works with you and me? That is the way Antichrist always works. "Well, you can be religious but not too religious. Don't go very far away from your whole way of life. Well, if you want to be in it, okay, but don't involve your husband or your wife or your children. And don't be in the business of making sacrifices for your new religion. It's not worth that. Leave your possessions behind."

Do you remember what Moses replied? "We will not leave a hoof behind." That's genuine religion. When you don't leave a hoof behind, when you say, "All I am, all I've got, is his." You use every talent, every opportunity, and every moment of time. It's only because of his hand over us that we are still alive. Every one of us has approximately 66,000 miles of blood vessels. Think of what can happen in 66,000 miles! So every moment of life is God's. Every cent of money is God's. We don't own a thing; we're only stewards.

You know, the Scripture talks about exacting every farthing, the Old English word for less than a quarter of a cent. God's religion goes all the way. Not a hoof to be left with Pharaoh. Not a hoof to be given to the things of the devil. Everything belongs to God.

So there you have a beautiful summary of how Antichrist works. "Don't go very far away. Stay in the land; stay where you are. Do the things you used to do. Just go to church once a week. Well, at least, don't take your family. Well, if you must take your family, leave your offerings behind. Don't sacrifice." But Moses said, "Not a hoof will we leave behind."

God is either Lord of all or He is not Lord at all. If you're withholding anything, you're not Christian. He gave all for us - an infinite all. What will we give for him? Will it be something very paltry? We are only here for a little time. We have to make every moment count.

I just received word about a friend of mine whom I've known for nearly half a century. He is a man who was very vibrant and very intelligent. I would see him most times I visited Australia, and now I hear he's died. I cannot help but feel the pain as it reminds me of how temporary life is. Here was a man who was vibrant with life, intelligence, dedication to Christ, and, suddenly, he's gone.

We all have loved ones who've gone. And one day there will be loved ones who will remember us because we're gone. Life is very temporary. We should acknowledge it's all his. Don't leave a hoof in Pharaoh's territory. Not a hoof. It's all God's.

Remember Goliath? In the Hebrew, Goliath is called the middleman, the mediator, of the enemy, and David is called the middleman, the mediator, of Israel. So Goliath, the representative, the captain, the king, so to speak, is the representative of one side, and David of the other. And when they meet, Goliath looks so huge. He's got the number six stamped all over him. He's six cubits high, has six different types of armour; his spearhead weighs six hundred shekels of iron. The number 6, 6, 6 is stamped everywhere over Goliath. He's a type of Antichrist, like Pharaoh and Nimrod.

But do you remember what happened to him? His own sword was used to cut his head off. And Satan, the great Antichrist, fought our David, the Beloved, the shepherd king, and the good shepherd, from Bethlehem, where David was born. When Satan, that towering giant, dealt with the Son of God who came down as the Good Shepherd, the Son of God took Satan's own weapon, death, as it says in Hebrews 2:14, 15: "By death Christ destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, that he might deliver all those who through their lifetime were held in slavery through fear of death."

We try not to think about it. In the nineteenth century, they talked a lot about death and little about birth. We've turned the tables. We talk a lot about birth, sex, and very little about death. Dying people we hide away. You just get the news they've gone.

"Deliver all those who through their lifetime are subject to bondage through fear of death?" Yes, by death, Christ destroyed him that had the power of death. Christ took the devil's own weapon, the cross, and destroyed the devil with it.

The story of Absalom is another great story! How fascinating it is to read 2 Samuel 14-18, to read of someone so beautiful from the crown of his head to the sale of his foot, who has no blemish. He had an exceptionally handsome face and beautiful hair. Everything about him was attractive, except his heart. He had a foul, filthy, ambitious, selfish heart. So he rebelled against the lifegiver, his father. He tries to take his father off the throne. But you remember what happened to him in the end? He was suspended in the air on a tree and killed, a figure of the devil being destroyed by the cross.

Read the story in 2 Samuel 18. Absalom is rushing with his armies, trying to find his father to kill him. And suddenly his horse races off from underneath him as he's caught in the boughs of a tree. One of David's soldiers comes up and says to himself, "I won't ask David," and just throws darts into the heart of Absalom. Absalom dies on the tree, a symbol of how the cross would destroy Satan, the Absalom of heaven, who was beautiful, who rebelled against the Lifegiver, because of proud ambition.

And do you remember the last words of the story in 2 Samuel 19? "Oh Absalom! My son! My son! Would God I had died for thee! Oh Absalom! My son! My son!" These are some of the most poignant words in all of literature, similar to the words from the cross, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Here is God weeping over the sinner.

That's how God weeps over everyone that rejects the gospel. "I died for you. I died for you. Why did you waste my sacrifice?" So Absalom becomes a type of Antichrist.

Do you remember the story of Sennacherib? First of all, let me remind you of Hezekiah. We're told of Hezekiah that he walked in all the ways of God, that his heart was perfect toward God. Sennacherib comes up to destroy Jerusalem, and at one stage, Hezekiah's own life is menaced. With strong crying and tears, he finally finds deliverance for his own life and for the city of Jerusalem. It's reminiscent of Hebrews 5:7 that says that Christ, with strong crying and tears, interceded with God to save the world.

So Sennacherib arrives. Hezekiah has no might against him, so the angel of the Lord goes forth and smites the army of Sennacherib. And note the way the King James Version translates the last verse. "And when they got up in the morning they were all dead men." Modern versions have missed the joke.

What a contrast is Christ to all these figures typifying Antichrist! Think first of Adam, who willingly lies down to sleep that God may do surgery on him, opening his side that he might have a bride. Abel, the young, good shepherd, is murdered because his works were righteous, though his brother's works were evil. Noah was the saviour of the world by the tortured wood of the Ark. Isaac was the willing sacrifice of his father. Melchizedek was a king and a priest. He came from Salem, the place of peace, and blessed Abraham after the battle, ministering to him with bread and wine. Joseph, the despised Jew, hated by his brethren was sold for pieces of silver and handed over to death by his brethren, and finally becomes the saviour of the world and feeds the world with the bread of life. These are a few of the typical pictures of Christ just from the book of Genesis.

Let me ask you the question, why is it important to study the subject we're studying? I'll tell you two reasons why it's important. Number one, the last conflict in the world will be the conflict over Antichrist, and it could be that many of us will see it.

The conflict is also typified all the way through the Bible. For example, there is the story of Jacob when he's just one river from home. He comes to the brook Kidron, the tributary of Jordan. If he gets through that, he's in the Promised Land. He's been a wanderer and a pilgrim for a long time and now he's nearing home. He hears the word that an enemy is coming, with hundreds of soldiers. It's his brother Esau, whom he cheated out of his birthright.

So Jacob sets himself to praying. It's the first real recorded prayer we have in the Bible, and it is found in Genesis 32. This is a good prayer, invoking the covenant God. Jacob says, "God, I'm not worthy of any of the truth nor of any of the blessings you have given me, but remember your promise about the seed. If I am killed now, that promise will never be kept. So Lord, because of your promises, deliver me."

I want you to look at the record in Genesis 32:24: "And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day."

What does that mean? First of all, let me remind you of some other typical pictures in the Bible of the last great conflict with Antichrist. Think of Baal-Peor, when the whole nation of Israel, Jacob's seed, again comes up to the promised land, they only have to cross over. Then Balaam, the false prophet, the type of Antichrist, unites with the civil power, Balak, and leads Israel into fornication, which is used in the Bible as a symbol of false worship.

So many of the hosts of Israel, on the borders of the Promised Land, are slaughtered when they fail in the last test before home. Baal-Peor was where the false prophet led the multitudes of Israel astray, and they perished on the borders of home.

I want you to think of Haman. Most of us don't know much about Haman. He's a descendent of Esau. He's very proud. When Mordecai won't bow, Haman can't digest his food for weeks. So he determines to get rid of Mordecai. He prepares a gallows to have Mordecai hung on it. And he plans to wipe out all the Israelites. That's ambitious. He bribes the king to make a decree that all the Jews shall be murdered in one night. And then there's a marvellous tissue of providences. God keeps the king awake. He can control hundreds of thousands of men, but he can't control one hour's sleep. So he calls, not for the dancing girls, not for the court jester, but for the musty old history books. And according to the tradition of the Jews, the wind blows through, and the scrolls are slipping around, and, finally, it stops at the record of how Mordecai saved the king's life.

So the insomniac king says, "What's been done for this man?" And the answer is the usual one: "Nothing. Nothing's been done for him." So the king looks into it, and he finds out about Haman trying to murder the man who had saved his life. And then at that moment he hears footsteps outside, and he asks. "Who's out there in the court?"

And they say, "It's Haman." Then Esther comes in and intercedes for her people.

Please get the picture. The one who lies in the bosom of the king intercedes for her people. Christ, who's in the bosom of the Father, intercedes for us.

The story finishes with quits for Haman, the enemy of God's people. Instead of wiping out Israel, he's wiped out on the very gallows that he's prepared for Mordecai.

These are some of the little vignettes in Scripture, pointing to the last conflict over Antichrist. Jacob is one river from home. Israel is just about to cross over into Canaan. Towards the end of Old Testament history, we see the people of Israel when Haman tries to wipe them out. And, of course, the most graphic one of all is Calvary. Caiaphas and Pilate unite with the government. Pilate and Caiaphas together will wipe out the messenger of God. And the whole story of Antichrist in the last book of the Bible uses that imagery of Calvary.

Revelation 17 is based on the scene in Pilate's judgment hall and its great denouement forty years later in the destruction of the city, and it predicts what will happen again at the end of the world. Read there how the woman steers the beast. It is not the beast guiding the woman. The woman, religion, controls government, a one-world government, dominated by religion of

the lowest common denominator, and they will make war on Christ by making war on his people.

Revelation 17 says that the masses, the multitudes, at the last will turn on the whore and rend her and burn her with fire. The only law in the Torah about burning a woman with fire was for when a priest's daughter committed immorality. So Babylon is here seen as a priestly group, a bad religion, guiding bad government. And it is successful. All the nations of earth unite and have one hour of victory. Then God comes down to see the tower, and the deception is unveiled. And the millions who make up the beast turn against the leaders of bad religion, represented by the whore, the harlot, and rend and burn her. And as John wrote it, what he thought about was Caiaphas, Judas, and the Sanhedrin, linking with Pontius Pilate and then Judas going to the holy place of the garden with the Roman soldiers. Christ was brought to the Jewish courts, and then taken to the Roman courts, and finally impaled on a Roman cross. But the years go by, and there's the great burning of Jerusalem. Many of those who cried out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" died in the flames.

So when John sketches the future by picturing the harlot riding the beast and the ten horns, symbolic of the united kings of earth, he finishes by saying, "But they'll turn on the woman and rend her and burn her with fire." He's replaying what happened at the cross and what happened at the destruction of Jerusalem. So Calvary is the last of the symbols of the crisis yet to overtake the world. That's why it's so very important.

I can believe everything I've said and be a rabid, prejudiced, bigoted religionist with no gospel in me at all. So here's the most important point. The Antichrist most to fear is not Nimrod, he's dead and gone; there were plenty of Pharaohs around, but they've gone too; Haman was hanged; Caiaphas is no more. But there is an Antichrist nearer than breathing and closer than hands and feet. Some of us shave him every day. Martin Luther said, "I am more afraid of pope self than the man on the Tiber and all his cardinals."

Antichrist "Self" is the one to be most afraid of. If we can overcome him, the other will be no threat. But we all have an old nature, a sinful nature. It doesn't matter how long we've been Christians. By the mercies of God, I've been a Christian now for over fifty years, and I praise God for his mercy. I could never have found him, but he found me. But I confess I have an old nature that's as bad now as the day before I was converted. And I have to seek help every conscious hour of every day so that that old antichrist won't rise up and dominate me. And I fail too often.

Come back to Genesis 32 and read verse 24. Consider what it means for us as we contemplate the antichrist within, the one who gives us so many surprises. If you've never surprised yourself, you're very lacking in discernment. Most of us get more shocks from ourselves than anybody else. And an hour or two later, we say, "Was it me? Did I really? Maybe it was in a dream. Tell me it's not true!" But your spouse is there, and he or she will say, "It's true, right enough!"

We do indeed have an antichrist within that is more fearful to us than Haman or Pharaoh or Nimrod or Antiochus Epiphanes or any terrorist. There's an antichrist within who gives us many surprises and brings us much shame, because we all say lots of things we don't intend to say. Here I am in my seventies, and I still don't control my tongue enough. I still find myself saying things that I wish I had not said a split second later. That's the antichrist within. He is responsible for most of our troubles.

You and I try to fix on a few things, a few people, and a few situations and blame them. But we ourselves are responsible in most cases for most of our problems. The things that have hurt me the most have never been anything people have done to me. It's always been what I have done to myself. That's antichrist.

Now consider Genesis 32:24: *And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh. And Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." And Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." He said to him, "What's your name?" He said, 'Jacob [Supplanter].' Then he said, "Your name will no more be called Supplanter but Israel, [overcomer] for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." And Jacob asked him, 'Tell me your name, I pray.' He said, "Why is it you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, 'I have seen God. I have seen God face to face and yet my life was preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh.*

Think of the picture. First of all, you see Jacob fearing. He's scared to death. He's afraid he'll be dead by the next morning. Then we see him praying. A lot of people never pray until the hour of death. He's fearing, praying, and then he's wrestling. It's wrong to think that Jacob's wrestling with the man to get something from the man. No, it says the man wrestled with Jacob. The nightly visitor is out to get something from Jacob. But Jacob is a stubborn old critter. He's used to winning everything. He'd won against his brother; he'd won the birthright. He'd received his father's blessing. He'd won against Laban. Jacob was used to winning. The one man he trusted in the entire world was Jacob. He's always been an overcomer, and he wants to overcome this wrestler. And how gentle God is. He lets Jacob fight, and then He just touches the hollow of his thigh.

Notice the word "touch." It was just a slight touch. That's all it takes from God to humble us.

You know, microscopic bacteria are so small yet they have bacteria on top of them. And anyone of them can lay us low. In every human mouth, there are more bacteria than there are people on the whole globe. Every time you fly in an airplane, half of every breath you draw, someone else has already drawn - maybe several times.

I tell you, it only takes a touch. It doesn't matter how strong you are, how well you are, how good your health is. It doesn't matter. If you breathe in the wrong bacteria, are found in the wrong situation, it only takes just a touch.

So the wrestler touches Jacob. And now we find him clinging. Remember, he began with fearing, then he goes to praying, then he's wrestling, and now he's just clinging. To finish off Jacob, the Lord humbles him by reminding him of what his name means. Think what it would be like to be born with a name that means "cheat" or "crook!" That's what Jacob means - supplanter or rogue. What parent would do that to their child? But it was from the birth situation where he took hold of his brother's heel. Even in the womb he was trying to be a climber.

So the wrestler humbles Jacob by reminding him who he is. "Jacob, you're a cheat. Remember how you cheated your brother? Remember how you deceived your father? Remember how you robbed your uncle? Jacob, you've always trusted in

yourself, but you've always been a crook. Now is your chance to change. Look at my face." So now the place is called Peniel, the face of God.

How do we know that Jacob is now different? Because, from then on, wherever and whenever Jacob walked, he did so with a limp. You can tell whether a person is a God-conquered person by the way they walk. And, of course, I'm using the term as a metaphor. The book of Ephesians says, "Walk in love." Walk in humility.

Godly talk is cheap. The pulpit is called coward's castle. The kitchen is where it matters, as is the bedroom, the office, the mechanic's workplace, and the doctor in his surgery. That's where religion counts. Not godly talk, but godly walk is what matters. Jacob limped ever afterwards, and it showed he was a God-conquered man.

I wonder what people observe about us from the way we spend money, the way we talk, and what we think is funny. Goethe once said, "We reveal our character most fully in what we think is funny."

The walk tells whether we're God-dominated people. How do we address those nearest to us? It's not too hard to speak gently to people in business. It's profitable. It's not too hard to speak gently to kind neighbours, unless their cattle have broken through and eaten all our vegetables, because we want to get along with them. The test is how do we speak to the people in our house, in our home, in our family? That's the test - a godly walk, and not just godly talk.

Jacob was a God-dominated man after this. You notice how beautifully it says at the end that the sun rose upon him as he walked in the area of Peniel. The sun rose upon him. The Scripture says, "The path of the righteous is a shining light that shines more and more under the perfect day." If you and I will let ourselves be conquered by Christ, if we'll see him face to face, the more we will think of him, and the less we will think of ourselves. The more we think of ourselves, the less we think of him. It's simple, isn't it? Come to know him, wrestle with him in prayer, cling to him in prayer. That's what Christian living is - leaning in dependence on Jesus.

Remember, there's an old hymn we often used to sing: "Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms." That's what Christian experience is. If you're leaning on your own beauty, on your own talent, on your own wisdom, or on your own wealth, all that's combustible, it's a deception. There's only one place to lean, and that's upon Christ - not on your past record, which you could ruin in a moment.

Sometimes I envy Christians who die. I say, "Well, they're safe." You can go for a long time resisting evil, and then suddenly fall into the pit, unless you're living a life of trust.

You can't base your religion on one great act, and it's over. Faith is like breathing. It is a continual exercised attitude to Christ every day and in every way. We are never out of the necessity of exercising that attitude. We are never so far along the way that we don't have to trust anymore. It's a battle until the end.

But the sun rose upon Jacob as he limped. He'd learned to cling. He had learned to lean on the God who loved him.

Antichrist is no threat to people like him.

CHAPTER SIX

Antichrist in the Book of Daniel

Psalm 71:7, speaks of a thousand falling at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand. It is one of a medley of predictions about a final conflict between good and evil, often referred to as the battle of Armageddon. This battle will be the result of a polarisation of the world by Antichrist.

I want to briefly review some things from our last chapter. We noticed that in the first place in the Bible where the word is used, Antichrist is described as a genus as well as the final personification of evil. And the apostle John says, "You've heard that Antichrist is to come, but even now there are many antichrists." And from Genesis to Revelation, we have these antichrists of other times listed. Let us review them.

Think of Nimrod, whose name means "the rebel." He was the first king who tried to swallow up the whole world and have Babylon as its capitol. As he makes the tower of Babel in defiance of God who had told the people to scatter over the world, the Almighty looks at the earth and says, "Let us go down."

So Nimrod points to the final Antichrist who will try to swallow up the whole world. And on the verge of his apparent success, God will say, "Come, let us go down."

Then we thought of Pharaoh, who tried to destroy the people of God and who was ever tempting them to compromise about their desires to worship the one true Creator and King. He says, "Well, if you must worship, don't go out of the land, don't be too different." And when that's refused, he says, "Well, just you men go. Leave your wives and children." And when that's refused, he says, "But at least don't take anything to sacrifice. Leave all your flocks and herds here." And do you remember the response of Moses? "Not one hoof will be left behind."

That is a beautiful picture of the contrast between those who bow down to Antichrist and compromise in their religion, and those who don't. Everyone wants some religion. Even atheism is a religion. But the distinction between the believer in Antichrist and the believer in the true Christ is that the believer in the true Christ crowns Christ, Lord of all, Lord of everything. "Not a hoof shall be left behind."

Then we thought of Goliath, the representative of the Philistines, meeting with David and how he was slain with his own sword. And so Christ, by death, destroyed him that had the power of death.

We thought of Absalom, a beautiful and yet awful symbol of the first great Antichrist, because the Bible refers to Satan as the primary Antichrist. Absalom, like Lucifer, was perfect in beauty, not marred in any way from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. But Absalom rejects David, the one who gave him life, and aspires to take his throne. He rebels against him, and, finally, dies on a tree, suspended between heaven and earth. This is typical of the Calvary cross that would destroy the devil. And then you remember David's cry, "Oh, Absalom! My son! My son! Would God I had died for thee. Oh, Absalom, my son!" This is a wonderful portrayal of the love of God for those who don't respond.

Then there was Haman, who in the days of Queen Esther tried to wipe out all the Jews. And he ends up on a tree, a gallows, suspended between heaven and earth, like Christ on the Cross.

These are cryptic, mysterious symbols of Calvary, which event was intended to wipe out the Son of God but only bruised his heel and crushed the serpent's head. So Haman is on a gallows, suspended, and Absalom is on a tree, suspended.

Calvary itself points to the very final conflict, where we see the religious leaders of the race, the Jews, allying themselves with the political leaders of the race and throwing Christ into great tribulation, from which God finally delivers him.

Now we're going to look at the book of Daniel. You can't understand the New Testament without the book of Daniel, and you can't understand the book of Daniel without understanding the theme of Antichrist. The major New Testament passages about Antichrist all come from the book of Daniel. This is the only book in the Old Testament on which Christ put his finger and said, "Make sure you understand it." But all that most people know about Daniel was that he was once in a den of lions.

It's been my privilege to study Daniel for over fifty-five years. In the year 1947, I began to write on it. And, after a while, in the merciful providence of God, I put down my pen and didn't take it up again on that topic for twenty-six years although I was studying it continuously. And then some of you may remember my book with a lion on the black cover, with the word *Daniel* printed in Hebrew in silver lettering, and published by Southern Publishing Association. A few years ago, because that book was out of print, I incorporated the best of it with a lot of extra material in the book *Daniel and the Coming King*.

I want to give you the cream of that half a century of study on Daniel as an introduction to our understanding of Antichrist. You must understand Daniel to understand Antichrist. You must understand Daniel to know what's coming on the world. So here's a very quick review of the book of Daniel.

Every chapter of the book promises ultimate vindication and deliverance of those who were faithful in the midst of heathenism. That word "vindication" is a synonym for justification. Wherever those words are found in Bible translations, they come from the same original Hebrew or Greek word. So vindication and justification are synonyms. And this is important, because the book of Daniel begins with a series of stories, and in each story the faithful are vindicated or justified. The stories illustrate the central meaning of justification. The central meaning of justification is not who is righteous but who is in the right. And so the saints, who are treated as dirt, are ultimately declared righteous by God because they are in the right.

The heart of religion lies there. However long you've been a Christian, you're not very righteous in yourself. But if you've taken the side of Christ, you are in the right and you are justified.

Each chapter contains the motif of trial and trouble, climaxed by elevation and glory. The good news that tribulation results in blessing for those obedient to Yahweh is continually sounded forth.

- Chapter one, the remnant of Israel are tested over their fidelity to the law of God. Those who are faithful are promoted to the palace of the king.
- Chapter two, the wise among God's people survive the threat of death and prove themselves superior to those who claim that they are the real people of God.
- In chapter three, the people of God are ordered to bow down to an image, and they refuse and they're thrown into the fiery furnace of suffering. But they are delivered and vindicated.
- In chapter four, a boastful king is humbled, and the saint of God who foretold his destiny is elevated.
- In chapter five, a great king is humbled, and Babylon falls. Daniel, the saint, is honoured.
- In chapter six, we have the first example of the next kingdom, which is Medo-Persia, and Daniel is thrown into the lion's den but survives.

Then we begin the prophetic chapters in detail. There's been one prophetic chapter before in story form, Daniel two, about a great image.

- In chapter seven, four great beasts come up from the sea. Ten horns are on the fourth one, and out of the ten comes a little horn that speaks very great things. It blasphemes, boasts, and persecutes.
- In the eighth chapter, you have the same little horn treading down the sanctuary of God.
- In the ninth chapter, we read about Calvary, when sin would be made an end of, when everlasting righteousness would be brought in. All the visions and all the prophecies of the Scripture would be fulfilled, and the Most Holy would be anointed.
- In the tenth chapter, you have the introduction to the final predictions of the book about the willful king, who, at the time of the end, will storm over the world to destroy all those that worship the true God.

That's a synopsis of the book of Daniel. It begins with stories, and it ends with prophecies. But, now, here are the keys to the book. The first key is found in the opening verses: "*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand with some of the vessels of the house of God, and he brought them to the land of Shinar, the house of his God, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his God.*"

Please note. Two cities are mentioned. Babylon and Jerusalem. Two kings are mentioned - the king of Babylon and the king of Jerusalem. The book opens with conflict between the king of Babylon and the people of Jerusalem. That's the theme of the whole book. In every Bible book, the key lies at the door. The introduction to every Bible book is the hint, the clue, and the elucidation in thesis, in principle, of what's to follow.

So the rest of Daniel expands the thought here at the beginning, which is the war between heathenism and the worship of the true God; the war between Babylon and Jerusalem. And the sanctuary that's mentioned here is the symbol of the kingdom of God and the symbol of the people of God. The Babylonian heathen hosts tread it down, and it looks as though everything that's good and noble and true has gone to the wall. That's how the book begins.

And all the way through, that theme is developed. It is the conflict between good and evil. God's people are always apparently underneath.

But at the end of this chapter, we find Daniel and his fellow Jews exalted. They pass a special test and a special examination, and they're found wiser than all the wise men of Babylon. So chapter one ends with the exaltation, the vindication, and the justification of the despised. That's the first clue to the book, the opening verses.

The second clue to the book I've already mentioned; the stories are the key to the prophecies. It took me nearly thirty years to wake up to that simple fact. The stories are the keys to the prophecies.

Every theme you find in the visions of prediction is found first in the stories. Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius are all idolaters. They're all persecutors, and they're all blasphemers. So the wicked kings of the stories portray Antichrist.

And Daniel and his fellow Jews who are faithful to the law of God, represent the people of God in all ages that refuse to bow to Pharaoh, to Goliath, to Haman, to Nimrod, to Antiochus Epiphanes, to Caiaphas and Pilate.

So the stories are the clue. A key word of the stories is the word "deliver." In chapter three, the king says, "Bow down to that image or else you'll be burnt to cinders. Who is that God that can *deliver* you?" And they reply, "O king, we're not afraid to answer you. Our God whom we serve is able to *deliver* us." And at the end of the chapter the king gives a proclamation, "No other God can *deliver* like this."

When you come to chapter six, it's similar. Daniel is thrown into the den because he won't worship according to the idolatrous rites of heathenism. And the king is troubled, because he knows Daniel is a good man. He comes down in the morning and says, "Daniel, is thy God whom you serve continually able to *deliver* you?" Daniel replies, "My God has shut the lions' mouths. He has *delivered* me."

It's very interesting the way that chapter finishes. Daniel is taken up out of the lions' den without a scar, but the men responsible for his going in have their bones broken before they hit the ground when they're thrown into the same den. This is symbolic of the fate of the wicked, a little symbol of the deliverance of the saints.

So here's the key word "deliver" in the stories, but when you come to the final prophecy, Antichrist is seen surging over the land. And then it says, "And at that time thy people shall be *delivered*" (Daniel 12:1).

So the stories typify the great crisis at the end of the world, which will be over religion when church and state unite. And the stories promise that although there will be martyrdoms, the great bulk of God's people will be delivered in the final crisis.

We've looked at two clues in the opening verses and the stories. There's another clue in the first prophecy. In Daniel two, the king has a dream of a great image with different metals - gold, silver, brass, and iron - and the feet are made of iron and clay. And, as he watches it, a stone cut out without hands smites the image at the feet. The image topples, smashed to smithereens, and the stone becomes a great mountain.

This prophecy, the first of the prophecies, is also a key to the book. Like the whole book, it includes Aramaic and Hebrew in the writing of it. Like the whole book, it has story and prediction. Like the whole book, it's telling about the boastfulness and the idolatry of those that don't know God and their ultimate destruction. Like the rest of the book it makes Christ prominent.

You have increasing deterioration in the image, from gold to silver, silver to brass, and brass to iron; and then an unnatural combination of iron and clay in the feet and toes, which points forward to that which the book of Revelation will expand. The final unnatural combination on earth of religious and political powers is symbolised by the iron and clay in that story.

The stone that smites the image is a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ. Seven times in the Bible, he's called the rock. And you remember Christ, quoting this chapter, said, "Whoever falls on this rock will be broken, but upon whomsoever it shall fall, he'll be ground to pieces." What it's saying is that the only real option we have in life, once we're launched on the conveyor belt at birth, is whether we will crown Jesus, King of kings, Lord of lords, and have our old nature broken. If not, at his coming, in mercy, we are ground to powder, because no one can go to heaven that doesn't take heaven with him or her. None can enter a new world without a new heart.

The stone smiting the image, as interpreted by Jesus, is a symbol of him, upon whom we must fall to have our old nature, our selfishness, our pride broken, or we will be broken at his coming because we're not ready for heaven.

So the first verses, the stories, the first prophecy - these are the keys.

But now let us examine the most important key. Would you look with me, please, at Daniel 8:13 and 14. The prophecies are in concentric circles, they cover the same ground. Seven repeats two. It has four beasts instead of four metals. Instead of ten toes, it has ten horns. Eight will repeat seven, with this difference: that it's written after Babylon has fallen. It also has the little horn doing the same work as the little horn in chapter seven, where it is blasphemous, persecuting, and idolatrous.

Look at the climax in Daniel 8:13 and 14: *Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one that spoke, 'For how long is the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and the host will be trampled underfoot?' And he said to him. "Until 2300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be justified."*

Some versions have it "and then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." That's the old translation that is no longer used. More modern ones have it "and then the sanctuary will be restored" or "then the sanctuary will be vindicated," or "then the sanctuary will be justified." The Hebrew word means "justified" and can be translated "vindicated."

What's this all about? This is the climax of all the symbolic prophecies of Daniel. After this, no symbolic prophecies. It's all straight forward. Never again in Daniel will you read of beasts and horns and that sort of thing. This is the climax of the final symbolic presentation of Daniel.

