

The Final Tribulation

By Harold Camping

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Preface

More than 2500 years ago God spoke through the prophet, Jonah, to Nineveh concerning a terrible predicament Nineveh had come into. Because of the wickedness of that city God warned that in 40 days it would be destroyed. Wonderfully, within that 40 day period the whole city from the king on down repented and came to salvation.

In a real sense the world is in very much the same situation today. The signs are increasingly pointing to the fact that we are very near to Christ's return and the end of the world. This means that the final tribulation also may be almost upon us. Unfortunately, as we shall learn in this study, the final tribulation is a period when the possibility of becoming saved is increasingly greatly curtailed.

Please note that in the first edition of this book, the assertion was repeatedly made that the final tribulation could not begin until the last of the elect had become saved, and a considerable number of Scripture verses appear to teach this. However, as this conclusion has been viewed more carefully in the light of the whole Bible, **it appears that it is unwarranted**. There are passages that surely imply that salvation could be possible right to the end of the world, or at least to some point well within the final tribulation period. **This is so even though the possibility of salvation will be greatly reduced.**

Thus, the idea that the final tribulation could not begin until all the elect are saved has been corrected in this edition. **An additional chapter (Chapter 15) has been inserted to analyze this possibility.**

Therefore, if there were ever a time when there was an immense urgency to bring the Gospel, it is now. If there were ever a time when an individual must seek peace with God immediately, it is now. the same urgency to repent is facing the world today that Nineveh faced in the days of Jonah.

Could it be that this book, which is long overdue, may serve in some way to warn the world of this tremendous urgency? Could it be that in these closing moments of the Day of Grace many might repent and become saved?

Introduction

Any student of the Bible eventually will become interested in the tribulation period that must come prior to the return of Christ. What is this tribulation? When will it come? How long will it continue? How extensive will it be? Will it be a time of worldwide bloodletting? Will believers go through this period? How does it fit into God's salvation program? Will there be events that precipitate this period? How extensively does the Bible speak of this event? Are we close in time to that event?

These are some of the questions that will be examined in this study. Hopefully when the study is completed we will have a clearer understanding of the causes of the period and a better knowledge of the character and nature of the period.

Be warned that many, if not most, aspects of this study are unhappy. You may not like what you read. This is probably the saddest book ever written, but if we are to come to truth, we must remember that all of the Bible is God's message to us.

Let us courageously begin our study.

Chapter 1 – The Final Tribulation

The Bible has much to say about the period of tribulation. God does not assign it a specific title; however,

to facilitate our study, we will call it "the final tribulation." God has given information in Matthew 24:21 that speaks clearly of this event. There Jesus declares:

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Tribulation, especially for the believer in Christ, has been normative throughout the history of the world. This is shown, for example, in John 16:33 where God declares "in the world you shall have tribulation." It is implied by the words of Matthew 24:21 where God states "tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world."

The reference in Matthew 24:21 to a greatly intensified tribulation is found in the context of the account of the events which are to take place at the end of the world. Matthew 24:29 informs us:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken,

The sun and moon are the timekeepers that God placed in the heavens to mark the passage of days, months, and years (Genesis 1:14). The darkening of them indicates that time is no more. In other words, immediately after this great tribulation, eternity begins. **Thus, we can know that this tribulation is to occur at the end of time.**

The Final Tribulation – A Well-Documented Event

The Bible has far more to say about the final tribulation than might be realized. In a host of passages it instructs us that just before Judgment Day there will be both an intensification of tribulation and a radical change in the nature of tribulation compared with any tribulation the world previously had endured. Matthew 24:15-28 addresses itself to this matter especially in verses 15-16, 21-22 and 24:

When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be. and except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

The final tribulation will be entirely different from any the world has ever known, as seen in the language of verse 21:

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Matthew 24 is one of the most lucid and detailed Bible passages on the final tribulation period, but many other statements in the Bible relate to it. For example, II Thessalonians 2:1-4 speaks of this period as a falling away.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him. That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Revelation 8 and Revelation 9 speak of it as a period when the third part will be killed. The third part refers to the body of believers within the church, the external body of believers gathered together as congregations and denominations around the world. Revelation 9:15 records:

And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

In Revelation 11:7-8 God refers to this event when indicating that the two witnesses will be killed:

And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

The two witnesses also refer to the church. Revelation 13 concerns this dreadful event, in verses 3-8.

And I saw one of his heads, as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed; and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 16 addresses this event in the ominous declaration of verse 13 and 14:

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

Revelation 17 gives further insight into this traumatic time in verses 12-14:

And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

Revelation 20 describes this event as a time when Satan is loosed for a "little season." We read in verses 3 and 7-9:

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison. And shall go out to deceive the nations which are of the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

Jesus anticipates this dreadful period of time, as He teaches in John 9:4; "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work." Luke 17:22-23 contains language that is not easy to understand, but which, as we shall see, can relate only to the final tribulation period. There we read:

And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or; see there: go not after them, nor follow them.

Jesus instructs us concerning this event in the prophecy of Luke 21:20-24:

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

The Old Testament, too, is replete with references to this awesome period. For example in Daniel 7:23-25 God prophesies:

Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand, until a time and times and the dividing of time.

The same period is in view in Daniel 8:23-25:

And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper and practise, and shall destroy

the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

The Bible anticipates this event in the difficult language of Genesis 19 where God describes the wickedness of the men of Sodom. These men wanted to molest the visitors (God Himself) who came to deliver Lot and his family out of Sodom and its impending destruction. Genesis 19 is further explicated in Judges 19, which details the killing of the concubine by the men of Benjamin. Both accounts teach aspects of the final tribulation period.

God anticipates this period by His judgments on Israel and Judah-Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians and Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians. Deuteronomy 28:15-68, II Chronicles 36:13-21, and many passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah anticipate this dreadful event (these will be studied later).

The final tribulation period is not an isolated event with incidental reference to it in the Bible. It is of major importance; it is spoken of repeatedly throughout the Holy Scripture. It is so frequently alluded to in the Bible that we wonder why it has not become an important part of Christian theology.

Ahead of that question, we wonder why God has so much to say about an event that is to be experienced only by the people of the world who are living near the end of time. We wonder why many final tribulation passages of the Bible are written in such a way that they are difficult to understand. For example, when we analyze the passages mentioned on the preceding pages of this study (a partial listing), we see how obtuse and puzzling the language is. Few of the statements are as plain as Matthew 24:21 where God declares that there will be great tribulation such as this world has never known. The context of Matthew 24:21 does not cause one to understand the character and nature of the final tribulation.

The Final Tribulation Comes at the End of the Church Age.

These questions can be answered if we realize that the chief truth hidden in the biblical language of the final tribulation period is that there will come a time when the work of the church, to evangelize the world, will end. This can happen only when all of the elect have become saved. The end of the work of the church will coincide with apostasy within the churches. God's judgment will come upon these churches—the various denominations and congregations throughout the world. This will be preliminary to God's judgment upon the whole world at Judgment Day.

The work of the church to evangelize the world is so important that God did not make the end of the church age a subject for theologians of the New Testament period. While God saved the elect from every nation, he repeatedly warned the churches that He would reject them if they were unfaithful. However, the dramatic truth that a short time prior to Judgment Day virtually every congregation and denomination in the world was to become apostate was not a concern of the evangelical church.

The end of the church age and God's judgment upon the church at the time of the closing of history is apparently antithetical, in opposition, and contrary to everything the Bible teaches about God's plan of salvation. That is why God has written extensively about this event. When it became time for God to reveal these truths to His believers, they would be able to find extensive documentation in the Bible. Therefore, God has hidden the teachings of this dramatic event in some of the most difficult biblical language. Once we understand the nature and purpose of the final tribulation period, the truths hidden in these passages begin to be revealed, and we see in a fresh and beautiful way the harmony and cohesiveness of the Scriptures.

We shall try to more clearly understand the character and purpose of the closing events of this world and the transition into Judgment Day. The greatest event that will take place before Judgment Day is the final tribulation period; we will spend considerable time studying its character and purpose.

As has been noted, the final tribulation period is directly associated with the end of the church age, when churches and denominations will no longer function as representatives of God to evangelize the world. Therefore, the more we know about the church as it existed throughout the ages, the more qualified we will be to understand the biblical information concerning the church's end.

We will attempt to gain a perspective – an objective look – of God's plan of salvation as it relates to the corporate or external body of believers. As we do, keep in mind that we wish to understand what the Bible teaches concerning the end of the church and the final tribulation period.

Chapter 2 – The Old Testament Church

The final tribulation period has been anticipated repeatedly throughout the Scriptures. The Old Testament anticipated it. The New Testament anticipated it. This is an event that has been spoken of in great detail in the Bible. The reason it is well documented is that it is so terrible in nature and purpose.

The chief characteristic of the final tribulation period is God's judgment on the church. This event will be traumatic and contrary to everything that we might expect; God has carefully and extensively written about it so that there might be no misunderstanding.

We will not have an appreciation of the final tribulation unless we understand the Bible's teachings about the church. The mission and character of the church should be of intense concern to every child of God, because he is a part of that church, which is found in every biblically faithful congregation and denomination. It is Christ's church; He went to the cross to establish it. Therefore, believers want to know all that the Bible teaches concerning the present and the future of the church.

To understand the church, its mission, character, and future, we must understand how God dealt with the nations of the Old Testament (especially national Israel), for they relate to the church's present and future. National Israel, for example, is presented in the Bible as a figure, type, or representation of the church. As we understand how God dealt with Old Testament nations, we will understand that the warnings given in the Old Testament relate to the New Testament church. Let us get a biblical perspective of the church.

In this chapter we will study the external appearance of the church from the fall of Adam and Eve until the time of Abram, whom God used as the beginning of the nation of Israel. We will briefly outline the history of national Israel from Abraham to the time of the cross, when the era of national Israel ended. In the following chapter we will look at the beginning of the New Testament church.

The Church from the Fall to Abraham

In the beginning Adam and Eve were created, according to biblical chronology, about 13,000 years ago, actually in the year 11,013 BC. From the time of their fall, salvation was possible. Abel, their son, was saved. Possibly Adam and Eve were saved. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Enoch, who lived a few thousand years before Noah, walked with God and was not because God took him. Indeed, there was salvation from the beginning. From the time that sin came into the world until the present day there has been the possibility of salvation.

During the first 9,000 years of the history of the world, people were saved as individuals, just as people today are saved individually. Today we are instructed by God to fellowship together as congregations. In those early years, God does not speak of a collective body assembling together. God does not speak of a congregation; God does not speak of a church. Nevertheless, their salvation was identical to our salvation and to the salvation of believers throughout time. We do not find that they were admonished to be a part of a congregation. It was not God's plan in those early days to have a great body of believers nor to assemble believers together in congregations.

The number of believers at any time was exceedingly few. At the time of the flood only eight people were saved. Out of a population of that day of perhaps a million people, there were only eight people who could possibly have been saved.

Thus, during the 9,000 years from the fall of Adam and Eve until the time of Abraham, there was no structured body of believers called a congregation or a church. Moreover, at any time during this period the number of believers was very small.

The Church from Abraham to Christ

When Abraham came on the scene about 4,000 years ago, it was the beginning of a change. He headed the first official congregation, i.e., the nation of Israel. The approximately 9,000 years that had gone before are recorded in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. In Genesis Chapter 12 God begins to deal with Abram. He was not a Jew. He was a Gentile who trusted God just as we must trust God. He was saved exactly as we are saved.

In the year 2092 BC Abram was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, a Gentile nation, and into the land of Canaan (which today is the land of Israel). At that time Abram was 75 years of age. Twenty-four years later, in the year 2068 BC, Abram and his family received circumcision as a sign that they were in the covenant.

The covenant was the agreement God made within the Godhead, on behalf of those who were to become saved, that God would save a people for Himself. Theologically speaking it is called the "Covenant of Grace" or the "Covenant of Redemption." Those who become saved as part of God's covenant plan become eternal citizens of the kingdom of God. This covenant is intimately identified with the kingdom of God.

God began to identify His kingdom with a visible body of believers by the sign of the covenant, circumcision. The fact that all males in Abraham's family and servants and slaves in Abraham's household were circumcised indicated that God was beginning to deal with a congregation.

Abraham fathered Isaac, who fathered Jacob. Jacob fathered sons who headed the twelve tribes (actually there were thirteen) that became national Israel. Again and again in the Bible national Israel was spoken of as the congregation. They looked to their roots; they looked to their progenitor Abraham as the beginning because he was brought to the land of Canaan, to the land of Israel, by God. It was in this land that the congregation of Israel lived for most of the 2,000 years from Abraham to the time of the cross. Israel was the official congregation that represented the kingdom of God in a visible, corporate, and institutional way. From what we read in the Bible, there was no other congregation in the world. Israel alone was the congregation.

There was salvation among the Ninevites after Jonah came on the scene. You can read about them in the Book of Jonah. You will not read that the believing Ninevites became a congregation. They are a special case that God put in the Bible for other purposes, to illustrate, for example, that it was not God's intention that salvation be confined to the nation of Israel. Their salvation emphasized that it was possible for Gentiles to be saved. There are other reasons why God gave us the Book of Jonah, but there is no intimation that God is teaching that congregations other than the nation of Israel existed in the world prior to the coming of Christ.

God's Congregation – The Nation of Israel

The only congregation that existed in the world from the fall of man until Christ came to die for our sins was the nation of Israel. This congregation was to be separated from the world. It was to have a distinct and unique identification that showed it was God's congregation. In Exodus 12, for example, if a Gentile (a stranger to national Israel), wanted to partake of the Passover, he and his household were to be circumcised (Exodus 12:48). In other words, if someone became saved, he was to identify with the nation of Israel by a particular sign placed on him. If a member of the congregation rebelled against God, he was to be cut off, which was frequently signified by stoning. The congregation was to be kept as pure as possible.

This was the congregation. Insofar as is known from the Bible, it is all that existed during the Old Testament period. This congregation was so important and so intimate with God, that He declared Israel to be His wife. God actually spoke of national Israel as His wife to whom He was married (Jeremiah 3:1, 8-10; Isaiah 50:1).

In this intimate relationship God lavished blessing after blessing upon Israel. No political nation has ever enjoyed the special favors that were experienced by Israel. However, for long periods in its history it appeared that Israel was under the wrath of God rather than under the blessing of God. It enjoyed exceptional blessings of God, but Israel did not always show the evidence of these blessings. Therefore God's judgments repeatedly fell on Israel.

During the days of King David and King Solomon, Israel was in its flower; it existed as a beautiful nation. There was no division within its ranks, but that condition was tentative. Solomon worshipped other gods in his old age and as a penalty God destroyed Israel – actually, He divided Israel. He took ten tribes, the largest part of Israel, and gave them into the hands of a foreign king. He left only Judah and Benjamin under the rulership of Solomon's son. This was a tremendous judgment of God upon Israel.

Two hundred and nine years later the ten tribes, also called the northern kingdom, were destroyed by the Assyrians because they were rebellious against God. One hundred and twenty-three years after the ten tribes were destroyed, the remainder of Israel, called Judah or the southern kingdom, was destroyed by the Babylonians, in the year 587 BC.

That was not the end of national Israel, even though they were in captivity in Babylon for a long time. In spite of the apostasy that had prevailed, a remnant came out of Babylon. God still recognized the nation of Israel as His congregation, as the corporate body. A remnant came out of Babylon, returned to Jerusalem, and there the nation of Israel was slowly rebuilt.

Up to and including when Christ came on the scene, Israel continued to be the external official representation of the kingdom of God on earth. Anyone who identified with the God of the Bible and salvation would have been a part of the congregation in national Israel. The nation of Israel continued until the time of Christ to be an integral part of God's visible church.

Ancient Israel Relates to the New Testament Church

We are interested in ancient Israel because it gives us insights into New Testament congregations; as God dealt with ancient national Israel, we get insights as to how God deals with the church of our day. It identifies with New Testament congregations from many vantage points.

Ancient Israel was a nation that God used as a type or figure of the Israel of God that came into existence later in history. It shall be seen that the Israel of God is the body of true believers, from the beginning up to the present day and till Christ returns.

Ancient Israel served many purposes in God's salvation plan in addition to that of being a type of the Israel of God. During their era they served as the visible, external representation of the kingdom of God. They served a marvelous purpose in that God used the Jews, the blood descendants of Abraham, as the people to write the Bible – possibly the whole Bible was written by official members of the congregation of the nation of Israel.

Another tremendous blessing we received from national Israel is the Lord Jesus. Jesus was a Jew. He was a blood descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David. We can be grateful to national Israel that humanly speaking they produced the Christ.

The nation of Israel was the progenitor of the New Testament church. Christ came from Israel, and the New Testament church came from Christ; therefore, the New Testament church came from national Israel. God used them in marvelous ways.

Another purpose in God's plan for national Israel was that He used them to bring Christ to crucifixion. The Sanhedrin (the Jewish rulers), the High Priest, and the Pharisees plotted the death of the Lord Jesus, which was an important part of God's plan. If Jesus had not been crucified, there would be no salvation for us. We are grateful that He was crucified. The nation of Israel, particularly the leaders of the nation of Israel, were incensed against Jesus. They were convinced that He was of Satan and therefore they wanted Him killed. They induced the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate to have Him crucified – a necessary part of God's salvation plan.

The apostles, who played an important part in the formation of the New Testament church, also came from national Israel. The twelve apostles were Jews. They were members of the synagogue. They were the men that God used to begin the New Testament church. We owe much to national Israel. It was used in a profound and wonderful way by God to prepare our salvation.

National Israel was a corporate, visible, institutional, external body intimately related to God. God brought magnificent blessings upon them; New Testament churches and congregations are equally blessed. This does not imply that every man of national Israel was saved. There were true believers within national Israel, but as a nation they remained unsaved. Since the nation itself was the church, it can be said that a great number of people within the church of that day were unsaved. Nevertheless, God loved them as a corporate body. Only those who were truly saved have eternal life. Those who were unsaved, even though they were members of the corporate body, remain under the wrath of God. They must pay for their sins the same as anyone else in the world who remains unsaved. Salvation through the shed blood of Christ was as essential for them as it is for us today.

Israel's Era Comes to an End

The era when national Israel served as the external representation of the kingdom of God on earth finally came to an end. It ended in a dramatic way. The end of the era opened the way for the kingdom of God to be externally represented by the New Testament Church.

The end of national Israel will be studied in some detail to be certain of this conclusion. The end of national Israel as the corporate representation of the kingdom of God occurred when Jesus hung on the cross. Before the cross (throughout the Old Testament period), sacrifices and blood offerings were made. Burnt offerings were made on the altar. These sacrifices pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, who was sacrificed for our sins.

The physical focus of these sacrifices was the temple in Jerusalem. In the temple was the Holy of Holies;

it was the most holy place. It was separated from the major part of the temple by a huge veil or curtain behind which no one ever saw. Behind the veil was the ark. In this ark were the two tablets of stone on which the ten commandments were written. The ark represented Christ. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the veil to sprinkle blood on the ark – the mercy seat which covered the ark. When he went behind the veil, everyone else left the temple. No one could look behind the veil because the Holy of Holies, which was the room behind the veil, represented God. The Bible speaks of it as the place where God came down to man. It was the most holy place that made the temple the most holy building in the world. The temple was in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem therefore, became the holy city.

When Christ hung on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent (Matthew 27:51). God, as it were, took His finger and tore the veil from top to bottom. The huge curtain which was, as near as we can determine, more than fifty feet high, was rent by God – no longer was the Holy of Holies a hidden place. No longer was it a place into which no one could look. It was wide open, and that meant that it was no longer the holy place. It no longer was the holy place, therefore the temple was no longer the holy building. The temple was no longer the holy building; Jerusalem was no longer the holy city. This marked the end of the era of national Israel.

Christ's suffering on the cross was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament sacrifices. He was the Lamb to which all the previously slaughtered lambs pointed. His death, therefore, marked the end of the observance of the ceremonial laws. The end of the ceremonial law brought the end of national Israel as God's official representation of the kingdom of God on earth.

God formed national Israel in the year 2068 BC, the year Abraham was circumcised. Exactly 2,100 years later, in the year AD 33, national Israel stopped being the official representation of the kingdom of God on earth. (There is no year zero. To determine the passage of time from an Old Testament date to the New Testament date, the two periods must be added together and then one (1) is subtracted from the total to obtain the actual years that transpired between the two dates. Thus the period 2068 BC to AD 33 equals 2101 calendar years but 2100 actual years: $2068 + 33 - 1 = 2100$.) From that time forward, if anyone wanted to know something about Jehovah God, if he wanted to know about the Bible, or the Lord Jesus Christ, he did not go to national Israel. We do not go to Jerusalem today to find out about the Christ. We go to the churches and the congregations that sprang up subsequent to the cross. God's action of tearing the veil as Christ hung on the cross ended the era of national Israel because they were the stewards or the custodians of the ceremonial law.

During the first 9,000 years of world history there was no congregation. During the last 2,100 years of the Old Testament era there was a congregation – that congregation was national Israel. Its land was the land of Israel; Jerusalem was its capital. The Lord Jesus Christ came out of that congregation. The crucifixion of Christ ended the era.

The Bible says that God has one more thing to do with national Israel; it is another subject. Briefly, it is: God speaks of Israel as a sign that we are near the end of time. The Bible indicates that when the fig tree is in leaf, you know that summer is nigh. When you see these things happening, you know that Christ is at the very door (Matthew 24:32, 33). The fig tree, which typifies national Israel in the Bible, is again in leaf and that tells us that we are close to the end.

This is of great importance and will be studied later in detail. It impinges heavily on the final tribulation period. The development of churches and congregations in the world began with the coming of Christ. When He was crucified man entered the era of the New Testament church. The next chapter covers the New Testament church.

Chapter 3 – The New Testament Church

In the last chapter it was determined that for almost the first 9,000 years of world history there was no congregation anywhere in the world. Salvation was available however, as attested to by individuals such as Abel and Enoch and Noah's family, who became saved. Beginning with Abraham, God formed a congregation, and that congregation, or that church, was national Israel. There are those who do not like the word "church" in connection with national Israel, but it is the word that God uses. For example, in Acts 7:38 God speaks of national Israel as the "congregation" or the "church" in the wilderness. It is the identical word that is used when God talks about the New Testament church.

The era of national Israel ended when Christ hung on the cross – when the veil of the temple was rent.

Fifty days later, God officially began the era of the New Testament church.

The Beginning of the New Testament Church

The beginning of the New Testament church was as dramatic as the end of the era of the Old Testament church. Jesus told His apostles in John 16:7-8:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

The Comforter is God the Holy Spirit who would begin His program to evangelize the world immediately after Christ returned to heaven. This grand event was promised in many places in the Old Testament. One phrase used by God to describe this new program is that the Holy Spirit would be poured out. In Joel 2:28, for example, God decreed that "it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost in AD 33. It was then that the Holy Spirit was poured out.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit does not indicate that God, who is the Holy Spirit, can be physically poured out. He is not a quantity that can be treated this way. God uses "pouring out" to identify with the biblical concept that the world before the coming of Christ was a spiritual desert – few had been saved. The spiritual desert was to be turned into a fruitful field. Spiritual forests would grow, and the wilderness would bring forth green vegetation. It is as though copious quantities of water were poured out on the spiritual desert. The water is a figure or type of God the Holy Spirit beginning His program to evangelize the world. The language the "Holy Spirit was poured out" simply means that God the Holy Spirit had begun His evangelical commission. This was the fulfillment of hundreds of Old Testament promises that indicated that believers would come to God from every nation.

To further build on the figure of water being poured on the desert, God used the term "filled with the Spirit" to indicate that New Testament believers were qualified to be witnesses. The picture God paints is that the Holy Spirit, like great quantities of water, is poured out and fills every believer; out of their bellies flow rivers of living water (John 7:38). The world which had been a spiritual desert would blossom with new believers in Christ, as God worked through believers to evangelize the world.

The program of worldwide evangelization began fifty days after Christ hung on the cross. Ten days earlier, on Pentecost, Jesus had gone back to heaven, and thereby indicated that His work of atonement had been completed. It was time for God's program to evangelize the world to begin.

As previously noted, the program to evangelize the world was thoroughly anticipated in the Old Testament. There are many Old Testament passages that point to the time when believers would come from every nation. Abraham, who was the beginning of the Old Testament church, was told by God in Genesis 17 that he would be the father of a multitude of nations. Throughout the Old Testament are statements that the day would come when all kinds of people would come to God, and the Gentiles would serve Him.

These promises focused on Pentecost in AD 33, fifty days after Christ was crucified. This was the beginning of God's salvation program whereby people from every nation were to be saved. National Israel no longer represented the institutional, visible, or external congregation. It no longer represented the kingdom of God. Congregations which began to spring up all over the world became the representation of the kingdom of God. At Pentecost 3,000 were saved from eighteen different nations. These people went back to their nations and became the church of God. They were not identified with the temple in Jerusalem. They were not identified with the synagogues.

It is true that the apostles still went to synagogues to teach; that is where the Jews were. That is where they assembled in religious worship. God had commanded the apostles to go first to the Jews to make sure that they heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostles no longer belonged to the synagogues. The church had begun afresh, apart from the church of the Old Testament. It began with the apostles who came out of the church of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament church had an external corporate character. The institutional, visible body consisted of the whole nation of Israel and the Gentiles who joined by circumcision. Within the church were found the true believers who had eternal life. They had personally had their sins paid for by the Messiah who was to come. They had been chosen or elected by God to become saved. This election process had taken place before God created the world (Ephesians 1:4). Those who were elected by God are the only ones who would ever believe in Christ and become saved.

The Bible teaches that Christ went to the cross for more reasons than to save the elect, even though that was the most important reason. Our Lord Jesus went to the cross, first, to save all who would believe on Him. He went to the cross to save David, to save Elijah, to save Moses, to save Enoch. The impact of the cross reached back to the beginning so that these men were saved anticipating the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is called Jesus because He saves His people from their sins. His people includes everyone who would ever believe in Him. That is the big task God had laden upon Him on the cross: He had become sin for every one of God's elect. All those whom God planned to save were saved by the Lord Jesus going to the cross.

Jesus went to the Cross to Establish the External Church

One may not normally think of this, but nevertheless it is biblical: Jesus went to the cross to establish the congregation, the visible, external congregation.

National Israel was important to God as a corporate, institutional body. This was seen, for example, in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. They were saved from the bondage of enslavement to Egypt. They came through the Red Sea in a miraculous way. God was present with them in the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. God cared for them; He brought to them the heavenly bread, manna. God gave them water out of the rock; they had plenty of water to drink. Their shoes did not wear out; their feet did not swell. God cared for them in marvelous ways even though individually most of them were unbelievers. God was tremendously involved with them as an external and visible body.

In the New Testament, God is involved with the external, visible body. Every congregation is identified with Christ. Christ went to the cross to establish these congregations. In II Peter 2:1 God declares that false prophets will arise among you "even denying the Lord that bought them." These false prophets are members of the visible body, but they are not eternal members. They are not saved; they are in the congregation, and they deny the Lord who bought them. The phrase "bought them" guides us to understand the corporate body's relationship to the cross.

God did not "buy them" in the sense that He paid for their sins. If this were so, then they would have been saved; they would not have been false prophets. God bought them in the sense that Christ went to the cross to establish the congregations as visible, corporate representations of the kingdom of God on earth. The unsaved, false prophets were members of the congregation; in that respect, God bought them. In other words, Christ went to the cross so that the visible, external body of believers, called the church or congregation, could come into being. God expected Old Testament believers to belong to a visible body called national Israel, and God expects New Testament believers to belong to a visible body.

The relationship of Christ to the visible body is seen in Revelation 2 and 3. The seven churches of Asia, which included Ephesus, Philadelphia, Smyrna and Laodicea are named. Each of these congregations was represented in heaven by a candlestick, and Christ walked among these candlesticks. Yet, in these congregations there were many unbelievers. There was a Jezebel in one of them and there were the Nicolaitanes who were in rebellion against God. Grievously bad things were going on in some of these congregations. Nevertheless, God repeatedly spoke of the fact that they were His congregations. They were each represented by a candlestick in heaven. God as Christ went to the cross to establish these congregations. Christ went to the cross not only to save individual believers but also to bring into existence the corporate, external body called the church. In the corporate sense it can be said that Christ bought the unsaved members of the church.

God's relationship to the New Testament congregation is not quite like it was to the Old Testament congregation, national Israel. The Old Testament congregation became the wife of God. God entered into that intimate relationship, but the New Testament does not say that Christ is married to the corporate, external congregation. God does not use that language when speaking of the New Testament congregation.

Christ was able to divorce the Old Testament congregation because God included in the ceremonial laws (Deuteronomy 24:1), that if a husband found that his wife was guilty of some unclean thing, that is, she was guilty of fornication, then he could write her a bill of divorcement and put her away. This is the law, or the principle, that God exercised to put away national Israel because of the Israelites continuing infidelity. They continued to rebel against Him and go after other gods; therefore, God divorced them.

When Christ came on the scene, the possibility of divorce was rescinded. In Matthew Chapter 19, verse 8, the Bible declares that from the beginning it was not so (that a man could divorce his wife for fornication). It was never God's intention that a man could divorce his wife, so the principle in the

ceremonial law of Deuteronomy 24 no longer stands. If a man finds his wife engaging in fornication, he cannot divorce her.

God never speaks of having a wife-husband relationship with the New Testament institutional or corporate body. If He were married to her, to the corporate body, the institutional church, in the light of Matthew 19:8, He could not put her away. He is not married to it; He can separate Himself from it because there has never been a marriage. Later we shall see how God intends to separate Himself from the New Testament congregations.

In the New Testament God does speak of a marriage relationship. Instead of a marriage relationship to the corporate, external body (as in the Old Testament with national Israel), in the New Testament the relationship is with the eternal body, the invisible body of believers, which is found in every congregation that is reasonably true to the Word of God.

