

The Fig Tree:

An Analysis of the Past, Present and Future of National Israel – Harold Camping

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Editing Notes:

1. The 1998 printed edition of *The Fig Tree* was reformatted into this Internet edition by M. E. Lee and G. D. Mittelstadt in November 1999 to facilitate downloading and printing of this important book.
2. The 1998 printed edition of *The Fig Tree* by Family Stations, Inc. includes a section entitled "A Thief in the Night and the Rapture" in **Chapter 14** after "Restraint of Sin and the Rapture" and also in **Chapter 16** after "What about Acts 1:6?". The repeated section was removed from **Chapter 16** in this Internet edition.
3. The 1998 printed edition of *The Fig Tree* by Family Stations, Inc. includes a "**Scripture Index**" at the end of the book that has been omitted in this Internet edition.
4. The "**Background Information**" section at the end of this Internet edition was added by the two editors named above.

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Introduction

What is the future of the nation of Israel? Does God still owe this nation future blessing as a result of promises and commitments He made to them during the days of Abraham or during the days of King David? How do the Biblical promises given to Israel relate to the New Testament church which has been in existence for almost 2000 years? Does the return of national Israel to its land in 1948 relate to Biblical promises? Why does national Israel of today remain in steadfast opposition to Christ as Messiah? Is the rapture of the church going to usher in a golden age when Christ will reign as king over national Israel?

These are some of the questions we will seek to answer in this study. As we obtain solutions to these questions we will also unfold much truth concerning God's plan to evangelize the world and God's plan for the return of Christ. Moreover, we will carefully examine Old and New Testament passages that are widely misunderstood by many theologians of today. I trust that this study shall prove to be of great help and significance not only to those who are interested in prophecy, but also to those who simply wish for a better understanding of God's Word in all of its aspects.

The source we will go to for these answers will, of course, be the Bible. God's Word concerns itself not only with national Israel but also with all who seek a relationship with the God Who created the world and provided redemption through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will begin our study with an examination of the founding of the nation of Israel. By looking very carefully at the promises made to Abraham, who was the beginning of Israel, we will be able to discern the commitments God made concerning Israel. We will then look at the rest of the Bible to discover how these commitments have been kept. Indeed, we will come to know precisely what, if anything, God still owes national Israel.

Since there is so much misunderstanding concerning the Biblical declaration of God's master program for Israel, we will look patiently at commonly quoted Bible verses that seem to relate to future blessings for national Israel. This will be done because any study of any part of the Bible is valuable. It will be done also because we realize that no conclusion arrived at by Bible study can stand unless it is found to be in harmony with anything and everything else in the Bible that might be related to the subject at issue.

In fact, I believe one of the most serious failings existing today, as theologians pursue truth from the Bible, is a lack of thoroughness in Bible interpretation. Only too frequently a conclusion or doctrine derived from one part of the Bible is not carefully examined in the light of related information wherever it may be found in any other part of the Bible.

Thus, conclusions and doctrinal positions are frequently posited from Old Testament verses with no attempt to discover whether the New Testament has any bearing on these verses. Consequently, great error is part of many aspects of Bible teaching. Even though much time and patience will be required, it is my hope that in this study every attempt will be made to examine each conclusion in the light of every pertinent passage in the Bible.

Chapter 1 – God's Promises to National Israel

When and how did Israel begin? Is it a nation that goes all the way back to Noah? Can we know its precise beginning?

Indeed, we can know its beginning. By carefully reading the Bible, we can know, without the possibility of error, exact circumstances that relate to the founding of Israel.

The birth of the nation of Israel coincides with commands by God to the ancient patriarch, Abraham (Abraham was called Abram until Gen. 17). Abraham was a Gentile living in Ur of the Chaldees. God commanded him to leave his homeland and go to a land in which he would live as a stranger. The land he was sent to was the land of Canaan which became the land of Israel.

As Abraham faithfully obeyed God, he received significant promises concerning himself and concerning his seed. These promises related to the land, to Abraham and his seed's relationship to God, and to the character and extent of his seed. These promises must be looked at very carefully if we are to understand God's present-day commitments to national Israel.

The promises in question are especially set forth in the twelfth through the twenty-eighth chapters of Genesis. We will carefully examine these promises.

Two Kinds of Promises

When we read these promises given to Abraham, in Gen. 12 through Gen. 28, we discover that some related only to the seed of Abraham while other promises related to Abraham and to his seed.

We read for example in Gen. 12:7: "the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land." This promise does not concern itself with Abraham but only with his seed. On the other hand, we read in Gen. 13:15: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." This promise is definitely concerned not only with the seed of Abraham but also with Abraham himself.

The fact that there were two kinds of promises made to Abraham is usually not noted by theologians who comment on God's promises to Abraham concerning Israel. But we should sense the grave importance of the distinction that exists between these two kinds of promises. Only by taking careful note of this distinction will we be able to see God's commitments to national Israel of long ago as well as to present-day national Israel.

We will begin our study by looking at the promises made only to the seed of Abraham, but not to Abraham himself. After we have diligently searched the Bible for all it might say that relates to these promises, then we will examine God's promises concerning Abraham and his seed.

God Promises Israel the Land of Canaan

At the time that Abraham entered the land of Canaan, God made a faithful promise to him concerning the land. In Gen. 12:6-7 the Bible declares:

And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

As we have already noted, this promise was made with no commitment whatsoever to Abraham himself. It was a promise given only to the seed of Abraham. His seed would be given the land on which Abraham walked as a stranger.

We might note two other aspects of this promise. First, it appears to be an unconditional promise, and secondly, there is no commitment concerning the duration of time that Abraham's seed would be the inheritors of the land. Let us keep these two facts in view as we continue our study.

In Gen. 15:18-21 we read for the second time that God made a promise to Abraham concerning his seed. There we read:

In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Please note as you carefully read these verses that this promise, like that given in Gen. 12:6-7, does not promise land to Abraham himself but only to his seed. Moreover, like the promise recorded in Gen. 12:7, it appears to be unconditional, and no information is offered concerning the length of time his seed would inherit the land.

Once more in the Book of Genesis, God makes reference to His promise to Abraham in which He declares that the land would be given to the seed of Abraham. In Gen. 24:7 we read:

The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

Please note that once again, this language relates only to the seed of Abraham, not to Abraham himself. Moreover, it appears to be unconditional in nature, and it offers no suggestion as to how long Abraham's seed would inherit the land.

These promises, recorded in the Bible, were given to Abraham but they offer no promise to Abraham himself. Rather, they are promises that his seed would be given the land of Canaan, which would also be called the land of Israel.

Have God's Promises to National Israel Been Fulfilled?

The logical question that now must be faced is this: Does the Bible speak of any fulfillment of the promise to the seed of Abraham that they would become the inheritors of the land? We know, of course, that the father of national Israel is Abraham. He fathered Isaac, who in turn fathered Jacob. Jacob fathered twelve sons who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus, there can be no doubt that national Israel may be regarded as the seed of Abraham. We must, therefore, examine these twelve tribes to see if they indeed received the land of Canaan as they were promised in Gen. 12:6-7, Gen. 15:18-21, and Gen. 24:7.

In the first chapter of Joshua, forty years after Israel left Egypt, God was speaking to Joshua concerning the nation of Israel. Israel had been wandering in the wilderness these forty years but was ready to enter the land of Canaan. God declared to the Israelites in Joshua 1:2-4:

Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

God was about to keep the promise He made to Abraham that his seed would be given the land of Canaan.

Israel Is Given the Land Unconditionally

Remember that we saw in the Genesis account that the promise of the land to the seed of Abraham appeared to be unconditional. That is, it was a gift from God to Israel which they would receive without being required to meet any prior conditions.

When we look further, we see that, indeed, Canaan was given to the Israelites unconditionally. In Deu. 9:1 we read:

Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven.

Deu. 9:4-6: Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.

Using this language, God clearly indicates that the land had been given to them as a gift from God without requiring Israel to meet any conditions. It was given to them altogether as an evidence of God's sovereign and gracious love for them.

The Duration of Israel's Possession of the Land Was Conditional

Remember, too, that at the time God made His promise to Abraham concerning the giving of the land to his seed, no reference was made as to how long they would possess the land. Does the Bible have anything more to say concerning this aspect of the promise?

Indeed it does. We read, for example, in Deu. 8:18-20:

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day. 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.

Therefore, we see that while God's gift of the land of Canaan was unconditional, Israel's continued possession of the land was conditional. If they became unfaithful to God they would be destroyed. Now we can understand why God in His promises to Abraham made no reference to the length of time they would possess the land. The length of time they would possess the land depended on the faithfulness of national Israel.

Have the Promises Been Fulfilled in their Entirety?

The question must be asked: Did God fulfill entirely His promise that the seed of Abraham would possess the land? In Gen. 15:18-21 God promised that Abraham's seed would be given the land from the river of Egypt unto the great River Euphrates. In verse 20 God mentions that Israel is to possess the land of the Hittites, a great nation far to the north of present-day Israel. They were located at least as far north as the River Euphrates.

In fact, in Joshua 1:4 God declares that Israel was to go in to possess the land, "From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast."

This is certainly a great area of land. Was there ever a time when Israel actually possessed all of this land? If it did not, does this force us to conclude that God still owes Israel the land?

We can see that the answers to these questions have enormous consequences. Israel today does not possess the land all the way to the Euphrates River. Thus, if the Israelis are still to possess this land, it can be concluded that the Israel of today still has a glorious future because God is always faithful to His promises.

On the other hand, if the Bible clearly teaches that God has fully kept His promise to Israel, then we must look for an entirely different answer to the question of the future of modern Israel.

Wonderfully, we need not speculate about whether or not God has fully kept His promise to Israel concerning the land. In Joshua 21:43-45 the Bible declares:

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

In this lucid statement, God declares in no uncertain terms that He has given to Israel all the land that He had promised to their fathers. Indeed, this is an emphatic declaration that the promise to Abraham concerning the gift of the land to his seed has been fulfilled.

How can this statement be made in Joshua 21? There is no Biblical evidence that at the time Joshua was speaking to Israel they actually possessed the land of the Hittites. In fact, within the central parts of the land of Canaan were portions of land they did not fully possess. For example, in Joshua 23:1-5, we read:

And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age. And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age: And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God is he that hath fought for you. Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you.

The language of these verses clearly indicates there was not a full possession of the land. How then are we to understand Joshua 21, where God expressly declares He has kept all of His promises concerning the land?

God Defines His Own Terms

The answer to this question must be seen in the fact that God defines His own terms. Whatever God meant when He promised Abraham in Gen. 12:7 and Gen. 15:18-21 that his seed would be given

the land of Canaan, in Joshua 21, God flatly declares that those promises have been fulfilled. No matter how we might argue, the fact stands that God has fulfilled His promises. God, who made the promise, is certainly qualified to know when the promise (as God had intended it) has been fulfilled. We must surrender our personal judgment or any personal speculation about the clear statement of Joshua 21.

Indeed, God has more to say in His Word concerning His faithfulness with regard to the promise of the land.

While the Book of Joshua was written very soon after Israel entered the land of Canaan, one of the last books of the Old Testament is that of Nehemiah. It was written almost one thousand years after Joshua. In this book we read again that God has been entirely faithful to His promises concerning the land.

Ezra, the holy priest of God, is praying to God. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he declares in Neh. 9:7-8:

Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous.

Note carefully that these verses speak of God's promise to Abraham that God would give to his seed the land of Canaan. No reference is made to the land having been given to Abraham himself. Thus, in these verses, God has in view only the promises made as recorded in Gen. 12:6-7, Gen. 15:18-21, and Gen. 24:7.

Note the declaration that God "hast performed thy words." God is declaring that He has faithfully kept His commitments and promises to national Israel.

Note, too, that the land of the Hittites is named. We saw both in Gen. 15:18-21 and in Joshua 1:4 that God had promised to the seed of Abraham the land of the Hittites, which was located far to the north of present-day Israel. But in this declaration of Neh. 9:7-8, God assures us that His promise to give the land of the Hittites to the seed of Abraham has been fulfilled. He has performed His Words. Thus, we need speculate no longer as to whether Israel at any time possessed the land so far north that even the land of the Hittites was included. No doubt of any kind should remain in our minds. God has been entirely faithful in giving national Israel all of the land He has ever promised them.

We must remember, of course, that in His promise to Abraham, God did not guarantee continuous possession of the land. God reiterated many times in His Word that if Israel did not remain faithful, it would be destroyed. Thus, the ten tribes were destroyed in 709 B.C. by the Assyrians. In 587 B.C., Judah and Benjamin and the remnants from the ten tribes were destroyed or taken captive by the Babylonians. In A.D. 70, Jerusalem was again thoroughly devastated, this time by the Roman, Titus. Following this destruction, Israel did not again possess the land until A.D. 1948.

We cannot help but wonder about the outcome of Israel's present possession of the land. As a nation, Israel remains rebellious toward God; they do not show any inclination to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Will God again destroy it from the land? We will find the Biblical answer to this question later in this study.

Following the Scriptures step by step, everything has fit together very neatly, bringing us to the conclusion that God has fulfilled His promises to national Israel concerning the land of Canaan.

Have We Looked at Everything that Relates to the Land of Israel?

Have we looked at everything in the Bible concerning the land and Israel? We read, for example, in Ezek. 37:21-22:

And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

Do these verses speak of a future gathering of the nation of Israel to their land? Ezek. 37:25 continues:

And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever:

and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

What are we to do with these verses? Are they perhaps to be looked upon as modifiers of some kind insofar as the language of Joshua 21 and Neh. 9 is concerned? Surely, whenever we come to any conclusion concerning Bible truth, we should be ready to examine that conclusion in the light of anything and everything in the Bible that might relate to that conclusion.

The conclusion we have made thus far concerning national Israel is ominous. If it is correct, then Israel's present occupation of the land is not a fulfillment of prophecy. Then, too, we would not expect present-day Israel to have any expanded blessing in the land. Therefore, we must not hesitate to look at any Bible statements that might affect our conclusion that God has fulfilled all of His promises to national Israel concerning the land. Thus, we must look at Ezek. 37 and other similar passages very carefully.

Before we look at Ezek. 37 and its impact upon our conclusions concerning national Israel, we should look again at the promises made to Abraham. We shall discover that there is an intimate relationship between the promise made to Abraham that he himself would be given the land and the promises set forth in passages such as Ezek. 37.

Chapter 2 – God's Promise to Abraham Personally

In the first chapter of our study we learned that God made certain promises to the seed of Abraham, national Israel, but Abraham himself was not included in these promises. We also learned that God declares that He has faithfully kept these promises.

Do you recall that there was a second group of promises? These promises concerning the land were made to Abraham and included Abraham as well as his seed as the possessor. We should examine these promises with great care. When we understand these promises, we will also be able to understand the other commitments, such as Ezek. 37:21-25, which relate to the land.

We read in Gen. 13:14-17, after Lot decided to dwell in the rich Jordan Valley, that God made a promise to Abraham concerning the land of Canaan.

Gen. 13:14-17: And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

Note that God is apparently promising the literal material land of Canaan. The promise is apparently without any conditions that first must be satisfied by those who are to receive the land. Note, also, that the seed of Abraham are those to whom the land is to be given.

Thus far, the promise is identical to that recorded in Gen. 12:7, Gen. 15:18-21, and Gen. 24:7, which we previously studied. As we look at Gen. 13:14-17 more closely, we will discover two very important promises not included in the previously studied verses.

God declares in Gen. 13:15: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." This is a solemn commitment that Abraham himself would possess the land. It is a striking addition that is unrelated to the promises God made in Gen. 12:7, Gen. 15:18-21, and Gen. 24:7.

Abraham Is Given the Land Forever

The other promise which we find in these verses is that the land was given to Abraham and his seed **forever**. Gen. 13:15 declares: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." God has now introduced a time factor that was not found in the Gen. 12:7, Gen. 15:18-21 or Gen. 24:7 accounts. The time factor is exceedingly significant inasmuch as it extends all the way into eternity. God uses the word forever, the Hebrew word *olam*, when speaking of the everlasting nature of God. It is a word that goes through the barrier of time all the way into eternity.¹

¹ The Hebrew word *olam* is found more than 400 times in the Old Testament. The usual translation is "for ever" or "everlasting." In a few places it is translated to signify the extremity of time. Thus, occasionally it is translated "old" or "ancient." However, in those verses where *olam* is used in connection with God's covenant promises to Abraham, the context clearly dictates that *olam* must be translated "for ever" or "everlasting." This is so because Abraham can

Thus, we see that we are now studying a different kind of promise concerning the land than that recorded in Gen. 12:7, Gen. 15:18-21, and Gen. 24:7. It is so different that we wonder if we have read it accurately.

But when we read Gen. 17, we find the promises of Gen. 13 repeated and re-emphasized. In Gen. 17 God has recorded the moment when Abraham officially became the head of the nation of Israel, for it is in this chapter that we read of 99-year-old Abraham being circumcised. Circumcision was the sign that for the following 2,000 years would mark the nation of Israel as being a separate nation from the nations of the world.

We read in Gen. 17:8: "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Note that all of the promises of Gen. 13 are included in this statement. He as well as his seed are to be the possessors of the land. The land would be an everlasting possession.

In His Lifetime Abraham Never Possessed the Land

One new word has been introduced. We read: "the land wherein thou art a stranger." The word "stranger" is a significant word; it introduces us to the fact that during Abraham's lifetime on this earth he dwelt as a stranger in the land of Canaan. He never did possess any of the land of Canaan. When his wife Sarah died, Abraham had to purchase a cave from the sons of Heth for a burial place for her (Gen. 23).

Moreover, in Heb. 11 the Bible gives us further information concerning the fact that Abraham dwelt as a stranger in the land of Canaan. We read in Heb. 11:8-10:

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Heb. 11:13: These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

We are faced, therefore, with the incontestable fact that under no circumstance was the promise of Gen. 13 or Gen. 17 that Abraham would possess the land fulfilled in any way during Abraham's lifetime.

How Can Abraham Possess the Land?

Now we have a difficult problem. The Bible clearly promised the land to Abraham, yet it just as clearly teaches that that promise was never fulfilled insofar as Abraham is concerned. Therefore, it must be fulfilled at some future time. Does this mean that at some time in the future Abraham will be resurrected so that he can again live in this world? Will he have the same experience as did Lazarus whom we read about in John 11, who was resurrected after he had been dead for four days?

But Lazarus was resurrected to live in this present world only for a brief period of time. He was not resurrected to live forever in this world for then he would still be living today. Because God promised Abraham that he would be given the land forever, this implies that once he was resurrected to inherit the land, he would never die again. So in order for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham concerning his everlasting possession of the land, Abraham must be resurrected to live again on earth, and he must be resurrected in such a way and at such a time that he will live forever on earth.

We are brought to the inescapable conclusion that the promises concerning the land, given to Abraham in Gen. 13 and Gen. 17, require a time for fulfillment when Abraham will have been resurrected. And when he is resurrected, he will live forever.

This is very serious; it means that the fulfillment of this promise cannot be realized in its final sense until the end of time. Only then will time be no more and eternity will begin. Where is this line of reasoning going to take us? We will consider this question in the next chapter.

receive his inheritance only after he has been resurrected, and we shall see later in our study that the resurrection is to take place at the end of the world. We shall also see that Romans 4 is a commentary on these verses. And Romans 4 clearly points us to eternity rather than the physical land of Canaan which will be destroyed the last day of this present world's existence.

Chapter 3 – Abraham’s Resurrection

We have been looking rather seriously at the head of national Israel, a man named Abraham. We have seen that God made two kinds of promises to him. The first consisted of unconditional promises that the land of Israel was to be given to the descendants of Abraham, but not to Abraham himself. The length of time they would possess the land depended upon their faithfulness in serving the Lord. We saw that these promises were entirely fulfilled by God.

The second kind of promise related not only to the seed of Abraham but to Abraham himself. He was to inherit the land himself. And both he and his seed were to inherit the land forever. We saw that this promise was not fulfilled for Abraham. As long as he lived he was a pilgrim and a stranger.

Therefore, the certain conclusion we had to come to was that Abraham must be resurrected at some future time in order to bring this second kind of promise to fulfillment.

How will this be? What does the Bible say about some future resurrection of Abraham? In fact, what does the Bible say about the resurrection of anyone who has trusted in the promises of God?

We should let the Bible guide us on this. We read four significant verses in the Gospel of John that speak of the timetable of the resurrection of the believers in Christ. All of these verses focus on the last day.

John 6:39: And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

John 6:40: And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at 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.

John 6:54: Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

In these four verses God is underscoring and emphasizing not only that there will be a resurrection, but also that it will be the last day. Because Abraham was a believer who implicitly trusted God, we sense that the resurrection of the last day must include him. Therefore, we want to study these verses very carefully.

The Resurrection Is the Last Day

In each one of these four verses, the timing is seen to be “the last day.” Does this phrase have the same meaning as the term “the latter days” or “the last days”? We know immediately this cannot be because these latter two terms, which use the plural “days,” relate to the whole New Testament period. Later in our study we will see this clearly. But the term “last day” is not the same as “last days.” Rather, when we search the Bible for anything that relates to the phrase “the last day,” we find that it is found only eight times in the Bible. We will carefully study these eight occurrences to discover all we can regarding the meaning of the phrase “the last day.”

In addition to the four places we have already examined in John 6, it is found in:

John 11:24: Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

John 12:48: He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

John 7:37: In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

Neh. 8:18: Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

When we study these eight verses to determine what we can concerning the phrase, “the last day,” we arrive at some very important conclusions.

The Last Day Is Not a Long Period of Time

First of all, we discover that the phrase “the last day” cannot be referring to a long period of time. Both in John 7:37 and in Neh. 8:18 the “last day” refers to the feast of tabernacles. It was a day, not a long period of time. This is important because some teach that the resurrection of believers can take place at various times separated by a time period as long as a thousand years. This kind of reasoning cannot hold up in light of the knowledge that the last day is a day like the last day of the feast of tabernacles.

Old and New Testament Believers Will Be Resurrected the Last Day

Secondly, we discover that Old Testament believers and New Testament believers will be raised the last day. That is, there is one resurrection of all of the saved whether they lived thousands of years before Christ or whether they lived long after Jesus went to the cross.

From the language of John 6, there is no doubt that the New Testament believers will be resurrected the last day. It is certainly impressive that God underscores this wonderful event four times in this chapter. Surely no one who reads the Bible faithfully can miss this significant teaching.

From the language of John 11:24 there is no doubt that the Old Testament believers will also be resurrected the last day. This can be known with certainty because John 11 is concerned with Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, an Israelite who lived and died on the Old Testament side of the cross. He, like David, Abraham, and every other Old Testament believer, was looking forward to the cross.

And yet Martha, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared of her brother Lazarus, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). Thus, we are assured that the resurrection of Lazarus will take place at the last day, which is the same time all New Testament believers will arise. Since Abraham, like Lazarus, was an Old Testament believer, the resurrection of Abraham must also take place on the last day, at the same time all the New Testament believers will arise.

The Last Day Is Judgment Day

Thirdly, we discover in looking at these eight verses that the last day (at which time the resurrection of the believers takes place) occurs simultaneously with Judgment Day. Verse 48 of John 12 clearly teaches us this, as it declares concerning the unsaved, “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.”

Judgment Day is at the end of time. It is the event that immediately precedes the destruction of this universe by fire and the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth. Rev. 6:12-17 teaches us this in dramatic fashion.

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

The great day of God’s wrath is Judgment Day. These verses teach that this awful event occurs on the day that the universe is collapsing and the timekeepers, the sun and moon and stars, are no longer functioning.

Rev. 20:11-12 also clearly identifies Judgment Day with the end of this world.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

The phrase “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away” guides us to understand that at the time God is judging the unsaved of the world (the spiritually dead who stand before God), the universe as we now know it will have come to an end.

Thus, we know that the term “the last day” is the last day. It is the last day of this present earth’s existence. It is the moment when eternity begins.

These truths regarding the resurrection of the last day, therefore, teach us that the resurrection of Abraham, at which time he is to inherit the land, must be at the end of time. It must be on the last day of this earth's existence, the day that Christ comes on the clouds of glory to judge the world.

Believers and Unbelievers Are Resurrected the Last Day

It must be the time when not only the believers are resurrected but also the unbelievers. The unbelievers cannot be judged until they have been resurrected. We are not surprised, therefore, to read of one resurrection, including the saved and the unsaved.

John 5:28-29: Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Please note in these verses that the **hour** is coming. It does not speak of hours (plural). Clearly there is one time, **the last day**, when all mankind is resurrected.

Neither are we surprised, therefore, to read concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 24:29 that:

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

The last day of this world's existence will begin like any other 24-hour day. But then Christ will return on the clouds of glory and all of the celestial bodies (the sun, the moon, the stars), that were created to measure time (Gen. 1:14), will no longer exist. Time will be no more, for there will be no means to measure time. Time will have ended and only eternity will exist. Such will be the last day, when Abraham will be resurrected to enjoy the completion of the promises of Gen. 13 and Gen. 17.

We have spent considerable time trying to understand the implications of the promise to Abraham that he, himself, would inherit the land of Canaan. We have seen that this can have its fulfillment only at the end of this world, when Abraham and all believers will be resurrected.

How Can Abraham Inherit the Earth if it Is To Be Destroyed?

This raises a difficult question. In II Peter 3, God declares that this earth and this universe will be destroyed by fire. In Rev. 6:12-14 God describes the end of the world as follows:

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

Therefore, the question that we must face is: How can Abraham inherit the land of Canaan at a time when this whole earth is destroyed? Gen. 17:8 specifically declares:

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Have we been going down a blind alley? Is it possible that in spite of all we have learned regarding the last day, our conclusion that it is the end of time is in error?

Wonderfully, the Bible comes to our rescue. Remember, we are always to interpret the Bible by the Bible. Therefore, the Bible is its own dictionary. It defines its own words. Specifically, we want to look more intently at this phrase of Gen. 17:8, "the land of Canaan." This is the land that Abraham as well as his seed is to inherit eternally. In this verse what does the Bible mean by the phrase "the land of Canaan"?

There are, of course, many passages in the Bible that point to the physical land of Canaan. It has existed in this world and does exist right to the present day, but certainly it will not exist after the last day. It will be destroyed by fire. So the question remains: How can Abraham inhabit the land of Canaan if he cannot come into his inheritance until Judgment Day when the physical, material land of Canaan will be destroyed?

The New Testament Comes to Our Rescue

In Rom. 4, we find our answer. In fact, we find that Rom. 4 is a commentary on all of Gen. 17. We will presently develop this relationship in greater depth because only by doing so will we truly understand

all of the other passages, like Ezek. 37:20-25, which speak of the land. But now we will look only at the phrase, “the land of Canaan.”

God declares in Rom. 4:13: “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

Please note that this verse speaks of a promise that was made to the seed of Abraham as well as to Abraham himself. Therefore, it is directly parallel to what we read in Gen. 17, where an inheritance is promised to Abraham and to his seed.

The Land of Canaan Equals the Whole World

Note, too, that it speaks of being heir to a piece of land. No, it doesn’t use the phrase “the land of Canaan,” which we read in Gen. 17:8. Rather, it uses the phrase “the world.”² In other words, God is making the Old Testament phrase “the land of Canaan” equivalent to the whole world. God is exercising His divine prerogative to define words.

Abraham was told by God in Gen. 13:14-15:

And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

By eyes of faith, he was seeing the **whole world**.

Can you begin to sense that we have come to an exceptionally grand truth when we understand the concept that Abraham was to inherit the whole world?

Remember, the last day is Judgment Day. That is, it is the day when this present world will have come to an end. The unsaved will be judged and removed into hell. This present world will be destroyed and God will create a new universe, called the new heavens and the new earth (II Peter 3:13). Tying together the two phrases “the last day” and “the world,” therefore, brings us to the dramatic and wonderful truth that it is not this present world with all of its sin and corruption that Abraham would inherit. It is the new earth, the new universe, that God will create out of the ashes of this present earth. It is the earth Jesus speaks of in Matt. 5, where He declares that the meek shall inherit the earth.

Now we can see why God promises in Gen. 13:15 that Abraham would be given the land forever. So, too, in Gen. 17:8 he was told that the land of Canaan will be an everlasting possession. The resurrection of Abraham and the beginning of the new heavens and new earth have their place at the end of time, when only eternity remains.

Who are the seed of Abraham spoken of in Gen. 13 and Gen. 17? How do these chapters, with their promises of a seed, relate to the Biblical truth that Abraham will be the inheritor of the new heaven and the new earth? We will examine these exceedingly important questions as we continue our study.

Chapter 4 – The Seed of Abraham

The same promise that was made to Abraham concerning the land was also made to “his seed.” Who are his seed? Is “his seed” limited to national Israel? If his seed is not national Israel, who is it? We cannot be satisfied with our conclusions concerning Abraham and the new heaven and new earth until we know how “his seed” fits into the whole picture.

Let us begin to answer these questions by searching the Bible for information concerning the seed of Abraham.

As we saw earlier in our study, the first record of the promise God made to Abraham concerning the land which would be inherited by Abraham and his seed forever is found in Gen. 13:14-15. There God gives us a clue concerning the multitudinous nature of the seed. Verses 15 and 16 of Gen. 13 record:

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy

² Some contend that the word “world” as it is used in Rom. 4:13 is speaking of the world of national Israel. Not only does such an idea contradict the rest of Rom. 4, but it must be realized that the word “world” (Greek *kosmos*) is never used in the Bible to refer to an individual nation.

seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

This promise is reinforced by the language of Gen. 28:13-15:

And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

The Bible records in Gen. 15 that Abraham received a vision from God in which God showed him that his seed would be as the stars of heaven. Gen. 15:5-7 declares:

And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

By carefully examining these verses, we can understand that God has purposed that the seed of Abraham would be exceedingly numerous. We still have not learned who his seed was to be. Was his seed to be limited to the blood descendants of Abraham? Or was his seed to include others? Let us see what we can learn about this.

Abraham's Seed Is to Include People from Many Nations

In Gen. 17:2-8, we begin to find the solution to these questions. In this passage God records:

And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Please note that these verses, which we studied earlier, show us that the land was promised not only to Abraham's seed forever but also to Abraham himself.

Additionally, these verses give us a valuable clue concerning the nature of Abraham's seed who are to be the inheritors of the land. Note verse 4: "thou shalt be a father of many nations." Note verse 5: "for a father of many nations have I made thee."

Three times in these few verses God declares that Abraham's seed would include people from many nations. It is this seed that would inherit the land forever. Therefore, we can understand that the seed that God has in view is not limited to national Israel.

Descendants of Ishmael or Esau: Are They the Seed?

How can this be? How can Abraham become the progenitor of many nations? Abraham fathered Ishmael by Hagar. Ishmael became the head of the Arab nations of today. Additionally, the seed of Abraham's grandson, Esau, also became a separate people. One of Esau's three wives was a daughter of Ishmael (Gen. 36:3). Thus, his descendants became part of Ishmael's descendants, so that together they became the progenitors of the present Arab nations.

Nevertheless, we know that it was not through Ishmael and Esau that God was to fulfill His promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a multitude of nations.

Notice that in these verses of Genesis, God repeatedly speaks of a covenant. Gen. 17:2 declares: "I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." We read in verse 4: "Behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations." Verse 7 says: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

In verse 7, God is speaking of an everlasting covenant. Verse 8 identifies this everlasting

covenant with the land that was to be given to Abraham and his seed for an everlasting possession.

Gen. 17:8: And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Thus, we know that this everlasting covenant, which promises Abraham a seed that would come from a multitude of nations, a seed which would inherit the land forever, could not have reference to the descendants of Ishmael and Esau. The descendants of Ishmael and Esau became political nations, but nowhere in the Bible is any political nation promised the land forever. That, of course, would be an impossibility because all political nations will cease to exist at the end of time.

Earlier in our study, we found that Rom. 4:13, which is a commentary on Gen. 17, indicates that the land is the world. Therefore, we saw that it is in the new heavens and new earth that the promise of the land forever has its fulfillment. This assures us that the political seed of Abraham, the Arab nations of whom Ishmael and Esau are progenitors, cannot be the seed in question.

Moreover, Gen. 17 shows that Ishmael and his descendants are not in view when God promises that Abraham would father many nations. At the time God was speaking to Abraham in Gen. 17, Abraham was childless by his wife Sarah. Therefore, he momentarily believed these promises would be fulfilled by Ishmael, whom he had fathered some years earlier by Sarah's maid, Hagar.

God declared to Abraham in Gen. 17:20-21:

And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

These verses clearly indicate that God has in view a seed that would come through Isaac rather than Ishmael. Therefore, we are confident that God's promise to Abraham that he would be the progenitor of many nations did not have the descendants of Ishmael or Esau in view. We will try to answer the next question.

Who are the nations that we read about in Gen. 17:4-6, which Abraham is to father? In Gen. 17:21 God speaks of a covenant He would establish with Isaac, who was the son of Abraham by Sarah. This covenant is brought to our attention in a number of places in Gen. 17. Is it a clue that helps us to identify the seed of Abraham who are to inherit the land with Abraham?

In Gen. 17:10-13 God speaks of the covenant which He has made with Abraham and his seed:

This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Circumcision, the token or sign of the covenant that God made, was to be administered not only to Abraham, but also to his servants who were not in his blood line. That helps to complicate matters. Are they to be the seed who would bring into existence the many nations? We do need help to determine precisely what God means when He speaks of Abraham fathering a multitude of nations.

Romans 4 Shows Us How We Are to Understand Genesis 17

Where shall we look for more information to help us? Earlier in our study we saw that Rom. 4 is related to Gen. 17. Let us look at Rom. 4 again, and we will find that it is a marvelous commentary on Gen. 17.

By studying Rom. 4, we will find that in Gen. 17, God outlined His salvation plan that is to be available to the whole world. We will see that the everlasting covenant God made with Abraham and his seed is the covenant of redemption. It is an everlasting covenant because God's salvation plan is everlasting. Gen. 17 speaks of Abraham being the father of a multitude of nations because God has in view the salvation of people from every nation of the world. In other words, by following the Biblical principle of letting the Bible interpret the Bible, we discover that Gen. 17 is not involved with national Israel at all; it is totally focused on the Lord Jesus Christ and the wonderful salvation He provides through His shed blood.

We read in Rom. 4:9-13:

Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in

circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

These verses identify precisely with the verses we have been studying in Gen. 17. They speak of Abraham and the sign of circumcision. They speak of Abraham being the father of the circumcision as well as the father of "all them that believe," which includes people from every nation.

The Seed of Abraham Includes All Who Believe in Christ as Savior

This stupendous information shifts our attention from the blood relationship, by which we think of seed or descendants, to another kind of descent. Only national Israel, which is called the "circumcision" in Rom. 4:9-12, are the blood descendants of Abraham. But God, in Rom. 4, is speaking of "all them that believe" as the seed of Abraham.

The phrase "all them that believe" identifies with salvation. It relates to those from every nation who have become saved by the blood of Christ. It relates to a vast company of people coming into the body of Christ from every nation. No wonder, then, that Rom. 4:13 speaks of "the righteousness of faith." The righteousness we receive in salvation is a gift from God, given to us by God's grace on the merits of Christ's shed blood. It is imputed to those who have trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior. Thus, in Rom. 4 God is instructing us that the promises of Gen. 17 relate to salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation is in view, as shown by verses 2-8 of Rom. 4, which introduce us to this disclosure concerning the seed of Abraham:

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

The covering of sins, the forgiving of iniquities, has to do altogether with salvation. Because these verses in Rom. 4 are a commentary on the statements of Gen. 17, we know that salvation is the target of the verses in Genesis that indicate Abraham was to father many nations.

God reassures us that this is so in Rom. 4:16-24:

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

These verses also relate entirely to Gen. 17. The phrase, "I have made thee a father of many nations," ties back to Gen. 17:4-5. Rom. 4:18-20, which speaks of Sarah's dead womb, relates back to Gen. 17:19 and 17:21. From the language of Rom. 4:23-25, we see that the entire passage relates to all who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, Rom. 4 has truly guided us down a path that opens up our understanding of Gen. 17. In Gen. 17 God is not making promises to national Israel concerning the physical land of Canaan. Rather, He is making promises concerning salvation. This salvation will come to people from every political nation, including national Israel.

That salvation for all who believe in Christ was in view when God made these promises to Abraham is further seen in Rom. 4:23-25:

Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

God is declaring in these verses that the promise of salvation was given not only to Abraham but to all of us who believe in Christ.

What a grand promise God made to Abraham in Genesis!

The Sign of the Covenant Is Circumcision

It is no wonder, therefore, that the sign of the covenant was circumcision. Circumcision, the cutting away of the foreskin, involved the shedding of blood, and Christ's blood was shed so that we might receive the blessings of the covenant.

Later, God said to Israel, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked" (Deu. 10:16). Physical circumcision was pointing to a spiritual relationship with God that could be accomplished only by Christ being cut off for us. That is, He took upon Himself our sins and was punished by God as payment for our sins. The punishment in view required that He endure Hell for our sins. He was cut off from God. He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). That is the essence of hell.

Physical circumcision involves the male reproductive organ. Thus, in a beautiful way, in Old Testament Israel, physical circumcision pointed to the seed who would come from the loins of Abraham who in turn would be the head of a vast company of believers. That seed is Christ who was a blood descendant of Abraham and who became the head of a vast company of believers from every nation. It was in Christ that Abraham became the father of a multitude of nations.

We can see now why God promised Abraham in Gen. 17 that his seed would inherit the land forever. Earlier in our study, we saw that the land was the new heavens and the new earth. It is an eternal land that all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will possess. We possess that land in a real sense from the moment that we are saved because we become citizens of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God will come to final fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth. Until the end of time comes, the kingdom of God has its homeland in heaven. The new heavens and the new earth will be an extension of heaven, for heaven is where God is. Even as God is presently in heaven, so He will be with us forever in the new heavens and new earth. Thus, the land God speaks of in Gen. 17 is an integral part of God's salvation plan.

Galatians 3 Helps Us to Understand God's Promises to Abraham

Other Bible passages also develop truths from Rom. 4 and its explanation of Gen. 17. For example, God declares in Gal. 3:7-9:

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Wonderfully, in these verses, the Bible reinforces the truths we have discovered. The Scripture, that is, the Old Testament, anticipated that the children of Abraham would include the heathen, the Gentiles, who would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This marvelous promise would find its fulfillment through Christ, as Gal. 3:16 declares: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

In the first instance, therefore, Christ is the seed of Abraham who is to inherit the world, and who is in view in the promises God made to Abraham and his seed. Because Christ became the head of a vast company of believers from every nation, God states in Gal. 3:26-29:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

How marvelously everything is beginning to fit together! God had given one kind of promise to national Israel, whereby it (not Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), received the physical land of Israel. God made a far greater and more wonderful promise to the whole world when He promised that all who

believe in the Lord Jesus Christ would be the seed of Abraham and inherit the land (the world) forever.

Some Passages Have a Double Fulfillment

We have carefully looked at Gen. 12:6-7, Gen. 15:18-21, and Gen. 24:7; these passages distinctly relate to national Israel. On the other hand, Gen. 13:14-17 and Gen. 17 clearly relate to our salvation, which finds its ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth.

Before we leave these promises found in Genesis, we must recognize that both national Israel and God's salvation plan are in view in some passages. We will study each of these passages, and in so doing, we will see, even more clearly, the distinction between God's promises to national Israel and those promises that are concerned with God's salvation plan. We will also see afresh that insofar as these promises apply to national Israel, they have been altogether fulfilled.

The first verses we should look at are Gen. 12:2-3, where God instructs Abraham to leave his homeland, Ur of the Chaldees, and go to a land that God would show him. At the same time, God makes promises to Abraham:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Three important promises in these verses lead us to wonder: Could they possibly relate to both national Israel and God's salvation plan? The promises are:

1. I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.
2. In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.
3. I will make of thee a great nation.

Does the promise, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee," relate in any sense to national Israel? When we study the experiences of Israel, we find no indication of this promise being applied to national Israel. Israel was badly treated by many nations, including Egypt, Canaan, Moab, Assyria, and Babylon. All of these nations continued to exist, sometimes with great glory, after their mistreatment of Israel. For example, Rome continued as a great nation for hundreds of years after it destroyed Israel in A.D. 70.

This promise is found in only two other places in the Bible. In Gen. 27:29, we read that Isaac pronounced a blessing on his son, Jacob, and said:

Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.

The words, "be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee," point to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One to whom believers bow down. He is the One who is Lord. Thus, we can know that this promise is directed to those who have become followers of Christ, citizens of God's kingdom, the Israel of God, who are the nation wherein God will bless those who bless them.

The only other place this promise is found is Num. 24:9. Wicked Balaam had been employed by the nation of Moab to curse Israel, but God would not permit this to happen. Repeatedly, as Balaam spoke, blessings rather than cursings flowed from his mouth; he prophesied in Num. 24:7-9:

He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.

Careful examination of these verses shows that Christ is in view. He is the One who poured out the waters (the Gospel, John 4:10-14), so that His seed (the believers), are in many waters (the nations of the world, Rev. 17:1). He is the One whose kingdom is exalted (Psalm 46:10). He is the One who was called out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15). In Num. 24:17, Balaam continues the prophecy and speaks even more plainly of the coming Christ:

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

Christ is the Star. II Peter 1:19: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."

Rev. 22:16: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." Christ is the Sceptre because He is the One who rules as King of kings and Lord of lords. Only Christ is in view when God declares in Numbers: "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

We have discovered that the promise in Gen. 12:3 does not apply to national Israel. Rather, it applies to Christ and His Kingdom of believers in Him. Those who bless Christ are the citizens of His Kingdom, those who are coming to salvation. They in turn receive the blessing of God because they have become saved. Those who curse Christ and His Kingdom are the unsaved of the world who are under the dominion of Satan. Unless they become saved, they will remain under the curse of God forevermore.

That this promise relates to believers in Christ is also seen in the second promise in Gen. 12:2-3: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." National Israel is in view only in the sense that they produced the Christ. But it is Christ Himself who brings blessings to all families of the earth. These blessings flow through the nation of believers who bring the Gospel to the world. Christ and His children are the seed of Abraham who bring blessing to the world.