What's it talking about? Well, the Jews understood it, and most commentators for more than two thousand years have understood it, as pointing to a crisis when the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, invaded the Jewish temple, set up an idol, poured pig's broth over the furniture, commanded the Jews to worship the false God, forbade the keeping of their law, forbade Sabbath-keeping, and ordered them to carry the ivy leaf on their hands and arms. The Syrians murdered forty thousand who wouldn't surrender.

So most commentators, for thousands of years, have said that this was the first fulfilment. But when Christ came, he quoted this prophecy and applied it to the future. He said, "When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the temple, in the holy place...." (Matthew 24:15).

After that, in the book of Revelation, the same language is used in chapter eleven about treading down the sanctuary, and it's applied beyond AD 70.

So early Christians came to understand this climax to the symbolic prophecies of Daniel as pointing first to a crisis before the First Advent when Judaism was nearly wiped out. It was the most important event that had happened since the Exodus. If Antiochus had succeeded, there would be no Christ; there would be no Christian church. It was an attempt to wipe out all of Judaism - Satan's attempt to destroy Israel so the Messiah couldn't come.

But Christians, after having the whole of Scripture, said that all this was symbolic of later fulfilments, like concentric circles, becoming bigger and bigger. What Antiochus did against the sanctuary and the people of God, is what the Caesars did when they burned the temple and threw the Christians to the lions.

And then, in later years, when the union of church and state dominated kings and millions during the Middle Ages, Christians said this prophecy of Daniel has yet a bigger fulfilment. Don't forget that, according to some historians, fifty million Christians were burned at the stake or murdered in some other way because of the union of church and state that followed the fall of Rome and lasted down until about the seventeenth century.

To say this is not to condemn any existing denomination. Millions of Roman Catholics are just as vehement as Protestants in repudiating what took place in those centuries. So we must not use this history to damn any existing denomination.

It's true that in the history of Roman Catholicism there was terrible, bloody persecution of millions, but never forget that when the United States of America was established, the only safe place for Catholics was Maryland, because Protestants killed them elsewhere.

You see the human nature of Protestants and Catholics is identical. Without Christ, we can all do devilish things. There's no difference. A fluke of birth determines whether we're WASPs or something else. There's no merit in it.

But we must think of what happened during the Middle Ages. There was no religious freedom. People were not allowed to read the Bible. Salvation was based on works, and the only way to get it was to obey the church in everything.

It's very interesting that, recently, Roman Catholic scholars, endorsed by the Pope, have agreed with Martin Luther's main thesis of justification by faith alone. This is very significant.

Now, of course, all that's associated with that change has not yet been spelled out. The Roman Catholic view of justification was this: By partaking of the sacraments and the mass, medicinally, Christ came within to perfect you, and then God recognised you as perfect because you partook of the sacraments and He declared what was so.

That's not the biblical meaning at all. The biblical meaning is, God declares us righteous, though in ourselves we're not. Otherwise, we're all done for. Everybody here has committed the greatest possible sin that's possible to commit.

"Oh," you say, "not me. I've never committed adultery, I haven't murdered anybody, I'm not a thief." No, no. Those sins are nothing compared with the greater sin, which we've all committed.

What's the greatest commandment? Love the Lord thy God with all your heart - all, not half of it - your entire mind, all your soul. And who of us has ever kept it? None of us has. We've all committed the greatest of all possible sins. We have violated the greatest commandment. We've never given God everything from our first breath. So our only hope is salvation by faith through grace because of the blood of Christ.

So what happened in the Middle Ages was an amplification of what happened in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, when false worship was imposed, when people were murdered who didn't succumb to it, and when the mercy and love of God were eclipsed. But the consummation of Antichrist is yet future and will be revealed as the world totters under cataclysmic threats and tragedies.

I want to tell you a great story. Some of you have read it, but you need to read it again. I have read it at least twelve to fourteen times. It's the story told in the *Brothers Karamasov* by Dostoyevsky. It's the story of the Grand Inquisitor. If you can understand this story, you can understand what the Bible is teaching about Antichrist.

It's the fifteenth century, and we're in Spain, in the city of Seville. We're there on a day after the martyrdom of a hundred heretics to the glory of God. The burning of the hundred took place before the king, the cardinals, the knights, and all the beautiful women of the city. But on this particular day, Christ comes down to Seville in Spain. He didn't come in glory. He's robed as humbly as when he first appeared among men. But everyone recognises him. There's a compassion, a sweet sympathy that beams from his brow and eye, and everyone feels it.

So, soon, the children are crying, "Hosanna!" And people kneel before him. But then a blind man says, "If it's you, heal my sight so I can see you." And Christ makes a gesture, and the man can see. At that very moment, they are approaching the cathedral, and a coffin of a little girl who has recently died is being carried in, and the mother is weeping.

And the crowd says to the mother, "He could raise her. He raised the girl of old."

She says, "If it's you, raise my daughter." And so, again, Christ says what he'd said fifteen centuries before.

He hovers over the coffin and says, "Little girl, arise!" She's covered with flowers. They see her stand up with roses in her hand.

At that moment, the grand inquisitor comes by. He's no longer in the regalia he had worn when he was martyring the hundred unbelievers to the glory of God. He's dressed as a simple monk. But as he sees Christ and the raising of the girl, his brows knit, and his face takes on a stern aspect. He's nearly 90 years of age, but he's erect, dominant, regal, and he's angry. He just points a finger at Christ, and the guards move in among the crowd and lay hold of Christ. Christ does not resist. The people do nothing to help him. Rather, they make way for the guards. They are like sheep.

So Christ is hustled into a closed, narrow, stuffy dungeon at the centre of the inquisition. And that night in the pitch darkness, the grand inquisitor comes alone. He has with him a small light. And when he opens the door, he sets the light down, and he looks at Christ and says nothing for several minutes.

Then he says, "Is it you or is it some semblance? Regardless, I shall burn you tomorrow. And the people you saw who kissed your hand and the earth on which you trod, they'll heap up the embers of the fire. Why have you come? Have you come to hinder us? You came fifteen centuries ago and offered mankind a gift they didn't want. You offered them freedom and truth. You said, 'I'll make you free.' But people can't tolerate truth. Don't you know that? People can't bear to be free. Don't you understand that? But we, we the church, have lifted that burden from them. We've given the people happiness. We've become their conscience. We've made it easy. We've permitted them to sin and said we'd take the responsibility. And to us they have spilled the inmost sinful secrets of their hearts. We've made them happy. We've made salvation easy. They just have to do what we tell them."

And he looks at Christ again. "How could it be that fifteen hundred years ago you didn't take the easy way to men's hearts? You offered them what they couldn't tolerate - the responsibility of choice between good and evil. Weak people can't handle that. Do you remember when that dread spirit - that spirit of non-being - tempted you in the wilderness? Just imagine if all the books about it had perished, and we had to gather together the sages of earth to reconstruct what happened that day. Do you realise that the three questions raised in the temptation in the wilderness sum up the whole history of mankind and make plain all the abnormalities and intricacies of the human soul?"

"If we found the wisest men on earth, and those words had perished, they could never put them together so well. For, on that day, the dread spirit raised the biggest issue of humanity - the issue of bread. Don't offer them pie in the sky. Give them bread now, for men and women want things they can feel. They want things they can taste, and they will worship anyone who gives them the tangible and the material.

"But you've pointed them to God who was unseen. You asked of them faith, and who can manifest faith? That's only for the

very strong. You refused to work a miracle. But don't you know? Weak people love miracles. They only turn to God in the hope that he'll work miracles for them, to solve their problems, their problems of home and family, of romance and business. That's the only reason they want God, because they want miracles, the miraculous. And you refused to work a miracle. And when you were on the cross, and the crowd said, 'Come down that we may believe in you,' you refused to do it. You wouldn't win men's homage by a miracle. How could you be so foolish? We, the church, have traded in miracles."

And the grand inquisitor goes on to say, "You wouldn't throw yourself down, because that called for a miracle. You knew that had you moved one step, you'd have been crushed to pieces by the earth you came to redeem. So you wouldn't work a miracle. But we have worked them. And then when Satan offered you all the kingdoms of this world, you turned it down. But we've accepted it. We've taken the sword of Caesar. We inherited Rome. Nine centuries ago, when the empire disintegrated, we took over. And we've given the people happiness. We've let them sin and said we'd atone for it. We told them when to marry and when not to marry, when to have children and when not to have children. But they've been happy. They've been like little children, just doing what they're told."

"Of course, there have always been rebels," says the grand inquisitor. "And we know as the time goes by and they learn more about science, they'll try to dispense with us and build a tower of Babel again. But they'll fail, and there'll be slaughter and there'll be terrible suicides. And the rest of the cringing weak masses will come to us, and they'll splatter our feet with the blood they've shed. And they'll cry for us to take over, because they can't control the world. There will be blood from one end to the other."

He looks more closely at Christ. "Don't you understand? All human beings have, as their main desires, these three things: mystery, miracle, and authority. And you wouldn't give them any of them. You wouldn't make salvation dependent on any of them. The only miracles you worked were to point them to faith and hope and love, whereas our miracles point to bread. Don't you know human beings want to be like a great unanimous anthill? They demand worship, because it's not enough to be. There has to be a reason for being. So even weak human beings must worship, but they want someone to take over their conscience. They don't want to have to make decisions about right and wrong. It's heavier than they can bear. And they want everybody to be in it because then they feel safe. They want the whole world to be in the same worship. Then they'll feel secure. And we will tempt them when they come to us and splatter our feet with their blood of the wars they fought as sciences increased. We'll ride the beast. We'll have the cup that carries the word 'mystery.' And we'll lure them with promises of heaven and eternity."

"But when they'll die, that will be it. If there is anything after death, they won't deserve it. But according to your book, there will be some raised from the dead, but only a few. We've given happiness to millions. You're only going to get a few. How could you be so foolish? But perhaps you just came for the elect. Perhaps you'll only save the elect. We can't understand that. That's a mystery. But if you can have a mystery, we can have a mystery. And people love our mysteries because it makes it easy to live. It means no stress, no strain in spiritual matters, no demand for hope, no demand for faith, and no demand for love. We abolish sin in practical terms. No need for faith, hope, or love."

And again he looks at Christ. "I don't love you."

He sees that Christ is looking upon him mildly, without any anger, and he can't stand it. He wants Christ to speak with bitterness. He wants Christ to condemn him, and to damn him, but Christ says nothing. And the inquisitor says, "I was once on your side. I lived on herbs and roots and locusts in the wilderness. I grew tired of waiting for you to come back. I took the other side, and I'm glad. Why don't you say something?"

And all Christ does is to step close to the grand inquisitor, this old man of 90. He kisses him gently on the forehead. And the inquisitor staggers and trembles. Suddenly, he goes to the door of the dungeon and flings it open, and he lets Christ move out into the dim alleys beyond. And the kiss glows in his heart like a fire, but he clings to everything he has said.

Now, if you understand that story by Dostoyevsky, you understand the essence of Antichrist. Antichrist realises that we are very weak, and the burden of having to live by faith and exercise hope and to love the unlovely is impossible, unless the divine Christ indwells us. So Antichrist offers us substitutes. He offers to make the religious decisions for us. And he will remove our concerns about guilt. He will tempt us with heaven and eternity, but believing there's nothing beyond anyway, and even if there were, we wouldn't deserve it. This is the essence of the Antichrist story.

Of what importance is this to us? Well, there is a coming conflict where we will need to be on the right side. But there's something more pressing. The real Antichrist is Antichrist Self, the person I shave every day, the person whose hair you comb every day. This is the Antichrist of our sinful nature, which gives us so many surprises, which brings us so much shame, and is responsible for most of our troubles. It's not our neighbour, not God, and not the devil, but the Antichrist within, which is responsible for most of our problems.

Now follow very closely. The climax of the symbolic prophecies of Daniel, is found in the words "unto 2300 evenings and mornings, then shall the sanctuary be justified." It was approximately that length of time from when Antiochus, the Syrian king, desolated Judaism till the Maccabees, the heroes of the land, retook the sanctuary and re-dedicated it.

In John 10:22, it says that Jesus kept that festival, the Feast of Dedication, called Hanukkah. Hanukkah was the event that took place 2300 evenings and mornings, about 1260 days or so, after the defilement of the sanctuary. All this prefigures the greater manifestation of Antichrist -what Pagan Rome did, what Europe during the Middle Ages did, and the final Antichrist will yet do.

Now, in the next chapter, we are told the meaning of the vindication or the justification of the sanctuary. Would you look with me, please, at Daniel 9:24?

Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people in your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for inequity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint the most holy.

Here are six of the greatest promises of the Bible, telling how God would undo the work of Antichrist. Remember, the chief

Antichrist is the devil, who brought sin into the world. Three of these six promises are put positively, and three are put negatively.

The positives are: 1. finishing the transgression; 2. putting an end to sin; and 3. atoning for iniquity. And here are the negatives: 4. to bring in everlasting righteousness; 5. to seal vision and prophet; and 6. to anoint the most holy.

Consider the words, "bring in everlasting righteousness." That word "righteousness" comes from the Hebrew root translated "cleansed, vindicated, justified," in Daniel 8:14. Daniel 8:14 was not only a prediction of how the Jewish temple would be cleansed at Hanukkah by the Maccabees, but also it pointed to the cross of Christ.

The sanctuary is a symbol of the kingdom of God and the people of the kingdom. And your greatest need and mine is to be justified, to be right in the sight of God. We're all temporal beings. We don't have long here. We are like a breeze that blows for a while and then is gone. That's it. Our greatest need is to be right with God, to be justified.

Daniel 9:24 talks about how God will bring in everlasting righteousness. It's nothing I could achieve; it's nothing I can earn; it's nothing I can win; and it's nothing I deserve. It had to be brought in by the Messiah. It talks about him here. The Messiah, the Prince, is mentioned in this passage. He's the one that brings in everlasting righteousness.

The question for us is: "Has it happened to me?" Literally, the Hebrew reads, "Shut up sin, seal up iniquity, and cover up transgression." That is: shut up, seal up, and cover up. The question is for me: Has it happened? Has sin in my life been shut up and confined?

I'm not saying, "Are we perfect?" I'm saying sin mustn't be on the throne of the life. There aren't any perfect people. The New Testament says, "In many things we all offend." But the issue is: Has sin been removed from the throne of our lives? That's the important thing. How do we live?

This morning I read a great story, which I received by email. Back in the sixties, when things were difficult racially, there was a terrible storm in a big city in Tennessee. A car broke down, and a black lady was standing outside, getting drenched. There was some emergency on, so she hailed the first car. Miraculously, it stopped. A young white man got out, not particularly well-dressed, and he only had an old car. But he said to the black woman, "Come on, get in. I'll take you somewhere where you can get a mechanic to come out and fix your car, and I'll get a taxi for you to go home."

And so he took her, and before she left him, she asked for his name and address. Some days later, he received a letter of thanks from the black woman. It was signed Mrs. Martin Luther King.

Today's mystery is tomorrow's history. Today is a gift. Maybe that's why it's called the present. Today is the only day we ever have to do anything for people. Today is the only day we ever have to reveal whether God has come in and given us the gift of everlasting righteousness. It makes us different people.

A little boy years ago went into a café and sat down at a table. The waitress couldn't be bothered with a young kid, but it was her job. He asked, "How much are the flavoured sundaes?"

She replied, "They're fifty cents."

"Oh," he said. "How much are the plain ones?"

"Thirty-five cents." She's very brusque; she wants to move on to another table where she'll get a tip.

The boy said, "I'll just have a plain one, thanks."

So he paid for it with a fifty-cent piece, and she gave him back the fifteen cents change. And he ate the plain ice cream. After he left, she went to the table to clear the dish and saw under the plate a nickel and a dime (15 cents). The kid had turned down the flavoured ice cream so he could give her a tip.

She couldn't be bothered with him; but he was thinking of her.

If God has declared us righteous, it will become apparent in the way we live. It will be most of all apparent to those who live near us. It's very easy to be saintly to people who only see you once a year. I feel quite secure when I travel long distance. But the people that live with you know you. The people you see every day, they know.

Christ as well as Antichrist is in this book of Daniel. Daniel prefigures him. There's no sin recorded against Daniel. He was a prince of the house of Judah. He was prepared to be faithful unto death. Ultimately, he was the deliverer of his people.

Yes, Christ is prefigured in Daniel. Christ is prefigured in the stone that smote the image. He's the Rock of Ages. Christ is Michael, who comes down to deliver his people.

Christ is the Son of man in Daniel 7. In Daniel 7, you see Antichrist, a nasty, vicious little horn making itself God; but in contrast, you see God making himself man, the Son of man.

Christ is there in Daniel 3 as the Son of God who comes down with the Hebrews in the furnace. God is always with us in the furnace.

Life has lots of furnaces. We'll never get beyond them in this life. If it's not one thing, it will be another. Life is a series of one trouble after another, especially as one gets older. But Christ is with us in the furnace, and the flames destroy only our bonds. The reference to the Son of God is a reference to him. It's only as we see Christ that we can become like him.

There is a sense in which the whole book of Daniel points forward to the cross of Christ. When it talks about the great atonement, making an end of sin, and bringing in everlasting righteousness.

Daniel 9: 24 uses five Hebrew terms. They are only found in one other chapter of the Bible - Leviticus 16. That chapter is about the great day of the Atonement, which pointed to Calvary. Some people think the great Day of Atonement points to an event in the nineteenth century. But, the great day of *the* atonement can only point to *the* Atonement, which happened on

Calvary. There was no sacrifice in the nineteenth century. So those five terms (sins, transgressions, iniquities, atonement, and most holy) are about the cross. That's where Christ made an end of sin and brought in everlasting righteousness.

Now I want to finish our meditation with some of the most profound words I've ever read: "*The Christ of the cross and the cross of Christ are the key to the world and its measure. At Calvary, we find the great lesson as to how to view the world and to deal with it. The cross puts its estimate upon everything we see or experience, on all that seems good or evil, upon promotions or demotions, upon pleasures, excitements, trials, sorrows, sufferings, rivalries, and the triumphs of mortals. The cross gives meaning to the shifting experiences of life, to all its sorrows, all its temptations, all its trials. The cross brings things together and gives a consistency to everything that seemed aimless, purposeless, and untoward. At the cross we find the tone into which all the sirens of the world's music must ultimately be resolved. At the cross we learn how to live and how to die. It is a superficial view to say that this life was made for pleasure. Those that look underneath the surface have a different tale to tell. The truth rarely lies on the surface. The world just looks right, but at the cross we find the glory and the splendour that will outlast everything else. Therefore, do not give the world your heart; do not give the world your trust. Never begin with the world. Begin with faith in Christ.*

Only those who put the kingdom of God first can enjoy this world. The only ones who can really use this world are the ones who don't abuse it. The only ones who can really feast in this world are the ones who have first fasted. And the only ones who will inherit this world are those who realise it is only a shadow of the world to come and for that world to come, are prepared to relinquish this one." (Author unknown).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Antichrist in the Gospels and the Epistles

In our study of what the Bible says about the end of the world, we must constantly keep in mind that the events surrounding the First Advent of Christ are, in many ways, a microcosm of those to come prior to the Second Advent.

Consider, for example, the prediction in Revelation 16:13-16: *"Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.*

They are the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."

Here in symbolic form the final crisis of earth is pictured. The entire world except Christ's little flock will be led by wicked spirits under Satan's control to war against God by attacking his church. This is the same event predicted at the close of Daniel 11, and in Joel 3, Zechariah 14, and Ezekiel 38 and 39. Satan, of course, is the chief Antichrist, but he will work through governments and apostate religious systems to do his will.

Every living soul is to be spirit-filled. The majority will have the spirits of devils, and the minority the Spirit of God. God's original purpose was that each one of us should be a tabernacle for the indwelling Holy Spirit. When God breathed into man at Creation the breath of life, the Hebrew word used there is the word sometimes used for spirit, and the breath that activated man physically and mentally was symbolic of the God who was dwelling within him until he sinned. When he sinned, he died spiritually, and the Spirit departed. So, millennia later, Christ could say to Nicodemus, "Unless the Spirit again comes into a man, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

So, the purpose for your existence and mine is that we might be temples of the indwelling Spirit of God. If we continually reject the invitation to have that experience, the alternative is that we'll be possessed by another spirit, the spirit of Antichrist.

Antichrist in the Gospels

Have you ever wondered why it is that the Gospels are so filled with references to demons, devils, and demon possession? You don't find that in the books of the Old Testament, and you don't find that following the Gospels and Acts. Only at the launching of the Christian church do you find it. And the reason is plain. As new power descended from on High, when God came down to walk among men, new power came up from beneath to oppose it.

We know that at the beginning of time that old serpent called the devil and Satan appeared to contest God in Eden. But when Christ came down, the demons were multiplied. And, repeatedly, you read about them in the records. Once more, that old serpent came down at the Temptation to taunt Christ for forty days.

When Satan possessed the heart of Judas fully, it was after Christ had washed his feet. Following this ministration of love, John 13 says that when Jesus gave the "sop," the special morsel, as a last gesture of affection, to Judas, then Satan entered into him.

Satan becomes the representative of the Jewish nation, who at the trial of Christ called out, "We have no king but Caesar! Crucify him! Crucify him!" Christ had earlier said to them, "Your house is left unto you desolate!" And he had told the story of what happens to a desolate house. Ultimately, seven wicked spirits - in other words, a completeness of evil - come in to occupy that house. And that's what happened to Israel. Today, the important thing for us to know is that what happened to Israel in the last days of its history before the cross is what will happen to the Gentile world in the last days of its experience. The New Testament says that the gospel was first preached to Israel, to the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles. So judgment came to the Jews first with the destruction of Jerusalem. But the same thing that happened to Judaism will happen to the Gentile world. Jewish human nature is no different from Gentile human nature.

If we resist and refuse the supreme privilege of having God dwell in us to motivate us, move us, and empower us, then the other spirit will fill us. There's no neutrality. Neutrality is impossible. When Pilate's wife sent him the message, "Have nothing to do with that just man," she was asking an impossibility. You either have to be for Christ or against him. You cannot have nothing to do with him. Christ says, "He that doesn't gather with me, scatters abroad." "He that's not with me is against me." There can be no neutrality about the supreme gifts of Christ and the gospel.

And so we find that demon possession a very prominent thing, and Satan himself appears when the power of heaven came down in a special way at the First Advent. And Judas in the Gospels is the symbol of Antichrist at the end of time. For three and a half years or forty two months, he's working signs and wonders, he's pretending to serve God, he's a prominent religious leader, but, ultimately, he betrays God for thirty pieces of silver. He was a type of Antichrist, who in the last days is a religious figure, a false prophet, with three-and-a-half years of working signs and wonders, but really betraying God.

And when Christ made that cryptic statement about "when you see the Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place," that prophecy had its first fulfilment in his own experience. When Judas came into the garden at Gethsemane, the holy place of prayer, he came with his mark, with his sign - "the one that I kiss, he's the one" - he betrays Christ with a kiss in the holy place. So in Revelation 13, Antichrist has a mark or sign as he opposes Christ.

The word "abomination" to the Jews meant "idolatry." Judas is called a covetous man, and covetousness in the New Testament is said to be idolatry. So the prediction about the Abomination of Desolation, the idolatrous Roman armies that would come into the holy place of Jerusalem and destroy the city, first had a minor fulfilment in what happened in the holy

place of prayer when Judas, the idolater, came to betray Christ with a kiss.

That whole scene points forward to the end of the world, when there will be a religious sign again. The word "worship" in Greek means, "to kiss" or "to kiss the hand." When you see Judas kissing Christ as the sign of the betrayal, it points to Revelation 13, where the Antichrist has a sign of false worship as he betrays God through false religion. It is a sign of lawlessness.

So in the gospel story, Antichrist is present - first, Satan in the temptation, and then as he works through Judas and Caiaphas.

Antichrist in Second Thessalonians

Most Bible commentators think 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 is the most difficult passage in the whole Bible to interpret except for the Abomination of Desolation in Matthew 24:15. Both difficult passages refer to the same thing - Antichrist!

Here is Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4: *Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*

Some versions have "apostasy" for "rebellion," and that's fine. The Greek word is "apostasia." It's a word that can signify declension from the faith or it can mean a rebellion.

So that day, the Second Coming, won't happen until there's a great apostasy and the man of lawlessness is revealed. Some of your versions have "the man of sin." The Greek word is "lawlessness," or "anomia." It's used in this passage four times. The thing that characterises this representative of the devil is lawlessness. "The son of perdition" - that word "perdition" in the Greek is akin to the word for "desolation" in Matthew 24:15 - the Abomination of Desolation. It could be rendered the Abomination of Perdition. It's the same idea here - the one "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship." Because of his lawlessness, anarchy and terrorism will always be smouldering beneath society.

All the characteristics in this chapter about Antichrist are taken from Daniel. You'll notice that the words that we've just read about opposing and exalting himself come from Daniel 11:36: *And the king shall do according to his will. He will exalt himself and magnify himself above every god and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. And he shall prosper until the indignation is accomplished, for what is determined shall be done. He'll give no heed to the gods of his fathers, nor to the one beloved by women. He'll not give heed to any god, for he'll magnify himself above all. And he'll honour the god of forces.*

He'll use force, brutality, and cruelty. And the final verses picture him as sweeping over the whole earth. Notice in verse 44: *"Tidings from the east and north shall alarm him. He'll go forth with great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many."* The word used for "destroy many" is the Hebrew word for "anathematise," separate from the protection of law. That is mostly what Revelation 13 talks about. "Whoever would not worship the beast should be killed."

So here's Antichrist, who exalts himself above every god, uses force, and sweeps over the world. And then, in the last verses of the chapter, it says he'll pitch his palatial tent between the sea and the glorious holy mountain, yet he'll come to his end with none to help him.

Thus Daniel pictures Jerusalem, the glorious holy mountain, being surrounded between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. All the armies of Antichrist menace Jerusalem, which is a symbol for the church of God in New Testament times. All the things of Israel in the New Covenant times apply to spiritual Israel.

So here's a foretelling that Antichrist in the last days will sweep over the world, exalt himself, elevate himself, magnify himself, use force, consign to death, anathematise, and surround the church to destroy it.

Come back to 2 Thessalonians 2, which has just quoted from Daniel's ancient prediction. Most of your Bibles will have in the margin, alongside verse 4, Daniel 11:36. So let's continue reading verse 4 again: "Who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God." The word "temple" here is "*naos*," so it means the inner shrine. It means the holy of holies. It means the most sacred spot conceivable. It's not a term that was used for the whole temple complex, with the two apartments and the courtyard. This is the word for the inner shrine within the veil. He takes his place there, where the Shekinah was, the gleam of glory that represented the presence of God.

Antichrist pretends to be God. That's the meaning of the passage. He pretends to be God. Now read on: *Don't you remember when I was still with you I told you this, and now you know what hinders him, what's restraining him, so he may be revealed in his time. But the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he's out of the way. Then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth, destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan, with all power, with pretended signs and wonders, with all wicked deception for those who are about to perish, because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved.*

What mysterious verses! Let's think of some of the elements of this prophecy. First of all, there's to be a great rebellion, a great apostasy. The time is coming when the whole world, except a little flock, will be in anarchy as regards the divine law.

The first drops of the coming storm are discernible in this country and right around the world. Today, there are thirty-five nations of the world engaged in civil war. You don't hear about most of them, because the news that filters through to us is only what the media want us to hear. You don't hear, for example, about the millions of Christians who have been slaughtered or enslaved in the Sudan. You don't hear very much about the persecution of Christians in China. You don't hear a great deal about how, in practically every Mohammedan land, Christians are oppressed. Mohammedans in the US are protected. Remember, it is claimed that there are about as many Mohammedans in the USA as Presbyterians or Episcopalians, and many of them are fine people.

But the Bible is telling us here in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the time will come when the whole world will be in rebellion against righteousness and those who uphold it.

The spirit of anarchy is very much abroad now. We saw some of it evidenced a generation ago in World War II. Who could ever have foreseen what would happen with the Holocaust and the death of fifty million people in World War II? No one could have foretold it, except those who knew the Bible.

At the turn of the century, a very wise man said anyone who studies the book of Revelation must anticipate that countries now prosperous in science, technology, and education will one day behave in a devilish manner towards being made in the image of God. The scholar Swete wrote that about 1909. It has already happened, but it's yet to happen on a much broader scale. Talk about terrorism!

So, first, see Paul's stress on the coming rebellion. The whole Bible has hints of this all the way through. You have it in prediction in Ezekiel 38 and 39 where Gog and Magog and all the multitudes are pictured as coming down against Israel. See also Zechariah 14, Joel 3, and Daniel 11. Then, it is found in types. Nimrod builds the Tower of Babel, goes on to build Babylon, and then moves out to Assyria, trying to possess the whole world. And his name means "the rebel." He points to the great rebellion.

So we can expect increasing anarchy. And the devil knows how to do it. The intensity of life is such that it's hard to remain sane if you are very involved in the usual activities of the twenty-first century. Life is so intense and complex. Any of you that have much to do with business today know how complicated it is. Typical of this is what happens when you phone an organisation, and you are referred from one person to another and then another. Also typical is what the medical profession has been through in recent years, with all the mountains of paperwork and governmental red tape.