The difference must be underscored. In the New Testament when God speaks about His church, He may be speaking about the external, visible, institutional, corporate body that is called the Lutheran church or the Presbyterian church or the Mission Covenant church, etc. This is the external, visible congregation just as national Israel in the Old Testament was the visible congregation – the external representation of the kingdom of God on earth. The Bible reveals that God has a tremendous interest in the corporate, external body of believers. When we join a church, corporately we become identified with the kingdom of God. This is true even if we are unsaved, as were the false prophets spoken of in II Peter 2 who were members of a church.

The Eternal Church within the External Church

Within the external body there are those who are true believers. They should be found in the congregations that are reasonably true to the Word of God, because God commands us, if possible, to be a part of a congregation.

The invisible church is invisible because only God knows who are the saved ones. You and I, who are saved, can know in our own hearts that we are children of God. God certainly gives us that assurance as we read the Scriptures and our faith is built up. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

One cannot know who else is saved. One cannot know the heart of another person. God knows who they are. Within any congregation there are those who are saved and those who are not saved. Insofar as the elders, the deacons, or the pastor desire, hopefully everybody within the congregation is saved. However, in the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, there were members, called Jezebel or Nicolaitanes, who were running after another gospel. Therefore, it is certain that in virtually every congregation there are those who are unsaved.

Of prime importance to God is the invisible body, the eternal church, made up of those who have truly become saved, who have personally received their resurrected souls. These were named by God from before the foundation of the world. They are named in the Lamb's Book of Life. They are the elect of God who were predestinated to be saved. They are the individuals named in God's will and to whom God has obligated Himself to give the eternal inheritance. These are the ones that the Bible speaks of as, "Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). These are the ones that Jesus spoke about when He said in John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me." These are in the eternal kingdom of God.

When we truly become saved, when we become a child of God, then we are members of the eternal kingdom of God. The eternal kingdom of God is found in every congregation that is reasonably true to the Word of God. This is the Israel of God. This is the eternal Israel that has trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the seed of Abraham in the spiritual sense: people who have had their sins covered by the blood of Jesus – these are the bride of Christ.

In Revelation Chapter 21 God shows us the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband. The holy city is not the institutional church. The New Jerusalem is not the external congregation. The bride of Revelation 21 consists only of those who are born from above, those who are part of the eternal, invisible church; God alone knows its total extent.

In Ephesians Chapter 5 there is an interesting statement concerning this bride relationship. Jesus commands husbands in verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

Christ does not cleanse the external congregation; it can go deeper and deeper into sin and finally, God cuts it off. He cuts it off because He is not married to it. He need not divorce it as He had to divorce ancient Israel. He is not married to the New Testament corporate, institutional body, so He simply cuts it off. He destroys it. He removes the candlestick.

The invisible church – the eternal body of believers, which is found within the institutional congregation – is the bride of Christ. Christ is married to it. He is the husband of the true believers, and He says that we are to love our wives as Christ loved the church. God uses the husband-wife relationship to give us an idea of the intimacy that exists between Christ and His body of believers. He declares that His purpose is to sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. Those who are eternally saved have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. He will present them to Himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that it should be holy and without blemish.

The external congregation, the Baptist denomination, or the Reformed denomination, or the Presbyterian denomination, or the Methodist denomination, will never be without spot or wrinkle. No denomination will ever be without spot or wrinkle. No denomination nor local congregation is the bride of Christ. It is the external representation of the kingdom of God, as has been seen, but it will fall away in time, just as churches throughout history have fallen away.

True believers within the congregations are the eternal church. They are the Israel of God; they are the bride of Christ. It is they whose sins have been washed away. They are the ones who are presented to God without having spot or wrinkle; God has covered them with His blood. God gave them, first of all, resurrected souls when they became saved. When He completes their salvation, He will give them a resurrected body in which they will never sin again. This is the most important aspect of the church. These individuals are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They are the legitimate ambassadors of Christ, and as ambassadors of Christ, they are qualified (by being filled with the Spirit), to be Christ's witnesses to the world.

Christ can never divorce this church because what God has joined together let not man put asunder. God will not violate this rule. God has guaranteed that we will be His bride throughout eternity. What a blessed, blessed promise this is!

The Eternal Church Includes Old Testament Believers

The eternal church, the invisible body of believers, includes not only those who have been saved since the establishment of the New Testament church, it also includes those who were saved in the Old Testament days. It includes those who lived in the nation of Israel and those who lived before the nation of Israel, for example, Noah, who "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). He lived almost 3,000 years before the founding of the nation of Israel. The Pharisee, Nicodemus, whom Jesus talked to in John 3 is an Old Testament believer. Christ here speaks on the Old Testament side of the cross, and yet He tells him, "Ye must be born again." He must be born from above, otherwise, he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God. This is the same language the Bible uses in reference to New Testament salvation.

The Bible declares many good and important things about the corporate body, the external institution, which is called the First Baptist Church or the First Presbyterian Church or the Episcopal Church, or whatever it may be called. However, under no circumstances are we saved because we belong to a congregation. Under no circumstances do we look to that church to save us. We must be extremely clear on this. Our salvation comes through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He personally has to wash away our sins.

Our salvation is entirely independent of our congregation. We may have been saved before we were aware that there were congregations. Many people are saved this way. We may have been saved after being invited to visit a congregation and hearing the preaching of the Word, in which case God blessed that preaching to our hearts, cleansed us from our sins, and we became saved. Nonetheless, we are not saved by the church. We are saved by the blood of Christ. We are saved by what Christ did for us on the cross.

The external church, the institutional church to which we belong, is the place where we gather to encourage one another in the Word and to worship. Worship is a large part of our relationship with Christ. As we pray and sing songs together, we worship Him. We can worship individually, but we are also to worship collectively. God has admonished us, if at all possible, to belong to a congregation. This is very important. The eternal church is made up of only true believers. The invisible church is eternal in character. It is the church that will be the bride of Christ eternally.

God's purposes for the nation of Israel, the corporate, external, institutional body for 2,100 years before the cross, ended when Christ hung on the cross. Unfortunately, it will be seen that the external visible body, our congregation, whatever the name may be, will also end, a short period before Judgment Day. The invisible church, which is made up of those who are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, will go on into eternity and forever be the bride of Christ.

Those who make up the invisible church, those who are saved, are also called a "remnant" or a "remnant chosen by grace." They represent a small percentage of all the people of the earth. As individual congregations become more apostate, as they become more rebellious against God, true believers will be a smaller and smaller percentage of the members of congregations.

This is not surprising. In national Israel, at any time in its history, the true believers, members of the invisible, eternal church, were a tiny percentage of the whole nation of Israel.

Frequently in our congregations, the same is true. Ideally, the congregation consists of only those who are true believers. In practice, particularly as a church becomes more and more interested in the world and tries to achieve success by rapidly adding membership, it begins to let down the bars. To some degree, this church begins to redesign God's laws as laid down in the Bible. The rulers do this to make it easier for people to become members of their congregation. Finally, it gets to the point where the number of true believers in that church (and only God knows who they are), is a remnant of the congregation.

Throughout history the number of true believers was a remnant compared with the totality of all people. The number of people in the world who are true believers is a small percentage of the whole.

Nevertheless, the totality of all those who have believed on Him is a vast company. In Revelation 7, for example, God declares that the totality of true believers is a vast company which no man could number. The building of the church, the invisible, eternal church, of which we become a part when we become saved, has been going on throughout history, particularly during the last 1,950 to 2,000 years. A tremendous number of people have become believers.

As we study the church and see how God has worked out His program to bring the Gospel, I surely hope that you are a child of God. In all likelihood you have membership in a congregation. Because you have been baptized, have membership in a congregation, teach a Sunday School class, faithfully go to church, and pray, does not guarantee that you are a child of God. None of these things guarantees that you are the bride of Christ, that you are part of the eternal body that will go on eternally.

If you have come to the Lord with a broken and a contrite heart, if you have looked upon yourself with the stark knowledge that you are a sinner under the wrath of God, and if you have begun to trust in Christ as your only sin bearer, as your Savior, you can know that you are on the path of salvation. Only if you have begun to find it more and more distasteful to sin, and if you have repented of your sins, is there evidence that God is doing a work of grace in your heart. Only then can you know that you are a member of the true church.

It is my desire that each one who reads this book might indeed know that he or she is a member of Christ's glorious eternal church.

The Task of the Church

In this study of the final tribulation period, it will be discovered that the things thus far learned fit precisely into God's end-time program of bringing judgment upon the church. Because of the church's increasing apostasy near the end of time, the era of the New Testament church will end, as did the Old Testament church – the nation of Israel.

To appreciate and understand the end of the New Testament church, one must understand the task of the church. What is the major task of the institutional church, the visible representation of the kingdom of God?

First of all, the task is to nourish and feed believers within the congregation. Those who have become members of the body of Christ, who truly have been saved, assemble and worship together as a body. This is an important function for the believer and is not to be taken lightly. The Bible teaches that we are not to neglect the assembling together of the saints, particularly as the day draws nigh (Hebrews 10:25). The Bible speaks of those in the congregation who rule over us (I Peter 5:1-3). It is God's plan that we be members of congregations. Within that congregation we are to be exhorted. We are to be taught the Word of God. We are to become more qualified to get on with the task that God has assigned to each of us: the task of sending the Gospel into the world.

The other task of the church – and it is a major task – is that it is mandated by God to send the Gospel into the world, that many more might be saved. God does not expect the secular community, nor the business community, nor the political community, to evangelize the world. They have nothing to do with the true Gospel. They have no mandate, of any kind, to send the Gospel into the world.

The congregations and denominations that have sprung up during the New Testament period, which have within them the true believers who are filled with the Spirit, have the task of evangelizing the world. They are to marshal their resources so that the Gospel might go forth. As the Gospel goes forth, and this one is saved and that one is saved, it is the congregation, the official representation of the kingdom of God, that welcomes the saved ones into the body of believers. They are baptized within the congregation. They fellowship within the congregation, commune together in the communion service, and anticipate the oneness that eternally exists in the body of believers.

God has assigned to the congregations the important task of bringing the Gospel to a lost world. Each congregation, while it labors at the task of evangelizing the world, is responsible to God to be a faithful representative of the kingdom of God. If they are unfaithful, if they become apostate, and go after gospels other than the true Gospel, then God removes the candlestick. That is, God cuts them off; they are no longer His church.

Throughout New Testament history, this falling away has happened again and again and again. For example, the seven churches of Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 were located in the part of the world that is now called Turkey. The churches that were in Turkey no longer exist; there is no substantial Christian presence in the nation of Turkey today. Their candlesticks were removed because they did not remain faithful.

This has happened repeatedly throughout history. Denominations have risen, they have become apostate, and they are no longer the church of Jesus Christ. The moment that a denomination or a congregation begins to have as its authority something other than the Bible alone and in its entirety, it is no longer a congregation of Jesus Christ. Its candlestick has been removed. However, as this happened throughout the New Testament period, God raised up more faithful congregations. It is God's plan that believers come from every nation.

It is the church's responsibility to send out God's Word. Jesus declared, "as my Father hath sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). The church as a corporate body can officially send out missionaries and use other methods to send forth the Gospel. Individual members of the church can exercise their responsibility by personally witnessing to others, handing out tracts, and joining with other Christians in ministries such as Family Radio. The Lord's command to every believer is – Go ye into all the world making disciples. This is the grand and important task of the church. By this means God has sought out and saved His lost sheep.

What is the end of the church, the corporate, external, institutional body? Before that question is answered, Satan's relationship to the body of believers, or to the church, will be examined. Satan must be kept in view when trying to gain a perspective of what happens in the world that leads to the end of the church and Judgment Day. True believers once were slaves of Satan and Satan still tries to claim them. Satan is constantly trying to destroy the church. God is actually going to allow Satan to destroy the corporate church.

Chapter 4 – Satan's Relationship to the Church

It will be found that the final tribulation has everything to do with the end of the church age; thus, we have taken an objective look at the history, purpose, and character of the church. With a proper perspective of the church we will understand the end of the church. As we see the end of the church, we will understand the final tribulation period. We have therefore spent considerable time looking at how God built His church and how He built His congregations.

Before the cross there was a corporate body of believers called the nation of Israel to which God was married. Within this body was a trickle of believers called the remnant chosen by grace; however, the church or nation as a whole remained in rebellion against God. Therefore, based on the law of divorce given in Deuteronomy 24:1 God divorced Israel.

The New Testament church, which began at Pentecost, is also a corporate, external body. When Jesus came the observance of the ceremonial law ended. The ceremonial law of Deuteronomy 24 that permitted

divorce for fornication also came to an end. From that time on, there could be no divorce for any reason. However, God did not marry the New Testament corporate, visible body. It was God's intention to cut off, to destroy, that body if it became apostate. He could not do this if He had married it.

Within the New Testament corporate body is the invisible eternal church – those who were personally saved by Christ. It is to this eternal church that Christ is married. There can no longer be divorce for any reason; Christ is forever married to the body of believers. Two aspects of the New Testament church that must be kept in mind when studying the history of the church are the corporate, visible body and the invisible, eternal body.

To gain a perspective of the whole program of God's salvation, we must know Satan's role. Satan has been intimately involved with the church in the past, and he is going to be involved with the corporate church as we approach the end of time.

Who Is Satan?

From everything read in the Bible, Satan was created as an angel along with legions of other angels. However, he wanted to be like God. He wanted to be a king in his own right. In Isaiah 14:12b-14 God speaks of him:

...O Lucifer, (Lucifer simply means "shining one") son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the Most High.

God created the angels to be ministering spirits, used of the Lord on behalf of those who were to be saved (Hebrews 1:14). God knew before He created anything that man would rebel against Him and come under the wrath of God. In anticipation of this, God created the angels to be used on behalf of those who were being saved. They were servants of God. Lucifer aspired to be a king in his own right. He rebelled against God and many other angels rebelled with him.

Lucifer saw an opportunity to be a king when God created the earth and Adam and Eve and gave them rule of the earth. He created mankind, and He gave them dominion over this creation (Genesis 1:28). Lucifer reasoned something like this, "If I can get Adam and Eve to obey me, rather than God, then by right of conquest I become their master. Then if God is just, He has to allow me to rule over them."

Whether he actually reasoned this out in his heart in this language is unknown, but this is the way it worked out. He came in the form of a serpent, the most wise of all the animals that were created in the Garden of Eden. He tempted Eve to disobey God – to eat of the forbidden fruit. Adam also ate of the tree, and both Adam and Eve rebelled against God and began to be enemies of God. By rebelling against God, they indicated their enslavement to Lucifer. Therefore, God allowed Lucifer, who is Satan, who is also called the serpent, to have spiritual rule over mankind. Ever since that time the heart of unsaved man has been under the rule of Satan.

This does not mean that God totally abandoned His rule of man. At no time in history was Satan allowed to do anything that would frustrate God's eternal plan for the world and its inhabitants. God did allow Satan to have spiritual rule over unsaved man.

Satan's Rule Over the World Before the Cross

Until Christ came as Savior, that is, for the first 11,000 years of the history of this world, Satan's rule over mankind was great; few became saved. Most people were kept in the darkness of sin. Only occasionally in the Bible do we read of anyone becoming saved. In the days of the flood, for example, when there may have been as many as a million people living, only eight people entered the ark to escape God's judgment; that was a tiny percentage of the world's population.

When Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed, Abraham pleaded with God: if there are ten righteous people in these cities that they not be destroyed (Genesis 18:32). The only way one can become righteous is to be saved. The heart of man is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), and there is none righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10). It is obvious that the only way one can become righteous is to be redeemed from the wrath of God which is rightly deserved because of sins. Abraham effectively asked God to spare these cities if only ten were saved within them.

Thousands of people lived in Sodom and Gomorrah; ten was the tiniest percentage of people saved within these cities. God faithfully promised, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake" (Genesis 18:32b). He did

destroy those cities, and fewer than ten people were saved. Actually only Lot and possibly his two daughters were saved.

The spiritual darkness of Sodom and Gomorrah existed all over the world on the Old Testament side of the cross. In places like China, the South Pacific, and North and South America, no one was saved. Everyone was completely under the rule of Satan. They were blinded by sin. In national Israel, which had been set apart to represent the kingdom of God on this earth, only a small percentage was saved. For example, during the forty years that they were in the wilderness, after they came out of Egypt to go to the land of Canaan, virtually the whole nation perished because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:19). It is not just a statement. How could this be? This was God's special people. They were "the apple of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10).

During the period from the fall of Adam and Eve until the time of the cross, Satan was allowed to bind the hearts of men to such a degree that they were kept in the darkness of sin. This was coincidental with God's elective program. God elected a small number to salvation from these early nations. Had He elected more than this number, God would have had to make provision for their salvation, but that was not God's program. Therefore, to a high degree, He allowed Satan to control the hearts of unsaved men.

Evidence of Satan's control over the hearts of men is seen, for example, in the days of Elijah when only 7,000 were saved (I Kings 19:18), out of a nation of possibly two million people. This is about one-third of one percent. The nation of Israel was the chief nation – the only nation – where people were becoming saved, with a few exceptions such as Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess, the Queen of Sheba, and the city of Ninevah. These are notable exceptions.

During the 11,000 year period before Christ came, Satan had great freedom. He was audacious in his freedom. He was allowed to go into heaven. God tells us in Job Chapter 1 verse 6 that Satan appeared among the sons of God. While there he said to God that Job remained faithful because God had put a hedge around him. Satan said Job was faithful to God only because God had bestowed so many blessings upon him. He was the accuser of the brethren. He enjoyed this freedom throughout time – until Christ came on the scene.

In Satan's rebellion against God he took many angels with him. These are called devils or fallen angels or evil spirits. The Bible records that evil spirits were in the hearts of people, particularly when Christ walked on earth (Luke 4:33), and in the Old Testament one may read of evil spirits (I Samuel 19:9).

Satan's Rule over Mankind was Never Total

During the 11,000 year period, Satan's spiritual rule over unsaved men's hearts was not total. He had not become king of kings and lord of lords as God is King of kings and Lord of lords. God restrains sin in unsaved men's hearts.

The restraint on sin of the unsaved is seen, for example, in Genesis 20 when Abraham fled to Gerar to escape the famine of the land. While there, Abraham became frightened that the king of Gerar would kill him to have Sarah for his wife. This was a low point in Abraham's life. He did not trust God sufficiently. Abraham was an individual like each of us, and he had sinful moments. He lied to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, and said of Sarah, "She is my sister" (Genesis 20:2). Actually, this was a half truth because Sarah was his half sister, but the intent of his statement was that she was not his wife.

God came to Abimelech in a dream (verse 3 of Genesis 20), and said to him, "Thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken: for she is a man's wife." In other words, "You are in great danger. You have taken a man's wife into your home." Abimelech had not come near her, and he said, "Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself, said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this" (verses 4-5). He had not committed adultery, although he would have in time. He had not yet taken nor tried to take Sarah as his wife, but he had taken her into his home. He argued with God that he had had no adulterous intentions toward her. He argued with God that this had been done innocently, that he had not realized that she was a man's wife.

God says in verse 6 of Genesis 20:

And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

God gives us tremendous insight here. A sinful man, Abimelech, an unsaved man in the blackness of Satan's spiritual rule, and yet God restrains sin in his life. He does nothing that God does not want him to do.

God teaches that the heart of man is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9) and out of the heart comes all manner of evil things (Matthew 15:19). The reason that mankind is not more sinful than he is, is because God restrains sin. Satan's rule is not total. Satan rules only insofar as God will allow him to rule.

The evil spirits and the wicked who were under the spiritual control of Satan were frequently used to accomplish God's purposes. When God wanted to destroy Israel, He allowed the wicked Babylonians to come and destroy them. When He wanted Saul to be a bad king, God took His Spirit from him and gave him an evil spirit. This does not make God guilty of sin. If God removes His hand of restraint, the evil will come in. The nature of man's heart is desperately wicked. Satan always looks for an opportunity to rule more heavily over men's hearts. The moment that God removes His hand of restraint the evil spirits will be there, and the wicked will be more wicked.

Until Christ came on the scene, this was the nature of the world; few people were being saved. The world was in bondage to sin as it has never been since Christ came.

Satan is Bound so that Christ can Build the New Testament Church

A drastic change took place when Christ came as the Savior. It was a change of such stupendous proportions that Satan was tremendously affected by it, and the world was greatly influenced. The Bible tells about this change in many different ways; for example, in the account of Jesus when He welcomed the seventy who had been sent out with the Gospel: the Savior is on the scene. The shadow of the cross is brilliant. God is preparing the believers for the beginning of the New Testament church, and when the seventy came back (Luke 10, verse 17), they returned with joy saying, "...Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name."

Jesus then said, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (verse 18). In other words, Satan will be conquered and he will lose his right to go into heaven. This is a drastic change in Satan's freedom. Further commentary on this is in Revelation 12:7:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Satan was cast out of heaven. Careful study of Revelation 12 reveals that the casting out of Satan occurred because of Christ's victory over Satan. This was accomplished by Christ going to the cross. Because of Christ's victory, Satan could no longer approach God and accuse the brethren as he did in the time of Job.

God has more to say about Satan. This is seen in the impact of the cross on Satan's actions: God had begun to deal with Satan; he would not frustrate God's plan to save people from all over the world. Christ bound Satan so that God's program of building the church could take place. Jesus alludes to this in Matthew 12, where He speaks of Beelzebub (another name for Satan). In Matthew 12:27-29:

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

In these verses, Jesus speaks of Satan as the strong man. Our Savior declares that Satan, the strong man, must be bound and his house plundered.

Who is in Satan's house? Unfortunately, the whole world. All of the unsaved, to a high degree, are under Satan's spiritual power. God's intention from the beginning was that Christ came as the Savior of a vast company of believers from every nation. To accomplish this, Satan was bound; he cannot frustrate God's plan to evangelize the world. God's intention was to plunder the spiritual house of Satan; i.e., Christ rescued those who were to be saved.

God gives additional information in the Bible about the change in Satan's condition. For example, in Hebrews 2:14, God speaks of Satan being destroyed as a result of Christ's victory on the cross:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

Satan in principle has been destroyed, although he is allowed to continue to rule over the hearts of unsaved men to some degree. A fantastic change happened to him at the cross: Satan and his fallen angels were consigned to hell. Jude verses 5 and 6 prove this:

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.

The fallen angels, those who rebelled against God, were consigned to hell by Christ's victory on the cross. They have not yet actually been put in hell. Hell is the place where people and Satan and the fallen angels will be placed on Judgment Day, at the end of time. They will be put there after they have been arraigned and tried before the judgment throne of God, and their sins have been exposed. In principle Christ has consigned Satan to hell; therefore, the Bible often speaks of him as being in a pit or being in hell, even though he continues to rule over the hearts of unsaved men with varying degrees of success. He will be allowed to rule over the hearts of the unsaved until the end of the world because he won this right when he defeated mankind (headed by Adam and Eve) in the Garden of Eden. Christ's victory on the cross guarantees that Satan will spend an eternity in hell. As a result, God uses language in passages such as Jude 5, 6 that seem to indicate that he is already in hell.

Another passage that speaks of the change in Satan's rule over mankind because of Christ's victory on the cross is Revelation 20:3:

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

This language is parallel to Jude 5, 6 and to II Peter 2:4 where the binding of Satan is discussed.

The Bible teaches that the binding of Satan, which is a result of Christ's victory on the cross, enabled God's program to save people from every nation to be completed. Satan cannot frustrate God's plan of salvation.

This was seen dramatically at Pentecost. Before Christ went to the cross, Jesus as eternal God was a preacher of the Gospel (Luke 4:18, 43, 44). He was the perfect Preacher; He preached for over three years and yet there was only a handful of believers when He returned to heaven. Then at Pentecost something wonderful happened: Peter preached one sermon and 3,000 from eighteen nations were saved. Satan had been bound. God had begun His glorious program to save a vast company of people from every nation. He bound Satan, and Satan could not frustrate God's plan. People from every nation have been saved and people continue to be saved since Pentecost. This is the fantastic change in Satan's relationship to the world as a result of the cross. God's plan was to save people from every nation, and Satan was neutralized to the degree that he could do nothing to frustrate this plan.

Satan Is Bound but He Still Rules the Unsaved

The binding of Satan was not total. He continues to rule the hearts of unsaved men. For example, in Ephesians Chapter 2 God discusses salvation in the New Testament after Satan had been bound. He discusses those who have been saved, and indicates that before they were saved they were enslaved to Satan. Ephesians 2:2:

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

To walk under Satan's rule is to walk, "according to the prince of the power of the air." He continues to go about tempting the believers. In Ephesians 6:11 God declares, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," that is, so that Satan, the devil, cannot overcome you. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood (that is, against human beings), but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (verse 12).

Satan is referred to as the ruler of the darkness of this world. He is spoken of as the one who engages in spiritual wickedness in high places. In other words, he is still able to deceive. He is still able to assault the believers. I Peter 5:8 says that Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour. Satan is present in this world, and his deception is terrible – it is magnificent at the same time because it is total deception. II Corinthians 11 says that he comes as an angel of light and that his ministers come as ministers of righteousness. This condition applies throughout the New Testament period.

Satan's rule is not so complete that he can frustrate God's plan to evangelize the world. When God intends to save someone, that person will be saved. Once we are saved we are taken out of the dominion of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13). This is guaranteed for

every believer. Satan cannot stop God's marvelous plan to save a people for Himself. Satan could NEVER stop God.

Satan to be Used of God to Bring Wrath on the Church

There will be another change in Satan's relationship to the church and to the world. God plans to use Satan as a means to bring His wrath on the church – the corporate, institutional body – when it becomes increasingly apostate before Judgment Day, which is the end of the world.

For example, in Matthew 24:15, 16 God warns:

When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains.

God is anticipating a time when the institutional church, called the "holy place" in this context, will be overrun by the abomination of desolation. God speaks of this in Matthew 24:24: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." He speaks of this dreadful change in the church in II Thessalonians 2: "that man of sin" (another name for Satan, Isaiah 14:6) will take his seat in the temple and be worshipped as God. These things will happen. After the institutional body has been used by God to save the last of His elect, then the church will become apostate and God will bring judgment on the church. This will be examined in great detail. For now: the Bible teaches that a time will come when God will remove the strictures on Satan so that all of the unsaved will be in bondage to sin as never before in history.

We have looked at Satan's relationship to the body of believers from the time of Adam and Eve until just before the beginning of the final tribulation period. From the fall of Adam and Eve until the time of the cross, Satan's rule over mankind was so complete that at any time only a small trickle of believers came into the eternal body of Christ.

At the cross Satan was bound so that his house could be plundered. Since Pentecost in AD 33 people from every nation have flowed into the body of Christ. Satan could deceive to some degree and he could continue to persecute, but he could do nothing to frustrate God's magnificent program to save a people for Himself – people so numerous that they would be a great nation – eternal citizens of God's kingdom.

We will continue our quest to determine what the Bible teaches concerning the end of the church. The next chapter answers the question of God's expectation of apostasy in the church.

Chapter 5 – The Bible Foretells that the Church Will Become Apostate

In the last chapter, it was learned that God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross to bind Satan. The binding of Satan was required for the eternal church of Christ, which includes everyone who is and will be truly saved, to flourish throughout the world.

Believers may be found in congregations and denominations around the world. True believers within these congregations are the eternal, invisible body of Christ; the congregations are the visible, corporate, external representation of the body of Christ.

True believers cannot lose their salvation. They will never fall away; they have been given eternal life. Nothing can snatch them out of the hand of Christ.

The external, corporate body called the congregation or denomination is another matter. Does the Bible say anything about God's expectation concerning its faithfulness? Is the future conduct of the corporate body totally unknown? Is it true that God knows the end from the beginning and, therefore, knows precisely what the church will do, including during the end time? If God knows the future, does He in any way disclose in the Bible what the future will be? Does He declare in the Bible His expectation concerning the future faithfulness or faithlessness of the church? These questions will be examined as the study continues.

God's expectation for the corporate body is seen as it existed in the Old Testament. The nation of Israel was the external representation of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament era. It also served as a type or figure of the New Testament church; therefore, studying God's expectation of the end of Israel teaches something about God's expectation for the New Testament church.

God's Expectation Concerning National Israel's Apostasy

The nation of Israel began with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Abraham was a man who dearly loved the Lord. Isaac was a man who loved the Lord. One would think, therefore, that the nation of Israel was a people for whom God had high aspirations and ideals, and from whom God could expect the utmost in faithfulness.

God called them, as His own people, out of the land of Egypt; He delivered them with a mighty hand from the Egyptians and slew all the Egyptians' firstborn. He cared for them in the wilderness with miraculous water that came out of the rock and miraculous manna from heaven. He was in their presence in the pillar of fire by night and in the cloud by day. He was with them in miraculous ways when He parted the waters of the Red Sea, and the water stood as a wall on either side, and they passed through on dry ground. God did the same thing when they crossed the Jordan River.

In spite of these marvelous accomplishments, God's expectation of the faithfulness of national Israel was not good. God declares the future infidelity of Israel in the words of Deuteronomy 31:16. The context is that God is speaking to Moses just before his death:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

What a dreadful expectation! God is speaking of the nation of Israel. These are not my words. They are God's words. God says in verse 20:

For when I will have brought them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant.

This is a terrible expectation for the nation of Israel!

In verse 27 of Deuteronomy 31 (please read the whole chapter to get the full flavor of what the Bible is teaching), Moses addresses Israel:

For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?

Then he declares unto them (verses 28-29):

Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.

Ugly, is it not? Yet these are the disclosures God makes in the Bible of His expectations for ancient Israel. He had done many great and wonderful things to bring Israel into existence, but the people were in constant rebellion against God. They went their own way, and God expected this.

The Bible's Expectation for the New Testament Church

What is God's expectation for the New Testament church and for New Testament congregations? Does He expect that they, too, will fall away, that they, too, are going to follow in the shoes of national Israel?