Thus, our conclusion that this second promise relates to God's salvation plan agrees with our conclusion concerning the first promise.

This means that the third promise found in Gen. 12:2-3 must also relate to God's salvation plan. Remember, in this promise God declares that He would make of Abraham a great nation. The great nation that God made of Abraham is the nation of believers that is found throughout the world. While it is true that national Israel became a great nation, this is not the focus of Gen. 12:2-3. Only God's salvation plan and the Israel of God can be in view.

A second passage, wherein a promise is made to Abraham that might relate to national Israel, is Gen. 15:5:

And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

God is promising that Abraham's seed would be as the stars of heaven. We will see that it may have a two-fold fulfillment. In speaking to ancient Israel in the wilderness, Moses said in Deu. 1:10: "The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude."

God is assuring us that insofar as national Israel is concerned, the promise of Gen. 15:5 has been fulfilled. This reference to the seed of Abraham becoming as the stars of heaven for multitude also points to the eternal seed who are believers in Christ. This can be seen by the context in which Gen. 15:5 is found. Verse 7 states: "And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." Because this statement speaks of Abraham inheriting the land, we know that God can be pointing only to God's salvation plan, which finds its ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth. As we saw earlier, Abraham can inherit the land only after he has been resurrected, and his resurrection can occur only at the end of time.

The phrase "stars of the heaven" refers to the believers in Christ, as is seen in the declaration of Heb. 11:12:

Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

The context of Heb. 11 is a listing and a focus upon some Old Testament believers who were faithful to God; they believed in God as their Savior. Therefore, verse 12 indicates that God's promises in Gen. 15:5, insofar as they relate to God's salvation plan, are being fulfilled.

We must conclude that while Gen. 15:5 may have a double fulfillment because of the reference in verse 7 to Abraham inheriting the land, the primary focus is on God's salvation plan. Insofar as it applies to national Israel, it has been completely fulfilled as people are saved throughout time.

Gen. 18:18 is another verse we will examine briefly. It says:

Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

In this verse, we find promises almost identical to two of the promises in Gen. 12:2-3: "I will make of thee a great nation," and "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

We learned that the primary focus of Gen. 12:2-3 is on God's salvation program. Therefore, we can know that Gen. 18:18 is also focused primarily on God's salvation program.

In Gen. 22:17-18, God expands the same promises and introduces a new element as He speaks again to Abraham. These verses state:

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Four promises stand out in these verses:

1. I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and
2. As the sand which is upon the sea shore.
3. Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.
4. In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

The promise concerning the stars of heaven could have the same double fulfillment as the similar phrase in Gen. 15:5 and for the same reasons. Nevertheless, while there is the possibility of incidental focus on national Israel, the chief focus is on God's salvation program.

The phrase "as the sand which is upon the sea shore" also has the same possible double fulfillment. We read in I Kings 4:20: "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry." This statement proves that insofar as national Israel was concerned, the promise of Gen. 22:17 has been fulfilled.

God promises in Hosea 1:10:

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

In this verse, God uses the phrase "the sand of the sea" in connection with Israel. In Rom. 9:26, God is explaining why the Gentiles are beginning to believe in Christ. Believers were not of the Jews only, but they were also of the Gentiles.

Rom. 9:25-26: As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

God quotes Hosea 1:10 to prove that it was always God's plan that the ultimate, eternal Israel (the Israel of God) would consist of people from all the nations of the world. In Hosea 1:10, He speaks of this vast company of believers as "the sand of the sea."

In Heb. 11:12 we read that the believers were "as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable." In this verse also we are made to understand that Gen. 22:17-18 points to God's salvation plan. This is required by the context of Gen. 22:17-18 and especially from the last promise, which states: "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," which is a repeat of Gen. 12:3 and Gen. 18:18.

It is in Christ that all the nations of the earth are blessed. National Israel is involved only insofar as they are the nation which produced the Christ. He was of the tribe of Judah and in the flesh, a descendant of David and Abraham.

That leaves one other promise in Gen. 22:17-18 that we must consider: "thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies."

Thy Seed Shall Possess the Gate of His Enemy

Nowhere in the Bible do we find this phrase repeated. The phrase indicates that Israel would have victory over their enemies. To possess the gate of the city was to control or rule the city, and God did give national Israel victory after victory over their enemies. Therefore, we can readily see that this promise was fulfilled insofar as national Israel was concerned.

This promise has yet another fulfillment. It is primarily pointing to God's salvation plan. In Luke 1:71-74, Zacharias is praising God as He contemplates that the Savior is coming. He joyfully declares:

That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear.

To be saved from the enemies is the equivalent of possessing the gate of the enemy. In fact, Zacharias speaks of the covenant made with Abraham especially as it relates to the fact that by this covenant there was to be freedom from the enemies. The only Old Testament promise he could have in mind is the one we are considering in Gen. 22:17. In Luke 1:71-74, God is assuring us that this promise concerning the possession of the gate of the enemy is fulfilled in Christ. The enemy who has been

vanquished by Christ's shed blood is Satan.

Therefore, Gen. 22:17-18 may relate to national Israel to some degree. Insofar as it relates to national Israel, it has been fulfilled in every way. The most important fulfillment of this promise is in relation to God's salvation plan, and it is being fulfilled as God saves people from every nation.

Thy Seed Are Given These Countries

Another statement we will consider before we leave this aspect of our study is Gen. 26:3-4:

Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

This passage records an encounter of Isaac with God's promises. The promise in verse 3, that he would be given these countries, is of the same nature as God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 17. Like his father Abraham, Isaac lived as a stranger and sojourner in the land. He did not receive the gift of these countries during his lifetime. This promise can be fulfilled only when Isaac is resurrected. Like the promises made to Abraham in Gen. 17, it has to do with salvation. Therefore, verse 3 is not related to national Israel.

God continues to speak to Isaac in verse 4, and makes these promises:

1. Isaac's seed were to be as the stars of heaven.
2. Isaac's seed were to be given all these countries.
3. In Isaac's seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.

The first promise is identical to that given to Abraham in Gen. 22:17. We saw earlier that it could have a double fulfillment: one relates to national Israel and the other relates to God's salvation program (the Israel of God), and the relationship to national Israel has been completely fulfilled.

The second promise speaks of the seed of Isaac being given "these countries." The word "country" is the Hebrew word *erets*. It is normally translated "earth" or "land." Therefore, even as in verse 3, Isaac and his seed were promised these countries (these lands), so verse 4 repeats the promise in regard only to the seed of Isaac. That is, the seed of Isaac are to be given these lands. This promise therefore parallels the promise in Gen. 15:18-21 wherein God promised to Abraham's seed the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaims, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites. This promise and the promise of Gen. 26:4 have been entirely fulfilled for national Israel.

The second promise of Gen. 26:4 is also intimately associated with God's salvation plan. Christ and His believers are the seed who are given the lands, that is, the whole world, as the new heavens and the new earth. Therefore, this promise, too, has a double fulfillment.

The third promise of Gen. 26:4 is similar to the promise made to Abraham in Gen. 22:18. National Israel is the seed who produced the seed, Jesus, in whom all of the nations of the world are blessed.

Therefore, Gen. 26:3-4, like some of the other verses we have examined, could have a double fulfillment in some phrases. For national Israel, which serves as a type or figure of the Israel of God, these promises have been entirely fulfilled. For the believers in Christ, these promises are being fulfilled.

Jacob's Ladder to Heaven

Gen. 28:13-14 is another passage which is similar to those we have been considering. In these verses, God speaks to Jacob as he flees from Esau. Jacob dreams of a ladder that reaches to heaven, and angels are ascending and descending on it. God promises Jacob in verses 13-14:

And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

The promise in verse 13 is almost identical to the promises made to Abraham in Gen. 17. The land is to be given to Jacob as well as to his seed. Inasmuch as Jacob dwelt in the land of Canaan without ownership of the land, this promise can be fulfilled only after Jacob is resurrected on the last day. Therefore, this promise relates entirely to God's salvation program. It will be fulfilled in its entirety in the new heavens and the new earth.

The promise of verse 14 that “in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” of course, relates only to national Israel in the sense that they produced the Christ through whom all the nations of the earth are blessed. Therefore, it points to God’s salvation program.

The promise in the first half of verse 14, “thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south,” can be understood by examining the New Testament commentary on it. We read in Luke 13:28-29:

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

In this declaration, Jesus indicates that blood descendants of national Israel will be cast out of the kingdom (Matt. 8:11-12), while others, from the four points of the compass, will be found in the kingdom. Jesus is speaking of those who will be saved as in the kingdom; they will come from every part of the world.

Therefore, we can know that Gen. 28:13-14 is not concerned with national Israel. Like the promises recorded in Gen. 17, these promises are focused altogether on God’s salvation program.

Angels Ascending and Descending

In Gen. 28:12, we read that Jacob dreamed that angels ascended and descended on the ladder. Jesus uses the same language in John 1:51:

And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

When we compare these two verses, we discover that the ladder of Jacob’s dream is the Lord Jesus Christ. What does it mean that the angels are ascending and descending on Him? We will understand this dream only if we realize that both in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word that is translated “angel” also may be translated “messenger.” When we understand that it is messengers ascending and descending rather than angels, then we can know what Jacob’s dream as well as Jesus’ words to Nathanael in John 1:51 signify. Those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are the messengers of God who carry the Gospel message to the world. We ascend into heaven, that is, we become citizens of the kingdom of heaven, by believing on Christ. In fact, Eph. 2:6 speaks of those who have become saved as being seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We ascend to heaven in Christ, but before we can remain eternally in the glorious presence of Christ, we must serve for a time as ambassadors, as messengers, of Christ to this present world. The messengers descend from heaven on Christ, that is, on the authority of Christ, to bring the Gospel message to the world. Obviously, the messengers do not literally go to heaven for a few moments at the time they are saved. God uses this picture to show that our citizenship has been changed by salvation and that our commission to bring the Gospel comes from Christ.

Can you see how Gen. 28:13-14 follows? Because the messengers are sent forth after they are saved, people will be coming into the body of Christ from every nation of the world. This is the great and wonderful truth that God gave to Jacob in a dream. It is the glorious truth that Jesus anticipated when He spoke to Nathanael in John 1. Indeed, Gen. 28:13-14 can be seen to be a beautiful promise that is fulfilled in our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Brief Summary of What We Have Learned Thus Far

We have learned first of all that God promised national Israel that its people would be given the physical, material land of Israel. Abraham was not included in this promise.

The land would be given to them unconditionally. That is, there were no requirements they had to meet to be given the land. They were not promised they could remain in the land unconditionally. Rather, they were told they would be destroyed from the land if they did not remain faithful to God. The land was to be of such size that it would include the land of the Hittites, which was located far to the north of present-day Israel.

Secondly, we learned that God has been entirely faithful to His promises. God assures us that Israel was given the land in accord with all of His promises and commitments. We also learned that because of the unfaithfulness of Israel, the people were repeatedly destroyed from the land.

Thirdly, we learned that God made a second series of promises concerning the land. In these promises, the inheritors of the land were to be not only the seed of Abraham but they would include

Abraham himself. Moreover, the land would be given as an eternal possession. These promises did not have national Israel in view at all. Rather, they have in view all who believe in Christ as Savior. This includes a remnant chosen by grace from national Israel as well as people from every other nation of the world.

We discovered that the land that was in view was ultimately the new heavens and new earth, which is given only to those who are saved. Abraham would inherit this land on the last day when he as well as all believers are to be resurrected. We also learned that we enter that land at the moment we are saved for we become citizens of heaven. Upon death we go home to heaven. The new heavens and new earth is an expansion of what we now call heaven.

We learned, too, that the seed of Abraham in the first instance is Christ. Because Christ is the head of all who believe in Him, the seed ultimately includes all who are saved through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the covenant God made with Abraham in Gen. 17 was a covenant of redemption. It was not related to physical descent; it relates to those who have become the seed of Abraham by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We were guided by the Scriptures to realize that a few of the statements that set forth God's promises have a double fulfillment. Insofar as their application to national Israel is concerned, they have been completely fulfilled. Insofar as these promises relate to God's salvation plan, they are being fulfilled as the elect are being saved from every nation. In this sense they will be altogether fulfilled when the new heavens and new earth become a reality.

We discovered the immense importance of interpreting Scripture with Scripture. Only by letting Rom. 4 and Gal. 3 guide us, were we able to understand Gen. 17. What a pity that many theologians fail to do this. If this is not done, there is no possibility of coming to truth.

Genesis 17: The Watershed of Biblical Truth

Gen. 17 is one of the most crucial chapters in the Bible. It is the crossroad from which doctrines travel, doctrines that are concerned with the future of national Israel, the return of Christ, and the end of the world. It is also the fulcrum that determines our understanding of the meaning of baptism and the nature of the kingdom of God. When Gen. 17 is carefully studied in the light of everything in the Bible that might possibly relate to it, then giant strides are taken toward a true understanding of the salvation program God has planned for this world. Moreover, the Biblical teachings concerning the future of national Israel and the details concerning the events culminating with the return of Christ are more easily grasped.

On the other hand, attempts to understand and explain Gen. 17 without the benefit of Rom. 4, and other New Testament passages that relate to it, will proceed down both an eschatological path and a salvation path that will lead farther and farther from Biblical truth.

Premillennial Doctrine Rests on a Wrong Foundation

May I take the liberty to make reference to premillennial theology? I do not do so to put anyone down but to warn concerning truth. The premillennial teaching is widely held today. It offers many conclusions concerning the return of Christ and the future of the nation of Israel that I am afraid are altogether unbiblical. How can it be that the premillennial doctrines are so widely held, when they are so unbiblical? I believe the problem begins with a misunderstanding of Gen. 17.

Sadly, when I view the literature produced by the premillennial writers, I find they explain Gen. 17 without any reference at all to Rom. 4. Based on their understanding of Gen. 17, they speak of an Abrahamic Covenant that does not relate to God's salvation program for the world.

Dear reader, you can test this. If you examine the writings of three of the most eminent and trusted premillennial theologians today, you will discover this sad fact. Dr. Dwight Pentecost has written a book, entitled *Things to Come*,³ on the future of national Israel and the return of Christ. On pages 69, 72, 73, 75, 76, 80, 85, 95, 291, 439, and 480, he makes references to Gen. 17. He sees in Gen. 17 the fundamental reason why God must still bring national Israel to its land and lavish salvation blessings upon them. But not once in his book does he make reference to Rom. 4 as a commentary or explanation of Gen. 17. He makes incidental reference to Rom. 4:2 (page 270), 4:3 (page 531), and 4:25 (page 196), but none of these references relate to Gen. 17.

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958).

Likewise, Dr. Charles C. Ryrie has written a book, entitled *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*,⁴ in which he makes reference to Gen. 17 on pages 50, 53, 55, 56, and 57. He does so because he believes this covenant, which he calls the “Abrahamic covenant,” promises future blessings to modern national Israel. While he makes extensive reference to Gen. 17, not one sentence in the entire book refers to Rom. 4.

Similarly, Dr. John Walvoord has written numerous books on subjects relating to Christ’s return. But again, references to Rom. 4 are noticeably lacking. For example, in his book *Israel in Prophecy*,⁵ he makes references to Gen. 17 on pages 25, 26, 33, 39, 48, 49, 62, and 80. He does so for the same reasons that Dr. Ryrie and Dr. Pentecost do. On the other hand, not a single reference is made to Rom. 4. It is regrettable that scholars of such high reputation as these men would so grossly violate the Biblical principle of interpreting Scripture with Scripture.

Premillennial scholars will argue that in our study of Gen. 17 we have spiritualized Scripture. Frequently, they contend that the chief difference between their understanding of the Bible and the understanding of those who believe that the eternal seed of Abraham are all believers in Christ, is that the premillennialists literalize Scripture while the others spiritualize Scripture. Thus, they argue that Gen. 17 refers only to the physical land of Canaan and to national Israel.

The fact is, however, that those who hold the premillennial view do not hesitate to spiritualize Scripture when it suits their purpose. For example, when the Bible speaks in Rev. 13 of a dragon with seven heads and ten horns, they do not hesitate to teach that the ten horns are in actuality ten European nations of today. They are correct in their understanding that the ten horns are not to be understood as literal horns, but they are incorrect in their understanding of what they do represent. Later, we will show that the ten horns represent the rule of Satan during the final tribulation period. Under no circumstance will the Bible allow a conclusion relating to modern day political activity.

Even though the premillennialists’ conclusion is faulty, they prove that they spiritualize certain passages of the Bible when the context demands, as do amillennialists.

Moreover, the premillennialist contends that the amillennialist never looks at prophecies concerning future events in a literal fashion. This contention also is without truth. As we go on in this study, we will come to many passages which can be understood only in the most literal fashion. For example, when the Bible declares in Matt. 24:29-31 that Christ will return immediately after the tribulation, we will show that this can be understood only literally.

Indeed, the problem of differences between the premillennialist and the amillennialist is not literal versus spiritual interpretation. Rather, it has to do with the care that is taken to allow the whole Bible to be used in interpreting the Scripture at issue.

Because these eminent premillennial scholars have not understood Gen. 17 in the light of the Rom. 4 commentary, their conclusions concerning Gen. 17 are altogether faulty. Consequently, because they have not understood Gen. 17 correctly, all that follows in their teaching concerning God’s promises to national Israel and concerning the return of Christ will be faulty. Therefore, I believe that anyone who holds the premillennial view should rethink and restudy his position, beginning with Gen. 17. Wonderfully, God has given us the Bible as the ultimate authority. Therefore, no matter how far any of us have strayed from truth, we can come to truth by making sure that any doctrine we hold is in harmony with everything the Bible teaches.

Another question must be faced. The nation of Israel was called Israel because the people were the physical seed of Jacob, whose name became Israel at the time he wrestled with God at the river Jabbok (Gen. 32:24-28). Does the Bible also regard as Israel those from all nations who are believers in Christ? This is an important question because the answer will help us understand difficult Bible passages that apparently speak of national Israel but cannot be fully understood until we see that they speak of the whole body of believers, who come from every nation. In our next chapter we will look at the word “Israel” very carefully.

Chapter 5 – Israel

We have seen that key passages like Gen. 17, which superficially seem to relate to national

⁴ Dr. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*. (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1953).

⁵ Dr. John Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978).

Israel, actually do not relate to Israel at all. Rather, they relate to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of any political nation in which they were born or have lived. How then are we to understand the word "Israel"? Careful study of the word "Israel" will help us to understand many puzzling and frequently misunderstood Old Testament passages.

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, was first called Israel. How does he relate to what we have already learned? Since he was in the direct line from Abraham to Christ, we would expect that the promises that were given to Abraham would also apply to him.

Indeed, this is so. At the time Jacob was leaving his parents to seek a wife in Padanaram, Isaac declared to Jacob in Gen. 28:3-4:

And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.

This promise, like that made to Abraham in Gen. 17, speaks of Jacob becoming a multitude of people; also, according to this promise, he would inherit the land wherein he lived as a stranger.

Do you remember that as Jacob was sleeping, God visited him? We read in Gen. 28:12-14:

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

We find a commentary on these verses in Matthew 8:11-12 and in Luke 13:28-29, where Christ declares that the sons of the kingdom (national Israel) would be cast out, while many others from every direction would come in.

Matthew 8:11-12: And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 13:28-29: There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

Furthermore, forty years after Jacob went to seek a wife, while he was returning to the land of Israel, God appeared to him. We read in Gen. 35:10-12:

And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.

Jacob had become Israel (Israel means "Prince of God"); He, too, was promised the land. He, too, will be the father of many nations. We have seen that all of this finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. All of the promises that were given to Abraham apply also to Jacob. But while Abraham was not called Israel (even though he was the beginning of that nation), Jacob was called Israel.

Jacob's physical seed, the twelve tribes, were called Israel. We find this to be true throughout the Bible. But what about his spiritual seed, all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Does the Bible also regard them as Israel?

Logically, if the physical seed of Jacob are called Israel because Jacob, their physical progenitor, was called Israel, we should likewise be able to assume that the spiritual seed of Jacob, the believers in Christ, should also be called Israel. Let us see how the Bible, our authority, directs us on this question.

Christ Ministers to a Gentile Woman: Is She Israel?

In Matthew 15 the Bible describes a visit of the Lord Jesus to Tyre and Sidon (a land outside of Israel), where He ministered to a woman of that area. Mark 7:26 speaks of her as "a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation." Matt. 15:22 tells us that she was "a woman of Canaan." Under no circumstances was she a blood descendant of Abraham.

As our Lord dealt with this non-Israelite, this Gentile, He declared to her, in Matt. 15:24, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This significant passage declares that Christ was sent only to the house of Israel.

From this pronouncement of the Lord Jesus, it seems we must conclude that Jesus was sent only to the nation of Israel. But does the phrase "the house of Israel" refer to national Israel alone?

If this were a correct conclusion, and Christ was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, what was He doing ministering to a non-Israelite, a Gentile woman? Was Jesus violating His own rules? Of course, this cannot be.

Nevertheless, His actions might puzzle us. Not only did He minister to a heathen woman, but on another occasion He ministered to another non-Jew, a Samaritan woman. He deliberately addressed a Samaritan woman and declared the way of salvation to her. We read in John 4:7: "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink." We read in John 4:13-14:

Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

He not only spoke to her of the way of salvation, but He spent two days in the city of the Samaritans so that many Samaritans believed on Him. We read in John 4:39-41:

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word.

These Samaritans were not Jews. This is shown by the language of John 4:9, which declares:

Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

How can this be if Jesus was sent only to the house of Israel, that is, if the house of Israel is to be understood only as national Israel?

All Who Believe in Christ Are Israel

To complicate matters even further, we read in John 1:29:

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

The world includes far more than national Israel. If Jesus was sent only to national Israel, why does John the Baptist introduce Him as the Savior of the world? Is it possible we are to understand that the phrase "the house of Israel" refers to all believers? Surely this appears to be so.

We saw from Gen. 17, Rom. 4, and Gal. 3 that God had prophesied in the Old Testament that Abraham would be the father of a multitude of nations. We saw that this promise was focused on the Lord Jesus becoming the Savior of Gentiles as well as Jews. We saw that this promise was repeated to Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. Therefore, the conclusion that the term "the house of Israel" would include Gentiles as well as Jews is entirely in agreement with the promises that Abraham was to be the father of a multitude of nations.

We can see why Jesus ministered to Gentiles such as the Syrophenician woman and the Samaritans. They, too, were the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Only by understanding this wonderful truth does Christ's statement, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), have any integrity.

But have we missed something? Isn't there another passage in the Bible that teaches that the lost sheep of the house of Israel cannot be Gentiles or Samaritans? The verses in question are Matt. 10:5-6, which declare:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Surely it appears that these verses are putting into opposition the house of Israel on the one hand and the Gentiles and Samaritans on the other.

Notice that the main modifiers of the verbs "go" and "enter," are "the way," "into any city," and "the lost sheep." The phrase "of the Gentiles" modifies the term "the way" in which the disciples were not to go and with which they were not to become involved.

The phrase “the way” has particular meaning in the Bible. We read in John 14:6 that Jesus said, “I am the way.” In Acts 9:2 the Bible declares that the believers in Christ are of the “way” (Acts 19:9, 23). Thus, the term “the way” signifies a spiritual path. When Jesus commanded the disciples not to go into the way of the Gentiles, He was effectively commanding them not to become involved in the spiritual paths of the heathen. They were to remain true followers of the way of Christ.

That this conclusion is accurate can be seen when we look again at the Syrophenician woman. If this command meant that the disciples were not to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, then Christ violated this principle when He ministered to the Syrophenician woman. To minister to her, Christ had to leave the land of Israel and go into the countries of Tyre and Sidon. If the phrase “the way of the Gentiles” meant that the disciples were not to go where the Gentiles lived, then the Lord Jesus violated this command by going with His disciples to the lands of Tyre and Sidon.

On the other hand, if the phrase “the way of the Gentiles” is understood to mean that the disciples were not to become involved with the heathen religions, then there was no contradiction or violation in Christ going to Tyre and Sidon to minister to the Syrophenician woman.

Likewise, when we examine the phrase “city of the Samaritans,” we see that this refers to the spiritual city or the religion practised by the Samaritans. Let us see why this is so.

The Bible frequently refers to the believers as the city of God or as the holy city. In Isa. 52:1 the believers are referred to as the “holy city.” In Rev. 21:2 we read:

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The bride of Christ consists of all the believers in the world. Believers are, therefore, the “holy city.” In Isa. 60:14 we read, “they shall call thee, The city of the LORD.” This chapter of Isaiah is dealing with the Savior who would come. He is, therefore, the City of the Lord.

The term “the city” can refer to a religion or a body of believers who are under the lordship of someone. The city of the Samaritans makes reference to a wrong gospel, a Samaritan religion. The disciples were not to become involved with the congregation or the religion of the Samaritans. Thus, the term “the city” has the same meaning as the prior term “the way.”

That this is an accurate and correct conclusion can be seen when we read of Christ’s activities with the Samaritans as recorded in John 4. In John 4:5 we read that Jesus came to a city of Samaria. In verse 8, the Bible informs us that the disciples “were gone away unto the city to buy meat.” In verses 39-41, as we discovered earlier, we read that He spent two days with the Samaritans.

All of this activity would have been in violation of the command in Matt. 10:5, “into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not,” if the city of the Samaritans is to be understood to mean a literal, material city. When we understand this phrase to mean the gospel or religion of the Samaritans, then there is complete harmony among all of the verses.

We now can see why in Matt. 10:5-6, Jesus on the one hand speaks of not going and not entering into the way of the Gentiles, or the city of the Samaritans, while on the other hand, He speaks of going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He is telling the disciples not to become involved with the religions of the Gentiles or the Samaritans. Rather, they are to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That is, they are to faithfully proclaim the true Gospel of salvation so that those whom God planned to save from every nation of the world might hear the Gospel and be saved. In our Lord’s declaration in Matt. 15:24, concerning the lost sheep of the house of Israel, the house of Israel refers to all believers; and also in Matt. 10, the house of Israel refers to all believers.

Moreover, we can be secure in the conclusion that all believers are called Israel when we realize that the Bible is its own dictionary; the Bible defines its own terms. God has the right to assign the name Israel to whomever He pleases, and He definitely wants us to understand that the term Israel refers to all believers. It is entirely within God’s prerogative to give a meaning to the term “Israel,” other than Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel), and the ten tribes (the nation called Israel after the death of Solomon) and the division of the twelve tribes), and the whole nation of Israel (blood descendants of Abraham). The Bible teaches us that at times, Israel can also be a reference to the whole body of believers.

Christ, too, Is Sometimes Called Israel

The Bible assigns the name Israel to another personality who is intimately identified with all believers. That personality is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He, too, is called Israel, which gives us added

assurance about understanding why the Bible refers to all believers as the house of Israel. All believers are a spiritual house (I Peter 2:5), and the chief cornerstone of that house is Christ (I Peter 2:6).

I Peter 2:5-6: Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

From these verses we learn that the house of believers is the house of Christ. If Christ is Israel then it necessarily follows that the believers are the house of Israel. If Christ is the head and we, the church, are His body, then if He, the head, is Israel, it surely follows that we, His body, are Israel.

We should show that the Bible sometimes speaks of Christ as Israel. In Hosea 11:1 we read: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."

In this verse, we learn that someone called Israel as a child was loved by God. He was the Son of God and He was called out of Egypt. This is most interesting. Who is this individual?

The Bible gives us a clear answer. In Matthew 2 we read of Mary and Joseph with the young child Jesus fleeing from Herod. In this context, the Bible declares in Matt. 2:14-15:

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Here God is quoting from Hosea 11:1 with the language "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." In other words, God is instructing us that the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 was being fulfilled when Jesus was taken by His parents into Egypt. That is, before Jesus would go to Nazareth to grow up, before He would begin His official work as the Messiah, He was called out of Egypt. Hosea 11:1 insists that this Son is Israel. Thus, Christ is called Israel. In coming as the child, Israel, out of Egypt, He is paralleling the experience of national Israel which came out of Egypt.

Therefore, we see that the name "Israel" in the Bible can refer to Christ Himself.

In this connection, we will look briefly at Isa. 49:1-3, where we read:

Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

This passage, which speaks of the Lord's servant called Israel, who has a mouth like a sharp sword and in whom God is glorified, can refer only to Christ. Do you recall that we read how He will come at Judgment Day with a sharp sword protruding from His mouth (Rev. 19:15)?

Do you recall that the name Israel means "Prince of God"? No individual can bear that name more accurately than Christ Himself, who is frequently called a Prince in the Bible (Isa. 9:6, Ezek. 46:2, Dan. 8:25).

We have established that in the Bible all believers in Christ are sometimes referred to as Israel, and that sometimes Christ Himself is referred to as Israel. This in turn agrees precisely with the Biblical truth that all believers are the seed of Abraham who was the father of Israel. As we proceed in our study, we see that every detail is fitting into place.

All Believers in Christ Are Jews

We have seen that in certain parts of the Bible, all believers are called Israel just as certainly as the nation of Israel is called Israel in other parts of the Bible. We have seen that this truth is reinforced by the language of Rom. 4 and Gal. 3, where all believers are called the seed of Abraham.

Are there other passages that point to the fact that insofar as God is concerned, all believers in Christ are the Israel of God? If there are, do these passages help us to understand Old Testament passages which speak of a future glory for Israel? Indeed there are, and as we examine some of them, we will learn more conclusively than ever that God always anticipated a nation, an Israel, that was far more glorious than the political nation, national Israel.

Let us look at Rom. 2:28-29 where God declares:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

In these verses, God is teaching first of all that in God's view, a Jew is not someone who has been circumcised, that is, one who is a blood descendant of Abraham. This is very significant. While in many parts of the Bible we are taught that the Jews were those of the nation of Israel, in this passage, God is teaching that from God's vantage point, Jews are only those who have become saved. To have one's heart circumcised is Biblical language indicating salvation. This was already commanded in Deu. 10:16: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked."

God says in Deu. 30:6 that He will accomplish this kind of circumcision:

And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

This statement clearly identifies with salvation, as can be seen by Col. 2:11:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

All Believers Are Circumcised

Now the question might be raised: Couldn't it be that in Rom. 2:28-29 God is speaking only of the saved Jews within national Israel? The Bible answers this question in Phil. 3:3:

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

This passage clearly points to the fact that all believers are the circumcision. This is taught in Col. 2:11-13:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Clearly the circumcision that God recognizes is that of those whose sins have been cut off by the blood of Jesus Christ. They are the Jews of Rom. 2:28-29.

This truth, that the circumcision God recognizes involves all who believe in Christ as Savior, is in harmony with the teaching of Gen. 17. Do you recall that the sign of the promises, of the Covenant, made to Abraham and his seed was circumcision? Concerning this sign, God declares in Gen. 17:14:

And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

In this warning, God is emphasizing that for these promises to become realized in the life and experience of the inheritor of the land, circumcision is a requirement. Is God thus teaching that physical circumcision is a requirement for salvation? Remember, we previously learned that the promises of Gen. 17 find their fulfillment in salvation.

Yes, circumcision is a requirement for salvation. But it is not physical circumcision. It is not an act which we perform. Rather, it is the circumcision of our hearts. It is an operation performed by God. Do you recall Deu. 30:6:

And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Can you see how beautifully Col. 2:11 agrees with Deu. 30:6?

Col. 2:11: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

Small wonder then that in Phil. 3:3 God declares that "we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." How harmoniously and how beautifully all of the Bible is fitting together.

Now we can see, too, why Gen. 17:14 declares: "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."

Covenant breakers are those who have not been circumcised in their hearts. That is, they have not become saved. Thus, they will be cut off. To be cut off is language that relates to eternal damnation.

Christ Was a Jew

It should not be surprising that the Bible speaks of all believers as Jews. Jesus, our head, was a Jew. He was of the tribe of Judah. Since He was a Jew, then we who have become adopted into His family are also Jews. Through Him, we have become identified with Israel and the tribe of Judah.

We must not lose sight of the truth that the identification of believers in Christ as Jews is just as real and substantive as that for blood descendants of Abraham, who are called Jews. God has given a much more meaningful and eternal meaning to the word “Jew” and the word “Israel” when He refers to those who have become saved than when He refers to national Israel.

In Gal. 6:15-16, the Bible makes further reference to Israel. There we read:

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and⁶ upon the Israel of God.

In this passage, God is highlighting the truth that those who are saved are to be called “the Israel of God.” The “new creature” of verse 15 is “the Israel of God” of verse 16.

We have discovered the tremendous fact that there is more than one Israel in the Bible. To look blindly at each verse of the Bible that speaks of Israel as though it speaks only of national Israel is to deny a great amount of Biblical truth. While, indeed, the Bible very frequently does speak of national Israel, it also speaks of another Israel that is every bit as real and substantive as national Israel.

That Israel is the Israel of God. The Israel of God is the Israel made up of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Israel that is eternally glorious. The members of this Israel are those who have become sons of God. The Israel of God is added to every time someone becomes saved. It is the whole house of Israel that our Lord came to seek and to save. It is the Israel that God has repeatedly in view as He develops His magnificent plan of salvation.

The question still persists: Aren't there other passages in the Bible that speak of a glorious future for national Israel? In the next chapter we will look at additional Scriptures that many theologians believe anticipate a future for national Israel.

Chapter 6 – God's Glorious Eternal Israel

We began this study wondering about national Israel and its future. Very quickly in the beginning of Chapter 1 we saw that God had made certain promises to national Israel concerning the land. We also saw that these promises were completely fulfilled.

We discovered that other promises were made to Abraham as well as to his seed. These promises emphasize that the land is an everlasting inheritance. When we continued to probe into the Biblical evidence concerning these promises, we found they always relate to salvation. They had national Israel in view only insofar as there is a remnant out of national Israel who together with the saved Gentiles constitute the house of Israel which our Lord came to save.

Everywhere we turned, we found further confirmation of this grand and wonderful truth. In fact, we are beginning to see that while God dealt with national Israel in history, He normally had in view in His promises the Israel of God, which is the Israel comprised of every child of God.

In this chapter, we will continue to look at significant Old Testament passages which appear to relate to national Israel, and, indeed, in the premillennial system of doctrine, these passages are used as proof texts to support the idea of a glorious future for national Israel. However, when we look at these passages in the light of the New Testament commentary, we see that they do not relate to national Israel at all. Rather, they all point to the Israel of God, which consists of every one who believes in Christ as Savior.

In Rom. 9, we find information that relates to Old Testament passages that apparently speak of national Israel but actually show that the Israel in which God is interested consists of Gentiles as well as believing blood descendants of Abraham. We read in Rom. 9:23-26:

⁶ The conjunction “and” which is the Greek *kai* is not properly copulative in this sentence. It is intensive and, therefore, the translation should be “even upon the children of God.” This agrees with the context for it is only those who have trusted in Christ who walk according to God's rules and have God's peace upon them.

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

In this informative declaration God is showing that the prophecies of Hosea anticipated the inclusion of the Gentiles in the body of believers. When we read the quotations as they are found in Hosea, and which are quoted in Rom. 9, we are astounded to find that they make no mention of Gentiles. The context of these verses in the Book of Hosea seems to indicate that they speak only of national Israel. Verse 25 of Rom. 9 quotes Hosea 2:23, which reads as follows:

And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

And verse 26 of Rom. 9 quotes from the second half of Hosea 1:10, which reads:

. . . and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

Not only does Hosea 1:10 speak specifically of Israel but in the same context, the next verse refers to Judah as well as Israel and indicates that the time is coming when these two Old Testament nations would again be one people with one head.

Moreover, when we carefully read the first two chapters of Hosea, we find no reference at all to Gentiles. The context appears to be altogether focused on national Israel. While they have become a divided people because of their sins and, in fact, have come under severe condemnation, nevertheless, God apparently is prophesying that they will again become God's own people.

Let us never forget that the Bible is its own interpreter. The Bible is its own dictionary. It provides its own commentary. While the first two chapters **apparently** are speaking of national Israel, God clearly shows us in Rom. 9 that He is **not** saying that national Israel would again become God's people.

Rather, He is speaking of a nation of people that would consist of believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews. Before we are saved we are not the people of God, but when we become saved we become the people of God. We become the sons of the living God.

Once we understand these wonderful truths we can see why God declares in Hosea 2:19-20:

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. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

In other words, in these two chapters of Hosea, God is prophesying the marvelous truth that in the coming Messiah (typified by Jezreel in these chapters), salvation would come to Judah and Israel. Christ would be their head.

In Rom. 9:25-26 God is showing that the Israel, the Judah, who would be saved includes Gentiles as well as a believing remnant from national Israel.

Significantly, in I Peter 2, God speaks of those who have believed in Christ and uses language of Hosea 2:23. Note I Peter 2:9-10:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

In these verses, too, God is underscoring the truth that all believers, whether Gentile or Jew, are to be identified with the Israel of Hosea 2.

The importance of what we are learning from Rom. 9 as it teaches God's intention concerning Hosea 1 and 2 cannot be underestimated. It truly is an outstanding disclosure. By this means, God has shown us that when He speaks in the Old Testament of a future glory for Judah or Israel, He has in view not national Israel but the Israel of God. It is the Israel made up of all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 9: A Commentary on Isaiah

God further develops this understanding in Rom. 9:27-29:

Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the

sea, a remnant shall be saved: For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.

We must remember that these verses, like Rom. 9:25-26, are being used to prove that God had always anticipated that the Gentiles would be saved right along with a believing remnant from national Israel. The next verse, verse 30, underscores this:

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

We know, therefore, that in these verses God has given a commentary on the original Old Testament passages from which they are quoted. Verses 27 and 28 are a quotation from Isa. 10:22-23, which declare:

For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land.

In that context God states in Isa. 10:20-21:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

Since we know from Rom. 9 that verses 22 and 23 of Isa. 10 have an Israel in view that includes Gentiles as well as Jews, we know that the "remnant of Jacob," the "remnant of Israel," has in view the body of believers who will come to the Lord Jesus Christ. These would include blood descendants of Abraham who have believed in Christ and Gentiles who have believed in Christ. God is indeed opening up our understanding concerning His intentions with the language of the Old Testament.

Returning to Rom. 9:29, we discover that this verse is a quotation from Isa. 1:9, which promises:

Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

Again, we must remember that since Rom. 9 is discussing an Israel made up of Gentiles and Jews, the first chapter of Isaiah is also anticipating an Israel that would be a body of believers made up of Gentiles and Jews. This accords beautifully with Isa. 1:18:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

This verse helps us to see that Isa. 1:25-27 is focused on the whole body of believers that would come forth as a result of God's redemptive work through Christ. These verses read as follows:

And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

The "faithful city," the "city of righteousness," and "Zion" are references to the whole body of believers who are to be redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ who came to satisfy God's judgment on their behalf. This city of believers is to consist not only of Gentiles but also of believers from national Israel. It is no wonder that Rom. 9:6-9 declares:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

In these verses, God sets forth the same truth that we discovered in Rom. 2:28-29. The Israel that God is especially concerned with does not consist only of those who are blood descendants of Abraham. It consists of those who are the children of the promise. The children of the promise are those who believe in Christ as Savior whether they are blood descendants of Abraham or Gentiles. This is seen clearly by the language of Rom. 4:16-17, where the promised seed are shown to include people of every nation. These verses state:

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed,

even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

An Understanding of the Old Testament Requires the New Testament

We are beginning to see that carefully reading the New Testament gives us a considerably different understanding of the Old Testament from that which we might have if we read the Old Testament without the benefit of the New Testament commentary. We should realize by now that it is imperative that we do not come to conclusions concerning Old Testament teaching without the benefit of the New Testament explanation. To do so is to violate a basic Biblical principle that we are to compare spiritual things with spiritual (I Corinthians 2:13). To violate this principle can only lead to very faulty doctrines.

For example, the Jews of Jesus' day did not have the New Testament. Their knowledge of the character and nature of the coming Messiah was based on the Old Testament. They had great difficulty, therefore, in understanding many aspects of the nature of God's salvation plan which are extremely clear to those of us who have the New Testament and the Old Testament. While the Old Testament declared that the Messiah was to be a blood sacrifice, the disciples themselves did not understand Jesus' crucifixion, that is, until after it had become an historical event.

Likewise, if we attempt to understand the Old Testament passages that speak of future glory for Israel or future events of any kind without carefully studying the New Testament verses that relate to them, we are bound to come up with wrong doctrine. Therefore, it is imperative that we carefully examine the New Testament before we try to understand the Old Testament.

The New Testament Church Was Thoroughly Anticipated in the Old Testament

Let us return to the Book of Romans and see how God teaches, when He makes reference to Old Testament promises, that He always had planned to save Gentiles as well as Jews. As we search out the Old Testament passages referred to in the New Testament, we will begin to see that the Old Testament spotlight is not on national Israel but on the whole body of believers whether they are Jew or Gentile. In other words, the spotlight is on the church which came into existence at Pentecost and continues to the present day.

In Rom. 15, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes a number of references to Old Testament prophecies which showed that God intended to save Gentiles as well as Jews. In Rom. 15:8-9 we read:

Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

This is a quotation from Psalm 18. Psalm 18:49 declares: "Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name." We are assured by the Bible that Psalm 18 is prophesying of the Lord Jesus Christ when He came as the Messiah. It is also speaking of the peoples who would believe on Him, peoples who would include the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Therefore, we know that verses 48 and 50 also speak of the salvation which would be provided by Christ. These verses read as follows:

Psalms 18:48: He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man.

Psalms 18:50: Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore.

These verses speak of deliverance from enemies and of mercy to David and his seed. They are anticipating the salvation to be provided by Christ whereby we are delivered from the enemy, Satan, and receive the mercy of God. When other Bible passages use these same phrases, they, too, ordinarily can be expected to be speaking of salvation in Christ. For example, we read in Luke 1:68-75 that Zacharias spoke of deliverance from enemies as he anticipated the birth of Christ who would bring salvation. In the beautiful statement he declared:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness

before him, all the days of our life.
How beautiful and cohesive the Bible is!