Life is becoming very complex, and it's not strange at all that mental diseases and breakdowns are multiplying *ad nauseum*. And then we use drugs, in order to survive. It's what Aldous Huxley predicted in the 1930s. He said the time would come when the Western world would invent Soma, a drug to keep people placid. Well, we've got many Somas. While drugs like Prozac help many people, the evidence is quite clear that some people taking these drugs go berserk. The children responsible for the fifteen murders at Columbine in Littleton, Colorado were on drugs similar to Prozac.

Many people are behaving out of character because of some forms of medication that react abnormally for them. I'm not saying these forms of medication are universally reacting like that. But if you have millions on such drugs, you're going to have thousands who react adversely. And one of the reasons for suicide and the increasing crimes of violence is a reaction to medications in a small proportion of people. Remember that a small proportion of millions, and that's how many are on these drugs, runs into thousands.

Apart from that, we have the glorification of violence on television. Many of our young people are growing up loving to spend hours surfing the Worldwide Web, and some of what they like the most is bloody, terrible, or prurient.

Following certain wars like Vietnam, where many soldiers innocently went to defend what they felt was a good cause; about 90 percent came back with their lives already broken. About 90 percent of Vietnam Veterans, in a matter of a few years, were in tremendous trouble, either from the drugs they had taken or from other problems that overcame them while in service.

The more wars we have, the more walking-wounded come back. The Bible says there will be a time when the whole world will be in rebellion against what's right and what's good. There will be universal anarchy, except for a little flock. In other words, things are going to come to a crescendo. There will be a hot-housing in the last days where both good and evil multiply and yield their respective harvest. One will be a baleful, evil harvest, and one a harvest of love and goodness and kindness. As the gospel goes to the entire world, the opposition to the gospel will increase.

Matthew 12 shows how serious it is to be confronted by God and by the gospel. Everywhere I go people ask me about the unpardonable sin, and this is the main passage in the Bible that talks about it. And it's very important that Christians understand that the unpardonable sin is not what most people think. Many people have sins in their closets - besetting sins things they've done which they regret and hate. And they're often tempted to say, "Hey, maybe that's the unpardonable sin," but it is not.

Let's notice what it says in verse 24 of Matthew 12: *"When the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'It's only by Beelzebul prince of devils that this man drives the devils out.' Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste. No city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he's divided against himself; how, then, can his kingdom stand? If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out [or claim to]? Therefore, they'll be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. For how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man? Then, indeed, he may plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me. He who does not gather with me scatters. Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men. But the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.'*"

The Jews have just declared he's doing these wonders through the power of the devil. Christ says, "I, by the Spirit of God, have worked these wonders." That Spirit is knocking at the door of your hearts, and when you refuse to let him in and when you ascribe to him the working of Satan, you blaspheme that pleading Spirit, and that's a sin that can't be helped. Because if you keep it up, the time will come when you'll not hear his pleading any more.

That's the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin is not stealing. It's not adultery, it's not murder, and it's not what we call blasphemy. It's the continual rejection of the pleading Holy Spirit as he bears witness to Christ and the gospel, until finally we say, "That's the devil, that's not God." At that point, we are in danger of so grieving the Spirit that we can no longer hear his gentle invitations. We've slammed the door. God is a gentleman. He'll never break the door down. He withdraws.

The unpardonable sin is that continued rejection of the pleadings of the Spirit until we hear him no more. Willful sin is a very

dangerous thing. There's no one here free from sin. But there's all the difference in the world between the sins we hate, the sins we fight, the sins we regret, the sins we repent of, and the sins we welcome, the sins we deliberately pursue. It's sin type number two that leads to the unpardonable sin, not the sins we hate, not the sins we regret, not the sins we fight, not the sins we repent of.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible makes a distinction between those two types of sin. In the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, you read about sins of ignorance, which meant either lack of knowledge or lack of strength; You read also about presumptuous sin, and anyone who sinned presumptuously, which was usually an outward violation of one of the Decalogue laws, was condemned to death. The penalty for adultery was stoning. The penalty for disobedience to parents was stoning. The penalty for murder was stoning.

So the presumptuous sin was the willful pursuit publicly of known sin, and that was fairly rare in the camp of Israel. What was universal in the camp of Israel was the awareness of falling short, not doing things as well as one should - a sin out of weakness or ignorance that was hated, regretted, or repented of. Such sin never brings condemnation. God doesn't even record them. Romans 4:8: *"Blessed is the one against whom the Lord does not record sin."*

So the Christian, though still erring, though still faulty, though still falling short, is not a rebel, doesn't sin presumptuously, doesn't willfully embrace what he or she knows to be wrong. Because when someone does this, he or she paves the way for the ultimate rejection of the pleading Spirit.

Now note verse 40: *"As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment of this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And, behold, someone greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will arise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it. She came from the ends of the earth to hear the Wisdom of Solomon. Behold! Someone greater than Solomon is here!"*

Then look at this parable. *"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. He says, 'I'll return to my house from which I come.' But when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself. They enter and dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So shall it be with this evil generation."* (verses 43-45)

When Israel came out of Babylon, they cleansed the house of outward idolatry. But they didn't fill the house with God. So when God came among them, they crucified him. And when Christ said, "Your house is left unto you desolate," he was saying, "Now seven demons are going to take possession of you." That's why a demon-possessed Israel cried out, "We have no king but Caesar! Crucify him! Crucify him!" And the scene at the destruction of Jerusalem, where parents ate their own children, could only have happened with a demon-possessed people.

What happened to Israel is to happen at the end of the world! The power of God will again be mightily manifest; the earth will be lightened with the glory of God. Revelation 18:1-4 and Joel 2:28 say that the Spirit of God will be poured out upon all flesh that believes. Pentecost will take place all around the globe. There will be a little flock mightily empowered by God. The gospel will be proclaimed unto the ends of the earth, but it will have a tremendous reaction. The same reaction as when Christ came. The majority will oppose it. The majority will reject it.

And, just as the demons were ubiquitous when the power of God came down at the First Advent, so on the eve of the Second Advent, when the power of God is coming down, as at Pentecost, in the last proclamation right around the globe of the gospel of grace, the demons of hell will come up again.

Note Revelation 16:13: *"I saw issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet three foul spirits like frogs. They are demonic spirits, performing signs, going forth to the kings of the whole earth to assemble them for battle on the great day of God, the Almighty."*

This is a description of Armageddon. That's a symbolic word, pointing to the final conflict between good and evil in the whole world, and it's the result of demon spirits, working signs and wonders, and inciting the nations to gather. To understand that gathering even more clearly, look at chapter 19. Revelation 19:19 says: "And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered together to make war upon him who sits upon the horse and against his army."

Here's a picture of all the powers of earth marshalled to make war on God. They do it by making war on his people, just as Saul, the pre-conversion apostle Paul, made war on Christ by persecuting Christ's believers.

So the whole world is to be marshalled for Armageddon, the last great conflict, in which the nations of earth throw off the yoke of God. This is the sort of thing pictured in Psalm 2. The nations are angry. They repudiate God's law, have a religion of their own making, and oppose all who will not conform.

We should learn early in our Christian life that to be a true Christian, you have to be a nonconformist. If you live like everybody else, you're certainly no Christian. If people where you work don't know you're a Christian, you're probably not one.

If you're a true Christian, you're different. You have to be. You cannot go the way of the world. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-this is what governs most people's habits, how they eat, drink, work, sex, spend, and live. That explains the behaviour of the world. But a Christian cannot be like that.

A Christian has to be a nonconformist. That doesn't mean being a "goody-two-shoes" but, instead, being a truly good person, who's humble and kind, sympathetic and empathetic, but who stands like a rock where obvious evil is contrasted with obvious right.

To be a true Christian, you have to be a "whistle-blower." I don't mean in the sense of being "holier-than-thou," but bad men prosper because good people do nothing. You are to blame for the evil you tolerate. We are responsible for the evil we permit as though we did it. Because of this, it's not easy to be a Christian.

In the last days, the lines will be drawn, the conflict will be there, and the entire world will be spirit-possessed. There will be a tiny group possessing the Spirit of God, but the spirits of devils will possess most.

In the closing verses of Revelation 9, there is another tremendous description of demons - a hundred million demons sweeping over the world. It is a very graphic picture: "*The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God.*

It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.

The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulphur.

The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulphur.

A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of their mouths.

The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the works of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk.

Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts."

Now back to 2 Thessalonians. Think for a little about the restrainer, the hinderer. What does that mean? *You know what's restraining him so he may be revealed in his time. The mystery of lawlessness is already at work, only he who now restrains it will do so until he's out of the way, and then the lawless one will be revealed. And the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth, and he will destroy him by his appearing and his coming.*

The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power of pretended signs and wonders. (2 Thessalonians 2:6)

Notice that this lawless one, this Antichrist, is a parody of Christ. These verses refer to his *coming*. The Greek word is the same word that's used for the coming of the Lord Jesus. The verses talk about his having signs and wonders. The same words are used in connection with the ministry of Christ. So this is one who comes in his time, as Christ came at an appointed time, but Antichrist will counterfeit the things of Christ and his person.

This is a counterfeit of Christ in every way; it is to be hindered. There's something or someone blocking him. And when that something or someone is taken out of the way, then there's a full flowering of what's already been there in seed form. Working surreptitiously, it will suddenly flower, germinating in a hothouse existence, when the hinderer/restrainer is removed.

So what can this hinderer be? "*You know what is restraining him now so he may be revealed in his time.*" The first theory, about the hinderer/restrainer, in the early days of the church, was that it was the Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire disappears, then Antichrist will be manifested. There are many scholars who still take that position. They say the prophecy is talking about the form of Antichrist in the Middle Ages. Church and State were united and pretended to have signs and wonders. The pope sat in the temple of God, the church, and took the place of Christ. When the Roman Empire was taken down, the Roman church took over. But please don't use that theory in order to stab Roman Catholics of today, because millions of Roman Catholics today repudiate what happened in the Middle Ages.

That's one theory, that the hinderer/restrainer was the Roman Empire, that when it went out of the way, then Antichrist came. And, in an apotelesmatic (repeated applications) sense, that may be a true application, but it's not the full one.

Another theory is that the hinderer/restrainer applies to angels. In Daniel 10, an angel appears to Daniel and says, "Look, I'm battling with the king of Persia, I'm holding him back, I'm restraining him." Therefore the hinderer is the angels.

Yet another view is that it was Paul himself. This view says that Paul was God's great messenger on earth, and after Paul went, the powers of evil would have their sway. That view is not so popular.

There are yet two other particular theories. One is that it's the gospel. That when the gospel can't be preached anymore, then comes Antichrist.

A similar view is that the hinderer is the Holy Spirit.

This is the one that I believe meets the evidence the best. Here are some of the characteristics of this hinderer/restrainer: It exists in Paul's time. (The text uses the present tense. The Greek word used is a present participle.) "You know what is restraining him." That's the first thing.

It's a beneficent power. That's the second thing. It's restraining evil. So this is not something nasty and evil. This is something that's the opposite of the Antichrist.

It's in existence in Paul's time, and it's a beneficent power, and it's resisting evil. Thirdly, it's law-abiding. It's in opposition to the lawless one. Four times you read "lawless one." So the hinderer is a *lawful* one, behaving in harmony with law.

It actively withdraws. In verse 7 we read, "Until he's out of the way." Let me give you the way some translators give it: "Until he steps out of the way"; "until he disappears"; "until he's gone"; "until he's out of the way"; "until he gets out of the way"; "until he disappears from the midst." The last one is closest to the Greek - "Until he disappears from the midst."

What is this power in existence in Paul's day that's beneficent, that's law-abiding, that's going to actively withdraw? What is it?

It has a divine time mission. God had nominated the time when the Antichrist would come. It is "in his time." So this hinderer has a time mission. It has to be extraordinarily great and mighty to be able to resist the agency of Satan.

So here's the one view that I think reconciles all these things. The restraining power is the operation of civil law, which through the influence of the Spirit, holds back the wicked from going the full distance, as long as the gospel is being proclaimed.

Let me say that again. Some of you have been to law court and observed what takes place. Many people who go to law courts have a strange feeling when they go there. It's almost as though there's an echo within that reminds them of the divine law and Judgment Day. Most people who attend the law courts have that experience and rightly so, because civil law is based originally on the law of God, which governs murder, theft, etc. The basis for these is the law of God. The Decalogue is the foundation of all the law. And the Decalogue is a reflection of the character of God. God is pure, God is true, God is good, God is kind, and God is the life-giver. All things against that character are illegal.

I suggest, as I wrote for my Manchester University thesis thirty years ago, that the restrainer is the work of civil law that has power to restrain men from doing their worst, so long as the Holy Spirit is in the world attending the proclamation of the gospel. But, when the gospel commission is completed, and the Holy Spirit withdraws from pleading with the hearts of men, nothing then can restrain them from breaking the law of God.

Consider some illustrations. Look at Proverbs chapter 1. These are very direct words, but they're sent in love. Beginning at verse 24, we read: *Because I have called and you refused to listen, I've stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, and you've ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity, I'll mock when panic strikes you. When panic strikes you like a storm, your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you, then they'll call upon me but I'll not answer. They'll seek me diligently but they'll not find me, because they hated knowledge. They didn't choose the fear of the Lord. They would have none of my counsel, despised all of my reproof. Therefore, they'll eat the fruit of their way. They'll be sated with their own devices, for the simple are killed by their turning way, the complacency of fools destroys them, but he who listens to me will dwell secure, will be at ease without dread of evil.*

Here it says, "They hated knowledge, would have none of my counsel." Now look at 2 Thessalonians 2, and you'll find that this idea is right in the context.

It says at the end of verse 10: *All wicked deception for those who are to perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore, God sends upon them a strong delusion to make them believe what is false so that all may be condemned who didn't believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

So please observe that it says here twice that people are deceived because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. It says that they accept a strong delusion, they believe the lie of the Antichrist, who says, "I'm God. Worship me." That's the lie. Antichrist pretends to be God, magnifies himself as God, and sits in the temple of the Church as though he's the Shekinah.

"Worship me." That's the lie, the Antichrist pretending to be God. "Strong delusion to make them believe what is false, because they didn't believe the truth," They had "pleasure in unrighteousness."

The same idea is in the first chapter of this book. It's talking about the coming of Christ, and in verses 6-8, we read: *God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Look at the first letter to the Thessalonians and observe what it says in chapter 2, verse 14: *You brethren became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sin, but God's wrath has come upon them at last.*

When the whole world rejects the last proclamation of the gospel, it commits the unpardonable sin. And the Spirit stops pleading. That's the close of probation.

Nobody can be neutral. There will be no one who can say, "I never knew." The whole earth will be lighted with the glory of the gospel (Revelation 18:1-4). It is to go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10). Everybody is going to hear it. And those who shut their ears and close their eyes to the gospel commit the unpardonable sin at that point. The unpardonable sin is the rejection of the conviction of the Spirit.

It can happen before that time when we constantly deny the message of God that says, "Stop that. Don't do that. This is the way to go." If we constantly, willingly, reject the pleading of the Spirit, the time will come when we won't hear him anymore.

One of the brightest days of my life was when I was training for the ministry, still a teenager of eighteen, and aware how far short, how very far short, I fell from the ideal that I wanted to personify one day in the ministry. And then I read a beautiful little Christian book, which said, "Every conviction of our own sinfulness is an evidence that the Spirit of God is moving upon us." That's a great truth! How it lifted my spirits when I read it.

Let me repeat it. "Every conviction of our own sinfulness is an evidence that the Spirit of God is moving upon us." But if you reject conviction, and you keep rejecting it, there comes a time when you no longer respond to the movings of the Spirit. Then you'll do things you never thought you would. Remember, between not doing something and doing it once' there's a great gulf fixed. Between not doing something and doing it twice is a much smaller gulf. Soon you can do it ten and twenty and thirty and forty times, and there's no gulf at all.

So the Bible foretells the time when the Holy Spirit will go to all the world, convicting the world with the truthfulness of the gospel, but people will say, "It asks too much of me. I can't live that way. I won't look at him. He's pleading, he died for me, he loved me, but I don't care. I can't do it." At that point, the world, by opposing those who give the message and condemning them to death (Revelation 13), has committed the unpardonable sin. Revelation 13 says that those who oppose Antichrist

should be killed. That's the outward sign they've rejected the pleading Spirit. At that moment, the spirit of Satan takes possession. As it says of Judas, "Satan entered into him." At that point, everyone in the world is filled with the spirit, either the Spirit of God or the spirit of demons, working signs and wonders.

Calvin was a very clever and great man. Every time I think of him I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Calvin said that God has common grace for all men restraining them from the full depths of sin into which they would otherwise plunge. Calvin was correct.

The Bible says in Romans 2:15 that we all have some of the law written in the heart. One of the great differences between law and gospel is that there's a sense in which you don't have to preach the law, because everybody knows it. But you do have to preach the gospel. It's so good that people find it difficult to believe. But Paul says, "The heathen show the work of the law in their hearts. Their conscience accusing them or excusing them."

That is common grace, says Calvin, the Holy Spirit moving on the hearts of all people everywhere. Even though they can't hear the gospel, they don't have the Bible, and they don't have a living preacher, they do have the law in their hearts. And the Spirit of God moves on them to prompt them lest they become outrageous, so that most won't go into anarchy or terrorism.

Now, many today will reject the Spirit and become anarchists and terrorists and do outrageous things. But the majority of people will not. The vast majority of people are fairly respectable. They may not be decent or even kind, but they're fairly respectable, for good reasons and bad reasons. The bad reason is they don't want to go to jail, because it's very dull there. Although it's not nearly as dull as it used to be. But it's a big hindrance to have a big fence around you, so that's a bit of a problem.

So there are reasons for morality that aren't holy, and there are reasons that grow out of the fact that people reflect God to some degree. They are made in his likeness, and they know certain things are wrong. Even in prison, prisoners hate certain crimes and often kill another prisoner guilty of the particular crimes they hate.

All men have this image of God, and all men have some awareness of right and wrong. If this were not so, terrorism and nuclear war would have wiped out this planet years ago. The Spirit of God moves upon the conscience and keeps us from going to the extremes where our passions might otherwise lead us. It's mainly when people lose control and get angry or are overwhelmed by some passion, that they violate this common grace.

But when the gospel has gone to the entire world and the Spirit of God is no longer accompanying it, and he's no longer pleading with people, that common grace will be withdrawn from every unbelieving heart. That's when anarchy will fill the world. That's when Jeremiah says there will be dead bodies from one end of the earth to the other. Read also the description in Isaiah 24: *See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants - it will be the same... for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor.*

The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers. The word languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish.

The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left (Verses 1-6).

The major manifestation of Antichrist in the last days will be the union of church and state, which are both in apostasy. But something else should be added. There is a viewpoint, which should be given serious consideration. This chapter may also be speaking also about the ultimate manifestation, where the spirits of demons will counterfeit the coming of Christ and "work signs and wonders." The same language is found about spirits in Revelation 16 as is here used about the man of sin.

This points to the ultimate counterfeit of the coming of Christ by the devil himself, working through wicked spirits, in many places on earth, pretending to be the Shekinah glory, pretending to be the fire come down from heaven, pretending to be what Elijah prayed for, to be what the prophets of Jezebel wanted. All around the world myriads of demons (described in Revelation 9 as numbering something like one hundred million) will counterfeit the coming of Christ in all the great population centres, with great signs and wonders.

The practical point for us is that earth's final crisis will take place when humanity rejects the gospel, because the wicked don't love the truth but believe a lie - the lie that Antichrist is the true Christ. They'll believe that lie because they've rejected the true Christ. They'll believe the false gospel because they've rejected the true gospel.

The most important thing in life for you and me is to know the gospel. And that can't be said too often. We all know the first great commandment - To love God with all your heart and mind and soul. We all know we haven't done it. But it can't be said too often that no one ever approaches keeping the first commandment until convinced that God loves him.

We must take the "whosoever" of Scripture very literally. It means you, whatever your past. Barabbas didn't have a good track record, but he escaped jail because Christ took his place. There's a sense in which we're all Barabbases. The penitent thief did not have a good track record, but he knew he had paradise, because Christ told him, "You will be with me."

It doesn't matter what my track record is. I'm not proud of it, though I've been a Christian for fifty-five years. I would rather die than knowingly pursue a course of sin, but I am aware that I sin all the time by falling short.

But what keeps me going is that I am aware of a God who gives and forgives seventy-times seven, and who loves each person to the full extent of Calvary. He pleads with us, and He suffers with us. We have a wounded God who cares, who is so gentle - gentler than the gentlest mother - and more sympathetic than the kindest person you've ever known. The Apostle Paul says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!*

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was

reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though Christ were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5: 17-21).

The work of reconciliation is done, complete. Ours is just to simply accept. When our hearts react to that invitation, then we can know that paradise is ours today. Whatever our track record, whatever our past, it doesn't matter. He's a great Saviour; he's for great sinners. He's not a painted Saviour for painted sinners.

It doesn't matter what your past. It doesn't matter how many times you've messed things up. If he can tell us that we must forgive our brother seventy-times seven, it must mean he's doing that for us; otherwise, he couldn't ask it. That's the only sort of God I could cope with, because that's the sort of God I need. I need him to forgive me seventy-times seven.

You know, the law seen in its depth is a terrible thing for sinners. The law seen in its depth means that every thought, every motive, every word, and every act should be as perfect as Christ or Adam before the Fall could do. That is amazing.

I remember I offended a minister once by saying, "Look, all of us sin a million times a day." He was horrified. He thought that was blasphemy. But the Lord demanded that every thought be as good as Adam's was before the Fall, and we think at least a million thoughts a day. And not one of us is as good as Adam before the Fall, because we are all tainted with selfishness, even after conversion. And, therefore, we do all sin countless times a day.

Would you look with me at the last verses of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2? After the stormy waters, we come into a beautiful breakwater of calmness and peace: *We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. For this he called you through our gospel so you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So then, brethren, stand fast. Hold to the traditions you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

And may our Lord, Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, may he comfort your hearts, may he establish them in every good word and work.

Look at the precious things here in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 2. "May *our* Lord Jesus Christ." Paul could have said, "May *the* Lord Jesus Christ." But he says *our*.

In the Ten Commandments, it talks about the Lord *our* God. You and I talk about *our* cat and *our* house, but imagine being able to say *our* God.

This text could have just said the Lord Jesus Christ. No, he's *ours*. And notice the last verse: "Our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father." It could have just said God the Father, but it says God *our* father "who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace."

In other words, we are given a status with God, which we don't deserve or earn. This is the essence of Christianity: You get what you don't deserve. Grace always means love without deserving it. That's the only grace I can ever cope with. I'll never get any other so it has to be that way.

"Comfort your hearts, establish them in every good work." How does he comfort our hearts? By saying, "I love you despite what you are. I love you despite your failures. I love you despite your weaknesses. I love you despite your heredity and your early environment. I love you despite the fact that you never attain the heights you want to reach. I love you still."

"I died for you. I don't impute your sins against you, because you're hidden in my Son. I see you at Calvary. You've paid for all your sins - yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's. You were in him. You were crucified with him. You were buried with him. You rose with him. Now you're seated in heavenly places with him."

That's comfort.

No wonder that other verse at the end of the book says, "*The God of Peace himself give you peace always by all means*" (2 Thess 3:16).

If we really believe in the love of God, we're invulnerable to all the assaults of Satan. I find it easy to believe when the going is good. It's a battle for me to believe when the going is tough. But if I could believe when the going is tough, I'd be invulnerable and invincible to all the assaults of Satan.

"*The God of Peace himself give you peace always by all means.*" In other words, whatever happens, it's all going to be temporary. This present suffering shall pass. But the reality of salvation lasts. The devil may grab your spending money, but he cannot get your jewels, because they are in Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Antichrist and the Book of Revelation

In the book of Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end. To understand the book of Revelation, one needs a good working knowledge of the previous sixty-five books. That is why Calvin, who wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible, did not write one on Revelation. In this he showed his great good sense. Every word of this book is as though it had been carefully felt and weighed in the balance before it was put down in the manuscript. It is the most carefully crafted piece of literature in existence.

As an example of how Revelation fits into the Bible, remember that, in the first three chapters of Scripture, you have a new heaven and a new earth, the marriage of the first Adam, and a day followed by night. When you get to the last three chapters of Scripture, there is a new heaven and a new earth, the marriage of the second Adam, and a day that knows no night.

In the third chapter from the commencement of Genesis we read of the entrance of Satan, sin, the curse, and death. In the third last chapter of the Bible we read of the abolition of Satan, sin, the curse, and death.

One of the clues to this book is what happened in the days before the first coming of Christ when Judaism was nearly wiped out by that king whose kingdom was a division of the Greek empire after the death of Alexander, the Great. We talk about Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. These were certainly the dominant empires from the sixth century BC to the fall of Rome in the fifth century AD. However, it is vital to remember that, after the division of Greece, the Syrian kings had much more influence on the Jews than any of the previous empires. In those days, Antiochus Epiphanes was very prominent as an Old Testament Antichrist. He took away the sanctuary offerings for 2,300 evening and morning services and put to death 40,000 pious worshippers of that sanctuary.

When one reads the well-known commentary by Jamison, Fausset, and Brown on Revelation 13, the commentary says that this chapter is modelled on the history of the Jews in the days of the persecution of Antiochus. He enforced a mark of pagan worship upon the Jews, and he put to death those who refused the mark. Revelation 13 is the chief chapter in the Bible about Antichrist, and the key to the chapter, according to the great Bible commentators, is the story of the persecutions under Antiochus Epiphanes.

The story of those persecutions is preserved for us in what is known as the Apocrypha, a set of Jewish books written between Malachi and Matthew in the centuries when there were no inspired messages. It consists of devotional, historical, and legendary books. I and II Maccabees give us the following account: *Antiochus... entered proudly into the sanctuary and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof...*

Moreover, King Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, and everyone should obey his laws: so all the heathen agreed according the commandment of the king. Yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols and profaned the Sabbath... and whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die... They set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar and built idol altars throughout the cities of Judah on every side... and when they had rent in pieces the books of the Law, which they found, they burnt them with fire. Whosoever was found with any book of the Testament, or if any consented to the Law, the king's commandment was, that they should put him to death... at which time according to the commandment they put to death certain women, that had caused their children to be circumcised. And they hung the infants about their necks, and destroyed their houses, and slew them that had circumcised them. Howbeit many an Israelite was fully resolved and confirmed in themselves not to eat any unclean thing. Wherefore they chose rather to die, that they might not be defiled with meats, and that they might not profane the holy covenant: so then they died (I Maccabees, chapter 1).

They were destroyed within the space of three whole days four score thousand, whereof forty thousand were slain in the conflict; and no fewer sold than slain. And in the day of the king's birth every month they were brought by bitter constraint to eat of the sacrifices; and when the feast of Bacchus was kept, the Jews were compelled to go in procession to Bacchus, wearing wreaths of ivy.... And whoso would not conform themselves to the manner of the gentiles should be put to death (II Maccabees, chapter 5 and 6).

These events of history, based upon biblical prophecy, foretell later crises for the people of God and, in particular, the final crisis of earth's history predicted in Revelation 13. In John 10:22, we read that our Lord Jesus observed the feast that we know as Hanukkah. It commemorated the cleansing of the sanctuary from the idolatrous defilements placed there by the officers of Antiochus. The cleansing was accomplished by Jewish heroes loyal to the law of God and led by Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers in 165 BC.

That wonderful overthrow of false worship and the rededication of the holy sanctuary is used by Scripture as a symbol of what Christ would accomplish first on the cross, legally, and then at the Second Coming, in consummation. The cleansed sanctuary was to be, for the rest of human history, a symbol of the promised cleansing of the world on the eve of the new heavens and the new earth after the return of Christ.

Returning now to the book of Revelation, we cannot understand it unless we recognise that the entire book is an expansion of that sermon recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The Second Advent sermon, the Olivet sermon as it is often called, is the seed from which Revelation developed as the flower of New Testament prophecy. There is nothing in the whole book of Revelation that does not have its roots in that, discourse by Christ, delivered from the Mount of Olives.

Note this point with care: that sermon itself has its roots in the prophecies of Daniel. In other words, one has to understand Daniel to be able to understand the Olivet Sermon, and one has to understand the Olivet Sermon in order to understand Revelation. Which means, of course, that you cannot understand the book of Revelation without the Old Testament book of Daniel, which scholars have declared to be the most influential Old Testament book in the writing of the New Testament.

Note following, are some of the ways in which Daniel is echoed in the Olivet Sermon.

Daniel is the only book in the Old Testament on which Christ put his finger and said deliberately "Understand it." One of the keys is the realisation that the book revolves around a series of contrasts. The same is true of the last book of the Bible. Consider the following examples.

The kingdom of God v. The kingdom of this world

True worship v. False worship

The wisdom from above v. The wisdom of this world

The law of God v. The laws of men

Truth v. Error

Humility v. Pride

Love v. Persecution

Reverence v. Blasphemy

The Messiah (Christ) v. Antichrist

The Son of Man v. The abomination of desolation

The remnant v. The majority

The angels of heaven v. The wicked spirits

Rewards v. Punishments

THE USAGE OF DANIEL BY THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Mark 13

... when these things are all to be accomplished (v.4).