The Bible does not teach that the New Testament church will continuously rebel against God as ancient Israel did throughout most of its history. The Bible does teach that in the New Testament church there will always be some unfaithfulness. This is seen in many ways; for example, in Jude 17 and 18 God declares:

But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own godly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

The context indicates that He is speaking of those within the congregation. The phrases, "last days" or "the latter days" or "the last time" as used in the Bible refer to the whole New Testament period, which ends at Judgment Day. God here indicates that He expects mockers within the congregation during the last time.

II Peter Chapter 3, verse 3, says:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.

This prophecy could be addressed to those outside the congregation. There are scoffers out there, but is

it possible within the congregation? The first three verses of II Peter Chapter 2 emphasize the possibility. There God declares:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

This is a statement of God concerning New Testament congregations. It speaks the same way as does II Peter 2:3. One may be appalled at these words, but they are the words that God gave to us. They are not isolated statements found in only one or two places; God is emphasizing that we can expect unbelief to arise in New Testament congregations. There are numerous other statements similar to those that have been read.

II Timothy Chapter 4 verses 3 and 4:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

God says this about New Testament congregations. It is similar, is it not, to what was read in Deuteronomy 31?

I Timothy Chapter 4 verses 1 and 2:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

This is a dreadful situation! Christ is talking about the church – the institutional body: the First Baptist Church of your city, or the First Methodist Church, or the First Presbyterian, or the Third Christian Church, or whatever the name may be. The potential exists within every congregation; it is God's expectation. He expects this to happen. God warns about it, but He expects it to happen. He does not say that it might happen; He says that it will happen.

This is not surprising in view of what God says of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. These seven churches are in the latter days. They have members who are compared to Jezebel in the Old Testament; they are grievous, adulterous members. Some people in these congregations are like Balaam, the wicked soothsayer who wanted to curse Israel. Within these seven congregations are those who are called the synagogue of Satan. This language depicts a terrible development!

The expectation of unbelief, unfaithfulness, and spiritual harlotry in the New Testament church is declared in the Scriptures. It is a gigantic warning. No congregation can pull its holy rags around itself and say, "We are such a wonderful congregation. That could not happen to us. We study the Bible so faithfully. We have such a marvelous set of doctrines; we have such a tremendous confession; we have such a faithful seminary." Regardless of what they rest their laurels on, they may say, "this cannot happen in our denomination, in our congregation." However, these statements are addressed to every congregation, and God says that they will occur.

How Can a Church Become Apostate?

If the elders and the pastor have carefully introduced and brought into a congregation only those who are saved, how can that church become apostate?

Pastors, elders, and deacons cannot know the hearts of those who become members. They may interrogate a person who wants to become a member, and investigate as best they can whether this person is truly a child of God. Based on the confession they hear and what they see in the person's life, they may decide, "This person is indeed a child of God. He should be taken into full communicant membership with the congregation." This is proper; it is expected of the rulers of the congregation.

If they bring into the congregation someone who is unsaved – someone who gave the appearance of being saved and yet was not – the unsaved members of the congregation will eventually depart from the truth. They do not understand the truth. They do not know what salvation is. They may have an intellectual idea of what it is. They may know some verses from the Bible, but in actuality, they have no idea what it is. God the Holy Spirit has not opened their eyes.

They may become increasingly dominant in the congregation. This may be because they speak well, or because of their warm personalities, or winning smiles, or because more and more of them come into the congregation. They may be rulers in the congregation: the pastor or elders. They will begin to lead the congregation into spiritual adultery. This has happened in congregation after congregation.

The measure of a congregation's faithfulness to the Word of God depends upon the percentage of the congregation that is born from above. God has faithfully built His church – His congregation, His institutional body – and it consists of congregations in cities and nations around the world. Because it is God's expectation that there will be spiritual adultery, churches occasionally lose their place with God. They no longer have a candlestick in God's presence (God warns of this in Revelation Chapter 2). Consequently, they are no longer a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may speak about a relationship with Christ, but they have no relationship with Him.

The potential exists for any congregation to go in the direction of apostasy. Every congregation can become spiritually adulterous and come under the judgment of God. These biblical statements are addressed to every congregation because the potential for apostasy exists in every congregation.

Even more ominously, the Bible indicates that as the end of time approaches, spiritual apostasy will envelop churches all over the world. In Matthew 24:15, 16 God declares:

When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains.

This statement is further developed in verse 24:

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

The elect are true believers. They are ordinarily found in congregations that are reasonably true to the Word of God. In this solemn verse, God warns that false prophets will teach and preach in churches. They will come with a gospel that is so close to the true Gospel that believers would be deceived – if that were possible. False prophets use biblical phrases that true believers know. They speak of salvation, heaven, hell, the Holy Spirit, being born again, sin, etc. They declare some doctrines that are biblical. If God did not teach true believers they could be easily deceived into following false teachers.

Later it will be shown: 1) that God guarantees that true believers cannot be deceived by false prophets, and 2) how to recognize false prophets. This verse teaches that they will come with signs and wonders (this truth will be developed in detail).

In II Thessalonians 2:1-4 God restates the expectation for the church near the end of time:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him. That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

These verses teach the same truth that was learned from Matthew 24:15-24. Whereas Matthew 24:24 spoke of emissaries of Satan called false Christs or false prophets, II Thessalonians 2 speaks of Satan himself (called "man of sin") coming to rule (taking his seat) in the congregations (the temple of God). He accomplishes this through preachers and rulers in the congregation who no longer follow the true Gospel. These men and women are deceived by Satan, but they are convinced that they are faithfully serving Christ.

These dreadful things will happen. There is no suggestion that "maybe" or "possibly" this falling away will occur. God declares that it will happen, and Satan will rule in the church. It must be concluded that both in the case of ancient Israel and New Testament congregations, God's expectation is they will eventually become apostate.

God Warned Ancient Israel

Let us look in the Old Testament to examine the question of God's warnings concerning Old Testament Israel. We saw in Deuteronomy 31 God's expectation concerning what would happen to them. God's warning to them may be read in many passages. Two have been selected because they are representative of Old Testament warnings.

In Deuteronomy Chapter 8 verses 19 and 20 God declared to the congregation that was ancient Israel:

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day, that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.

This is the warning. God warned them that if they were unfaithful, they would perish. Deuteronomy 31 states God's expectation that they would become spiritually adulterous. In Deuteronomy 8, God says that if they did become spiritually adulterous, they would perish.

God declared with startling clarity what was to happen. They were expected by God to fall away from Him, and God warned they would perish when they fell away. Indeed, the Bible declares how God destroyed them.

In Deuteronomy 28 God gives a long warning. In the first 14 verses He has good things to say to the congregation of ancient national Israel. In verse 1 He promises:

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth...

In this verse God speaks to the corporate, institutional, external body. This is known from the phrase, "God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth."

In the first fourteen verses He enunciates blessing after blessing that can come to Israel as a nation. Beautiful statements are made, like verses 9-11:

The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all the people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee.

God emphasized that His blessings would be upon ancient Israel if they remained faithful. If they were unfaithful, another set of conditions applied. In Deuteronomy 28:15-17 God declares:

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store.

Please read Deuteronomy 28, verses 15 through 68. Read and weep. Read and be warned. The warning goes on and on. Dreadful things were to happen to the congregation of Israel if they were unfaithful. They did not heed the warning and God's expectation was realized; they became apostate and consequently perished. The New Testament congregation has also been warned.

God Warns New Testament Congregations

When God speaks of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, He says of the church of the Laodiceans, "I will spue thee out" (Revelation 3:16), which means: I will vomit you out. This is ugly language. He says of another of the seven congregations, if they are unfaithful, "I...will remove thy candlestick" (Revelation 2:5). Each congregation was represented in heaven by a candlestick. To have their candlestick removed means they have ceased to be a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In these statements, God warns our congregations of what will happen to them if they are unfaithful.

In John 15:1 the Lord declares that Christ is the vine and we are the branches. He adds in verse 2, "Every branch...that beareth not fruit He taketh away..." He could be speaking of an individual who has joined the congregation and is not a true believer, but the principle applies to the entire congregation.

God's warning to the congregation that dreadful things will happen to the unfaithful church is seen in Revelation 6 when the seals are opened. The first horseman goes forth; this is a statement of the victorious nature of the cross. The second horseman goes forth; God calls our attention to Satan's opposition to the Gospel being spread to all the world.

The third seal is opened, and the third horseman appears. In Revelation 6:5, 6 God declares:

And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and, lo, a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst

of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

Exercise the biblical principle of interpreting the Bible with the Bible, and it is discovered that the truth in these verses reiterates God's warnings to ancient Israel. For example in Ezekiel 5:11-16:

Wherefore, as I live, saith the Lord GOD; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity.

A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee; and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted: and they shall know that I the LORD have spoken it in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them.

Moreover, I will make thee wast, and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by. So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations that are round about thee, when I shall execute judgments in thee, in anger and in fury, and in furious rebukes. I the LORD have spoken it. When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for their destruction, and which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread . . .

Breaking the staff of bread signifies that God is hiding the truth of the Gospel. The bread represents the Word of God. The ominous implication of breaking the staff of bread is that God will take away the truth, the Word of God. The breaking of the staff of physical bread signifies famine, and the breaking of the staff of the Word of God signifies spiritual famine. Physical famine results in death and destruction, and spiritual famine results in spiritual death and destruction. Thus, this passage warns that God will destroy the spiritually unfaithful.

Revelation 6:6 declares: "hurt not the oil and the wine." The oil and the wine represent true believers within the congregation, those who cannot come under God's judgment. The oil signifies the Holy Spirit; He indwells the true believers. The wine signifies the blood of Christ, with which all believers become identified – their sins are covered by Christ. Therefore, they cannot suffer any further penalty for their sins.

God can cut off the congregation as a corporate body that identifies with the kingdom of God. The spiritually unfaithful church or denomination will come under God's wrath. The same warning is found in Leviticus 26:21-26 where God declared:

And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate.

And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant; and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.

And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied.

"They shall deliver your bread by weight," is the warning restated in Revelation 6:5, 6 when the rider of the third horse carries a balance in his hand. It is a solemn warning to the congregations to remain faithful to the truth or come under the wrath of God.

This warning is reinforced and underscored when the fourth seal is opened and the fourth horseman appears in Revelation 6:8:

And I looked, and behold a pale horse; and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

God is speaking plainly of death, hell, and destruction. A further development of this verse is in Ezekiel 14:13:

Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it.

Verses 19-21:

Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast; Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?

The four judgments of verse 21 – the sword, the famine, the beast and the pestilence – parallel the judgments in connection with the rider of the fourth horse in Revelation 6. The fourth rider was given power to kill with the sword, with hunger, with death, and with the beasts. Revelation 6, therefore, restates the Ezekiel 14 warning: that His destruction comes because of the apostasy of the congregation. In these passages, God warns of the awful certainty that His judgment is coming upon the congregations that are not faithful to the truth.

Dearly beloved, the Bible clearly teaches that God had terrible warnings for the Old Testament church, and He also has terrible warnings for the New Testament church. In Deuteronomy 31 God talks about the fact that Israel would go apostate. He warns in verse 29, "ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days..."

"Latter days" in the Bible refers to the New Testament church. Therefore, Deuteronomy 31:29 applies as much to the New Testament congregation as it did to the Old Testament congregation. Compare the warnings of Leviticus 26, Ezekiel 5, and Ezekiel 14 with the language of Revelation 6, and it is obvious that the Old Testament warnings apply equally to ancient national Israel and to the New Testament congregations.

In the next chapter, the sins which led to the destruction of the Old Testament congregation will be studied and compared with the sins of the New Testament congregations. It will be seen how history repeats itself.

Chapter 6 – God Begins to Judge the Church

To understand the final tribulation period, we have sought an objective biblical perspective of God's plan of salvation as it unfolded throughout the history of ancient national Israel and continues to unfold in the New Testament churches. This perspective is extremely important near the end of time. Greater sensitivity to God's program for churches is crucial for believers.

God formed the New Testament congregations. They were brought into existence all over the world. As God formed the New Testament congregations, He expected them to become adulterous. The seeds of spiritual adultery were in these congregations, as the same seeds were in the congregation of national Israel. God expected them to go contrary to His will, and they did; that expectation is the same for the New Testament churches.

God warned the Old Testament congregation, the nation of Israel, and He also warns the New Testament congregation of what will happen if the church becomes unfaithful. God declares He will remove His candlestick. He will vomit that church out. He will bring terrible things against it and destroy it, as He brought terrible things against the Old Testament congregation, national Israel.

How these judgments against the New Testament churches are to be carried out, and what is to happen to these churches will be studied.

To look at the churches and congregations in their historical perspective is not too difficult. There have been traumatic times when Christians were persecuted and churches were assaulted by heresy from within. In spite of this, the movement of the church to evangelize the world has persistently continued. The rider on the white horse, to use the analogy of Revelation 6, has continued to go forth conquering and to conquer.

Biblical Basis that God Will Judge the Church

The conclusion that the time is descending upon us when the church is to cease to function as the instrument of God to evangelize the world and is to be judged requires a basis in biblical authority.

Jesus promised He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew

16:18). Satan was defeated at the cross. He could not frustrate God's plan to evangelize the world; therefore, how could anyone dare suggest anything other than a glorious future for the church – a future that will continue till the last day of this world's existence?

Some verses clearly teach that God expects the church to become adulterous. It may be argued: that does not imply that the end of the church age is upon us; or, that does not prove that God will reject His corporate body, which Jesus went to the cross to establish; or, some denominations are not as faithful to the Bible as they should be, but this has been the situation throughout the history of the church.

In view of these arguments, great care must be exercised before drawing conclusions that there will be an end of the church age, that there will come a time when, as a judgment of God, virtually all churches will be overrun by false gospels and when no one else can be saved. This is precisely why God has given us the Bible. Under no circumstances do we trust sin-tainted minds. Personal speculations and philosophies have no value. The Bible is God's book. It is perfect in its presentation of truth. Things in the Bible may be disliked but obedience to God's Word is required.

Biblical passages that speak of God's past or future judgments are not exciting to read. It is a happier situation to focus one's eyes and mind on biblical declarations of God's love and grace and be content with whatever God's judgments are; they will be tempered by God's love, compassion, patience, and forgiveness. To some, this is a happier and more acceptable part of the Gospel.

All of the Bible is God's Word. We cannot pick and choose what we like to study and forget the rest of the Bible. We cannot stick our heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich and hope that the danger of God's judgments will go away. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. We must be ready, therefore, to carefully, prayerfully, and obediently examine and study everything in the Bible. If the Bible brings us to a conclusion which is unacceptable because it is negative, ominous, or because it is something we have never before been taught, we must ask God for His mercy and grace to accept it and react obediently.

Is it right to look at the experiences of ancient Israel, Babylon, and Egypt as guidelines for the future of the church? Repeated references to these ancient nations have been made in an attempt to understand the future of the New Testament churches.

References to these nations cannot be accidental or incidental. God says that all Scripture is inspired by God. This principle cannot be set aside. God wrote extensively of these ancient nations to instruct us in the will of God. The Bible also answers the question of how biblical information about these nations can instruct us today.

God's Judgments on Old Testament Nations Teach Us What to Expect

God recorded the experiences of Old Testament nations to serve as warnings to us today. In I Corinthians 10:1-11 God speaks of ancient Israel when they sojourned in the wilderness after they came out of Egypt to go to the land of Canaan. They were a people especially blessed by God as indicated by the language of I Corinthians 10:1-4:

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

The blessings did not protect them from God's judgment, because the next verse says: "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness." Verse 6 explains why God instructs us in His dealings with ancient Israel. There we read: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted."

God emphasizes the point of verse 6 with specific examples of sins that ancient Israel committed, sins which brought God's judgments upon them. Verses 7-10 admonish us:

Neither be ye idolators, as were some of them: as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

The historical account of these sins and God's judgments upon Israel is in Numbers 16:41-50, Numbers 21:5-9, and Numbers 25:1-9. To clarify God's purpose in writing about these events, He adds in verse 11

of I Corinthians 10:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

God is declaring that His dealings with ancient national Israel anticipate how He will deal with the New Testament church. Jude 5 also warns New Testament congregations:

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

God again instructs us to look into the Old Testament to learn from His dealings with those ancient peoples.

The import of Jude 5 is ominous. In that single sentence God informs us that He destroyed His own people. God is not speaking of a wicked, heathen nation like Babylon, Moab, or Egypt. He is speaking of the nation that is the apple of God's eye, the nation that God had set apart for Himself. This warning should cause any congregation to tremble. God does not speak any more lovingly of New Testament congregations than He does of ancient Israel. Jesus, who is eternal God, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He reacted to the sin of His beloved ancient Israel by destroying them, and He will react the same way to sin in New Testament congregations. Further biblical evidence that New Testament congregations are warned by God's actions in regard to His ancient people is in Hebrews 3:8-9:

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

He warns us not to harden our hearts like they did – like the people of ancient Israel did when they were in the wilderness. He says in verses 15-17:

...To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: Howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

God is again directing our attention to what happened to ancient Israel. This must be understood if one is to understand what to expect for the New Testament congregation.

It has been seen that there was an expectation in the Bible of shattering unfaithfulness in the Old Testament congregation, national Israel; and there is an expectation that New Testament congregations will be shattered. It must be concluded that there is to be judgment on New Testament congregations as judgment came upon the Old Testament congregation.

Old Testament Israel: Not a Perfect Picture of the New Testament Church

The concept of national Israel as a picture of the New Testament church is limited. It is not a perfect picture. The reason is that the era of national Israel was followed by the era of the New Testament church, while the era of the New Testament church – congregations from Pentecost to the present – will be followed by the end of the world and Judgment Day.

This sequence makes a difference. The difference is that grace would shine through the worst condemnations of national Israel of the Old Testament. One of many Old Testament examples is Ezekiel 20. In this chapter God speaks of His wrath which is to come upon ancient Israel; it is to be destroyed by the Babylonians. However, in verses 41-44a He says:

I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, . . .

God is emphasizing that grace will come. Beautiful things are going to happen to Israel in the future.

The fulfillment of these promises is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is of national Israel, of the tribe of Judah. He is the head of a new nation of Israel – the Israel of God, which is made up of congregations that come from every nation.

In Hosea Chapter 1 God says ugly things to national Israel. Israel is being taken captive by the Assyrians, and God says in verse 2 of Chapter 2, "...she is not my wife, neither am I her husband; let her therefore put away

her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts." God goes on to say many ominous things because His wrath is upon national Israel.

However, Chapter 2 verses 14-19 have some of the most loving and most beautiful language of the Bible. God says,

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from hence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the days when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baali (Ishi means husband; Baali means lord).

For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow, and the sword, and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

God has in view here the only bride that Christ is married to forever – the body of believers that has come into existence all through time. It is for the most part believers that have come into the congregations – into a saving relationship with Christ – during the New Testament period. This softens Old Testament statements about the wrath of God and the utter destruction of national Israel – Grace is going to shine through.

When (as the Bible warns) the final destruction of New Testament congregations, which corporately represent the Israel of God, comes, then there can be no future blessings on the congregations. Old Testament Israel had a promise of future blessing; in this respect, it is not a perfect type of the New Testament church.

There is a parallel between a future blessing of Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. When God's judgment is poured out on the congregations, true believers will have a beautiful future. They will receive their resurrected bodies; they will receive the New Heavens and the New Earth. This is somewhat of a parallel between the blossoming of the Gospel and the end of the era of ancient Israel.

God's Judgment on the New Testament Church Will Parallel His Judgment on the Old Testament Church

In God's judgments there is a closer parallel. God's judgments on ancient Israel because of their sins parallel the judgments that will fall on the end-time New Testament congregations because of apostasy.

God expected apostasy to cause the destruction of ancient Israel. The Bible also indicates that God expects the New Testament churches to fall away, and it warns that they, too, will be destroyed.

The nature of Israel's sins will be compared with the sins that plague the congregations of today. We will study in greater detail how God responded to Israel's sins and thus understand what our congregations can expect.

Ancient Israel's Sins

A host of verses refer to Israel's sins, but just a few verses are needed to give an idea of what was going on. Equally explicit accounts of their sins are recorded in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and other Old Testament passages and some New Testament passages. Jeremiah will be studied because Jeremiah was being written while the Babylonians were beginning to destroy Israel; it was the end of national Israel as a free and independent nation. It was a time of severe judgment on national Israel. This judgment typifies the judgment that is going to come against the congregations of the New Testament.

Jeremiah 5, verses 30 and 31:

A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

This is a terrible indictment of the spiritual rulers. The prophets and the priests were commissioned and mandated by God to bring the truth of God's Word to the congregation. They taught and preached in the name of Jehovah God; therefore, they should have been sure they were not bringing their own ideas or philosophies. They should have repeatedly checked their messages against the written Word which they

had in their day.

They did not check; they taught their own doctrines. They brought messages that suited their fancy and pleased the congregation. The phrase "my people love to have it so," indicts them for preaching lies and bearing false witness. They ruled according to their own pleasure rather than in accordance with the will of God.

"And what will ye do in the end thereof?" is a rhetorical question that indicates that they and the congregation will come into judgment for their conduct. There will be hell to pay for such rebellion against God.

In Jeremiah 6:14-16 God takes the prophets to task over the Old Testament congregation. He warns:

They have healed also the hurt of the daughters of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace: when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord. Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

The indictment against national Israel is that the prophets were saying something like: "Everything is well. God is not going to bring judgment against national Israel. We are God's people. We are God's congregation. We are the chosen ones. We will never come under terrible judgment from God. Jeremiah, you speak falsely when you say that the Babylonians are going to destroy us. There is peace in our day."

Jeremiah 6 speaks about walking in the old ways or in the old paths. The "old paths" have to do with the Scriptures. This is where truth is found.

Ancient Israel was not satisfied with the Gospel that the prophets offered from the Scriptures. They wanted a more contemporary gospel. They wanted a gospel that dealt with the issues of the day and recognized that the Assyrians and Babylonians also had wonderful altars and prophets and worship services, and they wanted Israel to learn from them.

In Jeremiah 7:8 God accuses Israel: "Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit." All Old Testament prophets did not speak what God had given them. Some prophets spoke of ideas that came out of their own hearts; they said what they thought would please the congregation. They were lies because God had not said so.

Jeremiah 16, verses 10-11:

And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God? Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the LORD, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law...

The prophets began to bring their lies. The prophets began to neglect the truth that God had put in the old paths from the beginning, when He spoke through Moses and Abraham. The prophets began to speak from their own minds, and sin followed sin until ancient Israel worshipped other gods.

God speaks plainly about the sin of ancient Israel and the indictments He brings against them. History is repeating itself in that the same sins are in the congregations of our day. The Bible discloses God's response to Israel's sin. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 – God's Response to Israel's Sin

God has dealt with the human race through His church. God expected ancient Israel to become apostate and as a consequence God's wrath would come upon them. The New Testament congregations, in the various denominations, are also to fall away. The Bible says that they, too, will become apostate.

In the history of the New Testament church many congregations and many denominations that once flourished, have ceased to exist as congregations of the Lord Jesus. If they do exist they have become so apostate that they have another gospel, and can no longer be called a congregation of Jesus Christ.

Comparing Scripture with Scripture reveals that Old Testament Israel is a picture, figure, type, or representation of the New Testament church. How God dealt with Old Testament Israel gives insights as

to what can be expected for New Testament congregations.

Christians ought to be part of New Testament congregations; and thus, should be intensely interested in what Christ did with the Old Testament congregation, Israel. Within our congregations the same seeds of apostasy exist. Many things go on in our congregations that match the sins that were prevalent in the congregation of Israel when God brought it into judgment.

A few passages have given an idea of the nature of the sin of national Israel – sin that brought them under the judgment of God. If one desires to know more about the sin of ancient Israel, carefully read Jeremiah, Lamentations, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. These passages tell a lot about the sin of ancient Israel. It becomes apparent that Israel's sin parallels what is happening in many congregations today.

God's action in response to the sin of ancient Israel will be discussed next.

God Blinds Israel

The Bible reveals that a number of things happened to Israel. First, God begins to blind them (Isaiah 6). This judgment was declared almost 800 years before the end of the era of the nation of Israel as the external representation of the kingdom of God. Isaiah prophesied about 750 BC (almost 800 years before the cross), when the era of the congregation of Israel would end. Already in Isaiah's day, Israel had gone deeply into sin.

Isaiah 6:10 tells of this indictment:

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

This is dreadful! God is speaking of His people Israel. They have rebelled against God; they have gone their own way. God gets involved and actually begins to blind them, which is what God calls for in Isaiah 6. Romans 11, verse 8 is a commentary on this:

(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

This indictment is brought against Israel because of their sins: God begins to blind them. It is bad that they were already blinded in their sin and in the perverseness of their hearts. It is bad that they were blinded by Satan who rules over the hearts of unsaved men. When God began to deal with Israel, He declared that He would blind them. This is emphasized in Isaiah 29:10-12:

For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

God says here that He blinds the rulers of the church when the church begins to rebel against Him. As it becomes increasingly wicked and rewrites the rules, God begins to blind the spiritual rulers and they can no longer see the truth.

God Removes the Truth

Another of God's actions in response to the sin of ancient Israel was that He removed the truth. He took the truth away from them. This is implied in that He blinded the rulers. Almost 800 years before the end of the era of the nation of Israel, Isaiah Chapter 3 verses 1-5a were written:

For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem, and from Judah, the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water. The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another .

God here is taking away the stay and the staff. The staff has to do with the bread of life – the Gospel. When God takes away the staff, the Gospel is no longer available. It is not available because God has blinded the prophets. They are no longer able to bring truth. This is the judgment that comes upon the church as it becomes contrary to the Word of God.

The breaking of the staff is seen also in Ezekiel 4 where God tells about His judgment on ancient Israel; it

was to be destroyed by the Babylonians. God indicates in verse 17 of Ezekiel 4: "That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity." This verse was previously examined in view of the third horseman of Revelation 6. It relates to the fact that the Gospel was no longer available. God had removed the truth. It teaches the same sad truth as Isaiah 6.

God Rejects Israel

God blinded the people of Israel, removed the truth from them, and He rejected them. A number of verses speak of this, but one in particular is Hosea Chapter 4, verse 6:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

The people of God (the congregation of Israel) were married to God in the Old Testament, but they were not listening to the Word of God. They did not want to be obedient to the Word of God. They wanted what was in their own minds. They wanted their own kind of gospel.

To be rejected of God is terrible. The nation of Israel had been the apple of God's eye. God had carefully nurtured the congregation while He miraculously brought them out of bondage in Egypt, through the Red Sea, across the Jordan River, and delivered them into the land of Canaan. He defeated nations and conquered cities on their behalf. He gave them principles whereby they could know the way of God and know God. They rebelled against Him; therefore, God blinded them. He took the truth away from them, and now He rejects them. They are no longer His congregation.

Earlier in the study it was seen that this rejection is stated in the language, He "divorced them." The divorce became final in AD 33 when Christ hung on the cross. God's reaction to sin in the congregations is dynamic.

God Destroys the Congregation

Another result of Israel's sin is that God brought judgments upon them. The judgments were of such nature that Israel was destroyed. The end result of a rebellious congregation is that God destroys it.

In the case of the nation of Israel the destruction came by wicked nations that were under the power of Satan. God warned Israel that if they disobeyed Him they would be destroyed by heathen nations. God warned the congregation of Israel before they came into the promised land, the land of Canaan, in Deuteronomy 28:47: "Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things..." In language of today, God is effectively saying, "You are not content with the principles I have laid down for you: you want your own salvation program." God, therefore, declared in verse 49:

The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; . . .

It was "a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand" that was to destroy them. The following verses of Deuteronomy 28 describe how that nation was to destroy Israel.

Isaiah 28 presents the same truth, where God speaks particularly about the end of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom which were separated from Judah upon the death of Solomon. God declares in Isaiah 28:7 (approximately 722 BC) that He is going to destroy Israel because of their sins:

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way: the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

God uses wine and strong drink in this context to speak of running adulterously after other gospels. Earlier in Isaiah 28 He says, "woe...to the drunkards of Ephraim..." (verse 1). The prophets drunkenly run after gospels or religions of nations whose language they do not understand.

God declares in verse 11 of Isaiah 28, "For with stammering lips, and another tongue, will he speak to this people." He concludes in verse 13, "that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." This echoes the warning of Deuteronomy 28 that God would bring judgment upon Israel by a wicked nation whose language they did not understand. As will be seen, Assyria was the wicked nation that destroyed the ten tribes of Israel and the capital in Samaria.

The nation of Judah (135 years later, 587 BC), the part of Israel that had its capital in Jerusalem, came

into judgment because of its sins. God says in Jeremiah 5:15-17a:

Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD; it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread,...

Destruction again was upon Jerusalem and Judah by a nation whose language they did not understand. This is the language God used to declare He would destroy the congregation of Israel because of wickedness.

How Israel and Judah related to the wicked nations that destroyed them will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 – God's Method of Destroying Ancient Israel

In the laboratory of God's Word, one can investigate what God says about the future of churches and congregations of today. In this investigation flashes of insight have indicated that ominous things are on the horizon. All will not continue in a happy and wonderful way until Judgment Day.

Wonderfully, one can study the Word of God and know what is going to happen. There is no need to speculate and be in doubt. Faithfully read the Bible with a view to being obedient to what is found there.

God dealt with ancient Israel, the congregation of the Old Testament (the whole nation was the congregation), when they sinned and rebelled against God. The end of ancient Israel provided insight as to what can be expected for congregations of today.

God's response to the sin of the congregation of Israel was, first, He blinded them. He closed the eyes of their prophets; they were unable to bring the truth.

Second, He removed the truth from them. They did not have the full staff of the bread of life. They did not have all that was necessary to know truth. What a dreadful thing this was; it left most of ancient Israel in unbelief.

Third, He rejected them. They rejected knowledge and did not want to obey His law; thus, God declared in the most certain terms that He rejected them.