His People: All Believers in Christ

Returning to Rom. 15, in verse 10 we read another quotation from the Old Testament which relates to God's program to include Gentiles in the body of Christ: "And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people." This verse is a quotation from Deu. 32:43, which reads:

Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

It is noteworthy that this verse, which we can now understand has its fulfillment in the New Testament church in which God has included Gentiles and Jews, speaks of "his land" and "his people." We know from Matt. 1:21 that Jesus came to save "His people" from their sins. We know from Rom. 11:1 that God has not rejected "His people." We know from John 6:37-39 that Christ's people have been given to Him by the Father. John 6 emphasizes that "His people" must include all believers, and, therefore, both Jews and Gentiles. But so does Deu. 32:43 teach this inasmuch as we know from the Rom. 15:10 commentary that Gentiles are included in salvation. Do you recall that Zacharias said in Luke 1:68, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people." Again we see the cohesiveness and harmonious character of the Scriptures.

Of great interest is the phrase in Deu. 32:43 which tells us that He "will be merciful unto his land." We see in this phrase that the land is completely related to God's program of salvation. Earlier in our study we learned that the land that was promised to Abraham and his seed was not the material land of Canaan but the land that is given to all believers. It is the new earth which continues eternally and which is completely related to salvation. God will have mercy not only on those who believe on Him but also on the creation itself which will become the new heaven and new earth. Later in our study we will see that the phrase "his land" has a wider meaning than creation itself.

Continuing in Rom. 15, we find that the next verse, verse 11, which also ties in the Gentiles with the body of believers, is a quotation from Psalm 117. Rom. 15:11: "And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people." In this verse, God shows us that Psalm 117 is also anticipating the wonderful salvation God would provide to all the nations through the Lord Jesus. Psalm 117 tells us:

O Praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

Isaiah 11 Has the Salvation of the Gentiles in View

Another tremendous clue to correct understanding of the Old Testament is found in the next verse, Rom. 15:12:

And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

This is a quotation from Isa. 11. Verse 10 of Isa. 11 declares:

And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

Rom. 15:12 assures us that this verse is speaking of the phenomenon immediately following the cross, whereby the Gentiles would begin to flow into the rest provided by the root of Jesse. The root of Jesse is Jesus. The rest which He provides is rest from our efforts to try to become right with God by our own labor. We are to rest in the finished work of Christ who paid for our sins if we have become born again. Thus, we are guided by God to understand that the language of Isa. 11 is pointing to the cross and the church that would begin immediately after our Savior's ascension.

Therefore, we know that the language of Isa. 11:6-8, which is part of the context of Isa. 11:10, also must be entirely related to God's salvation program. These verses give us the information:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

If we look at this passage in a very literal, material way, then the cross would have brought about tremendous modification in animal behavior. We know that has not happened nor is it taught in the Bible.

We must realize this is symbolical language.

Salvation Signifies the Curse Has Been Removed

In the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world, the animals were herbivorous; that is, they ate no meat. In the Garden of Eden, there was no enmity between animals and no enmity between man and animals; and man was at peace and in harmony with God. But because of man's sin, death and enmity entered the world. Man became estranged from God and became the slave of Satan.

When we become saved, the curse of sin is removed. We are again at peace with God. It is as if we are again in the Garden of Eden, where: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isa. 11:6-7). The believer is pictured as a child (Matt. 18:3: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"). The believer plays on the hole of the asp and puts his hand on the cockatrice's den. Both the asp and the cockatrice are poisonous reptiles which typify Satan, over whom the believer in Christ has triumphed.

Thus, when these verses are rightly understood, they agree precisely with the conclusion to which the Bible has led us: The cross and the New Testament believers are in view.

Salvation comes to the believer because Christ went to the cross to pay for our sins. Salvation will come to its ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth. Therefore, as God discusses the conditions in the new heavens and the new earth in Isa. 65:17-25, He uses the same figure, as He declares in verse 25:

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

Even as in Isa. 11, literal animals are not in view. Rather, God is emphasizing that salvation brings about the wonderful condition that the curse of sin has been removed.

The second verse of Isa. 11 is similar to other verses in Isaiah which the New Testament assures us point specifically to Christ who came as Messiah. Verse 2 records: "And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."

Note how similar this language is to that of Isa. 42:1-4:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Isa. 42 is quoted in Matt. 12:18-21, where God declares:

Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

In Matt. 12:17, the Bible solemnly informs us that Isa. 42 was fulfilled when the Messiah came: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet." Therefore, we are certain that the prophecies of Isa. 11 and Isa. 42 find their fulfillment in Christ's coming as the Messiah and in the fact that Gentiles as well as a remnant from national Israel make up the Israel of God. Note the language of Isa. 11:12:

And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Here God speaks of assembling the outcasts of Israel and gathering the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The context surely indicates that they are gathered together to be saved. Salvation comes to all who believe on Christ, whether of national Israel or of any other nation. But in this passage, all of those who have believed are looked upon as Israel or Judah. This conclusion is in perfect harmony with everything we have already discovered in our study.

Israel and Judah Can Refer to All Who Believe in Christ

We can easily see why the believers in Christ are called Judah. Jesus, our Head, is of the tribe of Judah. He is intimately associated with Judah. Thus, since we who believe on Him are citizens of the kingdom of Christ, we, too, may be called Judah. In fact, the citizens of national Israel were called Jews because they were identified with Judah, and since we who believe in Christ are called Jews, we may be called Judah as well.

While we are on the subject of the beautiful prophecies of Isaiah that relate to the plan of salvation, we will look at Luke 4:17-21, where Jesus is reading from the Old Testament:

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

This Scripture is a quotation from Isa. 61:1-2, which promises:

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

Isaiah 61 Anticipates God's Wonderful New Testament Salvation Plan

Some theologians observe that when our Lord read from Isaiah, He read only the first half of verse 2. They believe that this implies that the last half of verse 2, together with the rest of Isa. 61, will not have fulfillment until some future time.

This conclusion is quite erroneous. Let us see why. When we look at other verses in Isa. 61, it can be seen that they also relate to Jesus as the Savior, and to the New Testament body of believers, which includes a remnant from national Israel and Gentiles.

A few examples from Isa. 61 will show this. Verse 2 speaks of a day of vengeance. The day of vengeance is Judgment Day, when God's wrath will be poured out on the unsaved. The last day of this earth's existence is Judgment Day. But so was the cross Judgment Day. It was as real and awful as the final Judgment Day because at the cross, Jesus suffered the wrath of God, the equivalent of eternity in hell, on behalf of all who believe on Him. Therefore, we know that the phrase "the day of vengeance of our God" can point to the cross.

This truth, that "the day of vengeance of our God" can point to the cross, is further seen in Isa. 35. The whole chapter gloriously prophesies concerning the coming of Christ. In the heart of this chapter is verse 4, in which God declares:

Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.

God came in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ to provide the recompense (the payment) for our sins. God came with vengeance and poured out His wrath on Christ for our sins. All of this occurred because He came to save us. Indeed, "the day of vengeance" is a phrase that rightfully can point to the cross.

The last phrase of Isa. 61:2 declares, "to comfort all that mourn." The Lord Jesus quoted these words in the Beatitudes in Matt. 5:4: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

The Beatitudes have in view those who have placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who "mourn" refers to those who weep as they see their sins and the wrath of God they so rightly deserve. But God comforts us by bringing salvation. God speaks dramatically of the fact that those who have been comforted are those who have been saved; He says in Isa. 40:1-2:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

Those whose iniquity has been pardoned are only those who have been saved. Thus, we can be certain that the last phrase of Isa. 61:2, "to comfort all that mourn," also speaks of the grand event of Christ being our Savior.

As we continue to look at Isa. 61, we will see more evidence that this chapter is focused on the coming of Jesus as our Savior. Verses 4-5 declare:

And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.

This prophecy, together with similar language found in other places such as Jer. 30:18 and Amos 9:11, is referred to in Acts 15:16, where the New Testament church is grappling with the issue of Gentiles becoming believers. The leaders of the church met in Jerusalem to study this phenomenon, and the Apostle James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared in Acts 15:16-18:

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Since these verses address the question the church faced in Acts 15, that is, Gentiles becoming saved, we can know that the language used in Acts 15:16, which speaks of rebuilding the tabernacle and its ruins, must be a word picture depicting the building of the church from people of every nation. By this declaration, we are informed that the Old Testament language which promises the rebuilding of David's tabernacle or raising up the former desolations does not point to the rebuilding of a material, physical city or tabernacle; rather, it points to the building of the house of God or the city of God. That house or city is the body of believers. This conclusion harmonizes perfectly with all our other conclusions in this study.

Returning to Isa. 61, we can now see why verse 9 promises:

And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.

Verse 9 also must be speaking of the salvation that was brought by Christ as He died for our sins. Thus, wherever we look in Isa. 61 we see a relationship to our salvation which was accomplished because our Savior went to the cross.

Isaiah 49 Prophesies God's Salvation Program

Before we leave Isaiah, we will look at Acts 13. Paul and Barnabas were bringing the Gospel, and they observed in Acts 13:47:

For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

This is a quotation from Isa. 49:6, where God promised:

And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Isa. 49 is a dramatic passage that presents the coming Messiah as the suffering servant. Verse 2 declares:

And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me.

Remember, God teaches in Rev. 19:15 that when Christ comes on the clouds of glory, He will have a sharp sword protruding from His mouth. That sword is the Word of God. Therefore, Isa. 49:2 is speaking of Christ coming as the Word of God. As we have already seen, verse 6 teaches us that His coming was to bring salvation to the world.

Verse 3 of Isa. 49 declares that this servant is Israel: "And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Earlier in our study, we determined that Israel means Prince of God. Christ is the Prince of God. Therefore, we are not surprised to see that He is called Israel in this verse.

Because Christ is also called Israel, it logically follows that verse 6 speaks of the believers who will come to Him as being not only the Gentiles who will come to His light but also as the "tribes of Jacob" and "the preserved of Israel." This accords with the earlier passages we studied which speak of the body of believers as Israel. It conveys the additional information that the body of believers may be called Jacob insofar as God's definitions are concerned. This language also suggests that Christ is sometimes called Israel in the Bible and that He at times is called Jacob. Even as the believers are the preserved who belong to Israel (Christ), so, too, they are the tribes of Jacob; that is, they are the tribes who belong to

Jacob (Christ). Later, we will see the significance of this as we look at the meaning of Jer. 30:7 which discusses "Jacob's trouble."

As we study any part of the Bible, we must remember that it is imperative that we understand the Old Testament prophecies in the light of New Testament information or commentary. This is vital if we are to be certain we have obtained a true perspective of the Scriptures. Those who have failed to follow this principle have arrived at warped conclusions concerning national Israel and the very nature of salvation.

I believe the chief reason the premillennial view of Christ's return can be proven to be unbiblical in so many ways is that it has as its foundation an entirely wrong interpretation of the Old Testament verses we have been studying. They have interpreted these verses, which speak of a future for Israel, without allowing the New Testament teachings to be brought to bear on them.

When we diligently apply the principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture, we see that God's definition of terms such as Jew, Israel, Jacob, and Judah can apply not only to national Israel, but also to Jesus Himself. Moreover, they can apply to the body of believers, which consists of saved Jews and saved Gentiles. This information puts us on guard as we read either the Old Testament or the New Testament. When any of these words are used, we must carefully examine the immediate context as well as the whole Bible to try to discover who or what is in view. Is national Israel in view, or the whole body of believers, or Jesus, Himself?

We have also begun to learn that passages such as Gen. 17, which tell us of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed, are concerned altogether with God's salvation program. This conclusion is supported by a whole host of Biblical references. It is the grand theme that permeates the Bible. Amazingly, every passage we looked at, except for the few which we examined at the beginning of Chapter 1, was immediately concerned with the salvation Christ came to provide.

Chapter 7 – We Visit Ezekiel 37

Now that we have begun to understand how we are to proceed with a study of Old Testament prophecies, let us look at Ezek. 37, which speaks of future blessing for Israel and Judah. This chapter is used by premillennial theologians as evidence that God has promised a glorious future for national Israel. Utilizing the principle that **all** Scripture is to be interpreted by **all** Scripture, we will answer the question: Are their conclusions accurate?

Which Israel and which Judah are in view in Ezek. 37? Is it national Israel, as many theologians of today believe? Is it the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it the whole body of believers which became the New Testament church?

Ezek. 37 is divided into two sections. The first fourteen verses are concerned with the resurrection of the house of Israel and placing them in their land. Verses 15-28 deal with bringing Judah and Israel into their land so that they are one kingdom ruled over by David forevermore. Let us examine each of these two prophecies.

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezek. 37 opens with the information that Ezekiel, a prophet of God, was brought to a valley full of dry bones, which is a picture of death. It is a picture of hopelessness. There is no evidence of any kind of life.

Then God told Ezekiel in verses 3-6:

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Ezekiel then prophesied (to prophesy is to declare the Word of God) to these dead bones, and they came together and flesh came upon them and they were covered with skin. But no breath was in them.

Ezek. 37:7-8: So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the

flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

Thereupon, Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy to the wind (*ruach*, which is the normal Hebrew word for spirit or breath), in Ezek. 37:9, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." So he prophesied, in Ezek. 37:10, "and the breath [*ruach*] came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

God then told Ezekiel in verses 11-14:

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.

Who Is the Whole House of Israel?

Immediately questions begin to multiply. Who is the whole house of Israel? What is the land of Israel that is in view? When is this great event going to happen?

The first truth we must realize is that God is speaking of a people who were dead and whom God brings to life. To come to life after being dead is to be resurrected. Therefore, they are a people who have experienced a resurrection.

Secondly, they come to life because Ezekiel, the prophet of the Lord, prophesies (declares God's Word) to them (verses 4-7). Thirdly, they are those who hear the Word of the Lord (verse 4). Fourthly, they are spoken of by God as "My people" (verses 12-13). Fifthly, after they have been resurrected, they will be placed in their own land (verse 12). Sixthly, God's Spirit will indwell them (verse 14). These, I believe, are the essential characteristics and experiences of those who are called "the whole house of Israel" in verse 11.

The essential all-important question is: Who is Israel? There are three possibilities. Israel can refer to the ten tribes which constituted the northern kingdom after the death of Solomon; or Israel could be all twelve tribes of national Israel; or Israel could be the whole body of believers in Christ who are also called the house of Israel.

Let us assume that either the ten tribes or the twelve tribes are in view, that is, the blood descendants of Abraham, and not the seed of Abraham which is constituted of believers in Christ.

Having made this assumption, we must answer the question: Does national Israel, either as ten tribes or as twelve tribes, satisfy the language "the whole house of Israel"? Immediately, of course, we can exclude the ten tribes because they were only a part of the whole of national Israel. Ten tribes could never be the "whole house" of Israel. We must conclude, therefore, that if national Israel is in view in these verses, it must be all twelve tribes. Let us consider national Israel as it has existed throughout time.

Is National Israel the Whole House of Israel?

Dr. Dwight Pentecost, a leading teacher of the premillennial view of Christ's return, in his book *Things to Come*,⁷ writes:

In this connection a word is necessary concerning Ezekiel 37, the vision of the valley of dry bones. It is held by some that the mention of "graves" in Ezekiel 37:13-14 would seem to show that resurrection is in view here, for it does not seem to mean a place among the nations, but rather a place of burial. However, the bones are not seen in a grave, but scattered over the valley. Ezekiel must be using the figure of burial and resurrection here to teach restoration.

In the explanation of the vision [verses 21-22], Ezekiel clearly explains that restoration is in view. It would be concluded here that Ezekiel is speaking of restoration and not resurrection.

Dr. Pentecost further explains that national Israel will be regathered in unbelief to their land (page 295). There they apparently will be restored, as a nation, to a righteous relationship with Christ. This will be presumably at or just before a future 1,000 year reign of Christ on this earth.

Let us examine this conclusion to see if it accords with Scripture. National Israel has existed since

⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), pages 409-410.

Abraham was circumcised in 2068 B.C. Therefore, they have a history covering about 4,000 years. Their average population during this period was maybe two million people. In a 4,000-year span of time, there would have been perhaps as many as a hundred generations. Thus, the total number of the whole house of national Israel could approximate as many as 200 million people.

Is God teaching us that all these Israelites, who have died and whose bones are now in the earth, will someday be resurrected and be brought back to their land? This must be our understanding if the “whole house” of Israel refers to national Israel. This would mean that those Israelites who perished in unbelief, and those Israelites like the scribes of Jesus’ day who had committed the unpardonable sin (Mark 3:22-30), would all have great blessings still to come to them in the future.

Surely this line of reasoning is preposterous. Nowhere does the Bible teach that those who have died in unbelief will escape eternal damnation. The Bible insists that from national Israel a remnant is chosen by grace. God speaks of those in national Israel who have become believers in Rom. 11:5: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” A remnant is only a small part of the whole. Therefore, under no circumstance may we look at the “whole” house of Israel as being national Israel.

Moreover, the conclusion that the whole house of Israel is national Israel does not take into account all of the language of Ezek. 37:1-14. Verse 11 of Ezek. 37 expressly speaks of the “whole” house of Israel. Premillennialists frequently contend that Ezek. 37 will find fulfillment during the final tribulation period when the nation of Israel will turn as a nation to Christ as Savior. But the blood descendants of Abraham who are living during the final tribulation period surely are not the “whole” house of Israel. They represent only a tiny part of the whole house of Israel.

Furthermore, in verse 25, we see that when Israel returns to their land they are to dwell there forever. Since this earth and the whole universe are to be burned with fire when Christ returns (II Peter 3), in no way could the physical land of Israel located along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea be in view because it will be destroyed by fire. The only way we can understand language that speaks of the land “for ever” is to remember what we learned from Gen. 17, where God speaks of Abraham and his seed inheriting the land as an “everlasting covenant.” We saw that Gen. 17 had God’s plan of salvation for the whole world in view. Therefore, we can be certain that national Israel was not in view in Gen. 17, and they are not in view in Ezek. 37 which speaks of the whole house of Israel.

Since national Israel is not in view in these verses of Ezek. 37, we have no alternative but to believe that the house of Israel which God has in mind is the body of believers from every nation who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Earlier in our study we discovered that Israel frequently is the name assigned to those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers in Christ Are the Whole House of Israel

Does the body of believers composed of saved people from every nation fit the description of the “whole” house of Israel? Our answer must be, “Indeed, it does.” As we saw earlier in our study, Jesus declared He was sent “but” to the house of Israel, and He came to the Syrophenician woman and to the Samaritans. In fact, He sent the disciples to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Are they the “whole” house of Israel? Indeed, they are. God has a precise plan of salvation that includes **all** who are predestinated to be saved. They are God’s elect, who were chosen from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). They were given to Christ by the Father, and Jesus declared He would lose none of them (John 6:37-39). Indeed, the believers in Christ meet the definition of being the whole house of Israel.

As we look at the truth that the whole house of Israel spoken of in Ezek. 37 consists of all who believe in Christ, we find they have all the characteristics presented in Ezek. 37. Remember, verses 1 to 13 speak of the house of Israel being in graves; that is, they are dead. Were those who have come to life in Christ dead? Indeed, they were. The Bible declares in Eph. 2:1: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” God further emphasizes in Eph. 2:5: “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).”

Spiritually all of mankind are dead in their sins. We are dead because we have rebelled against God; we have sinned. The law of God declares that the wages of sin is death. While in the Garden of Eden, Adam was told in Gen. 2:17:

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.

Spiritually, Adam became dead before God from the moment he sinned. He was slain by God

spiritually because he dared to disobey God. Since all of us come from the loins of Adam, we are equally spiritually dead. The evidence of mankind's deadness is seen in that we die physically and in that we will endure damnation eternally.

Ezek. 37 speaks of the whole house of Israel having the Word of God brought to them, which they hear, and which causes them to be resurrected. Does this apply to believers in Christ?

All Believers Have Experienced the Resurrection

Indeed, this does apply to all believers. God normally saves us through the preaching of the Word (Rom. 10:17). He gives us ears to hear and the will and strength to respond to the Word. He raises us from spiritual death to eternal life. Eph. 1:5: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

Our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, was raised from the dead; that is, He experienced the resurrection. If we have been raised with Him, then we have experienced the resurrection. At the moment of salvation, we receive our new souls. We become new creatures in Christ. We are born from above by the will of God. John 5:24 says it so well:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

If we were dead and now are alive, the inescapable conclusion must be that we have experienced the resurrection. There is no way around this conclusion.

Jesus speaks very succinctly to this question. In John 5:25 He declares:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

In this passage, the only dead being raised are those who have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a beautiful declaration that shows the fulfillment of the resurrection which God had promised in Ezek. 37:1-14.

Col. 2:12 speaks of this resurrection:

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

This same fact is reiterated by the exhortation in Col. 3:1: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

Do the believers in Christ meet the requirement in Ezek. 37:12-13 of being called by God "my people"? Indeed, they do. When we looked at Hosea 2:23 in the light of Rom. 9:25, we saw that God meant all believers when He used the term "my people." It was "His people" that Jesus came to save, which we read in Matt. 1:21: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

In Ezek. 37:14 God says He will put His Spirit in those who have been resurrected. Is this requirement met by all those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ? Wonderfully, yes. The characteristic of the child of God is that he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Rom. 8:9 teaches that if we do not have His Spirit, we are none of His.

All Believers Have Been Brought into the Land of Israel

Have we who have believed in Jesus been brought into the land of Israel as Ezek. 37:12 prophesies? This question requires a somewhat longer explanation.

Earlier in our study, we discovered that the land that had been given to all believers as well as to Abraham was the new heaven and the new earth. We come into this inheritance at the end of time, when we will have received our resurrected bodies. It is the final fulfillment of our salvation. It is in this sense that God speaks of the land in His promise to Abraham.

God uses the term "land" in another sense, which is related to and actually anticipates the meaning in Gen. 17. Let me explain.

In the Book of Joshua, we have the account of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan. The Israelites had left Egypt, the house of bondage, and had entered the land of Canaan, which had been given to them. It was necessary for them to conquer the land, and finally they became substantially victorious. Then we read in Joshua 11:23:

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

And in Joshua 14:15:

And the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba; which Arba was a great man among the Anakims. And the land had rest from war.

The New Testament commentary on these verses is found in Heb. 4:8-10:

For if Jesus [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Here we are taught that God typifies the rest we have in Christ by the rest the Israelites enjoyed in Canaan. In other words, our salvation is typified by the land of Canaan. Thus, in the Bible, language that concerns the land can refer to salvation.

Of course, we must remember that the land of Canaan in the ultimate sense typifies the new heaven and the new earth, which is a guaranteed inheritance for those who have become saved. The new heaven and the new earth, where we will dwell eternally with God, is an extension of heaven, where God now dwells. The Bible teaches that at the moment of salvation, we become citizens of heaven. Phil. 3:20: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." God shows us that our homeland has become heaven by His statement in Eph. 2:5-6:

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

This surprising declaration emphasizes that we reign with Christ from the moment we become saved. Eph. 1:20-22 shows that Christ is seated at the right hand of God, ruling over everything in this age and in the world to come. Therefore, if Christ is reigning and we are seated with Him, then we are also reigning. We have been assigned the task, however, of first serving as ambassadors of Christ to this sin-cursed world. Only when our work is ended can we go home to heaven.

The Land Is Christ's Kingdom which Believers Enter at Salvation

Col. 1:13 declares: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." In this beautiful statement, God informs us that those who have become believers are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is more substantial and real than any political kingdom for it will continue eternally.

The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom we enter into by being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). It is the kingdom that is constantly referred to in the New Testament. It is the kingdom that Christ established by going to the cross. It is the kingdom He rules over as King. It is a kingdom composed of all who have become born from above.

Because the kingdom of heaven is a substantial and real kingdom, with Christ reigning over it as King, its citizens are spoken of as being in a land. It is not a land occupied by existing political kingdoms; it is a spiritual land that today is the wonderful relationship we have with Christ. After Judgment Day, it will find its permanent homeland in Christ, as He rules over the new heaven and the new earth.

Therefore, we can conclude that the phrase "come into the land" is language that can be speaking of an historical entrance into the physical, material land of Canaan. Or equally, the phrase can refer to entrance into salvation. Or, it could have reference to the completion of our salvation at the time we enter the new heavens and the new earth.

The fact that the phrase "the land" could have reference either to salvation itself or to the completion of our salvation is paralleled by other language that described salvation as a present reality as well as a bestowal from God in the future. In Rom. 8, for example, we read that those who have been saved have become adopted as children. Verses 15 and 16 state:

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

Verse 23 declares: And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Comparing these two passages, we learn that when we became saved, we were immediately adopted into God's family. We learn also that we must be adopted into His family at some time in the

future.

Likewise, when we have been saved, we have entered the land, but our inheritance of the land will not be complete until our salvation has been completed. That will become a reality when we receive our resurrected bodies and enter into the new heaven and the new earth.

Returning to Ezek. 37:12, we see that the phrase “bring you into the land of Israel” has to do with salvation, even as the resurrection described in this chapter has to do with salvation. The whole house of Israel, which means everyone whom God has elected to salvation, will come into the land; that is, they will be saved.

We have seen that every phrase of the first fourteen verses of Ezek. 37 can be clearly understood when we learn that God is describing His wonderful salvation plan which is to be available to the whole house of Israel, that is, to all who will become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 37:15-28 Can Refer Only to God’s Salvation Program

Beginning in verse 15 of Ezek. 37, God again is making promises that relate to Israel. Will our earlier conclusion, that God has already kept all of His promises insofar as national Israel’s relationship to the land is concerned, stand close scrutiny in light of these verses? Indeed, it will, as we shall discover.

The opening verses of this passage appear to have only national Israel in view. During the days of David and Solomon, the nation of Israel consisted of one unified kingdom. However, upon Solomon’s death, in the year 931 B.C., the kingdom was divided into two nations. Ten of the tribes, including the dominant tribe Ephraim, with their capital in Samaria, continued to be called the nation of Israel. Two of the tribes, including the dominant tribe Judah, with their capital in Jerusalem, became the nation of Judah. This division of Israel into two nations continued to the end of their respective national existences as independent nations.

The nation of Israel, the ten tribes, was destroyed and taken captive by the Assyrians in 709 B.C. A little more than one hundred years later, the nation of Judah, which was also called Israel after the destruction of the ten tribes, came under attack and harassment by the Babylonians. In 587 B.C., the nation of Judah was destroyed and taken captive by the Babylonians. Ezek. 37 was penned just before the destruction of Judah.

The Two Sticks

In this context, God is speaking through the priest Ezekiel and says in Ezek. 37:19-22:

Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

As indicated earlier, at first blush, this language appears to relate only to national Israel. Indeed, if we stopped reading at verse 22, this could be our conclusion. But when we continue to read, we learn that the language that is used to describe this uniting of Judah and Israel relates to salvation. Verse 23 prophesies:

Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

This is the language of salvation. The phrase “I will save them” is completely identified with salvation. The phrase “wherein they have sinned” also is intimately associated with the message of redemption. Before we are saved, we are dwelling in our own house, that is, in our own life, and it is a sinful life. Christ came to save us from a life of sin.

Likewise, the phrase “and will cleanse them” is altogether related to salvation. You will recall Titus 3:5, which beautifully declares:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

The phrase “so shall they be my people” also is totally involved with salvation. We learned earlier when we studied Hosea 2:23, which speaks of “my people,” in the light of Rom. 9:25 and I Peter 2:10, that the phrase “my people” refers to all believers in Christ.

In a letter to the church in Corinth, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote in II Cor. 6:16:

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

In this verse, by the words “as God hath said,” God is showing us that He is quoting from the Old Testament. Some of this quotation comes directly from Ezek. 37:23, where God is prophesying, “so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.”

Since II Cor. 6 is addressed to Gentiles as well as Jews, it is teaching us that the phrase “I will be their God, and they shall be my people,” relates to all believers.

We have seen that verse 23 of Ezek. 37 declares that the promises concerning the reuniting of Judah and Israel in their own land point directly to the salvation that would be provided by Christ who came as the Savior.

Judah and Israel: All Believers in Christ

As we saw earlier in this study, the name Judah does not only refer to the nation that existed from 931 B.C. to 587 B.C., it can also refer to all who have placed their trust in Christ. Before we are saved, we are scattered amongst the heathen or nations of the world. After we are saved and cleansed of our sins, we enter the nation of Israel which is the land of salvation, the kingdom of God.

Likewise, when God speaks of Israel, the tribes which made up the nation of Israel during the period from 931 B.C. to 709 B.C. can be in view. But the name Israel can be equally assigned to those scattered throughout the world who are brought into salvation.

Thus, in Ezek. 37:15-22, God seems to be speaking of national Judah and national Israel, but when we read verse 23, which declares how the promises of the earlier verses will be accomplished, then we know that God is speaking of salvation, which came to the world through the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we have understood Ezek. 37:23 correctly, then we know that verses 15 to 22, which speak of uniting Judah and Israel, cannot refer to a political reunification of the two kingdoms. Judah and Israel must make reference to the elect who will be gathered from every nation and kingdom of the world into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The elect are typified by ancient Judah and Israel.

We have looked at verse 23, but what about the rest of Ezek. 37? Does it support our conclusion that this whole passage is focused on the coming of Christ as Redeemer? We read in verses 24 and 25:

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children’s children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

The Lord Jesus Christ, Typified by David, Will Be King Forever

In these verses, we see that David, God’s servant, is to be king over them. Verse 22 says that “one king shall be king to them all.” These verses make reference to David as king. Does this mean that David, who ruled over ancient Israel, is to be resurrected to rule over a united Judah and Israel? Earlier in our study, we saw that those who have died will not be resurrected until the last day. Thus, if David himself is in view, then it would have to be speaking of the new heavens and the new earth. If that were true, this prophecy could have no fulfillment in time.

The conclusion that King David, who ruled over ancient Israel, is to rule again over Israel appears to be supported by the phrase, “and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.” We learned earlier that the new heavens and the new earth (which must be in view when the Bible uses the word “forever”), relate to salvation. When we become saved, David does not become our king; Christ becomes our King. How can this be resolved?

We must bear in mind that God frequently uses a type when He speaks of an antitype. For example, God speaks of Elijah coming in Mal. 4, verses 5 and 6:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the

LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The New Testament commentary on these verses tells us that an angel informed Zacharias that he would have a son and he was to name him John. Concerning this son, who became John the Baptist, the angel declared in Luke 1:17:

And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Comparing Luke 1:17 with Mal. 4:5-6, we see that the Elijah of Mal. 4 was John the Baptist. In Mal. 4, God speaks of John the Baptist as Elijah because John was typified by Elijah. Elijah was the type which pointed to the antitype, John the Baptist.

The fact that Elijah typified John the Baptist is also seen in the language of Matt. 11:12-14, where we read:

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

When God speaks of David in Ezek. 37:24-25, He has the Lord Jesus Christ in view; Christ was typified by David. Jesus is the King who rules over all believers, who have become Israel. When Christ came, He was called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). Acts 5:31 speaks of Christ: "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

The Lord Jesus Christ Will Come as Shepherd

Verse 24 of Ezek. 37 informs us that "they all shall have one shepherd." Who came as the Good Shepherd? In John 10:1-16, our Lord talks about His sheep and says that He is the Good Shepherd. Verse 11 says: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep," which helps us to understand Ezek. 37. Ezek. 34:11-16 also makes a promise and declares that God Himself is the Shepherd:

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

In this beautiful and significant prophecy we are informed that God will be the Shepherd who will search out the sheep. Christ, who declared that He was the Good Shepherd, is the fulfillment of these Ezekiel passages. In Ezek. 37:24-25, God is promising that Christ, who was typified by David, will be King as well as Shepherd over all who become believers.

Those Who Believe in Christ Will Be Given the Land Forever

In Ezek. 37:24-25, we read the promise:

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

Note how parallel this promise is to the promise made to Jacob in Gen. 28:13:

And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.

Earlier in our study we learned that this verse and other similar verses relate altogether to salvation. How consistent God is in repeating His promises! Because Gen. 28:13 relates to salvation, we

know that the language of Ezek. 37:25 relates to salvation. Verses 24 and 25 of Ezek. 37 are entirely in harmony with verse 23, wherein every phrase relates to the salvation which would be provided by our Lord Jesus Christ who came to pay for our sins.

But Ezek. 37 has more to say that underscores the truth that these promises relate to salvation. Verse 26 tells us:

Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.

This verse assures us that salvation is in view in that it says: "I will . . . set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." Thus, eternity must be in view, and eternity always relates to salvation.

What is the sanctuary or temple that will be in the midst of the believers forever? Jesus called Himself a temple when He told the Jewish leaders in John 2:19: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Bible then tells us in John 2:21: "But he spake of the temple of his body."

How clearly we are taught that Jesus is the Temple or Sanctuary. He will dwell forever. God speaks of the new heavens and the new earth and declares in Rev. 21:22: "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." How marvelously all the Scriptures mesh together once we see that the dominant subject of the Bible is God's magnificent salvation plan!

God's Covenant of Peace with all Believers

Returning to Ezek. 37, we read that God will "make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them." What is this covenant of peace? An everlasting covenant must relate to salvation because only salvation is everlasting. How does salvation relate to peace? When the angels announced the exciting news of Jesus' birth, they said to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

The covenant of peace is the covenant of salvation. Before we are saved, we are citizens of the dominion of Satan, who is at war with God. Christ came, as it were, with the peace treaty. When we become saved, we are no longer at war with God. When we are saved, we are taken out of the dominion of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). Isa. 40:2 says it so well:

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

This is the everlasting covenant of peace that God speaks of in Ezek. 34:25-26. God emphasizes that all of Ezek. 37 is focused on the glorious salvation that would be provided by our Lord Jesus. It is the same covenant we studied earlier in Gen. 17. The covenant made with Abraham and the covenant of peace are one and the same.

Verse 27 of Ezek. 37 further reinforces our conclusion that this entire passage relates to salvation. In this verse, God tells us:

My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Christ is the tabernacle that is with us. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," is a reiteration of verse 23, which we learned is wholly related to salvation.

Ezek. 37:28 tells us:

And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

When Christ the Sanctuary is in the midst of the believers forever, it will be in the new heavens and the new earth, and all the nations will know that Christ is Lord. Phil. 2:9-10 says:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.

All the nations will know that Christ is Lord when He comes to judge them on the last day. Unfortunately, it will be too late for salvation, but they will know that Christ had come as Savior. They will know that Christ had come to sanctify, or set apart for His service, a people called Israel, the Israel that includes all who will ever believe in Christ.

We have shown that every part of Ezek. 37 can be understood plainly when we follow the principle of interpreting Scripture with Scripture. By carefully examining each phrase in the light of the New Testament commentary, we have seen that everything in Ezek. 37 points to salvation. Thus, the Judah and Israel that are presented in this chapter are not national Israel. The Judah and Israel

presented in this chapter are all the people who believe on Christ as Savior.

Ezekiel 37 Does Not Suggest a Glorious Future for National Israel

We have carefully studied Ezek. 37 because premillennialists typically use this chapter to suggest that God still has a wonderful plan for national Israel. In our study, however, we have found that this chapter relates entirely to the coming of Christ to be our Savior and to the salvation He has so graciously provided.

Those who hold the premillennial position assert that they differ from the amillennialists in that the former look at prophecy literally, whereas the latter spiritualize prophecy. They fail to realize that there are many passages the premillennialists spiritualize. For example, they do not expect a literal resurrection of the dry bones of Ezek. 37:1-12.

On the other hand, the amillennialists look at many prophetic passages that deal with Christ's return very literally. The resurrection of the last day as recorded in John 6 is a very literal resurrection. The resurrection of Daniel 12:2 is also to be regarded as a very literal resurrection.

I have become utterly convinced that the difference between the amillennial and the premillennial views is not due to literal versus spiritual interpretation; the difference in the two views has to do with the issue of the use of the whole Bible to interpret the Scriptures.

As I studied premillennial books, I discovered that conclusions are derived from Old Testament passages such as Gen. 17 or Ezek. 37 with no serious attempt to study the New Testament commentary on these Old Testament passages. Thus, I am afraid that doctrine is being taught that has not been arrived at by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Conclusions will be in error if they are not made in the light of everything the Bible the offers on the subject. It is a cardinal principle that we must compare Scripture with Scripture. Therefore, we dare not arrive at conclusions concerning Gen. 17 or Ezek. 37 or any other Old Testament passage until we have carefully taken into account every New Testament phrase that is associated with the prophecy being studied.

In our study, we are beginning to learn that the Old Testament is just as concerned with salvation as the New Testament. Oh, yes, it is much easier to read the Old Testament without doing the necessary work of searching the New Testament for God's explanation of the Old Testament. Only as we do this patiently will we come to truth. If we do not do this, we will teach error. It is imperative that we examine every part of the Bible in light of **everything** in the Bible that might relate to the verse in question.

Chapter 8 – God's Plan to Evangelize the World

We will begin this chapter with a study of a few words and phrases that will help us to understand some Old Testament passages which many people believe refer to a glorious future for national Israel. We shall see that the fulfillment of these passages centers on the New Testament, after Christ came as our Redeemer and as the Gospel goes into all the world.

The Phrase "Pour Out" His Spirit Points to God's Salvation Plan

The Old Testament has a number of references to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. While it should be easy to recognize that these references anticipated the sending forth of the Gospel into the world after the ascension of our Lord, unfortunately, many people believe these Old Testament passages require a future fulfillment centered around national Israel.

Study of the Biblical language that relates to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit reveals that passages such as Gen. 17 and Ezek. 37 anticipated God's program to evangelize the world.

We read how God began His program to bring the Gospel to the world in Acts 2, where the Bible quotes Joel 2 and records that God poured out His Spirit. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains the momentous event and declares in Acts 2:16-21:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew

wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Since this is a quotation from the Old Testament Book of Joel (Chapter 2, verses 28-32), we have assurance that Joel 2 must be promising and pointing to the beginning of the great event of the Gospel of salvation being sent into all the world.

We will briefly study the promise of the poured-out Holy Spirit in the Book of Joel to see how it relates to God's program of salvation for the world.

The Book of Joel Warns of Coming Judgment

God begins the Book of Joel by warning of impending judgment. This impending judgment is presented in a multi-layered fashion that points first to the destruction of ancient Israel by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and ultimately to the judgment that all peoples of the world must face on the last day when God will judge the nations.

Two aspects of God's final judgment are in view. The first is the judgment that will come upon God's people, who are constituted as congregations, and the second is Judgment Day.

Ancient Israel was the corporate, external representation of the kingdom of God on earth in the Old Testament, and the churches and denominations which are reasonably true to God's Word are the external representatives of the kingdom of God on earth today. Ancient Israel, which typified the New Testament church, was destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians, who typify the dominion of Satan. Just before Judgment Day, the churches and denominations will be destroyed by Satan's kingdom as Satan comes with false gospels to ravage the churches, which will become increasingly apostate as we approach the end of time. This sad situation will come to full flower during the final tribulation period, which I believe we are in now, just prior to Judgment Day.

The terrible judgment that came upon Israel and which points to the final tribulation period, is seen in:

Joel 1:10: The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth.

Joel 1:12: The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

Joel 1:17: The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered.

In these verses, "corn," "wine," "oil," and "seed," are references to the Gospel or the Word of God, which was in a sorry state during the time Israel was besieged by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. During the final tribulation period, the Gospel will be in an equally sorry condition. A couple of references in the New Testament will show us what is to happen during the final tribulation period. (Chapters 12 and 15 include greater details about the final tribulation.) Our Lord asks a rhetorical question, which sets forth the spiritual condition of the world when Christ returns, in Luke 18:8: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" In John 9:4, He anticipates this condition: "the night cometh, when no man can work."

In the Bible, "night" and "darkness" are synonyms for the rules of Satan. During the final tribulation period, Satan is loosed to overrun the churches.

The first eleven verses of Joel 2 are a dramatic warning of the reality and certainty of Judgment Day which is coming not only upon the whole world but already in a sense rests upon the unsaved. The warning of the coming of God in judgment is an important ingredient in God's salvation plan. God declares in John 3:36:

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

The warning of impending judgment in Joel 1 and Joel 2 sets the stage for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as He came to redeem a people for Himself from every nation of the world.

As stated previously, the coming of God in judgment is typified in the Book of Joel by the Assyrian and Babylonian armies which destroyed the ten tribes of Israel in 709 B.C. and the nation of Judah in 587 B.C. Joel 1:15 declares: "Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." These destructions of ancient Israel are presented in a multi-layered fashion as

they in turn are typified by a locust plague which in turn is typified by a devastating fire. Joel 2:7-9 describes the plague of locusts:

They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.

In Joel 2:5 the plague of locusts is typified by fire:

Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.

How can we know that the plague of locusts typifies the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians or Babylonians? God assures us that the Assyrians are typified by locusts in the Book of Nahum. Nahum 3:15-17 speaks of Assyria:

There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts. Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are.

The Judgment on Israel Typifies God's Judgment on the World

How can we know that the destruction of Israel by the enemy typifies Judgment Day at the end of the world? The Bible gives a great deal of evidence to show this. For example, in the opening chapters of Isaiah, God warns ancient Judah that the Babylonian armies are going to destroy them because of their spiritual adulteries. God declares in Isa. 5:13-14:

Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.

God says that the consequence of their sin is hell, but He also speaks of them going into captivity. Thus, captivity is equated with hell. Their destruction and captivity by the Babylonians become figures or types of Judgment Day when the unsaved will be cast into hell.

That Judgment Day is in view in Isa. 5 can be seen by the warning in verses 24 and 25:

Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

God warns more specifically of coming judgment in Joel 1:15:

Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

This ominous declaration is repeated in Joel 2:1-2:

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

The "day of the Lord" is Judgment Day, which will come upon the whole earth. Rev. 16:14 speaks of it as "that great day of God Almighty." In Rev. 6:12-17 God describes that awesome day with language that is very similar to Joel 2:10. Verses 12 and 13 of Rev. 6 inform us:

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

Rev. 6:17 concludes the description of this awful day by stating: "For the great day of his wrath is

come; and who shall be able to stand?"