Daniel

... all these things would be accomplished (12:7).

Mark 13

... wars and rumours of wars (v.7).

Daniel

Tidings... shall alarm him, and he shall go forth with great fury... to destroy (11:44; also 9:26).

Mark 13

This must take place (v.7).

Daniel

... what will be (2:28).

Mark 13

You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (v.13).

Daniel

They shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for some days... to refine and to cleanse them and to make them white, until the time of the end (11:33-35).

Mark 13

Your people shall be delivered (12:1).

Daniel

... the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not be (v.14).

Mark 13

... the transgression that makes desolate (8:13).

Daniel

Let the reader understand (v.14). David uses the thought of understanding over a score of times. See particularly 8:15, 16, 17; 9:2, 22, 23; 10:1; 11:33; 12:8.

Mark 13

... such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now (v.19).

Daniel

And there shall be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation (12:1).

Mark 13

... if the Lord had not shortened the days" (v.20).

Daniel

Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people (9:24)

Mark 13

False christ and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders (v.22).

Daniel

He shall give no heed to the gods of his fathers (11:37).

Mark 13

... the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" (v.26).

Daniel

"Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man.... and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom" (7:13, 14).

Texts are from the Revised Standard Version.

THE CERTAINTY OF THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE

by Louis F. Were

God and Israel

Rev. 1:4, 5. The Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 12; 13; 16:13, 19. False trinity - dragon, beast, false prophet.

God and Israel

Rev. 1; 6:2. God commissions His Son, and gives Him authority and power

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 12:2. The dragon gave the beast his "power, and his seat, and great authority."

God and Israel

Rev. 5:6. Christ is likened to a Lamb with seven horns - all power in heaven and on earth. Rev. 13:11.

Satan and Babylon

False prophet has two horns like a lamb, but speaks later as a dragon - political power controlled by church.

God and Israel

Rev. 22:16. Jesus, means Saviour

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 9:11. Apollyon or destroyer. Rev. 12:7-9; 20:2. Satan or Adversary.

God and Israel

Rev. 1:18; 3:7. Keys of death and Hades.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 9:1. Key of bottomless pit.

God and Israel

Rev. 3:21. Christ's "throne."

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 2:13; 16:10. "Throne of Satan.

God and Israel

Ps. 113:5; Isa. 40:18. Who is like unto the Lord."

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 13:4. "Who is like unto the beast?"

God and Israel

Rev. 5:6. "A lamb as it had been slain.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 13:3. One of the heads of the beast "as though it had been slain." See margin.

God and Israel

Rev. 2:8. Christ died and lived again.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 13:14. Beast received stroke of death "and lived." RV

God and Israel

Rev. 1:4. God: "He which is, and which was and which is to come."

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 17:8. Beast "was, and is not," and is about to come out of the bottomless pit.

God and Israel

Rev. 11. 17. RV drops last term of the above description.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 17:11. Last term of above description is dropped.

God and Israel

Rev. 6:16. The wrath of the Lamb - comes down with great wrath.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 12:12. The wrath of the dragon - comes down with "great wrath."

God and Israel

Rev. 7:2. God's seal.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 13:17. Beast's mark.

God and Israel

Rev. 7:3. Seal in forehead.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 13:16; 20: 4. Mark in forehead or the hand.

God and Israel

Rev. 14:1. Contains the name of God.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 13:17. Contains name of the beast.

God and Israel

Rev. 7:4. The tribes of Israel.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 1:7. The tribes of earth.

God and Israel

Rev. 16:12. The kings of the east.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 16:14. The kings of the earth and of the whole world.

God and Israel

Rev. 19:11-14. The armies of heaven.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 19:19. The armies of earth.

God and Israel

Rev. 21:24-26. Nations saved.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 16:19; 20:8. Nations destroyed.

God and Israel

Rev. 12:7; 16:14, 16; 19:11. The "war" or "battle" against Satan and his followers.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 12:17; 17:14; 20:8. The "war" or battle against Christ and His people.

God and Israel

Rev. 7:1-4; 14:6-17. Christ's messengers come "down" from heaven "above." See John 3:3, 7, margins; v.31, etc.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 11:7; 13:1, 11. Satan's messengers come "up" from the earth "beneath." See John 8:23, etc.

God and Israel

Rev. 19:9. The marriage supper of the Lamb: the triumph and joy of Israel.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 19:17-20. The supper of the birds: the defeat and death of Israel's enemies.

God and Israel

Rev. 21:10. The Lamb's wife.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 17:1, 5, 18. The harlot of Babylon.

God and Israel

Rev. 21:14. Apostles of the Lamb.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 2:2. False apostles.

God and Israel

Rev. 11:2; 14:20. The holy city, Jerusalem - God's church.

Satan and Babylon

Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 18:2, etc. The unholy city, Babylon - Satan's church.

Outline Showing Principle of Chiasmus

As one approaches the study of Revelation in order to decipher its messages about Christ and Antichrist one needs to recognise there are seven sections in the book. They constitute a chiasmus:

The church militant, chapters 1-3

The war begins, chapters 4:1-8:1

Trumpet calls to surrender, chs. 8:2-11:19

Synopsis of the war, chapters 12:1-14:20

Amnesty ends, judgments fall, chs. 15, 16

The war is won, chapters 17-20

The Church Triumphant, chapters 21-22

There is nothing in the last chapters of Revelation that is not in seed form in the first chapters. As in Daniel, the prophecies expand the principles of the stories, and the stories come first; in Revelation, the later chapters expand the seeds of the early chapters, which commenced with the story of John in exile.

The next thing to be said is that the book of Revelation is, above all, the book of the covenant. Throughout the whole of the New Testament the Greek word used for "covenant" can also be translated "testament." Scholars have long recognised that covenant may be a more accurate name. The Christian book is the New Covenant.

It's the last book of the New Testament that has most to say about the covenant, for it revolves around the blessings and curses of that divine arrangement. This is another important key for unlocking the prophecies of this inspired volume. The whole of Revelation revolves around the blessings and curses of the covenant. You find them both, first of all, in Deuteronomy 28.

Consider this fact: there are seven blessings in Revelation. "Blessed is the one who reads," "blessed are they that die in the Lord," "blessed is he that watches and keeps his garments," "blessed are those called to the marriage supper of the Lamb," "blessed is he that has part in the first resurrection," "blessed are those who wash their robes," "blessed is he who keeps the sayings of this book."

All the curses of the covenant are implicit in the three great cycles of seven in Revelation for they are all cycles of judgments. The seven seals talk about the judgments of God falling on the world as the gospel is resisted and how God's people will

survive amid those judgments. And the seven trumpets are preliminary judgments on the wicked world, calling them to repent. Finally, the seven last plagues are judgments upon the finally impenitent.

In principle, all the curses fell on our Lord Jesus as our Representative. We deserve to bear them, but he took them in our place. Because we are now in him by simple faith, the curses cannot fall upon us. God counts us as innocent despite our failures, despite our follies, because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. He took our sins in which he had no share that we might have his righteousness in which we have had no share. A wonderful gospel, indeed!

The first specific reference to Antichrist in Revelation is Revelation 11:8 although he is alluded to in prior symbols and types in the early chapters of the book. In this verse, Antichrist is described as a beast that ascends from the pit of death in order once more to make war upon the church. He is symbolised as killing two witnesses.

Christ is the faithful and true witness, and the church, which is his body, is also a witness to the truth. The two witnesses are likened to candlesticks because the church is the light of the world. And they have a message to give. As Jesus could say to the Father, "I have finished the work you gave me to do. It's finished!" We read in this book that when the two witnesses finished their testimony, then the devil made war on them.

The beast is sent out of the bottomless pit. The bottomless pit is the region of death, the region of hell. The beast is modelled on Daniel's four beasts representing earthly governments. The beast in Revelation (the Greek word means "a wild, ferocious animal") doesn't mean a cuddly bear or a pet lamb. It means a terrifying ogre.

So this wild, ferocious animal coming out of the abyss is the first distinct reference to Antichrist and is said to make war on the two witnesses. Two is the number of witness in Scripture. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." The witnessing church is described here by these symbols, and Antichrist makes war on them.

Come to chapter 12, and we'll see a new series on Antichrist. Revelation, chapters 12-17, pictures three enemies of the church - the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. This is modelled on what happened in Pilate's judgment hall, where there was Pilate as the agent of the devil about to condemn Christ, and Caiaphas and Judas representing the apostate people of God, who linked with apostate government to do the devil's bidding. So when you read John 18 you're reading about the three enemies: the devil, the Roman government, and the apostate religious system that unite to get rid of Christ.

Now in Revelation 12 onwards, it replays that scene. Please observe that judgment fell, after the devil, the Roman government, and apostate Judaism had dealt with Christ. After a period of testing and forty years of probation, Jerusalem was destroyed. Millions died, and hundreds of thousands went away into captivity.

When we get to the end of the description of Antichrist in this book, we have the same fate indicated. Chapter 17:3 says: "He carried me away in the spirit. In the wilderness I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast." The beast represents bad government, as in Pontius Pilate's time. The woman represents bad religion. Notice, the world government is not going to dominate religion. Religion is going to dominate world government.

Dostoyevsky's grand inquisitor quoted these verses and said: "*When the beast comes to us, all bloody with tears of blood and splatters us with blood, then we'll ride her with the cup of mystery in her hand, and we will guide her, and lead her.*"

That's what this is discussing here.

You will notice further down, that it gives a description of the work of these two in verse 13. It's talking about the ten kings that surrender to the woman.

These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings. Those who are with him are called and chosen and faithful.

When Saul was interrupted on the Damascus road, Christ said to him, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul was persecuting the body of Christ, Christians. So when it says here that Antichrist makes war on the Lamb, it means he is making war on the church. Just as Saul was persecuting Christ by attacking Christ's people, in the last days Antichrist will also attack Christ by making war on his people.

But observe verse 16... "*The ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.*"

So here it's picturing that the kings of earth will become united as a bad government, as a last resort to save a world that's disintegrating. The world is a very fragile place already. All governments are very afraid of biological terrorism, including weapons that can be made in any kitchen. There's no hope of discerning them, and very little hope of preventing them. Anyone can take a bag of anthrax spores into the Bay of Manhattan when the wind is blowing and throw it up into the air, and tens of thousands in New York could be dead in hours. How can anyone prevent that? So we live in a new world, where for the first time man can destroy himself. That's what's new about the world. It's been demonstrated that the universe is inflammable. We're only waiting until some fool puts a match to it, as one scientist put it.

No wonder Revelation 11:18 says Christ is coming to destroy those that would destroy the earth. That's why the Bible can say: "Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and fire consumes the earth and few men are left" (Isa 24:1-6).

These verses of Revelation 17 are saying that the kings of earth will get together to do the bidding of bad religion, in the hope of bringing unity among the troubled multitudes of earth. They are troubled economically, troubled with diseases, troubled with all sorts of political ideas, and troubled most of all by anarchy. The spirit of lawlessness will be present in a way it's never been before. Terrorism indeed!

When Revelation talks about the cup of Babylon, the Greek uses a word that can mean drugs, and we live in a world where drugs have been unleashed in a way as never before. I am always worried if my wife is coming home late because I know there are people driving on the highways that use drugs, and some that wait for people to emerge from buildings to rob them.

It's a very dangerous world because of drugs. Young people today, seeking money to satisfy their addiction to drugs, commit most of the crime. The world has changed greatly, and it's the influence of chemical things as well as technology, that is changing the face of the globe.

So the world, more and more fragile, is going to try and find some way to stabilise itself. It has tried education, but that hasn't worked. It has tried science, but that hasn't worked. Technology hasn't worked; war hasn't worked; and politics has never worked. So, the world has tried all these things. But the one thing they haven't tried is world religion. It would have to be a religion of the lowest common denominator.

We need to understand what's happening in Mohammedism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. The fundamentalism of those religions, despite some extreme wings, is disintegrating as education spreads. What has happened in this country where you have many people who no longer believe the Bible, is also happening in countries with these other religions. The younger people no longer believe the old religion but they adhere to it for cultural reasons. Many people in the so-called heathen religions are like most modern Jews and many so-called Christians. Most modern Jews are atheists. No more than 10 percent of Jews, at the most, believe the Old Testament comes from God. Many Christians go to church for social reasons only.

Now the same thing is happening in all the vast areas of earth under what we used to call the pagan religions. As education spreads, faith in the Koran, faith in the Vedas, the writings of Confucius, and the Torah - this is all beginning to disintegrate. It will happen at an accelerating rate, because everything now on our globe is speeding up.

Those of us who are over 50 know that tremendous changes have taken place in the last twenty years or so of our lives, outstripping by far what we knew in the first decades of life. Everything is racing at an exponential rate. Science and technology are going to transform everything, except the heart of man. Whereas the Bible says one sinner can do great harm, now, because of technology, one sinner can do colossal harm. The beast with two horns in Revelation 13, first looking like a lamb and then speaking like a dragon, is reminiscent of our Lord's warning when he said, "False prophets will come in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravaging wolves." This is an allusion to that prediction of Christ. The beast looks like a lamb with horns (like Christ who is the lamb with the seven horns), but inside it's the devil; it's a dragon.

This is religion gone wrong. "Lilies fester worse than weeds," said Shakespeare. No one ever said it better. The higher, the better, and the more important anything is, the worse it can become if it falls. Woman was made the highest of God's creation, she can fall the lowest. Religion has the greatest privileges, blessings, and standards, but if it goes bad, it's worse than anything else. Give me an honest atheist any day rather than someone who's fallen away from true religion.

So this beast represents religion gone wrong. It's called the false prophet three times. Having two horns, it is reminiscent of the two witnesses, who symbolise the church. Now the false church has the same symbolism of the two horns. In the later chapter of 17 it's pictured as a woman. A pure woman represents the church of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12). A woman clothed with the sun, dressed in white, with a crown of twelve stars - that's the picture of the true church. But the Babylonian woman is a harlot. Harlotry in the Bible represents adulterous connotations in the sense of idolatry. Taking as your partner the evil powers of the world, marrying and mixing with the things of idolatry. So the harlot represents the false union of church and state.

Daniel 2 talked about the clay and the iron - an unnatural mingling. The church and state are not meant to mix. The USA was founded on the wisdom that grew out of the persecution of the centuries in the preceding days in Europe. America made its strong stance about separation of church and state because its founders remembered what had been happening for hundreds of years when in Europe church and state were wedded, and about fifty million were slaughtered. I use a figure that's commonly used. We don't know exactly how accurate it is. It may have only been twenty or thirty million, but even that's more than the population of Australia. But it represents a bloody time when church and state united in evil.

The Bible is saying we face that prospect again. What happened in the Middle Ages will happen again. Government and religion will link. This time it will be to overcome anarchy or terrorism or both. And, then, whoever doesn't conform will be sentenced to death.

When it speaks about a mark on the forehead or hand, that's also an allusion to three Old Testament statements that admonish, "Write the law on your forehead and write it on your hand." You will find it in Deuteronomy 6:8, for example. In other words, see everything through the law, do everything according to the law, because the law is just the character of God spelled out in human behaviour.

This is saying that some will have the divine law, and some will have the beast's law. Some will be loyal to the precepts of the Decalogue; others will follow the perversions of it. It was said about Antichrist in Daniel 7:25, "He'll think to change the times and the law." So Revelation 13 is saying that when there is a union of church and state, it will interfere with the law of God. The devil will have his own gospel and his own law, and each person will have to conform or be in danger of death.

That's the scenario at the end of time. It's not an individual Antichrist. Where you have metaphorical passages, you must expect personification. "Man of sin," "son of perdition," no more means one person than when Daniel 7 talked about the kings of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. King there stands for a kingdom. Similarly, Antichrist is church and state united in its final attempt to find peace in the world.

Now look with me at I Thessalonians 5... *"As to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. You, yourselves, know well the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape."*

"When people say peace and security, then sudden destruction." That's based on the prophecies in Isaiah when Babylon says, "I sit as a queen. I see no sorrow." Peace everywhere. That's the idea. Then God says, "Therefore her plagues will come in one day."

Paul and John, in talking of the days of spiritual Babylon, predict there will be a little hour of peace when Antichrist rules the

world. There will be a little season, as Revelation calls it, when it looks as though the devil has succeeded. It will look like the time when Christ was on the cross, and it seemed as though the devil had won. That will happen on a world scale. There will be a little season when church and state will stick together for a while. But just as iron and clay cannot weld together, this false union of church and state cannot stay together. When they cry peace and safety, when the world is rejoicing, and when they expect a new millennium of peace and joy and prosperity - then God says, "sudden destruction comes upon them."

I Thessalonians 5 mirrors the future of the world and refers to what happened to Babylon of old. That was when Belshazzar and his lords got together and feasted and praised false gods of gold and silver. In other words, they violated the Decalogue, by taking the sacred vessels of the temple and prostituting them. (The vessels they drank out of came from the Jewish sanctuary.) Then God wrote on the wall: "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.*" "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting." And the record says, "that night Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans was slain."

That history is symbolic of the end of the world. The Babylonian world will take the things of God, the sacred things of God, the things of his divine law and his divine gospel and will prostitute them and abuse them and blaspheme them by commanding us to fulfil its law and its gospel. And when it does, God will write, "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting."

Babylon is only to rule for a little hour, for a little season, and then the plagues will come in one day.

Who will survive? See Revelation 14. "Then I looked and, lo, on Mount Zion stood the lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his father's name on their foreheads." And then it describes them from verse 4 on: "It is these who have not defiled themselves with women." It does not mean they are celibate. It means they have had nothing to do with adulterous religion; religion that "fornicates" an unnatural union between church and state. They are spoken of as chaste because they will have nothing to do with that type of religion. "It is these who follow the lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as the first fruits for God and the lamb. In their mouth is found no lie, for they are blameless." 144,000, of course, is a symbolic number having twelve (12 tribes, 12 apostles) as its root idea.

Who will be saved? The answer is, those who have the name of God on their fore-heads. They represent the love and character of God to people. Remember, a saint is someone who makes it easier to believe in God. I have met and know a lot of them. Sometimes, when I feel discouraged, certain people spring to mind and the thought raises my spirits.

Who will survive this test? Here, beyond the smoke and din of conflict of chapters 13 and 14, we are given symbolic encouragement regarding those who will come through unscathed and safe forever. They will have the Lamb's name on their foreheads, and be like him. Who's afraid of a lamb? If you bumped into a lamb in the darkness, you wouldn't be afraid of it. It's not like running into a crocodile, an alligator, a lion, or a tiger. To be lamb-like does not mean to be spineless either. It represents innocence and purity without evil intent. These lambs follow the Lamb wherever he goes in Christian service.

That's why we are here. We're not here just to please ourselves, but rather to serve the world.

You must ask yourself, "How much will I be missed? Will the world be any better because I have been here?" If not, you have no right to be here. We are all the time breathing in God's air, eating God's food, drinking his water, and receiving the love of family and friends. We are all the time receiving and taking. And we must all the time be trying to give back. We own nothing. We didn't determine the place of our birth. We didn't choose our parents, our sex, or our religion. It's all been a gift.

So we are to follow the lamb whithersoever he goes in service. We're here to serve, not in the sense of being do-gooders, always interfering in other people's business, but where the Lord indicates there's someone that can be helped, we should help.

es. Lewis said, "I don't know why I'm all the time gassing with words. People don't take much account of what I say. It's what I do that matters. It's what I am." The best way to witness for God is to be what we should be. The lambs follow Christ in service. They will follow him if necessary to the cross, to death, to resurrection, and to ascension.

What does it mean when it says in verse 5 "they are spotless" or "blameless? It's explained in an earlier verse, 7:14, "They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." The righteousness of the saints is never a moralistic achievement. It's a gift. The nearer we get to Jesus, the further we feel we are from him. There's never a moment in our lives where we cannot truthfully make the confession of Paul: "O wretched man that I am!" Therefore, righteousness has to be a gift.

So what does it mean when it says they follow the Lamb, and they're without spot, blameless? It's talking about when our eyes and mind are directed to the blood that was shed for us instead of our own blood being shed. It's when our hearts are melted by the love of God for the unlovely. It's when we take seriously the promise about "whosoever." - However weak we are, whatever colour we are, whatever culture we belong to, we are "whosoevers." It's when we take the promises of God as the breathings of unutterable love and take them seriously, saying, "They are for me." You are saved when you believe "Christ loved me," and you can say "He died for me."

Staupitz asked Luther, "Don't you believe the creed? Don't you believe it when it says about 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins?'"

"Yes," said Luther, "I believe it."

Staupitz said, "Well, say it like this: 'I believe in the forgiveness of MY sins.'" And that's when light began to dawn for Martin Luther.

We are spotless before God when we believe that the blood of Christ was shed for our sins, when we take it personally. At that point, we are without condemnation, and, in the sight of God, without spot, and blameless. We have eternal life, and we're through the Judgment, because we have the verdict right now. For us, the Judgment is a celebration of Christ's life and death.

Who's afraid of the big, bad Antichrist? Not us! He and his earthly representatives will be destroyed, and those trusting in the merits of Christ, abiding in his love and grace, will have a life that will measure with the life of God.

CHAPTER NINE

Calvary: Preview of the End of the World

The epochal events of September 11, 2001, shown so graphically on TV have now joined a series of other images that are hard to eradicate - the tragedies of Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia, Palestine, Sri Lanka, and other scenes of terrifying violence. In today's world there are over twenty million refugees desperately seeking a new homeland.

Of course, though horrible beyond description, we should remember that these events are but a fraction of the total cruelties and carnage of a world in rebellion against God. The news media tells us little of the onslaught by Muslims against millions of Christians in the Sudan. Closer home is the decimating fruitage of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, illegitimacy, divorced parents, and violence in the home. All these things have skyrocketed in Western society since World War II.

We live in a dysfunctional world. Our world is burdened with the breakup of the family, the threat of terrorism, and rampant suicide. All this is given some sort of meaning when we realise that we are a theatre to the universe. Jesus, the great realist, promised that these sad events are signs of his coming.

Life is very cheap, not just among scenes of terrorism, but everywhere. We could populate a huge city every year with the lives taken when abortion is used as a means of birth control. A mother's life must always come first. But there is no place for the careless use of abortion as a means of birth control. By that method, we take a million and a half lives every year in the USA alone.

Six out of every ten marriages in the USA end in divorce. Illegitimacy has soared since World War II. The results of these two statistics is terrible trauma for young people growing up without one or both parents. The leaders of Western countries do not always set us a good moral example.

We live under the threat of terrorism surpassing the terrorism of former generations. Biological and chemical terrorism are much more likely than all-out nuclear warfare. As mentioned earlier, if the wind is just right, any terrorist could release powdered anthrax into the bay of Manhattan, New York, and tens of thousands of people would die in a few hours. If they want to know how to do it, they can find out on the Internet. There are fourteen hundred sites on the Internet about how to kill people.

Today, more people kill themselves than kill others. Except for accidents, suicide is the main cause of death for people under forty in the Western world. As we consider the gruesome things that ushered out our old millennium, the words of Scripture come strongly to our minds: "*How long, O Lord, how long?*" That refrain is found throughout the Psalms and the prophets. Finally, it appears in the Bible's last book. "*How long, O Lord?*" (Rev 6: 10, KJV).

The Bible gives us hints into the meaning of things when it tells us that we are made a theatre to the universe. "For we are made a spectacle unto the world. And to angels, and to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9).

When the translators of the King James Version translated the Greek word "cosmos" they used the English word "world." It really means "everything made." We are made a spectacle, a sight, a theatre to the universe, to angels and to men. Here in our tiny world, the results of disobedience to the Creator are clearly demonstrated, and, in contrast, believers testify to the goodness of God.

His intent was that now through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:10-11, NIV).

Our world is the one lost sheep that has gone astray. The great controversy between good and evil that began in one place will not cease until it has been fought out on a global scale.

In answer to the question, "How long, O Lord?" Revelation 10:6 says, "There will be no more delay!" (NIV). The KJV version says, "Time no longer." That is not the best translation. All modern versions speak about "delay."

In the next chapter of Revelation we read: "*The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth.*" (Revelation 11: 18).

"The time has come to destroy those that would destroy the earth." That reminds us of the apocalyptic chapter in Isaiah 24, where it says: *The Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin the face and scatter its inhabitants [because].... The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left* (Isa 24:1, 5-6).

Jesus, the greatest optimist who ever lived - also the greatest realist - foretold our day when he said: *There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.* (Luke 21:25-26, NIV).

Jesus also said that in the very last generation, things that had happened right through the centuries would suddenly burgeon on a worldwide scale. Nations would be against nation, kingdom against kingdom, and famines, earthquakes and pestilences would be seen in many places.

Yet, Jesus admonishes us: "*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*" (Luke 21 :28, KJV).

One reason our world is so tragic is that which we have forgotten we are made in the image of God. Modern ideologies are making us into the image of society. Yet, more and more people are becoming uncomfortable with the idea that human life

came about by chance. The evidence points to a Creator. If there is a God, there is an afterlife. Eschatology is the study of the ushering in of that afterlife, the study of last-day events.

Why is the world so terrible? When Aleksander Solzhenitsyn was asked, "Why is Russia so tragic?" his answer was "Because we forgot God." God is as necessary to us as the heavens above or the earth beneath.

If we cease to believe we are made in the image of God, we will force each other to be made in the image of society. That's why, in the twentieth century, in the Western, educated world, one hundred million people were slain. They were killed by men who believed that people should be made in the image of society.

The greatest killers were those with the greatest education. The leaders of Adolph Hitler's systematic killing units were not road diggers, milk deliverers, or farmers. They were men with Ph.Ds. and other degrees.

Our troubles come because we've forgotten God. But is God really there? There is nothing wrong with asking a question like that. If Christ on the cross could ask, "Why?" (Matthew 27:46), then we can ask, "Why?" or "Whether?"

Let me share something from the book, *The Science of God*, by a professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The professor quotes a statement made decades ago that represented the thinking of most educated people back then: However improbable we regard this event [the start of all life], or any of the steps which it involves, given enough time it will almost certainly happen at least once. And for life as we know it, once may be enough.

Time is, in fact, the hero of the plot. The time with which we have to deal is of the order of two billion years. What we regard as impossible on the basis of human experience is meaningless here. Given so much time, the impossible becomes the possible. The possible the probable, and the probable virtually certain.

One has only to wait. Time itself performs the miracle. Such a view is now considered outdated by scientists, including those who are not Christians.

A few years ago, the journal *Scientific American* quoted that statement and went on to say this: Although stimulating, this article probably represents one of the very few times in his professional life when Wald [the author of the above-quoted statement] has been wrong.

Examine his main thesis and see. Can we really form a biological cell by waiting for chance combinations of organic compounds?

Harold Morowitz, in his book, *Energy Flow and Biology*, computed that merely to create a bacterium would require more time than the universe might ever see if chance combinations of its molecules were the only driving force.

Fred Hoyle, an atheist, is then quoted: The possibility of life coming about by chance is as good as a Boeing 747 being formed by a tornado sweeping through a junkyard.

Francis Crick, who describes himself as an agnostic and close to an atheist, says, "The only reasonable explanation is that life was planted here. Chance cannot explain it."

Since 1979, articles based on the premise that life arose through chance random reactions over billions of years, are not accepted in reputable journals. (Read that again, because it's important).

Life based on chance is a dead idea, It's as dead as a dodo.

There has been a great revolution in physics in the last sixty years. We now understand the anthropic principle. There is no possible chance of the miracle we call life ever having come about fortuitously. It's just not possible.

If, at that moment, which Christians call Creation and scientists call the Big Bang, certain things had been a trillionth of a second slower or a trillionth of a second faster, there would have been no universe. That is just one of forty such imponderables and impossibilities.

Yes, God is there. Because of this, many physicists are becoming theists. They are not necessarily becoming Christians. To be a Christian means you have to change your lifestyle. The main objection people have against Christianity is not academic; it is the requirement to change one's life.

It doesn't make sense to reject the forgiveness of sins, the gift of a perfect righteousness, and the bestowal of life eternal - all for free. But we are often reluctant to accept it.

Recently, in Australia, my daughter drove 190 kilometres to bring two young ladies to see me. They had just lost a friend by a drug overdose. Someone found her dead in a city toilet. These young women were bewildered, and, so, we talked about the meaning of life.

All of us have lost loved ones, and some day, our loved ones are going to lose us. The questions that automatically arise are: "Is that the end?" and "Shall we see our loved ones again?"

A young female student at Columbine was asked by a boy in a trenchcoat, "Are you a believer in God?" When she responded "yes," he murdered her, because she had been a Satan worshipper, was now converted to Christ, and refused to disavow her faith. What is her future? Shall we see her again? If not, what's the significance of her life? Does life have any meaning?

Bruce Barton, a Christian businessman, made an unforgettable statement. He said: *Immortality of some sort is a corollary with the fact of God. Would you, if you were God, make a world in which there was to be pain and sorrow and tragedy and toil? Would you convince people it was good to go against the flow, to stand for the truth, though the heavens fall, and to endure pain, to maintain a good conscience? Would you teach people that and then blot them out in the end? Of course not. There has to be another world, another life.*

Cardinal John Henry Newman, who wrote the classic, *The Idea of a University*, and many other books, said, "I would go mad if

I did not believe there was a future world where the injustices and the imbalances are not remedied."