Fourth, He destroyed them. They were destroyed by wicked nations whose language they did not understand. The nations whose language they did not understand provided God's testing program for them. The concept that God establishes testing programs bears heavily on the events that lead up to the end of the church age; it will be studied in detail.

God's Testing Programs

God sets up testing programs through which He accomplishes His overall plan for the human race. In the Garden of Eden, there was a testing program. Adam and Eve had not sinned; there was no thought of rebellion against God. Everything was sweetness and light. God saw everything that He had created and it was very good.

God planted a tree there which He called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What kind of tree it was is immaterial. They were not to eat of that tree. They could eat of every other tree of the garden – beautiful trees with beautiful fruit – but of that tree they could not eat. That is where mankind was destroyed. That is where mankind failed the test.

Into this arena came Satan (the angel Lucifer). He wanted to be like God; he wanted to be a king in his own right. He came as the serpent, the wisest of all the animals; and he tempted Eve. He told her half-truths, and she obeyed the serpent, Satan, rather than God. She ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was the testing program whereby mankind came into destruction: Adam and Eve failed the test. They disobeyed God.

The testing program was not a judgment of God because of previous sin. This is the way in which God deals with mankind, who is created in the image of God: He sets up testing programs.

When the nation of Israel was in the wilderness God set up a testing program. Moses left Israel for forty days and forty nights. In his absence, the people were unfaithful to God. They wickedly turned from God

after Moses left them.

The Bible tells us they failed the test. They caused Aaron to make a calf, and they fell down and worshipped before the calf. They began to worship other gods, as Adam and Eve did when they obeyed the serpent. By obeying Lucifer they had begun to worship Satan rather than God.

Testing programs are constantly with and to be expected for mankind and congregations. Believers are surrounded by the wicked world: by the blandishments and enticements of other gospels, by the deception of sin and the deceitfulness of Satan. God allows testing programs. Are we going to fail the test or are we not?

Assyria and Babylon: Tests for Israel and Judah

In the case of Israel, God set up a final testing program in which He brought Assyria close to the ten tribes. Israel became interested in the gods and idol worship of ancient Assyria.

Ezekiel 16, verse 28:

Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou was unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied.

This speaks of Israel: "Thou hast played the whore..."; that is, you are a harlot, an adulterous woman. The Assyrians came with their idol worship and heathen altars, and Israel wanted the same thing.

King Ahaz was King of Judah, but he mimicked what Israel did. After he saw an altar that had been built by the Assyrians, he had his priests make a copy of it and put it in the city of Jerusalem. This is dreadful spiritual harlotry.

The nation of Judah later began to engage in spiritual harlotry with the Babylonians. Ezekiel 16, verses 29-32:

Thou hast, moreover, multiplied thy fornication in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea, [Chaldea is another word for Babylon] and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord GOD, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman; In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!

In these verses, God is, as it were, weeping over Israel because it is His wife and yet they are taking strangers as does an adulterous wife – the worst kind of harlotry.

A similar reference is found in Ezekiel 23, and it is ugly. However, it is the Word of God, and it must be read; it refers to the congregation of the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 23 God typifies the nation of Israel (the ten tribes with their capital in Samaria), by a woman named Aholah. He names Jerusalem, or Judah (Judah had its capital in Jerusalem), Aholibah. God says of Aholah (ancient Israel), in Ezekiel 23, verse 5:

And Aholah played the harlot, when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours, Which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. Thus she committed her whoredoms with them, with all them that were the chosen men of Assyria, and with all on whom she doted: with all their idols she defiled herself.

The Israelites saw the Assyrians and their apparent success, their fine young men and their beautiful clothing, and they were convinced that the Assyrians were prosperous because their god was a powerful god. Consequently, they ran after the gods of the Assyrians; for this reason, God speaks of Israel as a harlot.

Ezekiel 23:11-12 declares:

And when her sister Aholibah [Judah with its capital in Jerusalem] saw this [saw the adultery of Israel] she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she [than Aholah, or Israel], and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms. She doted upon the Assyrians her neighbours, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men.

Verses 16-17:

And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea. And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated from them.

God is speaking of the dreadful whoredoms of Israel: whoredoms committed with the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The Israelites found these wicked nations with their gorgeously appareled and handsome

horsemen very desirable. They did not like the true Gospel. They did not like what God had spiritually given them. They wanted something more exciting. They wanted that which was so apparently wonderful in Assyria and Babylon.

God set these nations up as a testing program for ancient Israel: to determine whether they would be in rebellion against these nations or fall into damnation by running adulterously after them. God's purpose when sin surrounds us is that it is a testing program to discover whether we will remain faithful.

The nations with which Israel played spiritual harlotry were the nations that destroyed Israel. In Ezekiel 23 God speaks of Aholah (the ten tribes, Israel). They were destroyed in the year 722 BC by the Assyrians, with whom Israel had played spiritual harlotry. In verse 10 of Ezekiel 23 God says: "These discovered her nakedness," which means they saw the spiritual nakedness of Israel and engaged with her in spiritual nakedness. Also, "... they took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword; and she became famous," which means she became a name among women. The verse ends with: "...for they had executed judgment upon her." The nation that Israel had played spiritual harlotry with (a heathen nation, a nation whose language she did not understand), destroyed Israel. This is a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28 and Isaiah 28, where God warned that He would destroy Israel with a nation of stammering lips, a nation whose language they did not understand; He would make them fall backward and they would be snared and taken.

This is the judgment that God placed upon the church in the Old Testament. He destroyed them. He blinded them. He took the truth away from them. He rejected them. Prior to destroying them, He set up a testing program. The testing program involved a nation whose men rode on beautiful horses, who were desirable, and who were gorgeously appareled, a nation whose language Israel did not understand. God used that nation as a judgment against Israel; it brought destruction to ancient Israel.

Judah was the two tribes to the south; their capital was in Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 23 they are called Aholibah. In Ezekiel 23:22 God says: "Therefore, O Aholibah [Judah, capital in Jerusalem] thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee..." Her lovers were the Babylonians and Chaldeans, whose language they did not understand, whose riders were gorgeously appareled, and their men were desirable young men.

Ezekiel 23:23-29:

The Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them: all of them desirable young men, captains and rulers, great lords and renowned, all of them riding upon horses. And they shall come against thee with chariots, wagons, and wheels, and with an assembly of people, which shall set against thee buckler and shield, and helmet, round about: and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments.

And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal furiously with thee: they shall take away thy nose and thine ears; and thy remnant shall fall by the sword: they shall take thy sons and thy daughters; and thy residue shall be devoured by fire. They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels.

Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt: so that thou shalt not lift up thine eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy mind is alienated: And they shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare; and the nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.

God is indicating: "Judah, my congregation, the congregation that I love, because you have rejected me, and you have not obeyed my law, I have begun to blind you. I have taken the truth away from you. I have rejected you. I have set up a testing program to discover where you stand and you have committed whoredom. You have gone after other nations whose language you do not understand, and they are going to destroy you. They are going to take you captive. They are going to wipe you out."

That is exactly what happened in the year 710 BC The Assyrians came against the ten tribes and destroyed them. One hundred and twenty-three years later (587 BC) and actually for the previous twenty-three years, God began to bring destruction against Judah. First, by the Egyptians and then by the Babylonians; by 587 BC the ancient nation of Judah was removed from God's sight. He destroyed Jerusalem. He destroyed the temple. They were taken into captivity by Babylon. That was the end of the Old Testament congregation.

It was discovered earlier, however, that even though these judgments came upon ancient Israel, God had

a future for national Israel. God brought into existence the New Testament church, and Christ came out of the nation of Israel. This was a sequel: God eventually brought them back to the land, they became a nation again, and out of that nation came Christ. Out of Christ comes the tremendous blessings of the New Testament church. In this way, ancient Israel is not an exact type or figure of the New Testament church. Insofar as God's judgment upon them, it is a picture of the way God will deal with the New Testament church. This is true even though the end of Israel as the external representation of the kingdom of God on earth did not occur until Christ hung on the cross.

All of this relates to our congregations today. Israel succumbed in the midst of the final testing program. God destroyed them by means of the nations of Assyria and Babylon, with whom they had played spiritual harlotry.

The Bible also speaks of the New Testament church and the end of these congregations. In the Old Testament congregation there was an expectation by God that they would fall into grievous sin and apostasy. As a result of that expectation of God, they did fall into grievous sin and they were destroyed. In the New Testament church there is an expectation that the churches of the New Testament will fall into grievous sin, and God will bring judgment upon the New Testament church.

In this study, the nature of the sin of the new Testament congregation will be discovered. We will learn of God's action against that sin and determine whether or not it parallels His action in ancient Israel.

Chapter 9 – Sins of the New Testament Church

The final tribulation period comes just prior to Judgment Day, and therefore at the end of the New Testament church age. It is intimately associated with the end of congregations and denominations that have existed throughout the last 2,000 years.

There are distinct parallels between the congregation of the Old Testament, national Israel, and the New Testament church. A study of Israel and its end have given insights into God's plan for the end of the New Testament church. The nation of Israel, which typifies the New Testament church, became increasingly apostate. Increasingly, they went after other gods. God had indicated that He had expected them to do this, and God brought destruction upon them by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

God also described the nature of the sin of New Testament churches. There is an expectation in the Bible that they, too, will fall into grievous sin. The nature of the sin that finally brings the wrath of God and the end of the era of the institutional church will be determined.

The sin that would envelop the congregations is disclosed, for example, in I Timothy 4:1, 2:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

The New Testament church is seduced by gospels that are under the power of Satan. Many in the church heed these seducing spirits.

II Timothy 3:1-5:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good. Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

This is a description of the terrible sins that will overcome many within the church and finally the church itself. The situation is reprehensible; the charges are serious. It is speaking of the church because verse 5 says they have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. The secular world does not have a form of godliness. Only the church wishes to appear godly.

If a congregation is ruled by those who are unsaved, or has many members who are unsaved, then these charges will apply. The church could be overrun with those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, who are covetous, proud, blasphemers, unholy, false accusers, and traitors. This may be, even though the outward appearance is that of a viable, holy body of believers.

There is a total distinction between the child of God (a citizen of God's kingdom) and the unsaved (those

who are under the dominion of Satan). An antithesis exists between the two.

God's man:

Has an earnest desire to be holy still under the power of sin

Loves God above all

Walks very humbly

Is thankful to God for every gift

Is faithful to God

Loves God above the pleasures
of this world

Satan's man:

Loves himself

Is very proud

Is convinced he is entitled to what he receives

Is a traitor to God

Has no love for God but eagerly desires the
pleasures of the world

This list could cover every phrase in II Timothy 3:1-5. The point is that a church filled with unsaved people – people who think they are saved because they went through a ritual like baptism or confession of faith – will be a church patterned after these verses. Their sin is not that they have been baptized or made confession of faith (true believers do these things), rather, their sin is that they make these acts the basis for their salvation.

They experienced these rituals, and they believe they have become saved. They have not actually become saved, and the same desires exist in their lives (those which exist in the unsaved). Therefore the sins listed in II Timothy will find expression in their lives. They fail to realize that salvation has to do with a broken and contrite heart. It has to do with a childlike trust in Christ which is manifested in an earnest desire to please Him.

How Much of the World Is in Today's Church

An honest look at today's churches reveals that these conditions do exist. Few pastors preach on such passages as James 4:4 which warns:

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.

Few sermons are heard on Galatians 6:14, where God admonishes:

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Few teach I John 2:15-17:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Frequently church members love the world as much as unsaved people do. They find joy and security in things that money will buy just as their unsaved neighbors do. The church member may follow certain forms and practices expected by the church, but where is his heart? Jesus warns in Matthew 6:21: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

I often wonder how many children of so-called Christian parents are growing up in homes where the holiness of God, where the authority of the Bible, where the lifestyle of the parents, are so all-pervasive that the children recognize from a very young age the tremendous difference between the kingdom of Christ and the dominion of Satan?

"Carnal Christians"

Many denominations have come forth with the doctrine that there are three kinds of people: first, the unsaved; second, the saved – those who love the Lord and want to be obedient to Him; and third, "carnal Christians" – those who are saved but for whom Christ has not yet become Lord of their lives. This is such a convenient doctrine: the third class of people can have Christ and also the world. They are reasonably active church members, and they can live in the world much like the unsaved; however, this doctrine is contrary to the Bible. In I John 2:3-5 God warns:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

In Matthew 6:24 our Savior declares:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

These doctrines, which are widely taught in the evangelical community of our day, demonstrate that the sinful conditions spoken of in II Timothy 3:1-5 exist far too frequently in the church. Surely God's judgments will fall upon the church.

A statement in Daniel relates entirely to the final tribulation period and speaks of the spiritual condition in the church that brings the judgment of God upon it. God speaks of the little horn; the little horn can be shown to be Satan. He is the one who is loosed at the end of time. Daniel 7:25:

And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand, until a time and times and the dividing of time.

This verse will be developed only insofar as what Satan, the little horn, will do. He will "think to change times and laws." This condition is virulent and present in so many congregations and denominations that one wonders if we are not in the final tribulation period. We are not, but certainly we are close: this is based on a consideration of the number of doctrines that churches have written and adopted to suit the carnal desires of members. A few unbiblical contemporary doctrines will be examined.

Divorce: Changing Biblical Rules

When I was growing up (and that was quite a few years ago), we never thought of the possibility of anyone getting a divorce. Divorce was contrary to the Bible. Since then, the church has attempted to change the law of God. The law says there is to be no divorce, and after divorce there is to be no remarriage. The church (many denominations) has rewritten the law, and some pastors teach, "Oh, yes, you can have a divorce if there has been fornication. Oh, yes, if you have been divorced under certain circumstances you can be married again." Even deacons, elders, and pastors are divorcing and remarrying. They have changed the law of God to suit the carnal desires of men.

Birth Control: A Change in God's Law

Another example of re-writing God's law is in the matter of birth control. Presently, most pastors teach birth control. They say: God has given us minds of wisdom to make these decisions.

They fail to realize they are teaching people to disobey God's commands, such as Genesis 9:1: "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."

Psalm 127:3-5:

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Psalm 128:3-4:

Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.

Psalm 104:30:

Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.

Isaiah 42:5:

Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein . . .

In these verses, God says that He creates the baby in the womb. For those who are children of God, children are an immense blessing from God. However, when man rewrites the law of God, people are instructed that man makes these decisions, and they are not to trust that God knows exactly what size every family ought to be.

The Bible teaches that God utilizes the family to bring forth Godly seed (Malachi 2:14, 15). Satan, on the other hand, tries to prevent this: for example, when Israel was in Egypt and all the boy babies of Israel were to be killed (Exodus 1), and when Jesus was a young child and the babies in Bethlehem were killed.

Today, Satan is up to the same tricks. Through the success of birth control devices, he has planted the rebellious idea in people's minds that they are the decision makers concerning the size of their family. Even church rulers have decided that man knows more than God about the number of children in a family. They do not realize that no baby is conceived unless God Himself has taken action to create that baby in the womb. Little do they realize that they have become pawns of Satan. Little do they realize that the practice of birth control is a negation of the principle that one must trust God in all aspects of life.

God's laws have not changed. The church, which should be the custodian of the law and carefully guard and hold it and resist teaching that is contrary to the will of God, is now attempting to change these laws.

The Place of Women in the Church

Women's place in the church is another example of the decision to change God's law to suit man's ideas. There is tremendous pressure to accept women in the pulpit and women who rule and have authority in the church. This is absolutely contrary to the law of God.

In many areas of life, the Bible is no longer the authority. Learned theologians talk about the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, but where the rubber meets the road – that is, where the congregation or pastor wants their own way about something – there have been changes in God's law so that men can do what they want to do.

Today in many churches those who stand for biblical truth and want to do things God's way are considered to be oddballs even by many within the church. They are thought to have an "holier-than-thou" attitude and an inflated spiritual ego. There is no longer an intense desire in many congregations to live faithfully by the law of God. In effect, they say: "Let us change the laws so that they are more convenient for our lifestyles." This is the desire of many in the congregation.

Salvation is by Grace Alone

The law of God has been changed and it is widely taught that salvation is not altogether dependent on God's grace. It is taught that God has provided for the salvation of every individual in the human race and that salvation thus depends upon man as the decision maker. Of his own free will, some say, man can accept or reject salvation. Thus, salvation would ultimately be a joining of Christ's work on the cross and man's work in accepting Christ – both would have contributed to the individual's salvation.

This perverse teaching disregards all kinds of laws of the Bible. No recognition is given to the Bible's teaching that man is spiritually dead and has no desire to seek God (Ephesians 2:1-5). It denies the truth that Christ went to the cross to save His people from their sins, and the rest of the world must stand on Judgment Day and give an account of their sins. Their teaching fails to face statements such as Revelation 17:8, which teaches that only some people have their names written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

Today's Gospel: A Social Gospel

All people have three aspirations: 1) political freedom, 2) economic security, and 3) freedom from disease.

All of mankind desire these blessings, and pastors and teachers increasingly incorporate these desires into their gospels. The social gospel which has great concern for the physically hungry is becoming the number one priority. Preachers say that the Christian ethic demands that all men have political freedom. It is believed that the church must do all it can to provide medicine and doctors to the world, and it is also believed that the church can expect God to provide good health (even miraculous healings) to those who claim the name of Jesus.

These aspirations have nothing to do with the Gospel of the Bible. This is proven by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16). The rich man with all his money could buy many, many freedoms that were denied others. He could afford the finest doctors and medicines. Certainly he had economic security.

Lazarus, on the other hand, was a beggar. He had sores that were licked by dogs. He had no economic security, and he had poor health. His political freedom was of no consequence. Which of these two men most badly needed the Gospel? According to today's social gospel it is obvious that Lazarus had the greater need, but did he? God strips the curtain of eternity aside and the rich man is seen in hell and Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom, a figure which signifies heaven. The beggar, Lazarus, had everything in

this life because he was saved. The rich man had nothing because he was unsaved. Surely this teaches that the social-political gospel has nothing to do with the Gospel of salvation.

The Gospel is concerned with the spiritual needs of mankind. Only within the congregation does the Gospel concern itself with physical needs.

A few doctrines and practices that are prevalent today present evidence that the church has rewritten the laws of the Bible. Indeed, congregations are being encouraged to follow a salvation program different from that which is found in the Bible.

The Changing of Times

Daniel 7:25 advises that not only are the laws changed but also the times. The changing of times is increasingly present in the evangelical community.

The Bible is clear that it is appointed unto men once to die and then the judgment. Judgment is the last day; all the graves will open and everyone will either stand for judgment or be caught up to be forever with Christ (John 5:28, 29). The Bible is clear about this, and yet many churches and denominations have reconstructed the Word of God and devised an entirely different time scheme. They say, for example, that Judgment Day is at least 1,000 years in the future. That is convenient because man does not want to talk about Judgment Day. It is a relief to know that it cannot come for at least another 1,000 years. However, their timetable is not what the Bible teaches. That which is spoken of in Daniel 7 is coming to pass all around us. We are approaching the end of time, the time when the corporate body, the institutional church will be judged.

Unhappy Pastors

This teaching may offend many pastors. They may be disturbed. They may profess to love their congregations and are sure that they are Christ's church. If someone warns of God's judgment on the institution of the church, he speaks in their home territory. He speaks in the place where they minister. This is unacceptable to them and makes them unhappy.

The same thing happened in the nation of Israel when Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others prophesied that Babylon was going to destroy them because of their sin. The false prophets in Israel were unhappy with Jeremiah and the few prophets that dared to predict that judgment was coming. After all, they thought, Israel was the apple of God's eye; Israel was God's chosen people; God would never destroy Israel.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, and the other prophets whose statements are recorded in the Bible, were carefully reading the Word of God more carefully than the prophets who did not want to see God's judgment coming. The true prophets looked at the Word of God carefully and realistically. They did not stick their heads in the sand. They did not hope that it would all go away.

I implore pastors: be realistic. Read the Bible carefully. The Bible has things to say about the future of the church; it will be judged. The corporate body (the institutional body that represents the kingdom of God in congregations and denominations all over the world), will come under the wrath of God, whether we like it or not. It is going to happen. When it is seen what many churches are doing with the Word of God, then it will be seen why God's judgment will come upon the congregations.

Matthew 24 says that most men's love will grow cold. Temptations of the world are greater than ever in the history of the church. Television with all of its glamour draws attention away from a love for God. In our affluent society many people have boats and recreational vehicles and time to camp here and vacation there and so on. These activities all make demands upon the time that ought to be spent in the Word of God.

There was a day when elders came home from the worship service, sat down with their friends, and discussed the sermon. Nothing else of consequence took their time; they spent time studying the Word and reading theological books. How many elders, deacons, and pastors today spend long periods of time studying the Word, looking for divine truth, and analyzing questions? The demands and temptations of this world are tremendous, and most men's love is growing cold. The Bible predicts these things and unfortunately they are happening within the congregation.

As these sinful conditions develop within the congregations, it will be seen that God takes action. When in ancient Israel they rebelled against God, and went farther and farther from His Word, God began to take action. God blinded them as a first judgment. The same thing will happen to the New Testament church.

God Blinds the Church

In II Thessalonians 2 God teaches that He will blind those who reject His Word. In this passage God warns what will happen when Satan is loosed, and God brings judgment upon the church. Verses 3-4:

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Verses 9b-12 speak of Satan coming with:

all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This is speaking of the church. One may ask, "How can that be, when these statements apply to the unsaved. The unsaved are damned." It must be realized that, obviously, everyone in the church is not saved.

Hell and Damnation

One frightening thing is that there is so little conversation about hell and damnation, which is what we are saved from. All kinds of salvation messages are being presented with the general theme of God's love, the idea being that it would be salutary and wise to become identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. These messages imply that by accepting Him, things are going to go well and life will have purpose and meaning.

How can anyone become saved if he does not know what he is being saved from? How can he know what he is saved from unless it is thoroughly discussed and diligently taught that because of sin that he is under the wrath of God. He is subject to eternal damnation. To repent of sins, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved in accordance with God's salvation plan, one must know what he is being saved from.

One can rightly fear eternal damnation only if the Bible's disclosures of the awful nature of hell are taught from the pulpit. God did not give multitudinous biblical references to the awfulness and certainty of His wrath just to fill up space. These warnings are to be read, taught, discussed, and to instill fear in mankind. If these passages are neglected, it is not the whole counsel of God. It will be man's, and not the true Gospel.

I cannot search the heart. I do not know what goes on in anyone's heart, but I reflect on this and wonder, "What is going on in so many of our churches and congregations where hell and damnation is hardly ever mentioned? I am afraid many of the people in the congregations have no idea of what they have been saved from...then how can they be saved?...What kind of salvation identity do they have? What is this in their lives?"

When church leaders change the laws, they no longer present the whole counsel of God. They may present something plausible and pleasing that men like to hear, and which makes them feel good, but they have changed the laws and it is a gospel other than the Gospel of the Bible.

The sin of failing to preach eternal damnation as an integral part of the salvation message is identified and warned against in Ezekiel 3:17-19:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

A witness of the Lord Jesus is a watchman. He is to warn that the enemy, death, is approaching. This death is not physical death (everyone sees that coming), it is the second death: eternal damnation, and only the witness who has implicitly trusted the Bible sees that coming. He knows it is coming because of many biblical passages that refer to it. He knows something about its terrible nature because he has come to a realization of the holiness of God. He knows that sin is terrible rebellion against God. Therefore, as a faithful watchman he (like Jonah in the city of Ninevah), frankly, courageously, insistently,

and consistently tells the world the truth of its terrible condition. Of course, he also brings the glad news that the way to escape from hell is by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The witness says that those subject to damnation can know the magnificent love of God, which is lavished upon all who trust in Him.

Ezekiel warns that if the watchman does not tell the unsaved about the death (damnation) that is to come, their blood (those who go to hell without hearing the Word), will be on his account. He will be punished by damnation for his unfaithfulness in preaching the certainty of hell. This is a crucial warning to those who believe they are called to bring the Gospel. If a preacher does not make hell and damnation an integral part of the salvation message, his salvation is questionable.

If you are a pastor, please take this very seriously. Are you really digging into the Scriptures to know the whole counsel of God? The Scriptures contain numerous statements of the wrath of God and they are to be proclaimed. Mankind deserves God's wrath because of sin; only when this is understood, does one see the tremendous need for a Savior.

When churches are unfaithful, when they are places merely for being happy and having fellowship, God will blind those preachers and their congregations. If the preaching is designed so that after the sermon everyone feels good, God will blind them. If the preaching consists of a few moralities and avoids the issues of life and man's relationship with God, God will blind them. God says in II Thessalonians 2 that those who do not love the truth will have a strong delusion that they should believe a lie.

God blinded ancient Israel. God does not remain neutral to those who have been given the truth and consistently turn from it. God is not mocked. God declares that He will blind those who refuse to believe the truth. He will cause them to believe falsehoods. To put it another way, He will make it increasingly difficult for them to understand and believe the truth.

Man is desperately wicked by nature. The only reason man desires truth is because God restrains his natural tendency to sin. As God removes His restraint from man, man's natural wickedness and blindness will be increasingly evidenced.

Only God's grace leads any of us to spiritual truth. God is the One who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). He teaches truth. How merciful, how gracious God is!

How terrible when God is working to blind. The end of the one being blinded is damnation. It is awful when pastors and teachers give increasing evidence of this blindness.

God, in connection with this blinding, removes the truth. In the Old Testament, God removed the truth from ancient Israel, and God warns that He will remove the truth from the New Testament congregations if they are unfaithful. This will be searched out in the next chapter.

Chapter 10 – God Removes the Truth from the Church

The sad and terrible truth is that the congregations and denominations are heading for disaster. As they become increasingly unfaithful to the Word of God, His wrath descends upon them. Ancient Israel finally came under the judgment of God; God blinded them, removed the truth from them, rejected them, and last of all He destroyed them.

New Testament congregations are becoming increasingly apostate. Spiritual blindness will descend on these congregations, this will mean that the truth has been removed from them.

God is deeply concerned about the corporate, institutional, external body of believers called the church. The era of the external body, national Israel, came to an end at the time of the cross, and the era of the New Testament external body will end as apostasy develops all over the world.

God's judgment on the institutional church will not include true believers within it, those who are born from above. They do not come into judgment, even though they go through the tribulation, affliction, and difficulties of the time when God's judgment is visited upon the New Testament corporate church.

In the last chapter, it was seen that as the church becomes more rebellious against God – it changes laws and times, and men's love grows cold, it preaches a gospel of men rather than the Gospel of God – God blinds. A dynamic activity operates whereby God actually causes theologians and church leaders to see less and less truth. What truth they had is taken away from them because they do not bow their knees before God. They are not ready to acknowledge that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word

of God. They will not submit to it as the Word that is to be studied and obeyed. Therefore, God blinds them.

The blinding of ministers in the congregations is intimately associated with the removal of truth from the congregations. The institutional body, the church, is where truth ought to be found. The church is the custodian of the Word. Since Christ went to the cross and the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost day in AD 33, the Old Testament congregation, Israel, has not had truth. Their era ended. Throughout the New Testament period, one expects to find truth in congregations and denominations which are reasonably true to the Word of God.

Closer to the end, as God's judgment begins to come against the corporate, institutional body because of its rebellion, truth will be increasingly difficult to find. God will begin to blind those who have been unfaithful in their presentation of the Gospel. Pastors and others who have been taught truth in their younger years will repudiate one aspect of truth after another. Sometimes it seems they can hardly wait to get on the bandwagon of teachings and practices that are contrary to the Word. The more they depart from the Word, the less truth they have to offer. Through their teaching and preaching, truth is removed from the congregation.

Learn from the Old Testament

The removal of truth from New Testament churches is emphasized in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Jeremiah 23 is an excellent example of this. Let the warnings of the Bible seep deeply into our souls. Jeremiah 23:20 relates to us because God teaches, "...in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly." The "latter days" in the Bible points to the New Testament period. Sometimes it points to the whole New Testament period and sometimes it refers particularly to the end of the New Testament period. Thus, the term "latter days" as found in Jeremiah 23 does not refer to national Israel. There are many Old Testament references to the final demise of national Israel and their sin (as was seen earlier in this study), but Jeremiah 23 speaks principally of the New Testament body of believers – the church. Chapter 23 sums up many teachings of the potential apostasy that exists in the New Testament church; therefore, this chapter of the Bible will be closely studied.

Jeremiah 23 emphasizes that God's wrath is going to be visited upon the institutional, external church, because of growing apostasy. Verse 14:

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

Jerusalem is another name for the body of believers, typified, of course, by Old Testament Jerusalem. The prophets in the first instance are the preachers who declare the Word of God. In a wider sense, the prophets include all who are in the congregation because every member of the congregation is mandated to be a witness.

God is teaching that these prophets have become false witnesses. They run after other gospels. They hold as the ultimate authority things and ideas other than the Bible. In their spiritual fornication, God likens them to Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed because of wickedness.

God declares in Jeremiah 23 verse 15a, "Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, Behold, I will feed them with wormwood..." Wormwood is probably a synonym for hemlock and hemlock is poisonous. In other words, He will give them poison to drink. The congregation will no longer receive the pure water of the true Gospel; it will receive the poisonous water of false gospels. Verses 15b-17:

and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD. They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.

God here outlines the nature of the sin that causes the institutional church to come under His judgment. False prophets say to congregations, "All is well. We don't want to talk about hell and damnation. We don't want to talk about God's judgment. We want to speak of loving, joyful things that fill our hearts with peace."

Dearly beloved, these verses have been in the Bible since the Bible was completed, and yet for most of

the history of the church, few people have paid attention to them. If you talk to most pastors, perhaps if you look at your own life, you will discover that little is known about the prophecies of Jeremiah, Hosea, Malachi, or prophecies of similar nature. These are unacceptable to some preachers because they emphasize doom and gloom, and that is not what most people want to hear.