The day of the Lord, Judgment Day, was typified by the destruction of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians and the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians. These terrible events left Israel in ruins with no apparent hope for the future.

But the certainty of Judgment Day is not the only truth that God presents in His Word. God will have mercy. There is a solution to the absolutely horrible doom awaiting mankind.

God's Call to Repentance

The impending destruction of Israel typifies impending doom for the sinner, and God's call to Israel to repent to avert national destruction typifies God's call to the sinner to repent of his sins. Joel 2:12-14 sets forth this call to repentance:

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?

In Chapter 2 of Joel, we see the overwhelming and abundant grace of God in His provision for salvation. Joel 2:18 declares: "Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people." Matt. 1:21 refers to His people: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

"His people" are those whom Christ came to seek and to save. Likewise, we must understand "His land" is a reference to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was typified by the land of Canaan. Joel 2:19:

Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen.

Corn, wine, and oil refer to the Gospel which was to become abundantly available after Christ came as the Messiah.

God's Plan for Man's Escape from Judgment

Salvation is in view in Joel 2:19, as can be seen, for example, in the last phrase of Joel 2:26 which is repeated for emphasis in verse 27. The phrase, "My people shall never be ashamed," does not refer to the physical land; it relates to salvation. To be ashamed in the Bible relates to being under the condemnation of God, that is, to be subject to judgment. For example, we are taught about the relationship of shame to judgment in Psalm 31:16-17:

Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake. Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave.

The New Testament underscores this and indicates that it was first declared in the Old Testament. In Rom. 10:11 God declares: "For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Thus, we see again how the New Testament guides us and shows us we are on the right path.

Returning to Joel 2, in verse 28, God teaches us how the escape from judgment will be provided. He also displays the wonderful result of the escape from Judgment Day. Joel 2:28-32 records:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

These verses are quoted in Acts 2 and fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was poured out. This dramatic event signalled the beginning of God's program to evangelize the world.

How wonderful to read the words, "Whosoever shall call on the name of Lord shall be delivered." How merciful God is! This is the language of salvation, which is the major thrust of the Book of Joel. The references in the Book of Joel to the fact that Judgment Day is coming, emphasize the pressing need for

salvation. Unless we find an escape from Judgment Day, surely we will be cast into hell.

Note that Joel 2:31 contains the language of Joel 2:10, which warns that Judgment Day is coming. Joel 2:10 declares:

The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.

The phrases in this verse that speak of the sun, moon, and stars being darkened are used in the New Testament in Matt. 24:29 and Rev. 6:12, and instruct us about Judgment Day, when time will have come to an end. The timekeepers, the sun and moon, to which God assigned the task of ruling over the day and night (Gen. 1:16-18), will be taken out of commission. The stars will withdraw their shining and fall from heaven (Matt. 24:29), because the universe will be collapsing. The time of the end of this present earth will have come, and God will destroy it and create new heavens and a new earth wherein the curse of sin has been removed (II Peter 3:7-13).

In Joel 2:28-32, God is not speaking of Judgment Day at the end of time, He is speaking of Judgment Day experienced by Christ on the cross. Because of sins, unsaved mankind will come under the wrath of God on Judgment Day at the end of time. In Joel 2:28-32 God is speaking of salvation which will come to those who have trusted in Christ as Savior. Joel 2:32 says:

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

This dramatic statement points right to the Lord Jesus Christ who faced the judgment throne of God to pay for the sins of all who would believe on Him. He had become sin for us, and in His atonement He was found guilty of these sins. Thus, sentence was passed. He was condemned. He endured the wrath of God for our sins, the equivalent of eternity in hell for all who would believe on Him. Joel 2:31 employs the language of Judgment Day and warns: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come."

This is the language of Judgment Day, but the content indicates very clearly that the Judgment Day that God has in mind is that experienced by Christ on the cross, because it was at the cross that Jesus endured the wrath of God on behalf of all who would believe on Him. The sun and the moon were darkened at the cross, which underscores the fact that Judgment Day was being experienced by Christ.

God's Spirit Is Poured Out

In Joel 2:29, God says He will "pour out my spirit." How does this relate to God's salvation program? How can God's Spirit be poured out?

God's Spirit is the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit has been, is, and always will be present in the world. The Holy Spirit was present at creation (Gen. 1:2); He upholds the world by His power (Psalm 104). The Holy Spirit is God Himself. He is not a quantity of something that can be literally poured out. He is eternal God, who is everywhere present in the world.

But didn't Jesus say in John 16:7 that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, must come? Doesn't Joel speak of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit? How are we to understand these phrases?

The answers to these questions must be seen in the fact that God uses various phrases to speak about different aspects of the activities of God the Holy Spirit. Each phrase might be called a technical phrase used to describe a particular work of God the Holy Spirit. While it is beyond the scope of this study to develop this, it can be shown that to be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be qualified to be a witness of the Gospel. Likewise, those who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit are those who not only have become saved (that is, their sins have been washed away), but they also have become identified with God's New Testament program to evangelize the world.

In the same manner, references in the Bible to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit relate to the work of God the Holy Spirit in evangelizing the world. Until the Pentecost experience recorded in Acts 2, it had not been God's program to send the Gospel into the whole world; He dealt primarily with the nation of Israel.

The coming of Christ as the Messiah ushered in God's program to evangelize the world. In the Bible, expressions concerning the coming of the Comforter and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit refer to God's program to evangelize the world. For example, in Joel 2, in the context of a description of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, God makes the wonderful promise that "whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered." How gracious God is in that salvation was made available to the whole world!

Christ Experienced Judgment to Bring Salvation

We can now understand why Joel 2:30-31, which is quoted in Acts 2, uses language which speaks of Judgment Day. To effectuate God's plan of worldwide evangelism, it was first necessary that our Lord Jesus Christ experience Judgment Day for our sins. These two verses declare:

And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

This is the language of Judgment Day, but it is not describing the Judgment Day at the end of the world. It is describing the Judgment Day that Christ experienced on the cross on behalf of all who would believe on Him.

Notice the similarity of the phrase, "the great and the terrible day of the Lord," to the phrase in Mal. 4:5, where God prophesies concerning the coming of John the Baptist, who was typified by Elijah. Mal. 4:5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."

We know that the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" refers to the cross. John the Baptist, typified by Elijah, introduced Jesus as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Jesus was the Lamb who took away the sins of the world by going to the cross to pay for our sins. Thus, the promise of Mal. 4:5 gives us assurance that Joel 2:31 speaks of the cross.

Verse 20 of Joel 3 continues to speak of this wonderful salvation and shows that it is eternal, in the promise: "But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation." In this declaration, God again speaks of His believers, using the figures Judah and Jerusalem. God is quite consistent in the Bible in frequently using the names Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem in a very literal fashion while speaking of all who would believe on Christ as Savior.

The Book of Joel is a beautiful demonstration of how God presents the message of salvation in the Bible. We have assurance from Acts 2:17-21 that Joel 2:28-32 is speaking of salvation. God employed types and figures in the Book of Joel, which brings the message of salvation that would become available to the whole world.

The Book of Joel begins with the warning that God's judgment rests on all people. It then shows that salvation would be provided by the coming Messiah who would endure Judgment Day for those who would repent and believe. It closes with the wonderful promises of blessing for those who have become listeners. How gracious our Lord is in His salvation!

We will look at two other Old Testament passages which speak of God pouring out His Spirit.

Isaiah 32 Points to God's Program of Salvation

Isaiah 32 opens with the promise that a king will reign in righteousness. Verse 1 promises: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment."

Then the reader is reminded of the sad condition that prevails as Israel faces the future. Verses 13 and 14 warn:

Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks.

This bleak future will have an end. God speaks of His great love and compassion in verse 15:

Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

The phrase, "the spirit be poured upon us from on high," gives us immediate assurance that God is speaking of the great event recorded in Acts 2, when God began His program to evangelize the nations. The King who will reign in righteousness is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who came as our righteous king. The princes who rule in judgment must be the believers who are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6), which means that when we become saved, our homeland becomes heaven. As sons of God, who now are a royal priesthood, we serve on this earth as ambassadors of our heavenly kingdom.

Verse 2 of Isa. 32 further assures us that the reign of a king in righteousness identifies with the Lord Jesus Christ when He came as our Savior. Verse 2 declares:

And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Note the phrase, “rivers of water in a dry place.” Jesus promises in John 7:38-39:

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

In other words, when God began His program to evangelize the world, rivers of living water, that is, the Gospel of salvation began to flow from the lives of the believers. The man who is to be a hiding place is none other than Jesus who hides us from the wrath of God. Jesus is the great Rock in whose shadow we are protected from the wrath of God.

These rivers of water will produce a tremendous harvest. Isa. 32:15 promises that at the time the Holy Spirit is poured out “the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.” Isa. 32 speaks of sending the Gospel into all the world after the Lord Jesus came as the King of righteousness. Those who believe on Him would be at rest, as verse 18 teaches: “And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”

When we compare verse 15, which speaks of the effects of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, with Isa. 35:1 and Isa. 41:18-19, we are assured that these two chapters are also addressed to God’s wonderful program to evangelize the world. Isa. 32:15:

Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.

In similar language, Isa. 35:1 declares:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

Likewise, in Isa. 41:18-19 we read:

I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together.

We will not take time for a complete study of Isa. 35 and Isa. 41, but we will note Isa. 35:5, where God promises: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.”

Matt. 11:5 is a commentary on Isa. 35:5 and teaches us that we are to understand these Scriptures as having been fulfilled by Christ when He came as Savior.

Matt. 11:5: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

We are assured, therefore, that Isa. 32, Isa. 35, and Isa. 41 all have God’s wonderful plan to evangelize the world in view.

Unfortunately, there are people who read these chapters and come to certain conclusions, and they do not seek to harmonize their conclusions with everything else in the Bible that might relate to them. They conclude, for example, that national Israel’s relatively thriving agricultural industry of today must be a fulfillment of the promises in Isaiah.

How pitiful! To believe that today’s agricultural industry could be a fulfillment of these marvelous promises is to empty the Bible of all meaning. God has an infinitely more glorious fulfillment: The glorious fulfillment of the world becoming a seedbed of people being saved. God’s fulfillment is a harvest of souls who have been brought from the precipice of hell into an everlasting relationship with Christ.

I hope we are all beginning to see clearly and insistently that the Bible is God’s message to mankind concerning salvation. The Bible is a spiritual book. While it was written using types and figures of a material nature, the goal of the Bible is to teach us about the wonderful kingdom that God came to establish through our Lord Jesus Christ. God has been building this kingdom for the past two thousand years, in direct fulfillment of these Old Testament promises.

The New Testament commentary on God’s promise to pour out the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Book of Joel and several chapters of Isaiah. Knowing God’s intention with the language found in these chapters, we could take words and phrases from them as further commentary on the other parts of the Bible that seem difficult to understand. We are beginning to see that the Old Testament has a great deal to say about the glorious salvation program that was to fill the earth after the Savior went to the cross.

Ezekiel 39 Points to the Cross

A second Scripture passage where God promises that He will pour out His Holy Spirit is in Ezek. 39. This chapter is troublesome to understand, but because of the language of verse 29, we know that it had to be fulfilled when Christ came and God began His program to evangelize the world. Ezek. 39:29:

Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

Note that God's spirit is poured out upon the house of Israel. Acts 2:17-21 tells us that God's Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh. By tying these two verses together, and understanding that Acts 2:17-21 is a commentary on Ezek. 39:29, we discover that the phrase, "the house of Israel," has the same people in view as those who are in view in the phrase "all flesh" of Acts 2:17-21, which includes anyone from any political nation who will believe in Christ. Thus, we know that Ezek. 39 is a prophecy concerning the salvation of the world, the phrase "house of Israel" identifies with all believers in Christ, and "all flesh" becomes the equivalent of the house of Israel. This agrees precisely with our earlier study which revealed that "the house of Israel" has in view all who would believe on the Lord Jesus. How beautifully the Bible ties together concepts and truths!

There is another verse in Ezek. 39 which assures us that God has in view the coming of Jesus and the evangelization of the world. It is verse 25, which states:

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name.

The phrase "bring again the captivity" assures us that God's salvation plan is in view. This is a very important phrase, and we should study it carefully. Therefore, we will leave Ezek. 39 and explore this phrase as it is found in other passages, and then return to Ezek. 39 and a few of its more difficult verses.

Chapter 9 – Bring Again the Captivity

We want to look at some Old Testament passages that contain the clue phrase, "I will bring again the captivity," and which many premillennialists attempt to relate to future glory for national Israel.

In Joel 3:1 we read: "For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem." We learned earlier that the Book of Joel is identified with the coming of Christ to save. Therefore, we know that the phrase, "bring again the captivity," in Joel 3:1 speaks of salvation.

This phrase is also found in Ezek. 39:25, which we quoted earlier. Thus, we suspect that Ezek. 39 also speaks of the coming of Christ to save.

In fact, the phrase "bring again the captivity," or "bring back the captivity," always relates to salvation. We will study the verses which contain this phrase, and as we do, we will be assured that the passages in which it is found point to God's wonderful salvation program which was initiated by Christ going to the cross.

"Bring Again the Captivity" Always Points to God's Salvation Program

Psalms 14:7, Psalm 53:6, and Psalm 85:1-2 use this language even though they were written at a time when Israel was not in captivity. How then can these Psalms use language that teaches the freeing of those who are captives? The verses themselves show what God has in view.

Psalms 14:7: Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Psalms 53:6: Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Psalms 85:1-2: LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.

Notice that these verses speak of salvation, forgiveness for iniquity, and sins being covered. God is informing us that the promise to bring back the captivity relates to the forgiveness of sins. Let us see why this is so.

Before we are saved, we are in captivity to Satan. We are his captives because we have rebelled against God. Satan has conquered mankind because man obeyed Satan rather than God. But Christ

came to set us free. Christ came to make us His captives and His bond servants. Eph. 4:7-9 declares:

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)

Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth, a synonym for hell, which means He endured hell on our behalf to save us from hell. Moreover, He found us in hell, that is, we were captives or slaves of Satan on the way to hell. Christ freed us from Satan's captivity and made us His captives or bond servants. In Luke 4:18, Jesus reads from Isa. 61:1-2 to show that He has come to free the captives and fulfill Old Testament promises.

Luke 4:18: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

From this we can see that the Psalms we quoted which speak of bringing back the captivity do not have national Israel in view. They are prophecies of salvation for a vast multitude of people, who will be taken from every nation of the world, the Israel of God, with whom God is eternally concerned, and who are the focus of all of the Old Testament promises of future blessing for Israel.

When these Psalms were penned, Israel was not in captivity. They were written when David was king, and Israel was beginning to enjoy a freedom and glory they had never experienced before. When they were written, God had in view the wonderful freedom we can enjoy in Christ.

Christ came to bring salvation first to the Jews of national Israel. When He came as Messiah, He did not minister to Africa or Europe or China. He ministered to national Israel. He ministered to the disciples, who were Jews, and to Mary Magdalene and Martha, who were Jews. Salvation came to them as God promised in Psalm 14 and Psalm 53. Therefore, they were freed from spiritual captivity.

When Jesus came to national Israel to bring salvation to them, He also came to the Samaritans and the Syrophenician woman and, indeed, to all the world, to free captives from the bondage of sin. All who become saved, therefore, are the Israel, the Jacob, who have been freed from spiritual captivity.

The Book of Jeremiah Includes Prophecies about God's Salvation Plan

Many other Old Testament passages employ the phrase "bring back the captivity" or "bring again the captivity." Since we know that this phrase points to the salvation that was to be provided by Christ as Savior, we know that every passage in which this phrase is found prophesies the coming of our Lord Jesus. Thus, by this phrase, we know that a great number of Old Testament passages point to God's wonderful salvation.

For example, Jer. 29:14 declares:

And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

By the phrase "I will turn away your captivity," we can know that this verse establishes the fact that verses 10 to 14 of this chapter are speaking of the coming salvation through Jesus Christ.

How can Jer. 29, in the context of a return of Israel from Babylon, be speaking of salvation? We will study this question in some detail, for in arriving at an understanding of it we will develop an understanding of many other Biblical passages.

Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians in the year 587 B.C. This destruction began in the year 609 B.C., when the last good king of Judah, King Josiah, was killed in battle with Egypt. From that year forward, Judah or Israel began to go into captivity. For a few years they served Egypt, but then Babylon became the chief antagonist of Israel. Finally, in 587 B.C., Babylon completely destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The nation of Judah was destroyed and many Jews were taken into Babylonian captivity. As the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel were writing, Israel was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. This sad and terrible event is used in the Bible to serve as a figure of three aspects of the Gospel. They are:

1. Judgment Day.
2. The final tribulation period.
3. The fact that all men are captives of Satan.

The truth that the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians or the Babylonians has Judgment Day in

view is illustrated in many places in the Bible. We found this to be so in the Book of Joel. We saw that Isa. 5: 13-14 and 24-25 speak of the destruction of national Israel as a figure of hell. Passages such as Deuteronomy 28:15-68 are used in the same way. God again warns ancient Israel in Jer. 17:4:

And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever.

The phrase "ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever," assures us that eternal damnation is in view.

The second aspect of God's salvation plan which is typified by Israel going into Babylonian captivity is the final tribulation period. We observed this fact when we looked briefly at the first chapter of Joel. Even as Judah, which typifies the church, went into captivity to Babylon, so the church will be overrun with false gospels and will come into judgment. This aspect of salvation truth is closely related to the idea of Judgment Day. God's judgment program begins with judgment on the church and is completed with judgment on the whole world at Judgment Day.

The final tribulation period is therefore typified by the 23 inclusive years from the death of Josiah in 609 B.C. to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. It is also typified by the 70 years from 609 B.C. until Babylon was conquered by the Medes and the Persians in 539 B.C.

The third aspect of God's salvation program that is taught by the destruction of Judah by Babylon in 587 B.C. is that of man's fall into sin. Babylon is a type or figure of the kingdom of Satan. When mankind, beginning with Adam and Eve, rebelled against God, they became slaves or captives of Satan. When the nation of Judah rebelled against God, Israel went into captivity in Babylon. When individuals become saved, they are freed from bondage or captivity to Satan. When some of the nation of Israel returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, they were freed from captivity.

Thus, the destruction of Judah by Babylon as a type of man's fall into sin is a basis for the Biblical assertion, "I will turn away your captivity." This is what God has in view by this phrase in Jer. 29:14.

This World Is Typified by Ancient Babylon

Verses 4-7 of Jer. 29 underscore the fact that we live in a world ruled by Satan and, therefore, is typified by Babylon. God says in verses 4-7:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

This language emphasizes that as long as we are here, we are to seek the best for this world. When we seek the peace of the city, we desire the salvation of the unsaved, who are citizens of the kingdom of Satan. Only when they become saved are they at peace with God. Christ is the Prince of Peace.

In verses 13 and 14 of Jer. 29, God speaks of the salvation plan whereby slaves of Satan will be saved:

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

Before we are saved, we are slaves of Satan. We are captives of Satan because we are part of the human race which has rebelled against God. When we become saved, we are taken out of captivity to Satan, and we become sons of God.

Verses 15-19 might be difficult to understand. They state:

Because ye have said, The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon; Know that thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, and of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity; Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a

curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them: Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the LORD.

The picture God is developing is this: There are many in the world who believe and declare that they do not need salvation. They do not believe the Bible truth that by nature we are in bondage to sin and to Satan. They are typified by those in Judah at the time Babylon was a threat. Judah would not hear the pronouncement of the Lord's prophets that they not only would go into captivity but **must** go into captivity. Because they would not listen to what God had to say concerning their plight, but insisted that all was well, they were going to experience even more of God's judgment. So, too, those who believe they are good, moral, decent people who do not need a Savior (who do not need to be delivered from captivity), will come under God's judgment for certain. How grateful we should be that God has revealed to us our terrible condition of captivity so that we can know we must flee to Jesus, our Deliverer.

Bring Again the Captivity Helps Us to Understand Jacob's Trouble

We have studied Jer. 29 and the phrase "return the captivity," and we recognize that it always points to God's salvation program. We will now briefly examine another passage where this phrase is found, in Jer. 30, in which we find the intriguing reference to Jacob's trouble. This chapter speaks of the first coming of Christ because in two verses we find the key phrase "bring again the captivity." Verse 3 declares:

For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

Verse 18 promises:

Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof.

These two verses advise us that Jer. 30 is an important prophecy concerning the coming of Christ as the Savior. This is significant because the account of Jacob's trouble is found in this chapter. Many people teach that Jacob's trouble can refer only to a future distress upon Israel during the final tribulation. This conclusion is altogether impossible since we have already learned that Jer. 30 points to the cross and the salvation that would come from Christ on the cross. The verse in question is verse 7, which reads: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it."

Since this verse is in a chapter that promises salvation through the coming Christ, we know that this verse must relate to the cross. But who is Jacob? We learned that Jacob could refer to the patriarch Jacob, national Israel, or Christ, who is anticipated in this chapter.

We know, of course, that Christ is the one who endured the wrath of God for our sins. He is the one who suffered terrible trouble to save us. Therefore, we know that God is teaching that Christ, who is typified by Jacob, would have great trouble. That is, He must face hell for our sins, but He would be saved out of it. Once He had paid for our sins, God would raise Him up (Psalm 16:10, Psalm 22:21). Because of this salvation, all who will believe on Him will serve the Lord their God instead of Satan. Verse 9, which uses David as a figure of Christ, teaches us that, "They shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them."

Jeremiah 31: Another Chapter Focuses on Salvation

Chapter 31 also brings us the wonderful message of salvation. We are assured of this by the language of verse 23, which reads:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness.

Further assurance of this truth is found when we compare Jer. 31:15 with Matt. 2:18, where God declares that Jer. 31:15 was fulfilled when Herod killed the children of Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus. Jer. 31:15:

Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.

Matt. 2:18 teaches that that prophecy of Jer. 31 has been fulfilled:

In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Other verses of Jer. 31 are intimately associated with salvation. For example, God speaks of Himself as a Shepherd (verse 10), a Redeemer (verse 11), and He declares in verse 34 that He will forgive their iniquity. An important proof that salvation is in view is shown in verses 31-34:

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

God quotes these verses in Heb. 8:8-12 to show that they have been fulfilled in Christ.

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Our Lord spoke of this new covenant when He instituted the Lord's Supper and indicated that His blood is the "new covenant [King James: 'testament']", which is shed for many." Thus, in a very dramatic way, we are taught that Jer. 31 anticipates the shed blood of Christ as it speaks of a "new covenant." How can any theologian miss this important truth?

We have seen from many vantage points that the Bible teaches that Jer. 31 speaks of the coming salvation in Jesus Christ. Those who are to be saved, which includes all believers, are spoken of as "the families of Israel" (verse 1), "the virgin of Israel" (verses 4, 21), "Jacob" (verses 7, 11), the "remnant of Israel" (verse 7), "Ephraim" (verses 9, 18, 20), the "house of Israel" (verses 27, 31), "the house of Judah" (verses 27, 31), and "the seed of Israel" (verse 37). Thus, as we learned from Ezek. 37 and many other passages, the believers, those whom God plans to save, are typified by Old Testament types such as Israel, Judah, Jacob, and Ephraim. Likewise, the salvation we enter into is typified by the "land of Judah" (verse 23).

Jeremiah 32 Points to the Cross

Jer. 32 also points to salvation because the same clue phrase, "bring back the captivity," is found in verse 44, where God declares:

Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD.

In Jer. 32, God speaks of the historical event when Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. Jeremiah was commanded to buy a field for seventeen shekels of silver as proof that Israel would return to the land. The captivity of Judah by the Babylonians typified the fact that we who become believers were in bondage to Satan, typified by Babylon, until we became saved. This conclusion is demonstrated clearly by the words of Jer. 32:38-40:

And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

Once again we see how consistent the Bible is in pointing to the wonderful salvation that God has

provided for us in Christ. Repeatedly we see that when we let the Bible become its own commentary, difficult and obscure statements begin to become understandable. It is absolutely essential that we recognize that the **whole** Bible is the commentary. If we do not observe this principle, we will end up with private opinions and interpretations. Indeed, the shame of today's church is that so much interpretation is based on human logic rather than careful study of the entire Bible.

In fact, it is in vogue today in many evangelical circles to declare that when the plain sense of Scriptures makes common sense, seek no other sense. This principle looks logical and is the basis for a great deal of interpretation and understanding of the Bible, but it is altogether contrary to the Word of God. Regardless of how logical, plain or sensible our conclusion concerning a verse appears to be, we cannot determine the accuracy of our conclusion until we have checked to see if it is in harmony with everything else in the Bible that might relate to the verse in question. This requires careful study and long hours of work, but it is the only way that truth can be found.

From the clue phrase, "I will return the captivity," we have discovered that Jer. 29 through Jer. 32 prophesy about the wonderful worldwide salvation program that God would institute when Christ came to go to the cross. From our vantage point of almost two thousand years after the cross, we can see how marvelously those promises have been fulfilled.

Jer. 33 is another chapter that anticipates God's plan of salvation. This chapter has three verses which use the language of returning or bringing again the captivity to assure us that the whole chapter is speaking of God's salvation program. They are:

Jer. 33:7: And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first.

Jer. 33:11: The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD.

Jer. 33:26: Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.

There are other verses in this chapter which inform us that salvation is in view; for example, verse 8 speaks of cleansing from iniquity and pardon of iniquity. Verse 16 speaks of Judah being saved.

Even as other parts of the Bible use names like Israel and Judah to speak of those who through the Lord Jesus Christ come to salvation, so, too, in Jer. 33, God uses many types to speak of those who are to be saved by the coming Messiah. Believers are typified by Judah (verses 7, 14, 16), by Israel (verses 7, 14), by flocks (verse 13), by the land (verse 11), by Jerusalem (verse 16), by Levites (verses 18, 21), by the seed of David (verse 22), by the seed of Jacob (verse 26), and by the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (verse 26). The salvation the believers enter into is typified by the land of Benjamin (verse 13), by Jerusalem (verse 13), and by the cities of Judah (verse 13). Christ is typified by a branch (verse 15).

Jeremiah 48 and 49 Relate Believers to Ancient Moab and Ammon

We are patiently going through the Bible finding meaning to many difficult Old Testament passages by means of the clue phrase, "I will bring again the captivity." In all the passages we have examined, reference has been made to Israel or Judah or Jacob. In every case, we have seen that the nation God has in view is the nation of believers in Christ. Those who have become citizens of the kingdom of God are the Israel which has been brought back from captivity.

In Jer. 48 and 49, we find that God speaks of Moab, Ammon, and Elam being brought back from captivity. How does this relate to God's salvation program? The verses in question are:

Jer. 48:47: Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days, saith the LORD. Thus far is the judgment of Moab.

Jer. 49:6: And afterward I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon, saith the LORD.

Jer. 49:39: But it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD.

These are significant verses for they teach that Moab, Ammon, and Elam, enemies of God who have no direct relationship to national Israel, can be saved. Acts 2:9 emphasizes this glad truth as it speaks of the Elamites who were present when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Moab and Ammon were

born of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, but they have no blood descent from Abraham and therefore stand as alien as Elam to Israel. We read in Deu. 23:3 that the Ammonites and the Moabites were especially cursed of God:

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever.

There is more to these verses than the fact that in spite of God's Old Testament curse on these nations they can still be saved.

These Moabites, Ammonites, and Elamites typified those who become believers. Before we are saved, we are under the curse of God, and we cannot come into God's holy presence. But thanks be to God for the magnificent salvation He has provided in Christ! We who are cursed (typified by Moab and Ammon) can also be saved.

In addition to Moab, Ammon, and Elam, God uses other Old Testament nations to typify those who are cursed by sin and yet who will come to salvation. We will discover these relationships as we continue our study of the clue phrase, "bring again the captivity."

The phrase "return the captivity," or "bring again the captivity," is used in two verses in Ezekiel to underscore the fact that grace will shine through in spite of the total wickedness and degradation of man. In Ezek. 16, God puts on display the extreme harlotry of Jerusalem together with that of Samaria and Sodom. Jerusalem was the capital of Judaea, Samaria of the ten tribes of Israel, and Sodom was representative of the worst of the heathen nations of Canaan. Throughout Chapter 16, God faults them almost unmercifully. But then grace shines through in verse 53, where God declares:

When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them.

This is the language of the grace of God in salvation, which can be seen by the closing verses of this chapter, Ezek. 16:60-62:

Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.

The everlasting covenant, of course, is the covenant of grace, the covenant of redemption, which God established with the seed of Abraham. Thus, we know that salvation can come to the worst sinner, whose sins are typified by the spiritual harlotry of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom. How magnificent is the mercy of God!

Egypt Typified the World which Is in Bondage to Sin

The second place in Ezekiel where God uses the term "bring again the captivity" to indicate that His grace shines through in the greatest kind of sin is in Ezek. 29. In Ezek. 29 through Ezek. 32, God brings His charges and indictments against Egypt. In these verses, Egypt is a figure or type of the world which is in bondage to sin. Because of the world's sin (typified by Egypt), it has come under bondage to the kingdom of Satan (typified by Babylon). In this drastic setting of sin and enslavement to Satan, grace shines through. Ezek. 29:14 declares:

And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom.

Here there is barely a glimmer of grace, but we know that it is a promise of salvation to the world, which is sold under sin. We know this first of all by the clue phrase "bring again the captivity." We also know from other Biblical promises concerning Egypt. In Isa. 19, God brings indictments against Egypt, but He promises in verses 19 and 20:

In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them.

These beautiful verses promise salvation to the world, which is in bondage to sin (typified by Egypt), and are followed by further promises of grace until finally in the closing verses of Isa. 19, verses 24 and 25, God promises:

In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work

of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

In these verses, those who are in bondage to sin are typified by Egypt. Through Christ they are promised salvation. Those who are slaves of Satan are typified by Assyria; they are promised salvation. Those who are in the body of believers are typified by Israel. Thus, grace is promised equally to the most wicked even as it is already realized in the life of the believer. It is this grace which barely shines through in Ezek. 29.

The clue phrase “bring again the captivity” is also found in Hosea 6:11, Amos 9:14, Zeph. 2:7, and Zeph. 3:20. In each of these passages, the clue phrase helps us to see that even as God is prophesying judgment upon the world, salvation is still coming. God’s grace will triumph. Hosea 6:11 illustrates this. The whole chapter is one of doom and gloom, but then Hosea 6:11 declares:

Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people.

God is promising salvation to His people who are typified by Judah. In Amos 9:11-14, God declares:

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

The clue phrase “bring again the captivity” shows us that this passage is speaking of the salvation that would flow from the cross. Verse 11 is referred to in Acts 15:16 and is proof that God had always planned to save Gentiles as well as Jews. As the New Testament church struggled with the phenomenon that Gentiles were becoming believers, the Apostle James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared in Acts 15, verses 13-17:

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

God is declaring in a clear way, by quoting Amos 9:11 in Acts 15, that Amos 9:11 anticipated God’s New Testament salvation program.

In Zeph. 2:7, God shows us that the New Testament believers are typified by “the house of Judah.”

Zeph. 2:7: And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

Zeph. 3:14-20 is a lovely statement that emphasizes the gracious salvation plan which God has planned through Christ the Messiah. In these verses, not only do we find the clue phrase “turn back your captivity,” but we also discover that the Lord is called the King of Israel. Indeed, He is the King of all who become believers in Him. These verses teach:

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

We have looked at every passage in the Bible where the clue phrase “return the captivity” or “bring again the captivity” is found. Isn’t it remarkable that in every case the context shows that God has

in view His wonderful salvation program as it became fully developed in the New Testament? Indeed, we are seeing that the big story of the Old Testament is the Gospel of salvation.

We have spent a considerable amount of time in order to understand many chapters of the Bible by means of the clue phrases “pour out” the Spirit and “bring again the captivity.” We have done this to demonstrate the principle that the Bible is its own commentary. By understanding God’s usage of ideas and statements concerning salvation as they are found in the New Testament, and then relating these concepts to similar Old Testament statements, two avenues of truth are brought into view. The first is a more complete understanding of both the Old Testament statement and the New Testament statement. The New Testament statement explains the Old Testament statement. The Old Testament statement embellishes and beautifies the New Testament statement.

The second avenue of truth opened to us is the tremendous information that the Bible has one major theme in view throughout its pages: The message of salvation, which was brought into reality by means of the atonement. The moment we get distracted from this grand theme as we try to understand a verse, we can know we are departing from truth. The Bible is God’s message of salvation. This is the great story upon which we should keep our eyes focused.

We will now return to the study of Ezek. 39. We had begun to study this chapter earlier, but we took a detour to look at the phrase “pour out” the Spirit. We will return to this provocative part of the Book of Ezekiel.

Chapter 10 – We Visit Ezekiel 39

Ezekiel 39, like many other Old Testament chapters of the Bible, is frequently misunderstood by theologians. We will now discover what God is teaching in this intriguing chapter of His Word.

In our study of the Biblical language that relates to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, we saw that Ezek. 39 must be a prophecy concerning the cross and the sending forth of the Gospel into the world because verse 29 declares that God had poured out His Spirit upon the house of Israel.

This conclusion is reinforced by the statement of verse 25 in which God says that He will bring again the captivity of Jacob (Jacob typifies all believers in Christ), “and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel.”

Does the rest of the chapter, which speaks of Gog, Meshech, and Tubal, conform to this conclusion? We will run through a few of the most difficult verses to show that they relate to the cross and the sending forth of the Gospel into all the world.

Satan Is Vanquished by Christ

Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, is a reference to Satan, who rules over the nations of the world. Satan was bound by Christ on the cross so that he could not frustrate God’s plan to evangelize the world. Verse 2 of Ezek. 39 speaks of this: “I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee.”

Verses 3 through 7 indicate that Satan’s attempt to conquer the body of Christ (the mountains of Israel) is doomed to failure. Satan was defeated at the cross. Heb. 2:14 declares:

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.

Because Satan has been dealt with successfully by Christ’s victory on the cross, verse 9 teaches that the believers, typified by those who dwell in the cities of Israel, will burn the weapons of Satan seven years. This seven-year period identifies with the seventieth seven of Dan. 9:27. While it is not the purpose of this study to develop Daniel 9 (a Daniel 9 study-pamphlet is available from Family Radio), it can be shown that this seven-year period represents the time from the official commencement of Christ’s work as Messiah until Judgment Day. Christ officially began His work at the time of His baptism when John the Baptist announced that Jesus was the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sins of the world.

In Ezek. 39:9, the figure of burning the weapons of Gog is another way of underscoring that believers go forth with the Gospel conquering and to conquer. As they bring the Gospel, they are plundering the house of Satan, which is represented by the name Gog. Every one who believes in Christ comes forth from the prison house of Satan. God has been fulfilling this prophecy as the Gospel has gone

forth from the baptism of Jesus to the present time. This entire period is anticipated by the seven years of Ezek. 39:9.

Verses 11 through 16 employ a different figure to emphasize that the Gospel will go forth. In these verses, God is emphasizing that the house of Israel will be burying the enemy, Gog, for a period of seven months. Verse 12 emphasizes this: "And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land."

The enemy Gog is the kingdom of Satan. The house of Israel is the whole body of believers who send forth the Gospel into the world. What does it mean to bury Gog and all his multitudes? How are the seven months to be understood?

The Gospel which the believers proclaim is the Word of God. The Word of God is the law of God, which shows men their sinful condition. As men stand exposed to the Bible in their sinful condition, they are shown to be under the judgment of God; they are spiritually dead and subject to the second death which is eternal damnation. In Hosea 6:5, God describes this aspect of the Gospel by the words: "I have slain them by the words of my mouth." In the New Testament, the same principle is set forth by the language of Rom. 7:9-11:

For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

The Gospel is a two-edged sword. Those who hear it are under even greater condemnation than they were before they heard the Gospel because they have been exposed very specifically and directly to the law of God. Those who throw themselves on the mercies of God and trust in Christ as Savior will be saved. Those who remain rebellious and refuse to obey the command to believe in Christ will become even more subject to the second death, eternal damnation. It is these latter people who continue as the kingdom of Satan, which is represented by Gog and his multitudes in Ezek. 39. To use the language of Hosea 6:5, they are slain. Because they are spiritually killed, they are to be buried. Even as the death of Christ for our sins was emphasized by the burial of Jesus, so God in Ezek. 39 is using the language of burial to emphasize the spiritual death of the unsaved. Thus, the Bible uses the language of burial of the unsaved to underscore the judgmental aspects of the Gospel.

The Seven Months

What do the seven months represent? We can understand this figure if we look at two Old Testament feasts which relate directly to God's salvation program. The first feast is the Passover, which was observed by Israel in the first month of the Jewish year. It anticipated the cross, when Christ was slain as the Lamb of God. The crucifixion of Christ was a death blow to Satan. Heb. 2:14 records:

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.

The crucifixion brought death to Satan; the crucifixion guaranteed that God's judgment and eternal damnation would certainly come upon Satan and all his kingdom. Because of Christ's payment for our sins, the Gospel was sent into all the world. Therefore, the cross marked the beginning of the burial of Gog and his multitudes.

The second feast day that is of importance in this study is the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Ingathering, as it was also called. This feast was observed in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, when the nation of Israel celebrated their successful entrance into the land of Canaan after their forty year wilderness sojourn, and they celebrated the completion of their harvest. Both of these events anticipated the completion of the sending forth of the Gospel into the world. Insofar as this feast was concerned, the entrance of Israel into Canaan is a picture of the completion of a believer's life on this earth. The completion of harvest is a picture of the completion of the sending forth of the Gospel and the coming of Judgment Day, which is spoken of as harvest time (Matt. 13:30).

Thus, the Feast of the Passover, observed in the first month, pointed to the cross and the beginning of Christ's program to evangelize the world. The Feast of Tabernacles observed in the seventh month pointed to the completion of the sending forth of the Gospel. In other words, Ezek. 39 is teaching that the burial of Gog and his multitudes goes on for seven months, that is, from the Passover to the Feast of Tabernacles. This figure is pointing to the sending forth of the Gospel from the cross to Judgment Day. Ezek. 39:11-16, like everything else we have looked at in Ezek. 39, anticipates God's plan to send the Gospel into the world, starting immediately after the time of the cross.

Christ to Endure God's Judgment

In verses 17 to 22 of Ezek. 39, we find additional language that is somewhat difficult to understand. These verses read as follows:

And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord GOD. And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward.

At first blush, this passage appears to focus on Judgment Day. The thought presented here is parallel to Rev. 19, where God describes Judgment Day.

God speaks of this great event, described as a final battle, in Rev. 19, verses 17 and 18:

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

Even though we see the parallelism between these passages, we know from other phrases, such as "I have poured out my spirit," that Ezek. 39 has in view the cross and the sending forth of the Gospel into the world. Therefore, we must realize that verses 17 to 22 are also related to the cross. Let us attempt to understand them.

From passages such as Rev. 19, we know that when God uses language depicting a vanquished foe, with the birds of prey and the wild animals feeding on the corpses of the vanquished, Judgment Day is in view. Do we also realize there are two Judgment Days?

The Judgment Day with which we are most familiar is that which is still to come: The Judgment Day at the end of time, when the unsaved are judged and sent to hell to suffer eternal damnation for their sins and Satan and all the fallen angels will be cast into the lake of fire.

The Bible speaks of another Judgment Day which is of equal significance as the Judgment Day of the last day: It is the Judgment Day when Christ went to the cross to pay for the sins of all who would believe on Him. Do you recall that this Judgment Day was also in view in Joel 2? It was at this Judgment Day that He suffered the equivalent of eternity in hell on behalf of all who would believe on Him. Thus, it was of the same intensity as the Judgment Day of the last day. At the cross, the people of this world who place their trust in Christ were judged for their sins, found guilty, and came under the wrath of God for their sins; Christ as our substitute stood before the judgment throne of God on our behalf, but the horror, the trauma, the awfulness of God's wrath were no less real.

On the Judgment Day at the end of time, the unsaved of the world, who have no substitute to stand for them, must individually and personally stand before the judgment throne of God to answer for their sins. They will be found guilty and cast into hell to eternally pay for their sins. Thus, we see that there is a direct parallel between the Judgment Day of the cross and the Judgment Day of the last day.

Satan Judged at the Cross

Satan and his dominion will be judged and come to an end at the Judgment Day of the end of time. While it cannot be seen in as dramatic a fashion as it will be seen at the end of time, Satan was vanquished at the cross. His kingdom was in a real sense sentenced to eternal damnation.

How can this be? Satan is still active in the world. His dominion, which consists of all the evil spirits (fallen angels), together with his slaves (the unsaved of the world), continues to thrive in this world. This is what we see, but the Bible informs us that it is not quite this rosy for Satan and his dominion. We read in Heb. 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.

In this verse, God teaches us that because Christ went to the cross, Satan was destroyed. In Rev. 13:3 this same truth is underscored as it speaks of the beast (the kingdom of Satan), having one of

his heads wounded unto death. Those verses show that when Christ went to the cross, a death blow was dealt to Satan and his kingdom. What does this mean? We have not seen much physical evidence of this in the world throughout the New Testament time.

The Cross Brought Judgment Day to Reality

We must understand that until the cross, the eternal wrath of God against sin could not be seen as actual reality. That is, throughout the Old Testament, God threatened eternal damnation for the unsaved. Those who die unsaved will be resurrected on the last day to receive this penalty. Indeed, God underscored His studied intention to bring this to pass as He brought physical destruction of one kind or another against the peoples of the world. This was also demonstrated by physical death coming into the world. That fact alone signaled the certainty of God's intention to bring eternal damnation as the judgment against Satan and his kingdom.

Before the cross, all of the warnings, figures, and intimations of eternal damnation were present in the world, but no man or angel had actually suffered eternal damnation. Therefore, we can say that before the cross, eternal damnation, while a very serious threat to the wicked, was somewhat hypothetical in nature in that God had not yet demonstrated eternal damnation to its fullest extent.

When Christ went to the cross, eternal damnation was no longer hypothetical. It became a reality in all of its stark horror as Christ was punished for the sins of those whom He came to save. The punishment of Christ guaranteed that all of the warnings of the Bible concerning eternal damnation for the wicked would be carried out. It guaranteed that Satan and the fallen angels would be sent to hell. When Christ suffered for the sins of His people, it absolutely guaranteed that every other human being whose sins were not covered by Jesus must stand for judgment and be brought into eternal damnation.