Which brings us to the significance of the weighty word "eschatology." Eschatology simply is the study of what the Bible teaches about the future and about the end of things. Because the Bible is intentionally ethical, it has to be eschatological. If God is God, he cannot let things go on the way they are.

God has promised that the time will come when there will be delay no longer. He will destroy the earth. Because the Bible is so intensely ethical, it is full of eschatology - promises about an end to evil. Eschatology is the study of Last-day Events, and tells us that the return of Christ is the Blessed Hope. The whole Bible is full of the eschatological Blessed Hope. The Old Testament is promise, the Gospels are fulfilment, and the return of Christ is the consummation of the Blessed Hope.

There are two kinds of eschatology: 1. Individual eschatology, which has to do with our death and resurrection, and 2. Corporate eschatology, which has to do with the end of the world.

The first one, individual eschatology, is *not* the Blessed Hope. It is popular among Christians - at funerals - to speak about death as though it was a marvellous thing, the gate to heaven. But the Bible says that death is the last enemy, yet to be destroyed (see Corinthians 15:26).

The Blessed Hope in Scripture is never death. The Blessed Hope in Scripture is the return of Christ to finish death.

The Bible is full of this truth with over 2,000 references to it. The New Testament alone has over 320 references, and there are only 260 chapters in the New Testament.

The New Testament is a very eschatological book. When you pray the Lord's Prayer, there is eschatology in it: "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). When you celebrate the Lord's Supper, there is eschatology in it: "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26 NIV).

When you are baptised and go down into the water, you symbolise death; when you come up, you symbolise the resurrection day. Baptism is a symbol of eschatology.

The first preacher of the Second Advent is over 5,000 years old and still living! Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones." (Jude 1:14). It is a heaven-going doctrine. The apostles believed in it. The angels told them so at Christ's Ascension: *They [the apostles] were looking intently up into the sky as he [Jesus] was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:10-11)

Jesus believed in the Blessed Hope: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am.* (Jn 14:1-3)

Eric Hoffer, a blind longshoreman, wrote a book called, *The True Believer*, about fanaticism and religion. Hoffer said, "There is no potent faith without faith in the future."

Communism copied Christianity by offering people a future, but it failed. The future it offered had no base to build upon, because it had no God.

Let's all become theologians for a few minutes as we practice eschatology together. You can understand the whole Bible by eschatology. The Old Testament is full of promises about the approaching end-time "Kingdom of God."

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into this presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14).

While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth (Dan 2:34-35).

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of the mountain, but not by human hands-a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces (Dan 2:44-45).

That's eschatology.

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:9-10).

That's eschatology.

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose (Isa 35:1, KJV).

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox (Isa 11:6-7).

That's eschatology.

The Old Testament is full of promise. The Gospels fulfil that promise. Jesus said, "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). That is the fulfilment of the Old Testament's promise. But the consummation is yet to come.

The Old Testament is the promise. The four Gospels are the fulfilment. The consummation is yet to come.

Look at it another way. When you open the New Testament, Matthew talks about the kingdom over fifty times. When you move from the synoptic Gospels into John's Gospel, he talks about eternal life. In Acts, Luke talks about the eschatological gift of the Spirit. *"In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams"* (Acts 2:17).

When you move to Paul, he talks about the Last Judgment in terms of justification.

The synoptic Gospels talk about the kingdom of God, the fourth Gospel about eternal life, Acts about the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, Paul about the anticipated Last Judgment.

When you come to Jesus, he gives you the verdict of the Last Judgment. You have eternal life; you are accepted. There's no condemnation.

All these are eschatological themes. The kingdom, eternal life, the Spirit, judgment - they are all eschatology. Eschatology is a major theme throughout the whole Bible.

Think of this key truth about eschatology. The closing events of Christ's life prefigure the closing events of earth's history. The New Testament portrays Calvary as ushering in the end times. Christ's cry on the cross, "It is finished!" is a theme throughout the Bible. Christ's Passion Week pictures beforehand the finishing of God's work on earth at history's end.

Let me say it another way. The events at the close of the Old Testament era (the Gospel record of the events of Passion Week, culminating in Christ's death and resurrection) prefigure, foreshadow, predict, and are emblematic of the last events of earth's history.

The Gospel events that marked the end of the Old Testament era foreshadow the events that will mark the end of this dispensation.

Let me give you an illustration: *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."*

With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (Jn 19:28-30).

"It is finished!" The time of the end began at the cross of Christ.

Note the following Scriptures: *But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself* (Heb 9:26).

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

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light (Rom 13:11-12).

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings to us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come (1 Cor 10:11).

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Heb 1:12).

"These Last Days" - The Time of the End Began at Calvary.

When Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), cried, "It is finished!" he was looking back to the creation of the world when another naked Adam, by another Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, fell asleep.

That first Adam had his side opened so he could have a bride, Eve, on the sixth day of the week.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made (Gen 2:1-3, KJV).

At the time Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" the Sabbath was approaching. In synagogues all around Palestine, the words of Genesis were being read. The word "finished" is used repeatedly. In Gospels, Jesus - the second, or last Adam - is put to sleep on the sixth day. He is on a tree (Acts 5:30) - the cross is the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. His side is opened (by a spear). He has a bride - the church, which includes you and me.

"It is finished!" Jesus says.

"Finished" is a key word in the Bible.

In the last chapter of Exodus, we read repeatedly that Moses did all that the Lord commanded. Then we read: *"And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle"* (Ex 40:33-34).

Later, in book of Ruth, the last verse of chapter two says that Ruth stayed until the work was finished in the fields. At the end of the next chapter, her mother-in-law spoke to her: "*Then said she [Naomi], 'Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day'*" (Ruth 3:18, KJV).

You know the rest of the story of Ruth. Ruth, condemned by the law, and exiled because she was a heathen, was accepted by the grace of the lord of the harvest. That man was Boaz, whose name means "in Him strength." Boaz spoke to Ruth tenderly. He spread the corner of his garment over her in marriage (Ruth 3:9), so that she might bring forth fruit. The contract was made at Passover time, while he was sleeping amid the harvest stacks in the fields. "*The man will not be in rest, until he has finished the thing this day*" (Ruth 3:18, KJV).

When you arrive at the last book of the Bible, you read: *The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!"* (Rev 16:17 NIV). Also, "*He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is athirst I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life'*" (Rev 21:6).

Let me remind you of the things that led up to Christ's finishing of his work on the cross.

On the Sunday before Good Friday, there was Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The religious world was polarised. Opposing religions - Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians - prepared to join with the Roman state to get rid of their mutual enemy, Christ. So they plotted to kill him.

Jesus had challenged and questioned the multitudinous religious traditions. To avoid giving an answer to Christ, the religious leaders decided, "It is easier to kill him." It is a procedure that has often been followed.

Here we have a loud cry, the polarisation, the union of church and state, the death decree, a little time of trouble in Gethsemane, a bigger time of trouble on the cross. Jesus declared his cross to be the judgment of this world. The cross divides the world into the saved and the lost, and thus prefigured the world's last day.

We are not saved by whether we have been good or lost by whether we have been bad. I'm saved by whether I'm in Christ or not. In Christ I'm saved; out of Christ I'm lost. That's the meaning of the cross. Christ was crucified between two thieves. He was also the divider between one thief and the other - one called upon him, the other cursed him. We are all thieves.

"*There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:22-23). What makes the difference is my attitude towards the Man on the central cross. It is not the sin question that makes the difference; it's the Son question.

The darkness that engulfed the cross prefigures the last great day of judgment. The earthquake at the moment of Christ's death (when the dead were raised, see Matthew 27:52) prefigured the summoning of the multitudes to come to the judgment seat. And there was the King-Judge high and lifted up.

Because the events at the end of the Old Testament era prefigure the events at the end of the New Testament era, our brief outline of Passion Week tells us what is to happen in the last days. The gospel is to have its final, triumphant proclamation under the power of the Spirit. The gospel will go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people as Matthew 24:14 predicts.

The day will come when the church really takes hold of the gospel. Not the "gospel" of our own subjective feelings that we love so much; but the genuine, historical, objective gospel of Scripture. The result will be a polarised world. Some will hate the gospel, and some will love it; but those who present it to the world will be called the troublers of the world.

The world is desperately trying to conserve itself. It is perilously balanced, as the fragile globe contracts ever and ever smaller, becoming a neighbourhood but never a brotherhood. And in that tremulous, fearful condition, the governments of earth will be afraid of those who do not conform. True gospel Christians will be outlawed because they refuse to bow to the king of this world (Revelation 17:14). They have another king, King Jesus. Christians will be proscribed, outlawed, and threatened with death.

They will have a time of trouble such as never was, and many will be killed. Some will be beheaded (Revelation 20:4). But then will come the great day of resurrection. Then the King of kings and Lord of lords will return, and the balances of judgment will be adjusted.

CHAPTER TEN

Christ's Passion Week - a Mirror of the End of the World

In his actions, stories, sermons, and pronouncements during Passion Week, Jesus brought a time of judgment to Jerusalem and its people. So, in the end times, Jesus will be Judge. Jesus is the issue in the Judgment.

Please keep in mind this principle: the events at the end of the Old Testament era (Christ's birth, life, and his cross) prefigure the events at the end of the New Testament era (the end of the world). Think of the common things, would you, as I mention the events of Christ's last week of life.

- Jesus rode as a king into Jerusalem;
- He judged the city;
- He wept over it.

As he [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said: "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you" (Luke 19:41-44).

That is judgment.

When Jesus entered the city, he purged the Temple. Judgment again. Then he cursed a fruitless fig tree. More judgment.

Jesus then told a story about a beautiful vineyard: *Jesus told the chief priests and leaders to listen to this story: "A landowner once planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it and dug a pit to crush the grapes in. He also built a lookout tower. Then he rented out his vineyard and left the country.*

When it was harvest time, the owner sent some servants to get his share of the grapes. But the renters grabbed those servants. They beat one up, killed one, and stoned one of them to death. He then sent more servants than he did the first time. But the renters treated them in the same way.

Finally, the owner sent his own son to the renters, because he thought they would respect him. But when they saw the man's son, they said, 'Someday he will own the vineyard. Let's kill him! Then we can have it all for ourselves.' So they grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Jesus asked, "When the owner of that vineyard comes, what do you suppose he will do to those renters?"

The chief priests and leaders answered, "He will kill them in some horrible way. Then he will rent out his vineyard to people who will give him his share of the grapes at harvest time. "

Jesus replied, "You surely know that the Scriptures say, "The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all. This is something the Lord has done, and it is amazing to us."

'I tell you that God's kingdom will be taken from you and given to people who will do what he demands. Anyone who stumbles over this stone will be crushed, and anyone it falls on will be smashed to pieces.'" (Mt 21:33-44, CEV).

This is a story about judgment.

Then Jesus told a story about a wedding banquet (see Matthew 22:1-14). *Before the banquet began, the king came in to see the guests. He found a man there who was not wearing the wedding garment, which the king had provided. "So the king gave orders for that person to be tied hand and foot and to be thrown outside into the dark" (Matthew 22: 13).*

Here is more judgment.

Then Jesus pronounced seven woes upon the Pharisees and the teachers of the law of Moses. (See Matthew 23:1-36.) He called them hypocrites, blind guides, and fools. Seven times he told them, "You are in for trouble!" (v. 13). Finally he told them, "and now your temple will be deserted" (Matthew 23: 38).

Judgment again.

Next, in Matthew 24-25, Jesus gave a whole sermon on the judgment of the world. The sermon culminated in three judgment parables:

1. A Story About Ten Girls (Matthew 25:1-13). They were waiting for the marriage party, but became tired and fell asleep. When the groom arrived, only five of the girls were ready. The door was shut against those who were unprepared. When they knocked... "the groom replied, 'I don't even know you!'" (verse 12).

2. A Story About Three Servants (Matthew 25: 14-30). A master on a journey left his possessions in the hands of his three servants. When he returned and called for an accounting, two of the servants had increased the master's estate. But the third was afraid and buried what had been entrusted to him. The master was angry, and rebuked the servant. "You are a worthless servant, and you will be thrown out into the dark" (verse 30).

3. The Final Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46): When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (verses 31-33)

Who is this man who claims to be the Judge of all nations?

But you'll notice that the judgment stories do not end with theology. They end with love (or lovelessness). *He [the King] will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life* (Matthew 25:45-46).

How we treat people reveals what we think of Christ. The one theme that marks Christ's Passion Week is judgment. It is in Jesus' actions, his parables, and his sermons, and the events of Passion Week prefigure the events of end times. It is vital that we understand that.

One of the greatest problems for Christians is the delay of Christ's Second Coming. Christ's judgment upon Jerusalem during his Passion Week was conditional. Had Jerusalem repented, Christ's Second Coming would have been joined to his first. Christian preaching must not separate the Second Coming from the first. Only the cross of the first coming brings fearless anticipation of Christ's second Coming.

This helps some people to understand the most puzzling texts of the New Testament and the biggest theological problem of the Bible - the delay of the parousia (or return of Christ).

"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Mt 24:34; see also Matthew 13:30 and Luke 21:32).

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

When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:23).

There is a great deal of material on the problem of the delay of Christ's return. I remember over thirty years ago, when I was doing postgraduate work at the University of Manchester in England, I would wade through the mounds of material written on this problem.

When you understand that the theme of Christ's Passion Week was judgment, you have part of the answer. The Lord did come while some were standing there; the Lord did come before the disciples went through all the cities of Israel; the Lord did come in that generation - he came in judgment! For example, the parables of the vineyard and the wicked renters climaxes with Jesus asking the chief priests and leaders: *"When the owner of that vineyard comes, what do you suppose he will do to those renters?"*

The chief priests and leaders answered. 'He will kill them in some horrible way. Then he will rent out his vineyard to people who will give him his share of the grapes at harvest time.' (Matthew 21 :40-41, CEV).

This, of course, pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Not that this is the whole meaning. Had Israel repented, it would have actually happened that Christ's First and Second Advents would have merged.

We are dealing here with conditional prophecy, or promise. There are many in the Bible. For example, Jonah's message to Nineveh was that it would be overthrown in 40 days. "And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk." Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4, NKJV).

But the people of the city repented, and the city was not overthrown. The prophecy was conditional upon the response of the people. There are conditions to prediction.

So we can see a shadow - or partial fulfilment - of the meaning of Christ's return in Christ's coming to that generation in the judgments that followed the cross.

According to Josephus, at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, one million three hundred thousand Jews were put to death. A hundred thousand survivors were scattered as slaves throughout Roman markets. The Lord came in judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70.

Now, for a *most* important point. We have all attended many weddings and heard these words: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6 KJV; also Mark 10:9). I suspect there are many marriages that maybe God did not put together, but we won't quibble - it's the principle we are after. This principle - what God has joined together, let not persons separate - is true about the First and Second Advents of Christ.

If we preach the Second Advent without making plain the meaning of the First, all we do is breed legalists. We sow fear. We make Christians who are only outward conformists, afraid of receiving the Mark of the Beast or undergoing the seven last plagues. God has joined the two advents together. We must not preach the Second Advent of Christ without making the meaning of the First Advent of Christ clear. Otherwise, our religion is cultic.

An old preacher, A.T. Jones, was a very wise man. He once said to a large congregation, "Brethren, you know how it was with us. We preached the Second Coming, but none of us wanted it to happen."

The key to these meditations is that the events at the close of the Old Testament era prefigure the events at the end of the world.

Now we are emphasising that we are not ready for those last days until we understand the meaning of Christ's cross and have embraced Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

The troubles of the last days will be such that we have no hope of surviving them without faith, hope, and love. These qualities cannot be worked up or self-generated. They are the fruit of the Spirit. They come only as we look to Jesus. Faith, hope, and love are God's gift to us as we hear the gospel (and if we do not resist the gospel). Faith is born from hearing the gospel. So are hope and love.

Only then am I ready to face the great tribulation, which will be more terrible than anything the world has ever seen.

Notice how Jesus linked his two advents in the ideal way. During Passion Week, Jesus said: *"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from this earth, will draw all men to myself."*

He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die (John:31-33).

Notice the joining of judgment and appeal (or drawing). Christ will "draw" all people, not force, but draw. Here is the greatest magnet of all time, the cross of Christ. It is also the only lever that can move the world.

Some people leave a lasting influence when they die. But for most men when they die, that is the end of them. And those who die as criminals and are executed, it's doubly true. But Jesus said about his execution, "When I die, I will be glorified. My cross will become a magnet, and I will draw all men unto me." "All men" means the whole universe. In the King James Version, the word "men" is in italics. That means it is not there in the Greek. The Greek reads: "I will draw *everyone* unto me" - men, women, and angels, and all beings throughout the universe. The cross is to be the great magnet that will draw the whole universe together in wonderful harmony and unity. The Last Judgment will reveal this.

Why is the cross a magnet? Because it was God in Christ on that cross in my place and in your place.

We all know that we have fallen short in a thousand ways. We all know we've done things we ought not to have done and left undone the things we ought to have done. There is no difference in the *fact* of our guilt, even if there are differences in the *dimensions* of our guilt. If you murder 50 people, the courts do not necessarily punish you more than if you just murdered three. If you steal ten thousand dollars, you go to prison as certainly as if you stole a million. The Bible says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23, KJV). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23).

The gospel attracts us because it says, God is *for* me, not *against* me. Sin is mighty, but there is one thing sin cannot do. It cannot destroy Christ's love for me. Sin is mighty, but there is another thing it cannot do. It cannot prevent Christ manifesting his love for me, even though I'm guilty.

Christ's love is not a response to our love. His love is not at the mercy of our fluctuating affections. His love comes from a deeper source - his own nature, which is love. Our love is an echo of his; his love isn't an echo of ours. Forever and ever, he loves us. When I deny him and forsake him, when I blaspheme him, Christ loves me still. His love suffers long and is kind. His love is not easily provoked. His love suffers all things. His love bears all things. His love hopes all things.

The little infant in its mother's arms may pummel the warm breast on which it rests, but the mother is neither hurt nor angry. The arm is more sure and the heart is more loving. And Christ's arm around you and me is so sure and strong, we cannot force it away. His love for us is so divine, there is no way we can dam it. He suffers long and is kind. He bears all things, and hopes all things.

There is nothing I can do to make Christ love me more; and there is nothing I can do to make Christ love me less. It is true I cannot be saved by the things I do. It is also true that I cannot be lost by any single thing I do. Though that sounds unbelievable, it's biblical.

You ask, "What about murder? That will cause me to be lost." Well, Moses was a murderer; Paul was one also, and so was David. They were all murderers, and yet they are not lost.

"What about adultery? That will cause me to be lost." David was an adulterer. He is not lost though his sins greatly compromised his and others' lives.

My friends, nothing I can do can get me into heaven, and no single thing I can do can ensure I won't go. Once I have accepted the gospel and truly given Christ my heart in response, the only thing that can shut me out of heaven is my willful, or careless, protracted, back-turning on the One I know loved me and gave himself for me.

But woe to the fool who presumptuously seeks to take advantage of such wonderful grace!

Missionaries have better success when they preach the gospel of God's love in Christ rather than the Ten Commandments. Though the cross of Christ prefigured the last great judgment, in the cross we have peace about judgment. The wrath of God cannot abide on believers. The cross of Christ invited us into God's loving embrace.

When Moravian missionaries first entered Greenland, their unspoken strategy was: "These poor savages are too unsophisticated to understand about propitiation and justification. We will tell them about the character of God and the Ten Commandments. They can understand that."

The missionaries got nowhere. The Greenlanders carried on as usual, doing exactly as they wanted to do. It made no difference to them that the missionaries were there.

One day, a Moravian missionary began to read aloud the story of the cross. A Greenlander heard him and said, "What's that?" The missionary replied, "That's the story of how our God came and died for us."

"Well, why didn't you tell us that before?" said the interested Greenlander. "Hold on, while I go and bring some others." He called in more Greenlanders and they listened, raptly, to the story of Calvary, tears running down their cheeks.

What the Moravian missionaries had tried to do with the law, what they tried to do with theology, proved to be only possible in the light of the cross. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all unto me."

David Brainerd was the first of the great missionaries. His sacrifice inspired William Carey, and Carey inspired Adoniram Judson, and Judson inspired thousands. David died in his twenties of tuberculosis. But, before that, he went to work among the Indians. He made the same mistake as the missionaries in Greenland. He began to tell the Indians what to do and what not to do and got nowhere.

Then, one day, he began to read the story of the cross. Old men wept, and little children opened wide their eyes, and women sighed - and love came to rule the community.

Our modes of evangelism are so different to the Bible's. Too often, we just hit people over the head with the Ten Commandments. All we do is give them a headache, not the gospel.

Martin Luther said, "If you had known me in my early years as a monk, you would have found me with a whip by my side and the Ten Commandments under my head." The Ten Commandments are perfect for perfect people, but there haven't been any except Christ since the Fall. They remain a permanent standard because they represent the character of God. God's honesty, and truthfulness, and purity, and holiness are all represented in the Ten Commandments. You cannot get rid of the Ten commandments as a standard, but they can't produce salvation.

Notice that Jesus says that Calvary is a judgment of the world: "*This world's people are now being judged, and the ruler of the world is already being thrown out! If I am lifted up above the earth, I will make everyone want to come to me*" (John 12:31-32, CEV).

At the cross of Calvary there was darkness, there was earthquake, and many bodies of saints that slept arose. All things that will mark the last days were at Calvary: darkness, earthquake, resurrection, the king high and lifted up, and men divided. Now is the judgment of this world indeed!

First, however, we must also see it was judgment that was meted out on him. Jesus was made a curse for us. "*God made him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*"

We must see the sin of all the ages - past, present, and future, before the Flood, after the Flood, before Calvary, after Calvary, all that one terrible, grotesque, bloody heap - falling on the head of the purest being in the universe, and he was judged in our stead.

"Now is the judgment of the world." He took the whole human race in his arms and bore the penalty for the whole human race, and, legally, he restored the race to God.

That is why Scripture says Christ is our peace (see Ephesians 2: 14). He has taken away the note of our indebtedness. He nailed it to his cross (see Colossians 2:14). He has broken down the middle wall of partition between God and man. God recognises no divisions except that of unbelief.

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him that heareth say, "Come!" And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev 22: 17, KJV).

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (Jn 3:18).

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil (In 3:19, NASB).

The human problem is not an intellectual problem. Do not believe that atheism is an intellectual problem. It's not. It's a moral problem. Never forget it. Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. "The heart and not the head to the highest doth attain."

The close of the grand third chapter of John says: "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*" (John 3:36).

It says the wrath of God abides, or rests, on the unbeliever. It does not say the wrath of God will come one day - it is here now! It is very dangerous to die with the wrath of God abiding on you.

But "he who believes in the Son has eternal life" and is not condemned (see John 3:18). It does not read, "He who achieves," but "he who believes."

Believing is receiving, and receiving is believing. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not [won't receive the gift, and wants to abide in his or her own self-righteousness] is condemned already" and is under the wrath of God. But Jesus says, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all." He draws by his love for the unlovely.

Centuries ago, there was a beautiful cathedral in northern Europe. High in the arches, near the roof of the great cathedral, there was a beautiful sculpture of a face. It wasn't discovered for years until a beam of sunlight fell upon it just as someone was looking in that particular spot. Thereafter, crowds came every day when the sun shone in just the right place.

Here is the story behind that wonderful sculpture. When the cathedral was being built, an old man, worn in years and frail in body, came to the architect and begged permission to help. The architect thought the old man looked beyond useful activity, and he didn't want anyone to spoil his own work. So he only allowed the old man to work way up near the top of the cathedral, near the sky, where any damage he might inflict would not be seen. Then the builders forgot about him. One day he was found dead. All his tools were neatly set out in order. His face was directed at the wonderful sculpture he had created - a masterful production - of the One whom he had loved and lost in his youth.

All the builders and masons and craftsmen and painters and sculptors came together to look at the old man's masterful sculpture. They said, "This is the greatest work of all! Love has wrought it!"

Two thousand years ago, our God humbled himself to take our nature. At Calvary, Christ was nailed to a cross, poised between heaven and earth - and rejected by both. Naked, he was the object of shame and irreverence and mocking. Though hungry and weak, and feeling separated from God, his arms were still outstretched in invitation to his murderers. Love had wrought it!

One day soon there will be a new heaven and a new earth. There will be no more curse, no more death, and no more tears. If

we have been humbled enough to accept God's grace, we will say, "Love has wrought it!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Christ's Acted Parables of the Last Judgment

The last parables that Jesus told were all about judgment. Yet we can have hope despite a fearful future. The Bible always links the two advents of Christ. We are to know him as our Saviour at Calvary before we meet him as judge at his Second Coming.

The Irish Poet, W. B. Yeats, wrote a very predictive poem in 1921:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere,
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*
- "The Second Coming," stanza one

What prophetic words!

A cartoon showed two cavemen talking, and one says to the other, "I've been worrying all night. I wish we had never invented the future tense." One little hope is worth a whole bagful of memories.

Jesus spoke of the future time, when there would be distress of nations with perplexity, with men's hearts failing them for fear, for looking after those things coming upon the earth (see Luke 21:25-26, KJV). He said, "When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:28, NKJV).

We now begin a study of the last stories that Jesus told. All of them were stories of judgment. In one of them, as he pictures the Second Coming, Jesus says two things: 1. There will be a seemingly interminable delay, and 2. the coming will be at the darkest hour of earth's history, at the social, spiritual, and moral midnight of this world. But Jesus assures us: "Lift up your heads, for when it is dark, then your redemption draws near."

Because the Bible is so intensely ethical, it is eschatological in its emphasis. It points to the future, when God will balance the books.

This little world is a lesson book to the universe. It is here that we see the outworking of the principles of good and evil. Compared to the universe, our world is a tiny drop in the bucket. However, Scripture says, "We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9, NIV). Human history is a theatrical performance for all the universe to watch. Ultimately, forever and ever, the whole universe will observe the outworking of good and evil.

The whole universe, therefore, will be safeguarded. The great lesson will have been learned. The universe will have such a memorial in the terrors and horrors of world history (and especially of end times) that sin will never erupt a second time.

In the interim, while we anticipate the final global display of good and evil that will bring down the curtain on human history, we are to remember certain things: First, the events at the end of the Old Testament era (and the beginning of the New) prefigure, predict, and foreshadow the events at the end of the world.

Second, unless we always link the two advents of Christ, we will never be ready for Christ's second coming.

To contemplate Christ's coming to our world as Judge without knowing him as Saviour, is absolutely devastating. To think of the great Judgment day without thinking first of Calvary is fatal.

The two advents must be distinguished but never separated. It is the mark of a cult (or at least a cultic tendency) when the second Advent is proclaimed without the first. The Bible never makes that mistake.

In the Bible's last book, the book of Revelation (which is all about the second coming), the first chapter pictures Jesus saying: "*I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades [the grave]*" (Revelation 1:18).

The book of Revelation is a book about the second advent, but it introduces Jesus as *Saviour* first.

The middle verses of the book talk about the cross. They are found in Revelation 12:10-12: *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!

But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you!

He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Rev 12:10-12).

The words, "They overcame him by the blood of the lamb" are the heart of the book. And at the end of Revelation we find: *And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come. Whoever thirsts, come, take the water of life freely"*.

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life (Rev 22:17).

In John 12:31-33, when Jesus foretold his death on Calvary, he superimposed two pictures, the second upon the first. He said his death on Calvary is the judgment of this world.

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die (Jn 12:31-33, NKJV).

It was at Calvary where Jesus would be lifted up as the great judge and there would be darkness as at Sinai. Sinai, the day God came down to the mountain, also foreshadowed Judgment Day when all will be summoned before God.

There's an earthquake and a division between righteous and evil men (typified by the two thieves). Finally, as Jesus dies, the bodies of many saints rise from the grave. It's resurrection day.

The two Advents kaleidoscope together at Calvary, thus epitomising the gospel which tells about the glorious atonement of our Saviour and his solemn, yet joyous, return as Judge and King.

Christians need mature faith, hope, and love to survive the last great tribulation. To help his disciples prepare for the shock of Calvary, Jesus gave unusual demonstrations of his sovereignty. When we know that we are not the victims of chance, but that God is in charge of all things, life is much sweeter.

If we are to survive the last great tribulation, it is essential that faith and hope and love be mature. Please notice the very strange but, nonetheless, very appropriate way in which Christ put the finishing touch to the faith, hope, and love of his disciples. He did this just before the Calvary tragedy would immerse them in sorrow and disappointment.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away" (Matthew 21:1-3, NIV).

Suppose that a friend said to one of you, "Please go down to the shopping centre, and you'll find a beautiful new car outside the supermarket. The owner has left the keys in the ignition. I want you to take your time, open the car door, climb in, sit down, turn on the engine - and if anyone says to you, 'What are you doing with my car?' just tell them, 'Fred wants it.'"

With this unusual event Jesus is preparing his disciples for the shock of Calvary. He wants to tell them, "Nothing can happen by chance." He wants to convince them that Calvary is not a bad accident or happenstance. There are no accidents in God's universe.

If God is on the throne,
chance cannot be
If chance is on the throne,
God cannot be.

Jesus teaches us that God is on the throne, not chance. Regardless of appearances, God is in control. There was never a darker day than the Friday of Calvary, Good- Friday (or Bad Friday). There was never a blacker day than that, but that day brought us the salvation of the world.