These prophecies deal expressly and explicitly with conditions that exist today. In all likelihood they are going to find their fulfillment in our day because we are so near the end of time.

Many pastors and other individuals refuse to discuss these teachings. They do not want to admit that their church may have become apostate. Or, in spiritual blindness, they do not see the apostasy in their congregations. They are insensitive to the fact that the Bible is no longer their ultimate authority. Perhaps they consider themselves professionals, like doctors and lawyers, rather than servants who minister to spiritual needs.

It would be well to introduce into this study the questions: Who puts the pastor of my church on trial? Am I, as a member of the congregation, qualified to point my finger at the pastor and call him a false prophet?

Unfortunately, many believers see the growing spiritual apostasy in today's church and fall prey to the sin of judging. Only elders and deacons have spiritual rule of the congregation. Only they, therefore, have a God-given right and responsibility to assess the spiritual condition of a member of the congregation.

Any member of the congregation whose eyes, by the grace of God, have been opened to biblical truth can recognize unbiblical doctrines or practices. In Bible classes and fellowship meetings he may gently raise questions and express concern about doctrines or practices which trouble him.

He may not draw conclusions and make judgments that because the pastor preaches thus and so, or because the pastor does not preach this or that, the pastor is obviously unsaved and is a false prophet. That judgment can be made only by those who are qualified by God's law to make such judgments, i.e., those who have been given the spiritual rule of the congregation.

Individuals, specific congregations, and denominations have not been named in this study; it has merely outlined and emphasized the problem. However, we can weep as we see our congregation or our spiritual rulers go astray. Pray that those who are dear to us might remain faithful to the Word.

Frequently the rulers in a church find it is easier and more self-congratulating to point to the sins of entities other than the church. It is comfortable to criticize those who have political rule over us. It is easy to criticize Communism or some other non-Christian ideology.

The Church Must Engage in Self-Examination

God is forcing each of us to look at where we are in the church, in the corporate, institutional body. God is addressing us right where we are, and we better heed His warning. Spiritual rulers have an especially weighty responsibility, but every believer in the congregation should listen to God's warnings so that he does not fall into those sins.

The verses of Jeremiah 23 have taught us that there will be churches that teach "Peace, peace" when there is no peace. Some will say, "All is well...God is not going to bring evil on the church. Hasn't Christ declared that "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"? (Matthew 16:18) Isn't God true to His promise? How can you say that God will let Satan win a victory over the church, the institutional body?"

The reason that God will, is because God has so decreed. After the church has completed its work of evangelization and the last of the elect have been saved (by that time the church will have become almost completely apostate), then God is going to bring His judgment upon it, whether we like it or not.

He has given ample evidence of this. It is seen in the nation of Israel, the congregation of the Old Testament, and what happened to them. Therefore, we had better heed His warnings. Many pastors today say, "Oh, we're just a wonderful body of believers and we rejoice in the Lord. Praise God this and praise God that, but don't talk about ugly things relating to God's damnation or God's judging the church. We don't want to hear it." This attitude is precisely what God is anticipating in Jeremiah 23:18:

For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard it?

This is a rhetorical question and indicates that the congregations are not standing in the counsel of God. They are not perceiving and hearing His Word. They are bringing their own word, which is what they like to hear. Verse 19:

Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked.

That is the judgment that is coming on the church, the corporate, institutional body. Verses 20-21:

The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he hath executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

God teaches that the church will be overrun with those who say they have been sent by God. They will insist that they have been called by God, but in truth they have not been called by God. Anyone who brings his own gospel rather than the Gospel of the Bible is not sent by God. This is true regardless of how his gospel may identify with the Bible. True prophets are those who maintain the utmost fidelity to the Word of God.

The Church is Overrun with False Prophets

The prophets presented to us in Jeremiah 23 have not been spoken to by God. They do not have a message from God. They have been blinded. They bring their own gospel, a gospel that leaves people feeling fine. They have gospels that stress the power of positive thinking. Their gospels stress the idea that we need not worry about God's judgment falling upon us. They emphasize the idea that God will do increasingly wonderful works in our day and manifestations will develop here and there.

God says in Jeremiah 23:22:

But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

One who brings the truth of the Word of God, as ominous and negative as it may sound, causes those who listen and who are touched by that Word, to turn from their evil deeds and to Christ. An outstanding example of this, of course, is Jonah, when he went to Nineveh with the Word that God was going to destroy them. Ugly, but they listened and they repented.

Few contemporary preachers say that God's judgment rests on the corporate, institutional body. The cults and sects that continuously flourish in the world are not in view here. God has in view the congregations and denominations with the highest percentages of the body of believers. God declares that His judgment will come upon them as they go more and more against the Word of God.

Chapter 11 – God Rejects His Church

Within the corporate body are the true believers. They are the invisible, eternal church. The invisible body, those who are truly children of God (wherever they may be and in whatever congregation or denomination they are), do not come into judgment. True believers who are living on earth when God brings the corporate, institutional body into judgment will suffer grievous tribulation because God's judgments will be coming on the congregations to which these true believers belong.

It has been seen that there is an expectation in the Bible that the church will become increasingly wicked, and that as wickedness multiplies, God will begin to take action. He will blind those in the church. He will give them the spirit of unbelief to make them believe a lie. He will begin to remove the truth from that church. Those who teach and preach will become farther and farther from the truth.

In the last chapter an examination of the sad decline of the New Testament church was begun through the eyes of the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah 23:20-21 and 25-28.

The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.

This passage warns of apostasy in our day, not in Israel's day. When God tells us "...in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly," the "latter days" are the New Testament period, even though it was written during the time of ancient national Israel. Therefore, we must listen carefully.

Prophets who prophesy lies and who think their dreams reveal what truth is, could be a reference to actual dreams of these prophets. They are convinced the dreams are from God. This is a problem that will increase in the church, as will be discovered. This could also be a reference to church leaders' dreams of ideals, fantasies, or imaginations of what they would like the church to be. This can become a problem in a congregation where the pastor wants to have a "successful" ministry. He can be tempted to introduce unbiblical practices and doctrines into his church in an effort to please people.

This study is not meant to encourage anyone to despise pastors nor to despise the church. I, personally, belong to the church. I have been a member of the church all of my years. My children belong to the church. We believe that this is where we must be because God has so declared: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). The day is drawing nigh. Judgment Day is close but be careful not to leave the church earlier than necessary. The question of when true believers should leave the church is insistently pursued later in this study.

The Task of the Pastor

In the light of Jeremiah 23, many pastors today (there are exceptions – praise God for the exceptions), have as their first interest a large, successful congregation. As a result, the church becomes entertainment: movies are shown and "gifted" singers are brought in. Events are scheduled that titillate the fancies of the congregation. The preaching becomes increasingly pinched off and bland. It does not get into the heaven-hell question. It ignores the matter of eternal life versus eternal damnation. It does not mention God's judgment. It is preaching to keep the congregation happy. The pastor preaches from his own mind...these are reprehensible ideas.

One sad thing that happens in our day is that many pastors get their sermons from what others have written. They trust church fathers or certain theologians. Unhesitatingly, they proclaim what their authorities have written; they never bother to check what they have read against the Bible to see if it is biblical. One theologian simply teaches what another theologian teaches who in turn teaches what another theologian teaches until it becomes increasingly difficult to find a foundation in the Word of God.

These pastors fail to realize that although the theologians they trust may have in many ways declared true doctrine, they are not always trustworthy. No teacher, no preacher is without error. This is simply because no one has a perfect understanding of the Bible. Throughout a teacher's lifetime he should constantly search the Bible for truth. He should persistently and faithfully correct and refine the doctrines he teaches.

Great havoc is created in the church if teachers or theologians implicitly trust an earlier theologian. God has enabled each generation of theologians to personally go to the fountainhead of truth, the Bible.

The Bible says in Jeremiah 23, verse 28, "...he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully." Faithfully means to search the Word. It takes a lot of time to search. Word studies have to be made; Scripture must be compared with Scripture to determine what God has in view in a given verse. Conclusions arrived at by studying one part of Scripture must be checked against everything else in Scripture that might possibly relate to it to ensure that the conclusion is in harmony with all Scripture.

To ferret out truth from the Bible requires great diligence. Teachers have to "burn the midnight oil," so to speak. Teachers must deny themselves things with which other people attempt to satiate themselves, i.e., hours of nightly watching television, many trips, and long vacations. They have to diligently apply themselves to the Word; otherwise, they will not bring the Word faithfully, and they will bring chaff rather than wheat. The Bible asks, what is the chaff to the wheat? and answers, the chaff is nothing.

Jeremiah 23:29: "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" In other words, the Word of God is powerful. The Word of God is penetrating. The Word of God, brought faithfully, pierces into the heart of man and breaks down the toughest sinner until he cries out, "Oh, God, have mercy on me. I'm a sinner. I don't want to go to hell."

Verse 30 of Jeremiah 23 ominously declares: "Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour." God is declaring that some pastors negate the Word of God and encourage their congregations to turn from those who faithfully bring truth.

God goes on in verse 31, "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith." Many preachers wave their Bibles and say, "This is the Word of God and God says...", and they proceed to offer doctrines and philosophies that have no more basis in the Word of God than any other secular philosophy. Their ideas come from their minds and what they think is truth.

God warns in verse 32:

Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness: yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

God is disclosing the dreadful situation that develops when pastors and teachers in a church do not faithfully bring the Word of God. Rather than bearers of the truth, they bring lies. If it is not truth, it is a lie. They bring chaff for that congregation, and it will not profit them. How terrible to realize that much preaching today is merely from thoughts of men rather than a careful presentation of the Word of God. How dreadful to contemplate that a pastor stands before his congregation and preaches lies. Unfortunately, this is the present situation in many churches.

God Forsakes His Church

As has been seen in ancient Israel, God spiritually blinded the congregation of that day, then, He removed the truth from them, and following this, He rejected them. God will also forsake New Testament churches as they go deeper into apostasy.

Jeremiah 23:33 declares:

And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? [substitute the word "message" to understand this phrase: "What is the message of the LORD?"] thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? ["What message?"] I will even forsake you, saith the LORD.

God is declaring what His action will be as unfaithful preaching develops in the church. When pastors preach from their own minds rather than the Bible, God warns that the message they bring is the message of God that declares: "I will forsake you. I will reject you. I am going to bring you to an end." This is the last step before judgment. As those called of God become unfaithful, God spiritually blinds, then He removes the truth, and then He rejects them.

When the pastor and the teachers in a congregation teach the ideas of men – even though they may use biblical language and quote Bible verses – if what they teach is not firmly based in the Word of God, then it is lies. It is of men, and God warns, "I will forsake you." As for the prophet, priest, and people who shall say, "the burden [the message] of the Lord...I will even punish that man in his house." In other words, damnation will come upon them and their households because they are blind leaders of the blind.

God solemnly continues in Jeremiah 23:35-36:

Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken? And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more; for every man's word shall be his burden: for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God.

They will no longer be able to find the Word. Every man's message will be his own word; it will not be the Word of the Bible.

Dearly beloved, you might ask, "Is that the condition in the church today?" It is not the situation in every congregation, but in many congregations, it is the situation. It must be concluded that currently in many congregations, the truth is reprehensible and there is no desire to hear biblical preaching. The people want what is pleasing to their ears rather than that which is faithful to God's Word.

This is not to imply that I or that anyone has perfect truth. We all have to admit that we are learning. We all have to admit that we have feet of clay. One who is bringing the truth has an earnest and ongoing desire to continue to search out the Word and to change if something from the Word of God is contrary to what has been taught.

God threatens in verses 39-40:

Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

God is not talking about Communism nor wicked people in the political arena. He is not referring to sects and cults that obviously are under the power of Satan. God is talking about the institutional church from which the Gospel has been going forth throughout New Testament history, but to a high degree has become apostate. It is no longer faithful to the Word of God, and God is declaring what He will do to that church. He ends the solemn discourse of Jeremiah 23 with the declaration that He is going to reject them and cast them out. This is what happened to national Israel, the church of the Old Testament, when they increasingly rejected God's truth. God is declaring that this same rejection is to occur to New Testament congregations that are unfaithful.

Jeremiah 23 is an eye opener to anyone who is serious about Bible truth. One may not like God's threats and warnings but they are true. The language of this chapter and of so many other passages of this study is contemporary.

Wonderfully, God has given ample warning. Thus, even if one finds he has been going down the wrong path, he has time to repent and turn from wrong ways. It is still the day of salvation. Even if one's congregation is rejected, individual believers cannot expect rejection. Praise God that we can know we have eternal life and that nothing can snatch us out of our Savior's hand.

The last thing that came upon ancient Israel was God's judgment. They experienced this dreadful event at the hand of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. What judgment will come on New Testament congregations following their rejection by God? This question will be answered in the next chapter.

Chapter 12 – God Will Destroy the Church

The Old and the New Testaments have ample evidence that the New Testament corporate, external body will come under the wrath of God and be destroyed just as ancient Israel came under God's wrath and was destroyed.

Israel's era ended after Christ came from them and was crucified. It is God's purpose to evangelize the world by means of the New Testament church; thus, the New Testament church era cannot end until the last of God's elect are saved. No one knows when the last of the elect will be saved because no human being knows who the elect are. Only God knows who they are. The church must continue to witness to the world through faithful proclamation of the Word and trust that God will save the elect.

A significant body of truth relates to the future of the church. It can be known that if congregations and denominations become apostate, God will reject and destroy them. This warning is applicable to any congregation of New Testament history; however, it becomes a far more significant warning as the end of the world draws close.

National Israel: A Sign that We are Near the End

One of the most important signs that the world's history is about to close is Israel's return to their land. Jesus declares in Matthew 24:32, 33:

Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

Careful study of the Bible reveals that the only nation that meets the criteria of being the fig tree is the nation of Israel. After almost 2,000 years they are again in their own land; this is truly a sign that we are near the end of time. The Lord Jesus Christ must soon come on the clouds in judgment.

Israel as a political nation remains steadfast in its rejection of Christ as Messiah. This identifies perfectly with the prophecy of Matthew 24 where God declares the fig tree will have leaves. Significantly, no fruit is anticipated, and except for a tiny trickle of believers from Israel, no spiritual fruit is seen in that nation.

Knowing that we might be near the end of time, we must become even more interested and concerned about what is happening in the churches today. If indeed we are close to the end of time, then nearly all of God's elect have become saved. If this is so, the era of the New Testament church must be almost to an end.

The era of the Old Testament church ended as a direct result of national Israel's apostasy, their unfaithfulness to God. The biblical language of the New Testament church and its potential for apostasy

is parallel to that which was declared for ancient Israel. Therefore, if the end of time is near, substantial evidence of apostasy within congregations will be seen.

This is precisely what has been discovered in this study. God repeatedly declares in the Bible the nature of the sin of the church. Much that is unbiblical goes on in congregations and denominations of today. This apostasy is not in sects and cults which obviously are under the power of Satan; rather, it is in evangelical, Bible-related churches. To our utter consternation, these sins apply to a high degree to the most conservative contemporary churches and denominations.

Bibles are available to more literate people than ever before in history. Opportunities to study the Bible do not produce greater fidelity to the Word of God. Instead, increasing unfaithfulness to the Bible is developing all over the world. Ancient Israel was destroyed by political nations: Assyria, Babylon, and Rome. Will the church of today be destroyed by a political nation?

God warns that the New Testament institutional corporate body will be destroyed, and He uses the figure of political bodies, particularly Babylon. Babylon does not exist today, of course, but could a Communist nation like Russia be used by God to destroy the churches?

Through the years I have been trying to more fully understand prophetic statements such as Daniel, Revelation, II Thessalonians 2, I Thessalonians 4, and Matthew 24, etc. For a long time I wondered, "What is the role of Communism, the dynamic ideology that is so satanic in nature and which has swept the world with successes during the last 70 or 80 years?"

In its anti-God stance, it seems it must have a significant role to play. It is predominantly a political ideology, although in its anti-God posture it has religious overtones. Will God use it to silence the Gospel as a judgment upon the church? Or will God bring the institutional, corporate church into great and terrible trouble by some other political action, for example, a United States president so anti-gospel that he persecutes the church and brings judgment against it?

It is significant that Satan, working through Communism, has done his best to destroy the cause of Christ. Communism has made life difficult for the institutional church, and by this means, has hoped that true believers would cease to exist.

The nation of China was placed under the heel of Communist ideology with a vengeance. Children were separated from their parents and carefully indoctrinated into the ideals of Communism. Christianity was unavailable to them. Churches were destroyed. Many pastors were slain. Everything possible was done to stamp out all religion, including the true Gospel.

The bamboo curtain has been opened. The church is flourishing in China. Congregations are not found on every corner as in numerous communities in the United States (in many villages they have never heard about Christ); nevertheless, there is a vibrant body of believers within the nation of China. Communism has not been successful. Satan was unable to destroy the church by political means, therefore, that cannot be God's plan to destroy the church.

In the Bible, however, it is discovered how God plans to destroy the church. It will not be by political action. It will not be by an ideology like Communism. It will be by satanic activity working through false gospels that look so much like the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived, if that were possible.

God Uses Satan to Destroy

Satan becomes the dominant ruler within the congregation. In II Thessalonians 2, God speaks of the man of sin taking his seat in the temple. It will be seen that the man of sin can be only Satan. In Matthew 24, verse 24:

For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

In Revelation 13, verse 7 God informs us:

And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

The beast that comes out of the earth can be only Satan and his dominion, as he rules through false gospels. By this means, he is able to destroy the churches that are under the judgment of God. Thus, he is able to overcome the saints – the true believers – within the congregations.

Destruction of the New Testament church is not through political action, but is the action of the church,

itself, as it becomes apostate. Clues and guidance as to how this will materialize can be learned from God's dealings with ancient Israel, because Israel is a type, figure, or representation of the New Testament church. What happened in the nation of Israel gives insights as to what will happen to the congregations of our day.

Remember that God had set up a testing program for ancient Israel. The testing program involved contemporary nations. During the days of the demise of the ten tribes, it was the nation of Assyria. The nation of Israel looked with longing at the beautiful horses and the beautiful apparel of the Assyrians and decided that their gods must be victorious gods. They began to play spiritual harlotry with Assyria. They began to run after the gods of the Assyrians, a nation whose language they did not understand. It was the Assyrians that God used to destroy Israel.

Then the nation of Judah began to play spiritual harlotry with the gods of the Babylonians and the Assyrians. They looked at the success of these nations (the beautiful horses and the beautiful apparel), and all that went along with it, and Judah began to lust after their gods. Babylon, too, was a nation whose language they did not understand. It was this nation that destroyed Judah in 587 BC. This is the scenario that God gives to guide us into truth concerning the destruction of the New Testament church.

God's Testing Program for the Church

God sets up testing programs for mankind. If man fails the test, terrible things happen to him. If he is victorious through the test, great blessings will result.

The first reference to this principle was made in the Garden of Eden. Before sin entered the world, God set up the first testing program for the human race by placing in the Garden of Eden one tree of which man could not eat. Genesis 2:16-17:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

This is amazing. Before there was any sin in the world, God established a testing program as a fundamental principle by which God would relate to mankind. The testing arena was a tree that God called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If man was victorious in the test, the implication was that he would live forever. If he failed the test, he would suffer the most dire consequence: death. It is known from the Bible that the death God had in mind was not merely physical death, it was also the second death: eternal damnation.

The principle of a testing program is found repeatedly in the Bible. Israel, for example, was tested by God when Moses left them for forty days to receive the tables of the law on Mt. Sinai. Israel failed the test by making and worshipping the golden calf. As a result, God's wrath came upon them and 3,000 men were killed (Exodus 32:19-28).

The number forty in the Bible may be a clue that a testing program is in progress. Israel was in the wilderness forty years after coming out of Egypt. They failed the test; few of them trusted in God. Therefore, the Bible records in Joshua 5:6:

For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD swore that he would not shew them the land which the LORD swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

Significantly, it can be shown that there were exactly 400 years from the time when Israel came out of Egypt (1447 BC), and Saul became king over Israel (1047 BC). This occurred in the days of Samuel, who was the last of God's prophets to judge Israel. When Samuel was old, Israel came to him and asked for a king to rule over them. I Samuel 8:4-7:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

Saul became king exactly 400 years after Israel, under the direct rule of God, came out of Egypt. Another interesting testing program in relation to the number forty is in the book of Jonah. Jonah was instructed to

cry against Nineveh because of their wickedness (Jonah 1:2). In Jonah 3:4 are these significant words:

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

Wonderfully the people of Nineveh were victorious in their test. Jonah 3:5 and 10 report:

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

Perhaps the greatest testing program of all occurred in the New Testament, and the Lord Jesus Christ was the object of the test. He had taken on a human nature, consequently, He, too, came under this principle. Luke 4:1-2:

And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing, and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

The first Adam was tested in the Garden of Eden, and the second Adam, Christ, was also tested. The first Adam failed the test by disobeying God and thus plunged the human race into sin, but our Lord was victorious in the test. He remained entirely obedient to God. His perfect obedience has made the incomprehensible kingdom of God a reality for all who believe on Him. Obviously, the principle that God tests the human race is firmly established in the Bible.

The end-time church, too, is faced with a testing program. Unfortunately, the Bible reveals the end-time church will fail this testing program, just as Adam and Eve failed in their day and as ancient Israel repeatedly did. The church will fail the test and will come under God's wrath, just as God's judgment resulted when Adam and Eve failed the test.

God's Final Testing Program

The testing program that identifies with the end-time church will be focused on a nation whose language the congregation does not understand. Because of the dynamic importance of this truth, how the Bible teaches it will be reviewed, and it will be further developed.

God gives at least two prominent clues in the Old Testament as to the nature of the final testing program. The first is in Deuteronomy 13:1-3 where God informs us:

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

God clearly says that He is proving, that is, testing the congregation through the activity of a false prophet within their midst. One should know the character of this prophet and the nature of his teaching.

The introduction to Chapter 13 is the last verse of Deuteronomy 12, where God admonishes the congregation: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it."

In this admonishment God says that man shall not add to nor take away from the Word of God. To recognize the Word of God as His Word and have an intense desire to be obedient to it, is in fact worshipping God as the giver of the Word. On the other hand, to believe that there is an additional source of divine information (to believe that it is from God when indeed it is not), that effectively is worshipping a god other than the God of the Bible.

God gives the same warning in the New Testament, in Revelation 22:18-19:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

"This book" can be only the Bible. The Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God. An additional articulated, verbalized message which is delivered through a dream, vision, or by any other means, would be an addition to the Bible. If one listens to these messages and believes they are of God, he effectively

is worshipping a god other than the God of the Bible. God warns in verse 18 that anyone who commits this sin is subject to the plagues written in the Bible; that is, he is subject to eternal damnation.

Deuteronomy 13 says the false prophet is a dreamer of dreams, that is, he is convinced that what he hears in his dreams is of God. The sign or the wonder, the prophetic statement of his dream or vision, comes to pass. He, therefore, has received a supernatural visitation, but because the message he received was not from God, it had to be from Satan. When he teaches that the message he received in a dream or vision was from God and, therefore, is the Word of God, he is encouraging people to go after a god other than the God of the Bible.

This is a deadly serious sin within the congregation. Deuteronomy 13 says that this prophet is to be put to death even if he is the dearest loved one of someone in the congregation.

The key phrases in these verses are, "for the Lord your God proveth you" (or tests you) and "to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." These phrases teach something about God's final testing program for the church. God clearly says that He will test the congregation by allowing those who say they declare the Word of God but who are in fact false prophets (because their source is other than the Bible), to be within the congregation.

I Corinthians 14 Gives a Clue to the Final Testing Program

The second Old Testament clue to the final testing program that will come against the church is that which came against ancient Israel. The signpost to this clue is in the New Testament, I Corinthians 14:21,

In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

To understand this clue, one must know the setting in which it is found. I Corinthians 14 discusses the phenomenon of tongues, which was present in the church at Corinth. Certain individuals there received from God, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, messages in a language (a tongue), which neither they nor anyone else in the congregation could understand. In I Corinthians 14:2 God speaks of these as "in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."

Additionally, within that congregation God gave certain individuals the gift of interpretation. By means of this God-given gift, the message received in the tongue was made understandable to the congregation. I Corinthians 14:5 informs us that when the tongues message was interpreted, it edified the congregation.

This was a valid spiritual event in the church at Corinth. They had only that part of the Bible which is now called the Old Testament. God was still breaking the silence between the supernatural and the natural when He gave messages to Paul, John, Peter, and Agabus (Acts 11:28). Because these messages were from God, they were an addition to the Word of God. The New Testament had not yet been completed, even with these additions; the churches of that day had an incomplete Word of God.

During the same time that it was possible for the apostles to receive direct messages from God, there were individuals in the church of Corinth who received messages from God in a tongue. The messages could have been in the form of a prayer, praise, or a revelation. Howbeit, it was a message from God, therefore, it was an addition to the written Word of that time.

In the center of the discourse on the phenomenon of tongues (I Corinthians 14, verse 21), is a reference to the law wherein God had written that through tongues He would speak to the people and they would not listen. This is a reference to the law of the Old Testament. God speaks about tongues in Deuteronomy 28, as examined earlier in the study. Moses addressed Israel when they were about to enter the Promised Land. He warned them that they would not be content with the gospel he brought them (Deuteronomy 28:47):

Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things...

The result of their rebellion against God was punishment. This is declared in the remaining verses of Deuteronomy 28; however, verses 48 and 49 summarize the warning:

Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;...

The enemy that was to destroy them was a nation whose tongue they could not understand. Therefore, this is the passage of law referred to in I Corinthians 14 in regards to the tongues phenomenon.

The ten tribes of Israel were destroyed by the nation of Assyria after Israel engaged in spiritual harlotry with the Assyrians. As a result of their spiritual rebellion, God caused the nation of Assyria, a nation whose language Israel did not understand, to destroy them. In the year 710 BC the nation consisting of ten tribes of Israel ended at the hand of Assyria.

God gave a final warning of this a few years before it happened. The warning is found in Isaiah 28:11-12.

For with stammering lips, and another tongue, will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

The sequel to God's judgment on Israel occurred 135 years later. The nation of Judah ran like a harlot after Babylon, a heathen nation whose language they did not understand, and Babylon is the nation that destroyed Judah in the year 587 BC. A few years earlier they had been warned by the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah 5:15-17:

Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD; it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword.

God is focusing on "a nation whose language thou knowest not." This passage, too, is referred to in the ominous language of I Corinthians 14:21.

Deuteronomy 13, Deuteronomy 28, I Corinthians 14, and God's judgment tie to the end-time church when one considers the two important principles learned earlier.

The first principle is that ancient Israel was a picture or type of the New Testament church. God's judgment on them for their spiritual adultery sheds light on the nature of God's judgment on the New Testament church for its spiritual rebellion.

The second principle is that God sets up testing programs for mankind. In Deuteronomy 13 it is seen that within the church a testing program will involve false prophets who receive supernatural messages. They will encourage the congregation to go after other gods by revealing their supernatural experiences, which come from a source other than God.

These two biblical principles give understanding as to how God will judge the end-time church.

Tongues: End-Time Testing Program

The question might be raised: Why does God write extensively in I Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 about the phenomena of tongues? One might be surprised to read in the Bible about this temporary phenomenon. A few decades after this phenomenon occurred in the church in Corinth, the visions of the Book of Revelation were received by the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos. This book closed with the warning that anyone who added to its words would be subject to plagues; therefore, there could be no further revelation from God by visions, voices, tongues, or anything else. Thus, the phenomenon of tongues that occurred in the church at Corinth would also have come to an end. From that time to the present day, do not expect God to bring a message by these means or by any other means. The Word of God is complete. The Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God.

It appears that the phenomenon of tongues was short-lived and confined only to the church at Corinth. It was an incidental matter even in that day, thus, the question persists: Why did God write extensively about it?

The answer lies in the realization that these three chapters of I Corinthians discuss the matter of tongues as God's testing arena for the end-time church. God planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, and it was the testing arena of our first parents. Satan saw his opportunity in that testing program to tempt man into sin and thus enslave him. In the warning and testing program of Deuteronomy 13, God allows a false prophet to deceive some people within the congregation. God sets up the testing programs, but it is Satan who uses the tests as an opportunity to lead astray those who are being tested.

It is the phenomenon of tongues, recorded in I Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, that God established as a testing arena for the end-time church. God gave the true gift of tongues briefly in the church at Corinth so that the end-time churches' fidelity to the Word of God could be discovered.

Adam and Eve were permitted to eat of every tree of the garden except one. In these trees there were

lavish blessings of God; they provided fragrant and delicious fruits to satisfy the physical needs of man. Lucifer wanted man to serve Satan rather than God, and he tempted Adam and Eve into thinking they were missing something important if they did not taste the fruit of the one tree that had been placed off limits.

The church is repeatedly reminded throughout the Bible of the lavish blessings that attend salvation. They are far more than anyone deserves. They are so wonderful that our hearts should continuously praise God.

The one minor blessing that was briefly enjoyed by a few people in the church at Corinth was an incidental blessing (being able to receive an additional message from God in an unknown language), when the magnificent blessing of the whole Word of God was unavailable.

God maximized His communicative blessings to mankind by giving them the entire record of His will (the New Testament and the Old Testament) and placed the minor blessing enjoyed by the church at Corinth off limits. It was no longer to be expected in view of the fact that God had given His larger blessing – the entire Bible.

God, in His wisdom, retained the record; indeed He prominently displayed the record of the phenomenon of tongues in the Bible. Its placement there makes it a testing arena for the end-time church, as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the testing arena for the beginning of the human race.

Satan Uses Tongues to Destroy

It is precisely at this testing place that Satan uses his final opportunity to win a decisive victory over Christ by defeating the church. He defeated Adam and Eve by encouraging them to eat of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. Likewise, he encourages the end-time church to enjoy the forbidden gift of tongues.