Therefore, the cross in its own way is as dramatic and horrible as the Judgment Day at the end of time. Satan and his kingdom have not yet been formally arraigned; they have not yet personally given an account of their sins before the judgment throne of God; nevertheless, in a real sense, they stand condemned. Their formal condemnation is guaranteed by the fact that Christ has already suffered eternal damnation for the ones He came to save.

Now we can see why Jesus says in John 3:18-19:

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

In these verses, God underscores the certainty of eternal damnation for the unsaved. Heb. 2:14 declares that Satan has been put to death. The absolute certainty of Satan's eventual removal into hell to suffer eternal damnation is signified by this language.

This also explains the statements of II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, which speak as if Satan (a fallen angel) has already been cast into hell.

II Peter 2:4: For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.

Jude 6: 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.

Satan is not literally in a place called hell during the New Testament period. We know this because he is still the prince of the power of the air. Nevertheless, by Christ's death on the cross, Satan is so certainly guaranteed to end in eternal damnation in hell that God speaks of him as if he were already committed to hell.

Of course, in a real sense Satan came under the wrath of God from the time he first rebelled against God. Immediately after Satan tempted Adam and Eve into sin, God pronounced a curse on him and declared that the seed of the woman (Christ) would bruise the head of the serpent (Satan) (Gen. 3:15), that is, Christ would destroy Satan. The curse on Satan is also seen in the language of Isa. 14, where God is talking about the king of Babylon. The King of Babylon is presented as a figure of Satan, even as Babylon is a figure of the kingdom of Satan. In Isa. 14:12-15, God declares:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, 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.

Throughout the Old Testament period Satan already stood in a fallen and cursed relationship to

God. But when Christ came on the scene, God's opposition to Satan intensified. When the seventy returned from sharing the Gospel, our Lord announced in Luke 10:18, "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." This banishment from heaven is reported also in Rev. 12:7-9:

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.

Ezek. 39:17-22 describes Judgment Day at the cross when God guaranteed eternal damnation for those in the kingdom of Satan. Verses 21 and 22, however, illustrate the wonderful salvation plan that God has prepared. God's glory will be known among the heathen; that is, God is indicating it is His plan to send the Gospel into all the world. The house of Israel of verse 22 consists of all believers from every nation. Verses 21-22 declare:

And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward.

God Will Bring Salvation

Ezek. 39:23-29 closes the chapter by underscoring the wonderful salvation that God will provide. Verses 23 and 24 emphasize that people from the nations of the world (the heathen) will recognize that those who are being saved (the house of Israel) were in spiritual bondage to sin and Satan and under the wrath of God ("therefore hid I my face from them").

Ezek. 39:23-24: And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them.

Verses 25-29 declare how God will bring salvation to these who have been captives of Satan.

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

God will bring salvation ("Now will I bring again the captivity"); God will save people out of every nation ("I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands"). He will accomplish this, particularly beginning with Pentecost ("I have poured out my spirit").

We have seen that Ezek. 39 in a beautiful way relates to the salvation God was to provide through the coming Messiah. We have found that every phrase, regardless of how obtuse and difficult to understand it might appear to be, began to unfold once we saw that it relates to God's salvation plan for the world. In this study, we cannot possibly look at every part of the Bible, but it is hoped that the passages we have looked at will encourage each one of us to continue to study the whole Bible and remember to interpret Scripture with Scripture.

We have been laying the groundwork to find the answer to the future of national Israel from the Bible. We must let the Bible interpret the Bible, which means that we might have to give up some long-cherished ideas. We have learned that while we can trust much of what theologians of the past have taught, we cannot trust everything. Each and every person who studies the Bible and teaches the Bible has feet of clay. None of us is infallible. This is clearly seen when we fail to let the whole Bible speak to a verse in question.

In this study, we have tried to let the whole Bible speak to each verse, and we have found the wonderful message of salvation even in the most difficult passages. Obscure passages such as Ezek. 37, Ezek. 39, Dan. 7, and Dan. 8 open up for us and we see that they, too, are intimately associated with the Gospel of salvation.

We have discovered that we must let the Bible be its own dictionary. When God uses words like "Israel," "Judah," or "Jacob" we must let the Bible define these terms. We have learned that these words

can have several meanings, depending on the context in which they are found. Only when we have found this to be true have difficult passages unfolded for us.

We have not found any passages that give us reason to believe that God has a glorious future for national Israel. But does Rev. 20 teach that there is a future thousand-year period during which Christ will reign on this earth? Will this not be a time when national Israel will again come to flower? We will look at Rev. 20 in some detail.

Chapter 11 – The Millennium

Any study concerning the future of national Israel and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ must include a careful analysis of Rev. 20. This chapter of the Bible presents information on the millennial reign of Christ, and this millennial reign is one of the most important hinges upon which eschatological understanding hangs.

Six times in the first seven verses of this chapter, reference is made to a period of a thousand years. Nowhere else in the Bible is the phrase “thousand years” found in connection with past, present, or future historical events. The only other place in the Bible where the phrase “a thousand years” is used is in II Peter 3:8, where God declares:

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

In this context, it is used to underscore the fact that God’s timetable is not ours. What seems slow to us is quick to God. What seems quick to us could be slow to God.

In the face of this remarkable absence of Biblical usage of the term “thousand years,” it is truly amazing that God would use this phrase six times in the opening verses of Rev. 20. To what period of time could this phrase have reference? Is it a future time? Is it a period of time that is already past? Or does it relate in some way to the present?

Three Major Views on Christ’s Return

Three major views on Christ’s return are held among conservative theologians: The premillennial position, the postmillennial position, and the amillennial position.

The premillennialists believe that there is to be a future one-thousand-year period during which Christ will reign from Jerusalem over this present world. They believe it will be a one-thousand-year golden age during which Satan will be bound so that sin will not be present, and the blessings of an earthly reign of Christ will abound. Only at the end of the thousand years will Satan be loosed so that he can again bring nations into the bondage of sin; and sin will again raise its ugly head. This will be followed by Judgment Day, the destruction of this world by fire, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth which will continue forever. It is called the premillennial position because of the belief that Christ will personally return to this earth **before** the thousand years (1,000 years = millennium) of Revelation begins. Rev. 20 is one of the principle texts undergirding the premillennial position.

The postmillennialists likewise look for a future one-thousand-year golden age. However, they believe this golden age will not come into existence because Christ personally will have returned to this earth to reign, but rather, because the impact of the Gospel will have become so pervasive and so successful that every area of human activity will have come under the rule of the Gospel. Sin will have become severely restricted and all nations will look to Christ as their Savior.

Postmillennial parallels the premillennial position not only in that it is looking for a future millennial golden age, but also in the sense that it is looking for Judgment Day and the end of the world to be at least one thousand years in the future. It is called postmillennial because it looks for the return of Christ **after** a future one-thousand-year period.

The amillennialists believe that the thousand years are a figurative period which indicates the completeness of God’s plan. It does not look for a future golden age for this present sin-cursed earth, but rather, it looks for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, Judgment Day, and the end of the world to occur very soon. It is called the amillennial position because it does not see a future one-thousand-year period.

Which position is correct? Only one can be correct. Consequently, the other two must be incorrect, and therefore quite unbiblical. It is our task to carefully study Rev. 20 so that we might know

which is the correct view.

Is the Book of Revelation Chronological?

Before we begin to make a careful verse by verse study of Rev. 20, a word must be said about this chapter's place in the Book of Revelation. There are those who teach that the Book of Revelation is to be understood as a chronological unfolding of future events which God has planned for the world. They believe that the events recorded in any chapter come after the events recorded in the previous chapters. Thus, they teach that the events recorded in Rev. 20 follow in time those events that are recorded in Rev. 19.

They teach, for example, that Rev. 4 speaks of the rapture of the church. Since, according to their thinking, the rapture of the church immediately precedes the final tribulation period, everything from Chapter 4 to Chapter 20 deals with the final tribulation period. Thus, Chapter 20, which discusses the binding of Satan for a thousand years, must be presenting an event that takes place after the final tribulation period. Those who are familiar with the premillennial position will recognize these ideas.

This line of thinking can be shown to be entirely foreign to the Bible for many reasons. Let us look at a few of these reasons, for in doing so, we will be greatly helped in our understanding of Rev. 20.

First, it must be emphasized that if the Book of Revelation is chronological, then everything presented after Rev. 6 must be in relation to the new heavens and the new earth because Rev. 6:12-17 distinctly calls attention to the collapse of the universe and Christ coming in judgment. Rev. 6:12-17:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Note the phrases:

1. the sun became black as sackcloth,
2. the stars of heaven fell unto the earth,
3. the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together,
4. every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Since the premillennialist likes to insist on his literal understanding of each prophetic statement, these would be excellent verses for him to carefully consider. As a matter of fact, there is nothing in the Bible that suggests these statements are to be understood in any way but literally. They teach the same truth as that offered in Matt. 24:29, which states:

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.

They agree with the teaching of II Peter 3:10, which informs us:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Note also Rev. 6:16-17:

And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

This language focuses our attention on the most awful day of the earth's existence: Judgment Day, when God will judge the unsaved and pour out His wrath upon them by sentencing them to hell to pay for their sins. This dreadful day is spoken of in I Thes. 5:9, where God comforts believers with this promise: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Judgment Day is the time and event spoken of in Rev. 20:11-15:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;

and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Verse 11 teaches us that Judgment Day comes at the time the universe is collapsing. Note the phrase, "from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away."

Incidentally, there are those who equate the wrath of God spoken of in I Thes. 5:9 with an outpouring of God's wrath during the final tribulation period. Throughout history, God has brought His judgments upon the world. Wars, earthquakes, pestilences, famines, and other natural disasters have fallen repeatedly upon this world. With few exceptions, the believers in Christ and the unbelievers have experienced trauma. Additionally, throughout the history of the world, believers have been especially subject to tribulation because of persecution. How many believers have been tortured or burned at the stake or fed to lions? Indeed, the Bible tells believers in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Tribulation is **not** the wrath that God has in view in I Thes. 5:9 which the believers are to escape. The wrath from which we can expect to be spared is the terrible wrath that will come upon the world of the unsaved. The believers do not come into wrath because Christ has already paid for their sins. Small wonder, therefore, that we read in Rev. 6:15-16:

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

The Book of Revelation Is Not Chronological

If the Book of Revelation is to be considered a chronological development of future events, then everything following Rev. 6 would be a discussion of the new heaven and the new earth because the Bible clearly teaches that the new heaven and the new earth immediately follow the destruction of this present universe. For example, in II Peter 3:12-13, God declares:

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The Book of Revelation is **not** to be understood in chronological fashion. Each vision is to be understood on its own merits. Each vision teaches some aspect of God's wonderful and awesome salvation program. Some visions focus mainly on the kingdom of Satan as it exists presently or in the future. Some visions relate particularly to Satan himself. Others are focused on some aspect of the believers' future.

Those who teach that Rev. 4 indicates the rapture of the believers contend that after Rev. 4, the church is not mentioned again. To them, this is proof that the church has been raptured. It is true that the word "church" is not found in the Bible after Rev. 4, but the word "church" is not found in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, or John, and it is not found in I John or II John or I Peter or II Peter or Titus. Does this mean that these books of the Bible do not relate to the church? Of course, this cannot be. God does not use the word "church" in these books, but that does not mean they do not relate to the church. God simply uses words other than "church" to speak of the body of believers.

Likewise, in the Book of Revelation, God uses words other than "church" to speak of the church. For example, Rev. 11 speaks of two witnesses. Later, we shall see that these two witnesses represent the church as it sends forth the Gospel into the world. The woman of Rev. 12:6 can be shown to be representative of the church. Rev. 13:7 speaks of the saints who are fully overcome by the beast. These saints also are part of the church. Many other examples could be offered but these are sufficient to make the point.

Rev. 4 does not speak of the rapture. It simply declares to us that the Apostle John was caught up in the Spirit into heaven so that he could receive the ensuing vision. The rapture of the believers is in no way implied in this passage.

We must understand that we are under no Biblical mandate to assume that the events set forth in

Rev. 20 follow chronologically after the events of Rev. 19. Rev. 19 is one of several chapters in the Book of Revelation that call attention to Judgment Day. This chapter is particularly concerned with the end of the kingdom of Satan as it is discussed under the figure of the beast and the false prophet of Rev. 13. The closing verses of Rev. 19 call attention especially to God's final judgment on the dominion of Satan with the words of Rev. 19:20-21:

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

Rev. 20, however, is concerned with Satan himself. As we study this chapter, we will find that the focus is on Satan as he is bound, loosed, and comes into judgment, even as Rev. 19 indicates the final judgment that comes to his dominion.

Satan Is Bound

Rev. 20 describes a vision that the Apostle John received on the island of Patmos. The first three verses declare:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and 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.

When these verses are read superficially, they seem to be easily understood. They apparently teach that the time is coming when Satan will be bound: He will be cast into a pit. He will be removed from this earth for a period of one thousand years so that he cannot cause the nations to sin. Near the end of the thousand years, he will be loosed so that briefly he can again deceive the nations.

The teaching of the preceding paragraph is accepted by those who hold the premillennial and the postmillennial positions. Indeed, if we isolate these verses from the rest of the Bible, they do seem to teach a future literal binding of Satan.

When these verses are read more closely, we begin to see that the above conclusion has some serious defects. When we bring the whole Bible to bear on these verses, we discover that this conclusion is quite unbiblical. We must have a quite different understanding of these verses.

The first defect we discover as we attempt to look at these verses literally is the understanding of the phrase "a great chain." Satan appears to be bound with a chain, but Satan is a fallen angel. He is, therefore, a spirit being. How can a literal chain be used to bind a spirit? Immediately we sense that a strictly literal understanding of these verses is impossible. The "chain" must be understood in a figurative or symbolic sense. Therefore, the premillennial and postmillennial positions are already threatened because they insist on a strictly literal understanding of these verses.

A second serious defect inherent in a literal understanding of these verses is related to the term "a thousand years." Verses 2 and 3 teach that Satan will be bound a thousand years and **after** the thousand years, he will be loosed a little season. Therefore, we can know that the thousand years Satan has been bound ends a few years before Judgment Day. As we continue our study of verse 4, we will discover that it speaks of believers who reign with Christ for a thousand years, but the duration of their reign is an altogether different period of time than that of the period during which Satan is bound. In fact, we shall see that the duration of time believers reign with Christ varies from believer to believer. Thus, the term "a thousand years" is addressed to many different periods of time. Therefore, Rev. 20 will be seen to be teaching that there are many different time spans which are all termed a period of "a thousand years." Therefore, to look upon the term "a thousand years" as representing a literal period of time becomes impossible. We will develop these truths later in our study.

When we let the rest of the Bible become our commentary, we see even more conclusively that a literal understanding of these first three verses cannot stand. Every related passage points to the event of the binding of Satan as having occurred at the time Christ was crucified, A.D. 33. Thus, we know that Rev. 20:3 must be speaking of the period from the cross until a time when the fortunes of Satan are drastically changed from what they had been throughout the New Testament period.

In light of the problems we uncovered in connection with the phrase "a great chain" and in connection with the uncertainty of a common beginning and ending point of the thousand years, we are

constrained to search the Bible for further help.

The Binding of Satan

When we search the Bible for information that relates to the first three verses of Rev. 20, we find two kinds of verses.

First, there are many verses that show quite conclusively that the binding of Satan occurred at the cross. The second group of verses shows quite conclusively that after the cross and throughout the New Testament period, right up to the present day, Satan continues to rule the hearts of the unsaved and continues to persecute and harass the believers. Thus, we are faced with an apparent contradiction. It will be our purpose to show that after looking at the verses on both sides, this apparent contradiction is resolved, and, indeed, all of the verses are part of one grand harmonious whole.

Let us attempt to discover any other phrases or verses in the Bible that speak of a binding of Satan. The first passage we will go to is in the little Book of Jude.

In the Book of Jude, God reminds us of three historical judgments that took place in the past. The first of these is spoken of in verse 5:

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.

This judgment on Israel took place some 1,500 years earlier than the time Jude was written. The nation of Israel came out of Egypt in the year 1447 B.C., and during the following forty years, most of Israel perished in the wilderness because of unbelief. This was a great judgment of God upon them.

God tells us of another historical judgment of great severity in verse 7 of Jude, where He warns:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

The destruction of Sodom took place more than 2,000 years before Jude was written. More information about this judgment is given in Gen. 19.

Between these two historical judgments in the Book of Jude, God reminds us of another historical judgment. Just as the destruction of Israel in the wilderness is spoken of in the past tense in verse 5, and the destruction of Sodom is spoken of in the past tense in verse 7, the judgment spoken of in verse 6 is in the past tense.

The judgment of verse 6 is not on men, it is a judgment on angels. Since Satan is a fallen angel, we immediately are interested in this verse. Satan, together with many other angels, rebelled against God. Notice how parallel verse 6 is to the first three verses of Rev. 20.

Jude 6: 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.

Whatever God has in view in Jude 6, we know that this verse is dealing with fallen angels, of whom Satan is the head. We also know that it is speaking of a judgment that had occurred prior to the time Jude was written. We know that this judgment appears to be closely related to the event described in Rev. 20:1-3. Therefore, we should begin to wonder if Rev. 20:1-3 is describing an event that was already a fact of history at the time the Apostle John received his vision.

In II Peter 2, we find a situation almost identical to that of Jude 6. In II Peter 2, the Apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is warning about the judgment that will befall false prophets. As proof that judgment is certainly and surely to befall the false prophets, God reminds us of three historical judgments. In verse 5, God recalls the second of these past judgments by the words:

And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.

This judgment took place more than 5,000 years earlier than the time II Peter was written. The record of this terrible judgment is found in Gen. 6 and 7.

In II Peter 2:6, God recalls a third historical judgment:

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.

In the context of reminders concerning judgments of the past, God speaks of another historical judgment, the first of three recorded in II Peter 2. Like the judgment described in Jude 6, it is a judgment on angels. The description of this judgment is given in the past tense, which indicates that at the time the

Apostle Peter was writing, it had already happened. Moreover, it is described in language surprisingly similar to the language of Rev. 20:1-3. II Peter 2:4 declares:

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.

How can it be that Jude 6 speaks of angels (Satan and all the fallen angels), being reserved or kept in chains of everlasting darkness? How can it be that II Peter 2 speaks of these fallen angels being cast into hell? Don't these events take place at Judgment Day? Doesn't the Bible teach that throughout the New Testament period, Satan goes about as a roaring lion? Doesn't Eph. 6 speak of the rulers of darkness of this world with whom we wrestle? How can we reconcile these apparently contrary viewpoints?

The Binding of the Strong Man

As Jesus anticipated His death for our sins, He informed us in John 12:31-33:

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.

Our Lord indicates that the prince of this world, who can only be Satan, is to be cast out. Whatever this means, it implies that there will be an important change in his fortunes as a result of Christ's death.

God gives us further help in Matt. 12:25-28, where Jesus calls Satan and the other fallen angels "devils." He declares in verse 28: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."

In the next verse, Jesus makes a statement that relates directly to Rev. 20:1-3. He speaks of **binding** the strong man in order to spoil or plunder his house. (Spoil is an Old English word for plunder.) Jesus says in verse 29:

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.

Who is the strong man whose house must be plundered? Remember the context has Satan in view. Satan is the one who is the enemy of Christ. He is the one who has the unsaved of the world in spiritual bondage. Matt. 12:29 repeats the promise set forth in Isaiah 49. God is promising the coming of the Savior by the language in Isaiah 49, verses 24-25:

Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.

The "mighty" in these verses can only be Satan, who holds the unsaved in spiritual bondage. The deliverer can only be Christ, who will build His church by taking the spiritual captives away from Satan and delivering them into the kingdom of Christ. We are told in Col. 1:13: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

In His magnificent salvation plan, Christ plunders the prison house of Satan. Every person who has become saved has been taken from bondage to Satan and become a child of God. Matt. 12:29 teaches us that before this deliverance could take place, it was necessary for Satan to be bound.

When Was Satan Bound?

The logical question might be raised: When was Satan bound so that captives could be delivered into the kingdom of God?

Do you recall the declaration of our Savior as He preached in the synagogue in Nazareth? Luke 4:18 reports:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

This verse is a quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2, a promise of future deliverance for captives. Jesus came to "preach deliverance to the captives." Who are these captives? They are those who are in spiritual bondage to Satan. The Lord Jesus came to set the captives free. God teaches in Eph. 4:8: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."

Who is this captivity that was led captive? It can only be the believers, who before salvation were

in the prison house of Satan but have been led forth as captives or bondservants of Christ. Verse 9 of Eph. 4 tells us where Christ had to go to find us and to accomplish the task of leading us forth as His bondservants. Eph. 4:9: "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?"

In this verse, "the lower parts of the earth" is a synonym for hell, just as the phrase "bottomless pit" in Rev. 20 is a synonym for hell. Before we are saved, we are subject to hell because of our sins. Although we have not yet experienced the official judgment of God, which will come at the end of time, we are under God's wrath which will certainly send us to hell. Thus, in a real sense, Christ found us in hell when He saved us.

The phrase, "he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth," has an even more pointed meaning, which is that Christ had to endure hell to save us. On our behalf, He had to satisfy God's justice perfectly. The wages of sin is eternal damnation, which every unsaved person must pay. Christ's death, Christ's payment, which was made on our behalf, had to be the equivalent of our spending eternity in hell. Only by this sacrifice could He free us from bondage to Satan. Only then could He plunder the house of the strong man.

Thus, we know that the binding of Satan occurred when Christ died for us. He died for us and paid the price that freed us from our sins.

Satan is restrained by God. Satan cannot frustrate God's plan to bring His elect from Satan's bondage into Christ's kingdom. The timetable for this agrees precisely with that suggested by the words of Jude 6 and II Peter 2:5. Now we can see why these accounts of judgment on the angels are in the past tense; these accounts were written a few decades after the cross, when Satan had already been bound.

In this regard, do you recall Jesus' words to Peter in response to the wonderful confession in Matt. 16:16: "Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matt. 16:18 reports this significant promise: "and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The rock is the Messiah, the Christ, who went to the cross to pay for our sins. The gates of hell - the prison house of Satan where Christ finds us - cannot keep us captive.

Satan Cannot Frustrate God's Plan of Salvation

Are there other passages that tie the event of the cross to the binding of Satan? Indeed, there are passages that show that something drastic happened to Satan because Christ went to the cross. Heb. 2:14 records:

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.

In this verse, God declares that by Christ's death, that is, the atonement, Satan was destroyed. He was dealt a death blow. Hell, eternal damnation, is the death that God has in view as wages for sin, and hell, eternal damnation, is the death Christ brought against Satan. This is why II Peter 2:4 speaks of the angels who had sinned as being cast into hell, in the past tense, and why Rev. 20:1-3 speaks of Satan being bound and cast into a pit. Satan was bound in the sense that he could do nothing to frustrate Christ's plan to build His church.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes of a dramatic change in Satan's fortunes because of the atonement. Col. 2:14-15:

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

In these verses, "principalities and powers" is a synonym for the forces of Satan that threaten the world. God teaches that they have been spoiled, that is, plundered. To accomplish this required that the strong man be bound, as we learned from Matt. 12:29.

Is Satan Really Bound?

The questions might be asked: If Satan is bound, if he is cast into a pit, what are we to do with the New Testament passages that teach that Satan is alive and well? Is this a serious contradiction to the conclusions we are making?

Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to show that Satan actively continues throughout the New Testament period. Eph. 6:11-12:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

I Peter 5:8 warns us: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

If we isolated these passages from the rest of the Bible, we would conclude that Satan is as much at liberty to do his evil work in the New Testament as he was in the history of the world.

But when we read these verses in the light of Col. 2:14-15, Heb. 2:14, and Matt. 12:24-25, we know that because of the cross there has been a great change in Satan's relationship to mankind. Satan was dealt a death blow at the cross. In principle, he was destroyed; he was consigned to hell. By looking at passages such as Eph. 6:11-12 and I Peter 5:8 in the light of the rest of the Bible, we learn that Satan can harass the church, he can persecute, and he can tempt the believers, but he cannot stand in the way of Christ's plan to plunder his house of those who are to become believers. In that sense, he was bound. There is no contradiction.

I am afraid that some theologians fall into the snare of allowing Webster's Dictionary or their own minds to define terms in the Bible. It is tempting to conclude that to be "bound" or "cast" into "a pit" can mean only that Satan is removed from the scene of human activity. When we remember that the Bible is its own dictionary and the Bible defines its own terms, we learn that to be "bound" does not mean that Satan was removed from human activity, it means that Satan cannot frustrate God's plan to build His church as Christ plunders the house of Satan.

To be "cast" into "a pit" does not mean that Satan was taken out of any further contact with mankind. Rather, it means that Satan has been made subject to hell.

Because Satan Was Bound, Salvation Comes to the World

There is another way we can know that Satan was bound at the time Christ went to the cross.

The binding of Satan by Christ's atoning work on the cross can be seen in dramatic fashion as we look at God's program to evangelize the world. The mighty change in the effects of this program can be seen in the success of the preaching of the Gospel before and after the cross.

Before Christ was crucified, there were preachers of the Gospel. John the Baptist, the twelve apostles, and the seventy of Luke 10 were assigned that task. God Himself was personally active in preaching the Gospel. Jesus says in Luke 4:43-44:

And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.
And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

There was no finer preacher than Jesus, who is God Himself. And yet after more than three years of sustained Gospel declaration, the number of believers was remarkably small.

The largest numbers of true believers reported in the Bible are 120 in the upper room (Acts 1:15) and about 500 in Galilee (I Cor. 15:6). A few weeks after our Lord returned to heaven, God returned to again personally address Himself to the task of bringing the Gospel. God the Holy Spirit was poured out.

Then the Apostle Peter preached one sermon on Pentecost afternoon and three thousand souls were saved (Acts 2:41). What happened to make the preaching of the Gospel so successful? Why did it not happen when Jesus, who is just as certainly God as the Holy Spirit, preached?

The difference is that Satan was bound at the cross. At Pentecost, God began His program to evangelize the world. Satan's ability to hold the unsaved in spiritual darkness and bondage, to the degree he had done in the Old Testament, was broken at the cross.

Marvelously, ever since the cross, people from every nation have been streaming into the body of Christ. The first five missionaries to the Auka Indians of South America were murdered by this benighted people, but because Satan was bound at the cross, God would not allow them to continue under Satan's power. Later reports indicated that perhaps one-half the tribe had become saved.

Isn't it wonderful to see how many Scriptures can be understood once we have the right understanding of the binding of Satan?

God Sets a Seal on Satan

We read in Rev. 20:3 that Satan has been cast into a bottomless pit, where God has shut him up and set a seal upon him. We might think that great pit with a cover on it is like a jar of fruit which has been

sealed with wax or a rubber ring, but to be cast into the pit means that Satan has been condemned to hell. He has been reserved for hell, as we learned from II Peter 2:4. At the cross, he was severely limited in his power to keep men in spiritual bondage.

The seal that God set upon Satan relates to the fact that the full authority and power of God stand behind the edict of God that Satan should be reserved for damnation and limited in his ability to keep man from believing the Gospel. The believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13) and sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). The language indicates the absolute guarantee of our salvation. Likewise, the sealing of the pit absolutely guarantees that Satan will be sent eternally to hell even though he is now allowed by God to go about as a roaring lion and deceive many. This is the meaning of the phrase in Rev. 20:3, that "he should deceive the nations no more."

For 11,000 years, only a trickle of believers came to faith in Jesus Christ. The only nation that ordinarily produced believers was the nation of Israel, and even in Israel there were few believers. In the wilderness sojourn from Egypt, almost the entire nation perished because of unbelief. In Elijah's day there were 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. In Jesus day, the largest numbers of believers are 120 and 500, but beginning with Pentecost in A.D. 33, believers have been flowing into the kingdom of God from every nation.

One Thousand Years: How Long?

Is the phrase "thousand years" of verse 3 to be understood literally as 1,000 calendar years or is it to be understood in a figurative sense? If we had been living before A.D. 1033, we might have been tempted to look at this period as 1,000 literal years. But since 2,000 years have passed since Jesus was crucified and the conditions that prevailed immediately after Pentecost still prevail today, we know that the 1,000 years must be understood figuratively and not literally. Later in our study, we will look at the 1,000 years indicated in the verses which follow verse 3, and we will see that when the entire context is taken into account, there is no possibility that the 1,000 years could refer to a literal 1,000 years.

How are we to understand the phrase "a thousand years"? In the Bible, God frequently uses numbers to signify or symbolize spiritual truth. For example, it can be shown that the number 4 often represents universality. The number 5, or 50, or 5,000, frequently represents the grace of God or redemption or salvation. The number 7, or 70, or 7,000, if it has spiritual meaning, represents the perfection of God's plan.

Likewise, the number 10, or 100, or 1,000, frequently represents the completeness of God's plan. The ten coins of the parable of Luke 15:8-10 as well as the 100 sheep of the parable of Luke 15:3-7 represent the completeness of all believers. The 1,000 generations of Psalm 105:8 represent the completeness of all who are commanded to believe the Gospel. Similarly, the 1,000 generations of Deuteronomy 7:9 represent the completeness of all those throughout time who will keep God's commandments.

One Thousand Years: The Completeness of God's Plan

In like manner the 1,000 years of Rev. 20:3 is not a literal period of time. It symbolizes the completeness of God's program to evangelize the world during the New Testament period. When God's plan is complete, that is, when the last one of God's elect has become saved, the end will come.

Satan was bound at the cross, but he is loosed during the final tribulation period. While Satan is still reserved for judgment, his freedom to keep the unsaved in spiritual bondage during the final tribulation period is so complete that it will appear that he is the winner. It will appear that hell is no longer a threat to him. Because this will appear to be Satan's time of victory, God uses language that makes it sound like Satan has become victorious. God declares that Satan has been loosed.

As we go on in Rev. 20, we see that God teaches in this chapter that even after Satan was bound, he could still martyr believers. Verse 4:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

In this verse, God speaks of those who have been martyred during this thousand-year period. Let us try to determine the larger teaching of Rev. 20 as it relates to some other chapters of the Book of Revelation, and then we will see the chief intent of verse 4.

In Rev. 13, God discusses the successes of the kingdom of Satan. The kingdom or dominion of Satan is represented by a first beast coming out of the sea and by a second beast coming out of the earth. We will look at this chapter in greater detail later in our study.

In Rev. 14, God contrasts the joys of the redeemed with the damnation that will come upon the unsaved.

In Rev. 15 and 16, God presents Judgment Day under the picture of seven bowls or vials of wrath. According to Rev. 16:13, God is bringing this wrath on the dragon, on the beast, and on the false prophet. The dragon represents Satan himself. The beast and the false prophet represent the kingdom or dominion of Satan.

In Rev. 17 and 18, God again portrays His final judgment on Satan and his kingdom, which are portrayed as a great harlot who rules over the peoples of the world.

In Rev. 19, God describes the final judgment on the kingdom of Satan. This kingdom is again portrayed under the figure of the beast and the false prophet. Both are cast into the lake of fire (verse 20).

But in Rev. 20, God looks at Satan. How did Satan fare after Christ defeated him at the cross and bound him so that Christ could build His church? What will be the end of Satan? Will his end correspond precisely to that which comes upon his dominion, represented in Rev. 13 and Rev. 19 by the beast and the false prophet?

The first three verses of Rev. 20 assure us that Satan was bound so that Christ could build His church. Verse 4 shows us that while Satan cannot frustrate God's salvation plan, he can continue to persecute believers, because verse 4 speaks of those who have been beheaded. Thus, Rev. 20 teaches that although God tells us that Satan has been bound and cast into a pit, Satan has not been taken out of the way so that his presence is no longer felt. Satan can still harass believers and bring them to violent death.

Believers, though Martyred, Reign with Christ

Rev. 20:4 informs us that Satan has not won. While he has done everything he possibly could to frustrate and destroy the body of Christ, he cannot be the victor. In a vision, the Apostle John "saw thrones, and they sat upon them," and "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God."

Many theologians read this passage superficially and conclude that this is a vision of believing martyrs who are reigning here on this earth with Christ. In books on eschatology, they speak of Christ reigning on earth.

They argue that the Apostle John must have been on earth when he saw this vision; therefore, the vision must have been a scene on this earth. Doesn't Rev. 20:1 state that he saw an angel coming down from heaven?

The fact is that the Book of Revelation is a series of visions given to the Apostle John wherein God is prophesying concerning events in heaven, on earth, and in eternity in the new heavens and the new earth. Where John was located when he saw a particular vision is unimportant. In Rev. 4:2, for example, John was in heaven in the spirit, and God describes a great many things he saw in heaven. Rev. 6:1 continues to describe his vision in heaven as the Lamb opens the first seal. But the next verse indicates that the Apostle John saw events which are related to the first seal occur on this earth.

Likewise, Rev. 8:2 declares that he "saw the seven angels which stood before God." It is implied that he was in heaven, but most of the rest of the chapter describes events which take place on earth.

In the same manner, the Apostle John's location or vantage point when he saw the events of Rev. 20 is unimportant. The location of an event described in a verse must be determined by the verse itself; verse 4 of Rev. 20 cannot be speaking of this earth.

The word "earth" is not found in Rev. 20:4. No verse in the Bible teaches that Christ Himself will reign from a throne placed on this sin-cursed earth. I am afraid that these theologians are reading something into this passage that is not there.

Verse 4 clearly shows us that the vision is of a scene in heaven. It cannot be looking at this earth because verse 4 speaks of "the souls of them that were beheaded." Let us look very carefully at this phrase.

In the Bible, God uses the word "soul" in two ways. Sometimes the word "soul" is used to speak of a man as a whole personality. For example, in the Old Testament, God laid down the rule that if a man were not circumcised, "that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Gen. 17:14). In I Peter 3:20, God declares that "eight souls were saved by water." In both of these references, the word "soul" denotes the whole

personality. It is a synonym for the word “person” or “people.” That person [soul] will be cut off. Eight people [souls] were saved.

God also uses the word “soul” to signify the spirit essence of man in contrast to the body. For example, Matt. 10:28 informs us:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

In this verse, the soul is the spirit of man, which leaves the body at death. It does not represent the whole personality but only the spirit essence. One cannot substitute the word “person” for the word “soul” and still have a meaningful verse.

Likewise, in Rev. 20:4, the word “soul” represents the spirit of man rather than the whole person. Notice that it speaks of the souls “of them” that were beheaded. For example, if we said, “I saw the hands of them who had been beheaded,” what did we see? Did we see people who had been beheaded? Or did we see only the hands of those who had been beheaded? Of course we saw only the hands.

In similar fashion, the Apostle John did not see people who were beheaded. He saw the souls **of** people who were beheaded. Therefore, he saw disembodied souls.

The logical questions must be asked: Do disembodied souls have anything to do with this earth? Can the souls which are seated on thrones reigning with Christ be here on this earth? The answers are obvious. Believers who are separated from their bodies at death do not remain on this earth; rather, they go to heaven in their soul existence. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul expresses this truth in II Cor. 5:6-8:

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

For believers, death is the moment when our bodies go into the grave to wait for the resurrection of the last day, but in our soul existence, we leave our bodies and go to heaven to reign with Christ. We can go to heaven because from the moment we became saved, we have been reigning with Christ. Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, reigning over everything in this world as well as in the world to come. Eph. 1:20-21 teaches:

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

When we become believers, we are raised with Him and we are seated with Him in the heavenlies, as Eph. 2:6 declares: “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Believers Reign with Christ Now

Because Jesus is reigning in heaven over the world, and because we are seated with Him, therefore, we, too, are reigning. While our homeland and throne have become heaven, the assignment God has given us as sons of God, as those of royal blood, is to serve as Christ's ambassadors on earth. God speaks of our work on this earth in Rev. 5:10: “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

When our work on earth is finished, we leave our bodies and go to heaven, where we continue to reign with Christ.

Returning to Rev. 20, God is focusing on the fortunes of Satan, and we see that while Satan can kill believers, he cannot really hurt them. Their death at the hands of Satan is that wonderful moment when they leave this world of woe and continue to live and reign with Christ in heaven. Therefore, Satan has not won a victory at all when he persecutes a believer to death. It is no wonder that Jesus says in Matt. 10:28:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Moreover, we are not surprised that Jesus says in Luke 21:16-18:

And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

How marvelous to know that Satan cannot gain victory over the believers. This is the beautiful truth taught in Rev. 20:4.

How long will the believers reign with Christ? Verse 4 declares that it will be “a thousand years.” Could this be a literal period of 1,000 years? Obviously not. Some believers died 2,000 years ago and are still reigning with Christ in heaven. Others died as recently as yesterday and are presently reigning with Him in heaven. Only when we understand that this thousand years, like the thousand years of verse 3, is to be understood as the completeness of God’s plan for the believers, do these verses make any sense. Every believer who has died and gone to heaven has a different starting point from which he began to reign with Christ in his soul existence. These believers will reign with Christ in their soul existence until they return with Christ on the clouds of glory on Judgment Day. Under no circumstances does the context of Rev. 20 allow a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Only when it is realized that the thousand years signify the completeness of God’s plan can all of the verses of Rev. 20 be harmonized with the rest of the Bible.

Verse 3 of Rev. 20 teaches that Satan was bound for the completeness of God’s plan (a thousand years), which we have discovered to be the period of time from the cross until the beginning of the final tribulation period. Verse 4 teaches that the martyred believers reign with Christ in their disembodied souls from the time of their death until the return of Christ in judgment at the end of the world.

Before we leave verse 4, we should comment on the phrase, “which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands.” This statement has particular reference to Rev. 13, where verse 4 speaks of the unsaved worshipping 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?

The beast causes all of the unsaved to receive a mark in their right hand or on the foreheads, as verse 16 declares:

And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads.

In the next chapter, we will look at this verse to discover the identity of the beast named in Rev. 13, and who worships him. We will also consider the phrases in Rev. 13 which speak of fire coming down from heaven, those who cannot buy or sell, and the number 666.

Chapter 12 – The Dragon and the Beast

God declares in Rev. 20:4 that the martyrs reigning with Christ a thousand years are those who had not worshipped the beast nor his image and had not received a mark on their foreheads or hands. This is a reference to Rev. 13.

We will look carefully at Rev. 13 to determine the identity of the beast and also the period of time that is in view when the Bible speaks of those who have his mark. If Rev. 13 speaks only of the final tribulation period, then Rev. 20:4 must speak only of the final tribulation period. If that is so, then our conclusions concerning the millennium are defective.

Rev. 13 begins with the declaration:

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

Who is this beast? How does the beast relate to the dragon of Rev. 12:3, where we read:

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

Why does this dragon have its heads crowned and not its horns? How does the dragon of Rev. 12 and the beast of Rev. 13 relate to the beast of Rev. 17:3?

Rev. 17:3: So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Why does the beast of Rev. 17 have neither its head nor its horns crowned? Let us try to bring all of these passages into focus. Rev. 17:9-10 states:

And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

These verses indicate that the beast with its seven heads represents the rule of Satan throughout time. The “seven mountains” refer to seven kingdoms. The number 7 must be understood to represent the perfection of God’s plan to allow Satan to rule. Frequently in the Bible, the term “mountain” is a synonym for “kingdom.” Verse 10 indicates that the seven heads are seven kings because kingdoms are ruled over by kings.

In these verses, God indicates that at the time the Book of Revelation was being written, the beast had already ruled for a considerable period of time. Five kings out of seven had already ruled. That is, five-sevenths of his rule was already past.

On the other hand, Rev. 17:12 teaches that the horns represent the rule of Satan at the end of time:

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.

In this verse, God shows that the ten horns represent the kingdom of Satan at some future time. It is a brief period of time and undoubtedly coincides with the final tribulation period.

In Rev. 12, the beast is spoken of as a dragon and is presented with crowns on the heads but not on the horns. Thus, Rev. 12 focuses on Satan himself, when he ruled principally during the Old Testament and was not yet bound. This was his condition as he sought to kill the man child (Christ) who was born to the woman.

In Rev. 13 and Rev. 17, God does not use the word “dragon,” He uses the term “the beast.” Moreover, in these chapters, the seven heads do not have crowns on them because Satan was bound at the cross. After the cross, Satan could not reign with the power and freedom he enjoyed throughout the time of the Old Testament.

But his kingdom continues to go on. Notice that Rev. 13:1 declares that this beast comes out of the sea. The sea, like the bottomless pit, is a synonym for hell. Satan has been reserved unto hell by Christ’s victory on the cross. We have seen that this is language that indicates he is a defeated foe subject to Judgment Day, and he cannot frustrate God’s plan to evangelize the world.

His kingdom continues to be in evidence throughout the New Testament period. This is represented by the beast of Rev. 13. Even though Satan was vanquished at the cross, his dominion continues, and so the beast comes from the sea, which represents hell, where Satan was bound. The heads of the beast are not crowned because Satan could not rule over his dominion with the freedom and certainty that he had before the cross.

The ten **horns** of the beast are crowned in Rev. 13:1, which shows that at the end of time, for a very brief period, the kingdom of Satan will appear to be as free and certain as its rule before the time of the cross. Rev. 17:8 describes these changes in Satan’s rule:

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

The phrase, “the beast that thou sawest was,” refers to the reign of Satan before the time of the cross. The next phrase, “and is not,” refers to the fact that he was bound at the cross.

The phrase, “and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit,” refers to the loosing of Satan at the beginning of the tribulation period. This phrase parallels the language and expresses the same truth that is found in Rev. 9:1, where God speaks of locusts coming out of the pit. These locusts, with tails like scorpions (verses 3 and 10), are a figure of Satan, who comes with his devilish destruction.

The phrase, “and go into perdition,” refers to the final judgment on Satan and his kingdom at the end of time. The last phrase in Rev. 17:8, “and yet is,” emphasizes that while in one sense Satan was bound, in another sense, he continued throughout the New Testament period. His kingdom continued to be in evidence, but he was not able to frustrate God’s plan to save a vast company of believers.