Here is an equally strange episode: *"On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"*

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover" (Mark 14:12-16).

Jesus wants to convince his disciples that he has power over everything, even when he is not visibly present. He wants to convince his disciples that he traces the words, the deeds, the actions, the motives, the intentions of all people everywhere, because he is divine. His prophetic eye looks down upon the city - which was crowded with about three million pilgrims for Passover - and sees a man at the well.

Usually it was a woman's work to go to the well to draw water. But Jesus sees a man there. He notices the man filling the pot and knows exactly when that man will reach a certain place. So Jesus said to his disciples, "Go now and when you get to a certain spot, a man will have just arrived from the well. Don't talk to him, just follow him. He's only going to stop at one house. He's not going to go and visit friends on the way. He'll only stop at one house. And you are to go into that house, and you are to say to the master of the house, "Our master wants the upper room."

Think of all the possibilities. Meeting the right man just on time at that certain place. The man doesn't stop anywhere, he just goes to the one house. The disciples are to say to the owner of the house, "We want your house." What if that master had said, "That's what you think!?" What if there were no upper room where the man with the pitcher stopped? If there was one, what if it were only a tiny upper room? What if it were not furnished or ready?

The disciples didn't hesitate; they just did what they were told. Here is a marvellous display of God's providential power. Christ is not present. Christ is not visible. Yet he foresees the actions of men, and he is absolutely in control.

When the disciples took the donkeys, they were to say, "The Lord has need of them." Jesus, the Galilean carpenter, is Lord of all people and things. He is in control of events. If we can really believe this, it will take a great deal of the stress out of life.

If you think you are at the mercy of accidents, your life will always be uncertain. If you can come to believe that God is in control - even of the most terrible things - life will be so much sweeter and better.

There's such a depth of meaning in these scenes. For example, if one day we are all going to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb and feast in heaven's upper room, then we first must follow the one with the water. We first have to be baptised into the family of God. Then we are led to the upper room where we feast on his broken body and his shed blood. That room

will merge into the marriage supper of the Lamb. But it all begins with our obeying him and following the man with the water until we become professors of Christ by baptism and then partake of his broken body and shed blood.

There is tremendous depth of meaning here, but the main meaning is, Christ is in control.

This is what the disciples needed to know because of Calvary. Was Calvary a slip-up? An accident? No! It was the predetermined plan for the salvation of the world.

March 23, 1989 seemed an ordinary day. Yet it was a day when Stalin's statement could have been terribly fulfilled: "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." On March 23, 1989, an asteroid, unforeseen by astronomers, suddenly loomed out of the depths of space and came within a few hours of the earth. It had been in the solar system for approximately five billion years. It was travelling 72,000 miles an hour. If it had hit the earth, the energy released would have been the equivalent of 20,000 hydrogen bombs. It would have wiped out any continent it struck. The chances of this asteroid not hitting our earth over a period of billions of years is calculated as one in seven million millions.

When Jesus said, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7), he used language with which people are familiar. In our day, he could have said, "I count the asteroids. I handle the stars. I hold up the universe. I'm in charge of everything."

It is very important that we understand that God is in control and that God is sovereign.

Read John 10:28-29, and pray for grace to believe the good news that every believer safely resides between the hands of the Father and the Son.

We now examine Christ's Passion Week and notice how it prefigures the end of the world.

In the story we read in Matthew 21:1-3, we saw that Jesus gave no anxious thought. He simply said, "Go and get the donkey and its colt."

Jesus was always given what he needed. He had the use of the donkey, an upper room guest chamber, a tomb to rest in, and a royal anointing. Those who give their all to God find that God gives them all they need. Those who are mean and selfish will always be prone to anxiety and care about material things.

Jesus has surrendered everything to his Father's will, so everything he needed was at hand. "Go and get the donkey and its colt." These animals become the symbols of the Jewish church and the Christian church. The older animal represents ancient Israel. Jesus riding on the younger colt is the symbol of the newer Christian church.

At his triumphal entry, Jesus displayed his sovereignty and, at the same time, set himself apart for the cross. This was the day when the paschal or Passover lamb was separated out from the flock, in preparation for the Passover sacrifice. So Jesus set himself apart.

It was appropriate that Calvary not happen privately and quietly. We often think of Calvary as a lone hill with a few people. But there were probably many thousands of people present that day. The city of Jerusalem had two to three million people present during Passover season. They were all stirred because of this triumphal entry.

Jesus draws attention to the Messiah of Israel, who is about to die for the sins of the world. He does so purposely so that Calvary could not be ignored. As he does so, Jesus polarises the world. The final proclamation of the gospel will do the same thing, and have the same effect.

Revelation 18:1 talks of a time when the earth will be lightened with the glory of God. This will be like Pentecost taking place in all the great cities of the world. The gospel of the love of God will be offered worldwide in a way it has never been offered before.

That will be the antitype of Christ's Triumphal Entry. That, too, will polarise the world, just as the triumphal entry did. Some will be happy and accept the gospel. Others will be angry and want to crucify the people who challenged them to bow the knee to the lordship of Christ.

This is also a dim foreshadowing of Christ's coming in glory amid the triumph of the angels and the joy of the saints. Christ sits upon a colt, upon which no man had ever sat. This declares the uniqueness of Jesus. Just as he was going to lie in a tomb that had never been occupied, just as he was born from a virgin womb, now he sits on a colt that has never been ridden, showing his sacred uniqueness. "*This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey''*" (Matthew 21:4-5).

The donkey was a symbol of peace. It was not a mean creature. When Solomon came in as king, he also came in on a donkey. But the donkey is in contrast with the horse, which is a steed of war. War is the devil's invention. Satan delights in war. There are so many madnests wrapped up in war, one could lecture on it all day long. They select young men for war because young men haven't had much experience.

After the age of forty, fewer men are violent.

We dress people up for war. People love uniforms. They like to be on a stage as though acting, and to do so they will go through anything. We have music and speeches and medals anything to persuade people to die. If we had wars with politicians only in the battle arena, then we would have far fewer wars. Wars are always puffed up to look wonderful and marvellous at the time when millions of young people are to be sacrificed. But when we look back later, we see them as terrible tragedies and disasters.

Christ came as the Prince of Peace. He represents love and goodness, not bloodshed and violence.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who

comes in the name of the Lord! "Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:8-9).

The crowd took off their outer garments and spread them on the road. This was very fitting, because the One on the colt had laid off the garments of his glory for us and had come in the humiliation of human nature to die.

Matthew does not record what happened midway in the journey of Christ's Triumphal Entry, but Luke does. The triumphal procession had just turned a bend in the road coming down from Mount Olivet. Jesus, his disciples, and the crowd, reach the brow of the hill, and suddenly the city of Jerusalem comes into view. Standing out in its beauty is the temple, lit up by the western sun. Its snow-white marble walls and the gold-tipped pinnacles of the pillars gleam in glory.

The crowd stops and thinks that the Master will be filled with admiration at what he sees. To its surprise, Jesus gives a wail of sorrow, and his body sways to and fro as in a tempest. Then he cries out, and weeps a message of doom that interrupts the cheers of the crowd. Here Jesus speaks as Prophet: *As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you"* (Luke 19:41-44, NIV).

When Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, he was portrayed as king. Now we see him as prophet. Later, when he comes to the temple, we shall see him as priest.

We see Jesus revealed as prophet, priest, and king again, as we draw closer to Calvary. When the women wept over him as he struggled toward Calvary, Jesus said prophetically: *"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'"*

Then he says: *"they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills 'Cover us' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"* (Luke 23:30, 31).

This is Jesus as prophet, predicting that Jerusalem is going to be burned up. When he is nailed to the cross and his blood spurts, Jesus becomes priest. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34). His prayer reveals him as a priestly intercessor.

Then we see him as king, bestowing entrance into his kingdom (or paradise) upon one of his subjects (the penitent thief). *"Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise'"* (Luke 23:43, punctuation supplied).

Here Jesus promises immortality *"You will be...."* Everyone present thought Jesus and the thief, hanging upon the cross, were about to "not be." Jesus promises everlasting life. *"You will be with me in paradise."* Here is the glory of heaven, not of earthly crowns. We see Jesus as king giving heaven away. Here he is prophet, priest, and king.

When Jesus wept before Jerusalem, he was not weeping for his own sorrow. At that vantage point, he could see the Sheep Gate, through which the sacrificial sheep were led to be slaughtered in the temple. From that point on the road, he could also see the district of Calvary where he would hang upon a sacrificial cross. But his sorrow is not for himself. His sorrow is for Jerusalem, because he sees what it is going to happen to its people. *"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace"* (Luke 19:41).

Jesus, here, is speaking to all of us. We often don't know what belongs to our peace. We are so affected by the things of sight and sense. We are so beguiled by the things of today, that we live as though there was never going to be a tomorrow.

How few people wonder, "Where will I be in a hundred years time?" How few there are who ask the questions: "Am I pleasing God by the way I live? Is my life given to him? Do I expect him to give me eternity if I don't yield to him in time?" How few there are who know the things that belong to their peace! Ancient Israel could have stood foremost in the glory of kingdoms. There need not have been any foreign soldiers at her gates. There need not have been any idolatrous Roman banners hanging from her walls. She could have been the glory of all kingdoms, the greatest metropolis of the world.

God chose and created Israel, but not because she was better than other nations. He said, *"The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you"* (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

They were chosen by God's love because they were the least of all people; but they were to be the stewards of the oracles of God.

God entrusted to them the gospel in type and symbol. That is what the sanctuary was all about. God entrusted them with his holy law, which is the condition of happiness - not the perfect keeping of it - that is beyond us in this world - but a heart that is surrendered to it.

They were meant to be messengers to the world, but had set up hedges and barriers between themselves and other nations. They had shut themselves in and esteemed themselves better than others and declared, "We are the righteous remnant." They had missed God's intention for them. They did not know the things that belonged to their peace. Thus, our Lord wept in sorrow over the city, because he loved Jerusalem so. Is he weeping or rejoicing over you?

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.' Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of robbers. "

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. 'Yes,' replied Jesus, "have you never read, 'From

the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?' And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night (Matthew 21:10-17, NIV).

As the procession entered the city of Jerusalem, people everywhere asked "Who is this? Who is this?" If the Spirit of inspiration had been operative in the disciples of Jesus at that time, they would have answered as follows: Adam will tell you, "This is the Seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's heel."

Abraham will tell you, "This is the One in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Jacob will tell you, "This is Shiloh of the tribe of Judah."

Isaiah will tell you, "This is Emmanuel, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of Peace."

Jeremiah will tell you, "This is the Branch of David, this is the Lord our Righteousness."

Ezekiel will tell you, "This is the good Shepherd."

Malachi will tell you, "This is the Priest who will come to his temple, and he will be like a refiner's fire and he will purify the sons of Levi."

And John the Baptist told you, "Behold! The Lamb of God!"

Even his satanic majesty could have told you, because through the demons he said, "We know who you are. The Holy One of God."

Who is This? All of this and more. The Jewish leaders were acquainted with philosophers and agitators and fanatics, but they had never met anyone like Jesus.

The procession is interrupted by priests who have come out from the temple. The priests joined the crowd. They said to the Master, "Why don't you stop all this noise? What's all this fuss about?"

The priests took no notice of the joy in the voices of the men, women, and children who were crying out. Many in the crowd were from Bethany. They were eyewitnesses of the raising Lazarus from the dead by Jesus in their hometown. The priests hated anything that might lessen their significance and prestige in the eyes of people, which is why they were so opposed to Jesus.

Historically, it was the next day that Jesus entered the temple, but Matthew puts it immediately after the triumphal entry. Jesus swept into the temple, which is the heart of Judaism. Judaism represents the heart of the world. God wants us to see the centrality of religion, but he also wants us to realise that religion has a tendency to go bad. Wherever there is great potential for good, there is always an equal potential for ill. Religion can become the greatest curse in the world when it's not good religion - and much religion is not good. We can be painfully sympathetic when many atheists and agnostics look at popular religion and say, "I don't want anything to do with it." You and I don't want anything to do with it either.

One day, God will cleanse all bad religion and wipe it out. That is what Christ's cleansing of the temple prefigures.

There is a mystical verse in the book of Daniel: "*And he said unto me, 'Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed'*" (Daniel 8:14, KJV). This predicted that one day the sanctuary would be cleansed or vindicated. The context of the verse is wickedness treading down and defiling the sanctuary. The verse itself is the last verse of the symbolic presentations of the book.

It is the key to the book of Daniel. It is paralleled by the climaxes of all the other prophecies in the book, such as the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13), the stone smiting the image (Daniel 2:35, 44-45), and Michael standing up (Daniel 12:1). These are all the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary.

When Jesus comes again, the sanctuary of professed religion will be cleansed at the same time as the world is cleansed. That will be the ultimate cleansing of the sanctuary. The final cleansing is at the end of the millennium, when Satan and his hosts come against the holy camp of God. Then God cleanses the universe forever and ever and ever (Revelation 20:7-10).

Of course, that temple is a symbol of your heart and mine. You and I were made to be temples of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). The only reason for my existence, the only reason for your existence, is that we might be temples of the living God. The covenant promise in the Old and New Testaments is, "*I will be their God and they shall be my people. I will dwell in them*" (2 Corinthians 6:16). We were never meant to live alone. We were meant to be inhabited by God.

It is interesting that Jesus cleansed the temple at the beginning of his ministry and at the close. After cleansing it the first time, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus taught out what he had acted out. When Nicodemus came to him after the first cleansing of the temple, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." The human temple had become defiled by sin.

"We must be born again." This has direct meaning for every one of us. The right way to read the Bible is with a rake, where you gather information in and say, "What does it mean for me?" The wrong way to read the Bible is with a spear, where you take a passage and "throw it" at some other person. Reading the account of the cleansing of the temple with a rake means that God wants us to be clean temples with pure hearts, letting him dwell there, having nothing profane his temple - no thought that heaven cannot countenance, no motive that God cannot approve of, no action and no word that is not in harmony with holiness and goodness.

The miracle of the fig tree that withered is an acted parable. Just as Christ pronounced judgment upon a fruitless tree, so he pronounces judgment upon a fruitless Jerusalem and Israel. Judgment comes upon all who are without fruit. Fruit can only appear in the life as a result of love for Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus was just as much human as though not at all God, and just as much God as though not at all man. He knew what it was to be hungry and did not play-act. We read: "*Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was*

hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, 'May you never bear fruit again!' Immediately the tree withered" (Matthew 21:18-19, NIV). Jesus had probably spent all night in prayer and was hungry. He came to a fig tree beside the road. It belonged to nobody, only to God. It was in full leaf. When the fig tree is in full leaf, it means there are figs; because on the fig tree, the fruit comes first. Jesus searched from the lowest branch to the utmost twig, and, amazingly there was not a fig to be found.

Jesus then did something unique in his ministry. This is the only miracle Christ ever worked that did damage. (We do read of another one in Mark 5:1-20 where demons, cast out by Christ's mercy, destroy a herd of pigs. But the demons did the damage, not Jesus.)

The miracle is an acted parable, for the fig tree is a symbol of Israel. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus told a parable about a barren fig tree.

Then he told this parable: A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"

'Sir,' the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig round it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down" (Luke 13:6-8).

Jesus had talked to Jerusalem, Jesus had wept over Jerusalem, and now Jesus would act. And his act prefigured what was going to happen in AD 70 when the Romans came to Jerusalem.

From childhood, I have always been impressed by the fact that all history admits Jesus was here and died about AD 30; and that the Jerusalem nation that crucified him, through the Romans, died in AD 70. The cursing of the fig tree is an acted parable that predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation. It is not an anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic, acted parable. It is not saying, "Oh, those Jews; they are an especially bad lot." You and I, too, have a rebellious heart. The spirit of Pharisaism is the spirit of human nature. But because the gospel came first to Israel, judgment came first to Israel. Judgment fell on the Jews first because the gospel went to the Jews first (see Romans 1:16 and 2:9-10).

Judgment will just as certainly fall on the Gentiles - just later, that's all. The issue in the acted parable is: "Are your lives fruitful?" We are not here simply to adorn the world with the brilliance of our intellect or the smartness of our activities or the beauty of our faces. We are not here simply to adorn the world, but to bring forth fruit. We must justify our existence by making the world a better place. Many who profess to be Christians think and plan and spend and work only for selfish reasons. That is the way to hell. Fruitfulness is the essence of belonging to God. How much better will the world be because we have been in it? How much will we be missed? This is the test of a person.

Think of a bowl of water. Put your finger in it and then take it out. That is how much many people will be missed. Many fathers will not be missed by their children. The children will be glad they're gone. Most modern fathers spend more time polishing their shoes than talking with their children.

Fruit! Fruit! Fruit! That is the test of discipleship. The most important thing about a tree with regard to its own life is the root, but the evidence that the tree is alive is fruit. You and I are not saved by our works or by our fruit, but our works are the evidence that we have been saved. If there is no fruit, no unselfish life, no making the world better because we're here, then we have never met Jesus. It's as simple as that.

By the way, if Jesus could wither the fig tree, what could he have done to his crucifiers at Calvary a few days later? He could have withered his crucifiers just as surely as he withered the tree, and much more deservedly.

You will notice how the emphasis in all the events covered so far is judgment. The king, King Jesus, comes into Jerusalem as Judge. He foretells the judgment of Jerusalem. He goes into the temple, and judges it as he cleanses it. He comes to the fig tree and curses or judges it.

Judgment, judgment, judgment! This is because the end of Christ's ministry and life foretells the end of the world - which will be characterised by judgment.

An old story tells of a criminal brought for trial. He recognises the judge as a man who had been his defence lawyer once before. "Judge! Don't you remember me? You were my advocate ten years ago, and you saved me from punishment." The judge answers, "Yes, I was your advocate then, but I'm your judge now."

Jesus is our advocate now, but one day he will be our judge, and he's looking for fruit. Fruit in our lives is only possible if we really come to know Jesus and have fallen in love with him.

We need to understand the gospel and the sacrifice Christ has made on our behalf. His life, death, and resurrection has reconciled us to the Father. When we know how God has loved us, the fruit will appear spontaneously. You will not have to labour to be fruitful. It will be spontaneous. *Let your light shine* (Matthew 5:16). Don't force it. *Let it shine*.

We now come to the last public statement made by Christ before his death. After this, we will find him only in private, teaching his disciples. We have skipped some chapters since the withering of the fig tree, because those chapters contain parables. Now we come to Matthew 23, a series of judgments pronounced by Jesus as a series of woes. In the King James Version, there are eight woes, because Jesus began his ministry with the eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5. He begins with eight blessings and finishes with eight woes.

These woes constitute a statement of what characterises bad religion. If you want to know whether the religion you cherish is the religion of heaven or the religion of hell, this chapter, Matthew 23, will tell you. I've always found it a very encouraging chapter, because I love the words of Jesus when he talks about bad religionists. "*They bind heavy burdens and grievous to bear*" (Matthew 23:4, KJV). This is Jesus' way of saying, "If you have the real thing, true religion, it won't be burdensome, and it won't be hard to bear." Jesus said, "*My yoke is easy and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:30, NIV).

I have often had to challenge myself with this thought, "Don't complain. Don't call your burden heavy. If God gave it to you, it isn't." I've always understood it intellectually, but I've not always acknowledged it experientially. Jesus condemns a religion that is burdensome, a religion that's just rules and regulations, full of do's and don'ts. That is a Pharisaical religion.

There *are* "do's and don'ts," but they are never the heart of true religion. The heart of true religion is the forgiveness of sins, the mercy of God, and faith, hope, and love. Everything else is just on the perimeter, though it is an inevitable perimeter. Jesus said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15, NKJV).

True religion is not meant to be burdensome. If your religion is like pushing a wheelbarrow filled with bricks, get rid of it. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). We have as much rest in our souls as we have trust in Jesus. That much and no more.

In this final public statement made by Jesus, we see, one after another, the things that are wrong with bad religion.

There is religious pride. "*Everything they do is done for men to see ... they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues, ... and to have men call them 'Rabbi'*" (Matthew 23:5-7, NIV).

There is opposition to the gospel. "*You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to*" (verse 14).

There is sectarian proselytising. "*You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are*" (v. 15). There are many cultic groups that are very anxious to win people to their cult, or sect. We are to win people to Christ.

Baptism really isn't baptism into a cultic group or a church. Baptism is into Christ. We are to seek for people to be joined to him. There's no salvation in a church, or denomination, or organisation. There's salvation only in Jesus. Jesus was saying, "You go to great efforts because of your cultic pride. But when you win someone, you make them worse than you are." Such cultic "converts" are not really converted.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus attempted, repeatedly, to reform the people's observance of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. Here he reforms the third commandment: "*You say 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?*" (Matthew 23:16-17). As in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus rebukes the practice of making oaths. The habit played fast and loose with the truth, because men were thereby encouraged to think that only when an oath was uttered could the words be accepted as true.

It also suggested that there were two types of truth, one important, and the other not. In this particular instance, the Lord rebukes the folly of the belief that the gifts of gold which enriched the priests and Sadducees were to be considered more sacred than the temple itself. Thus if one swore by the gold, the oath must be kept, but if by the temple, the one making the oath could be excused from fulfilling his vow. Bad religion is always characterised by casuistry.

Jesus says here in Matthew 23 that doing this is a perversion of the third commandment. Jesus reformed the fourth commandment about the Sabbath. Please, never fall into the trap of thinking that because - according to the Pharisees - Jesus broke the Sabbath, that he really did. No, he kept it.

Jesus said, "*I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love*" (John 15:10, NASB). If Jesus had broken the Sabbath, he could never have been our Substitute on the cross.

The Sabbath commandment is the best-protected commandment in the whole Decalogue. If you want to be rid of it from the front of the Decalogue, you have to clamber over three commandments. If you want to be rid of it from the other end, you have to clamber over six commandments.

It is the only commandment that God acted out himself. It is the only commandment that Jesus risked his mission to reform, it was only after Jesus began to teach about true Sabbath-keeping that his opponents plotted to kill him (see Mark 2:23-3:6; John 5:16-18).

True Sabbath-keeping is meant to be a delight. In legalistic religions, it has become a burden. Young people are glad when the sun goes down on Sabbath evening. But the Old Testament calls the Sabbath a delight (Isaiah 58: 13). There are only two things in the Bible that are called honourable. One is the Sabbath and the other marriage (see Isaiah 58: 13 and Hebrews 13:4).

Jesus reformed the fourth commandment. He did not abolish it. You would never bother to scrape the barnacles off a sinking ship. You would never bother tidying up a shed that you are going to burn down. You would never bother to reform a Sabbath you intended to abolish.

Reforming the fifth commandment, he said: "*You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' [that is, a gift devoted to God], then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that*" (Mark 7:9-13, NIV).

The Pharisees said, "Look, you can own a house and say 'After my death it goes to the temple, but my parents can't walk in it or touch it or benefit from it.'"

But Jesus was saying, "You deny the commandment of God and make it void by your tradition when you say that a child can say about his property, 'It's mine but when I'm dead it can go to the temple.'"

Here Christ again rebukes casuistry. The tradition of the Pharisees taught that because God was greater than man, anything promised to God as an ultimate gift (after death) could not be used by anyone apart from the giver. In practical terms, it taught that any son might keep all his goods for his own use during his lifetime as pledged to God and yet not relieve the necessities of his parents. It was a direct contravention of the fifth commandment.

Religious leaders made void the seventh commandment by permitting easy divorce (see Matthew 19:3-12). There is a place for divorce, a last place - because God wants marriages that will last. Jesus, in effect, said, "You have broken the seventh commandment by allowing easy divorce."

Jesus was able to reform the commandments of God because he understood and loved the really important matters of God's law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The gospel always reforms and establishes God's moral law. The gospel can never abolish justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

The last warning (or woe) of Jesus to the religious leaders of Jerusalem tells of the danger of bad religion. Bad religion is all outward show, but good religion is positive and about faith, hope, and love. Bad religion makes mountains out of molehills and molehills out of mountains. True religion is God pronouncing us clean and forgiven because we trust in Christ.

Jesus warns that the main characteristic of bad religion is making much of little and little of much. If we make that mistake, we will be lost in the last judgment.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Mt 23:23-24, NIV).

Seven times in this chapter (Matthew 23) Jesus calls the religious leaders hypocrites. Twice he calls them blind guides. Twice he calls them blind and foolish. Once he calls them serpents. Once he calls them a generation of vipers. Jesus is not flattering toward teachers of bad religion. What distinguishes bad religion is making much of little and little of much.

The essence of good religion is kindness, goodness, and enduring patience. You have to keep a menagerie to be a true religionist - you have to be a "bear and a forbearer" (see Galatians 6:2, 5 and Colossians 3:13).

A true saint is someone who makes it easier for others to believe in God. A true saint is much like Mother Teresa. Some of you may remember hearing Father Coughlin on the radio years ago. He was always on the air denouncing somebody or something. Such negative religion is a bad thing.

True religion is positive, outgoing, merciful, and kind. One Christian writer said that if we would humble ourselves before God, if we would be kind and merciful and tenderhearted and pitiable, there would be a hundred conversions where now there is only one. The big things are faith and hope and love, goodness, kindness, and mercy and pity. Then there are a lot of little things, and we are to keep them little.

Jesus says false religion is outward rather than inward. *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean"* (Matthew 23:25-26, NIV).

Inwardly, these religious leaders were full of extortion and rapacity, though on the outside they looked perfectly fine. Many people are very respectable, go to church, never swear, and pay their taxes. They have never been in jail. They are respectable on the outside, but inwardly they are proud, vain, cruel, greedy, and lustful. That is very bad religion.

Last, Jesus says: *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, "If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barakiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.*

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Matthew 23:27-39).

Who is the Person saying these things? He says, "For centuries I've been sending you prophets." He says, "I want to encompass the whole city and care for you, every one." He cannot be a mere human.

This is God speaking. But what sort of a God? A God who condescends to liken himself to a mother hen caring for her chicks. What sort of a God is he who would call himself a barnyard fowl? A tender, gentle, humble God. Our picture of God is often wrong.

What a beautiful picture Jesus offers. Here is the mother hen. She clucks and all the chicks come running. What a great time they have under her feathers, cheeping and chirping a wonderful symphony. They are covered by her wing feathers and warmed by her breast - protected and comfortable.

That fierce hawk, circling in the sky, cannot touch them. They have mother hen over them. They are perfectly safe, perfectly comfortable, perfectly happy. What a picture of God is that mother hen!

The amazing thing in this passage is that Jesus is speaking about his enemies. He is not talking primarily about his disciples. Jesus loves his enemies, which is a bit of a test for us. We usually like those who like us. We bless those who bless us. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. But we hate those who speak ill of us. We hate those who criticise and threaten us. But Jesus loves his enemies. "How often would I have gathered you murderers. How often would I have gathered you Pharisees, you Sadducees, you extortionists, you proud people. How often I would have gathered you."

What a God is this! Humble enough to liken himself to a hen and loving enough to love his enemies.

Let us now consider the last act of our Lord towards his own disciples before the final events of Calvary. "*It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love*" (John 13:1).

Yes, Jesus loves his enemies, but his own followers are his children, his jewels. "*He loved them unto the end*" (John 13:1, KJV). We are important because we are loved by God. Other people may not see our importance. They may know the truth about us in many respects. But we are important, because we are beloved of God. Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end.

Here is a picture of the whole plan of redemption: "*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him*" (Jn 13:3-5, NIV).

In the plan of redemption, Jesus arose from the feast of heaven. He put off his glory. He put on the towel of humanity. He came down here to wash us by his precious blood.

When Peter could not stand to see his master acting like a servant, Jesus said to him, "*Unless I wash you, you have no part with me*" (John 13:8). Jesus wants to wash us of our pride, our selfishness, our lust, and our impatience. He has such a long way to go with you and me, but he wants to wash us.

Notice these encouraging words. Jesus answered, "*A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean*" (John 13: 10). You are clean! Within a few hours, one of these men pronounced clean would curse and swear and say, "I do not know the Man." Others present who are declared clean would run for their lives when their Master was taken. They would not be in the front row at the crucifixion show. Yet Jesus says about such men, "You are clean."

A few minutes before Jesus said that, the disciples were grumbling and saying. "I'm not going to be the servant. Call someone else in. It's not for me. I'm going to be treasurer or secretary of the new kingdom. I intend to be head of an important department." Jesus says, "You are clean."

Similarly, in his prayer in John 17, Jesus prays, "*I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word*" (John 17:6).

Did Jesus have a bad memory or poor eyesight, or what? But here is the glory of the gospel. Jesus and his Father only see us as we are in Christ, not as we are in ourselves.

That, dear friends, is the gospel, and that is a revelation of how Christ will judge believers at the end of the world.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Passion Week Parables About Final Events

The stories that Jesus told during Passion Week (the last week of his earthly life) are also all about judgment. The events of Passion Week give us a shadowy outline of what will happen on a worldwide scale at the end of time.