When God set up the testing arena in the Garden of Eden, He used language that made it easy – or at least paved the way – for Lucifer to tempt Eve. God did not give the forbidden tree a foreboding name like "forbidden" tree. God gave this tree the intriguing name "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Certainly, such a title would cause Adam and Eve to wonder what mysterious power the fruit of this tree possessed. This is evidenced by Eve's reaction to Satan's enticements, in Genesis 3:6:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Satan stimulated Eve's lustful thinking by making reference to the name God had given the tree. In Genesis 3:5 Satan declared to Eve:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Note his words, "your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Surely in giving this tree the name "the knowledge of good and evil," God gave Satan a theme that he could use to stimulate our first parents into sin.

God, of course, is not the author of sin, nor is He in any way guilty of sin. God did, however, design an insistent and valid testing program, in that the fruit appeared to be especially luscious ("the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes," verse 6), and in the name that the tree was given.

God also made the testing arena for ancient Israel quite intensive. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom, which was called Israel, were destroyed by the Assyrians, a nation whose language they did not understand. While Israel was failing the test, God blessed the nation of Assyria: they conquered Syria (II Kings 16:9), and appeared to be the nation with all the answers. Ezekiel 23:5, 6:

And Aholah played the harlot, when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours, Which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses.

As previously mentioned, "Aholah" is another name for the capital of Israel which was in Samaria. Assyria with its political successes and worldly achievements appeared to be the nation to emulate. Similarly, Judah, the southern kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem, was enamored by the beauty, power, and successes of both the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

The beauty, power, and political successes of Assyria and Babylon were the results of God's blessing. These wicked nations were in total rebellion against God, yet God brought them to power and made them

attractive merely to serve as testing programs for Israel and Judah.

Israel Goes to Assyria for Help

The Bible gives a vivid illustration of how God allowed a wicked nation like Assyria to appear to Israel to be a success story. During the days of Isaiah, Jerusalem was threatened by Israel and Syria. The situation was grave. II Chronicles 28 discloses the wickedness of Judah's king Ahaz, and the resultant punishment God brought upon Judah by Israel and Syria. II Chronicles 28:5-6:

Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers.

The king of Judah, a wicked man named Ahaz, and all of Judah should have cried to God for help. They should have repented in sackcloth like Nineveh did when Jonah preached to them. They should have cried out to God as King Jehoshaphat did when the Moabites and the Ammonites came to destroy Judah (II Chronicles 20). Instead the Bible records that Judah went to Assyria for help. II Kings 16:7,

So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant, and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.

They could not have more dramatically displayed their complete lack of trust in God. God rescued sinful Judah by wicked Assyria, as II Kings 16:9 declares:

And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

Assyria conquered Syria. Until recent times, it was not an independent nation. God used Assyria to destroy the ten tribes; they no longer existed as an independent kingdom. These two nations, Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel, therefore were removed as a threat to Judah by the strength of the heathen nation Assyria.

The point of this information is that God brought successes to Assyria to intensify the testing program that was coming against Judah. The successes of Assyria in its flower, and Babylon in its flower, suggested that their gods were more powerful and more trustworthy than Jehovah God. God, for His divine purposes, gave Assyria the victory, but Judah was convinced that the superiority of the Assyrian gods made them victorious. This spiritual mentality is seen in the citation of II Chronicles 25:14 where another king of Judah, Amaziah, worshipped the gods of an enemy called Edom or Seir. This verse declares:

Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them.

II Chronicles 28:22-23 records similar action by the wicked King Ahaz:

And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.

God Intensifies the Final Testing Program

When God sets up a testing program, He strengthens the test by His words or by allowing the actions of enemies of God to appear to be successful. The same principles apply to God's final testing program for the end-time church: in relation to God's words in the Bible and in relation to the successes that God allows the enemies of the Gospel to enjoy.

Three examples may be offered of words that God uses to indicate the severity of the test for the end-time church. First God says that those who spoke in tongues in the Corinthian church were edified as they spoke these mysteries in the Spirit (I Corinthians 14:2-4). Surely anything that serves to edify or build up the faith of the individual believer is to be sought after?

Secondly, God declares in I Corinthians 14:39, "forbid not to speak with tongues." Surely this teaches that no one should suggest that speaking in tongues is sinful?

The third example requires more explanation. In three of the four gospels the sin described as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is mentioned. It is also referred to in I John 5 as a "sin unto death." This sin is unusual in that those who commit it can never have forgiveness; that is, they can never become saved. Moreover, it is unusual in that God protects mankind from it to the point that it is virtually impossible to find anyone who has ever committed this sin.

However, the scribes of Jesus' day committed this sin. Mark 3:22 says of them:

And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

In response to this grievous sin Jesus declares in Mark 3:28-29,

Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation;...

In verse 30 He explains that the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to believe that Christ was under the power of Satan rather than under the power of the Holy Spirit. The scribes who hated Jesus and desired His death had committed this dreadful sin; they were convinced that He was of Satan. They had no desire to look upon His as their Messiah.

The scribes spoken of in Mark 3 and Matthew 12 are the only mention in the Bible of individuals who have committed this sin. The most hardened sinner of today ordinarily would never become convicted that Jesus received His power from Satan. There may be those in the world who have committed this sin, but if they have they would never worry about Christ as their Savior. Anyone who has the slightest interest in Jesus as Savior could not have committed this dreadful sin.

One might ask: why did God put an extensive record of this sin in the Bible? Its presence in the Bible has produced much sorrow for true believers who have been incorrectly taught that the sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is to reject Christ. Many true believers when young have repeatedly rejected Christ. They have become saved in their later years, but are haunted by the question: can they be saved? One reason for the recording of this sin in the Bible is to increase the severity of the testing program of the end-time church.

The correct understanding of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to believe that Jesus, when He came as the Savior, was under the power of Satan.

By a simple extension of this idea, it could wrongly be concluded that anyone who believes that Christ or the Holy Spirit works through the church under the power of Satan, that person has committed this terrible sin. In other words, it might be said that if someone examines a particular gospel or church and decides that it is of Satan, by that judgment he is in danger of having committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This conclusion is erroneous, but it is widely taught by those who believe in tongues. Few dare to make the judgment that a "tongues gospel" is of Satan. Almost no one dares to conclude that a gospel can be a product of Satan if its claims that Christ is the Savior. As a result, the "tongues gospel" is protected from criticism even by those who want to remain true to the Bible. In fear of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, they are forced to acknowledge that even though they disagree with many doctrines of the "tongues gospel," it must be considered an aspect of the true Gospel. This, in turn, encourages many people to follow the "tongues gospel." God has built characteristics into the tongues testing program that make it appear safe in its identification with the true Gospel.

The Success of the Tongues Movement

An ever-increasing number of individuals and congregations fails this end-of-time testing program all over the world. The tongues movement, also called the "charismatic movement," is sweeping through churches like wildfire. Virtually every denomination has churches that have welcomed it with open arms.

For generations attempts have been made to unify various faiths and denominations; however, no attempt has made progress like the charismatic movement. Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists – all gospels that identify with the Christian ethic – find brotherhood under the charismatic banner. To those who embrace the tongues phenomena, it appears to be a wonderful and certain demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible guides us into truth; we can know the facts. The church has become apostate. Consequently, God is blinding people so that they believe this movement is of the Holy Spirit. They do not realize that it is of Satan. By means of this phenomenon, Satan is defeating the true Gospel to a degree never before

realized.

Indeed, God brought judgment on the Old Testament church (Israel and Judah), by nations whose language Israel did not understand, nations with whom Israel had engaged in spiritual harlotry. It was these nations that God used to destroy Israel and Judah. Likewise, churches and denominations of today are engaging in grievous spiritual harlotry by blindly running after gospels that feature an unknown language called "tongues." These false gospels are being used of God as a judgment on the church. Expect to see the church destroyed by them.

Congregations will continue to exist. They may appear to be more vibrant and spiritually successful than ever. It may appear that the cause of Christ is advancing all over the world: crusades attended in ever-increasing numbers, churches filled to capacity, seminaries with more prospective preachers. Nevertheless, it must be realized that the church is under God's judgment. The abomination of desolation increasingly stands in the holy place. The man of sin increasingly takes his seat in the temple. The era of the New Testament church has almost ended.

Two important characteristics appear always to be present in the tongues movement. First, acceptance of the principle that God is still speaking today. Additional revelation, it is believed, may be revealed through an unknown language called tongues, a vision, a dream, or by hearing a voice. Invariably where there is an interest in dreams and visions, there is an interest in tongues. Likewise, wherever there is an interest in tongues, there is an interest in dreams and visions.

The insistence on the principle that God is speaking today automatically proves that the tongues movement is a false gospel. Its authority is a different authority than that of the true Gospel.

The true Gospel is circumscribed by its authority – the Bible alone and in its entirety. The "tongues gospel" has as its authority the Bible plus the messages that supposedly come from God in a tongue, dream, vision, or voice. It is easy to know that it is not the true Gospel, and if it is not the true Gospel, it is a false gospel.

Secondly, in the tongues movement, there is a pronounced interest in signs and wonders. There is a conviction that God is performing miracles today, as our Lord and the twelve apostles did signs and wonders. Miraculous healing is most commonly expected. The sign of people falling backward – being "slain in the spirit," as some call it – is evidence of a supernatural event. While so-called miraculous healing can be explained in earthly, physical terms, falling backwards appears to be unexplainable from an earthly, physical vantage point.

The phenomena of someone appearing to receive a message from God in a tongue, or vision, etc., may actually have a physical explanation. It could be the result of an hallucination, or it could be related to the individual's subconscious mind. Also, it could be supernatural activity induced by Satan; he captivates the hearts of those who are not content with the true Gospel. When it is a supernatural activity it should be called a sign or a wonder because God calls the activity of speaking in tongues a sign in I Corinthians 14:22.

Significantly, the Bible makes reference to "signs and wonders" in connection with the end of time. Of great importance is the fact that these references have nothing to do with the true church. Every reference relates to satanic activity. For example, in Matthew 24:24:

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

This verse indicates that false prophets will come with a gospel that is so much like the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived, if that were possible. The elect are the true believers – chosen by God to salvation. They cannot be deceived because God will hold them fast. False prophets can be recognized by their signs and wonders.

In II Thessalonians 2:9 God warns of the man of sin who will take his seat in the temple: "Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders..."

In Revelation 13, in reference to Satan coming as a false prophet, God warns in verses 13-14:

And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image of the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

In Revelation 16 God is speaking of satanic activity just before Judgment Day, verse 14:

For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the

whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

God shows in these references that as He brings His judgment on the end-time church, it will be through gospels that feature "miracles." Do not be surprised that signs and wonders are prominent in churches with false gospels. When Christ came with the true Gospel He attested to its genuineness by performing miracles. John 20:30-31:

And many other signs truly did Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.

When Satan comes at the end of time with his false gospels that feature tongues he, too, will attempt to attest to their genuineness with signs and wonders. As was seen earlier, only two miracles are credited to him in the Bible. These are: first, his ability to break the silence between the supernatural and the natural with messages in tongues and visions. The second is that he can supernaturally cause people to fall backward. To add further credence to these gospels, Satan will come with lying signs and wonders; that is, his adherents will claim to do miracles and believe miracles have been done, when none have been done. Chicanery and deception will be utilized to convince followers that a miracle has been performed.

Modern means of communication such as television will enhance the spread of these false gospels. People who worship in churches that are reasonably faithful to the true Gospel may become familiar with the blandishments and enticements of false gospels in the privacy of their homes. With no one knowing, they can drink deeply of this poisoned water, and when the plague enters their churches, they will be prepared to accept it as an aspect of the true Gospel.

One can see the reality of God's judgment on the church because of growing apostasy. Right before our eyes, church after church capitulates to gospels that do not consider the Bible alone and in its entirety to be the true Gospel.

Two events develop simultaneously in preparation for the final tribulation period. The first event is that all of the elect will have become saved. The nature of the final tribulation period is that no one will become saved during that time; thus, it cannot begin until the last of the elect have become saved.

The second event is the end of the era of the corporate church as the external representation of the kingdom of God on earth. The steps that lead to the end of the church era are well defined in the Bible.

First, churches and denominations increasingly rewrite the laws of the Bible.

Second, God begins to blind the churches and they stumble into greater apostasy.

Third, God removes the truth from them as they are increasingly under His judgment.

Fourth, God rejects them and allows sin to multiply within the congregations.

Fifth, God destroys them in that they are no longer an external representative of the kingdom of God.

The destruction of the church, to a high degree, is accomplished through the testing program of tongues. In blindness, a church will fail the test as Satan deceives the congregation into accepting the false gospels of tongues and signs and wonders. Thus, congregations will continue to exist during the final tribulation period, but they will be increasingly false. True believers will either voluntarily leave or they will be required to leave when the congregation begins to follow a false gospel. Those who remain within the congregations in reality will be serving Satan even though they think they are serving Christ.

We have seen, therefore, that the final tribulation period is God's judgment on the church because of its apostasy. It will be a judgment on the world in the sense that the possibility of salvation has come to an end. During this spiritually terrible period there will be no hope for anyone to become saved.

A number of questions might be asked, such as:

1. What assurance is there that the final tribulation will not be a time of massive bloodletting? If it is not physical persecution, what trauma makes it a great tribulation?
2. If no one can become saved during the final tribulation period, what will happen to children born to believing parents during this time?
3. Are there any additional Scriptures (besides those already examined), that teach of Satan's involvement in the final tribulation period?
4. Can the duration of the final tribulation period be known?
5. Will anyone know when the tribulation period has actually begun?

6. What immediately follows the final tribulation period?
7. What will true believers do during the final tribulation period?
8. What about the anti-Christ? Who is he?

These questions will be considered in the following chapters.

Chapter 13 – Believers are Killed when Satan Rules in the Church

It has been learned from the Bible that the New Testament church era will end, just as the era of ancient Israel came to an end. The end of the New Testament church will result from increasing world-wide apostasy within the church and God's judgment upon it. That judgment is totally involved with the final tribulation period.

Few verses thus far quoted in this study suggest that the final tribulation period is a time of massive bloodletting. If other verses allude to this ugly possibility, perhaps they will teach more about the character of the final tribulation period.

Because of the important teaching of Matthew 24:21 and because the time when this verse will come to fulfillment is near, it will be studied again. In Matthew 24:21 God declares:

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

This verse says that the character of the final tribulation period will be different from any that has ever come on the face of the earth. Physical persecution is not the chief characteristic of the final tribulation period. Persecution by bloodletting has happened throughout history. However, this will be different; it will be something the world has not previously known.

The context of Matthew 24:21 gives some clues as to what this tribulation will be. Verse 15 instructs:

When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains...

As was noted earlier, the only biblical holy place, after Christ went to the cross, is the body of believers. The homeland of the corporate body is the congregation or church. The abomination of desolation is the incursion of Satan into the heart of the church. The phrase "spoken of by Daniel the prophet" identifies with Daniel 8:13:

Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?

In this verse God speaks of the sanctuary being trodden under foot. The "sanctuary" like the "holy place" in Matthew 24:15 can identify only with the body of believers. Therefore, the phrase "trodden under foot" in the Daniel account gives the same information as the phrase "standing in" in the Matthew account.

When Satan stands in the holy place – when he rules in the church – then the sanctuary will be trodden under foot; the church will have become vanquished by Satan. Daniel 8:13 and Matthew 24:15 speak of the same sad event. Thus, it can be fairly safely asserted that these verses teach that during the final tribulation period, congregations and denominations world-wide will be overrun with satanically inspired gospels. It is God's plan that the churches will come under this judgment. The chief characteristics of the final tribulation period will be Satan's spiritual leadership in the congregations and the binding of the hearts of the unsaved, so that in all probability there is a great slowing down of the number of people becoming saved.

Satan's leadership and character in the church is known from verses that follow Matthew 24:21. Verse 24 declares:

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Our Lord could not make plainer the fact that the congregations will be grievously troubled by Satan during the final tribulation period. This truth is in evidence in II Thessalonians 2:1-4:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together

unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

These instructive verses show that the man of sin will take his seat in the temple and be worshipped as God. Satan is called the man of sin; he is typified by the king who reigned over ancient Babylon in Isaiah 14. In this chapter, God discusses Babylon and its king and directs attention to the fall of Satan. In the same paragraph, with no transition whatsoever, the Bible discloses both events: the destruction of Babylon and the fall of Satan. The reason is that Babylon is a type or figure of Satan's kingdom, and the king of Babylon is a type or figure of Satan.

God declares in Isaiah 14, verses 16 and 17:

They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?

Satan made the world as a wilderness by tempting Adam and Eve into sin. He desires to hold the inhabitants of the world in spiritual bondage and refuses to let anyone out of his prison house. Praise God that our Savior bound Satan by going to the cross and set His prisoners free.

In these verses Satan is called "a man." Satan, of course, is not a man. He is called a man because he was typified by a man: the king who had ruled over ancient Babylon.

In II Thessalonians 2:3, Satan is called "that man of sin." Undoubtedly God deems it appropriate in this passage to call him a man because God is emphasizing Satan's kingship as he rules in the church. The type of Satan, the king of Babylon, ruled over Babylon; and Satan will rule as a king within the church. Verse 4 bears this out, it speaks of him sitting in the temple of God and showing himself as God. "To sit" biblically connotes reigning. Jesus sat down at the right hand of God and was given authority over all things (Ephesians 1:20-22). God only reigns as King.

II Thessalonians 2:4 says that Satan will rule as a king in the temple. The temple can be only the congregations where true believers should worship.

Satan does not wear a red suit with a forked tail. He comes as an angel of light, and his ministers come as ministers of righteousness (II Corinthians 11:13-15). Those who remain in congregations with false gospels will have been deceived by the master deceiver. They will think they are worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. They will be worshipping Satan. This is suggested in Revelation 13, where God says that the beast that comes out of the earth will cause those who follow him to make an image of the beast which had the wound by a sword and did live. Verses 13 and 14 show us this dramatic truth:

And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image of the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

The beast that was wounded by a sword is Satan. Hebrews 2:14:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Christ destroyed Satan in principle by going to the cross. Christ endured the equivalent of eternal damnation in the cross experience, and it guarantees that all the wicked, including Satan, are subject to the second death, eternal damnation.

Satan lives in that he is allowed to continue to reign over the hearts of unsaved men during the final tribulation period. However, on Judgment Day the second death with all its force will overtake Satan and he will be thrown into hell.

Satan is worshipped, according to Revelation 13:14 and the phrase, "make an image," which is drawn from the Old Testament. Israel was frequently snared into false religions that featured idol gods. Therefore, to "make an image" refers to the development of false gospels. Those within these gospels will think they are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 11 pictures the beast with two horns like a lamb. Christ is the Lamb who took away the sins of everyone who believes on Him. Thus, verse 11 teaches that Satan will come with the appearance of Christ.

Revelation 13:15 indicates that the adversaries of the beast will be killed:

And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

This verse parallels Revelation 11:7 which says that the two witnesses who bring the Gospel eventually will be killed by Satan. The two witnesses will be killed after their testimony has been finished. God has written, in Revelation 11:7:

And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

A study of Revelation 11 reveals that the two witnesses who must be killed (verse 7), refer to the body of believers, those mandated by God to bring the Gospel. In Revelation 11:4 they are called "two olive trees" and "two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." God speaks of the body of believers as an olive tree into which the individual believer is grafted. The number two is commonly used in the Bible as a figure of the church, for example, when God sent the seventy out two by two. They are a picture of the church as it proclaims the Gospel. Moreover, it is out of the mouths of two or three witnesses that every word is established. Thus, both from the standpoint that the olive tree represents the body of believers, and, from the standpoint that the number two signifies the church, the two olive trees represent the church as it brings the Gospel.

In Revelation 1:20 God speaks of the seven churches represented in heaven by seven candlesticks. God uses the term "candlestick" as a synonym for a congregation. Thus, the phrase "two candlesticks" as used in Revelation 11 describes the two witnesses who represent the New Testament congregations that spread the Gospel.

Revelation 13:15 and Revelation 11:7 seem to contradict the premise that the final tribulation period will not be a time of grievous bloodletting, the chief characteristic of persecution throughout history. The conclusion might be reached that these verses speak of physical violence. However, a fundamental principle of Scriptures is that spiritual things must be compared with spiritual; that is, test all conclusions against the rest of the Bible to see if they are in harmony with everything else the Bible teaches.

That physical bloodletting will not be the major focus of the final tribulation period is strongly suggested in Matthew 24:21 where Jesus declares that it will be a tribulation like no other. Matthew 24:15 and 24:24 and II Thessalonians 2:1-9 indicate that the final tribulation period will be a time when false gospels that feature signs will be present in the churches. The success of false gospels which closely resemble the true gospel points to the absence of physical persecution. Physical persecution is not currently limited to those who hold the true Gospel. Persecution, if in vogue, is against all who call themselves Christian. In Mohammedan countries, for example, the true Gospel and every false gospel that includes the idea of Christ as Savior are the enemy. This is true also in Communist countries where any gospel called Christian, or any religion regardless of its character, is an enemy of the state.

Thus, if the false gospels mentioned in Matthew 24 and II Thessalonians 2 are to flourish as indicated, their environment cannot oppress any gospel that calls itself Christian. Therefore, do not expect special bloodletting during the final tribulation period.

The Bible indicates that in all likelihood the final tribulation period will be a time of substantial world peace. Even though wars will continue to the very end of time, the nations will believe that world peace is possible. In many ways it will be business as usual. Matthew 24:37-39 says:

But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not, until the flood came, and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Similarly, in Luke 17:28-30, God compares world conditions at the time of Christ's return to the situation in Sodom when it was destroyed:

Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

The final tribulation period does not include physical persecution of true believers, but Revelation 11:7 and 13:15 speak of killing. However, the Bible says that those who hate are, in fact, murderers. I John 3:15: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

I John 3:13 emphasizes that the true believer will be hated by the world, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." In Matthew 10:22 Jesus emphasizes the world's hatred for the believer: "And ye shall be

hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

The basis of this hatred is, of course, that the people of this world are enslaved to sin and Satan. They are citizens of Satan's dominion, and Satan is the bitter foe of Christ. Satan wanted Jesus killed when Jesus came as the Savior, and he wants the citizens of Jesus' kingdom killed.

Satan has two options whereby he can cause the death of true believers. The first is subject them to physical death. This has been a long-standing method employed by the forces of evil. Satan's difficulty with this murder method is its long-time failure to accomplish his desired goal: stamp out the kingdom of Christ. Physical bloodletting actually tends to build the church. The blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church.

Satan's second method of attempting to neutralize the kingdom of God is to kill those within the church. This method appears eminently successful. If Satan can cause a person to turn from the true Gospel to a false gospel, he effectively will have killed that person; he remains under the condemnation of God. He is subject to the most awesome death mankind will ever know: eternal damnation. Satan is the essence of destruction; his goal is to draw people away from Christ, who is life, and into the path that leads to destruction. An unsaved person is spiritually dead because he is under the wrath of God.

There is what seems to be an apparent contradiction: verses that suggest "business as usual" during the final tribulation period and verses that speak of Satan killing believers. Revelation 13:15 teaches that those who do not worship the beast (that is, true believers), must be killed. A true believer is not subject to eternal damnation; therefore, this kind of killing cannot be in view in this verse. Other verses teach that physical persecution will not be a major factor of the final tribulation period.

The solution may be found in Revelation 13:7:

And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

In this revealing verse God assures us that Satan will win in a sense. In the warfare Satan has assaulted the church again and again, but Satan cannot win until the last of the elect have become saved. Christ will build His church and the gates of hell cannot triumph.

After the last of the elect have become saved (the temple, consisting of true believers, has been built), then Satan will stop the advance of the Gospel, and in that sense he will appear to have won. No one else will become saved.

Similar language discusses the fourth beast, the ten horns, and the little horn, in Daniel 7:7-8:

After this I saw in the night visions, and, behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns.

I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

Who or what is the little horn before whom three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots, and which had eyes like the eyes of man and a mouth speaking great things? Verse 21 says that the horn made war on the saints and prevailed against them: "I beheld, and the same horn made war with his saints, and prevailed against them."

The same truth is revealed in Revelation 13:7 where God says that Satan will overrun the churches with false gospels. Thus, the little horn of Daniel 7 is Satan. The ten horns represent the completeness or finality of Satan's rule at the end of time, that is, the final tribulation period. Revelation 17:12-14 addresses this subject:

And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

Ten is the number of completeness. Satan's rule will be completed, or finalized, during the final tribulation period as he wars against the Lamb. The Lamb, of course, is Christ. Satan's war with Christ will be directed against the body of Christ, the church, in that he will overrun it with other gospels.

Three of the horns plucked up by the roots can be understood if one bears in mind that ancient Israel and its end typified and anticipated the New Testament church. Israel was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC, and Babylon is a type or figure of the kingdom of Satan. The destruction of Israel by Babylon is a picture

of the end-time when Satan will be victorious over the church. It is in connection with the destruction of Israel by Babylon that the putting down of the three horns can be understood. When Babylon conquered Israel, Babylon removed the last three kings that ruled over Israel: Jehoiakim (II Chronicles 36:5-8), Jehoiachin (II Chronicles 36:9, 10), and Zedekiah (II Kings 25:1-7). These three kings did evil in the sight of God. Therefore, they, like Babylon, were instrumental in causing the demise of Israel. This is summed up in II Chronicles 36:14-17.

Moreover, all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much, after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.

The final three kings of Israel, like Babylon, became intimately associated with wickedness. Therefore, they relate to the reign of Satan at the end of time. God does the relating in the language of Daniel 7, where He declares that the little horn plucks up three of the horns.

The description (Daniel 7:7-8) of the little horn is significant. It had the eyes of man and a mouth speaking great things. The phrase "eyes of man" undoubtedly relates to Isaiah 29:10:

For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.

This verse teaches that the "eyes" represent the prophets who ministered to Israel. Thus, God teaches that the little horn represents Satan and his rule in the church through false prophets and false Christs. This conclusion harmonizes with Matthew 24:24, where God teaches:

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

The "eyes of man" represent false prophets – emissaries of Satan – as does the phrase "a mouth speaking great things" (Daniel 7:8, 20). Daniel 7:25:

And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand, until a time and times and the dividing of time.

As part of the apostasy that will develop in the church and cause God's judgment to fall upon it, God will allow pastors to rewrite the rules of the Bible as this verse teaches. God emphasizes that this will be the character of Satan's rule (the little horn's rule), over the church. Satan will rule in the manner described in II Corinthians 11:13-15, where God warns:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

These verses show that Satan will be so deceptive when he rules in the churches during the final tribulation period that his followers will be convinced they are serving Christ.

The dominant and all pervasive goal of the church is to send forth the Gospel so that the temple of God can be built. It will appear that the church has become destroyed when it is no longer used of God to save people. Furthermore, as has been noted, the church will have become thoroughly apostate. It will have become a dead church, and it will show itself to be spiritually dead because it will be overrun by gospels fostered by Satan. Thus, true believers will be killed in a two-fold sense: the church to which they belonged will have become spiritually dead, and although they personally live in Christ, they will be dead in that no longer can one come to life through their testimony. The two witnesses will have been killed (Revelation 11:7); they will no longer be a fountainhead of life. Rivers of living water no longer flow from them to bring spiritual life to the unsaved. All of God's elect have become saved; no one remains to be saved.

John 16:2-3 says:

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the

Father, nor me.

In these verses God is teaching that spiritually to be put out of the church is the equivalent of being killed. Thus, again, in all likelihood the character of the final tribulation period will not be physical persecution.

The second way in which the final tribulation will be different from any other tribulation is that, in the history of the world, there has never been a time when people could not be saved. Even in that dark and terrible day when Christ hung on the cross, the thief was saved. There has always been the hope of salvation. At some point during the final tribulation (perhaps very close to Judgment Day), hope for the salvation of the lost will be gone. Satan will appear to have won. Regardless of how diligently believers witness, no one will respond to the true Gospel. True believers will exist as though they have been killed. The unsaved will be in bondage to sin and Satan. At some point during this period, no one will come to salvation. This fact sets apart the final tribulation from all other tribulations. Satan has always assaulted the church through persecution with false gospels, but there has been hope in the world: The hope of life eternal in Christ.

The world does not recognize this hope. The unsaved do not want salvation, but without their awareness, there is in the world the hope of salvation. Salvation is being free of eternal damnation; it is the hope for the world. The existence of the possibility of salvation is the highest blessing this world can know. The removal of the possibility of salvation is the most traumatic event. When hope is taken away and there is no program of salvation, then the world will experience the most grievous tribulation.

The awful nature of this truth can now be only sensed. Today, and throughout history, believers witness to and pray for unsaved loved ones. The hope is always present that God in His magnificent mercy will save them. If a loved one dies apparently unsaved, one clings to the possibility that, unknown to living relatives, there may have been a death-bed conversion. Thus, to live in the world with no hope of salvation is the most serious of traumas, but this is what to expect during the final tribulation period.

This truth is suggested by the language of Matthew 24:15, when the abomination of desolation overruns the church. It is suggested by II Thessalonians 2 where God speaks of the man of sin taking his seat in the temple. It is taught by Revelation 11:7 which says that the two witnesses must be killed. Revelation 13:7 teaches the same truth when it declares the saints will be overcome. In John 9:4, Jesus declares: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

Jesus has in view the work of sending the Gospel into the world. When the spiritual night of the final tribulation comes, no man can work; that is, no believer will have success in his work of evangelization.

The same truth is revealed in Revelation 7, an important chapter which is introductory to Revelation 8 and 9. The two latter chapters describe the final tribulation period in the most traumatic language, and they speak of massive devastation. It may appear that these chapters point to massive bloodletting as the chief characteristic of the final tribulation period, but the key to understanding them is that God is speaking in parabolic language. The earthly story, described in all its horror, points to the spiritual meaning of God's judgment on the church.

In Revelation 7, God speaks of the nature of the final tribulation period in the parabolic language of Revelation 8 and 9. In this context He prophesies, in Revelation 7:2-3:

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

The four angels and their activity of destruction are also spoken of in Revelation 9:15:

And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

The Bible is its own interpreter; thus, it must be learned what the Bible means by "the third part," which is frequently found in these chapters.