Because of the intimate relationship that exists between Rev. 13 and Rev. 17, we can know that Rev. 13 refers to the reign of the kingdom of Satan throughout the New Testament period. We receive added assurance that this chapter has in view the kingdom of Satan throughout the New Testament period in Rev. 13:5, which speaks of authority being given to him for a period of 42 months. Careful analysis of Daniel 9:27 shows that the 42 months symbolize the entire New Testament period.

Rev. 13:3 teaches:

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.

The wounding (Greek means *slain*) unto death of one of his heads signifies the victory Christ won over Satan at the cross. This verse reinforces the truth we have already discovered: At the cross, Satan was bound and reserved for hell. The fact that Rev. 13:3 speaks of the wound being healed emphasizes that the kingdom of Satan continues to function throughout the New Testament period; indeed, near the end of time (the time of the ten horns), he will look as victorious as if he had not been vanquished by Christ at the cross.

The loosing of Satan near the end of time is expressed in the language of Rev. 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.

This will be during the final tribulation period when the true Gospel is gradually pinched off; God's plan of salvation has nearly ended because most of God's elect have become saved.

Satan Rules as Antichrist

In Rev. 13:11, God describes another beast coming from the earth: "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon." This beast represents the kingdom of Satan or the rule of Satan when he rules as Antichrist, as a pseudo-christ. This beast comes from the earth to signify that his rule is through men. We are made of the dust of the earth and return to the dust of the earth.

The "two horns like a lamb" emphasize that his rule has the appearance of Christ's rule. II Cor. 11:13-15 speaks of this rule:

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.

In I John 4:3, God underscores the same truth:

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Satan, the Antichrist, has been ruling spiritually since the fall of man. He rules through men who come with gospels almost identical to the true Gospel. In Rev. 13, God speaks of this rule by the picture of the beast coming from the earth.

Satan Rules through False Gospels

Rev. 13:14 tells us that the kingdom of Satan, functioning as an Antichrist, will "make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live." To make an image signifies the development of gospels other than the true Gospel. The language identifies with the false religions of the Old Testament, for instance, the worship of Baal. Baal worship was similar to the worship of Jehovah God; it had priests, altars, and ceremonies. The name Baal signifies lord. Baal worship was the worship of a lord, but their god was an image or an idol.

This is the picture God is presenting in Rev. 13. Satan causes men to develop false gospels, which are similar to Old Testament Baal worship. This phenomenon has been occurring throughout the New Testament period, but judging from everything we can find in the Bible, it has been greatly intensified during these end-times, when Satan is loosed. By means of the false gospels, Satan himself will be worshipped. He will greatly deceive many people so that when they worship Satan, they will be completely convinced that they are worshipping Christ. Those who follow false gospels are, therefore, worshipping the beast and the image.

Rev. 13:13 says that this beast does great miracles: "And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." This beast is also called the false prophet in Rev. 16:13 and Rev. 19:20.

Verse 15 declares that the beast had power to give life to the image:

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.

These passages tell us that Satan will, at times, be able to break the silence between the supernatural and the natural, so that these other gospels will appear to be directly from God. We know that Satan is allowed by God to break the silence between the natural and the supernatural insofar as secular activity is concerned. Witchcraft, mediums, Tarot cards, and Ouija boards testify to this. Therefore, coming as an angel of light, Satan can certainly work through similar means in the church as he brings his other gospels. Even as the secular world has seers who believe they receive messages from God, so in the churches, those who come with other gospels will speak of their revelations, visions, and dreams. By this means, the other gospels look like they are of God.

Satan Makes Fire Come from Heaven

In Rev. 13:13, the Bible discloses that the beast “maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” Does this mean that at some point in time, Satan will be able to literally make fire come down from heaven? Allow me to suggest that this phenomenon is presently taking place in many places in the world, but no, it is not a literal fire, it is an activity that is the equivalent of calling down fire from heaven. Let us search the Bible to see how this can be.

In two outstanding examples in which Satan, through his emissaries, threatened believers, fire came down from heaven to destroy the wicked ones.

In II Kings 1, we read of the wicked king of Israel sending a captain with 50 men to take Elijah. In the face of Satan’s open assault on believers, Elijah, who represents believers, called down fire from heaven and the captain and 50 men were destroyed.

In Rev. 20, we read of Satan assaulting the camp of the saints by means of the nations from the four corners of the earth, and fire came down from heaven to destroy these nations.

But there was another time when Satan assaulted the kingdom of God and fire should have been called down from heaven to destroy him. Instead, a different action was taken to show that Satan should have been destroyed by fire. That action, therefore, became the equivalent of calling down fire from heaven.

The event was the binding of Jesus outside the Garden of Gethsemane, when Judas and the temple soldiers came to take Jesus. Satan himself was there, because a bit earlier, he had entered into Judas (Luke 22:3). Satan was so much a part of what followed that Christ called Judas a “devil” (John 6:70-71). Jesus asked Judas and the temple soldiers, “Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus then answered, “I am” (John 18:4-5).

At that moment, following the action of Elijah as recorded in II Kings 1, and the action against the forces of evil as recorded in Rev. 20, Jesus should have called down fire from heaven to destroy the enemies who would bind Him. But Jesus could not take this action. He declared to the temple soldiers, “this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). Christ could not destroy these enemies because it was necessary that He be bound and go to the cross to pay for our sins. Only then could He be our Savior.

Jesus showed that He was willingly being bound and that it was God’s will that He be taken, but Christ could have easily destroyed these enemies. Instead of bringing fire from heaven, when Jesus said, “I am,” He caused them to reel backward and fall to the ground (John 18:6). This was a substitute action to show that He had the power to destroy them.

Therefore, we see that to fall backward to the ground under some supernatural power is the equivalent of calling fire from heaven. Thus, this could be the manner through which Rev. 13:13 finds its fulfillment. Among the false gospels of our day, there is an extensive phenomenon going on in which many people fall backward by some supernatural power. Among some, this is called “being slain in the spirit.” Since Satan himself cannot literally call down fire from heaven, he follows the lead of Jesus and causes people to fall backward, which is a substitute for calling down fire from heaven.

Rev. 13:15 records that those who do not “worship the image of the beast should be killed.” Martyrdom for those who will not deny Christ and agree with a false gospel has been common throughout time. This was the lot of the souls who had been beheaded as spoken of in Rev. 20:4. In all likelihood, this killing of true believers has its fulfillment in the proliferation of false gospels during the final tribulation period. We will look at this possibility more closely when we examine the loosing of Satan from his prison at the end of God’s plan (a thousand years).

The Slaves of Satan

We read in Rev. 13:16:

And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads.

Is this mark on the hand or forehead a literal mark? Never in the history of the world have unbelievers had an outward mark. Moreover, the Bible shows us that this mention of a mark is to be understood as an indication of ownership. Even as a slave has a brand or some mark to indicate who owns him, so, too, the slaves of Satan, spiritually speaking, bear a brand or mark that shows they are slaves of Satan. The mark on the hand signifies that the will is sold out to Satan. The mark on the forehead signifies that the mind is sold out to Satan.

That this language of the mark is to be understood spiritually and not literally is seen in similar language that relates to the believer. In Rev. 14:1, God discloses that the 144,000, who can be shown to represent the fullness of all believers, have their Father's name written on their foreheads. What is the name of God the Father? He has no name and needs no name to distinguish Him from other gods because there are no other god. Also, when Christ comes on the clouds of glory, He has a name which no one can know (Rev. 19:12). All of the names assigned to God in the Bible are given to tell us something about God. He is the Savior. He is the Christ, the Anointed One. He is the Word. He is Faithful. He is True. Believers do not at any time have God's name literally on their foreheads. Rather, God is instructing us by the language of Rev. 14:1 that the believers are bondservants of God. They were purchased by the price of Jesus' blood. So, too, the unsaved are pictured as bearing the mark or brand of their master, Satan.

Who Can Buy or Sell?

Rev. 13 closes with the information that no man could buy or sell unless he had the mark or name of the beast. The Bible shows us that to buy or sell bears no relationship to the economics of this world. It is not to be understood as literal buying or selling. To what then does it refer?

In Mark 11, Jesus speaks of those who bought and sold in the temple. He cast them out and declares in verse 17:

And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Thus, Christ is equating those who sold and bought with a den of thieves. The reference to a den of thieves comes from Jer. 7:9-11, where God informs us:

Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.

In this passage, God is teaching that a den of robbers equals those who are Baal worshippers but who nevertheless believe they are saved (those who "come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered").

We have seen from Mark 11 that a den of robbers equals those who buy and sell. Therefore, by putting Mark 11 together with Jer. 7, we conclude that those who buy and sell denote those who are followers of other gospels (Baal worshippers), who believe they are saved. Of course, a true believer cannot become snared into a wrong gospel. Nothing can separate a true believer from the love of God, nothing can snatch him from his heavenly Father's hand. Therefore, since the believer does not have the mark of the beast, he cannot buy or sell; he is not a slave of Satan. That is, the true believer cannot be snared into other gospels, which are spoken of in Rev. 13:12-15. What a tremendous comfort to the child of God! Regardless of how deceitful Satan may be as he comes with false gospels that look almost like the true Gospel, the true believer in Christ cannot be misled. The true believer cannot lose his salvation.

The concept that those who buy and sell represent those who are followers of another gospel even though they think they are saved is further expanded by the Bible's use of the word "merchandise." In John 2:13-16, we have an account similar to that of Mark 11. In these verses we are told that Christ has driven the money changers and those who sold oxen and sheep from the temple. Verse 16 informs us: "And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

In this verse, the word "merchandise" is used of those who were buying and selling in the temple.

The same word is used in II Peter 2:3, where we read:

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.

The context of this verse discloses that false prophets among the people are bringing damnable heresies. God speaks of them as making merchandise of the people. In other words, God is applying the concept of buying and selling or merchandising to those who have other than the true Gospel; they merchandise in the temple. That is, they try to snare true believers into their false gospels. But praise God, as we learned from Rev. 13, true believers cannot become involved in this; they cannot buy or sell.

Rev. 13 closes with the statement of verse 18:

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

The Number 666

What is this number 666? Unfortunately, we have an erroneous translation in our King James Bible, which declares that "it is the number of a man." The word from which "a man" is translated is the Greek word *anthropos*, which can refer to a single individual but more often refers to mankind in general.

The same noun is used in John 5:27: "And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." In this verse the Lord Jesus is called the "Son of man." He, of course, is not the son of a man. He did not have a human father. He was the Son of mankind. Likewise, the number 666 of Revelation is not a number assigned to a man but to mankind. Therefore, a better translation of Rev. 13:18 would be, "it is the number of man." That is, it is the number God has assigned to all of mankind in a spiritual sense. It is derived from Zech. 13:8-9, where God divides all of mankind into two groups. One group consists of those who are saved, who in a spiritual sense bear the number 1/3 (one-third). The other group consists of the unsaved, who spiritually bear the number 2/3 (two-thirds). Zech. 13:8-9 records:

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 refers to those who have become saved; they have passed through the fire in the sense that Christ, as their substitute, has endured the wrath of God on their behalf. The wrath of God is identified with the eternal fires of hell. In Christ the full penalty of our sins has been paid; we can now stand blameless before God. We are His people, and the Lord is our God.

In these same verses, God is using the number 2/3 to signify those who are unsaved and still under the wrath of God. God emphasizes these proportions in at least two historical events. We read of the victory of David (who is a great type of Christ), over Moab in II Sam. 8:2:

And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.

Note that two-thirds were put to death and one-third was spared and became servants of David. The one-third is a picture of believers who have become servants of Christ. The two-thirds represent the unbelievers who will be consigned to eternal damnation.

Another historical example is found in II Kings 1, where we read that on three occasions captains with 50 men came to take Elijah. The first two bands of men were destroyed by fire from heaven. The third captain and his men pleaded for mercy and were spared. Thus, in the Bible, the proportions of two-thirds (2/3) and one-third (1/3) stand out prominently.

How does the number 2/3 relate to the number 666? Indeed, they are the same number. If we divide 3 into 2, which we do to write the number 2/3 as a decimal number, we have the number 666666666, etc. If we write this number using only the first three digits, we obtain the number 666.

God is teaching us that those of mankind who are doomed to destruction are assigned the symbolic number 666. The only way that number can be removed from anyone is by that person becoming a child of God.

God is giving us the grand truth in the closing verses that no one who is a child of God (who does not have the brand of Satan or the number 666, which shows he is still under the curse of God), can be snared into a false gospel (can buy or sell). Satan can come with his most deceitful gospels, by which he

rules the hearts of unsaved man, but he cannot have victory over the saved. The saved are safe in the arms of Christ.

We have learned that Satan and his kingdom are portrayed as a dragon and a beast. As a dragon, Satan's rule throughout time is symbolized by the seven heads. Before the cross, these heads had crowns to signify spiritual rule over the unsaved. After the cross, he no longer has crowns on his heads. Thus, God tells us that Satan's power over unsaved men has been broken. This was required so that God could plunder Satan's house and Christ could build His church.

The dragon was also portrayed with ten horns which are crowned, which pictures the rule of Satan during the final tribulation period. At this time, his rule is total in the sense that few will become saved. God's plan for saving the elect out of each and every nation is almost complete.

We have also learned that Satan's rule is typified by a beast with two horns, which focuses on Satan's spiritual rule in the world as he comes with false gospels. This rule has been in evidence throughout the New Testament period but is especially in evidence during the final tribulation period.

Those who are snared into these false gospels are spoken of as worshipping the beast and of having his mark on their hand and on their forehead. Those who do not become snared in this fashion are those spoken of in Rev. 4. They are the ones who are martyred and who reign with Christ in heaven until the end of time.

The Antichrist

Virtually every book that looks toward the end of time relates in some manner to the Antichrist. Most theologians teach that he will be a human being who will come on the world scene at a future time, and because he will be indwelt by Satan, he will have great power and authority and be a world ruler.

When we read the Bible carefully, we can discover who the Antichrist is. It is not some world ruler, rather, it is Satan himself. Let us see why this is so. The verse that helps us to see most clearly to identify the Antichrist is I John 4:3:

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

This verse tells us that the Antichrist was already in the world almost 2,000 years ago when these words were written and that the Antichrist will come. Therefore, we can know that the Antichrist must have been living during the entire New Testament period. Of course, no human being can fit that description.

But there is someone who can. That someone is Satan. He is the Antichrist. He answers to every description in the Bible in which the Antichrist is in view. Christ is the head of the kingdom of believers, who in turn are called Christians or believers or prophets. Likewise, Satan, the Antichrist, heads the dominion of darkness. His followers are called antichrists, or unbelievers, or false christs, or false prophets.

Because Satan is a spirit being (a fallen angel), he does his work through men. Principally his work is through false prophets within the church. Matt. 24:24 records:

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 II Cor. 11:13-15, we find this very pertinent information:

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.

Thus, we can know that in those passages which speak of a future time when great wickedness will occur under the rule of someone holding great power and authority, it is Satan who is in view as the ruler. He is the Antichrist. He is called the man of sin in II Thes. 2 because he was called a man in Isaiah 14:16:

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.

Verses 12-20 speak of Satan, who is also called Lucifer. He is called a man because he was typified by the king of Babylon, who, of course, was a man.

When we recognize that Satan is the Antichrist, then every part of the Bible falls into place. For example, we see immediately how the loosing of Satan, which is discussed in Rev. 20, identifies with the

other passages that point to the Antichrist.

In the next chapter, we will learn what the first resurrection is and how it relates to the martyrs referred to in Rev. 4.

Chapter 13 – The First Resurrection

We have been examining Rev. 20 in some detail. We are very interested in this chapter because those who hold the premillennial view believe these verses teach that during a future literal period of one thousand years, Christ will return to and reign over this sin-cursed earth from the city of Jerusalem. Thus far, we have found no evidence in Rev. 20 or anywhere else in the Bible to support this conclusion. Because Rev. 20 is so important in the study of prophecy, we will continue to examine it to make sure our conclusions in the previous chapters of this study are not negated by other evidence found in Rev. 20 or in any other part of the Bible.

Do you remember that the martyrs pictured in Rev. 20:4 had not worshipped the beast nor his image and had not received the mark of the beast? In other words, God is teaching that these were true believers; they were not slaves of Satan, and they were not involved with a false gospel.

Continuing in verse 4, we read that “they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” We should look at the word “lived” a bit more closely, for it is the same word used in verse 5, where God speaks of the unsaved as those who lived not. Rev. 20:5:

But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

The word “lived,” as found in both verse 4 and verse 5, is the Greek word *ezesan*. It is a word that God uses to denote conscious existence. This word can be used in connection with saved or unsaved people. Acts 26:5, for example, speaks of the Apostle Paul’s life before he was saved, using the words, “I lived [*ezesan*] a Pharisee.” It is the same word used in Rev. 13:14, where we read of the beast, “which had the wound by a sword, and did live [*ezasan*, same root word].”

Neither of the above passages relate to eternal life. They simply emphasize conscious existence.

In Rev. 20:4, when Satan martyred the saved, they did not die. Oh, yes, in their bodies they were put in graves, but because they have eternal life, physical death became the marvelous moment when they left their bodies and continued to have conscious existence. But now they are living in their soul existence. They are reigning with Christ in heaven.

They will reign with Christ a thousand years (that is, for the completeness of God’s plan), in the condition of being absent from their bodies. Throughout the New Testament, believers are martyred and go to heaven to reign. For all of them, their reign as disembodied souls will end at the time of the return of Christ, when all believers will receive their resurrected bodies, and from that time on, as complete personalities, will reign with Christ.

The duration of each believer’s reign in heaven will be different from almost all other believers’ reigns. This is because believers arrive in heaven at different times, but for each believer, it will be for the duration of “a thousand years,” that is, until the completion of God’s plan.

Unbelievers Upon Death Go to a Place of Silence

The Bible declares that the rest of the dead, spoken of in verse 5, lived not again (that is, they did not have conscious existence), until the thousand years were finished. Who are the rest of the dead? Since those who are saved have conscious existence after they die (they go to heaven to reign with Christ, see II Cor. 5:6-8), we know that the rest of the dead referred to in verse 5 must be those who are unsaved. Upon death, they cannot go into God’s holy heaven. Instead, they will go to a place of silence (Psalm 115:17). Of course, they will be resurrected at the end of time to be judged. For them, a thousand years (the completeness of God’s plan), is from the time of their physical death until Judgment Day. Therefore, a thousand years is a different time span for each unsaved individual.

Rev. 20:5 is proof that the unsaved do not go into torment immediately after death. They go into silence to await their resurrection, when they will be officially judged for their sins. Only then will they be removed into hell, where they will eternally have conscious existence and pay for their sins. (Thus, after an unsaved person dies, the next event he will know is his resurrection and standing for judgment to

answer for his sins.) In the account of the rich man and Lazarus described in Luke 16, where it seems that the rich man is immediately in torment, please remember that this is a parable. Luke 16:22 informs us that the rich man was buried, but verse 23 mentions his eyes and verse 24 tells us of his tongue. This would be impossible if this were a literal description of life after death. Only by understanding that this is a parable can these and other apparent contradictions within the story be reconciled.

What Is the First Resurrection?

God gives us the reason why Satan is not the victor when he is able to have true believers killed. We read in Rev. 20, verse 5b and verse 6:

... This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

What is the first resurrection? Verse 6 teaches us that five characteristics apply to those who have experienced the first resurrection.

1. They are blessed.
2. They are holy.
3. Over them the second death has no power.
4. They are priests of God.
5. They will reign with God a thousand years (the completeness of God's plan).

Who has these five characteristics? Let us look at the five characteristics, which identify with those who have experienced the first resurrection, to show how each characteristic relates to those who have become saved.

Those who have experienced the first resurrection are blessed. The Beatitudes of Matt. 5 are sufficient to show that the child of God is blessed. In fact, it is a theme that runs throughout the Bible.

Those who have experienced the first resurrection are holy. I Peter 2:9 declares that the believers are a holy nation. Believers are holy because we have been taken out of Satan's dominion to be set apart to serve God.

Those who have experienced the first resurrection are not under the power of the second death. Rev. 20:14 indicates that the lake of fire (hell) is the second death. Believers in Christ are no longer under the fear of hell because Christ, as their Savior, has already endured hell on their behalf.

Those who have experienced the first resurrection are priests of God. In I Peter 2:9, God teaches that those who are saved are a royal priesthood. Rev. 1:6 teaches that Christ has made us priests.

Those who have experienced the first resurrection will reign with Christ a thousand years. We learned from Eph. 1:20-22 that following His resurrection, Christ sat down at the right hand of God. He was given authority over everything, not only in this age but also in the age to come. This is the reason why He is our King. In Eph. 2:5-6, God speaks of those who have been saved:

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

In other words, we who have been saved are now reigning with Christ. Our throne is in heaven, which is also the land of our citizenship (Phil. 3:20-21), but for the time being, we have been assigned the task of representing Christ on this earth. We have become of royal blood; we now reign with Christ. We are His ambassadors. Only when our task on earth is finished, will we be called home to reign in heaven, which was the experience of the martyrs of Rev. 20:4.

Rev. 5:10 emphasizes the kingly character as well as the priestly nature of the believer: "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

We reign now on earth because we have a heavenly citizenship, and our throne is with Christ at the right hand of the Father. Of course, we will also reign with Christ eternally when God creates the new heavens and the new earth.

We have seen quite clearly that each of the five characteristics which relate to the first resurrection of Rev. 20:5 identify with believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The First Resurrection Is Salvation

What is the first resurrection? When did we experience it? Do you recall what we read in John

5:24?

John 5:24: Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

In this verse, God is telling us that a saved person has come from death unto life. This can only mean that before we were saved, we were spiritually dead, but now we have eternal life. Note the present tense, which teaches us that our eternal life is a present reality. If we were dead and are now alive, then we must have experienced a resurrection, which is precisely what Eph. 2:5-6 teaches:

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

In these verses, God speaks of Christ being raised. Christ, of course, experienced a very literal resurrection, but we have been raised with Him. Thus, we, too, have experienced a resurrection.

How can that be, since the Bible clearly states that our bodies will be resurrected when Jesus comes again? The answer is that we are more than just bodies. We are also souls, our spirit essence, which is the part of us that leaves the body at death and goes to be with the Lord, even as the souls of the martyrs in Rev. 20:4 could leave their bodies at death and reign with Christ in heaven. The reason they could go into heaven at the time they were separated from their bodies (physical death) is that in their souls, they had experienced the resurrection at the time of salvation. In their souls, they had become born from above. In their souls, they had become new creatures (II Cor. 5:17) and old things had passed away.

At physical death, we who have been saved cannot go into heaven in our bodies. Only after our bodies have experienced the resurrection will they be caught up in the air to be with our Savior; this will be the second resurrection for believers.

The first resurrection occurred at the moment of salvation, when we received our resurrected souls. This is why Satan could not win a victory over the martyrs whom he had beheaded (Rev. 20:4): They had experienced the first resurrection. Therefore, their physical death at the hand of Satan's evil men simply marked the marvelous moment when they went home to heaven, where they will forever live and reign with Christ. Satan had won no victory at all.

We read about the resurrection of the soul (the soul is also called the spirit of man), in I Peter 4:6:

For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

Believers are judged as men according to the flesh in the sense that their bodies (their flesh) will be placed in the grave, but in their spirit, in their souls, they live according to God. That is, they will never die. What a comfort this is to those who have placed their trust in Christ!

While we are considering the matter of the first resurrection, we might reflect briefly on the impact of this powerful experience on our lives.

Before we are saved, both in body and soul (in our whole personality), we are dead in our sins. We live in rebellion against God. There is great harmony within our personality as we live our sinful lives. When we sin, both in body and soul, we love that sin. The only restraint we sense is in our conscience. Our conscience reflects God's law, which to some degree is written in our hearts (Rom. 2:15). We know it is wrong to murder, steal, and commit adultery, but as we proceed deeper into sin, our conscience becomes seared. We become more hardened in our sins. As long as we do not have to face an outside penalty (social stigma, criminal charges, etc.), we take pleasure in the sins we love. Between our body and soul, there is complete agreement concerning our way of life.

But when we experience salvation, a profound change occurs in our lives. No change occurs in our bodies. In our bodies, we continue to lust after sin. This will be a problem for us as long as we live. This is one reason why believers long for the return of Christ, because when our Savior returns, believers will receive their resurrected bodies. This change in our bodies is wonderfully described in I Cor. 15.

Upon salvation there is a total change in our souls. We are given new resurrected souls in which we never want to sin again. I John 3:9 declares that that which is born of God cannot sin. It is in our soul existence that we never wish to sin again. It is in that part of our existence that we have eternal life.

This change brings difficulties to us. Before we are saved, both in body and soul, there is harmony, there is agreement. After salvation, a struggle begins. In our body, we want to sin. In our new soul, we never want to sin again. But we must live as a whole personality with our body and soul integrated with each other.

The Believer's Tug-of-War

There is a tug-of-war going on in the life of the true believer. When we live close to Christ and His Word, our soul is winning, and we turn away from sin. When we take our eyes from Christ and look longingly at the pleasures of this world, the desires of our bodies entice us and sin will become a problem.

When we fall into sin, we experience great internal trauma. We are violating ourselves in our soul existence in which we never wish to sin again. David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, described this trauma in the words of Psalm 32:3-5:

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

In other words, the true believer cannot go deeper and deeper into sin, nor can he engage continuously in sin.

The contention between the desires of his soul on the one hand and the desires of his body on the other will be severe and uncomfortable. It will not be long until he is pleading with God for forgiveness and for victory over the besetting sin.

The struggle between the soul and the body in the life of the believer is set forth so clearly in the language of Rom. 7:18-24:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Thus, we see that there is great evidence in our lives that we receive our resurrected souls at the moment of salvation. The final proof of this glorious fact is evidenced at death. At death our bodies are placed in a grave to await the resurrection of the last day. But our souls do not go down to a place of silence to await the resurrection. In our souls, we are immediately brought into God's glorious presence. The Holy Spirit guided the Apostle Paul to declare in II Cor. 5:8: "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

The reason we can, in our souls, go instantaneously at death into God's holy presence, is that we experienced the resurrection of our souls when we became saved.

Returning to Rev. 20, we read in verse 7: "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." Remember that the term thousand years is a synonym for the completeness of God's plan. Satan was bound at the cross so that he could not frustrate God's plan to evangelize the world and save God's elect.

When God's plan of salvation is nearly completed, that is, when almost all of God's elect have become saved, Satan will be loosed from prison; he will be permitted to hold the rest of the human race in great spiritual bondage, which will usher in the period of time known as the final tribulation.

The Bible has much to say about the final tribulation. The final tribulation will not be studied in depth in this book, but a careful study of this period is presented in the booklet ***The Final Tribulation***, which is available from Family Radio.

We will, however, further discuss the question of the timing of the rapture. As we look at this question, we will learn about the fundamental characteristics of the final tribulation period. We will also examine many Scripture verses that premillennial theologians use as proof texts to support their understanding of the details of the return of Christ. Moreover, we will see if there is anything in these verses that in any way suggests a future glory for national Israel.

In our next chapter, therefore, we will look at the timing of the rapture.

Chapter 14 – When Is The Rapture?

As never before in history, there is an increasing preoccupation with the subject of the return of

our Lord Jesus Christ. The return of Israel to its land, the tremendous multiplication of knowledge, the potential for massive worldwide destruction by nuclear war, and the rapid increase in communication technology (permitting the Gospel to penetrate everywhere in the world), are some of the phenomena that cause serious students of the Bible to wonder if the end of time is at hand.

Naturally those who have placed their trust in the Bible as the only reliable source of information concerning the future will look to the Bible for information concerning the end-time events. One event that gives great comfort to the child of God is the rapture of the believers. By the word *rapture* we have in mind that moment when the believers in Christ who have not experienced physical death will be changed into their glorified bodies. At that time, they will be caught up in the air to be with Christ, as I Thes. 4:17 declares:

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 subject of the rapture of the church is important for many reasons. One reason is that we must remember that the time line of history is the unfolding of God's salvation plan. The church, and by this we mean the various congregations and denominations in which true believers in Christ are found, is intimately and extensively a part of God's salvation plan. Since the **rapture** is the catching up of believers to be with Christ in the air, it signals the end of the believers on earth. That is, it indicates the church has come to an end on earth. Therefore, we must learn when this will be in relationship to the chronology of history.

A puzzling situation has developed, however, concerning the timing of the rapture. Some hold that it will take place 1,007 years before the end of the world. Others believe the Bible teaches that it will be 1,003.5 years before the end, while still others suggest 1,000 years. Then there are those who teach that this grand event will occur right at the end of time.

One logically wonders, therefore, if the Biblical teaching concerning the timing of the rapture is intentionally obscured or is the language of the Bible just extremely difficult to understand. Of course one would surely wish to understand the Bible clearly on this question, for then one could know more specifically how the believers will relate to the final tribulation of which the Bible speaks. Moreover, a clear understanding of the timing of the rapture would greatly help in our understanding of many other details that relate to the end of time.

Wonderfully, the Bible has much to say about the rapture. It is not an event that is rarely alluded to in the Bible. The timing of the rapture in relation to Judgment Day and the end of time is extremely well documented in the Scriptures. We need have no doubt whatsoever concerning its place in the sequence of events that relate to Christ's return.

In this study we will examine seven different sets of Scriptures that deal with the rapture. As we go through these Scriptures, we will find seven independent paths that lead us to the same inescapable conclusion: **The rapture of the believers will occur at the end of time.** It will take place at the same time our Lord comes to judge the world. It will come right at the time when the world is beginning to collapse and God prepares to destroy it by fire. It will be at the end of the time line of history.

May we be grateful to our Lord for the abundance of Biblical information He has provided on this important matter.

Let us look together at the first of these seven paths.

The Last Trumpet and the Rapture

In I Cor. 15:51-53 we read:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

In these verses God is discussing the fact that not everyone will die. (To fall asleep is Biblical language signifying death.) There will be those who will instantaneously receive their resurrected bodies without first falling asleep. This language is clearly concerned with the rapture, for verse 53 speaks about the believers receiving their immortal bodies.

Then God tells us when this event will occur. Note the language, which declares, **at the sound of the last trump.** This is a time clue. God is effectively saying that when the **last** trumpet sounds, the rapture will occur.

Following the Biblical principle that the Bible interprets the Bible, we must now search the Bible to find language that relates to the sound of the last trumpet. If such references can be found, perhaps they will tell us when the last trumpet will sound.

In Rev. 11:15-18 we read:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

In this passage God gives us an outline of the events that will accompany the sounding of the seventh or last trumpet. At that time the following becomes reality:

- a. The time has come for the dead to be judged.
- b. The time for the rewarding of the saints has come.
- c. The time for destroying the destroyers has come.

In other words, the sounding of the seventh trumpet signals that Judgment Day has come. It signals that the time has come for the believers to receive their reward. It is the time that the forces of evil are to be cast into hell. Therefore, the sounding of the last trumpet must be at the end of time, for it is at the end of time that Judgment Day dawns, and Satan is thrown into the lake of fire.

Returning to I Cor. 15:51-53, we will recall that this passage effectively declares that the rapture of believers is to occur at the sound of the last trumpet. Since we have seen from Rev. 11 that at the sound of the seventh trumpet Judgment Day occurs, we can know that the rapture is an event that occurs simultaneously with Judgment Day.

Sodom's Destruction and the Rapture

From I Cor. 15:51-53 we have seen that the rapture is to occur at the time Christ returns to judge the world. Let us now look at a second path that helps us to better understand the timing of the rapture. In Luke 17:28-37 we read:

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. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

In this passage, God is using the destruction of Sodom as a figure or type of the judgment of the last day. We will see that the saving of Lot and his family is a figure of the rapture. God links the rescue of Lot and his family to the rapture in verse 34: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left."

Just before the destruction of Sodom, God sent heavenly messengers to rescue the family of Lot (Gen. 19). On the heels of this rescue operation, God rained down fire and brimstone upon Sodom and the other wicked cities, utterly destroying them.

God declares in Luke 17:30, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Thus, Christ links the destruction of Sodom to Judgment Day.

The parallelism that exists between the destruction of Sodom and the end of the world is clearly evident. Sodom, a wicked city ripe for judgment, is populated by two kinds of people. There are the wicked, who are to be destroyed, and there is the church, represented by Lot and his family. It is a tiny little remnant in this wicked city.

So today the world is mostly populated by those who are altogether rebellious against God. Amongst the vast population of the world there is the church. It consists of only a tiny percentage of the

world's population.

Then Judgment Day comes for Sodom. The cup of their iniquity is full. God is to utterly destroy them for their sins, but just ahead of that judgment, God rescues Lot. So close in time is the rescue to the poured out judgment of God that Lot's wife is destroyed in the judgment. So it will also be at the end of time. When the nations have become ripe for judgment, God will send His angels to rescue the believers from amongst the unbelievers. Two will be in one bed; one is taken, the other is left. The one that is taken is caught up in the air to be with Christ, even as I Thes. 4:17 teaches. The one that is left will stand for judgment even as the wicked of Sodom were left for judgment.

Thus, Christ is teaching that the rapture comes simultaneously with Judgment Day. There is complete agreement between the account of Jesus concerning the destruction of Sodom and the I Cor. 15 account, which speaks of the rapture coming at the sound of the last trumpet.

The Noachian Flood and the Rapture

A third path through the Bible continues to give us vast assurance that the rapture will occur simultaneously with Judgment Day. This is found in the language Jesus utters as He compares the flood and its events to Judgment Day and its events. In Matt. 24:37-41 we read:

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. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

In this passage, God sets up parallel language that relates the flood that destroyed the world of Noah's day to Jesus' return. This parallelism, which indicates that the destruction of the world in the Noachian Flood was a type or figure of Judgment Day, is also set forth in II Peter 3:3-7:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

When we look at the flood account in Gen. 7, we see that seven days before the flood, God gave Noah notice that the flood would come in seven days. Therefore, Noah and his family were to go into the ark.

Gen. 7:1: And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

Gen. 7:4: For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.

The flood did indeed come seven days after notice was given; we read in Gen. 7:10, "And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth."

The Bible then records the precise date of the flood, together with the information that Noah actually entered the ark the selfsame day that the flood came. We read in Gen. 7:11-13:

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark.

Thus, Christ teaches that the peoples of Noah's day continued eating and drinking until the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood swept them away. Luke 17:27 reads:

They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

Certainly we can see the parallelisms that exist between the flood and Judgment Day. Noah and his family lived in a world cursed by sin. At Judgment Day the believers, a tiny remnant of people, will exist in a world cursed by sin. When the floods were to begin, Noah and his family entered into the ark, a haven of safety for them. At Judgment Day the believers are raptured while the unsaved are judged and

removed into Hell: "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Matt. 24:40). The one taken is like Noah. Even as Noah went into the safety of the ark, so the believer is caught up to the safety of Christ. The one left is left for judgment, even as the people outside the ark were left for judgment.

Once again we see clearly that the rapture occurs simultaneously with Judgment Day.

When Christ rose from the grave, He showed the resurrection to be a fact by many proofs (Acts 1:3). Likewise, the Bible's teaching concerning the timetable of the rapture is set forth in many places in the Bible. We shall now look at a fourth path in the Bible by which this truth is taught.

The Resurrection of the Dead and the Rapture

I Thes. 4:14-17 is one of the most frequently quoted passages concerning the rapture. We shall begin with this passage as we discuss a fourth path that shows the timing of the rapture. There we read:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The first truth that we will look at in this passage is the fact that the rapture will occur simultaneously with the resurrection of our bodies. God indicates that at His coming He will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. Elsewhere (II Cor. 5:8) God teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When Christians die, because they were given their resurrected souls at the time of their salvation, in their souls they can go to be with Christ. In this condition they live and reign with Him in Heaven.

At Christ's return all those who have died, that is, who have fallen asleep, and who have been living with Christ in Heaven, will come with Him, as I Thes. 4:14 teaches. Then the graves are to be opened and the bodies of those who have died will be resurrected. At the same time, the believers who have not died will be given their resurrected bodies. Immediately following this, those resurrected from the graves, together with the believers who have not died but who have instantaneously been given their new bodies, will be caught up in the air to be with the Lord forever. Only the unsaved will remain to face the wrath of God, which will be poured out upon them because of their sins.

All Believers Will Go to be with the Lord

Now we want to look more closely at the fact of the resurrection of these bodies. The Bible teaches the precise time when these bodies will be resurrected, and since, as we have just seen, the rapture occurs simultaneously with the resurrection of the bodies of the believers, the determination of the time of the resurrection of the bodies of the believers will also give us the timetable of the rapture.

John 6:39: And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

John 6:40: And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at 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.

John 6:54: Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

The phrase **the last day** is quite significant. It is found only eight times in the whole Bible. Since God chooses words very carefully, we know this phrase has been selected to signify important truth.

Let us look at this phrase for a moment. It is used four times in John 6, as we have seen. The other four references are as follows:

John 11:24: Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

John 12:48: He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

John 7:37: In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

Neh. 8:18: Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

We see that in John 11:24 God is showing us that Martha understood the truth offered in the four verses of John 6. The resurrection of believers is the last day.

From John 12:48 we discover that the last day is Judgment Day. It is then that God will have all the unsaved give account of their sins and remove them into Hell to pay for their sins. Thus, we see that the resurrection of believers, which also is to occur the last day (John 6:40), takes place simultaneously with Judgment Day. Since we saw from I Thes. 4:14-17 that the resurrection of our bodies occurs simultaneously with the rapture, we can know from these verses that the rapture occurs simultaneously with Judgment Day.

Before we look at the remaining two references to **the last day**, let us think a bit longer on John 12:48. If Judgment Day is the last day, then the resurrection of the unsaved must also be the last day, for Rev. 20:13 indicates that the sea "gave up" the dead, and death and Hades "gave up" the dead, and all were judged and cast into the lake of fire. If this is so, then the resurrection of unbelievers occurs on the last day, and there must be one general resurrection of both the saved and unsaved on the last day. Under no circumstances are we to understand that the believers are resurrected at one time and the wicked another.

This is precisely what the Bible teaches. In John 5:28-29 we read:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Everyone will be resurrected at the moment of Christ's return. No one will be left in the grave. In I Thes. 4:17 we read that the believers will hear the shout of command. John 5:28-29 shows, however, that the unbelievers too will hear that shout, for our Lord declares that **all that are in the graves shall hear His voice**. This verse cannot possibly be teaching that there are two resurrections separated by one thousand years, as some would teach. It is speaking of a single time, "the hour" (singular) is coming.

John 5:29 does add that those who come forth from the tombs will go to one of two destinations. Those who have done good, that is, those who have had their sins covered by Christ's righteousness, will be resurrected to life. Those who have done evil, that is, the unsaved, those who have not had their sins covered, will be resurrected to damnation in judgment.

We have compared the Scriptures that speak of **the last day** with I Thes. 4:14-17 and John 5:28-29, and we have discovered that the Bible clearly teaches that the rapture, the resurrection of believers, the resurrection of unbelievers, and Judgment Day are events that take place simultaneously on the Last Day, which is the end of time. Isn't it marvelous how all these verses fit together so perfectly?

We have looked at six of the eight verses in the Bible that use the phrase **last day**. The remaining two are:

John 7:37: In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

Neh. 8:18: Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

We will look also at these verses to make certain that we check everything that relates to the term **last day**.

The Feast Days Relate to the Rapture

These two remaining references are both related to the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, both verses speak of the *last day* of the Feast of Tabernacles.

What does the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles have to do with the rapture or Judgment Day? We shall see that it is intimately involved with these subjects.

Let us look at the nature of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a feast to commemorate two events. First, it looked back upon the sojournings of Israel in the wilderness, and second, it was the time of the completion of the harvest.

In Lev. 23:42-43 we read:

Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

These verses teach that it was a feast that looked back on the wilderness sojourn of Israel, before they entered the Promised Land, the land of rest. So, too, believers today are living in the wilderness of this world. When Christ comes, our rest in Him will be complete. We are strangers and pilgrims now, but when we receive our resurrected bodies we will be forever with Christ (I Thes. 4:17). Therefore, we can see how this feast identifies with Christ's return: It is then that we receive our resurrected bodies. It is then that our salvation is complete. It is then that our wilderness sojourn is ended.

The second reason for commemorating the Feast of Tabernacles was the celebration of the end of the harvest.

In Exo. 23:16 we read:

And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.

This is a surprising verse, for it speaks of the Feast of Ingathering, which is the same as the Feast of Tabernacles, as the end of the year. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated during the seventh month (Lev. 23:39), and the seventh month is many months from the end of the year. Yet God speaks of it as the *end* or *going out* of the year.

When we see how intimately this feast is related to the end of time, we can see why God speaks of it as the end of the year. Jesus speaks in Matt. 13 of His return at the harvest time.

Matt. 13:30: Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Matt. 13:39: The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

Since the Feast of Tabernacles commemorates the harvest, thus relating it to the end of the year, and since Christ speaks of the end of the world as a harvest time, we can see that a beautiful relationship exists between the Feast of Tabernacles and the end of the world. No wonder then that the term "last day" is found in connection with the resurrection of believers, Judgment Day, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The following chart shows these relationships:

Feast of Tabernacles

End of year

Harvest time for crops

End of wilderness sojourn

for Israel

Last day (Exo. 23:16)

End of World

End of time

Harvest time for mankind

End of wilderness sojourn

for believers

Last day (John 6:39-40, 12:48)

No wonder then that in Neh. 8:18 and John 7:37 God uses the term "last day" in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles.

Before we leave the Feast of Tabernacles, one other important fact should be noted, which links the Feast of Tabernacles to the last day or the end of time. In the Old Testament, three times during the year all the men were required to appear before the Lord, as recorded in Exo. 23:14-17:

Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

The first feast was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, that began and was identified with the Passover. This feast began in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month (Lev. 23:5), and continued for seven days after the fifteenth day (Lev. 23:6, Deu. 16:1-3). It was the day that anticipated the shedding of Christ's blood as the Passover Lamb that would take away the sins of the world.