- Just as the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem drew attention to Christ and his gospel, so, at the end of time, attention will be drawn to the gospel.
- Just as Jerusalem was polarised over Christ - with his friends agreeing with him and his enemies getting together to plot against him - so, at the end of time, when the gospel goes to all the world, there will be a resultant polarisation of the whole world's inhabitants.
- There was apostasy in Jesus' party. Judas joined with the religious leaders (who were already apostate).
- The conspirators went to the government to aid in their ugly work. This will happen again at the end of time when apostate religion and state unite to move against God's people.
- A death decree was pronounced against Jesus. That will happen again at the end of time against true followers of Christ.
- The time of trouble Jesus had in Gethsemane will happen all over the world in the last days when Christians are under sentence of death. This cruel sentence against them will be enacted simply because faithful Christians want to live by the Bible and its gospel.
- There was a greater time of trouble when Jesus was crucified; but his death was followed by his resurrection.
- Similarly, at the end of time, God's church will suffer a greater time of trouble as the world strives to enact the death decree. However, Jesus will return in the midst of this trouble and deliver his people.

The stories that Jesus told during Passion Week all reinforce his judgment acts and emphasise that Jesus was testing the religious people of his day on both law and gospel. Therefore, we can conclude that at the end of time the body of Christ (the church) will do the same to the religious world. The religious world of the twenty-first century will need to be challenged on these two issues: How have you responded to the grace of God? How have you responded to the known will of God?

For example, Jesus said: *What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'*

'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go.

'Which of the two did what his father wanted?'

'The first,' they answered.

Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you' (Matthew 21:28-31, NIV).

Jesus is saying that sons and daughters should not have to be told to work. It is assumed. It is spontaneous. A man is working in a factory. Everyone else is looking at the clock as it gets near five o'clock. One never looks up from his work. The whistle blows. All the workers leave. The man works on. Who is he? It turns out the hard-working man is the son of the owner.

Son, go and work. That is the evidence that we are a true son or daughter. We do something. We do not just think great thoughts, we go ahead and do something.

When? When I grow up? When I am rich? When I know everything? No. Today. "Son, go work today."

There are those who say to the Lord, "Yes, of course." They go to church, they sing hymns - but they do nothing else. One church had a sign over the door, inside. As you left the building, you would read: "The service is not over. It is just now beginning." There are too many who go to church and say, "That's it." They are the ones who say, "I will go," and don't go.

There is another kind of rogue out there. This kind gets into trouble, and cries in pain, "Oh, what is life all about? Of what use is my life?" Such rogues have said "No" to God. Then, under the influence of the Spirit, they come to their senses. Now they say "Yes."

Here is one of the main reasons for pain - to wake us up. When we are awake, God brings us his comforting presence in the gospel.

Jesus continued by telling the story referred to earlier, that of the landowner and his vineyard and the unfaithful tenants.

Israel is often pictured as a vineyard in Scripture: for example, in Isaiah 5, the Psalms, and other places. The vine was a most precious plant. It took the most caring for, but gave the richest reward. In this story, Jesus tells us that the vineyard represents Israel. God has dug it out of Egypt, and planted it in Canaan. God has put a hedge around it - the law. By knowing the will of God, Israel is protected and blessed.

Do not think that the law of God is entirely *against* you. Ideally the law of God is meant to be for us, to tell us how to live. It tells us that the universe is not run by chance. The universe is causal, not casual. The law of God teaches us to put *first* things first. We are not to put things first, because things come last in the Ten Commandments. They are not mentioned until the last commandment. The law, therefore, is teaching us that *people* are more important than *things*.

The law is not against us. It tells us how to live. God put a hedge around Israel, to protect them, to bless them. God also put a tower in the vineyard of Israel. The tower represents the sanctuary. Just as a tower enables us to see, so God's religion helps us to see.

The symbols of the gospel help us make sense of life. God did all these things for Israel. Naturally Israel is expected to bring forth fruit. That is what a vineyard is for. But when God, the owner, sends his messengers, the prophets, to look for the fruit of holiness, there isn't any. And the tenants stone the messengers.

God sends another group of prophets, and then another. Finally, God sends his son. How patient the vineyard owner is! What hope would any of us have otherwise? I was convicted on certain issues of behaviour for years before I capitulated and became a Christian. How patient God is.

At last God sends his son. "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). "The faith that was once for all time delivered to the saints." Jesus is God's last word. He's the final arrow from the divine quiver.

You should ask about every topic you study: "What does Jesus say?" In some areas of theology, people go first to Paul, but that's a mistake. They should go first and last to Jesus, and in between to Paul. The Bible doesn't say, "Go into all the world and teach them what Paul has commanded you." You begin with Jesus and you end with Jesus. And look at Paul in between.

Did you know that the Gospels were written after the Pauline letters? In the Pauline letters, for example, you find all sorts of altercations and debates. Do you have to be circumcised? Do you have to become a Jew to become a Christian? What is the proper attitude to the law?

When you get the Gospels, that is all gone. All four Gospels assume that the law is God's good gift - but we are not saved by it. We are only saved by grace. The wicked tenants kill God's last Word. In order to gain all, they murder and, thereby, they lose all. That is the theme of many a great novel. To gain all, the protagonists murder someone, only to lose all.

Anything taken without God's permission is like the manna that was stored. It turned into worms (see Exodus 16:20). I wish I could write this in the hearts of young people. Anything taken without divine permission, that promises good, will turn to worms like the manna that was gathered against the will of God. We are not safe in doing anything outside of God's will.

Notice this magnificent statement: *Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures. 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes?'"* (Matthew 21:42).

Jesus is saying: "I am God's Headstone. I am God's Cornerstone. I am the Acme and the Pinnacle of all God's plan for all of Creation. Even if you reject me, I am still going to win." What a tremendous saying! And it was based on an actual experience.

When the first temple was being built, all the stones were hewn and chiselled before they were moved to the temple site. This way it would be silent on the holy sacred site. One of the stones that came from the quarry was especially huge and ugly. The builders could find no use for it, and it was in their way. It was a "stumbling block." They wished it wasn't there.

The builders became frustrated in their search for a suitable cornerstone for the temple. Finally in desperation, they said, "Let's try this huge, ugly stone. It has withstood the snow, the frost, and the sun. Maybe it can stand the tremendous pressure that the cornerstone must take." They moved it into place, and it proved to be the perfect stone. The psalmist wrote: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes* (Psalm 118:22-23).

It is a symbol of Jesus. The builders are the religious leaders who rejected him. Ultimately, however, he becomes the Headstone of the corner.

Jesus foresaw his own death, and sketched it in this story: *"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him"* (Matthew 21:38-39).

Imagine discussing your own death like that! But Jesus is not worried. He says, "Even if you reject me, I'm going to be the Headstone of the corner."

Luke includes a statement that Matthew omits: *Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone?'"*

"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed" (Luke 20:17-18).

Jesus is the Rock of Ages. If I make him the foundation stone and the cornerstone of my life, I will find peace and joy and happiness. I will also find a success that transcends anything that the world knows as success. I can build on him with confidence.

But to build on him, something has to happen to me. I must first fall on him and be broken. In order to be able to build on Jesus, I must mortify my natural vanity and pride, and have my self-will broken. My fallen human nature does not like that.

Well, there is an alternative, and Luke lists it. If I do not fall on him and allow myself to be broken, at his Second Coming Christ will grind me to powder. These are the only options, because Jesus cannot be ignored. Jesus is God's best gift and must not be overlooked.

We must have our old self, our old way, our disobedience, our pride, our arrogance, our lust, our covetousness, and our idolatry broken. Or, if not, when Jesus returns, he will grind us to powder. It would be for our sake, because heaven would be hell to the unconverted.

His warnings are warnings of love. After pronouncing the woes over Jerusalem (Matthew 23), *Jesus wept and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children*

together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

The woes are not anger or hateful passion, but the moan of a mother over the child that she loves, the weeping of a father over a beloved son or daughter. All his warnings are the utterances of love.

Our next Passion Week story is found in Matthew 22, "The Parable of the Wedding Banquet," It is really a continuation of the story about the vineyard in the previous chapter.

But whereas the vineyard story put the emphasis on the law, this story puts the emphasis on the gospel. The story of the vineyard puts the emphasis on what people are to do, which is to serve, and bring forth fruit. But without the gospel, Christian service alone fails.

So, "The Parable of the Wedding Banquet" puts the emphasis on the gospel. It's a great story: *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.*

"Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet."

"But they paid no attention and went off - one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city" (Matthew 22:1-7, NIV).

I love the way that Jesus was always telling stories about parties. The main symbol of the gospel in the New Testament is a party. Sadly, when you go to some churches you would think that the main symbol is a funeral. But it's not. The primary symbol for the gospel in the New Testament is a party. It is a feast for love and laughter and 'for fullness and fellowship. Of course, if you are hungry, any feast is good - even a feast of crusts. But it's better still if it's a rich man's feast and better still if it's a king's feast. And best of all if it's a king's marriage feast.

Here is a feast of feasts representing the gospel. Lo, and behold, you don't have to contribute anything. It's not a potluck. The king provides everything! Isn't that wonderful? The king does not ask for money to enter the banquet or ask whether you have worth. The king simply says, "Come and dine."

This is the way that we must present the gospel. It is all about the generosity of God. For the human hearts that do not respond to that message - well, there is nothing more that God can do. We are to preach the generosity of God that is as attractive as an invitation to a feast. Still, in the parable, there are stupid people. They paid no attention to the king's invitation and made light of it.

Now, if it had been Moses offering them the two tables of stone, I can understand why they would reject the offer. As a sinner, I'd want to turn my back on God's holy law also. But it's not Moses offering them two tables of stone. It's a beautifully spread table being offered by a king. "All you need is a knife, a fork, and a chance," as one hungry boy said. That's all you need.

All we have to do is come. We don't provide anything for the banquet. It's free. What a beautiful picture of the gospel!

But those who receive the king's invitation act like idiots. They are filled with excuses for refusing the invitation. They are preoccupied with their farms and businesses. Please notice, it is possible to be as respectable as can be - and still be lost. You can own a good farm, and there's nothing wrong with that. Businesses? Nothing wrong with them. But to be preoccupied with our farm or business and forget God who gave us sight and hands and head and feet and energy is foolishness.

Notice that the most dangerous things in the world, in this story, are not the vicious sins that we all shy away from. They are not the most dangerous things, because most of us don't have enough courage to do them. Besides, we have a sort of antipathy to going to prison. The biggest threat to you and me isn't the worst of sins - it's being preoccupied with the second best.

A Christian learns that there are 10,000 things that invite time and attention from which we must turn away. As early as possible, we must learn to avoid the petty larceny of our lives by trifles. I remember once talking to my wife Gill while the radio was on. She said, "Do you mind turning off that static." A lot of life is static, and we need to switch it off.

It's the same as all that junk mail that comes in your mailbox. You have your wastebasket sitting right there, and you have all the mail out of your letterbox on the table. Most of the stuff you just throw into the wastebasket. Life is like that. You cannot pay attention to every demand upon you. You don't have to catch every ball thrown to you.

The people in Jesus' story who miss out on the feast are the people who are preoccupied with the second best. They were not especially nasty people. They were no more wicked than average.

Now that is a scary thought. You can be deeply respectable and lost. To be saved, you need to respond to God's grace and become gracious and kind - loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. That's it! There's nothing else that will do.

Notice the humble way in which the king pleads with his servants: *Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests (Matthew 22:8-10).*

Although he is a king, he says to his servants, "Look, I'm embarrassed by these refusals. The wedding feast is ready, but there's no one to eat it. Go and invite anyone you can find." He is pleading with his servants, and through them pleading with any strangers who will respond. I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 5: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). The Almighty condescends to plead with sinners. What a picture!

This story in Matthew is very fitting historically. The story of the vineyard in Matthew 21 represents Christ coming to the nation

of Israel, looking for fruit, and not finding any. That parable represents the close of the Old Testament era.

The second story, the one we are studying in Matthew 22 about the wedding banquet, represents the apostles of Christ after the cross going back to the nation of Israel and saying, "What about now? Come to the wedding feast. Everything's ready."

Again, the nation refuses. Verse 7 says the king was so upset with those who refused his generous invitation that he sent his army "and burned their city." That is a reference to AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem. That is when Christ returned in judgment.

In the story, the servants of the king went out to strangers to beg them to come in to the feast. This represents the apostolic messengers going out to the Gentiles. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the apostolic church went to the Gentiles. This parable takes in the whole Christian era - 2,000 years plus. After AD 70, the gospel went to all the world. A poet described the results of the gospel going to all the world:

Lame beggars jostled each other with their crutches.
Blind beggars groped ravenously
Towards the bounteous tables.
Dumb beggars mumbled their inarticulate delight.
Walking lepers followed rank on rank,
Lurching bravos from ditches dank.
Vermin-eaten saints with mouldy breath,
Unwashed legions from the ways of death.

What a party! The guests include the dumb, the deaf, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the unwashed, and the vermin-eaten. The gospel is for sinners, you know. Jesus is not a painted Saviour, and the gospel is not for painted sinners. The gospel is for real sinners - the spiritual lepers, the spiritually lame, and the spiritually blind. They are all welcome. What a picture!

We will briefly consider the remaining Passion Week stories of Jesus.

The next story our Lord tells is in Matthew 25:1-13, "The Parable of the Ten Virgins." This is a story that has lights and shadows, trumpets and bugles, singing and dancing, and stark disappointment and tragedy.

The kingdom of heaven is like what happened one night when ten girls took their oil lamps and went to a wedding to meet the groom. Five of the girls were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps, but no extra oil. The ones who were wise took along extra oil for their lamps.

The groom was late arriving, and the girls became drowsy and fell asleep. Then in the middle of the night someone shouted, "Here's the groom! Come to meet him!"

When the girls got up and started getting their lamps ready, the foolish ones said to the others, 'Let us have some of your oil! Our lamps are going out.' The girls who were wise answered, 'There's not enough oil for all of us! Go and buy some for yourselves.'

While the foolish girls were on their way to get some oil, the groom arrived. The girls who were ready went into the wedding, and the doors were closed. Later the other girls returned and shouted, 'Sir, sir! Open the door for us!' But the groom replied, "I don't even know you!" So, my disciples, always be ready! You don't know the day or the time when all this will happen (Matthew 25:1-13, CEV).

The story of the ten girls waiting for the bridegroom is a story about how the bridegroom tarries. By the days of Malachi, or even before, many Jews had given up hope of the coming of the Messiah.

Now this is typical of what is happening in our own era regarding the Second Coming. Many Christians say, "We heard our parents talk about the Second Coming, and we heard our grandparents talk about it. So-and-so didn't bother to get an education because he thought Christ was returning. Forget it."

But the Messiah *did* come the first time. Ezekiel said, "*What is this proverb you have in the land of Israel: 'The days go by and every vision comes to nothing?'*" (Ezekiel 12:22).

There were four hundred years of silence after Malachi was written and before John the Baptist began preaching. Four hundred years in which God apparently said nothing and did nothing.

Many Jews settled back and said, "The Messiah will never come." And that is the way it is for the Second Advent. Our Lord appears to tarry and delay, but the moment will come when there will be delay no longer (see Hebrews 10:37).

And when does the bridegroom arrive? At midnight, the darkest hour of the night. While there is a spark of light, don't expect him. When things are a thousand times worse than you could ever contemplate, that's when he comes. Matthew 24:28 says, "*Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.*" When society has become a rotten carcass, then the vultures of judgment fall.

Thank God that in that dark day we can stand - as we do now - in the light that shines from Calvary's cross!

Jesus warned: "*So, my disciples, always be ready! You don't know the day or the time when all this will happen*" (Matthew 25:13, CEV).

That date is mercifully hidden from us. But the day of our salvation and readiness is mercifully revealed to us - the day of Calvary! Trusting in Jesus' constant readiness while on earth to please his Father, we find that we are always ready for the return of Christ. The perfect righteousness of Christ is credited to every believer, and that alone fits us for the Day of Judgment.

In Christ, we are ready today however long the delay!

Jesus' next story, "The Parable of the Talents," is about trading with talents. (A talent was a coin worth more than a thousand dollars.) *The kingdom is also like what happened when a man went away and put his three servants in charge of all he owned. The man knew what each servant could do. So he handed five thousand coins to the first servant, two thousand to the second, and one thousand to the third. Then he left the country.*

As soon as the man had gone, the servant with the five thousand coins used them to earn five thousand more. The servant who had two thousand coins did the same with his money and earned two thousand more. But the servant with one thousand coins dug a hole and hid his master's money in the ground.

Some time later the master of those servants returned. He called them in and asked what they had done with his money. The servant who had been given five thousand coins brought them in with the five thousand that he had earned. He said, "Sir, you gave me five thousand coins, and I have earned five thousand more."

"Wonderful!" his master replied. "You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little, but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in my happiness!"

Next, the servant who had been given two thousand coins came in and said, 'Sir, you gave me two thousand coins, and I have earned two thousand more.'

"Wonderful!" his master replied. 'You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little, but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in my happiness!'

The servant who had been given one thousand coins then came in and said, "Sir, I know that you are hard to get along with. You harvest what you don't plant and gather crops where you haven't scattered seed. I was frightened and went out and hid your money in the ground. Here is every single coin!"

The master of the servant told him, 'You are lazy and good-for-nothing! You know that I harvest what I don't plant and gather crops where I haven't scattered seed. You could have at least put my money in the bank, so that I could have earned interest on it.'

Then the master said, "Now your money will be taken away and given to the servant with ten thousand coins! Everyone who has something will be given more, and they will have more than enough. But everything will be taken from those who don't have anything. You are a worthless servant, and you will be thrown out into the dark where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain" (Matt 25:14-30, CEV).

The man who didn't trade said to his master, impertinently, "I know you are hard to get along with. You want to harvest where you haven't sown seed. You're a hard taskmaster, so I buried my talent." This is a man who does nothing because he has a wrong view of God.

Here's the real reason for the ineffectiveness of most professed Christians; they have a wrong view of God. This man did not do his trading, because he did not see God as *God is*. When we see that God is kinder than the kindest person we will ever meet; when we see that in the heart of God there are oceans of love, (compared with the rivulet that is all the human love in the world combined); when we see God as being better than we could ever hope, it is not hard to serve him.

But if we have a wrong view of God, we will bury our talents.

Our last story, "The Sheep and the Goats" (or "The Final Judgment") is about the time when the Son of Man shall come in his glory and the people of all nations will be brought before him. The Son will separate the people into two camps, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. What is the basis for the separation? A very simple basis. Some have learned to love unselfishly and some have not. *When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne.*

The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created. When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me."

Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, 'When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?'

The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."

Then the king will say to those on his left, 'Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty but you did not give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me.'

Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?"

The king will say to them, 'Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me.'

Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished forever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life" (Matthew 25:31-46, CEV).

Here is something you may not have thought of: wherever the Bible uses the New Testament expression, "all the nations," it

does so in connection with the missionary proclamation to all the world. When those on the left say "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?" the story is talking about the Gentiles who have heard the messengers of the gospel and despised them.

Christ says to those on his left, "Those whom you failed to help are my brethren. Inasmuch as you did it unto one of these preachers of the gospel - who, for my sake, became poor, who, for my sake, was stripped naked, who, for my sake, was thrown into prison (2 Corinthians 6) - inasmuch as you did it unto one of these, you did it unto me."

See the beauty of it.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52:7, NIV).

If you are living the gospel, you are one of Christ's brothers or sisters. Living the gospel is more important than talking the gospel. Ideally, we should do both, but always in that order: living first, talking second. Christ counts us as himself. The way people treat us is the way they treat Christ.

Remember Paul's words to Philemon about the runaway slave and thief? "If then you count me a partner, receive him as you would me." (Phil 17, NKJV).

That's how it will be in the last judgment. The world will be judged on how it dealt with the messengers of the gospel. That is because, in God's sight, the person who lives the gospel is counted as Christ.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Second Advent Sermon: Matthew 24-25

That is the "abomination of desolation" mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24:15? It will help us to study the context first. There are many dark things in the chapter that describe the terrible human conditions just before Christ returns. Yet, Matthew 24 also assures us that everything is under God's loving control.

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)..." (Matthew 24: 15, NASB).

What is the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel? The well-known Bible commentator, William Barclay said, "We might as well admit it. We don't have a clue." Vincent Taylor, another great British scholar, said "We don't have an inkling."

It's an enigma, but let's examine Matthew 24 and consider a few other features. This is the chapter that says: *At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other* (Matthew 24:30-31).

It's this chapter that shows the startling dimensions of the Calvary event. Straight after this chapter, we will see Christ's descent into shame, anguish, humiliation, and death.

But this chapter comes first to tell us who it is that men are going to impale on a cruel cross. It's the One who owns all the angels of heaven. That's who it is. This chapter reveals to us the horrible depths and heights of the iniquitous event soon to happen, when creatures will torture and put to death their Creator.

In some respects, the chapter seems full of bad news. For example, verse 12 says: *"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold"* (Matthew 24:12, KJV).

The King James translators found this so shocking, they did not literally translate it. The Greek says, "The love of *the* many." In other words, most peoples' love - those who have loved - will wax cold. This is not speaking about atheists. This is saying that the love of most *religious* people will wane away.

What a tremendous catastrophe when the professors of Christ lose their love for him because iniquity will abound! We all have to admit that when the going is tough, because of prevailing wickedness, our hearts tend to sink. We ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

This is a startling announcement made by Jesus. He says that, just before he returns, things will be so bad that most people who professed love for Christ will allow their love to wane away.

Verse 28 says: *"Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather"* (Matthew 24:28). This means that society is to become a rotting carcass, polluted from end to end, east to west and north to south. It will be absolutely degenerate in a way that's difficult for us to imagine - even in this iniquitous day and age. When society becomes that bad, then the vultures will gather together. It is God's angels who are pictured here as devouring vultures. On the day of judgment they come to deal with the rotting carcass of human society.

In the next chapter, chapter 25, Jesus expands on this thought in "the Parable of the Ten Virgins." Verse 6 says: *"At midnight the cry rang out"* (Matthew 25:6).

It is at the darkest hour, midnight, that Christ returns. Not sunrise, not sunset, but at midnight, the darkest hour. Christ returns after such a long delay that even the church has fallen asleep. Christians ask: "Why doesn't Christ return? Why doesn't he come? Perhaps he isn't returning. Instead of watching and waiting, let's do something else. Let's rest a while."

But after a long delay, when things are absolutely far gone, then the Bridegroom returns.

Jesus says later in Matthew 25: *"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man"* (Matthew 25:37).

The book of Genesis tells us that wickedness was great in the earth before the Flood, and God saw that every imagination of men's hearts was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). That's a pretty torrid state of affairs.

We get some inkling of what this could mean when we see the impact of the media on our modern culture. When we are mystified by an event such as the massacre at the Columbine high school in Littleton, Colorado, we need to remind ourselves what many people fill their minds with. There's an old computer adage: "garbage in, garbage out" (GIGO). If the heart is filled with garbage, the hands and head will proceed to perpetrate that garbage.

In the last days, the imagination of men's hearts will be only evil continually.

Yet, there is encouragement in chapter 24. The elect are referred to more than once. "If those days had not been cut short no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). "And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matthew 24:31).

Christ never loses sight of his own. They are more precious to him than jewels are to you and to me.

Jesus said: *"You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come"* (Matthew 24:6).

How can one *not* be alarmed? Chapter 24 talks about wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, religious persecution, the love of most people waxing cold, and society becoming a polluted carcass. How can we *not* be troubled?

Jesus used this expression repeatedly during Passion Week: "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1). Then he gave three reasons why: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many Mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1-2, NKJV).

The three points are:

1. You believe in God;
2. You believe in Christ;
3. Christ will return.

Therefore, don't be troubled. Let me give you the major reason why we shouldn't be troubled. It is the reason Jesus hints at most often. He says: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows*" (Matthew 10:29-31).

Not a sparrow falls without the permission of God. The hairs of our head are all numbered. The Bible teaches clearly that, despite all appearances, God remains sovereign and is in control.

The only way we can avoid being discouraged and troubled when things go wrong is to really believe in our heart of hearts that God is still in control. God gathers up the fragments, the broken pieces, so that nothing is lost.

In everybody's life there are lots of broken things; hopes, aspirations, ambitions, family problems, financial problems, and business problems. But our Lord gathers up the broken things, the fragments, so that ultimately nothing is lost. This truth of divine sovereignty is essential if we are to maintain calm, peace, and joy when everything looks bad.

There is a wonderful example of God's sovereignty and loving control in Matthew 27. Here Pilate is confronted with Jesus: "*While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him'*" (Matthew 27:19).

As Pilate is faced with Jesus, he is thinking of how he can wriggle out of the dilemma he is in. Seven times the Gospels say that Pilate acknowledged, "I find no fault with him." Pilate is reluctant to crucify Jesus. He thinks about Barabbas. Barabbas was a terrorist and due to die. Pilate thinks that, maybe, he can send Barabbas to the cross and release Jesus.

Then Pilate receives a message from his wife. The message is: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal in a dream because of him."

God is very punctual. This is a crucial moment, and God chooses this vital moment to give Pilate his last opportunity. God is never too early, God is never too late. But consider how God accomplishes his timeliness - with a dream.

Try and chart the course of an arrow as it leaves the bow. Who would endeavour to do that? Try and chart the course of human thoughts when slumber has come. A dream is precipitated by so many things: by what we eat and drink; by the anxieties of the day; by the movement of a mouse across the carpet; by the noise of the cars or people going by outside; by the fears and anxieties we cherish. A dream is the most lawless thing on earth.

Yet, here is God in charge of the dream of a pagan heathen woman. And he gives it to her at the right time. Pilate's wife says, "Today in a dream." So it was a morning dream. She must have had her dream after Pilate had left their bed and gone to sit early on the judgment seat. She not only has the dream, she remembers it. Can you remember 5 percent of your dreams?

The Romans had a theory that morning dreams were always true. Therefore, because she remembers her morning dream, Pilate's wife does something about it. She sends a message to her husband. Have you ever done that?

"Sorry, darling, to interrupt you at work, but I've just had a dream."

What if you had a husband who is a judge and sitting in court at that moment?

Please notice that the episode of Pilate's wife's dream has the same lesson as two stories about Jesus' instructing his disciples.

First, think of the story about instructions regarding preparation for Passover and the Lord's supper: *Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."*

'Where do you want us to prepare for it?' they asked.

He replied, "As you enter the city; a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there. They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover (Luke 22:7-13).

Then there is the story about preparations for the triumphal entry: *After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, "The Lord needs it.""*

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

They replied, "The Lord needs it."

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it (Luke 19:28-35).

The dream story, the Passover story, and this story are similar in meaning. Jesus is saying, "I am in control." Jesus is revealed as Lord of everything - including human dreams and thoughts.

Imagine the mystery of human thought! No surgeon operating on a human brain has ever said, "Eureka! I've found a human thought!" The mystery of thought is inexplicable. We can talk about electrical-chemical phenomena, but that is not truly explanatory. It is just an attempt at description.

Our God not only understands, but is in control of human thoughts - even lawless human dreams.

We now need to examine the important words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15-16: "*Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains*" (Matthew 24:15-16, NKJV).

So far in his sermon, Jesus has said: "You'll hear of wars, you'll hear of famines. Don't be troubled. But when you see - the abomination of desolation..."

The disciples had asked Jesus, "Lord, what is the sign of the end of the world?"

And he answered: "Well, it's not wars, because they are just the beginning of sorrows. It isn't famines or earthquakes, because the end is not yet. But you ask me for a sign, so here it is: "When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, that is the sign."

What does the sign mean? Jesus gives us a clue when he says, "spoken of by Daniel the prophet." Some people have wanted to make the comment in verse 16, "let the reader understand," (NIV) a notation from the gospel writer. However, they are the words of Jesus. The gospel writers are not in the habit of interjecting their own words into the middle of Jesus' words. We have no example of such a practice.

"Let the reader understand" is a very clever statement. The word "understand" occurs approximately 24 times in the book of Daniel. Jesus, even here, is quoting from the book of Daniel.

The "abomination of desolation" is the name the Jews used for Antichrist. They even called the book of Daniel "The Book of the Abomination of Desolation," because its great theme is Antichrist. Let us review some things from the Old Testament.

Daniel's book opens, you remember, with the story of the king of the north, Babylon, coming down against the city of peace, Jerusalem. The king of the north comes down to attack Jerusalem and to defile the sanctuary and plunder it. That is how Daniel begins - and you know that the key is always at the door. You must read the beginning of a book to understand what that book is about. Daniel opens with Babylon, the king of the north, swooping down on the people of God and attacking the sanctuary. And all the rest of the book is about that same theme of Antichrist's attacks upon the people of God.

In Daniel, the nations and powers of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, the Antichrist of the Middle Ages, the Antichrist at the end of time, are all symbolised by the king of the north.

That is because the north is where Satan said he wanted to put his throne.

Lucifer said: "*I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation. On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High*" (Isa 14:13-14, NKJV).

Lucifer was not allowed to act like that in heaven, so, when he came to earth, he took over Babylon to the north of Jerusalem. To the prophet Daniel, Babylon (because of its attacks upon God's people) became the king of the north or Satan's throne.

Charles Dickens wrote a book entitled, *A Tale of Two Cities*. The first line is famous: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Daniel, like the whole of the Bible, is a tale of two cities in conflict: Babylon and Jerusalem. Antichrist tries to bring about "the worst of times."

Babylon symbolises the reign of Satan. That's because Babel means "gate of God." But when humankind rebelled against God and built the Tower of Babel, confusion resulted (see Genesis 11:1-9). So Babel became Babylon. Satan began in heaven as Lucifer. But then he fell and became the king of confusion.