The third part of men is a parabolic phrase which points to the church. The number is taken from Zechariah 13 where God indicates that the world is symbolically divided into two groups of people. The unsaved are typified by the number two thirds and the saved by the number one third. Zechariah 13:8-9:

And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off, and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, the LORD is my God.

The one third are God's people. They have been refined in that Christ has endured hell for them. Thus,

they are clean before God. In Revelation 8 and 9 the one third are pictured as being dead. This truth was seen in Revelation 11:7, 13:7, and 13:15. True believers have been killed in that they are no longer the fountain of life. No longer can anyone be saved after hearing their testimony. They have been killed in that the external, corporate representation of the body of Christ (the church), has been overrun with false gospels; it, too, is spiritually dead.

Revelation 8 and 9 can be understood only when it is realized that references to one third in the earthly story point to the body of believers in the heavenly meaning. God points in Revelation 8 to:

<u>The third part of the</u>	<u>In verse</u>
Trees	7
Sea	8
Creatures	9
Ships	9
Rivers	10
Waters	11
Sun	12
Moon	12
Stars	12
Day	12

Revelation 9:15 speaks of the third part of men. In each reference to the third part, death and destruction are in view. The figures of speech (trees, sea, creatures, ships, rivers, etc.), can be shown in their context to represent the body of believers which is called the church. These two chapters can be understood only when it is realized that they discuss the final tribulation period, after the church has been judged and no one can become saved. The death of the third part of man must be understood in the same way as the death of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:7.

In Revelation 9:15, "an hour, and a day, and a month and a year" means that this will be accomplished in the fullness of time. The figure is similar to that in Galatians 4:10, where reference is made to the ceremonial law: "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years."

The ceremonial laws pointed to the first coming of Christ. Our Savior was to come at a special moment in history, called the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4).

The emphasis of the ceremonial laws served as earthly stories illustrating the heavenly meaning of various aspects of the Gospel message. For example, the sacrifice of animals pointed to Christ as our sacrifice. The burnt offerings were types of Christ as our burnt offering.

Time was of the essence in God's salvation program. Rigorous laws dictated when feast days were to be observed. These precise times anticipated God's precise timetable for the coming of Christ. For example, when Jesus hung on the cross as the Passover Lamb, the priests in the temple were killing the lambs that were to be eaten as part of the Passover Feast. When God poured out the Holy Spirit to begin His program to evangelize the world, it was on the same day that the nation of Israel celebrated the Feast of Pentecost, which was a feast pointing to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Revelation 7:2 and 3:

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

In these verses, God is saying that the events of Revelation 8 and 9 cannot take place until all of God's servants have been sealed on their foreheads. The servants of God are the believers. They became bondservants of Christ the moment they were saved. They are called the twelve tribes of Israel because they are typified by Old Testament Israel. There is a vast number of believers who throughout time have come from every nation (Revelation 7:9). The number twelve in Revelation 12 signifies the fullness of all believers.

To be sealed on the forehead means to be saved. In Ephesians 1:13 God declares:

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,...

Sealing is on the forehead as the Father's name is written on the forehead of the 144,000 in Revelation

14:1. The forehead signifies that the mind has been renewed. The person has become born again; he has become a child of God.

Thus, Revelation 7:2-3 teaches that the terrible event recorded in Revelation 8 and 9 cannot take place until all who are to be saved have been saved. In other words, God advises us that no one will become saved during the final tribulation period. This same truth was learned from other passages.

Matthew 24, II Thessalonians 2, Revelation 13, and other passages teach that the special trauma of the final tribulation period will be twofold. First, the churches, which historically have been the bastions of the true Gospel, will be overrun by false gospels, and true believers will flee from them. By the end of the final tribulation period, it appears that no church will follow the true Gospel.

Second, the final tribulation period cannot begin until all of the elect have become saved. Consequently, during the final tribulation period no one will become saved. This will bring trauma to the world as never before experienced.

If no one will become saved during the final tribulation, what about babies born to believers during this period? God's promises are inviolate. He has promised to be a God to us and our children, has He not?

At this moment, the answer to the question of the salvation of children born to believers during the final tribulation period is uncertain. Perhaps God will shut the wombs of believers, there is ample biblical precedence for this possibility. Many husbands and wives appear physically capable of bearing children; they earnestly desire pregnancy, and yet no pregnancy occurs. In these cases, it must be that God, for His own divine purposes, has shut the wombs of these wives. This possibility exists for believing wives during the final tribulation period, and is suggested in Jeremiah 16, verses 1 and 2: "The word of the LORD came also unto me, saying, Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place."

The context of this pronouncement bears on the significance of the fact that Jeremiah is not to have sons or daughters. These chapters of Jeremiah give insights into the nature of the final tribulation; Jeremiah is a figure or picture of the believers. Jeremiah, the prophet, prophesied for forty years prior to the time Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians. It has been seen in a number of verses that Israel, under Babylonian oppression, is a picture of the church under God's judgment during the final tribulation period. Jeremiah 14:11-12 relates to the final tribulation period:

Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.

God's instruction to Jeremiah indicates there was no longer any hope of salvation for Israel. God's command to the church is to bring the Gospel. Believers should have concern for the salvation of both those within the congregation and those outside the congregation. When God commands that prayer on behalf of the unsaved is no longer to be offered, then the church's task has ended. It is no longer to be concerned with the salvation of the lost. This will be true of churches during the final tribulation period. Jeremiah 14:19-21:

Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath they soul loathed Zion? why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble! We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us.

Jeremiah, a type or figure of the church during the final tribulation period, was pleading with God, recognizing that because of the sin of the church, God had visited Israel (the corporate body of believers), with these judgments. In this context Jeremiah represents the body of believers who do not bear children. The unbelievers (those under God's wrath), will bear children, and those children will suffer the wrath of God. Jeremiah 16:3-4:

For thus saith the LORD concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land; They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.

These warnings parallel the prophecy of Matthew 24:19: "And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!"

In this verse, Jesus discusses the final tribulation period. The similarity to Jeremiah 16:3 indicates that

Jeremiah 16 provides insights into the character of the final tribulation period. One of these insights may be that true believers will not bear children during the final tribulation period.

In any case, through continued diligent study of the Bible, before and during the final tribulation period, God may reveal additional truth.

In this chapter, it was learned that the final tribulation period will not be a time of massive bloodletting. The Gospel will appear to flourish all over the world, but it will not be the true Gospel. It will be gospels of Satan. Satan, working through false prophets who look like ministers of righteousness, will rule in virtually all of the congregations. These congregations will not be used of God to bring the true Gospel to the world. They will bring a gospel that will damn the listeners to hell.

The final tribulation period will not begin until almost all of the elect are saved. It will be a time when the world has less and less hope so that following some point in time during the final tribulation period, no one can become saved. Those who were saved before the final tribulation began will patiently wait for Christ's return. That the rest of the world is in bondage and no one else will be saved – this will be trauma that has never been known.

Chapter 14 - How Long is the Final Tribulation?

Coincidentally with the saving of the last of the elect will be the apostasy in churches and denominations that should be faithful to the Bible. They will no longer bring the whole counsel of God. Instead of faithful proclamation of the truths of the Bible, they will bring many doctrines fashioned in the minds of men.

God will have rejected His church. The era will have ended. Those in the church may appear to be Godly, but no power of God will be found within them. Spiritually they will be dead. No longer will they have the commission to send forth the Gospel. Simultaneously, Satan will be loosed in the spiritual sense and his spiritual hold on the unsaved will be complete. The world will exist with no hope whatsoever. Every unsaved person will be destined for hell.

Will Believers Experience the Final Tribulation?

A period of affliction more severe than this world has ever known frightens many people. They think of tribulation as a time of great physical suffering, i.e., nuclear war or physical persecution. No one enjoys physical suffering; therefore, they cling to the idea that a good God will not let His children suffer; He will rapture them before the final tribulation period. They fail to realize, however, that when tribulation comes into the world, believers experience it as readily as the unsaved. When Jerusalem was destroyed, in horrible fashion, by the Babylonians, believers experienced the trauma of the event just as the unsaved did. Today when an earthquake, tornado, war, or famine strikes, believers experience the same hurt as the unsaved. If persecution comes, believers will frequently experience the trauma and many unbelievers will not.

Jesus said in John 16:33, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Anyone who thinks that because he believes in Jesus Christ he will be safe from grievous affliction, is not reading the Bible carefully enough.

The Bible clearly indicates that believers will be present on earth when Christ returns at the end of the world. II Thessalonians 2:1: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him." If believers are to meet Jesus when He comes, then they must be on earth. In I John 6 God declares four times that believers will be resurrected the last day. John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Verses 39, 40, and 54 repeat the assertion that believers will be resurrected the last day. John 12:48 says that the last day is Judgment Day.

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

I Thessalonians 4:17 teaches that the rapture of believers will be simultaneous with the resurrection of believers.

Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The resurrection of believers is the last day, therefore, the rapture is the last day. Thus, believers will be

present on earth until the last day. (Additional biblical proofs that believers will go through the final tribulation period are provided in detail in *The Fig Tree* and *When is the Rapture?*, written by Harold Camping, available through Family Radio.)

Thus far, nothing has even hinted that the final tribulation will take place after believers are raptured from earth. However, two verses that are used to attempt to prove that believers will be raptured before the final tribulation are I Thessalonians 5:9 and Revelation 3:10. These verses will be studied.

In I Thessalonians 5:9 God declares: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Some theologians attempt to equate God's wrath, spoken of in this verse, with the final tribulation. They fail to realize that the wrath of God is eternal damnation. Most believers have lived and died and were never threatened by the final tribulation. Until saved, they were threatened by eternal damnation. This is the awful calamity from which believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are saved. The closing verses of Revelation 6 disclose the truth of the awful moment at the end of time, when the unsaved must face "the wrath of the Lamb" for "the great day of his wrath has come." I Thessalonians 5:9 cannot speak of the final tribulation period.

Revelation 3:10 informs us:

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Theologians may carelessly equate the "hour of temptation" with the final tribulation period, but they fail to realize that the Greek word *pierasmos*, translated "temptation" and "try" in this verse, is **never** translated "affliction" nor "tribulation" nor "trouble." It is **always** translated "temptation" or "trial" or "testing." The Greek word *thlipsis*, translated "affliction" or "tribulation" or "trouble" is **never** translated "testing" nor "temptation" nor "trial." Thus, the final tribulation period cannot be in view in this verse.

The "hour of temptation" is Judgment Day. If someone is charged with a crime, he is brought to trial, where his guilt or innocence is determined. Judgment Day is the hour of trial when all the unsaved must stand trial. Revelation 3:10 would be more easily understood had it been translated "hour of trial." Believers are not brought to trial. John 5:24 declares that believers do not come into judgment. The Greek word *krisis*, translated "condemnation" is also translated "judgment" in Matthew 12:18, 20, 36, and 41. Romans 8:1 assures believers that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

This same truth is in the prayer Jesus taught the disciples. The petition "lead us not into temptation, [Greek *pierasmos*] but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13), is a prayer for salvation, i.e., deliver me from the terrible event of Judgment Day which I so rightly deserve. Of course, deliverance is an accomplished fact in the life of the believer.

Time Duration of the Final Tribulation

Matthew 24:29-31 teaches that the final tribulation is the last event this world faces before Judgment Day. God emphasizes that immediately after the final tribulation, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shine, and the stars will fall from heaven. The sun and the moon were placed in the sky to regulate time. When they are darkened, they can no longer govern time-time will be no more. Stars falling from heaven indicates that the universe is collapsing. These events signal the end of the world's existence.

Many theologians teach that the final tribulation period will continue for seven years. They base their conclusion on Daniel 9:27:

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

These theologians believe the seventieth seven of Daniel 9:27 is a final tribulation period that will come after Christ reigns for one thousand years on earth. However, careful Bible study reveals that both of the suppositions are false: Christ will not reign on earth for "one thousand years" and the seventieth seven of Daniel 9:27 cannot be the final tribulation period. It cannot be the final tribulation period because in the middle of the seventieth seven, sacrifice and offering cease.

For 11,000 years, beginning with Cain and Abel, sacrifices were offered. These sacrifices were types and shadows of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He offered Himself as the sacrifice, the system of sacrifices ended. Jews continued to offer sacrifices at least until AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed, but the sacrifices had no meaning. The great sacrifice that ended all sacrifices was Jesus, when He went to the

cross in AD 33 Therefore, the middle of the seventieth week – when sacrifices and offerings ended – can be only AD 33 Regardless of anything else taught by Daniel 9:27, the middle of the seventieth seven must be AD 33 This period of time cannot be the final tribulation.

The Bible does give information on the duration of time of this traumatic event. It would be profitable to search this out in the Bible.

Duration of Final Tribulation Period Shortened

In Mark 13:20, God teaches:

And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

This verse unquestionably speaks of the timetable of the final tribulation period, because the verse preceding it declares:

For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.

The Bible clearly teaches that the final tribulation will come but that the duration of the tribulation will be shortened. One might ask, What does it mean that it will be shortened? A possible answer to this question is found in the Old Testament. God anticipated the final tribulation when He dealt with ancient Israel. The destruction of Judah by Babylon points to God's judgment on the church near the end of time. God's judgment on the church is the main event of the final tribulation period. Matthew 24 discusses the final tribulation in detail. Verse 20: "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day." The context suggests that the words "sabbath" and "winter" are synonyms for the final tribulation period. God is apparently warning believers to pray that they may not have to face the final tribulation. For two thousand years since the cross believers have lived and died and not experienced the final tribulation period. Only believers who live at the time of the end of the world will experience the final tribulation period.

Final Tribulation Period Is Called A Sabbath

In the Old Testament, "sabbath" can be a synonym for the final tribulation period. In the New Testament, "winter" is a synonym for the final tribulation period.

The end of the independent nation Judah began in 609 BC, when the God-fearing, upright king Josiah was killed during a battle with Egypt (II Chronicles 35:24-27). Judah came under the rule of Egypt (II Chronicles 36:1-4), and four years later (605 BC), the king of Babylon ruled Judah until Judah was destroyed (587 BC). Many people of the land were taken captive into Babylon. Their captivity continued until 539 BC when Babylon was conquered by the Medes and the Persians, led by King Cyrus. Cyrus decreed that the Jewish captives be permitted to return to the land of Israel.

The captivity of Judah by Babylon and the subsequent reign of Persia is recorded in II Chronicles 36:20-21,

And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons, until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

In this citation God speaks of the seventy years from 609 BC to 539 BC as a sabbath. This seventy-year sabbath is a type or figure of the final tribulation period, which must be the reference God has in view in Matthew 24:20 when He warns, "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day."

The final tribulation period should encompass seventy years, but God says that the period will be shortened. It is definitely God's plan that believers are to be present on this earth when Christ returns. The average life expectancy is about seventy years (Psalm 90:10), and no one is to become saved during the final tribulation period; therefore, if this dreadful period continued for seventy years, at the end of it, virtually no believers would be left on the earth. Thus, God plans to shorten the final tribulation period.

The Number 23 and the Final Tribulation Period

Another time span suggested by the Bible is twenty-three years. This is the length of time from the death of King Josiah, in 609 BC, until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, in 587 BC, which is

twenty-three years if both 609 BC and 587 BC are included.

The number twenty-three is prominently identified with the final tribulation period. This is demonstrated in I Corinthians 10, which records a tragedy that enveloped ancient Israel when they were to cross the Jordan River and go into Canaan, the promised land. Their entrance into the promised land typifies the completion of salvation. The forty years that Israel wandered in the wilderness is a picture of the believer's life on earth. Believers are strangers and pilgrims, waiting for the completion of salvation which will occur at the end of the world. Israel wandered in the wilderness, waiting for the time when they could enter the land of Canaan, which was to be their permanent home.

Before they entered the promised land, a tragedy occurred. Numbers 25 indicates 24,000 died in the plague. I Corinthians 10:8 states: "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." The startling information in this statement is the number 23,000. In Numbers 25:9 God informs us: "And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand."

There is, of course, no contradiction. The I Corinthians 10 citation says that 23,000 died in one day (obviously, the worst day of the plague), and the next day 1,000 died, for a total of 24,000.

God calls attention to the number twenty-three in I Corinthians 10. The judgment of God upon ancient Israel, before they entered the promised land, parallels the final tribulation, when God will judge the church before our salvation is completed. God definitely identifies the number twenty-three with the final tribulation period.

The Tribe of Levi: A Picture of the Unsaved During the Final Tribulation

One other Old Testament citation that features the number twenty-three relates to the tribe of Levi. God uses the tribe of Levi in two ways to picture things to come. First, as a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Numbers 3:12-13:

And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine: for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast; mine shall they be: I am the LORD.

In this context, the firstborn of Egypt, who died in the plague, are a figure of the human race that will come under judgment because of their sins. In these verses God indicates that the Levites are a substitute for the firstborn of the nation of Israel. Christ is the substitute who endured hell on behalf of the believers; therefore, Christ in the atonement is typified by the tribe of Levi.

Many years later, as recorded in Numbers 26:62, God again speaks of the tribe of Levi:

And those that were numbered of them were twenty and three thousand, all males, from a month old and upward: for they were not numbered among the children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given them among the children of Israel.

In this citation God is emphasizing two important truths: the Levites had no inheritance among the children of Israel and there were 23,000 of them. This relates to the church near the end of the world, which will have no eternal inheritance with Christ, and includes all who are unsaved at the beginning of the final tribulation. Corporately or externally they are a part of the Israel of God, but eternally they have no inheritance with Christ because they remain unsaved.

In this context God features the tribe of Levi as a picture of the unsaved. God again features the number twenty-three in a way that relates to the final tribulation period.

A Shipwreck Points to the Final Tribulation Period

It has been learned that Matthew 24:20 indicates that believers are to pray that their flight not be in winter or on a sabbath day. In this context sabbath and winter are synonyms for the final tribulation period.

In Acts 27 the Bible gives an account of a shipwreck in which the Apostle Paul was involved. Statements in this account show that it is an historical parable typifying the final tribulation period. The Bible informs us that the Apostle Paul along with other prisoners, soldiers, and sailors were en route to Rome. They arrived in a seaport near the city of Lasea at the beginning of winter (verse 8). This haven was not a good place to spend the winter, and even though it had become dangerous to sail (verse 9), they sailed on. They hoped to reach a better port, Phenice, where they would stay for the winter (verses 12-13). While at sea, a great storm, called Euroclydon, arose and caused the ship to be wrecked. However, not one of the

276 men aboard was lost; all were saved.

The ship is a picture of the church during the final tribulation period. Spiritually the church will have no haven because God will bring judgment against it. Spiritually the church will be in winter, because it will be a time when no new vegetation (new believers) will come forth. The word tempest, in verse 20, "no small tempest lay on us," is the same Greek word in Matthew 24:20, where it is translated winter. By the word winter, God is tying acts 27 to the final tribulation period.

The Storm Typifies Satan's Attack on the Church

The storm, Euroclydon, identifies with the Greek word *eurochoros*, which is used only in Matthew 7:13, and is translated "broad": "broad is the way that leadeth to destruction." A storm came up on the sea of Galilee and caused the disciples to fear their ship would sink. Jesus stilled the storm on the sea of Galilee. Both storms are a figure of Satan attempting to destroy the church. However, Satan cannot frustrate God's plan to build His church. In Acts 27 the storm was not stilled because it is God's plan that during the final tribulation period the church will be destroyed.

Historical parables incorporated into Acts 27 are: 1) the ship was destroyed as the era of the New Testament church will end during the final tribulation period. 2) None of the 276 people on board lost their lives in the shipwreck, and not one true believer in the church will be spiritually lost during the final tribulation period.

The number 276, which God carefully includes in the biblical account, is a significant number and has an unusual characteristic. Only one other number has this unusual characteristic; it is the number 153.

153 Fish are Caught

In John 21 God records the account of the disciples casting their net into the sea and catching a great number of fish. Jesus had said earlier, "I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Therefore, this great number of fish is a picture of all believers.

In this account, God discloses that there were 153 fish in the net (verse 11). The number 153 is unusual; it has a characteristic few numbers have. The numbers $9 \times 17 = 153$, or $3 \times 3 \times 17 = 153$. Also, all the numbers that come before 17 added together equal 153. Thus, $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10 + 11 + 12 + 13 + 14 + 15 + 16 + 17 = 153$. God is surely focusing attention on the number 17. God uses the number 3 or 3×3 and the number 17 in the Bible to illustrate spiritual truth, that is why God included in the biblical account that there were 153 fish.

The number three, if employed in the Bible to illustrate spiritual truth, signifies that God's purpose will be accomplished. Three times, Jesus prayed in the garden that the cup of God's wrath might pass from Him, but it was God's purpose that He must drink it. Three times, Paul prayed for removal of the thorn in his flesh, but it was God's purpose that He endure it. Likewise, it is God's purpose that these fish (the believers) be caught.

Number Seventeen Signifies the Kingdom of God

The number seventeen evidently illustrates heaven or the completion of salvation. Jacob, a type of the church, at the age of 130 came under the care of Joseph, a type of Christ. Jacob died at the age of 147, having lived seventeen years under Joseph's care. The seventeen years is a picture of the salvation which reaches into eternity and which is enjoyed under the care of Christ as Savior.

A second illustration of the use of the number seventeen to signify heaven is in Jeremiah 32. The nation of Israel (Judah) is about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. Jerusalem will be ravished, and many Jews will be taken captive. In this sad context God instructs the prophet Jeremiah to buy a field in the land of Benjamin. Jeremiah 32:6-9:

And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel, the son of Shallum thine uncle, shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth; for the right of redemption is thine to buy it.

So Hanameel, mine uncle's son, came to me in the court of the prison, according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

And I bought the field of Hanameel, my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver.

The purchase of this field for seventeen shekels was evidence that Israel would again occupy the land which God had given to them. Jeremiah 32:14-15 declares:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days: For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.

The return to the land points to God's entire salvation program, as He states in Jeremiah 32:37-38:

Behold, I will gather them out of all countries whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

The land that was purchased for seventeen shekels is a type or figure of the kingdom of God that begins with salvation and continues on into eternity.

The 153 fish of John 21 represent those who are to become saved. The numbers $3 \times 3 \times 17 = 153$ represent the purpose of God to bring into His kingdom all who are to become saved. The uniqueness of the number 153 is that within it the number 17 is featured (both as $3 \times 3 \times 17 = 153$ and as $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10 + 11 + 12 + 13 + 14 + 15 + 16 + 17 = 153$ which helps to focus attention on the kingdom of God, illustrated by the number 17.

The 276 shipwrecked people are an historical parable of the end of the church and the final tribulation period. The 153 fish event anticipates the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, that is, God's program to evangelize the world. Thus, the two accounts are intimately related.

Number 276 is a Special Number

The number 276 in the Acts 27 account has a number within it that is featured the same way that the number 17 is featured within the number 153. No numbers with this unique characteristic, except the numbers 153 and 276, have been found.

The number $276 = 3 \times 4 \times 23$. It also equals the sum of all the numbers that come before 23. Thus, $276 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10 + \dots + 21 + 22 + 23$. By this unique arrangement, God focuses our attention on the number 23.

The number 3 signifies the purpose of God, and the number 4 signifies universality. The Bible illustrates this, for example, by the four points of the compass. People will come from the north, and the south, the east, and the west into the kingdom of God. The number 23 is identified with the final tribulation period, when God's judgment comes upon the church. Therefore, one can understand why God gives the precise number 276 in the Acts 27 account: the ship represents the church. During the final tribulation, the era of the New Testament church will end, i.e., the ship is entirely destroyed.

True believers within the church, represented by the 276 people aboard the ship, are saved. Not one aboard the ship was lost. Salvation is eternal; nothing, not even the end of the church, can separate the believer from the love of God. The number 276, which equals $3 \times 4 \times 23$, represents the purpose of God that in all the world the believers who are present during God's judgment on the external church – during the final tribulation period – cannot lose their salvation. They are eternally secure.

The 3-1/2 Days of Revelation 11

Another biblical account that dramatically focuses on the final tribulation is found in Revelation 11. God presents two witnesses who witness for 1,260 days. These two witnesses represent the church as it brings the Gospel throughout the New Testament era. The 1,260 days, which equals forty-two months or three and a half years, is a figure taken from Daniel 9:27, where the middle of the seventieth seven was the time of the cross, when sacrifice and offering ceased. The last half of Daniel 9:27 says that the end of the seventieth seven relates to "the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

The overspreading of abominations surely refers to the final tribulation and the consummation can refer only to the end of the world and Judgment Day. Thus, the entire New Testament era, from the time of the cross to Judgment Day, is typified by 1,260 days or 3 1/2 years. During this time the church witnesses.

Revelation 11 instructs us that after the two witnesses have finished their testimony, they will be killed and "their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (verse 8). At the end of the 3 1/2 days, they became alive again and ascended up into heaven.

It was discovered earlier in this study that the death of the two witnesses signifies that the final tribulation has begun. All of the elect have become saved. The church has become apostate; therefore, its mandate to preach the Gospel has ended. No one else in all the world will become saved.

The resurrection of the two witnesses signifies the end of the world when believers are raptured to be with Christ. Thus, the 3 1/2 days, during which the two witnesses are dead, represent the final tribulation period.

Thus far, three numbers point to the time duration of the final tribulation period: seventy years, twenty-three years, and three-and-a-half days. It must be learned which of these time periods is in view in Matthew 24:22, where God declares those days will be shortened.

It has been determined that seventy years is too long a period, three and a half days appears to be too short a period, and twenty-three years might be possible. It will be discovered that none of these time periods is the actual duration of the final tribulation period. Biblical evidence tells how long this dreadful event will continue. However, these three time periods – 70 years, 23 years, and 3 1/2 days – are intimately related by a common denominator.

A Common Denominator

The number 84 is common to both 70 years and 3 1/2 days. There are 840 months in 70 years, and there are 84 hours in 3 1/2 days. The number 84 is significant because it is the product of 3 x 4 x 7. The number 3 signifies the purpose of God; the number 4 signifies universality; the number 7 signifies the perfection of God. Thus, 3 x 4 x 7, numbers found in the 70 years and in the 3 1/2 days, represent the final tribulation period and signify the purpose of God that in His perfect timetable the final tribulation will take place.

The number twenty-three in the twenty-three years also has the number 84 or 3 x 4 x 7 as a common denominator. In 23 years there are exactly 8,400 days. Multiply 23 times 365, add 5 to the total to include leap year days, and it equals exactly 8,400 days. God has tied together 70 years, 23 years, and 3 1/2 days in a most interesting way. Each of these time spans represents the final tribulation period.

Another Look at the Little Horn of Daniel 8

God has given another citation that relates to the time duration of the final tribulation; it is found in Daniel 8. Earlier in the study reference was made to the little horn of Daniel 8. Daniel 8:8 refers to a great horn that becomes broken. Verse 21 teaches that this symbolizes the first king of Greece, Alexander the Great, whose brilliant leadership resulted in Greece becoming a worldwide power. He died about 300 years before Christ, but God continues to recognize the Greeks as representative of all the nations of the world until the end of the world. This is seen in verses 21 and 22:

And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

The number four indicates universality, or the entire world. The New Testament recognizes this Grecian reference to all the kingdoms of the world, it repeatedly uses the phrase Jews and Greeks (cf., Acts 14:1, 18:4, 19:10, 19:17, 20:21, I Corinthians 1:22, 23, 24), to distinguish between the blood descendants of Abraham and the rest of the world. For centuries the Roman empire was the dominant nation of the world, but God does not use the phrase Jews and Romans. In agreement with the prophecy of Daniel 8, God uses the phrase Jews and Greeks.

Daniel 8 explains that the little horn, who is Satan, comes out of the nations of the world. Verse 9 declares "out of one of them came forth a little horn." God explains who this little horn is and when he will appear in verse 23:

And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

"When the transgressors are come to the full," can refer only to the end of time when God comes in Judgment. God explains that this little horn, Satan, will be a king of fierce countenance who understands dark

sentences. To understand dark sentences is a phrase that identifies with understanding the Bible. For example, Psalm 78:1-3 declares:

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old; Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

Thus, the little horn, the king of fierce countenance, comes through preachers and theologians who have a substantial understanding of the Gospel. The little horn is Satan: he comes through teachers that present a gospel that is so close to the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived if that were possible.

II Corinthians 11:14-15 addresses Satan's activities with false gospels:

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

It Looks Like Satan Will Win

Daniel 8 explains Satan's success in causing the true Gospel to be conquered. Verses 24 and 25 prophesy:

And his power shall be mighty but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many; he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

This will be the situation during the final tribulation period, when Satan ravishes churches with gospels that feature signs and wonders (Matthew 24:24). Satan's success in overcoming the true Gospel is further explicated in Daniel 8:10-12:

And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them. Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered.

In the phrase "daily sacrifice," in the King James Bible, the word sacrifice is *italicized*, which means that it was not in the original language of the Bible. It was inserted by the translators because they believed that sacrifice was the daily activity that was taken away by the anti-Christ or the little horn. However, the word sacrifice cannot be a correct understanding, because sacrifice ended when Christ hung on the cross. He was the completion and the fulfillment of every sacrifice.

The Daily Candlestick

The daily that will be taken away by the activity of Satan is the daily candlestick. It is important to understand this because it will give understanding of the duration of the final tribulation period. The Hebrew word for daily in Daniel 8 is the word *tamid*. It is translated into the word continually in Leviticus 24:2-4:

Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive, beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually. Without the veil of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning, before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually.