The second was the Feast of Harvest or the Firstfruits or Feast of Weeks. This feast was observed seven full weeks from the morrow after the Sabbath, that is, the Sabbath that occurred during

the Passover week (Lev. 23:15-16, Deu. 16:9). Because this feast day was fifty days after that Sabbath, it was also called Pentecost. It was a day that anticipated the spiritual harvest that would begin as a result of Christ going to the cross.

The third feast during which the males had to appear before the Lord was the Feast of Tabernacles, which was preceded by the Day of Atonement (the tenth day of the seventh month). The Feast of Tabernacles continued from the fifteenth day for eight days of the seventh month (Lev. 23:27, 34, 39). It was a feast day, as we have seen, that anticipated the completion of the spiritual harvest that would result because God provided salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The awe-inspiring fact that now faces us is that, while these feast days anticipated and pointed to the historical accomplishment of the atonement, on the very same days that the nation of Israel was celebrating these feasts, God brought to pass the spiritual reality to which these days pointed. On the Passover in A.D. 33, while the Jews were keeping the Passover, Jesus hung on the cross as the Passover Lamb.

It was on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the Old Testament Feast of Firstfruits, that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and the harvesting of souls began. It was at that time that the firstfruits of the harvest were seen - 3,000 from eighteen nations were saved (Acts 2).

So we see that two of the three most important feasts, those specifically emphasized as times when all Jewish males were to go to Jerusalem, were the occasions when God's program of redemption was being carried out. The Jewish Passover was celebrated the very same day that Christ, the Passover Lamb, was slain. The Jewish Feast of the Firstfruits, Pentecost, was observed the very same day that God poured out His Holy Spirit and the firstfruits of the spiritual harvest were seen.

That leaves one remaining feast day, the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Ingathering. Surely the Bible is suggesting that Christ will return in literal fulfillment of this feast, even as there was literal identification with the two other important feasts. That is, we can believe that it will be in the fall of the year, at the very same time of year when the Feast of Tabernacles would have been observed by Old Testament Israel, that Christ may come again.

No wonder then that God uses the term **last day** in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles is identified with Christ's return on the last day, just as the resurrection of our bodies and Judgment Day are identified with Christ's return on the last day.

We see, therefore, that in all eight places where the term **last day** is found in the Bible, it points to the end of time. It points to the end of this earth's existence, when Christ will return in Judgment.

The Tribulation and the Rapture

We have seen thus far from four separate and distinct Biblical paths that the rapture must be the last day of this world's existence. It must be an event that coincides with the resurrection of all humanity and with Judgment Day, but the Bible has more to say about this. Let us now look at this question from another viewpoint.

In Matt. 24 Christ gives us an outline of the signs or events that must take place just before the end of the world. He declares in Matt. 24:21-31:

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. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. 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. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

As we examine these verses, we shall see that the rapture not only immediately follows the final tribulation, which believers must endure, but that it occurs simultaneously with the end of the world. Thus, it must occur simultaneously with Judgment Day.

In verses 21 and 22, God speaks of an increasingly great tribulation that must come upon the earth. For the sake of the elect this tribulation will be shortened. At this time we will not discuss the implication of this tribulation, but we know it must come. No other passage in the Bible speaks more plainly of it.

We should ascertain who the elect are, who are spoken of in verse 22. God uses the word “elect,” which is the Greek word *eklektos*, some twenty-three times in the New Testament.

Some people teach that the *elect* refers only to believing Jews on the ground that Matt. 24 relates only to the nation of Israel and not to the Gentiles. According to this reasoning, Matt. 24 is only for the Jews inasmuch as Jesus was speaking to the disciples, who were Jews. By the same token, it could be logically argued then that John 3 has no reference to Gentiles, because Christ was speaking to Nicodemus, who was a Jew. On that basis, only Jews must be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Likewise, the Book of Romans has no import for us today because it was addressed to the church at Rome; and Isaiah and Jeremiah are of no interest to Gentiles because these prophets were sent primarily to Israel.

On this basis only certain books of the Bible are to be considered pertinent and authoritative for New Testament believers.

We immediately sense the error of this line of Biblical interpretation. The Bible says that **all** Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for teaching, etc. (II Tim. 3:16). **All** the Bible is to be studied and obeyed. Matt. 24 is to be read and studied by Gentiles as well as Jews, and just as carefully as John 3 or any other part of the Bible. When we read Matt. 24 carefully, we see that God is discussing the whole world. In verses 3 and 13 we read of the end of the world. In verse 14 God speaks of the Gospel going to every nation. In verses 28-31 He speaks of His return in power and great glory. He will not return to Jews only. He will return to the whole world. Therefore, the warnings of Matt. 24 are to the whole world. The statement of Matt. 24 is as important to Gentiles as I Thes. 4:14 or any other passage of the Bible.

Returning now to the word *elect* found in Matt. 24:22, we find that in the King James Bible it is translated as *chosen* or as *elect*. Examining the twenty-three places where the Greek word *eklektos* is used, we see very quickly that the Bible is speaking of those who are elected of God to be believers. This can be seen in passages such as:

Matt. 20:16: So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Rev. 17:14: 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.

Rom. 8:33: Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

Col. 3:12: Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.

Titus 1:1: Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.

Since the believers are the elect, and since Matt. 24:22 teaches that the tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect, we see that believers will be present throughout the tribulation. Thus, on the basis of this verse alone, we have trouble with a doctrine that teaches that the rapture will occur before the tribulation.

Returning to Matt. 24, we see that God gives a careful chronology covering the relationship of the tribulation to the return of Christ. In Matt. 24:29-30 God declares:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

This tells us emphatically that the last event that occurs before the return of Christ is the tribulation spoken of in Matt. 24:21-22. The language **immediately after** does not allow for any passage of time between the tribulation and the events spoken of in verses 29-31.

The events that immediately follow the tribulation include the sun being “darkened, and the moon” will not give its light, which indicates that it will be the end of time. The sun and the moon regulate the passage of time. Time will be no more, for Christ will have returned. It will be the last day of this world's existence. Then the stars begin to fall from heaven. This is language of Judgment Day and the destruction of this universe. God gives us further amplification of this event in Rev. 6:12-17, where He

declares:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

This can be language only of Judgment Day. We are not surprised to read of the collapse of the universe. In II Peter 3:10-13 we read:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

We see that one fact stands out. This universe will be destroyed when Christ comes again. It must be destroyed because it is under the curse of sin. Viruses, earthquakes, tornadoes, and famines are experienced because mankind has rebelled against God. Therefore, not only was man cursed, but the universe over which man ruled was also cursed. We read in Rom. 8:20-22:

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

The creation looks with eager longing at the revealing of the sons of glory (the believers), because at that time the universe will be made free from the curse. Immediately after the unsaved have been judged and removed into hell, the destruction of this earth, and its redemption and recreation as new heavens and a new earth must take place.

Therefore, we are not surprised to read that the stars will fall from heaven, and that heaven will be rolled up when Christ returns. From Matt. 24:29 we know that this immediately follows the tribulation. A system of teaching that suggests that following the tribulation Christ will return to this sin-cursed earth to set up an earthly throne, offers an impossible situation.

We might note the conduct of the unsaved immediately after the tribulation when the universe is collapsing and Christ comes in power and great glory. In Matt. 24:30 we read that all the tribes of earth mourn. In Rev. 6:15-17 we read that all the peoples are in abject terror, calling to the mountains to hide them and the hills to crush them. No wonder they are in great terror. It is the great day of the wrath of the Lamb. It is Judgment Day, at which time they must give an account of their sins and receive the righteous condemnation of God as payment for their sins.

Now let us look more carefully at Matt. 24:31, for there God reveals the first thing that Christ will do when He comes in great power and glory. Note how parallel in language it is to I Thes. 4:16-17, which speaks of the rapture.

First we read in the Matthew account that Christ will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet. I Thes. 4:16 speaks of "the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." Christ then speaks in Matt. 24 of gathering the elect from the four winds under Heaven. I Thes. 4:17 speaks of those who are alive being caught up to be with Christ. As we saw earlier, the elect are the believers who are being raptured from all over the earth. The term *under heaven* could be translated simply *under the sky*. In any case these are the believers living on the earth, whose commonwealth is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

So we see that there is parallel language in Matt. 24:31 and I Thes. 4:16-17 concerning angel activity, the sound of the trumpet at Christ's return, and the rapture of believers.

Thus, in our study of Matt. 24 we can see clearly that God's timetable for the rapture of believers is at the end of time. It is immediately after the great tribulation and coincides with Judgment Day. How marvelous God is in giving so many proofs concerning the timing of the rapture.

Thus far we have found five plain and distinctive paths that reveal that the rapture will be at the

end of time. Let us now look at a sixth path found in the Bible.

The Man of Sin and the Rapture

In II Thes. 2 we discover more information that points to the rapture taking place at the end of time. In this passage God is teaching us that two events must happen before He will be ready to come for His believers. The first is that the rebellion is to take place, and the second is that the man of sin is to be revealed. He will be revealed at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, at which time Christ will slay him with the breath of His mouth. That is, the wicked will be cast into hell. II Thes. 2:1-9:

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. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.

Who is the **man of sin**? If we see that he is Satan as he works through his emissaries called false prophets and false christs, we find total Biblical validation. We find in these verses that he is worshipped as God. Rev. 13:4 speaks of the dragon, who is Satan, being worshipped:

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?

Thus, the language of II Thes. 2, which speaks of the man of sin being worshipped, points to Satan as being the man of sin. How can Satan be called a man? Isn't he indeed a fallen angel? We shall see that he is called a man because he was typified by the king of Babylon who, of course, was a man (Isa. 14:4).

In Isa. 14 we read of the fall of Lucifer. From the context we know that this Lucifer is Satan himself, but as Isa. 14 discusses the fall of Lucifer, God speaks of Lucifer as a man.

We read in Isa. 14:16:

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; . . .

As Rev. 18 teaches, Babylon is often used in the Bible as a figure of the kingdom of Satan. Thus, we see the parallelism that exists. On the one hand we have Babylon, which is ruled over by the king of Babylon. On the other we have Satan's dominion, ruled over by Satan.

The man of sin, who is Satan, takes his seat in the temple. To what does taking one's seat refer? Jesus is seated at the right hand of God and rules over everything (Eph. 1:20-22). Thus, to take a seat is Biblical language meaning to rule or have authority. The man of sin, Satan, takes his seat or rules in the temple.

The Temple and the Rapture

To what does the **temple** refer? Is there to be a literal reconstruction of the temple? Nowhere in the Bible do we read of a future reconstruction of the temple. In fact, since the veil of the temple was rent when Jesus hung on the cross, the temple in Jerusalem ceased to have significance as a holy place. Rather, the Bible speaks of the body of believers as being the temple. We read in Eph. 2:19-21:

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

In I Peter 2:5 we read:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

In I Cor. 3:16 God emphasizes that the body of believers is the temple. He declares: "Know ye not

that ye are the **temple** of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

Therefore, the temple is the church, the corporate body of believers. It is here that Satan will operate as the man of sin. Thus, we know that before Christ comes again, the man of sin (Satan), must take his seat (rule) in the temple (the church or body of believers) where he will be worshipped as God. Since he is a spirit, he cannot be seen to literally rule amongst the body of believers. He can rule, however, through false prophets and pseudo-christs who bring gospels other than the true Gospel. The Bible speaks of this kind of activity in II Cor. 11:13-14:

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.

Similarly we read in Matt. 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.

These verses emphasize the utter deceitfulness of Satan in this effort. The gospel he brings will be so much like the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived if that were possible.

Note in the Matt. 24 verse that these false prophets will come with signs and wonders. Satan will come not only with a gospel so closely patterned after the true Gospel that even the elect would be deceived if that were possible, but he will also give life and vitality to it through signs and wonders. Even as Jesus came 2,000 years ago with signs and wonders when He brought us the true Gospel, so Satan will attest to the seemingly God-like, Jesus-related character of his gospel by coming with signs and wonders.

II Thes. 2:1-9 also speaks of signs and wonders. The false prophets who represent Satan will come with signs and wonders even as verse 9 teaches: "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."

We must realize, of course, that these false prophets have been so deceived that they are convinced that they are servants of Christ. Satan is the great deceiver, the father of lies (John 8:44). Moreover, II Thes. 2:10-11 teaches that God Himself blinds these who come because they refuse to believe the truth.

Thus, we see that God is declaring in II Thes. 2 that before Christ comes there must be evidence of the activity of Satan as those who come with signs and wonders, and who in fact are his servants, rule or have authority among the body of believers, where the true Gospel ought to be proclaimed. These false prophets will be convinced that they are true prophets of Christ. Because they are coming with a gospel other than the true Gospel, they will in actuality be causing people to worship Satan. This is the chief nature of the rebellion that must come before Christ returns. The church, consisting of congregations and denominations all over the world, will be infiltrated and finally overrun by those who bring other gospels. The chief characteristic of these false gospels, which serves to help us to immediately recognize this threat, is the focus on signs and wonders.

Many who come with false gospels speak of Christ as Savior, heaven, hell, sin, righteousness, the Holy Spirit, etc., but they are false because they are based on authorities different from that on which the true Gospel is based. The authority of any gospel structures and determines the character of that gospel. In Rev. 22:18-19, God declares:

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.

Before these verses were penned, God declared His Word by the Scriptures available at any time in history, but in addition, He brought His divine Word by special visitations of angels, dreams, visions, voices, and unknown languages called tongues. Thus, Peter or Paul or some of the members of the church in Corinth could receive direct revelation from God. Then God came to the last chapter of His revealed Word. When God wrote Rev. 22, utilizing the Apostle John as His scribe, He indicated that His Word had been completed. Never again could there be a vision or tongue or voice from God. Thus, the true Gospel is circumscribed by the Bible. **The Bible alone and in its entirety is the articulated, verbalized Word of God.** The Bible alone and in its entirety structures and determines the character of the true Gospel.

Therefore, anyone who comes with a gospel based upon the Bible but to which he has added the possibility of divine truth from other sources such as visions, voices, tongues, dreams, or so-called infallible utterances of church leaders, is bringing what is by definition another gospel. The moment we

consider anything at all to be as authoritative as the Bible, we have a gospel that consists of the Bible plus the other source of supposed divine truth. The Bible will then be interpreted not only by itself, but by these other supposed sources of divine truth. Obviously, doctrines will then be forthcoming which will be different from those that come when the Bible alone is considered to be the Word of God. In view of the teaching of Rev. 22:18, the supposed extra-biblical sources of divine truth (visions, voices, tongues, etc.), cannot be of God. Even though they may be from the recipient's own mind, nevertheless, they are ultimately from Satan. Those who listen to these other sources are unwittingly serving Satan rather than God.

Restraint of Sin and the Rapture

Returning to II Thes. 2, we read in verse 7: "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

The word *letteth* is an old English word for restrain. This passage is thus teaching that the one who restrains sin will be taken out of the way.

There are those who teach that the one who restrains is the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit indwells the believers, they suggest that this verse must be teaching something about the rapture of the church.

They are correct, of course, in teaching that the one who restrains sin is God Himself. We need only recall an event that occurred in Abraham's life. He had left Canaan to dwell in the land of Gerar to escape a famine. While there, for fear of his life he told the king of Gerar that Sarah, his wife, was actually his sister. Consequently, the king of Gerar took Sarah into his palace. Then Abimelech was warned of God not to touch Sarah because she was Abraham's wife. The king of Gerar responded by indicating that he had not touched her. Then God declared, in Gen. 20:6:

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.

This incident serves to illustrate that God restrains sin. We see God's restraint of sin also through what the Bible declares concerning the nature of mankind. The heart of man is desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). The Bible indicates that out of the heart of man comes murder, adultery, etc. (Matt. 15:19). Only because man experiences this restraint is he able to live a reasonable life and manifest some virtues, such as love between parents and children, kindness and loyalty between friends, and compassion on the underprivileged.

We must note, however, that this restraint does not take place because of the presence of believers. While God the Holy Spirit does indeed indwell believers, the Holy Spirit is not limited to them. He does His work of restraining sin in the world with or without the presence of believers.

Thus, when God speaks in II Thes. 2 of taking Him who restrains out of the way, He is not suggesting that the believers will be raptured, for they are not the restraining power. Rather, He is indicating that He will remove His hand of restraint to permit wickedness to multiply. This is indicated by the context, for in these verses God is speaking of rebellion. Matt. 24 speaks of wickedness being multiplied, and Rev. 20 speaks of Satan being loosed. These passages teach one and the same thing: The time will come when God will allow the world to become desperately sinful. He will accomplish this by removing His restraint on unsaved man, and Satan and his angels. They will be more wicked than ever.

In II Thes. 2:1-11, we see that before Christ returns to receive His own, the man of sin described above must first be revealed. God then declares in this passage that when the man of sin is revealed, Jesus will destroy him by the brightness of His coming. That is, Satan and all the wicked who follow him (the unsaved) will be judged and cast into Hell when Christ comes. In hell the wicked will be punished by eternal destruction.

Notice that II Thes. 2:1-3 speaks of the gathering of the believers to meet the Lord Jesus. God is saying that this gathering together of believers to meet Christ will not take place until the man of sin is revealed. Since verse 8 states that when the man of sin is revealed, these wicked will be destroyed (that is, judged and cast into hell) by His coming, we immediately can see the simultaneous timing of the assembling together of the believers to meet Jesus (the rapture) and the destroying of Satan and the wicked (Judgment Day).

Again we find total agreement with all the other passages we have looked at that teach that the rapture comes at the same time as Judgment Day and the end of the world. We will look at one more path that emphasizes the same truth concerning the rapture and its occurrence at the end of the world.

A Thief in the Night and the Rapture

When we seek an understanding of the timing of the rapture, we find more than sufficient information in the Bible to know that it is to occur at the end of time, when Christ returns to judge the nations. Six different paths in the Bible have been examined, and each one gives the same teaching. But before we leave this question, we should look at one more path. It too is intimately concerned with Christ's coming. It too will show us that believers will be here when Christ returns in judgment.

Repeatedly the Bible speaks of Christ coming as a thief or as a thief in the night. Jesus says in Matt. 24:43 in the context of discussion concerning His return:

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

God declares in II Peter 3:10, as He discusses the destruction of the universe at the end of time:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

In Rev. 3:3, we read the warning:

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

And in Rev. 16:15, as God is speaking of the end of the world, we find:

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

On the basis of these verses various doctrines have come forth, including those which suggest that Christ will come silently, and suddenly and quietly Christians will be removed from the earth. This idea certainly appears to be valid in the light of the language of Christ coming as a thief in the night.

Is this really so? I Thes. 4:16, which speaks of the rapture of the believers, does not suggest that He will come silently as a thief. There God speaks of the shout of command, of the trumpet of God. That is anything but a silent coming.

Wonderfully, however, the Bible is its own commentary. If we follow the Biblical rule of letting the Bible explain or interpret the Bible, we can have a correct understanding of the phrase **thief in the night**. We shall discover that the Biblical references which use this phrase are not at all suggesting a silent coming of Christ. Moreover, we shall discover additional support for the clear teaching of the Bible that the occurrence of the rapture must be simultaneous with the timing of Judgment Day.

In I Thes. 5:1-9 we read:

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this passage we find a clear reference to the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night. The day of the Lord is the day when our Lord Jesus Christ will come on the clouds with power and great glory. It is the day when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In these verses, God teaches that that day will come as a thief in the night. Is He then teaching that He will come when no one expects Him?

Certainly this is true for the unsaved. Verse 3 records:

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

The unsaved are not looking for Christ to come in judgment. They may not even be looking for His return at all. They may believe, in their evolution theory-blinded minds, that mankind is finding answers to problems of living in this world. These answers may falsely assure them that by exercising careful diligence, mankind can continue a million years or more on this earth. Certainly they are convinced that insofar as Judgment Day is concerned, if happens at all, is probably millions of years

away. In their own minds they have concluded that God need not be reckoned with and they are safe and secure to follow their own lustful pleasures.

If among such people are those who relate to the Bible somewhat but are nevertheless unsaved, they also will be quite sure that Judgment Day is of no real concern. After all, they think, God is a loving God, and He does not wish that any should perish; somehow God has a marvelous plan for this earth and its inhabitants that will ensure maximum love for all. In their blindness that stems from their false gospels, which seem so successful and so God-ordained, they will be certain that there is still hope for a utopia on this present earth. Again, as in the case of those who wish to deny God altogether, they will feel that all is secure.

So for the unsaved Christ will come unexpectedly. As a matter of fact, His coming will be a horrible surprise for the unsaved, who will discover that they are to stand for judgment. They will discover that, while perhaps they thought all was well between them and the Lord, they had been following a salvation designed to their own liking rather than the salvation designed by the Bible. Christ's coming will be a moment of truth; they will realize that they had never served Him as Lord. They had obeyed the Bible only when it was convenient. They had never trusted Christ as the only one who could save them. Rather, they had been seeking a salvation based on the grace of God plus their own efforts. They had thought they were at peace with God and secure in Christ, but it was a false peace and a false security. At His coming the terrible truth will come to them that they never had been born from above.

For all these, Christ's coming will be as a thief in the night. Notice what will happen to those for whom His coming is as a thief in the night: **Sudden destruction will come upon them, and there will be no escape.**

This is the language of Judgment Day. Remember what happened to the people of Noah's day. Suddenly they were deluged with water and destroyed. Remember Sodom. It, too, experienced sudden destruction. Remember the language Jesus uses as He speaks of Judgment Day in Matt. 7:13:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.

Jesus warns in Matt. 24:37-39.

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.

And in II Thes. 1:9 God declares: "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

What an awful moment! What a terrible place to be! No wonder we read in Rev. 6:16 of men calling upon the rocks to crush them and the hills to cover them. No experience of trauma that mankind has ever experienced can even begin to approach the sheer terror of Judgment Day.

The Bible discloses other news that relates to this momentous occasion. It indicates there are others present for whom our Lord's coming is not as a thief in the night. These are the true believers: They are ready for His coming because their sins have been washed away in Christ's blood. They are not under the dominion of darkness. They are children of the day (a synonym for Christ Himself). They are children of the light (Jesus is light). They belong to the Lord.

I Thes. 5:4-5 tells us:

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

We read in these verses that the day of the Lord will not overtake believers as a thief. They have anticipated His coming and are ready for it.

Thus, we see that when Christ returns in judgment, believers will still be here. Therefore, these believers could not have been raptured earlier. Since Judgment Day is at the end of time, we know that is when believers will be raptured. In no sense are they to experience judgment, even as I Thes. 5:9 declares, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

The wrath spoken of in this verse is not the tribulation period, as some would suppose. With the sure knowledge that the rapture will occur simultaneously with Judgment Day, we know that believers will go through the final tribulation period, but that period is not the wrath of God that must be visited upon unbelievers as payment for their sins. The wrath of God is the punishment the unsaved are to experience eternally as a result of their sins. The true believers in no way are to experience this because Christ has

covered all their sins by His blood.

Rev. 6:15-17 speaks eloquently of the wrath of God:

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

This is the wrath from which the saved are free. Praise God for such a wonderful salvation!

Summary of Chapter 14

We have seen from I Thes. 4:14-17 that the rapture occurs simultaneously with the resurrection of believers, and from John 6, that the resurrection of believers occurs on the last day. From John 12, and from the *last day* references to the Feast of Tabernacles, we have seen that the *last day* is Judgment Day. Moreover, these truths agree precisely with the statement of John 5:28-29, which speaks of one general resurrection at Christ's return.

We have seen that I Thes. 4, when looked at in the light of John 6 and the other passages that tell us when the resurrection of believers will occur, ties together the rapture, Judgment Day, and the end of time as events that occur simultaneously.

I Thes. 5 can be understood very readily when we recognize that there will be a simultaneous occurrence of the rapture and Judgment Day. While Christ will come as a thief in the night to bring judgment upon the unbelievers, the believers are ready for His coming. For believers He will not come as a thief in the night: for believers it will be the marvelous moment when their salvation is completed, and they will be raptured to be forever with Christ.

We have studied seven different paths in the Scriptures that are concerned with the timing of the rapture. Each path shows us that the rapture of believers occurs simultaneously with Judgment Day. God has indeed given us ample evidence of this.

Because this truth is clearly documented in the Bible, all other teachings concerning the details of our Savior's return should be studied in the light of this Biblical truth. In fact, as we study the Bible to discover aspects of His return, we should find that there is continuous agreement because the Bible is perfect in its truth and trustworthiness.

We have discovered striking evidence that the time line of history is indeed the unfolding of God's salvation plan. Thus, the rapture will conclude the salvation plan on this earth. History will also be concluded and the end of the world will have come.

The big question we all must face is: Are we ready for our Lord's return? Have we seen ourselves as the sinners we are? Have we repented of our sins, believing in the Lord Jesus as our sin-bearer? Have we turned from our sins, earnestly desiring to be obedient to Christ?

If we have not, we are not ready for His return. We are still included amongst those who are subject to judgment. Our condition is indeed dangerous.

Praise God for His love, that it is still the day of salvation, that forgiveness is available for any who call upon the Lord! Praise God for such a Savior!

Chapter 15 – Judgment Day

We have been patiently pursuing the question: Is a glorious future for national Israel promised in the Bible? In our pursuit of this question, we have examined chapter after chapter and verse after verse trying to find a clue that relates to this question. In our study we found information that shows that God had always anticipated an Israel of God which would be made up of all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have also discovered much truth concerning the return of our Savior.

Nowhere did we discover any information concerning the future of national Israel. In a sense, we are not surprised. Early in our study, we found that God's promises concerning national Israel's possession of the land of Canaan have been entirely fulfilled.

Yet we wonder: Israel did become a nation in 1948. This surprising event surely must have been

anticipated somewhere in the Bible. Doesn't Ezek. 38 relate to national Israel? We haven't looked at the 144,000 of Rev. 7; they definitely are spoken of as twelve tribes of Israel. The two witnesses of Rev. 11: Are they Moses and Elijah who must come back to preach repentance? And since they were citizens of national Israel, surely their return must say something about national Israel.

Because we desire to leave no stone unturned in seeking Biblical information concerning the future of national Israel, we will look briefly at these three chapters.

The Two Witnesses

Rev. 11 speaks of two witnesses who will preach for a period of one thousand two hundred and sixty days. We read in Rev. 11:3-7:

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. 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.

Earlier in our study, we learned that the figure of 42 months or 1,260 days is the whole New Testament period. It is the last half of the seventieth week of Dan. 9:27. We can be assured of this because Dan. 9:27 informs us that in the middle of this seventieth week sacrifice and offering ceased. We know that the moment when sacrifice and offering ceased was the atonement. As Christ hung on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom. The huge curtain that separated the holy of holies from the holy place was torn open by God to signify that the ceremonial law had come to an end. It had become completed in Christ. Even though the Jewish nation continued for a while to offer burnt offerings and blood sacrifices, their offerings had no meaning. At the cross, the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, shed His blood as an offering for our sins. There can be no more shedding of blood as a valid sacrifice. Therefore, we know conclusively that the beginning of the last half of the seventieth week of Dan. 9:27 had to be at the cross.

We then read in Dan. 9:27, concerning the end of the seventieth week that there is to be overspreading of abominations, "until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." The consummation can be only at the end of time, which is when all that has been decreed or determined will come to its ultimate fulfillment. Thus, we know that God typifies the whole New Testament period, from the cross to Judgment Day, as a half a week of years. This equals three and a half years, or 42 months, or 1,260 days. The New Testament is the period of time when the two witnesses of Rev. 11 preach the Gospel.

Who are the two witnesses? Rev. 11:3 tells us who they are. They are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks that stand before the Lord. The olive tree typifies the New Testament church. Rom. 11 tells us of an olive tree into which we are engrafted when we become saved. God speaks of two olive trees because the New Testament church is typified by the number 2. The seventy were sent out two by two. Out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word is established (Matt. 18:16). Jesus speaks of the church in Matt. 18:19:

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

Thus, we see that the two olive trees point us directly to the church.

The two witnesses of Rev. 11 are typified by two candlesticks. In Rev. 1:20 God informs us that "the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

In Rev. 1:13 we read:

And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

These verses clearly teach us that churches are typified by candlesticks among which Christ walks. Thus, the two witnesses of Rev. 11 are representative of the New Testament church which has been commissioned by God to bring the Gospel to the world.

The language of Rev. 11:5-7 leads us to wonder if the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah. Moses turned the water into blood when Israel went out of Egypt (Exo. 7); Elijah called down fire from

heaven to destroy the captain with fifty men who came to take him (II Kings 1). But Moses and Elijah also focus on the Word of God. Jesus spoke of the Scriptures as “Moses and the prophets” (Luke 16:31, 24:27), and Elijah was one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

Thus, we may conclude that the two witnesses (the whole New Testament church) go forth with the Gospel in the power and authority of Moses and Elijah (the Word of God). The church brings the Gospel which has the power to save people, but it also has the power of God to send the sinner to hell (strike them down with fire from heaven).

Rev. 11, therefore, is not telling us of a resurrection of some Old Testament prophets at a future time. Such an idea not only disagrees with the context but it is an impossible idea. The resurrection of all Old Testament believers will be at the end of time. It will be at the time when God is ready to destroy this earth by fire and create new heavens and a new earth. We must conclude that Rev. 11 gives us no help in discovering anything concerning the future of national Israel.

The 144,000

Does Rev. 7, which speaks about twelve tribes of Israel, teach that God is going to save national Israel, and then Israel is to preach the Gospel to the world? This is what some theologians tell us. But let us look at Rev. 7 to determine what it really teaches.

In Rev. 7:1-4 we are instructed:

And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. 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. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

When we read these verses very carefully, we find that God is introducing us to the terrible events that are further described in Rev. 8 and 9. Note that there are four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea. We read of these four angels in Rev. 9:13-15:

And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. 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.

These four angels represent God's judgment that must come on the church. We can know that the body of believers (the church) is in view because verse 15 declares that a third part of men are to be killed. The term “third part” is a clue phrase that God introduced into the Bible to speak of believers. We learned that the number 666 in Rev. 13 is the number two-thirds which God has symbolically identified with those who are under God's judgment. The figures one-third and two-thirds are used in Zech. 13:8-9, where God declares:

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.

These verses show us that the one-third represents God's people. They have been brought through the fire. That is, Christ as their substitute has endured the fires of hell on their behalf. The punishment these believers deserve because of their sins, eternal damnation, has been paid. Therefore, they can be the people of God.

God's Judgment on the Church

Why is God's wrath poured out on the one-third of Rev. 9:15 if they are God's people? Surely God cannot bring judgment upon those who have become saved.

The answer to this question can be found only if we remember that God speaks of His church, His kingdom, or His people both in an eternal, individual sense, and in a corporate or external sense. In Matt. 8:12 Jesus speaks of the children of the kingdom being cast out. This ominous declaration could not include the elect who were chosen by grace out of national Israel. Rather, it could relate only to the Israelites who were corporately or externally members of national Israel but who never became born from

above. Because they were identified with the same body to which the true believers belong, they were called the children of the kingdom.

Likewise, in the New Testament period the corporate, or external, or visible representation of the kingdom of God consists of the churches and congregations throughout the world and throughout the New Testament era which have been reasonably true to the Word of God. Within them are the true believers, who are the eternal church or eternal kingdom. They remain faithful, and they cannot come under condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

The corporate body is called the church or the kingdom of God, and the corporate body, the external church, may be symbolized by the number one-third. This is the one-third that God is bringing under judgment in Rev. 8 and 9. Note how frequently God makes reference to one-third in these two chapters (Rev. 8:7-12 and Rev. 9:15).

We will not go into a detailed study of Rev. 8 and 9, but we will summarize the information God gives us in these chapters. God is describing judgments He will bring on the corporate body, the church, because of their growing apostasy. We are warned in I Peter 4:17:

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

The churches and denominations typified by the number one-third in Rev. 8 and 9 will come into judgment because they have not remained faithful to the Word of God. Ancient Israel, which corporately or externally represented the kingdom of God, came under the hammer of God's judgment because of their sins, and so will the New Testament church come under the hammer of God's judgment.

But now we are facing a very real problem. Christ declares in Matt. 16:18:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Does this teach that Satan will never be victorious over the church? Indeed, for almost two thousand years, this promise in Matthew has held true. Christ has been building His church as people have been and are being saved from every nation. Satan cannot frustrate God's plan to save His elect.

But finally, when the last of the elect have become saved, God's church will be completely built. Even as the church became increasingly unfaithful, God was working through it to complete the task of saving the lost. When the last of the elect have been brought in, the work of the church in evangelizing the world will be complete. Then God is going to bring His judgment upon it. The destruction of the church by Satanic activity is described in Rev. 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.

When Will the Church be Judged?

When will this dreadful event occur? God tells us in Rev. 7:3:

Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

In this verse, God tells us that the judgments of Rev. 8 and 9 cannot occur until the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads. To be sealed on the forehead means to be saved. In Eph. 1:13 we read:

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.

Rev. 14:1 speaks of those who have the Father's name written on their foreheads:

And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

In other words, God is teaching us that the judgments in Rev. 8 and 9 will not take place until all have been saved who are to be saved. The fullness of the believers must come into the eternal kingdom of God. All whom God predestinated to become saved must first become saved; only then will God's judgments, which are preliminary to the final Judgment Day, be poured out on the church.

The true believers, however, will have to leave most churches. Jesus declares in Matt. 24:15-16:

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.

True believers are called Jews in the Bible. Sometimes they are spoken of as Judah, and the homeland of Judah or the Jews is Judaea. The place where believers gather together as a body is the church. Therefore, God is instructing the true believers to leave their congregations (Judaea), when the congregations become overrun with other gospels (the abomination of desolation). These other or false gospels will be a judgment of God brought upon the church because of their growing apostasy. Matt. 24:24 speaks of this sad event:

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.

What God is declaring to us is that as the churches and congregations (which corporately or externally are the body of Christ and in which the true believers are found) complete the task assigned to them of bringing the Gospel to the world, the corporate church will grow increasingly apostate. They will increasingly depart from the authority of the Bible. As their task of preaching the Gospel nears completion because most of God's elect are saved, God's judgment comes on the churches.

In Matt. 24, God speaks of the church coming under false prophets. Rev. 8 and 9 speak of this judgment in graphic and dramatic language. Rev. 11:8-9 speak of the two witnesses being killed after their testimony is finished, that is, all of God's elect have become saved. To use the language of Rev. 7, all of those who are to be sealed on their foreheads have been sealed on their foreheads.

In Rev. 20:7-9, God speaks of the end of the Gospel proclamation and God's judgment on the church in the following statement:

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 in 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.

The loosing of Satan, the marshalling of Satan's forces against the camp of the saints or against the beloved city, all speak of the same event: God's judgment on the church because of its growing unfaithfulness.

The Twelve Tribes: Who Are They?

We read in Rev. 7 that the number sealed included 12,000 out of each of twelve tribes of Israel for a total of 144,000. Are these twelve tribes national Israel itself? If we read these verses superficially, we might think so, but when we read them more carefully, we know that they can refer only to the Israel of God, which is the Israel made up of all believers in Christ.

We have seen that those who are sealed are the believers in Christ. They include a remnant chosen by grace from national Israel, but not Israel as a political nation.

We have seen that two tribes, the tribes of Ephraim and Dan, are left out. In order to leave out Ephraim, God substituted the tribe of Joseph. Since the Bible declares that of the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim was to have preeminence over Manasseh (Gen. 48:12-20), it is altogether remarkable that in Rev. 7 He would include the tribe of Manasseh and the tribe of Joseph to avoid including Ephraim. Joseph is seldom named as a tribe, but to come to a list of twelve tribes, God had to include Joseph if He wanted to exclude Dan.

Therefore, this cannot be a listing of national Israel. If these twelve tribes were pointing to national Israel, it would have been bad enough to leave out Dan (for the Bible has some bad things to say about Dan, Gen. 49:17), but to deliberately avoid naming Ephraim is another matter. Ephraim was the most important of the ten tribes during the time of the northern kingdom, Israel. Surely these names are to be understood in some symbolic sense.

In all likelihood, Dan and Ephraim are left out because they were tribes most notoriously involved in idol worship. Jeroboam, the first king over the ten tribes of Israel, set up golden calves in Bethel (a major city of Ephraim) and in Dan. We read in I Kings 12:28-29:

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan.

Since the twelve tribe names in Rev. 7 represent those who are children of God, we can see that Dan and Ephraim are the poorest examples of fidelity to the Word of God. Historically, they were leaders in apostasy.

The number 12 is highlighted. Twelve thousand are to be sealed from each of twelve tribes. Since each tribe is far larger than 12,000 (national Israel today is numbered in the millions), then 12,000 could be only a remnant. Thus, it could be only a remnant from national Israel rather than national Israel itself that God has in view in this chapter.

Rev. 7:4 clearly shows us that these twelve tribes cannot be national Israel:

And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

Since the tribe of Dan was an integral part of the nation of Israel, verse 4 could not speak of "all the tribes" if national Israel were in view. Only if the Israel of God is being featured can the language "all the tribes of the children of Israel" make any sense. We will see this more clearly as we look at the number 144,000.

Nowhere does the Bible speak of these 144,000 proclaiming the Gospel as many theologians teach. The Bible simply declares that these are the ones who are to be sealed before the events recorded in Rev. 8 and 9 take place.

How then are we to look at this 144,000? Let us remember that we have already learned that they must be sealed (that is, they must become saved) before the events of Rev. 8 and 9 take place. Therefore, they represent the elect of all ages whom God has obligated Himself to save.

In fact, in Rev. 14, God speaks again of the 144,000. There He identifies them as those who have been redeemed from the earth (Rev. 14:3-4) and as those who have the Father's name written on their foreheads, that is, they are owned by God.

Also, the 12 twelve is heavily emphasized. When the number twelve is used in the Bible in a symbolic sense, it is used to symbolize the fullness of whatever God has in mind. In Rev. 21, for example, God speaks of the whole body of believers, which He calls the bride of Christ, as a city 12,000 furlongs by 12,000 furlongs by 12,000 furlongs in size. Since people are not a material city, we can know that the number 12 is highlighted to signify the fullness of all believers. Likewise, in Rev. 21:17, God speaks of a wall that is 144 cubits. He does not disclose whether this 144 cubits represents the length or the width or the height of the wall; we cannot know anything about a material wall by the description given. But when we realize that the 144-cubit wall is the picture of the fullness of all believers, then the verse has clear meaning for us.

The Fullness of All Believers

We can know that the 144,000 of Rev. 7 and 14 are the fullness of all believers; they are "all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Rev. 7:4). They are the vast company of believers who make up the body of Christ as it is found in every nation of the world throughout time. Only when the last of the elect is saved can the events recorded in Rev. 8 and 9 take place.

These 144,000 are typified by twelve tribes of Israel because ancient Israel was a great type of the Israel of God. The tribes of Dan and Ephraim are not named probably because they were leaders in the worship of other gods. They were particularly notorious because the first king of the ten tribes, Jeroboam, established heathen worship in Dan and Bethel (I Kings 12:26-33). Bethel was in Ephraim.

Actually, the 144,000 can be seen beautifully as the fullness of all believers in the statement of Rev. 7:9:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

The Bible speaks of these believers as those who have come out of great tribulation in Rev. 7:14:

And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

What tribulation is this? Is this the tribulation spoken of in Matt. 24:21? There we read:

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

The tribulation spoken of in Matt. 24:21 is a final intensification of the tribulation that believers can normally expect in the world.

As believers, our sojourn in this world is one of tribulation. This is so because we are aliens. We are citizens of God's kingdom, whereas the unsaved spiritually are citizens of Satan's kingdom. Satan is

at war with Christ. Therefore, the believers can expect tribulation. Jesus says in John 16:33:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Rev. 7:14 sums up all of the tribulation (including the final intensification of tribulation spoken of in Matt. 24:21) that believers have experienced throughout time as “the great tribulation.” (The King James Bible unfortunately omits the article “the” which properly belongs there.) Praise God for the wonderful promise He has made in Rev. 7:15-17 concerning the believers who come out of the great tribulation.

We have looked at Rev. 11 and Rev. 7 and found much about God’s magnificent salvation plan but nothing concerning the future of national Israel.

Does Ezekiel 38 Tell Us About National Israel?

Does Ezek. 38 teach that Russia is going to come against Israel and that Israel is going to destroy Russia? Unfortunately, this doctrine is taught from some pulpits. Let us look at Ezek. 38 to see if it gives us any clues or insights concerning the future of national Israel.

Ezek. 38 begins with the disclosure that God is giving commandment to Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Verse 2 records:

Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him.

Who is Gog? Where do theologians find reference to Russia? The answer to the latter question can be found in the fact that the Hebrew word for “chief” in verse 2 is *rosh*. Since *rosh* sounds like Russia, and since Russia has been an enemy of national Israel, many pastors are convinced that Gog is Russia.

This conclusion is terribly faulty on at least three counts. First, the word *rosh* is found over 500 times in the Old Testament. If *rosh* is to be understood as “Russia,” then it ought to be translated “Russia” in many of these verses. But *rosh* simply means top or head or chief. To try to force this verse to signify Russia because of the word *rosh* in it is to abuse Scripture to the highest degree.

Second, as we continue to look at Ezek. 38, we will find that political warfare is not in view at all. The warfare of the Bible is the warfare between the kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan. In the Bible God is not concerned with political nations such as the United States or Russia. God is concerned with the spiritual warfare between God and the wicked.

Third, the Bible tells us who Gog is. The Bible is its own interpreter, and in seeking understanding of a verse or phrase, we must search the Bible for help. The Bible helps us to understand Ezek. 38:2 in Rev. 20:7-8:

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 in 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.

In this statement, God informs us that Gog and Magog are the nations from the four quarters of the earth; they represent all of the nations of the world. Russia does not constitute all of the nations of the world, and Russia cannot be in view in Ezek. 38.