Jerusalem means "foundations of peace." Its king originally was Melchizedek, a name that means "king of righteousness." Because he ruled over Salem meaning "peace," he was also "a prince of peace."

The book of Daniel and the whole Bible is about the struggle between the two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem. They represent the struggle between the two powers, Lucifer and God, and the battle between evil and good.

A neglected clue to the study of Daniel is that the stories give us the key to the prophecies.

The stories are all about antichrists. The villains are the kings - Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius. The characteristics of these heathen kings who menace the people of God are that they are proud, idolaters, blasphemers, and persecutors. These are the elements of antichrist.

Satan himself is *the* great Antichrist. He is proud and persecutes. When you are proud, you have to make other people think as you do and make other people do as you want them to do. That's the sign of Antichrist.

God never forces people or drives them. God draws us to him with the love found in the gospel. He never drives or forces us.

In Daniel's stories you have wicked characters who are symbols of Antichrist. They are all personifications of pride, arrogance, idolatry, and persecution - all of them.

But we cannot understand the second half of the book of Daniel, which is all prophecy, without them. We need to understand the stories in order to unlock the prophecies.

There are even key words found in the stories that reappear in the prophecies. For example, when the great image is set up in Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar said to the Hebrew worthies: "*Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?*"

"Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

*"And who is the god who will **deliver** you from my hands?"* (Dan 3:14-15, NKJV, emphasis ours).

The response to the king's command is:

*"O Nebuchadnezzar" we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will **deliver** us from your hand, O king"* (Daniel 3:16-17 emphasis ours).

Notice the king's reaction at the end of the story after the deliverance from the fiery furnace: *Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and **delivered** His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the kings word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!"* (Daniel 3:28 emphasis ours).

In chapter 6, we read the story about Daniel, King Darius, and the lions' den. The plotters against Daniel came to King Darius and said: "*Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, a king, shall be cast into the den of lions?"*

The king answered and said, 'The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.'

So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

*And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to **deliver** him; and he laboured till the going down of the sun to **deliver** him* (Daniel 6:12-14 emphasis ours).

But the king was unable to deliver Daniel.

Darius was sure that Daniel was going to be eaten by the lions. Who could deliver Daniel from such a situation? Even the king's hands were tied. The laws of the Medes and Persians could not be changed, and the law had gone forth that no one but Darius could pray to any god (see Daniel 6:7-9, 15).

*"So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, 'Your God, whom you serve continually He will **deliver** you'"* (Daniel 6:16 emphasis ours).

The next morning, the king, after a bout of insomnia, returned to the lions' den. "*The king spoke, saying to Daniel, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to **deliver** you from the lions?"*" (Daniel 6:20, emphasis ours).

The king did not expect an answer, but the text says: *Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.*

Then the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God (Daniel 6:21-23).

In joyous response, King Darius sends out a decree: *Then King Darius wrote: "To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.*

I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end.

*He **delivers** and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. Who has **delivered** Daniel from the power of the lions"* (Daniel 6:25-27, emphasis ours).

Those are some of Daniel's stories. When we come to the end of the book, the prophetic section, we have a picture of the king of the north coming down again on Jerusalem (which is now a symbol of the church). Then we read: *At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be **delivered**, every one who is found written in the book"* (Daniel 12:1, emphasis ours).

The stories of divine deliverance are the key to the prophecies. God will deliver his people however cruel and rampant Antichrist becomes. The book of Daniel is warning us that God's people will always be under attack. The attacks will get worse and reach their climax at the end of time.

The name Daniel gives to the attacking Antichrist is the *Abomination of Desolation*. Abomination was the Jewish word for an idol. Desolation meant "persecution."

Put into today's terms, Daniel is prophesying that, at the end of time, there will be a power that is idolatrous (that is, religious) but linked with the state in order to desolate (that is, persecute).

"Abomination" is an Old Testament term used for idols and images (see 1 Kings 11:5, 7; 2 Kings 23:13 KJV). Therefore, when we read in Daniel about an abomination, we are reading about a power that's idolatrous. When we read about the "abomination of desolation," then it is an idolatrous power that links itself with government power in order to persecute.

A church on its own cannot persecute. A religion must join itself to the sword as did the Muslims long ago. So the key phrase "abomination of desolation" points to a union of church and state in order to persecute.

The book of Revelation gives us history's climax. Two beasts are pictured. One comes up out of the sea (Revelation 13:1-10), and looks like an amalgam of Daniel's four beasts that represent the kingdoms of earth (see Daniel 7). Then a second beast comes up out of the earth looking like a lamb but, later, speaking like a dragon (Revelation 13:11-18).

The first beast represents bad government, and the second beast represents bad religion. They get together and make an image, (a theme based on Daniel 3), and a decree goes forth that whoever will not worship the image will be killed. There is the final fulfillment in probationary time of the abomination of desolation.

There is a very intriguing fact about the Second Advent prophecy in Matthew 24. Certain key words occur in connection with this prophecy about the abomination of desolation that recur in the next chapters about the final hours of Christ.

This is so important that it bears repeating. In Matthew 24, which is Jesus' sermon about the Second Advent, certain key words are associated with the prophecy of the abomination of desolation in the last days and the account of the last hours of the Head of the church, Christ.

Why is that?

Because what happens to the Head is to happen to the body. Christ is the Head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). We, the church, are the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Nothing will happen to the church that did not first happen to Christ in principle.

So, in this chapter, we read about the word "hour." *"No one knows about that day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"* (Matthew 24:36).

Then later in the narrative we find the word "hour" repeatedly. (See Matthew 26:40; Mark 14:37, 41; Luke 22:53 and John 17:1.)

We read about the word "watch." *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."* (Matthew 24:42; see also 25:13.) Repeatedly, the word "watch" is used in the Olivet sermon. Later, Jesus took his disciples with him to Gethsemane. He told Peter, James, and John: *"Stay here and keep watch with me"* (Matthew 26:38).

We read the word "betray." *"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other"* (Matthew 24:10). In the next couple of chapters in Matthew, the word "betray" is found approximately ten times: *"And while they were eating, he [Jesus] said, 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me'"* (Matthew 26:21). Jesus replied, *"The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me"* (Matthew 26:23).

What are we to understand from this? Why are certain key words used by Jesus in his prophetic sermon in Matthew 24-25 also used during his last hours? The Scripture is saying that the things that happened to Jesus (the Head of the church) will happen on a worldwide scale to the church (the Body of Christ) at the climax of history.

At the end of time, the devil will try to project a worldwide Calvary. Satan will plot to put to death all believers in Jesus Christ. That is what is known as the "last great tribulation." Calvary will be attempted on a universal scale.

Of course, Satan will not be successful. His diabolical project will be interrupted, and Jesus will return. Some will fall in death, but the vast majority will not. Jesus will interrupt Satan's murderous project.

Is anything mentioned about the "abomination of desolation" in the last hours of Christ? Yes.

When Jesus was in the holy place of prayer, that covetous idolater, Judas, came to *betray* him. *So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons* (John 18:3).

Judas, the idolater and abomination, went to the government for a band of Roman soldiers. He went to the church leaders for extra help from them, and with the government soldiers and the temple guard, he came to betray Jesus.

He came to betray Jesus at the sacred hour and in the holy place of prayer. How did Judas betray his loving Lord? With a kiss. *Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him"* (Matthew 26:48).

"While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:47-48).

The Greek word for worship means "to kiss with the hand." When we examine Revelation 13, we find the word "worship" used repeatedly. *"All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world"* (Rev 13:8).

Furthermore, there is a sign or signal for this false worship called the mark of the beast. *Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.*

Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed (Rev 13:11-15).

An image, an abomination, of the beast will be set up. Church and state will unite. There will be a death decree. In the Jewish mind, all this imagery went back to the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. While that name might not mean much to people today, it meant everything to ancient Jews.

Do you remember this verse? "*Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade*" (John 10:22-23, NJV).

What was "the Feast of Dedication?" There is a good chance that the Apocrypha is included in your modern version Bible, especially the New English Bible. The Apocrypha is a collection of sacred books, whose name means "hidden books," or "not canonical." These books do not claim inspiration. You will never read in them, "Thus says the Lord." But they were religious and historical books written between the close of the Old Testament canon and the beginning of the New Testament.

Here are some words from the Apocrypha: *Alexander [the Great] had reigned twelve years when he died. His generals took over the government, each in his own province. On his death, they were all crowned as kings, and their descendants succeeded them for many years. They brought untold miseries upon the world.*

A scion of this stock was that wicked man, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus. (1 Maccabees 1:7-10, NEB)

Our chapter on Daniel describes the evil deeds of Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus Epiphanes set up an image - an idol, an abomination - in the sacred Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and thereby blasphemed God's sanctuary. He had swine's broth poured over the temple vessels. He commanded the Jews to stop keeping the Sabbath, stop practicing circumcision, and stop reading their Scriptures. He had forty thousand Jews murdered because they would not obey his efforts to eradicate their religion. Sadly, a large proportion of Jews apostatised and joined with the renegade government of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Some heroes, called the Maccabees, arose and revolted against Antiochus' blasphemous actions. They ultimately defeated the tyrant's armies.

About 2,300 evening-mornings after Antiochus had defiled the sanctuary, it was re-dedicated, or cleansed. This is the original cleansing of the sanctuary. This cleansing of the sanctuary is what is referred to in John 10:22: "It was the feast of the dedication." This was the festival that was celebrated in honour of the time when the Jewish heroes overcame the Antichrist of their day, Antiochus Epiphanes. The ancient Antichrist had defiled the sanctuary with an image and had commanded false worship. Antiochus was finally ousted, however, and the temple vindicated.

The Bible uses the Antiochus Epiphanes crisis as a symbol of what would happen repeatedly throughout history. God's people would be attacked by antichrists throughout the centuries, culminating in a universal crisis.

When Jesus used the "abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15, his first meaning was "the Roman armies are coming." The Roman armies had ensigns with their gods on them. When they destroyed the temple, they planted those idolatrous banners, those abominations. They sacrificed to them and worshiped them. The pagan Roman armies would come like the armies of Antiochus Epiphanes against Jerusalem and its temple and destroy them both.

Then Jesus saw that the same pagan Roman power would proceed to persecute the church. The New Testament church is called the temple of God (see 2 Corinthians 6:16). After destroying the temple in Jerusalem, the Roman power persecuted Christians in the centuries that followed.

There were repeated periods of persecution by the Roman powers against God's sanctuary that is, the church temple. Christians were thrown to the lions or dipped in tar and set alight as human beacons for Nero's beer gardens. Christians were even blamed, by Nero, for the burning of Rome in AD 64.

Jesus also saw what would happen in the Middle Ages when church and state, idolatrous to the core, would persecute the people of the Book. Then he saw that, at the very end of time, there would be a final, universal fulfilment (which is spelled out in detail in Revelation 13).

Ultimately, the prophecy declares that in the last days religion will become idolatrous amid much religious apostasy. It will link itself with the state in order to persecute those that wish to be faithful to the gospel.

In the twelfth chapter of John's Gospel, we find another factor that helped precipitate the final crisis in Christ's life on earth. *Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume* (John 12:13).

The story is going beautifully: But now there enters a jarring note: *But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.*

'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. "It was meant that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me" (John 12:4-8).

This was the Saturday night on the eve of Christ's triumphal entry: Here we see the maturing of the best and the worst in readiness for the final *dénouement* of Calvary.

We see the maturing of love, so lavishly demonstrated in Mary. We see the maturing of hate, in Judas. The Bible is telling us that the rapid maturing of good and evil precipitated the final crisis of Passion Week. Because these Gospel events are a type, or picture, of last-day events, a rapid maturing of good and evil will also bring about the final crisis of human history.

That very expensive alabaster box was a symbol of Jesus and his body; soon to be broken. When Christ's body would be broken on Calvary, the fragrance of his sacrifice would fill the entire "house" of the universe.

Notice that Mary's mature gesture was wonderfully generous. In commenting on Mary's act, Matthew's Gospel says: "Why this waste?" (Matthew 26:8). When that question was raised, Jesus must have thought of his coming Atonement so rich and extravagant. It was so extravagant that angels might look down from heaven and exclaim, "To what purpose is this waste?"

If extreme Calvinists are correct, Jesus did not waste anything, for he only died for the elect. He only died for an elect few, predestined from before the foundation of the world. But the New Testament does not teach a limited atonement. The New Testament teaches an atonement that appears wasteful because it is so superabundant. It has provided for more than those who will accept it. It has provided for everyone.

The New Testament says that Christ died for every man. "*We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*" (Hebrews 2:9).

Christ tasted death "for everyone." Christ tasted death for you. Christ tasted death for me. Therefore the sacrifice of Christ can look like a waste. It is so extravagant, so lavish, and so generous, that it goes beyond the necessity of the event. Jesus did not just die for those who will finally be saved. He died for all.

Mary's broken box with its spreading fragrance points to the broken body of Jesus and the fragrance of Calvary wafting throughout the universe. That wafting, ultimately, precipitates the final preaching of the gospel and appalling opposition. When Mary broke the box of expensive perfume, Judas was angry. The "waste" precipitated his betrayal. He wanted to put the gospel movement on a more cost-effective foundation.

The message of Mary's broken box (that is, the broken body of Christ on the cross) is to be taken to the world in the last days of earth's history. This will prompt the "abomination of desolation" to make its final attack on the church of God.

As the gospel is proclaimed in the east and west and north and south, and its fragrance permeates the globe, people will rapidly mature for good or rapidly mature for evil. That is what will bring the final crisis.

Personal Significance of Our Study of Matthew 24-25

In Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24-25, he said, "Whoso readeth, let him understand" (Matthew 24: 15, KJV). Jesus spoke in specific reference to the phrase "the abomination of desolation" found in Daniel 9:27. If Jesus says, "Let him understand," it is very important that we obey him. Sadly, this is one of the many neglected commands of Christ. Yet, we are to understand it. Considering that Jesus told us to understand and read, wouldn't you think there would be thousands of books written on "the abomination of desolation"? While Gill and I worked on my second Ph.D. thesis, I searched for a long time in the libraries available to me, including the Library of Congress, the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, and major libraries in London, Cambridge, and Manchester. But I could not find one book in English on the topic.

I spent two years at Manchester University thinking on this subject for most of the hours of my day. (It would have been more than two years were it not for Gill, who knew German and French better than I did. Gill helped me greatly with translating the foreign language material and typing my thesis.) Between us we churned out a book, called *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology*.

Why are we to understand this topic? Because the crisis is coming, the final crisis. Unless we are wedded to Christ in faith, hope, and love, we will join the many (and that refers to professed Christians) whose love waxes cold. Unless we appreciate the fragrance of what happened at Calvary, we will be swept aside by the tide of worldliness.

God either matters tremendously or doesn't matter at all. We need to repeat that over and over again to ourselves.

God is to us what the sun is to the solar system. All the rest of the solar system is about a millionth part of what you have in the sun. You could toss a million worlds into the sun, and there would be space for a hundred thousand more. That is a symbol of what God is meant to be for you and me. All the things of earth are tawdry compared with God.

The great sin of the world is idolatry. Let us not be guilty of that great sin. Our great sin is idolatry, though not necessarily connected with idols of wood and stone. Perhaps we idolise our reputations, our achievements, or our talents, our families, our ambitions. The number of idols humans create is innumerable. But "whatever that idol be, help me, Lord, to tear it from its throne and worship only Thee."

Mary is the symbol of those who will finish the work of God in this world. Mary had a broken heart. The broken vase of perfume represented Mary as well as Jesus. Her heart was broken.

One commentator wrote, "Unless you are broken, you are useless." What a pungent, searching, piercing, humbling statement! As long as I am whole in self-esteem, self-confidence and self-righteousness, God cannot use me.

If, however, like Mary, I really appreciate the love of the Saviour, he becomes everything to me, and God can use me. If, like Mary, you have a loving response to such great salvation, then God can use you. But those who resist that love will find their hearts hardened like the heart of Judas. Instead of crowning our Lord, "Lord of All," they will crucify him.

May God grant that you and I may so consider the uplifted Christ on the cross that it may indeed be the magnet that draws our hearts to him. Then we will find that the cross becomes our way of life. The cross is not something to wear around our neck as a charm. It is our "self" crossed out, our "I" crossed out.

The cross is a choosing of the will of God and a crucifying of my own will. The way of the cross is a way of life, a way of fragrance. It is the only way that can bring an end to sin and sorrow and tragedy. May God give us the heart of Mary and save us from the fate of Judas. This is the only way to be prepared for the testing last crisis (Revelation 13), the Second Advent, and Judgment Day. It is only the gospel which makes us to love the Saviour and our fellowmen. The gospel is the only key to salvation now and in the world to come.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Happily Ever After

Are our spiritual selves just a freakish aspect of our material being? And will they perish with the death of our bodies? Life is bleak when lived without God.

We need confirmation for our spirits. We need to know that our love is more than the equivalent of a stomach upset.

We need to feel that the universe will back us if we choose to be brave, patient, and just.

We need to know that we are overarched by a great Spirit, a Super Being with an intellect and emotions like our own. A great Someone to whom we belong and to whom we can turn for communion and help.

The religion of the Bible reveals just such a One. He is the personal God who, in the gospel, is shown to be like Jesus. By living in friendship and communion with this God, and, by attending to duty and pleasure as if they come from him as his gifts - life is glorious.

With the God revealed in the gospel, life becomes a relationship, a prayer. Then we celebrate the coming of One who enriched the spiritual life of men and women more than all others besides. We have Jesus to thank for teaching us that God is very much involved in our world and all that happens in it. And, first of all, He welcomes the penitents as His forgiven children, each as precious as Christ himself.

Christ has clothed an otherwise drab world with high purpose. By his example, we have learned that God is the central point of reference for human beings. We have seen that joy leaches away from all endeavours carried out in a godless environment.

Jesus was the most fulfilled man that ever lived. That is because Jesus lived for God, with God, under God. The contentment that Christ knew, he shares with all who come to God through him. To understand the gospel is to enter Paradise as surely as the thief of old.

This is the best of news. Now let us consider the ultimate *dénouement* of the gospel - the world to come, as pictured by the closing chapters of Scripture. Please read Revelation 20-22.

In the beginning of the Bible, the third chapter of Scripture (Genesis 3) introduces Satan, sin, sorrow, the curse, and death.

At the end of the Bible, Revelation 20 (the third chapter from the end) bids farewell to all of these.

Revelation 20 unveils the secret realities of faith and unbelief. It tells of the resurrection of all men, purchased by the cross of Christ. But the wicked testify, by their murderous attack on him who raised them from the dead, that eternal death is both their just desert and choice. They are unchanged, and one with the great Destroyer. This is now fully apparent.

Once this is aptly demonstrated, sin no longer has reason for existence; it becomes no more. And with it go the curse, death, and sorrow. The earth again becomes an abyss, without form and void.

From its ashes, God now calls forth order and beauty, life and song. The Greek word for "new" here means "renewed." *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: See, the home of God is among mortals, He will dwell with them as their God; They will be his peoples, And God himself will be with them; He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; Mourning and crying and pain will be no more, For the first things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:1-4, NRSV).

The millennial Sabbath is over, and God once more regenerates.

The last two chapters of the Book of Revelation depict the consummation of the plan of salvation. They speak of a real world, though one necessarily described with metaphors from the Old Testament. All the covenant promises are now portrayed as fulfilled, and Edenic life is restored.

The old atmospheric heavens and the earth's old scarred surface pass away, and with them the sea as we know it. (There is no reason to believe there shall be no sea at all in the new world. It will not be as it is now: a threat, a danger, and a separator. John, the author of the Book of Revelation, was exiled to the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). The sea separated him from his churches and loved ones.)

The promise that the meek shall inherit the earth is fulfilled. This is no ethereal inheritance. Scholars in all ages have understood this. But in recent years this truth has come to the forefront because of the restoration of the Hebrew view of nature and humanity.

The capital of the new earth - already inhabited by the saved - descends from heaven. That descent towards earth is pictured in Revelation 20. Like Noah's ark it rides above the flood of fire, which devours the old world. Jewish apocalyptic writings had much to say about a New Jerusalem coming in glory. The seed of the idea, however, is in the Old Testament itself (Eze 40-48; Dan 8:14).

Daniel had foretold that judgment on the desolating powers of sin would result in the cleansing and vindicating of God's sanctuary. When the angel Gabriel interpreted this for Daniel, he spoke not only of the end of sin and the bringing in of righteousness. He also spoke of the fulfilling of all prophetic vision and the anointing of a "most holy" (Daniel 9:20-27, see especially verse 24).

The last expression pointed to God tabernacling once more with his people, as of old (Exodus 25:8). Revelation 21:14 vividly pictures the reality of that forecast. God comes to dwell with humanity. With God's coming, every tear is dried, and every bitter memory, by some magic alchemy, becomes sweet. The covenant promise, reiterated throughout Scripture, now finds its

consummation: "*I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people*" (Leviticus 26:12, NRSV).

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, "It is done!

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:5-8).

What took place under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit is now fulfilled in deeper dimensions with the visible reign of the Son of God. Verse 5 reminds us of 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Christ is now present, as at the beginning of the Book of Revelation. Some of his opening words are echoed now.

The thirsty are assured of acceptance and refreshment. To drink is to become an overcomer. God requires nothing that He does not provide for the believer. To look at the cross of Christ is to find strength for the conflict and joy in the battle. We can do all things required of us through Christ who strengthens us.

Those who are redeemed from the old Egyptian bondage of sin find all the commandments of God are now promises. "**Thou** shalt not...", rather than "Thou **shalt not**..."

The sins here listed are not those of unsought failures and regretted lapses. They are the sins of apostasy. From the Psalms we learn that mistakes do not put us outside the covenant; but to forsake deliberately the God of the covenant is another thing (Ps 32; 39:7-8; 40:8-12; 51).

Those who are yet idolaters (and all sin is a form of idolatry) lack the seed of eternal life.

The "cowardly" are people that fear humans more than they fear God. It is a relevant warning, especially at every crisis of persecution.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.

It has a great high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:9-14, NRSV).

The purpose of these verses is not, primarily, to give a literal representation of the New Jerusalem. These verses present the city's transcendent reality; and do so in such a manner as to arouse our longing to be there.

Everything that is said of the city tells us also about its inhabitants. It is a radiant city, which needs no sun. Those that dwell there have been the light of the world. It is the house of God with safe, eternal walls. The Holy Spirit has walled about those who dwell there forevermore in perfect security.

It is a city of firm foundations. Those who dwell there never forget that their foundation lies on the apostles and prophets who built upon Christ the great foundation. The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem are there solely because of the firm foundations of the covenant made with the twelve tribes and the gospel of the twelve apostles.

The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using.

The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysochryse, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass (Revelation 21:15-21, NRSV).

The New Jerusalem is described as a perfect cube. This is reminiscent of the holy of holies in the temple, where the length, breadth, and height were equal. The wall's thickness has the number associated with the sealed saints (Revelation 7:1-4; 14:1).

The jewelled foundations are made of the same components as the high priest's breastplate. They are also the symbols of the zodiac; but in reverse, to show separation from pagan things.

With foundations of jewels, gates of pearls, and streets of gold, it is a city to make human eyes sparkle and human hearts pant. Yet, these symbols are but tawdry baubles compared with the gems of God's love and wisdom that will be shared with us throughout eternity.

That city is the only safe bank for our present small hoard of wealth. Down here, thieves break in and steal, and moth and rust corrupt.

"I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

And the city has no need of the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

Its gates will never be shut by day - and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:22-27, NRSV).

Here is the city without a church. The whole city is God's temple! Glory and purity characterise it.

Reviewing the characteristics of the city, we note:

1. Its **heavenliness** (see verse 2), revealed by heaven and by heaven brought down to earth.
2. Its **divinity** (verse 11), seen in its having the glory of God, with the Father and the Son and the Spirit as its temple.
3. Its **security** (verses 12-14), foundations, walls, and angels at the gates are all symbols of release from anxiety and care.
4. Its **symmetry** (verse 15-16), everything is appropriate in size and position.
5. Its **amplitude** (verse 16), the walls stretch over 1,500 miles (2,500 kilometres), and it lies foursquare - a challenge to all to comprehend what is the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of God's love.
6. Its **costliness** (verses 18-21), all that people value most contribute to it, but it is the pearled gates that remind us that all the glory came through pain.

Is the reference to "the nations," the hope that all shall be saved (the doctrine of universalism)? The context does not support this. All who cling to abominations will not be forced into heaven. The key to the puzzle is that John has taken many figures of speech from the Old Testament prophets. He has mingled promises that applied to various times. These last two chapters of the Bible are a marvellous fabric of ancient promises now set forth as fulfilled.

The Lamb's book of life is repeatedly mentioned throughout Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 25). To be in the Lamb's book of life means that we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. It means we have passed from death to life by faith in Christ's merits. To be in the Lamb's book is to be in Christ's mind and heart. We can never be forgotten or neglected. Whoever touches us touches the "apple of his eye."

Verse 27, read as a whole, makes it clear that those in the Lamb's book cannot practice evil. They would rather have Christ than all that the world, the flesh, and the devil can offer. Justification is distinct, never separate, from sanctification. God gives his gifts with both hands. God justifies none whom he does not sanctify.

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river, is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:1-5, NRSV).

Water, food, light, and God are the great needs of all; and all exist in abundance for the saved. The first three are the emblems of the fourth. God is the embodiment and the source of all. With God is the fountain of life, for God only has inherent immortality, life in Himself. In God is light and no darkness at all.

The waters clear as crystal from God's throne symbolise the perfect untainted blessings that flow from God's goodness. In this life, we need water for cleansing and for refreshment. Humanity needs spiritual cleansing and spiritual refreshment.

In this life, all we receive is but a drop by the way. In the life to come, the sea of divine goodness will envelope us (Rom 8:23).

The blessings of the first Paradise are now restored, and so we see the tree of life. But it is not a single tree. Rather, as Ezekiel pictures it, there are avenues of trees on both sides of the river of life (Ezekiel 47:12).

We should probably translate verse 2, "Midway between the street of it and the river, on this side and on that": ie, there is a 'street' or boulevard on each side of the river and, parted from the river by a sort of quay, in the midst of which is a row of trees. It can hardly be meant that there is a single plant of the tree, as in the old Paradise (Gen 2:9).¹

The fact that the tree yields a different kind of fruit each month indicates that the usual cycle of gradual production is bypassed. It "expresses the absolute triumph of life over death."²

But the chief joy of the new environment is expressed in verses three and four. We shall see and worship the One who has loved us from before our birth and who guided our feet without our knowledge.

The "healing of the nations" does not mean sickness exists in the new world. It means that all our lack in the old world will now be made up.

The phrase "his name will be on their foreheads" is a reflection of Genesis 1:26 and Exodus 28:36-38. Adam was originally made in the likeness of God's character. Through glorification, this likeness is now restored. This is symbolised in the words "Holy to the Lord," which appeared on the high priest's golden plate.

The seal of God (Rev 7:2) pointed to the same ultimate blessing-the final restoration of the image of God. At creation, after the first humans were made, the Sabbath was introduced. Since that time, the second has ever been the sign of the first (Gen 1:26; 2:1-3; Eph 4:23-24; Heb 4:1-10).

"The Lord God will be their light" should read, "The Lord God will shine upon them." It is an allusion to the ancient benediction in Numbers 6:25.

In the prospect of reigning with God forever and ever, we see the fulfilment of the promise in Revelation 3:21. It is a fitting conclusion to the dazzling vision of the city of God.

And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place." "See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Revelation 22:6-7, NRSV).

There is within most of us a tinge of rebellion at the promise, "I am coming soon." We know the promise was made so long ago, yet Christ tarrys.

Christ's tarrying is our fault, not his. Jesus said, "And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14, NRSV). By the second century, the Fathers of the church no longer understood the Pauline good news. It did not reappear until the Reformation. Justification was blended with sanctification; creature merit was confused with the perfect merits of Christ's imputed righteousness. The church had no gospel to take to all the world.

Only when we know that justification and sanctification are united, yet distinct, can we define the true gospel. We are justified (acquitted) on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. This is God's glorious work **for** us in Christ. This is the sole basis of salvation. This is the good news of the gospel.

United with justification (yet distinct from it) is sanctification. God does a great work **in** us through the Holy Spirit. This holy living is the *result and fruit* of salvation. It does not win salvation. It flows from the salvation that Christ alone won for us. He won that salvation for us in his substitutionary life, his ransom death, and his representative resurrection.

A church that truly knows the gospel will share it with the world. The delay in the fulfilment of the great commission indicates that many who worship do so ignorantly - and are thus unable to fulfil the mandate of heaven. Jesus will not return until the commission is fulfilled, even if he must cut short the evangelistic work through angelic ministry.

It is even more essential to sense the existential significance of our Lord's warning about time. That person is a fool - and in a dangerous place - who does not ever bear in mind the shortness of this present life compared to the next. Death can come with swift suddenness. No person's tarrying for Christ exceeds a lifetime. What is a human lifetime but a watch in the night, a tale that is told, grass that grows up and soon withers. But the one who believes has the verdict of the Last Judgment, and eternal life, at the very moment Christ is embraced. Ever afterwards, he or she can say with Paul: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charges against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecutions or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:28-39).

Footnotes:

1. W. Simcox, *Revelation*, pgs 201-202.
2. G. E. Ladd, *Revelation*, p288.