The candlestick which was to burn continually or daily in the temple represented the light of the Gospel. The temple was a picture of the church, or body of believers, that Christ came to build. Believers are assigned the task of being lights in the world; they share the Gospel. The Gospel was to go into the world without ceasing, that is, it was to go into the world continuously, until the elect become saved. Then, according to God's plan, the light would go out. This is what Daniel 8:11 means. Satan, the little horn, the anti-Christ, working through gospels that feature signs and wonders, will overwhelm the church; it will no longer bring the true Gospel. The era of the New Testament church will have come to an end. The abomination of desolation will be standing in the holy place.

Two Thousand Three Hundred Days

Daniel 8, verses 13 and 14 declare:

Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.

This is the time reference that was sought. As was learned, the number twenty-three is intimately associated with the final tribulation period. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the number of days be 2,300. It must be determined whether this is a symbolic number or a real number. A period of 2,300 days would be approximately six years and four months. In the phrase "two thousand three hundred days," the Hebrew word translated days is actually a word that should be translated "evening morning." This is reinforced by the language of verse 26:

And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days.

The phrase "the evening and the morning" is fairly unusual in the Bible. Ordinarily when the Bible speaks of the passage of a day, the morning is put before the evening; a day progresses from morning to evening. God reversed this order in Daniel 8 and mentioned evening ahead of morning. The word daily in Daniel 8:11-12, explains why. It was discovered that the daily had reference to the candlestick that burned continuously in the temple. Leviticus 24:3-4 also speaks about the candlestick burning continuously in the temple, and in the same sequence: evening precedes morning:

Without the vail of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning, before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually.

In the historical context, the focus of evening to morning is that the lamp was to burn through the night. Spiritually this is an important focus. The light of the Gospel is to go into a world that is under the dominion of darkness. Numerous New Testament verses bear on this concept. When the candlestick is taken away, the unsaved world remains in the darkness of sin and the darkness of Satan's dominion.

The point is that the candlestick was to burn in the temple each and every day. The passage of a day encompasses 24 hours; therefore, the 2,300 evening mornings of Daniel 8 **probably** represent 2,300 days, each twenty-four hours long.

Evening and Morning Days of Creation

An important reference to further substantiate the idea that "evening morning" points to literal twenty-four-hour days is Genesis 1:3-5:

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

God's words, "let there be light" and "the evening and the morning were the first day," teach that light was created on the first day of creation. Spiritually this historical event was looking forward to the time when Jesus would come as the light of the world and to the New Testament era when the light of the Gospel would be sent into all the world.

The word evening before the word morning is the same sequence as in Leviticus 24 and Daniel 8. This can be expected because all three passages spiritually relate to the Gospel going into the world: Genesis 1 anticipates the Gospel going into the world. Leviticus 24 indicates the Gospel is to go forth continuously. Daniel 8 says there will be a time when the Gospel light will be extinguished.

The evenings and mornings referred to in Genesis 1 were twenty-four-hour days. This is known because on the fourth day God created the sun and the moon to serve as the timekeepers. Therefore, each day had to be twenty-four hours in length. Moreover, if the third day, when the vegetation was created, had been a period longer than twenty-four hours, then plants could not have survived through the long night that would have followed. If the evening and morning of Genesis 1 was twenty-four hours, and if the evening and morning of Leviticus 24 was twenty-four hours, then the evening and morning of Daniel 8 was also twenty-four hours.

The final tribulation period that the church and the world must face before the end of the world has been examined in detail, including its purpose, its chief character, and the time span it will encompass. Two

additional questions are relevant to this study: Will we know when we have actually come into the final tribulation period? Will there be conclusive evidence that we have indeed entered this final traumatic period, which immediately precedes the end of the world and Judgment Day?

Carefully Continue to Send Forth the Gospel

I feel compelled to warn that we must be very careful. The Bible instructs the believer to "occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13), that is, continue to witness the true Gospel as long as possible, till the last day of this earth's existence. God appears to have disclosed to us that during the last 2,300 days on earth, the earth will be experiencing a final tribulation. There may come a time when we will sense that we have come into the final tribulation period because of events in the church and in the world. However, we must not risk trying to be wiser than God. God has given considerable biblical evidence that may indicate that the end is near, but conclusions as to the timing of the end of the world are partially based on circumstantial evidence. **No statements in the Bible plainly give us sufficient information that that we can unequivocally know that this final period has arrived.**

If every congregation in a denomination which historically had no relationship to gospels that feature signs and wonders began to embrace a gospel of signs and wonders, one might strongly suspect that the world had entered the final period. If the nation of Israel were substantially destroyed, one might strongly suspect that we had entered the final dreadful period. If either or both of these events occur, continue to maintain great caution.

Wonderfully, the closing events of the end of the world are in God's hand. God has cared for the world – and especially for those who have become His children – since its creation approximately 13,000 years ago. Be sure that God will care for this world and His children to the last day.

Chapter 15 - Can People Become Saved during the Final Tribulation?

In the first edition of this book it was repeatedly asserted that the beginning of the final tribulation period would be coincidental with the fact that all of the elect of God will have become saved. Considerable evidence appears to support this conclusion.

In Daniel 8, for example, God speaks of a time duration of 2300 evening mornings when the temple would be trodden under foot. We had identified this period with the final tribulation period when the church will have lost its commission to preach the Gospel. It apparently will have lost its commission not only because it will have become apostate but also because all who were predestined to become saved (the elect) will have become saved.

Moreover, we looked at Revelation 11 which speaks of the two witnesses being killed. The Bible clearly shows that these two witnesses are the church, which consists of all the congregations that are commissioned to bring the Gospel. The killing of the two witnesses surely appears to identify with a cessation of bringing the Gospel. This in turn appears to indicate that all of the elect will have become saved before this dreadful event. In this setting we identified the three and a half days during which the dead bodies of the two witnesses are on display as the final tribulation period.

Furthermore, when we looked at Revelation rather carefully we learned that the dreadful events spoken of in Revelation 8 and Revelation 9 could not take place until all the servants of God had been sealed on their foreheads. Since we identified the events spoken of in Revelation 8 and 9 with the final tribulation period, and since the sealing of people on their foreheads had to do with their becoming saved, we logically concluded that these chapters were teaching that during the final tribulation period no one could become saved.

Even though none of the above evidence is absolute, nevertheless it is very strong circumstantial evidence that during the final tribulation period no one could become saved.

However, as we continue to study the Bible we discover additional evidence that was not considered in the first edition of this book. Because we must look carefully at all evidence before we arrive at a conclusion we should consider at this time some additional information the Bible offers. We should then attempt to harmonize the foregoing passages with this additional evidence and thus hope to come closer to an accurate Biblical conclusion.

The Teaching of Zechariah 14

Let us first consider a passage in Zechariah. In Chapter 14:2, God gives us a description of the final tribulation period. He declares:

For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

In this verse Jerusalem can only be the church that is assaulted by Satan. It is during the final tribulation that Satan is so successful that the city is taken. He is the victor. The half city that goes into captivity represents all who are snared by Satan into false gospels. The residue of the people that are not cut off from the city represent all the saved who cannot lose their salvation as a result of having been vanquished by Satan.

Even as Revelation 20 speaks of this assault by Satan as the nations from the four quarters of the earth coming against the beloved city, so in this verse God speaks of all the nations coming to battle against Jerusalem. And even as Revelation 20 then declares that fire came down from heaven and destroyed them, so verse 3 of Zechariah 14 declares: "Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle."

We thus would conclude that all who oppose the true Gospel during the final tribulation come under God's judgment with no hope of salvation. In other words, it would appear that these verses are also teaching that during the final tribulation period no one can become saved. But then we read Zechariah 14:15 where God discloses:

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

This most significant verse is surely teaching that some of those who were actively fighting against the true Gospel during the final tribulation period did become saved. This is so because the only ones who worship the King are the believers. Therefore, there must be some who do become saved during the final tribulation period. Surely, these verses lead us to this possibility.

Is Salvation Possible to the Very End?

The question logically follows: Is salvation possible all the way to Judgment Day? This could be suggested by Matthew 24:14 where we read: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

There is a strong implication in this verse that the task of bringing the Gospel must continue all the way to the end of time. It does not say that people will become saved all the way to the last day of the earth's existence, but it surely appears to say that there is to be no cessation of the witnessing.

Could the word "end" mean all the events close to the end of the world including the very end of the world itself? In that event the final tribulation period would be included in the phrase "the end."

This is possible although strictly speaking the end is when Christ comes again. More likely we are to understand this verse to mean that even though the church loses its commission to bring the Gospel at some point during the final tribulation period, nevertheless the believers are to continue to attempt to be a witness all the way to the day of Christ's return.

But if this is so, what about the verse that says that night is coming when no man can work. Jesus declares in John 9:4, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

This verse could be speaking of a short period of spiritual night before Judgment Day. This could be all or part of the final tribulation period. But it could also be speaking of the time when the end of the world has come and Judgment Day has arrived. Insofar as the task of sending forth the Gospel is concerned, when Judgment Day comes it will be spiritual night time because the time has ended for the sending forth of the Gospel. Obviously no one will be able to continue to preach the Word when all the believers have been caught up in the air to be with Christ.

The parable of the pounds recorded in Luke 19 also echoes the idea that the believers are to continue working until the end of time. In verse 13 we read: "And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy until I come." We are certain that the word "occupy" means to work as

servants of Christ in this world. Thus, the phrase, "occupy until I come," appears to emphasize that believers are to witness until the last day.

Furthermore, we must remember that no matter how bad the situation became with ancient Israel as God brought devastating judgments upon them, there was always a witness in their midst. An outstanding example of this is the witnessing of Jeremiah while Israel was being destroyed by Babylon. The situation became so bad that Jeremiah was told in Jeremiah 7:16: "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee." And yet Jeremiah was told to continue to witness to them.

Moreover, when God ended His relationship with ancient national Israel at the time Jesus went to the cross, God still had a witness among them. That is, there were Jews who continued to witness even though the New Testament church, which began at Pentecost, had not yet begun. Consider Mary Magdalene, for example, who was commanded by the resurrected Jesus to, "go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your father; and to my God, and your God."

Thus, even though Israel as a congregation no longer had an official relationship to nor mandate from God after Christ died, individual Jews continued to do God's work.

When is the Last of the Elect Saved?

In the first edition of this book we took the position that the killing of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 and the completion of the sealing of the believers as spoken of in Revelation 7 were events that took place at the *beginning* of the final tribulation period. That this took place at the *beginning* of the final tribulation period was a conclusion that is not necessarily correct and surely is not required by these two passages.

In Revelation 11 the bodies of the witnesses who are killed are exposed to the mocking gaze of the world for three and a half days. While we saw that these three and a half days definitely relate to the final tribulation period, they do not necessarily have to include the entire 2300 days of this period. Technically speaking, they could be a literal three and a half days at the close of this period or they could include some other time period within the 2300 days. It must, of course, be the last part of the 2300 days if it is a shorter period than 2300 days.

Likewise, the completion of the sealing of the believers as disclosed in Revelation 7 could be as late as three and a half days before the end of the final tribulation period or it could be at some other time within the 2300 days.

In other words, the idea that some salvation of the elect will take place during the final tribulation period is not contrary to the Bible.

One verse that could strongly imply there will be salvation of the elect during the final tribulation period is verse 22 of Matthew 24: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

Earlier in the study we concluded that this verse could be teaching that the 2300 days of the final tribulation period are considerably shorter than the 23 year and 70 year Old Testament periods, which typified the final tribulation period. It was suggested that so few would become saved during the final tribulation period that if the duration of the final trauma were too long, most believers by normal life expectancy would have died and relatively few would remain alive on earth at the time of Christ's return.

But there is another possible understanding of this verse. As we look at it very carefully we see that one of the key words is "saved." This word almost always signifies the fact of salvation. Thus, the phrase "no flesh should be saved," effectively says that no salvation could take place. This verse very definitely could be teaching that it is God's intention to save some during the final tribulation period, but there may be a time during this period when no one else could be saved.

God declares "for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." The shortening of the period need not necessarily relate to a period shorter than 23 years or 70 years. It could relate to the 2300 days. Let us consider this possibility.

The 2300 Days are Shortened

From Daniel 8 we learned that in all likelihood the duration of the final tribulation period will be 2300 days, but when we read Matthew 24:22 we discover that those days are to be shortened; and they are to be shortened for the elect's sake.

Could it be that at the beginning of the final tribulation period as described in Daniel 8 many of the elect of God have not yet been saved, and therefore, to ensure their salvation God shortens the 2300 days to a somewhat lesser time period as suggested by Revelation 11? The shortened time period could be as short as three and a half days or as long as any other time period that is shorter than 2300 days.

While Satan's assault on the church as set forth in Zechariah 14:2 and Revelation 20:8-9 encompasses the entire period of 2300 days, the full trauma and result of this assault will not be experienced until well into the final tribulation period. Thus, it appears that salvation continues to be possible well into the final tribulation period. Only during the last part of the final tribulation period will salvation no longer be possible. This scenario surely accords with Matthew 24:22, which declares that except those days be shortened, no flesh could be saved. And if this is so, then the sealing of the believers reported in Rev. 7 would be completed at some point within the final 2300 day period. Then, too, the events described in Rev. 8 and Rev. 9 would begin at the same point in time and continue to the end of time. Moreover, the killing of the two witnesses of Rev. 11 would occur at the same point during final tribulation period. Thus, while the final tribulation period officially begins 2300 days before the end of time, but the last of the elect will not be saved until some point in time that is well into this 2300 days. If this is so then the full trauma of the final tribulation period will be delayed until that point in time.

A question can logically be asked: "What is the precise nature of the final trauma of this period?" As we learned in this study, it could be the simple fact that there will come a time within this period when no one can become saved. It may be as simple as that. But we can know for sure that God will save each and every one who is predestined to salvation. Nothing can stand in the way of this. Moreover, as we have seen, even though the church may finally lose its commission to bring the Gospel, it appears that as Jeremiah witnessed to Israel and Babylon while Israel was being destroyed, we can expect that right to the very end there will be a witnessing voice here and there. It appears that this will be true all the way to the last day even though the last of the elect may have become saved some days, months, or years earlier.

One thing is certain: We must not become too dogmatic concerning the events of the final tribulation period. There may be many surprises. For example, we know that the Bible has identified the nation of Israel as a type or figure of the New Testament church. Suppose it is God's plan to have them simultaneously destroyed with the New Testament church. What impact, if any, would this have on the trauma of the final tribulation period? Indeed, there is much we do not know.

Summary of Chapter 15

Our present knowledge of what may happen in connection with the final tribulation period can be summarized as follows.

1. There will be a period of great tribulation that will end with the return of Christ and the end of the world.
2. In God's timetable it appears that in its overall nature it will encompass a period of 2300 days, which is approximately six years and four months.
3. At least going into this period of time and for some time during this period, God will continue to save.
4. It appears that the chief characteristic of this period will be Satan's assault on the church as he comes with false gospels. This will coincide with increased spiritual blindness coming upon the leaders in the congregations.
5. It appears that at some time within this period the congregations of the world will become so apostate that God will take away the churches' commission, that is, they will no longer be used of God to bring people to salvation. This would coincide with the salvation of the last of the elect.
6. Even though the churches' time has come to an end, believers are to remain in a congregation unless it definitely has become a false gospel.
7. Even though the church may lose its commission to send out the Gospel, it appears that individual believers are to continue to witness to the world until the end of time.
8. The final tribulation is a time of tribulation that has never before been experienced on earth. It could be that this is primarily or entirely a result of the fact that a time will come when salvation is no longer possible. But it may include other events still unknown to us.
9. Apparently the heavy trauma of this period is to be delayed to some point in time within the

final tribulation period and is not to encompass the entire 2300 days.

10. How other events in the world, such as the possible destruction of Israel, impact the trauma of this period is unknown.

11. Whatever happens, we know that God is absolutely in control. He has a perfect plan for the events that lead up to the end of the world.

12. Regardless of how difficult things become either spiritually or physically or both, no true believer will lose his salvation.

Before we finish this study, we should look at the plague of AIDS that is presently ravishing the world. Was it anticipated anywhere in the Bible? Is it, too, an end-time phenomenon? We will consider this in our final chapter.

Chapter 16 - AIDS

For the last several years the eyes of the world have been increasingly riveted on a deadly plague, a disease that has been named "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" or AIDS. It is an awful disease, and there is little likelihood of a cure in the foreseeable future. It may have been diagnosed in the past as a rare disease, but in the last few years it has afflicted people by the thousands.

AIDS particularly afflicts homosexuals and through homosexuals it appears to have spread to many parts of the world. It is exceedingly contagious. It has spread from homosexuals to many who are sexually promiscuous, to some who have received transfusions of AIDS-tainted blood, and to some from infected needles. Babies of diseased parents are vulnerable. As with all plagues, the innocent suffer with the guilty.

Disease resulting from sexual misconduct is not a new phenomenon. For hundreds of years, venereal diseases have scourged mankind. AIDS is unique in that it has been heavily identified with homosexual behavior. Because of its terrible nature, it has received a lot of publicity. In our land, it has such a high profile that virtually every citizen is aware of it.

AIDS: An End of the World Sign?

This plague has come when many signs seem to indicate that the end of the world is close at hand. One cannot help but wonder if it is related to the final tribulation period. Does the Bible contain language that identifies a disease like AIDS as an important ingredient of the final tribulation period?

Many biblical passages describe the character of the final tribulation period, but insofar as can be determined, none of these passages has language that specifically describes a plague like AIDS. The focus of Bible prophecy concerning the final tribulation is on the church. The AIDS plague is only incidentally in the church. AIDS is a dreadful plague that particularly assaults those outside the church where sexual perversion is rampant and where the drug culture flourishes. However, one passage in the Bible appears to contain prophecy concerning this disease, and this passage will be carefully studied to discover its relationship to end-time events.

Romans 1 discusses the fact that mankind does not want to worship God as the Creator of the universe. Verses 22 and 23:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

The result of rebellion against God has dire consequences. Verses 24 and 25 declare:

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

More specifically in verses 26 and 27 God says:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

Verses 28 through 32 complete the list of sins to which God gives people over as a result of their continuing and insistent rebellion against Him:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient: being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

The prediction of Romans 1, that God gives the wicked over to dreadful sins, has been fulfilled throughout history. At any time in the history of mankind any or all of the twenty-four sins named could be found. The heart of man is desperately wicked, mankind by nature is enslaved to sin and Satan, and the potential to grievously sin is ever present. However, God in His mercy restrains sin in the human race; ordinarily, these dreadful sins are not on display. Neighbors who may have no interest in Christ as Savior may be decent, moral, and law abiding. This does not mean that their hearts are not wicked; it is simply evidence that God restrains sin in mankind. If He did not, sin would be so rampant that mankind would destroy themselves. God in His mercy restrains sin so that the world can continue to its predestined end.

Romans 1 Points to the End of the World

When the Bible uses language that God has given people up, or given them over to awful sin, then an end is in view. When ancient Israel began to be exceedingly sinful, God was about to send judgments upon them. He did when He destroyed them by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. When the world of Noah's day became dreadfully wicked, the judgment of the flood came upon them.

In II Thessalonians 2 God speaks of the final tribulation period as a time when people will be so deceived that they will think they are serving Christ, but they will be serving Satan. In that context God indicates that He will give them a strong delusion so that they will believe a lie (II Thessalonians 2:4-12). There is evidence in the Bible that when sin multiplies, God's judgment cannot be long in coming. Thus, when God declares that He gives up the wicked to gross sin (Romans 1), it means that an end is very close. The language of Romans 1 can apply to many situations throughout history, but it especially applies to the final tribulation period.

A prophecy in these verses indicates that they are focused on the final tribulation period. Verses 26 and 27 speak of the sin of homosexuality. God indicates that there will be serious consequences in the lives of those who are guilty of this sin. He declares that they will receive "in themselves that recompense [payment] of their error [sin] which was meet [deserved]."

Ordinarily God warns that those who continue in sin will be blinded and go deeper into sin or He warns that they will come into judgment if they continue in sin. However, it is unusual for God to single out a sin and pronounce a specific judgment upon those who commit that sin. It is a warning that something special is in view.

One might wonder if the sin of homosexuality is greater than the other sins named. It is a repugnant sin, but so are fornication and murder. God does not indicate a natural consequence of such sins as fornication and murder which relate to the sin itself. Homosexuality is a terrible sin, but God is not highlighting it as an especially awful sin.

This world has existed for about 13,000 years. Except for the present time, God has not brought a specific sin-related judgment on the homosexual. Judgments of venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea have existed, but these diseases may result from any sexual immorality. They are not focused on the homosexual.

There are increasing signs that we are near the end of the world, including the fact that a homosexual runs a great risk of receiving the AIDS virus: the prophecy of Romans 1 comes alive. Practicing homosexuals are at the forefront of those under the judgment of AIDS. The warning prophecies of Romans 1 have had relevancy at any time in history. They have particular and insistent relevancy at a time when there are other signs that the final tribulation period is near.

Homosexuality and the End of Time

Two historical parables in the Bible point to the end of time and the final tribulation period and focus on

homosexuality. The first is in Genesis 19 where God describes His judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. The destruction of these cities typifies the final judgment on the world. God speaks of the men of the city demanding the right for homosexual conduct with the men who came to warn Lot of impending judgment. God is surely focusing on homosexuality in connection with the final judgment.

The second account is in Judges 19, where the man of Ephraim and his concubine, who are on their way home, are overtaken by darkness. They find shelter in the home of an aged man of the tribe of Benjamin, but, as the men of Sodom desired homosexual relations with Lot's visitors, the men of this town of Benjamin demanded homosexual conduct with this visitor. Judges 19:22:

Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.

This sad account in Judges 19 can be shown to be an historical parable that points to the final tribulation period as are the activities in and around Lot's home before the destruction of Sodom. The final consequence of Sodom's sin was the destruction of Sodom. The final consequence of the land of Benjamin's sin in Judges 19 was the almost total destruction of the tribe of Benjamin (cf., Judges 20:44-48 and Judges 21:1-3).

The sin of homosexuality has distinct end-time significance. This sin is singled out for special mention in Romans 1, and it is featured in a way in which God gives people up so the sin will be more sinful. These are definite reasons to believe that an end-time judgment is in view.

Romans 1 Predicts the Plague of AIDS

Romans 1:26 and 27 describe a judgment on the sin of homosexuality that has not been in evidence until this decade. AIDS, with its major focus on the sin of homosexuality, is a terrible plague and is evidence that the world is close to Judgment Day.

All the sins named in Romans 1 are in greater evidence in the world now than at any time in history, including fornication and murder; sexual promiscuity is rampant in all the world. When the great empire of Rome fell, a large contributing factor was the debauchery of the upper classes, but there is no evidence that debauchery characterized the masses. Today sexual debauchery cuts through every level of society.

Was there a time when a highly educated people, with a Judeo-Christian heritage such as our nation, ruthlessly murdered more than one million babies a year? When Egypt attempted to murder all the male children of the people of Israel, they were only a step from Judgment Day. When the first-born of Egypt were killed it was a picture of Judgment Day. The murder of babies in the womb emphasizes that Romans 1 points to the end of the world.

The plague of AIDS, which increasingly ravishes the world, is in all likelihood an end-time phenomenon. The major biblical focus, insofar as the final tribulation is concerned, is on the end of the church age and that salvation will no longer be possible.

Is Judgment Day Really Coming?

God warns throughout the Scriptures that Judgment Day is coming and will eventuate in eternal damnation for all unsaved sinners. Believers know that the great judgment will come at the end of the world.

To emphasize the certainty of His wrath at the end of the world, God has given examples of judgment predicted and realized. For example, God told Noah He was going to destroy the entire world by the flood, and He did. God told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom and Sodom was destroyed. God warned Israel that He was going to destroy Israel by the Assyrians; this prophecy also came true.

The problem is that for almost two thousand years, no specific judgment related to gross sins has occurred. Mankind in general pays no attention to the ancient judgments.

The statement of Romans 1 – that specific judgment will come upon the homosexual – has been unfulfilled during the almost two thousand years since it was written in the Bible. Mankind gives no heed to the multitudinous warnings in the Bible that Judgment Day is coming.

A dramatic break in the apparent inaction of God to fulfill prophecy is that the prophecy of judgment upon homosexual behavior is being fulfilled. Mysteriously, several years ago, the terrible disease AIDS appeared. God raised it up and all the world knows about it.

The explosion of AIDS, in precise agreement with the Scriptures, is a giant reminder to the world that when God predicts judgment in the Bible, judgment will come. AIDS is a case in point; it demonstrates that God means what He says.

Be assured that as this judgment on homosexual activity is taking place, so, too, all of the prophecies concerning Judgment Day will take place. Mankind attempts to mock God and contends that eternal damnation cannot be real, but the plague of AIDS demonstrates in no uncertain terms that eternal damnation is coming.

The plague of AIDS serves at least two important functions. First, it is evidence that the end of time is near. Second, it is a dramatic warning to the world that Judgment Day and eternal damnation are real.

Marvelously, there is another half of the story: God has told of the astonishing and wonderful plan that whosoever believes on Christ as Savior and Lord will escape the awful judgment of hell.

However, time is fast running out. Throughout the history of mankind, as long as a person was alive, there was the possibility of salvation. That possibility will end sometime during the final tribulation. Many current events, when looked at in the light of the Bible, appear to indicate the end of time is near. It is imperative that people everywhere become right with God by beseeching God for salvation. In the short days that lie ahead, it is imperative that Christians martial every means to warn the world that Judgment Day is coming.

Woe unto anyone who treats the subject of the final tribulation and the end of the world as an academic matter that has no reality. Woe unto anyone who rebelliously continues to go his own way and serves the world and his own lusts. Woe unto those who will not cry out to God for mercy while there is time for salvation.

This concludes the study of the final tribulation period. Many additional passages of the Bible offer evidence to prove the conclusions of this study. The biblical passages that have been offered should be sufficient to warn us that the world is in a terrible predicament. Oh, that many would take heed to the warnings of the Bible.

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Background Information

Family Radio

The following information was copied from the Family Radio Web site:

The Ministry of Family Radio

Broadcasting Christ-centered programs to the United States & around the world!

Committed to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

Family Radio is committed to the Person and salvation work of Jesus Christ as revealed in God's divine Word, the Bible. We are a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to obeying our Lord's command to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Family Radio programs include no commercial advertisements. Air time for other Christian broadcasters on Family Radio is free of charge. The ministry relies solely upon God working through listeners for the financial support of day-to-day operations. We as a ministry desire to be entirely faithful to God's divine, infallible Word, the Bible. Every effort is made to accurately present the Gospel of the Bible. In purpose and belief, we stand out from other radio and TV ministries in our faithful reliance on the Bible as the ONLY infallible authority.

First Broadcast in 1959

Family Radio was organized in 1958 under our official name, Family Stations, Inc., and began to broadcast February 4, 1959, over KEAR FM in San Francisco. Since then, God has enabled the ministry to purchase a number of powerful AM and FM stations and several smaller educational facilities and translators around the country. Our domestic broadcasts reach metropolitan areas such as Birmingham, Charleston, Chicago, Cleveland, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Omaha, Philadelphia, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

International Broadcasts

An important addition came in 1973 with the purchase of an international short-wave station, which we called WYFR, in Scituate, Massachusetts. With the use of many transmitters and antennas, the Gospel is proclaimed in ten languages from thy WYFR facility, now located in Okeechobee, Florida. In 1982, our international outreach was expanded to India and the Far East with the use of powerful transmitters in Taiwan. Family Radio has become a worldwide ministry; our broadcasts now span the globe so "That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:60).

A Diversified Outreach

In addition to the broadcasts, Family Radio offers Bible-based pamphlets and tracts to teach and exhort and other diverse means of spreading the Gospel, including the following.

Family Radio School of the Bible

Primarily a correspondence school, Family Radio School of the Bible courses are designed to help laymen and professionals to minister in the church, on the job, and at home through the study of various subjects and certificate and degree programs. The school operates on the principle of Matthew 10:8, "freely ye have received, freely give." In accordance with this principle, the FRSB does not charge tuition; it is dependent upon the generosity of students and friends.

Missionary Tours

Family Radio sponsors "Missionary Tours" which provide opportunities for staff members and listeners (at their own expense) to help spread the Gospel through tract distribution. Our ambassadors for Christ have visited cities in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia (every continent except Antarctica).

On the Internet

Our Christ-centered programs are now available worldwide, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on the Internet. Access to the Internet may be via computer or television (with the proper equipment). In addition to the programs on the Internet, Bible studies such as "The Glorious Garden of Eden" and "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9" are on our Home Page. Downloadable books include "What God Hath Joined Together" and "God's Magnificent Salvation Plan." The Internet also has our program guide, short-wave schedule, and The Bible. Tell your friends and family that they can find Family Radio on the Internet at: <http://www.familyradio.com>

Supporting Family Radio

If you believe God would have you financially support Family Radio you can send your tax-deductible gift to:

Family Radio

Oakland, CA 94621 USA

Or use our "Secure Internet Check Form!"

End of Web site information.

For biblically based answers to your questions, you can listen to the *Open Forum* on Family Radio stations in many locations in the USA on Monday through Friday evenings at 8:30-10:00 p.m. Eastern Time (5:30-7:00 p.m. Pacific Time) or call 800-322-5385 (from within the USA and Canada) during the program to ask a question or make a comment. You can also listen to live broadcasts on Family Radio's Web site at <http://www.familyradio.com/> during those hours. There are also recordings of past programs available on this Web site.

The Open Forum is translated from English into nine other languages and broadcast by short-wave radio around the world. You can also listen to prerecorded short-wave broadcasts on the Web site. Write to Family Radio at the above address to obtain a short-wave broadcasting schedule for your area or call these numbers:

Toll Free: 800-543-1495 (from within the USA and Canada)

Toll Call: 501-568-6200 (from outside the USA and Canada)

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This book was reformatted from material downloaded from the Web site of a Family Radio listener and checked for accuracy against Family Radio's printed book. This was done by two Family Radio listeners who have grown in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior over the years (with help from the questions and answers about the Bible as heard on the *Open Forum* program and other Family Radio materials) and who desire the same for others.

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