All of the nations of the world take part in the conflict of Ezek. 38, as can be seen in the names recorded in this chapter. Every original national name is recorded in the table of nations found in Gen. 10. Meshech, Tubal, and Magog were sons of Japheth (Gen. 10:2). Persia (also called Elam, Isa. 21:2), Ethiopia (also called Cush), and Libya (also called Phut), are named in Gen. 10:6, 22. Gomer and Togarmah of verse 6 were the son and grandson of Japheth (Gen. 10:2-5). Sheban and Dedan of verse 13 were descendants of Ham (Gen. 10:7). Tarshish of verse 13 was a descendant of Japheth (Gen. 10:4). These nations represent the whole world.

With whom are these nations from the whole earth at war? Ezek. 38:11 records:

And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwallled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates.

What nation exists in the world without bars or gates? What nation is at rest and dwells safely? Does national Israel? Surely not. It is an armed camp ready to do battle at a moment’s notice. Does any political nation dwell safely? We know that in this world of terror and hatred, no political nation dwells safely.

There is one nation that does dwell safely. It is not a political nation, but this nation is a real and substantive nation nevertheless. This nation is the nation of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a

nation that is sprinkled throughout the political nations of the world. This nation is safe - not from physical violence - but from the wrath of God. This nation is at rest because it has found rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the only nation that meets all of the requirements of Ezek. 38. It is the land brought back from the sword (verse 8), that is, it is no longer at war with God. It is gathered out of many people (verse 8); believers are found throughout the world. It is "my people of Israel" (verse 16); believers are God's people. The believers are the Israel of God.

Ezekiel 38 Points to Judgment Day

We can now begin to understand the teaching of Ezek. 38, which presents the identical truth found in Rev. 20:7-9, where we read:

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 in 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.

God is teaching that near the end of time, Satan will be loosed, that is, during the final tribulation period, Satan will increasingly control the hearts of the unsaved and fewer and fewer people will become saved. Satan will marshal the nations of the world against the camp of the saints (also called the beloved city) to destroy them.

This will not be a physical battle.

It will be Satan coming with false gospels to destroy true worship of God. This will be the chief characteristic of the final tribulation period. Satan will overrun churches and congregations with his gospels that feature signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24).

This will be a judgment brought by God against the church. Ezek. 38:4 states:

And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords.

Note that God takes the action. God brings judgment on the churches that have become increasingly apostate. God utilizes Satan for this dreadful task even as He used the wicked nations of Assyria and Babylon to destroy ancient Israel. Satan will not be the final victor. When Satan thinks he has won, God will bring him into judgment. Rev. 20:9 discloses:

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.

Fire from heaven is a figure to indicate God's judgment. Satan and all of the wicked of the world will come into judgment.

Ezek. 38 speaks of the same conclusion to the fortunes of Satan and the wicked of the world in verses 18-23:

And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD.

This is the language of Judgment Day; it gives us assurance that Satan will not be the final victor. As we approach the end of time, it will appear that Satan is winning. False gospels, particularly those that feature signs and wonders, prosper. In fact, they trouble many congregations. The Bible is becoming less and less their ultimate authority. The salvation program being preached may be logical and seem loving and reasonable in the eyes of men, but it is not the salvation plan of the Bible in which the whole counsel of God is presented. The true believers will become increasingly lonely. They will wonder how it can be that the cause of Christ will have become so ineffective.

Then Judgment Day will come. Satan will not win. The believers headed up by Christ will be vindicated. O glorious salvation! O glorious and loving God who is faithful to all of His commitments!

We have seen that Ezek. 38 gives no clues concerning the future of national Israel. In the next chapter, we will look at a few other verses that are often employed to teach there could be a glorious future for national Israel.

Chapter 16 – Romans 11

In this chapter, we will look at Rom. 11:25-26. We are trying to find any verse that conceivably could be promising future blessing for national Israel. Our interest is in truth, and we can know truth only if we humbly submit to the entire Bible as our authority.

Most of the passages we have studied thus far are among the most important being offered as proofs that God still has a blessed future for national Israel. In every instance, when we looked at these passages very carefully, and let the Bible be its own interpreter, we saw that they did not have national Israel in view. Rather, in every instance, we found that they were making promises that concern the Israel that consists of each and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ regardless of the political nation in which they were born or lived. Wonderfully, the Israel of God, which has constantly been in view, has believers in it from national Israel as well as from the Gentile nations.

Almost miraculously, after almost 2,000 years of non-existence, Israel was brought together again as a nation in 1948, and exists as a nation today. This event has to have great and important meaning. Surely it might appear that this is related to some future blessing for national Israel.

Let us search the Scriptures to learn what they say concerning the future of national Israel.

We learned that God promised in Gen. 15:18-21 that Israel would inherit the land of Canaan. We also learned from Joshua 21:45 and Neh. 9:7-8 that God has fulfilled all of His promises to national Israel.

But Israel returned to the land of Israel. Surely the Bible must have **something** to say about this. The Bible does intimate that Israel would again be a nation. To find this information, we will have to look at verses that are not ordinarily looked upon as proofs concerning a future for national Israel.

Romans 11 Speaks of National Israel

Romans 11:25-26 discusses national Israel as opposed to the Gentiles of the world:

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

Many theologians read these verses and are convinced that they teach that God is promising great blessing for national Israel. They seem to think: “Doesn’t this passage declare that while blindness is now upon national Israel, the time will come when all Israel will be saved? And since this great event has never happened in the past, surely it will happen in the future. The fact that Israel is again in its own land surely anticipates a future spiritual restoration of national Israel.”

While these ideas might appear attractive for one reason or another, they are not even suggested by these verses. In fact, these verses teach us exactly the opposite; namely, that there will never be spiritual restoration of national Israel.

In Rom. 11:7-9, God is teaching that national Israel is divided into two parts. We read:

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (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. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them.

The one part, which consists of the elect, is a very small part of the nation. Rom. 11:5 speaks of the elect as a remnant: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”

In Elijah’s day, this remnant was included in the “seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal” (Rom. 11:4). It also included the Apostle Paul (verse 1) in his day. The other part of

national Israel consisted of those who were blinded, which included the major part of national Israel at any time in its history.

Today, we see the division of national Israel into these same two parts. While there is a trickle of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ among the blood descendants of Abraham, sadly, the vast majority remain in unbelief.

God again makes reference to the part of Israel who remains in unbelief. He tells us how long this condition of blindness will prevail in national Israel in Rom. 11:25, where we read, "that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." This statement not only tells us how long this blindness will continue on the one part of Israel but it also implies that during the same period a remnant chosen by grace will continue to come in. As we continue our study, we will see what a blessed promise this is to those who are Abraham's descendants.

How long will this blindness continue? Verse 25 declares, "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." The phrase "fulness of the Gentiles" would have to include every Gentile in the entire world chosen by God to be saved. If the fullness of the Gentiles had come in, that would mean that nowhere in the world could there be even one more person who, as one of God's elect, must still be saved. God's salvation program for the world would have come to an end. Thus, this verse teaches that as long as there remains even one Gentile in the world to be saved, we can expect that the greater part of national Israel will remain in blindness.

This means that Israel as a nation will never turn to the Lord because Matt. 24:14 teaches:

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.

Many theologians envision an eschatological program in which at some time in the future national Israel is supposed to evangelize the world. Rom. 11:25 definitely teaches the incorrectness of such an eschatological scheme. God declares emphatically and specifically that we must recognize, sorrowfully, that as long as one Gentile anywhere in the world remains to be saved, the greatest part of national Israel will remain in spiritual blindness.

All Israel To Be Saved

Doesn't Rom. 11:26 promise that "all Israel shall be saved"? Indeed, it does. But who is "all Israel"? Israel has existed as a people for about 4,000 years. All blood descendants of Abraham are part of national Israel. Surely no one who lived in previous generations and died in unbelief can be saved, and yet they are just as much a part of Israel as the blood descendants of Abraham who are living today. Therefore, if all Israel is to be saved and yet a vast part of national Israel lived and died without becoming saved, then we have to look for a meaning of the term "all Israel" other than that which includes every blood descendant of Abraham.

The key word is "all." When we use the word "all" in ordinary speech, we normally use it in an all-inclusive sense. That is, if we were told that all the people in a particular room were wearing shoes, we would rightly assume that no one in that room had bare feet.

But when the Bible uses the word "all," the meaning is conditioned by the context in which it is found. For example, in Acts 2:17, God declares that He will pour out His Spirit on **all** flesh. Does this mean that every person in the entire world will experience the pouring out of the Spirit? No, it does not. We know from other parts of the Bible that only those who become believers in Christ experience the pouring out of the Spirit. God is effectively teaching in Acts 2:17 that He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh whom God intends to save. Only God's elect will experience this wonderful event, at the time of salvation. In this verse the word **all** does not mean the whole human race, rather, it includes all in the human race whom God planned to save.

In I Cor. 15:22, God states: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." From information given elsewhere in the Bible, we know that the first "all" includes each and every human being who ever lived on this earth. The Bible tells us in Rom. 3:10 that "There is none righteous, no, not one."

If the second "all" of I Cor. 15:22 included each and every person in the entire human race, God would be teaching universal salvation by means of this verse because the phrase "be made alive" means, in this context, to be saved. But universal salvation is not suggested anywhere in the Bible. In fact, the Bible offers many statements that show us that hell will be heavily populated. The only way we can look at this verse so that it harmonizes with everything else in the Bible, is to realize that it teaches, "so in Christ shall all be made alive" (all whom God intends to make alive, that is, God's elect). Again the "all" is conditioned by other Bible truth.

Let us return to Rom. 11:26, where God declares, “all Israel shall be saved.” We know from verse 25, which we have examined in detail, that at any time in the history of Israel, right up to the time when even one Gentile in the entire world remains to be saved, most of Israel will remain in unbelief. Therefore, “all Israel” must refer to all Israel who are to be saved. That is, even as “all flesh” of Acts 2:17, and “all be made alive” of I Cor. 15:22 refer to the totality of God’s elect who are to be saved, so in Rom. 11:26 the term “all Israel” must refer to the totality of God’s elect who are to be saved from within national Israel. We should, therefore, read this verse this way: “And so all Israel [who are the remnant of the election of grace] shall be saved.”

But aren’t we missing something? Doesn’t Rom. 11:26 teach that **after** the fullness of the Gentiles comes in then “all Israel shall be saved”? Cannot “all Israel” refer to all who are national Israel living at the time the fullness of the Gentiles will have come in? Couldn’t there be a massive turning of national Israel to Christ **after** the last of the Gentiles who are to be saved have become saved?

SO Does Not Mean THEN

As a matter of fact, many theologians change the word “so” in Rom. 11:26 to the word “then” or the word “after.” You can check any number of books that teach the premillennial view and find that this is the case.

The word “so” which in its Greek form is found more than 150 times in the Bible is **never** translated “then” or “after.” In a few places it is translated “in this manner,” but it is never translated to indicate chronological events. Rom. 11:26 in no way suggests that **after** the fullness of the Gentiles comes in **then** all Israel will be saved. Rather, it teaches that blindness will continue on the major part of national Israel right to the end. This means that there will always be that other part of national Israel: the remnant according to the election of grace. As long as one Gentile remains to be saved, there is the remnant, the trickle of God’s elect, in national Israel who will be saved. And so, that is, in this manner, all Israel who are to be saved will be saved.

We see that Rom. 11:25-26 teaches exactly the opposite of that which is taught by many people. Not only is it **not** teaching a future glory for national Israel, but in fact the passage teaches the sad fact that there **will not** be a future glory for national Israel. These verses bring us precisely the same truth that we discovered previously. They reinforce our conviction that we correctly understand the Bible insofar as God’s dealings with national Israel are concerned.

Before we leave these verses, we should comment on the last half of verse 26 and all of verse 27, where we read:

... as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Whether they realize it or not, those who teach that Rom. 11:25-26 are proof texts that there will come a time when all of national Israel will become saved are effectively teaching two salvation programs. The first is that which has been in effect until the present time, wherein believers come one by one into the kingdom of God; and the second is a program wherein a whole nation will come in. According to their understanding of Rom. 11, the whole nation cannot come in until the deliverer shall come out of Zion who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob and shall take away their sins.

Some even believe that the deliverance of Rom. 11:27 is a political deliverance. This idea is also altogether without possibility in view of the phrase “when I shall take away their sins.”

In other words, according to the understanding of some theologians, the Savior must still come to save national Israel. Apparently, the fact that Christ has already come as Savior was not sufficient for them. This teaching in a real sense denies the atonement. Why is this so? Does the Bible in any way teach two salvation programs: one for all believers throughout time, including the remnant chosen by grace from national Israel who have lived any time during the last 4,000 years, and the other for the whole nation of Israel that might exist at some future time?

Surely the Bible does not teach two salvation programs. When Jesus came as the Savior, to whom did He come? Did He come to the Chinese? To the Egyptians? To the North American Indians? Indeed not. He came to **national Israel**. Jesus was a Jew. He was born in a Jewish city, Bethlehem. He grew up in a Jewish city, Nazareth. He was baptized by a Jewish prophet, John the Baptist, in the River Jordan which flowed through the land of the Jews. He preached for more than three years in Jewish cities such as Capernaum, Jericho, Bethany, and Jerusalem. All of His disciples were Jews as were His personal friends, such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Indeed, Jesus has **already come** as the deliverer from Zion to take away the sins of those He

came to save out of national Israel. Because He came as the deliverer to take away sins, we rejoice that it is possible that individuals out of national Israel, as well as out of every other political nation of the world, can be saved. To suggest that Jesus must still come to save national Israel is to deny all that the Bible teaches concerning the first coming of Christ.

Moreover, to teach that God has a different plan of salvation for a future generation of national Israel, whereby they as a whole body will be saved, is to deny a fundamental principle wherein God declares He is not a respecter of persons. We read in Acts 10:34-39:

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.

These verses are quoted to show that not only is Christ not a respecter of persons, but also to emphasize that Jesus came to Israel as the Redeemer.

While we are considering the matter of Christ's first coming and how it relates to national Israel, we will look again at Acts 5:31, which says:

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

This verse beautifully and clearly reinforces the concept we have been discussing: Jesus did come to Israel to be their Savior.

The idea of a future salvation for national Israel as a corporate body is not supported in any way by Romans 11.

What about Acts 1:6?

Does Acts 1:6 imply that there is to be a future restoration of national Israel? This verse records one of the final questions the disciples asked Jesus before He returned to heaven. We read:

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

Surely the disciples were still looking for a future restoration of national Israel; this was the dream of the Jews' day. We read in Luke 17:20 that the Pharisees wanted to know "when the kingdom of God should come." In Luke 19:11, God tells us that the Jews were apparently looking for some kind of political kingdom. We read: "because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." Notice Jesus' answer to the Pharisees in Luke 17:20-21:

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

Jesus is teaching that the kingdom of God is not to be one of observation, that is, one that can be viewed as an outward body. The kingdom of God is within each believer. The kingdom of God is not like a political kingdom, it is a kingdom made up of all who have become believers in Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that we cannot see the kingdom unless we are born from above, and we cannot enter that kingdom unless we are born of water and the spirit.

When the disciples asked Jesus in Acts 1:6 about the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, Jesus answered in Acts 1:7-8:

And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The phrase "the times or the seasons," relates to the end of time when the sun and the moon cease to exist.

We read in Gen. 1:14:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and

let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.

Incidentally, the participle “for” (for you to know the times or the seasons), should have been translated “of.” It is not “of” you to know the times or the seasons. That is, you will not have knowledge concerning the end of the world through information coming from within yourselves.

Thus, in Jesus’ answer to the disciples, He is effectively saying to them, “It is not of you when the end of time will come, at which time the kingdom will have been restored to Israel.” God uses the same phrase, “times and seasons,” in I Thes. 5:1-2:

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

In this passage, God is effectively declaring that it is not necessary for God to write to us concerning the timing of the end, for the day of the Lord (Judgment Day), will come as a thief in the night; that is, for the unbeliever, Judgment Day will be when he least expects it. Of course, for the believer, His coming will not be as a thief because the believer is always prepared for His coming. I Thes. 5:4: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

The Restoration of Acts 1

Returning to Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question in Acts 1, Jesus then commands them to be His witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. Why does He give this answer to their question concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel? Remember how Jesus answered the pharisees in Luke 17:20-21: “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. . . . behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Surely Christ is saying to His disciples in Acts 1:8 that the kingdom of God will be built as the Gospel goes into all the world. By the end of time, the restoration of the kingdom will be complete; that is, God’s salvation program will be complete in every sense of the word.

God speaks of restoration because the world began as a perfect world, but because of the rebellion of man, this world, including mankind, came under the curse of God. Christ came as the Redeemer, and God not only is building a kingdom of believers for Himself, but He also plans to restore this creation. This is taught in Rom. 8:21:

Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The completion of this restoration will be at the end of time when Christ comes on the clouds of glory. God speaks of this restitution in Acts 3:19-21:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

In verses 24-26, God tells what He has in mind as He emphasizes that this restitution was prophesied by the prophets.

Acts 3:24-26: Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Please note that these verses speak entirely of God’s wonderful salvation program that has been continuing for the last 2,000 years.

Thus, we see that the disciples undoubtedly were at first looking for glory for the nation of Israel of their day. Very significantly, once we get past the ascension of Christ, never again do we find in the writings of the apostles any reference to a physical, literal kingdom of God in this present world. The only place we see any expression or outward representation of that kingdom is in the church, the congregations and denominations that consist of believers from every nation. Moreover, after the ascension of Christ, we find no implication that at some future time God will again deal with national Israel as His chosen people. Sorrowfully, again we must conclude that we have found no Biblical evidence of future spiritual blessing for national Israel as a political entity.

Blessed is He that Cometh in the Name of the Lord

Another verse that has been used to teach that national Israel will some day turn to Christ is Matt. 23:39:

For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Because we want to face anything and everything in the Bible that might possibly suggest that in the future, national Israel could respond to Christ as Savior, we will look carefully at this verse.

The setting for this statement is Jesus' indictment of Israel for their continued unbelief. Verses 37 and 38 record:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

This ominous accusation is followed by verse 39 where our Lord says that they would not see Him again until they would say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Three questions must now be raised: (1) Who comes in the name of the Lord? (2) When will He come? (3) Do only believers declare that one is to come in the name of the Lord, or can nonbelievers also say this? Let us briefly examine these three questions.

The answer to the first question: Who comes in the name of the Lord?, comes from the Old Testament. Psalm 118 is a Messianic Psalm, that is, it anticipates the coming of Christ. We read in Psalm 118:26: "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD." By this verse, we are assured that Christ Himself is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

The second question is: When will He come? At the time Jesus was speaking in Matt. 23, He had already come triumphantly into Jerusalem as King (Matt. 21:1-9). At that time the multitudes had acclaimed Him as King, and declared in Matt. 21:9:

And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Matt. 23 reports events which followed His triumphal entry. Therefore, His declaration in verse 39 that the Jews would not see Him again until they would say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," must relate to some future event. In fact, almost immediately after He said these words of Matt. 23, Christ went to the cross. And then, except by His closest friends and the five hundred of Galilee (I Cor. 15:6), He was not seen again. The next time He is to be seen by the nation of Israel and by the world will be at the end of time when He comes with power and great glory.

Does this imply that the nation of Israel will have become saved before the end of the world because surely the words, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," must come from the lips of those who have become saved?

The Bible clearly shows us that it is not necessarily those who are saved who are to acclaim Jesus with these words. As we have seen, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem the Sunday before His crucifixion, He was being proclaimed King. Matt. 21:9 records that it was the multitudes who cried: "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Luke 19:37-38 speaks of them as the multitude of disciples, but this multitude of disciples was not saved. Oh, yes, a few of them were saved; as many as 120 in the upper room at the time the Holy Spirit was poured out were saved. But to be called a disciple does not necessarily imply salvation.

In John 6, we have an example of disciples who were unbelievers. Jesus is discussing very frankly with His followers the nature and character of His atonement. His words disillusioned many who followed Him, and we read in John 6:66: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

The disciples who turned away from Him obviously were not saved. Likewise, the multitudes of disciples who cried out at the time Jesus entered into Jerusalem were not necessarily saved. A few days later, the multitudes were shouting, "Crucify Him." Most of them were disciples only as long as Jesus looked like a political king who would free them from Roman rule.

Therefore, we conclude that the prophecy of Jesus set forth in Matt. 23:39 is not to be fulfilled by believers shouting, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." It is to be fulfilled at the last day when Christ comes with power and great glory, when all the peoples of the earth will acknowledge Him as King. We read in Phil. 2:9-11:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

At the end of time, the peoples of the earth, including all of the blood descendants of Abraham who have remained in unbelief, must acknowledge Christ as King because He will have come to rule over them and judge them. Can you see that Matt. 23:39 has the same import as Phil. 2:9-11?

The above conclusion is in harmony with every other truth we have discussed in this book. To suggest that Matt. 23:39 is somehow teaching a glorious future for national Israel would contradict the many passages we have studied.

We have found no promise of future glory for the nation of Israel. Indeed, we have found no clear reference to a future of any kind for Israel. Is this the end of our study?

No! God does say something about the final future of national Israel. We will look at that in the next chapter.

Chapter 17 – The Fig Tree

Our study of the Bible concerning national Israel and its future must appear frustrating to those who are fondly looking for a glorious future for national Israel. Indeed, it would be wonderful if we could identify some verses in the Bible that point to such a glorious future. After all, no nation has suffered like Israel has suffered. No nation has experienced traumas so repeatedly and terribly. Our hearts go out to this country, and we would greatly rejoice if we could know that national blessings were on the horizon. How we agonize to find some hint in the Scriptures that might suggest future spiritual blessing for this beleaguered nation.

We have looked at virtually all of the major statements of the Bible that many theologians relate to future glory for Israel, and we have not found one statement that suggests such blessing. We wonder if there is any statement in the Bible that gives us even the slightest clue concerning the nation of Israel.

Surely it was an event of the greatest importance when in 1948, after almost 2,000 years, Israel again became a nation amongst the nations of the world. Surely such a significant event was anticipated somewhere in the Bible.

Indeed, the Bible does offer statements that relate to Israel of our day. Rom. 11:25-26 is one such statement, where God predicts that the major part of national Israel will remain in unbelief right up until the end of time. He also implies that a remnant according to the election of grace will come out of national Israel.

We can see the perfect fulfillment of these prophecies in God bringing Israel back into its land as a national body. We have an exceedingly superior vantage point of almost 2,000 years of history, during which time there was never the slightest deviation from a literal fulfillment of these prophecies. During this entire period, there was never a time when more than a remnant of Jews became believers; there was never a time when there was a national Jewish mind to turn to Christ as Savior.

But God has put Israel on display as a nation again, and these prophecies remain precisely accurate. We must recognize, sadly, that today in the nation of Israel there is not the slightest intention to turn to Christ as Savior. By raising up Israel as a nation in our day, God demonstrates His total faithfulness to His prophecy in Rom. 11.

The Fig Tree Is Given One More Opportunity

There are other Scriptures that point to the Israel of our day. Let us look at these to discover what they say about the future of national Israel.

Jesus gives us the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13:6-9:

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Since this is a parable, we wonder who or what the fig tree represents. According to the parable,

it is a fig tree that does not bear fruit. Therefore, it cannot be the New Testament church because Jesus said the New Testament church would do greater works than Jesus did. When we examine Scripture to learn what works these might be, we discover that they relate to bearing much fruit. We must remember that the work of Jesus was not only to be the Gospel by going to the cross to pay for our sins, but also to preach the Gospel.

We read in Luke 4:43-44:

And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

Then in John 14:12, Jesus declares:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

Jesus came to preach the Gospel, and He also assigned this work to the New Testament church when He commanded in Mark 16:15: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," and in John 20:21: "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

But in John 14:12, Christ's prophecies concern the success of the New Testament church. The success of the church is seen dramatically in that 3,000 people were saved at Pentecost.

Therefore, the fig tree definitely does not relate to the New Testament church, and nowhere in the Bible does God relate Egypt or Syria or Moab or any other heathen nation to a fig tree.

The Fig Tree: National Israel

National Israel, however, is another matter. We read in Joel 1:7:

He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.

In this passage, God definitely has national Israel in view. Ancient Israel was under God's judgment because of its rebellion against God, and so God speaks of Israel as a fig tree that has been barked. To remove the bark from a tree will certainly kill that tree. So a barked tree signifies that the nation of Israel was under God's judgment.

Likewise, in Jer. 24:10, God presents Israel using the figure of a fig tree and speaks of the nation of Israel's obedience to God. Those who are obedient to God are likened to good figs, whereas those who are disobedient to God are likened to very bad figs. Figs of course are the fruit of a fig tree. Therefore, God is likening national Israel to a fig tree that produces either bad fruit or good fruit.

We have Biblical evidence that the fig tree does refer to national Israel. The rest of the parable of the fig tree set forth in Luke 13 agrees with this conclusion. Again and again Israel rebelled against God. In the wilderness they were destroyed because of unbelief. After they entered the land of Canaan, first the ten tribes were destroyed by the Assyrians in 709 B.C. because of the spiritual harlotry of Israel; and in 587 B.C. the remainder of Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians.

Again in Jesus' day, the spiritual climate was so rebellious that the Jewish leaders made sure that Jesus was crucified. Finally, that nation was destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Roman, Titus.

Three times, God has dealt with Israel in a massive way. Ordinarily, when God spoke three times, that was the end of the matter; there was no more to say. Jesus prayed three times about the removal of the cup, but He had to drink it. The Apostle Paul prayed three times about the removal of the thorn in the flesh, but it was not removed. He was simply told that God's grace was sufficient. So, too, God had come to Israel looking for fruit three times, but each time, Israel was found to be in rebellion against God. Therefore, when God destroyed Israel in A.D. 70 by the Roman, Titus, that should have been the end of Israel.

God's Mercy on Israel

God in His overwhelming mercy has given Israel another opportunity. The fig tree is cultivated one more time. In 1948, Israel again became a nation amongst the nations of the world, an event unmatched in the history of the world. Never has a nation been driven from its homeland and dispersed among the nations only to return to its homeland almost 2,000 years later, an intact nation. This is the beautiful fulfillment of the promise made in the parable of the fig tree recorded in Luke 13:6-9. Israel is being tested one last time.

Unfortunately, as a nation, Israel is not bearing spiritual fruit, and, therefore, in accordance with

the parable of the fig tree, it will be cut down. That is, it will be destroyed as it was in the wilderness, as in 587 B.C., and in A.D. 70. Sadly, the destruction that is coming will be the end of national Israel. Later in our study, we will look at this more closely.

We see, therefore, that in Romans 11, as well as in Luke 13, God speaks on the subject of national Israel of today.

Are there other statements in the Bible that relate to national Israel of today? Indeed, there are.

In Isaiah 6, we read of the commissioning of Isaiah to be a proclaimer of the Gospel to Israel of his day. When he was prepared to go forth with the Gospel, he was told in Isaiah 6:9-12:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 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. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

These terribly negative words were written more than seven hundred years before Christ. Already in that day God was underscoring the principle emphasized in Rom. 11:7, that except for a remnant chosen by grace, the rest of Israel would remain blinded. This relationship of Isa. 6 to Rom. 11 is proven dramatically; Rom. 11:8 quotes Isa. 6:9 in support of the proposition that most of Israel remained in unbelief even during the Apostle Paul's day.

According to the language of Isa. 6, how long is Israel to remain blinded? "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate" (Isa. 6:11). This sounds like the condition of blindness would continue until the end of time. It cannot refer to any desolation experienced by Israel between the time of Isaiah and the New Testament period when God was writing the Bible through the Apostle Paul, because not only Rom. 11:8 quotes Isa. 6 in support of the continuous unbelief of Israel. Jesus quotes the same verses in Matt. 13:14-15 and the Apostle Paul quoted them again in Acts 28:25-26, near the close of his ministry.

The Fig Tree: Cursed Forever

In Mark 11, Christ alludes to the sad future of national Israel in very specific language. He does so in connection with a fig tree, which we discovered earlier relates to national Israel. Mark 11:12-14:

And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

Why did Jesus come seeking for figs when it was not the time for figs? Jesus, who is eternal God, who created the world, knew it was not time for figs. Why does it say that He was hungry?

Only when we see that this fig tree represents national Israel and that Christ cursed the fig tree to teach something about national Israel does the cursing of the fig tree have any meaning. Let us examine this passage very carefully to discover the deeper spiritual meaning it conveys.

Verse 12 declares that Jesus was hungry when He came seeking fruit from the fig tree. Did Jesus have an earnest desire that national Israel might bear fruit, that is, that they would respond to Him as Messiah? Indeed, He did. Christ declares in Matt. 23:37-38:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and prophesies the impending doom of Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

While it is not God's sovereign plan to save a great number from national Israel, nevertheless, God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). The desire of God is the obedience of His

creatures. Only because God has elected some of mankind to salvation and then inclines their wills and hearts to Him does anyone become saved.

This then is why the Bible records that Jesus was hungry when He came seeking figs and yet obviously He knew there were no figs. He is expressing His desire that national Israel would respond to the Gospel even though He knew that they would not turn to the Gospel. How could He know they would not turn to the Gospel? Verse 13 of Mark 11 records that it was not time for figs. Jesus knew of God's curse on national Israel, recorded in Isa. 6. In Matt. 13:14-15, He quotes this passage as the reason for the adamant unbelief of Israel in His day. When Jesus came to the fig tree, which had leaves so that from a distance it looked like it might be bearing fruit, He knew full well there would be no figs. Likewise, as we look at Israel in the days of Jesus, it looked very much like it should bear spiritual fruit. The leaves were there. It was a nation in its own land, a remarkable fact considering the terrible devastation of Israel in 587 B.C. by the Babylonian empire.

But it was a nation that could not be expected to bear spiritual fruit. Because of their constant unbelief and rebellion down through the centuries, God pronounced the curse of Isa. 6:9-12, that they would be blinded (except for the remnant chosen by grace spoken of in Rom. 11:5).

It was not the season for fruit. And so Christ's curse of the fig tree was a reiteration, an underscoring, of the curse given in Isa. 6.

Now the question arises: In the record of the cursing of the fig tree, is there any clue as to how long this curse would apply, that is, how long national Israel as a nation would not bear spiritual fruit? We learned from Isa. 6 that this could be the condition of national Israel all the way to the end of time.

In Mark 11:14, we discover that God is declaring that it is His expressed intention that national Israel would never again bear fruit. Mark 11:14: "And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it." **Forever!** Never again would this fig tree bear fruit. Never again would national Israel bear spiritual fruit. It is no wonder that today we see national Israel so opposed to Jesus as Messiah.

Can you see that in Mark 11 we have in another form a repetition of the words of Isa. 6? Can you see the perfect agreement between Mark 11 and Rom. 11:25? In the Rom. 11 passage God declares that blindness would continue on the major part of national Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, that is, until the end of time.

A Blessed Remnant from the Fig Tree

How wonderful is the assurance of Rom. 11 that a remnant chosen by grace will come from national Israel into the body of Christ! It is wonderful to know that this remnant will continue to come in as long as anyone in the whole wide world is being saved.

We have seen that God does indeed speak concerning the future of national Israel in Isa. 6:9-12, Luke 13:6-9, Mark 11:12-14, and Rom. 11:25-26. Are there other passages in the Bible that offer us further information concerning the future of national Israel?

There are at least two additional passages that have something to say concerning national Israel near the end of time. We will now address ourselves to these passages.

In Mark 13:28-29, we read:

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.

The context of Mark 13 is that of the return of Christ at the end of time. In the verses immediately preceding verses 28 and 29, Christ indicates that He will come with great power and glory. The timekeepers, the sun and the moon, will cease to function (because time will have come to an end), and the universe will be collapsing (the stars will fall from heaven).

The Sign of the Fig Tree

In Mark 13:28-29, our Lord gives us a clue as to how we might know when this will occur. He declares that even as the appearance of leaves on the fig tree signals that summer is close at hand, so when we see all these things, we will know that Christ is ready to come again.

What things does God want us to see that tell us that Christ is ready to come? In verse 14, Christ has spoken of the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. In verse 22, He declares that

false prophets and false christs will arise with signs and wonders. In an earlier chapter of our study, we saw that these verses refer to the spread of false gospels throughout the world to such a degree that it will be almost impossible to find a church that is still true to Christ.

Jesus also makes reference to the fig tree in leaf. If He had used the figure of an apple tree or a walnut tree, we would conclude that all of the events named in the earlier verses of Mark 13 are typified by an apple tree or a walnut tree in leaf. When those events were occurring, we would know that Christ's return was close at hand.

But Jesus used the figure of a fig tree. We have already seen that the fig tree typifies national Israel. Thus, one of the events that would signal that summer was at hand was the rebirth of national Israel. Therefore, effectively Jesus is saying, "When you see national Israel again appear as a viable nation among the nations of the world, you will know that summer is at hand," that is, you will know that Christ is at the very door. Significantly, in verse 28 Jesus teaches: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree." In other words, the fig tree typifies something (we know it can only be national Israel), even as in every parable the elements named in the parable typify some aspect of God's salvation program. So we can be very certain that we are on target as we conclude that God is pointing to national Israel becoming a nation again. When it became a nation, we would have a tremendous sign that the world was very close to the return of Christ.

Please note that Jesus does not speak of the fig tree in fruit. Like the event of the cursing of the fig tree of Mark 11, He is referring to a nation that has a standing amongst the nations of the world.

The return of Israel to its land in 1948 was prophesied in Mark 13. Although we see the fig tree in leaf (Israel is again a political nation), regretfully and with great sorrow, we do not see it in fruit. There is no national interest in Christ as Messiah.

According to Mark 13:28-29, the event of Israel's return to its land in 1948 means that we must be very near the end of time. Christ must be at the very doors.

Israel To Be Destroyed

Another passage that may be speaking of the national Israel of our day is Luke 21:20-24, where we read:

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 therein. 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.

Most theologians of the past have looked at these verses in the light of the destruction of Israel by the Roman armies in A.D. 70. This conclusion appeared to have considerable validity in view of the fact that for almost 1,900 years it looked like Israel would never be a nation again. It is true that the context of these verses is within the end times, because immediately following verse 24, the language is definitely pointing to the return of Christ. Nevertheless, the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70 appeared to be so final that it was altogether reasonable to conclude that the destruction in A.D. 70 is in view in these verses.

Then Israel returned to its land in 1948. That extraordinary event immediately assures us that whatever these verses of Luke 21 teach, they cannot refer to the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70 because verse 24 teaches, "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." The phrase "the times of the Gentiles" can have reference only to the nations of the world. Only when the end of time has come will the times of the Gentiles (the nations) have been fulfilled.

Therefore, when the Jerusalem of these verses is trodden down, it will remain trodden down until the end of time. Since Israel became a nation again in 1948, its destruction in A.D. 70 cannot be in view here.

What, then, do these verses teach? Surely they have reference to an event that has not yet taken place. When we examined many Old Testament passages in previous chapters, we discovered that Jerusalem often refers to the literal city of Israel. We also saw that it can with equal validity refer to the body of believers who have become Jerusalem, the city of God, which I believe, in its first meaning and teaching, is the Jerusalem God has in view in the ominous statement of Luke 21. It is God's purpose that the body of believers is to be surrounded by false gospels so that finally the true Gospel will be almost silenced. Indeed, today the assault on the true Gospel is massive and intense. False gospels abound, and I believe we are now in the final tribulation period. This sequence of events is surely in view in Luke

21.

There is also a slight possibility that Jerusalem in this context is additionally referring to the literal city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem does identify with national Israel and today is occupied by national Israel. Jerusalem is surrounded by enemies that seek to destroy it. The unrelenting hatred of the Arab nations toward Israel is as intense and bitter today as it has ever been in the history of these nations.

The Biblical reason for the destruction of Israel certainly exists. In the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13, the fig tree was to be given one more opportunity to bear fruit. If it did not bear fruit this time, it was to be cut down. Israel at this time does not bear spiritual fruit. Therefore, we can expect that it will be cut down; it will be destroyed.

Even before Israel entered the promised land, God warned them of destruction, as in Deu. 8:19-20:

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.

Again, when Israel was in its flower during the reign of Solomon, God warned Solomon in II Chron. 7:19-22:

But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations. And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house? And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

In Jer. 18:9-11 God repeats the warning to Israel:

And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

In these warnings, God clearly indicates that the nation of Israel has no prerogatives. They will be destroyed for their sins as readily as any other nation. As we see Israel continue to the present day in rebellion against God, as they reject Christ as their Messiah, we can only expect their destruction. Oh, how dreadful! Oh, if only they would repent and turn to our Savior for mercy!

God has established the principle that "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Today, Israel is an armed camp. I'm afraid that Israel's trust is only in its might. Their successes in the last few decades have given them the idea that somehow they are invincible, but those who live by the sword will perish by the sword. Those who trust in their armies eventually will be overthrown by someone with greater armies. How can Israel continue its present course of action and not be destroyed?

We must remember, of course, that not only national Israel is subject to the wrath of God for its sins. Every nation eventually will experience destruction. Destruction will come on all the nations, including Israel, on the last day. Then all the unsaved of the earth will stand for judgment. At that time, the destruction that will be experienced by each and every unsaved person will be far more serious than physical destruction - it will be the destruction of eternal damnation. How desperately the world needs Christ. Without Christ, there is no possibility of escaping this awful judgment.

Who Will Destroy Israel?

Interestingly, the Bible appears to give some clues as to who might destroy national Israel. We read in Ezek. 35:1-7:

Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against mount Seir, and prophesy against it, And say unto it, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O mount Seir, I am against thee, and I will stretch out mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time

of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end: Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: sith thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee. Thus will I make mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it him that passeth out and him that returneth.

The context of these verses has in view the enmity that exists between Mount Seir (verse 2) and Israel (verse 5). This enmity ends with the destruction of Israel by Mount Seir. Mount Seir in turn comes under God's judgment (verse 7).

Who is Mount Seir and which Israel does God have in view? Let us first determine who Mount Seir is. In Deu. 2:4, we read:

And command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore.

In this verse, God identifies Mount Seir with the children of Esau. God makes this point four more times in this chapter (verses 5, 8, 22, and 29). God surely does not want us to miss this truth. The next question that logically follows is: Who are the descendants of Esau insofar as the nations of the world are concerned? The Bible tells us in Gen. 28:9 that Esau married a daughter of Ishmael:

Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife.

In this marriage the blood lines of Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar, and Esau, the grandson of Abraham, were joined. Thus, Esau and Ishmael together became the progenitors of the Arab nations, who rightly claim sonship with Abraham.

The curious fact is that tension and enmity between the Ishmael-Esau line and the Isaac-Jacob-Israel line existed from the very beginning. When Isaac was a child, Ishmael, his half-brother who was thirteen years older, mocked Isaac so that great anxiety was produced in the life of Sarah, Isaac's mother. We read in Gen. 21:9-10:

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

Even before the twin sons of Rebecca, Esau and Jacob, were born, this enmity was in evidence. God declares in Gen. 25:22-23:

And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

Surprisingly, the enmity between these two lines has continued throughout history. It continues to this very moment. Thus, the language of Ezek. 35 appears to be completely appropriate. Verse 5 of this chapter is especially significant. There we read:

Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end.

This verse appears to suggest the destruction of Israel by Esau (the Arab nations) in the time that their iniquity had an end. However, because we have now approached so closely to the end of time and Israel has not been destroyed by physical war, we should realize that Ezek. 35 must be understood spiritually.

There is a spiritual dimension to this passage, as we noted a spiritual dimension to Luke 21:20-24. We learned from Luke 21:20-24 that Jerusalem could refer to the body of believers, and the enemy that would destroy the church, that is, the enemy that would almost silence the true Gospel during the final tribulation, is the false gospels spawned by Satan. Because these other gospels are so close to the true Gospel, and therefore completely interrelated with the true Gospel, it is the church destroying the church. The unsaved within the church who insist on following gospels which feature signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24) will become so dominant that true believers will be driven out of most churches (Matt. 24:15); the era of the church sending the Gospel into the world has nearly come to an end.

The same sad truth is surely implied in Ezek. 35. The two antagonists, Esau and Israel, are types or figures of those within the church. Esau is a picture of the unsaved. Even as the unsaved within any church claim a relationship with Christ and insist they are sons of the kingdom of God, so Esau and his descendants (the Arab nations) claim sonship from Abraham and a heritage in the land of Palestine. Even as the saved within any church are the true children of Christ, and the true citizens of God's eternal

kingdom, so Israel was chosen of God to be His people and inhabit the land of Canaan.

We find clear and conclusive information in the Bible that the fig tree, that is, Israel, as a national entity, will never come to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Except for a remnant chosen by grace, we must conclude sorrowfully that Israel will remain hardened in its rebellion against Christ. How we praise God for the remnant that continues to come into the body of Christ!

Conclusion

We have patiently examined anything and everything in the Bible that could possibly relate to national Israel and its future. We have seen in a very striking fashion that all of the Old Testament passages that refer to a future Israel, future Judah, or future Jacob, find their fulfillment in Christ Himself or in His body, the Israel of God. We discovered that the Israel of God is in every way just as tangible, real, and substantive as national Israel. We found that it is an Israel made up of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is made up of people from every political nation. Wonderfully, it includes a remnant chosen by grace from national Israel. Thus, a blood descendant of Abraham can be saved just as readily as any Gentile.

We also saw that the Bible predicted national Israel's renewed existence as a national entity, which occurred in 1948. The Israelis' return to their land has signalled that the end of the world has come very near.

Could it be that many citizens of national Israel will recognize their imperative need of Christ as Messiah? Likewise, could it be that many Gentiles will recognize that God always keeps His promises? May they clearly understand God's declaration that the wrath of God will be poured out on all the unsaved. To escape that wrath, could it be that they would flee to the cross.

Oh! that there might still be a great harvest of souls both from national Israel and from the other nations of the world!

* * *

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 shortwave 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 Homepage. Downloadable books include "What God Hath Joined Together" and "God's Magnificent Salvation Plan." The Internet also has our program guide, shortwave 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 1-800-322-5385 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 write to Family Radio, Oakland, California 94621 USA to obtain a short-wave broadcasting schedule for your area. You can also listen to prerecorded short-wave broadcasts on Family Radio's Web site.

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This book was reformatted from Family Radio printed material (see "Editing Notes" at the end of the **Contents** section). 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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